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The End of an Affair

American Research Institute
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Dear Peter,

On Saturday, the 12th of April, I ate a quiet brunch with a seasoned observer of the Greek political scene at the Athens Hilton's Byzantine Cafe. I was to fly back to Istanbul later that day, and I had little left to do; and so, after lunch, being blessed with a bit of time to kill, I took a stroll down one of the wide avenues that leads away from that overpriced hotel. Perhaps three blocks away (hardly more), I came upon what I was looking for: a pocket park graced with a monument. I first stumbled across this memorial back in the summer of 1973 when I was reading ancient history, perusing archaeological reports, and touring the various ancient sites as a student at the American School of Classical Studies. Now I wanted to see it once again.

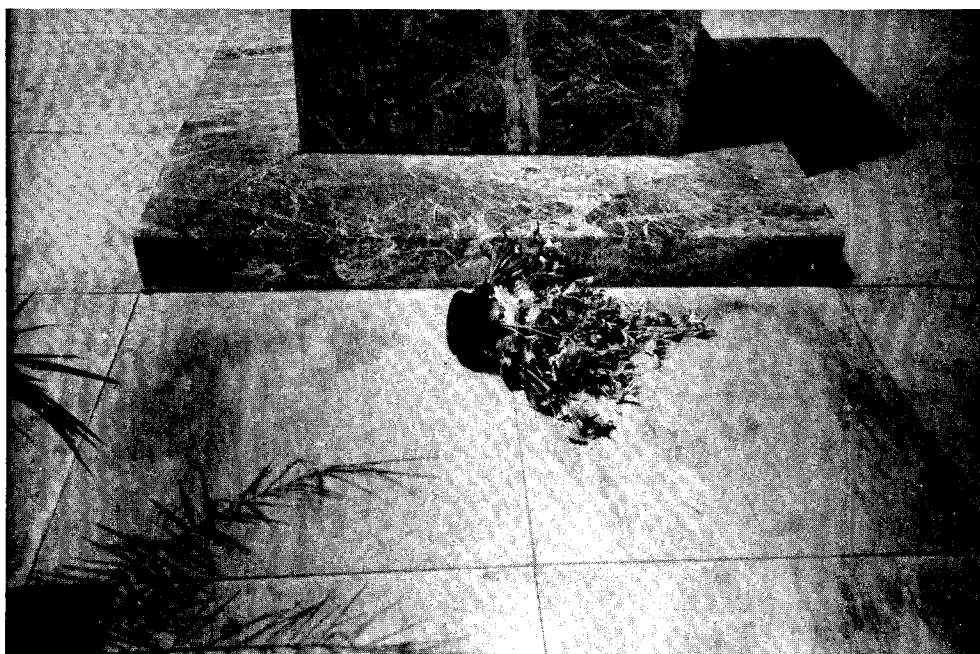
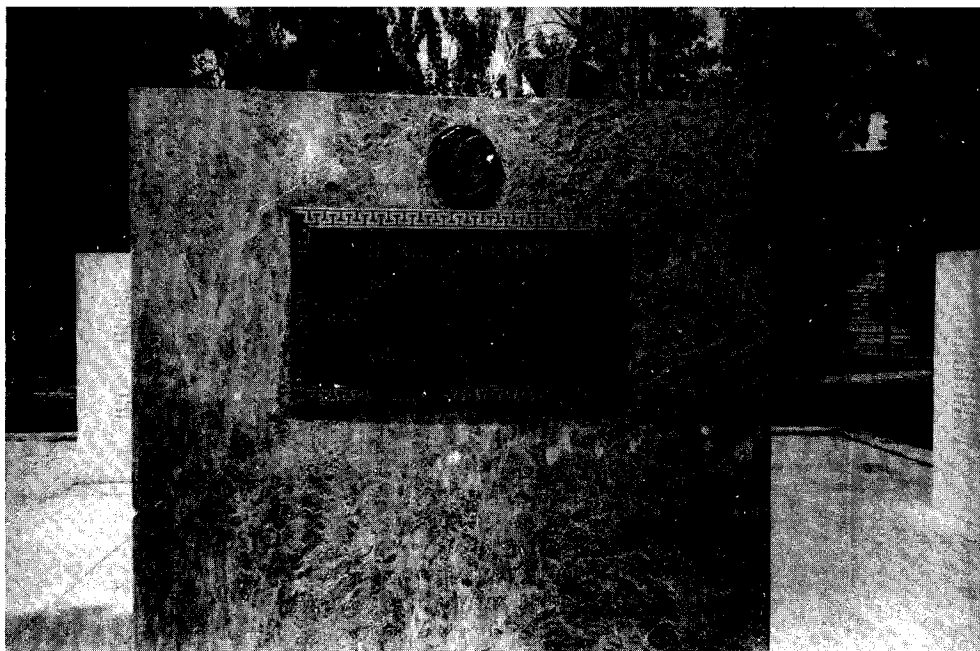
The bronze statue that I first examined more than a decade ago had been dedicated by the Royal Greek Government and by the Order of AHEPA (The American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association) on the 29th of May, 1963. AHEPA had paid for the bronze casting and for the construction of the park, and the leading members of that element of the so-called Greek Lobby had been responsible as well for the wording on the bronze plaque tacked onto the pediment:

HARRY S. TRUMAN

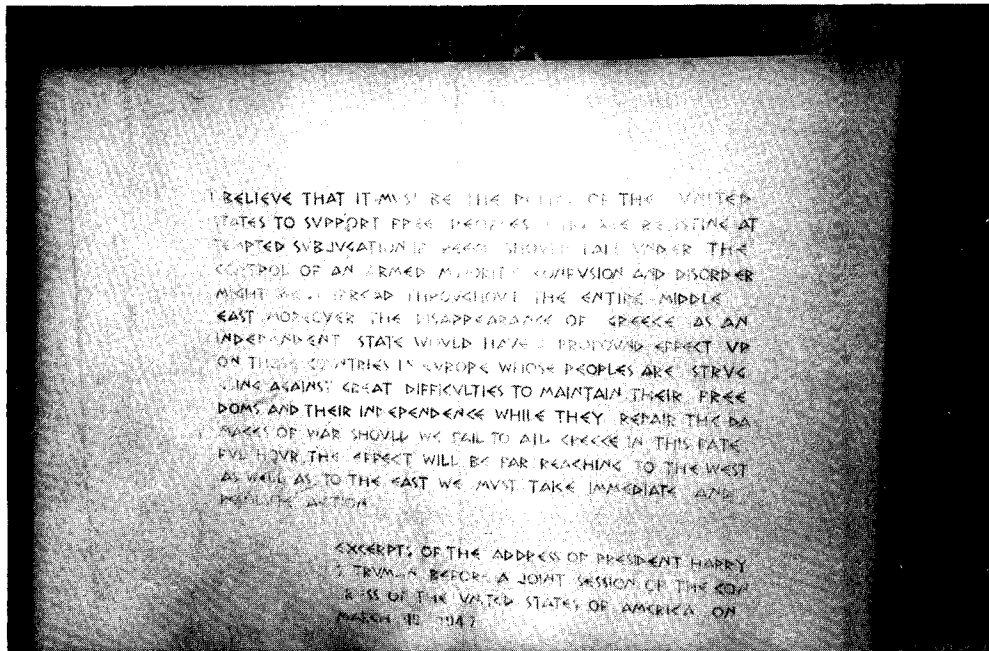
PRESIDENT OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
APRIL 12, 1945-JANUARY 20, 1953
STATESMAN--HUMANITARIAN--PHILHELLENE

Behind the statue, these Greek-Americans had erected two marble slabs. One bore in English and the other in Greek the following inscription: "To Harry S. Truman in grateful acknowledgement of the

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Truman Doctrine which he as President of the United States of America proclaimed on March 12, 1947 thereby helping the Greek people to preserve their freedom and national integrity at a crucial turn of the history of mankind and expressing the devotion of the American people to the ideal of liberty." On the right stood two additional slabs with excerpts from the speech that Truman delivered to a joint session of Congress on that momentous occasion.



The Truman Doctrine

I wanted to see the park again chiefly because the statue was no longer there. On the 25th of March, shortly before US Secretary of State George Schultz arrived in Athens to meet with Greek Prime Minister Andreas Papandreu, a local terrorist organization called the Revolutionary and Popular Struggle had planted a small explosive device atop the pediment. When it exploded, Harry Truman came tumbling down from atop his pedestal. For a time, he lay on the marble plaza like a great fallen oak, damaged but still somehow impressive. Then, the city government sent a truck to haul him away.

In mid-April, when I stopped by to pay my respects, the pediment was intact; the bronze plaque was undamaged; and the great marble slabs still stood in place. But there was something eerie about the site with the statue gone, and I could not help feeling a certain sadness when I noticed a pot full of flowers overturned in front of the monument. There had once been a love affair between the people of Greece and America, and that love affair had come to an abrupt end. My luncheon companion that Saturday had mentioned to me that the City Council of Athens would be meeting on the following Monday to decide whether to erect the statue of Harry Truman once again. Andreas Papandreu's Panhellenic Socialist Union (PASOK) was the dominant force on the council, and there was (so he said) every reason to suppose that the members of that body would take this as an occasion for disposing of what had been an embarrassing reminder of the friendship that had once united the two peoples. The PASOK press had welcomed the explosion; the Papandreu government had waited four days before condemning the act; and, when it became clear that the city government would have to decide whether to have the statue erected again, the newspapers supporting the Papandreu

administration joined the adherents of Greece's two communist parties in arguing that the memorial should be eliminated as a sign of the hated Amerikanokratia and as a danger to those residing nearby. After all, they sagely observed, it attracted bombs. In the event, the members of the council voted just as my friend had predicted. It was a deliberate and gratuitous slap in the face for Americans (and for Greek-Americans above all), and it is very hard to see what Hellas has to gain from such behavior.

Nicholas Gage, a Greek-American who once covered Hellas for The New York Times and later published an important and highly influential book on the Greek Civil War,¹ summed up the situation rather well in an interview he gave the conservative paper Kathēmerini shortly after the city council reached its decision: "Greece is shooting itself in the foot. By deciding not to re-erect the statue of Truman, the municipal authorities are tacitly expressing approval of the terrorist action. Who will gain from this isolation to which Greece is reducing itself with regard to the US? If the Communists, if the Third World had any intention of helping the country, why have they not done so until now? Is America only good to give loans? It is not enough—the fact that with everything that is happening and has been written they have killed off tourism with regard to Americans in Greece. Now they have to chase off the Greek-Americans as well." Someday, perhaps, there will be hell to pay. The patience of Americans is wearing thin.

I

It is difficult to know just how deep the hostility to the United States evident in Greece really goes, but the available polling data suggests that anti-Americanism should not be underestimated as a force. That data throws considerable light on other related developments as well.

Polling is a recent phenomenon in Greece, and even now there are only three organizations that conduct surveys with any regularity. The first and least important is the Center of Political Research and Information (KPEE). This is a think tank closely associated with the conservative New Democracy Party (ND). It conducts a great many more surveys than it publishes in its bimonthly magazine Epikentra, and it is generally suspected of following the time-honored maxim: all the news that fits we print—but scholars nonetheless find the data it releases of use.

Of more use are the extensive surveys conducted every two years by the Commission of the European Communities. They enable one to compare public opinion in Greece, which has been included in

1. I intend to discuss the impact of his book Eleni and that of the film of the same name in a future letter.

the surveys since 1980, with public opinion in the rest of the EEC. The results are published in Eurobarometer.

The only Greek polling organization that can be accorded considerable trust is Panayote E. Dimitras' EURODIM organization. Because EURODIM is strictly nonpartisan, it is excluded from doing work for the government, and the opposition keeps it at arms length as well. In practice, this means that Dimitras (a social scientist armed with a Ph.D. from Harvard) operates on a shoestring and restricts his polling efforts to the Athens area. Despite the bias presumably inherent in a sample drawn from so narrow a geographical area, EURODIM has been proven uncannily accurate in its forecast of national election results. When I spoke with Dimitras in April, he ascribed his success thus far to three factors. First: because EURODIM is nonpartisan, the questions it poses are designed to get at the truth rather than to elicit particular results. Second: EURODIM uses women to do all its polling, and the individual Greeks interviewed are far less likely to feel threatened by EURODIM's poll-takers than by the men employed by KPEE and its fly-by-night rivals; consequently, they are far less likely to tell Dimitras' assistants what they think the pollsters want to hear. Third: in a sense, Athens is Greece. Roughly one-third of the population of the country lives there; many are recent arrivals from the countryside; and a high proportion of Athenians return to their villages to cast their ballots in any case. In recent elections, Athens has given PASOK, the Moscow-line Communist Party (KKE Exōteriko), and its Eurocommunist rival (KKE Esōteriko) only marginally greater support than the country as a whole. All that we can discern from the EEC surveys and from the results of Greece's elections suggests that what EURODIM discovers about Athenians is true for Greeks in general.

Over the last few years, Dimitras has tried to assess Greek disaffection with the United States and with the West in general; his results have been consistent, and he doubts very much whether much of anything has changed.² The surveys conducted by EURODIM over the period from 1982 to 1984 indicate that only one Greek in three wanted Greece to be intimately linked with Western Europe, to remain in the EEC, and to improve its ties with the US; EURODIM's results suggest as well that only one Greek in four then supported full membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, seriously believed that NATO is capable of defending Western Europe, wanted the American bases to remain in Greece, and looked on the US with favor and approval. In fact, at that time, more Greeks thought in favorable terms of the USSR than of the US--though at least two-thirds of the population disapproved of each superpower and half of the population was prepared to call down a pox on both.

2. For a rough summary of these results, see Panayote Elias Dimitras, "Greece: A New Danger," Foreign Policy 58 (Spring 1985) 134-150. For a more recent discussion providing more detail, see Dimitras, "Changes in Public Attitudes," Greek Opinion: A Monthly Survey of Greek Public Opinion and Politics 3:2 (February, 1986) 2-25. In revised form, the latter article will appear in a collection of essays entitled, Political Change in Greece: To Dictatorship and Back Again and edited by K. Featherstone and D. K. Katsoudas, which will be published in the relatively near future in London by Croom Helm.

The strength of anti-Americanism is linked with a commitment to Marxism. In the Spring of 1983, EURODIM found that some 37% of all Athenians thought Marxism the best interpretation of the historical evolution of mankind thus far discovered while 48% were persuaded that the Moscow-line KKE would have governed better than or as well as PASOK. In September, 1982, Dimitras' pollsters found that 48% of all Athenians were convinced that a KKE government would be more democratic than an ND government while 38% were persuaded of the opposite view. Recently, the image of the US has improved marginally while that of the USSR has declined: the poll conducted by EURODIM in November, 1985 suggests that 38% of the Athenian population has a good opinion of the United States while only 27% hold such an opinion of the Soviet Union. Despite this shift in sentiment, EURODIM found in January, 1985 that 46% of the population blamed the royalist forces for the Greek Civil War while only 35% blamed the communists--and, more revealing, only 43% thought that Greece would have been in worse shape had the communists won that war while some 33% actually believed that Greece would have been better off with the communists victorious.

There can be little doubt that, if the Greeks had had the option in the early 1980s, they would have joined the nonaligned states. To borrow a metaphor that Panayote Dimitras applies to PASOK, one would not be far wrong if one were to suppose that, in the last few years, Hellas has functioned with a Western mind and a Third World heart. It is certainly not fortuitous that Papandreou's Greece has maintained close and warm ties with Gaddafi's Libya up to now. Nor is it an accident that, in the last few weeks, when Syrian strongman Hafez Assad decided that it was high time that he mount a diplomatic offensive and act to shake off his reputation as a sponsor of terrorism, Papandreou stepped in to give him a helping hand and rolled out the red carpet for him in Greece.

II

Not that the Greeks much like the Arabs. If truth be told, they are like the man in the Tom Lehrer song: they don't like anybody very much. The Greeks were once justly famous for their hospitality, and even now one sometimes encounters a kindness that one would be hard put by to find in the United States. But, this notwithstanding, xenophobia is now and always has been a powerful force in Hellas, and the hordes of tourists that descend on the country each spring and summer have contributed greatly to its reinforcement. In moments of despair, today's Hellenes describe themselves as a nation of waiters; by the end of each summer, they are frazzled. They are happy to rake in the lucre that the tourist trade brings, and the young men of Hellas take considerable pleasure in proving their manhood each summer with playmates from America, England, and Northern Europe--but, if truth be told, the ordinary Greek would prefer to be less dependent on the largesse of holiday-makers.

Some of the time, he would prefer to damn all foreigners to hell--particularly if they happen to be Jews. When Greek newspapers publish cartoons of Henry Kissinger (as they used to do quite often in the days immediately following the Cyprus Crisis of 1974 and the collapse of the Greek junta), they depict the former Secretary of State in a fashion that would do justice to the caricatures to be found in Der Stürmer. EURODIM polls conducted in 1984 indicate that a majority of Athenians firmly believe that the Jews dominate both political and economic life in the United States and Europe. More than half of these think that this domination does great harm to Greece, and nearly half of all those polled opposed the provision of police protection to Athens' synagogue. During Greek-Israeli sports events, the Greek spectators often chant anti-Semitic slogans.

Blacks are not much better liked. This past September, Antonis Plytzanopoulos, formerly the captain of the freighter Garifalia, was sentenced by a court in the Peiraeus to ten years in prison for dumping a number of Kenyan and Tanzanian stowaways into the Indian Ocean some miles off the coast of Somalia in March 1984. His defense lawyer Panayiotios Vrettos argued on Plytzanopoulos' behalf that the captain of the Garifalia had done nothing untoward: sharks, he explained, do not eat blacks; they do not like the smell; blacks are much stronger than whites and could easily swim the distance to shore; and, in any case, the case should be dismissed since "violence is the very essence of blacks." Though the arguments presented by Vrettos failed to persuade the court, they illustrate rather well the type of racist slander that surfaces all too often in the law courts, the political meetings, and the newspapers of Greece. Had the Papandreou administration not been eager to curry favor with the governments of Kenya and Tanzania, Plytzanopoulos might have been acquitted.

III

The ultimate source of Hellenic xenophobia is the Greek Orthodox Church. Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, Greek Orthodoxy persists in blaming the Jews for the death of Christ. More important, it continues to nourish a deep resentment of Western Christianity--both in its Catholic and Protestant forms. In a sense, the Greek nation remains within its Ottoman cocoon. When the Pope met with the Patriarch of Constantinople some years back, there were serious disturbances in Athens: ecumenism remains unpopular.

This is the case, I suspect, because Greek Orthodoxy is not really a universal religion--at least not in the way that Western Christianity is; like Judaism, it is rather a faith that defines a nation. Thus, it possesses an importance for unbelievers that Catholicism and Protestantism lack. Roughly ten percent of the Greek population attends church on any given Sunday, but only five percent of the population elects to be married outside the church. Anticlericalism is predominant in Greece, but a strong majority

opposes the separation of church and state. Even atheists would mourn disestablishment; almost everyone recognizes that Greece would not be Greek without Orthodoxy.

For that reason, Greek nationalism often evidences a peculiar, almost pre-modern, religious character: to be Greek is to be a member of a chosen people; it is to assert the superiority of one's nation, one's religion, one's culture—in short, one's way of life—to all the alternatives. If foreigners fail to recognize that superiority, it is merely a sign that they deserve hatred and contempt.

IV

There was a time when the United States was relatively free from Greek ire. In 1944, Winston Churchill had acted decisively to prevent a communist seizure of power in Greece; in the late 1940s, when Britain faltered, Harry Truman persuaded Congress to come to the aid of the Greek forces resisting the communist assault. That act won the United States the affection of the great majority of the Greeks then alive, and it prepared the way for Greek entry into NATO and for the establishment of close ties between Hellas and the West. At a critical moment, America had proved itself to be the friend of Greece, and it had secured for itself a reservoir of good will.

For the most part, the US managed to distance itself from the British during the EOKA campaign in Cyprus, and consequently it retained for a long time that reservoir of good will—but eventually, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the romance came to an abrupt end. The key event took place in April, 1967—when, at a time of considerable political turmoil in Greece, a small coterie of junior army officers led by a shrewd conspirator of peasant origin named George Papadopoulos (who was nicknamed "Nasser") carried out a coup d'état and imposed a dictatorship on the country. Papadopoulos and his fellow Colonels insistently asserted their loyalty to the West; and, though initially the United States intimated its unhappiness with the coup, it did nothing decisive to bring down the junta, and eventually the American government actually reached an accommodation with the Colonels.

Greek legend has it that, apart from a few traitors, the citizens of Hellas were uniformly hostile to the Colonels from the start. But the truth is that a good many Greeks were fed up with the antics of the nation's politicians—left, right, and center—as well as the machinations of the royal family; and, in the end, nearly everyone acquiesced in the change of regime where they did not actually welcome it.³ Constantine Karamanlis, the once and future Prime

3. On political developments in the late 1950s and the early 1960s, there is much of value in C. M. Woodhouse, Karamanlis: The Restorer of Greek Democracy (Oxford 1982). Woodhouse, who served in Greece during the Second World War, knows virtually all of the principle figures extremely well and has written a number of

Minister of Greece, summed up the attitude of many of his compatriots when he observed in August, 1968, "One can say that democracy in Greece was murdered by a free regime. The colonels simply inflicted a mercy killing."⁴ He had gone into self-imposed exile well before the coup.

Only later, when the Hellenes wearied of dictatorial rule and came to see the junta as a malevolent and dangerous collection of buffoons, did public opinion turn decisively against the new regime--and that happened at about the time that (or, at least, not very long after) the Nixon administration foolishly decided to embrace Papadopoulos and his colleagues. There is not a shred of evidence to suggest that the United States had anything to do with the 1967 coup (or with any other plan for a coup); indeed, what is known now suggests that the CIA and our diplomats in Athens were caught completely flat-footed.⁵ But, ultimately, this matters very little: if the Americans are not to blame for the junta (and for its blunders in Cyprus in 1974), then responsibility must be attributed to the Greeks themselves--and the modern Hellenes, though they may sometimes seem to oscillate between delusions of grandeur and bouts of self-loathing, have always been notoriously unwilling to take the blame for their own blunders.⁶ By embracing the Colonels, Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew merely made it easier for Andreas Papandreou and those to his left to propagate the myth that nearly all Greeks now employ to shield themselves from having to acknowledge their own responsibility for the political disasters of the 1960s and the early 1970s.⁷

Today, Greek politics turns on two great events--the Greek Civil War and the period of dictatorship. The polls taken by the EEC and by EURODIM indicate that those of the civil war generation tend to vote for New Democracy and to be pro-American and pro-European in their politics while those who came of age under the junta and in the first few years after its fall tend to be stalwart supporters of the Moscow-line Greek Communist party, of the Eurocommunist Greek

other books on recent Greek history. See also David Holden, Greece Without Columns: The Making of the Modern Greeks (London 1972) *passim* (esp. 174-229).

4. London, The Guardian, 7 August 1968.

5. The account in Laurence Stern, The Wrong Horse: The Politics of Intervention and the Failure of American Diplomacy (New York 1977) 11-62, is based almost exclusively on a memoir (as yet unpublished) composed by an American foreign service officer who was serving in the American embassy at the time of the coup. I was able to track down and interview this individual in April; he could confirm most of what Stern asserts as fact (and he was in a good position to know); but, where Stern speculates about lower-level CIA involvement with the coup, he is dismissive. The best account of the period is C. M. Woodhouse, The Rise and Fall of the Greek Colonels (London 1985). Woodhouse draws on a considerable body of evidence unavailable to Stern that has come to light in Greece since the Colonels' fall.

6. This propensity is nowhere more brilliantly analyzed than in Romilly Jenkins, The Dilessi Murders (London 1961). See, especially, the chapter discussing "Truth and 'Ethnic' Truth": 99-117.

7. For an elegantly constructed example of rumor-mongering, if not rumor-inventing, see Andreas Papandreou, Democracy at Gunpoint: The Greek Front (Harmondsworth 1973).

Communist Party, or of PASOK.⁸ Each generation had its formative experience, and surveys make it clear that those under 35 could no more consider voting for ND or some other conservative party than those over 49 could consider casting their ballots for either KKE. Only among teenagers is there evidence for increased support by the young for the right, and that support is inevitably soft. Unless there is a major crisis that undermines the current regime and humiliates PASOK, there is every reason to suppose that Andreas Papandreou, who shamelessly exploits the tide of anti-American sentiment and who practices patronage politics with a ruthlessness and skill never before excelled in Greece, will remain in power for a good, long time.

Such is not my view alone. To judge what I was told when I spoke at some length in April with a high-level American diplomat, US policy is to make the best of a difficult situation. Papandreou needs the United States, and he knows it; the US needs bases in Greece, and he knows that as well. Not long after he first came to power, he signed a base-agreement with the Reagan administration that is far more generous than anything that the previous New Democracy government had been willing to concede; next year, he is expected to renew that agreement. As a leftist and a putative anti-American, he can do more for us than our friends.

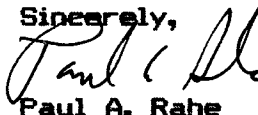
In the last year-and-a-half, as Papandreou's inflationary policies have brought the Greek economy to near collapse and as he has found it necessary to go more often to his NATO allies with hat in hand, the PASOK government has moderated its anti-American rhetoric (though the PASOK press has not). What will happen over the next few years remains unclear. In the meantime, much to the annoyance of the leaders of New Democracy, the United States is assiduously avoiding all involvement in the continuing partisan conflict within Greece.

Over dinner in April, I chatted at some length with a senior New York Times correspondent who had served in Greece in the mid-1960s and who had recently returned. He knew Papandreou and his wife Margaret rather well in the old days, and he was no one's fool. I remarked that much of the political trouble that afflicted Greece in the period from 1961 to 1967 could perhaps be traced to the fact that Constantine Karamanlis did not know how to be in opposition while George Papandreou did not have any notion of what it meant to govern. For all his faults, Andreas Papandreou appears to have mastered both arts. I even suggested that the current Greek Prime Minister had ditched Karamanlis as President in the Spring of 1985 in order to bamboozle the left and that he might now become Karamanlis in order to bamboozle the right. My companion laughed and said, "Maybe--but remember one thing! The man may know how to conduct himself effectively in opposition, and he may know how to conduct

8. Ironically, the same survey data suggests that the younger generation is as culturally pro-American and pro-European as it is politically anti-American and anti-European; by the same token, the older generation is culturally far more traditional and far less cosmopolitan but politically less inclined to go it alone. The Colonels dealt a death blow both to the old political and the old cultural and moral order.

himself while in office as well--but above all else he is an improviser. In one regard, he will never be Karamanlis: there is no long-range plan." That undeniable fact means that the future must remain almost entirely uncertain.

Sincerely,



Paul A. Rahe

Received in Hanover 6/9/86

P. S. That same New York Times correspondent had one other telling comment to make. When I asked him whether he thought that the Athens City Council would actually vote against restoring Harry Truman to his rightful perch, he replied, "If the statue does not go back up, it will be a sign that the American ambassador is not doing his job." On the 3rd of June, a bit over a week after PAR-18 was put in the mail, the Greek government overruled the municipal council of Athens and ordered that the statue be repaired and restored to the pediment from which it toppled. The militants of the left had been allowed to let off steam, and then the central administration had intervened lest Greek petulance do Hellas damage abroad.