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Shattered States: Reconstituting Political Authority in the

Aftermath of Civil War in Russia and Greece

Abstract

This article examines the process of disintegration and

reconstitution of political authority in civil war with reference

to the Russian (1918-1921) and Greek (1946-1949) civil wars. These

conflicts bracket the post-World War I period of revolutionary and

counterrevolutionary conflicts that has been the core subject of

historical scholarship on European civil strife. Both cases were

highly polarised clashes between establishment and revolutionary

forces, and much of the relevant historiography has been naturally

coloured by this aspect of the conflicts. I argue that the

interpretative focus on polarisation obscures a different dynamic

that is equally important for our understanding of civil war as a

type of military conflict and, crucially, its political aftermath.

Civil war in Russia and Greece did not emerge as a result of

functioning states splitting into two or more competing

authorities. It was rather the product of a multifaceted

fragmentation of political power as a result of war and

revolution; a shattering of the state into an array of

asymmetrical actors competing for control over both its territory

and its administrative resources. Polarisation followed this

fragmentation, as these disparate actors manoeuvred to form the

camps of the civil wars. This form of coalition building was a

dynamic process in which armed violence was not only the chief means of resolution of the competing claims to power, but also an essential factor in the formation of the sides themselves. A corollary of this is that the process of political reconstruction that follows civil war is determined as much by the imperative to work out a functioning relationship between the various elements of the victors' camp as by securing victory through the permanent exclusion or reintegration of the vanquished.

Long a staple of social science research, the comparative study of civil war has been rather less popular with historians. Although the scholarly output on individual intra-state conflicts can occupy several libraries, there have been few attempts to craft general accounts of civil wars as analogous historical phenomena that share structural features. In recent years, however, some scholars have sought to address this gap in the literature by laying the groundwork for the development of a conceptual framework for comparative civil war research.[1] This article is an

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[1] D. Armitage, *Civil Wars: A History in Ideas*, New Haven, CT 2017; J. Rodrigo, 'Under the Sign of Mars: Violence in European Civil Wars, 1917–1949', in: *Contemporary European History* 26 (2017) 3, 487–506; B. Kissane, *Nations Torn Asunder: The Challenge of Civil

attempt to contribute to this effort by tracing the outline of a core process of civil war, namely the disintegration and eventual reconstitution of political authority within the territory of a given state.

In the pages that follow, I discuss this process with reference to the Russian (1918–1921) and Greek (1946–1949) civil wars. These conflicts bracket the post-WWI period of revolutionary and counterrevolutionary conflicts that has been the core subject of historical scholarship on European civil strife. Both cases were highly polarised clashes between establishment and revolutionary forces, and much of the relevant historiography has been naturally coloured by this aspect of the conflicts. I argue that the interpretative focus on polarisation obscures a different dynamic that is equally important for our understanding of civil war as a type of military conflict and, crucially, its political aftermath. Civil war in Russia and Greece did not emerge as a result of functioning states splitting into two or more competing authorities. It was rather the product of a multifaceted fragmentation of political power as a result of war and revolution; a shattering of the state into an array of asymmetrical actors competing for control over both its territory and its administrative resources. Polarisation followed this

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War, Oxford, New York 2016. Stanley Payne's survey of civil wars in Europe includes a historiographical discussion of the conceptual nexus of civil war and revolution. See S.G. Payne, *Civil War in Europe, 1905–1949*, Cambridge 2012, 1–14.

fragmentation, as these disparate actors manoeuvred to form the camps of the civil wars. This form of coalition building was a dynamic process in which armed violence was not only the chief means of resolution of the competing claims to power, but also an essential factor in the formation of the sides themselves. A corollary of this is that the process of political reconstruction that follows civil war is determined as much by the imperative to work out a functioning relationship between the various elements of the victors' camp as by securing victory through the permanent exclusion or reintegration of the vanquished.

The argument proceeds in two parts. First, in a necessarily condensed account of the Russian and Greek civil wars, I focus on the formation of the victors' camps in the two conflicts from the crisis of political authority in the status quo ante to the end of hostilities. I then move on to a more detailed examination of the political systems constructed after the guns fell silent. I show that political dysfunctions within the winning side as it had been constituted during the conflict were a major source of instability in its aftermath. In both cases, this produced a sustained crisis that ultimately ushered into a violent reshuffling of the political system.

1. State breakdown and camp formation

The enduring appeal of the framing of the Russian Civil War as a Red/White conflict owes much to its neatness, but also to the fact that it is, in broad strokes, true. Ultimately, the military

conflict that decided the fate of the Romanov Empire was between the revolutionary forces led by Lenin's Bolsheviks and the White movement fronted by Admiral Kolchak. Nevertheless, most recent scholarly efforts have been directed towards complicating this picture by highlighting the rich diversity of actors that engaged in the conflict to pursue distinct goals that could not necessarily be subsumed under either the Red project of Soviet power or the nebulous restorationist vision of the Whites. The Russian Civil War consisted of a number of overlapping but distinct armed conflicts rooted in the multitude of social and political cleavages of late Imperial Russia. Nationalists pursued independent states while Tsarist officers organised to keep the empire intact. Socialists strove for a workers' state while anarchists dreamt of no states at all. European peasants demanded land reform and control of their own grain, while Muslim clan-chiefs and intellectuals in Central Asia sought to build Islam-based political communities. All of them had sufficient experience in organised violence to pursue their goals, leading to one of the most brutal armed contests of the 20th century.[2]

That this kaleidoscope of conflicts reached a Red/White endgame was therefore not a predetermined outcome. It took a combination of political manoeuvring, contingency and violent coercion for the

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[2] For a highly readable synthetic account spanning the full range of conflicts that transformed the Russian Empire into the Soviet Union, see J. Smele, *The 'Russian' Civil Wars, 1916–1926: Ten Years That Shook the World*, Oxford 2016.

multiple vectors of power to be subsumed under the Red and White camps. The relative competence displayed by the two sides in building and managing coalitions was a key determinant of victory. Ultimately, the Reds prevailed because they secured the backing of a critical mass of the rural population by guaranteeing the land gains of the peasantry and offering cultural autonomy to minority nationalities.[3] This strategy had not been fully worked out at the time of the October Revolution, but was gradually pieced together by the Bolsheviks over the course of the civil war.

It is worth noting here that the Bolsheviks were not, at the outset, the only party in the Red camp. The establishment of a Soviet government was supported by the peasant-based party of Left Socialist-Revolutionaries (SRs) who then joined the Bolsheviks as junior partners. In the provinces, broader coalitions of Bolsheviks, Left SRs, anarchists and other radicals overthrew PG-affiliated authorities and, instead, set up local Soviet administrations. In the first months of Soviet power, considerable efforts were made to keep these political coalitions in place, in order to broaden the legitimacy of the fledgling state. It was only under the pressure of the civil war that the junior partners began to peel away from the Red coalition. Above all, an attempted coup by the Left-SRs in July 1918 left the Bolsheviks as the sole legal party in Soviet Russia, locking the emerging state into one-

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[3] Ibid., conclusion; A. Retish, *Russia's Peasants in Revolution and Civil War: Citizenship, Identity, and the Creation of the Soviet State, 1914-1922*, Cambridge 2008, 130-131, 200-209.

party rule. Nevertheless, though the Bolsheviks secured a permanent monopoly on government, power in the provinces was still predicated on navigating a complex web of interests and personal relations in order to secure grain, munitions and soldiers for the Red war effort. In many cases, this was achieved by local Bolshevik party groups co-opting their erstwhile allies, rather than pushing them out. For this system to work, it was necessary for local party bosses to be able to develop patronage networks that, though ultimately loyal to the central government, continued to operate with a degree of autonomy from it.[4] A centralised proletarian party governing a diverse, primary rural country was thus the basic shape of the political system developed by the Red camp by the time of its victory. More a product of contingency than a blueprint of governance, its concrete mechanics remained a work in progress in the post-civil-war period.

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[4] On various iterations of the Red coalition, centre and local, see L. Douds, '"The Dictatorship of the Democracy"? The Council of People's Commissars as Bolshevik-Left Socialist Revolutionary Coalition Government, December 1917–March 1918', in: *Historical Research* 90 (2017) 247, 32–56; A. Marshall, 'The Terek People's Republic, 1918: Coalition Government in the Russian Revolution', in: *Revolutionary Russia* 22 (2009) 2, 203–221; D.J. Raleigh, *Experiencing Russia's Civil War: Politics, Society, and Revolutionary Culture in Saratov, 1917–1922*, Princeton, NJ 2002), chapter 6.

In contrast to the immense scale of the Russian Civil War, the conflict that took place in Greece some three decades later was a more compact affair. In its narrow, legal definition, the Greek Civil War took place in 1946–1949, pitting the government and military of the Kingdom of Greece against the partisans of the Democratic Army of Greece (DSE) led by the communist party (KKE). Historians, however, have long traced the origins of the conflict in Greece's experience of Axis occupation (1941–1944), and it is indeed impossible to explain the development of a communist insurgency without reference to the crisis of political authority that followed the country's military defeat in World War II.[5] Shortly before Axis troops had completed their conquest of Greece, the King and a newly formed cabinet were evacuated from the country along with the rump of the army, and they eventually set up a government in exile in Cairo. Greece was divided into separate German, Italian and Bulgarian occupation zones, and a collaborator regime was set up. Famine, violent reprisals and the annexation of Greek territory by Bulgaria spurred the growth of a mass resistance movement centred around the KKE-led National Liberation Front (EAM). EAM's armed wing, ELAS, grew to become a

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[5] On the periodisation of the Greek Civil War, see P. Voglis / I. Nioutsikos, 'The Greek Historiography of the 1940s. A Reassessment', in: *Südosteuropa* 65 (2017) 2, 316–333; N. Marantzidis / G. Antoniou, 'The Axis Occupation and Civil War: Changing Trends in Greek Historiography, 1941–2002', in: *Journal of Peace Research* 41 (2004) 2, 223–231.

guerrilla army numbering some 50,000 troops capable of complex operations coordinated with Allied military intelligence. At the height of its power, EAM controlled a solid, contiguous territory extending over most of the Greek countryside, with occupying and collaborator troops confined to the major urban centres.[6] Political authority in occupied Greece was thus contested by the collaborator state and EAM, both of which had territorial control of parts of the country, as well as the Cairo government, which enjoyed Allied recognition. The camps of the Greek Civil War began to take their final shape when the fate of the collaborator state was sealed in the endgame of World War II. In September 1944, EAM representatives signed a treaty with the exile government, stipulating the formation of a national unity government under centrist Prime Minister Georgios Papandreou, and the integration of all partisan formations into the regular army. It was agreed that the King would not return until a referendum had determined the constitutional future of the country. In October, the government returned to Greece accompanied by a British military mission and a handpicked brigade of loyal troops headed by the royalist general Alexandros Papagos. The power-sharing arrangement collapsed within weeks. On 2 December, EAM ministers resigned from the government after the head of the British military mission

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[6] G. Margaritis, *Proaggelia thiellodon anemon. O polemos stin Alvania kai i proti periodos tis katochis,* Athens 2009), 383–412; Y. Skalidakis, *I Eleutheri Ellada. I eksousia tou EAM sta chronia tis katochis,* Athens 2014.

ordered ELAS to unilaterally disarm. Violent conflict broke out
the following day after police fired on an EAM demonstration in
Athens, leading to a series of armed clashes between ELAS troops
and the combined British and Greek forces available to the
government. Crucially, the latter included captured collaborator
troops that were released and rearmed specifically to repel ELAS
from the capital. In February 1945, the defeated EAM leadership
agreed to disband ELAS in return for a series of political
guarantees enshrined in the treaty of Varkiza.[7]

The significance of the Battle for Athens lay primarily in that it
marked a violent denouement to the uneasy alliance between the
communist-led resistance movement and the rump of the pre-war
political system that had survived in exile. In that regard, the
conflict drew a hard demarcation line between the camps of the
1946-1949 civil war. In addition to this, it made it possible to
reintegrate the armed wing of the collaborator state into
mainstream politics, by retrospectively rebranding its activities
during the occupation as a legitimate struggle against communist
banditry. It thus allowed the government camp to broaden its base
to include the full spectrum of anti-communist forces regardless
of their previous allegiance.

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[7] D. Close, *The Origins of the Greek Civil War,* London 2013, 127–
141; A. Gerolymatos, *Red Acropolis, Black Terror: The Greek Civil
War And The Origins Of The Soviet-American Rivalry, 1943-1949*, New
York 2004), 96–97, 195; P. Voglis, *I adinati epanastasi. I
koinoniki dynamiki tou emfyliou polemou,* Athens 2016, 80–85, 102.

In the years that followed, anticommunism became the central principle around which the entire Greek state apparatus and its political system were reorganised. The Varkiza agreement was followed by a campaign of terror against EAM members and sympathisers, spearheaded by a network of paramilitary organisations connected to the monarchist right. The civil service and the military were purged, and a new security apparatus was staffed with reliably anti-communist personnel. During that time, key positions in the military came under the control of a shadowy organisation known as the Sacred Union of Greek Officers (IDEA), founded in the Middle East shortly before the return of the Cairo government with the express aim of reversing EAM gains in Greece.[8] Still, the political system remained highly turbulent. There were no less than five governments in 1945 as the terrorist campaign of the right alienated moderate politicians who sought the implementation of the Varkiza treaty. The stabilisation of the government camp was only achieved by two political developments that also led to the most active phase of the civil war. In March 1946, a united slate of the hard right won an absolute majority in an election boycotted by moderate politicians as well as KKE. The

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[8] Gerolymatos, *Red Acropolis,* 195-199; G. Leontaritis, *I alithia gia ton I.D.E.A. (1943-1967),* Athens 2010, 25-6; P. Papastratis, 'The Purge of the Greek Civil Service on the Eve of the Civil War', in: L. Bærentzen / J.O. Iatrides / O.L. Smith (eds.), *Studies in the History of the Greek Civil War,*, 1945-1949, Copenhagen 1987, 41-54.

new government doubled down on repression by introducing a new

bundle of anti-communist legislation that included extensive use

of the death penalty. In September, it organised a highly

fraudulent constitutional referendum that returned a large

majority in favour of the monarchy. KKE and its broader web of

alliances built through EAM were thus locked out of the political

system. Towards the end of the year, dispersed guerrilla

formations that had survived the onslaught of the state were

reorganised into DSE, and the communist leadership resolved that

the armed struggle had become the party's chief political

priority. The Greek Civil War thus entered its main military

phase, which was to last until the final defeat of DSE in the

summer of 1949.[9]

2. Reconstruction: Soviet Russia, the Red state

As indicated above, the process of political reconstruction cannot

be easily decoupled from the military conflict of civil war. The

disintegration of the state that makes civil war possible consists

in the establishment of distinct, mutually exclusive sets of

political institutions within its territory. For the rivalry

between them to escalate to sustained hostilities, the contending

sides need to have acquired a degree of internal consistency that

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[9] Close, *Origins*, 173–199; Voglis, *Adinati epanastasi,* 152, 211.

allows them to command armies, control territories and govern populations. Battlefield victories then allow one side to extend its institutional reach by force of arms, until rival authorities are vanquished or forced into exile.[10]

On historical maps, this schematic representation of the dynamics of civil war is neatly represented by the relative expansion and contraction of differently coloured areas. Following the end of hostilities, the uniformity of a map without such shading misrepresents the extent to which the political authority of victors remains severely compromised for years after the guns fall silent. Social scientists studying post-conflict societies have long stressed the fragility of peace after civil war. In the negotiated settlements that have ended conflicts in the post-1989 era, mutual distrust and institutional weakness are widely recognised as persistent hurdles to the construction of stable

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[10] These have been the two main outcomes of the European civil wars of the 20th century. The Irish civil war is an exception in that regard, prompting one scholar to suggest that it should not be treated as part of the same class of conflicts. See Rodrigo, "Under the Sign of Mars", 9. Stalemate leading to a negotiated settlement has also been an outcome of civil war in other geographical and temporal contexts, most recently in Nepal. See M. Lawoti / A.K. Pahari (eds.), *The Maoist Insurgency in Nepal: Revolution in the Twenty-First Century*, London 2009.

polities.[11] The more or less total victories characteristic of Europe's civil wars until 1949 were followed by bouts of repression against the vanquished. Although such violence varied in intensity from country to country, it nevertheless testifies to a degree of instability and insecurity as an inherent trait of polities that emerge out of civil war.[12]

To a large extent, such institutional precariousness can be attributed to the presence of large numbers of the defeated side's activists and supporters, among whom the newly established authorities presumably enjoy scarce legitimacy. There is, however, another, less appreciated factor contributing to the instability of post-civil-war regimes. This is the limited political cohesion of the victors' camp, or in other words, the tendency of civil war dynamics to produce weak victors. The Russian case is instructive in that regard. The Bolshevik party had a long history of maximum

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[11] Kissane, *Nations*; P. Collier, *Wars, Guns and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places,* London 2009, 75-78; A. Suhrke / M. Berdal (eds.), *The Peace In Between: Post-War Violence and Peacebuilding*, London, New York 2011.

[12] P. Hagenloh, *Stalin's Police: Public Order and Mass Repression in the USSR, 1926-1941*, Baltimore 2009; N. Panourgiá, *Dangerous Citizens: The Greek Left and the Terror of the State*, New York 2009; G. Foster, *The Irish Civil War and Society: Politics, Class, and Conflict*, New York, NY 2015, 142-171; J. Kekkonen, *Kun Aseet Puhuvat: Poliittinen Väkivalta Espanjan Ja Suomen Sisällissodissa*, Helsinki 2016.

centralism and military-like discipline originating in *What is to be done?,* Lenin's treatise on political organisation published in 1902. When the Bolsheviks emerged as the sole victors out of Russia's catastrophic civil war, they set about carefully buttressing their monopoly on power by fusing leading party organs with the state apparatus, while mopping up pockets of political and military resistance to their rule. Eventually, the Soviet party-state developed into one of the world's most unassailable dictatorships, with recurring waves of political repression ensuring its iron grip on power.[13]

While favoured by Western Sovietologists and official Soviet accounts, this image of an almighty, solidly unitary ruling party obscures the fragility of Bolshevik power after the Civil War as well as the complexity of the institutional arrangement developed by Lenin's party to hold their revolutionary coalition together. No sooner had the most direct military threat to Soviet rule receded with the flight of White forces from Russia, than the fledgling socialist republic faced rebellion from a hitherto staunchly loyal constituency. Towards the end of winter in 1921, just as the Baltic sea-ice was beginning to thaw, the garrison of the Kronstadt naval fortress famously mutinied, inviting a violent Bolshevik crackdown that pitted Red Army soldiers against Baltic

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[13] R. Service, *The Bolshevik Party in Revolution: A Study in Organisational Change 1917–1923*, London 1979; B. McLoughlin / K. McDermott, *Stalin's Terror: High Politics and Mass Repression in the Soviet Union*, Basingstoke 2004.

Fleet sailors who had played a critical role during the 1917 revolution. The mutineers had published a resolution listing a number of demands that were directed against the Bolshevik monopoly on power while purportedly preserving the socialist character of the Soviet state.[14]

Whether the Soviet state could have been held together without Bolshevik control is debatable, but rhetorically at least Kronstadt was a rebellion *within* the Red camp. Transparently inspired by anarchist and Left-SR ideas, the Kronstadt mutiny demonstrated that the Bolsheviks' defeated erstwhile allies and later rivals could make a political comeback in one of their core bases of support. The uprising took place just as the 10th party Congress was gathering to lay out the direction of the Soviet state in the post-civil-war era. With some 40,000 Red Army troops deployed to subdue 27,000 Baltic heavily fortified seamen and soldiers supported by two battleships, the Kronstadt events highlighted not only the Bolsheviks' tenuous hold on power, but also the precarity of peace after victory. The Red coalition could disintegrate, or, indeed, shatter into new warring factions.[15]

To make matters worse, the Congress became the scene for a final showdown between the Central Committee and the Workers' Opposition (WO), the culmination of an internal political crisis that had been brewing for over a year. Led by highly esteemed Bolsheviks

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[14] Smele, *Ten Years*, 203-208

[15] S. Semanov, *Likvidatsiia antisovetskogo Kronshtadtskogo miatezha 1921 goda*, Moscow 1973), 82-87.

such as Alexander Shliapnikov and Aleksandra Kollontai, the opposition articulated a spirited critique of the political course of the leadership which, in its denunciation of creeping bureaucratisation and suppression of criticism, shared much with the demands of the Kronstadt mutineers. Having secured military victory, the Bolsheviks were now faced with smouldering dissent from their core social constituency and a concomitant disintegration of the steel-bound unity that had been their chief political mark of distinction.[16]

Responding to the potentially explosive confluence of internal political turbulence with the economic devastation wrought by several years of total war, the 10th party Congress introduced two measures that would define the contours of Soviet historical development for the rest of the 1920s. Thus, a tax in kind on agricultural production in place of direct requisitioning became the first measure of the Bolsheviks' New Economic Policy (NEP), a mixed economic model reintroducing market mechanisms and limited private property of the means of production. At the same time, the Congress enacted a blanket ban on organised factions within the

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[16] S. Pirani, *The Russian Revolution in Retreat, 1920-24: Soviet Workers and the New Communist Elite*, London 2008, 68-69; D. Priestland, 'Bolshevik Ideology and the Debate over Party-state Relations, 1918-21', in: *Revolutionary Russia* 10 (1997) 2, 37-61.

party to prevent the re-emergence of a coherent challenge to the Central Committee.[17]

A superficial reading of the 10th Congress would focus on its resolutions as a compromise on economic control by the party to secure the greater prize of its political supremacy. Although such considerations were undoubtedly never far from the minds of the leadership, the party's response to the challenges of post-civil-war reconstruction was rather more layered than a simple doubling down on authoritarianism. For even though the ban on factions placed severe limits on the scope of acceptable political dissent within the party, the leadership also sought to address the grievances that had stoked oppositionist sentiment in the first place. Both the Kronstadt rebellion and the WO had been animated by widespread resentment within the broader Red camp towards an increasingly bureaucratic mode of governance that disenfranchised industrial workers, the Soviet republic's purported ruling class. The WO had in fact begun to organise in response to a policy initiative by Leon Trotsky to bring labour under military discipline. To this, the oppositionists counterpoised a syndicalist platform, demanding that industrial management be brought under the control of trade unions.[18]

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[17] V. Lenin, 'X S'ezd RKP (b)', in: *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii,* 5th edition, vol. 43, Moscow 1974, 24–25, 89–92.

[18] B. Allen, 'Alexander Shliapnikov and the Origins of the Workers' Opposition, March 1919-April 1920', in: *Jahrbücher für die*

While denouncing the activities of the WO as dangerous
factionalism, the Central Committee nevertheless initiated a spate
of reforms that implicitly acknowledged its criticisms and went
some way towards restoring the industrial participatory practices
that the party had pushed for in 1917. Though operational control
of enterprises remained the prerogative of management, trade-union
organisations were given responsibility over a number of functions
pertaining to determination of production norms, the formulation
of planning targets and the selection of personnel for further
training and promotion. In order to prevent this complicated
arrangement from gridlocking production, the party leadership
sought to ensure that loyal communists would lead trade-union
groups as well as factory administrations.[19]

Moreover, to buttress the legitimacy of their leadership of
industrial life, the Bolsheviks resolved to further
institutionalise the presence of their party organisations in the
country's enterprises. Launched in tandem with public mourning on
the occasion of Lenin's death in 1924, successive waves of mass
recruitment drives inducted tens of thousands of working-class
members into the party. By 1927, organisations comprising a few
scores of communists at the end of the civil war had swollen to
memberships of more than one thousand, with the party total
doubling over three years. The so-called Lenin enrolments

Geschichte Osteuropas 53 (2005) 1, 1–24; A. Kollontai, "Rabochaia
Oppozitsiia", in: *Levie Kommunisti v Rossii*, Moscow 2008, 165–206.

[19] *Protokoli X S'ezda RKP (b),* Moscow 1933, 590–591, 605–607.

transformed the communist party from an isolated victor of a sanguinary war to a mass institution that was tightly woven into the fabric of Soviet social life. In the newly-founded or -expanded party organisations, the leadership now had a solid cohort of rank-and-file supporters and a pool of reliable candidates for promotion to leadership posts in industrial management as well as trade-unions.[20]

Nevertheless, the reconstruction of the Bolsheviks' political credibility with their core constituency was very far from a trouble-free, uncontested process. Rejuvenated by the influx of new members, the party's grassroots organisations quickly became embroiled in the factional struggles that followed Lenin's death. Pitting Stalin and the Central Committee (CC) majority against a shifting web of alliances of other Bolshevik luminaries, these leadership struggles were ultimately fuelled by diverging visions of how to advance the socialist cause for which the civil war had been fought. Although Trotsky is now remembered as the leading light amongst party oppositionists, the most dramatic challenge to the leadership line at the time was launched by Grigorii Zinoviev, chair of the Leningrad Soviet and leader of the city's party organisation. An astute and ambitious politician, Zinoviev

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[20] J.B. Hatch, 'The "Lenin Levy" and the Social Origins of Stalinism: Workers and the Communist Party in Moscow, 1921-1928', in: *Slavic Review* 48 4 (1989) 4, 558–577; W. Chase, *Workers, Society and the Soviet State: Labor and Life in Moscow, 1918-29*, Urbana-Champagne 1987, 297–300.

succeeded in mobilising the party's second largest and most heavily proletarian organisation against the CC on a platform that denounced the NEP as an unacceptable compromise with the bourgeoisie. Concerns regarding the meagre growth of state industry in the early 1920s turned pillars of loyalism such as the Putilov factory against the leadership; this, in turn, became the most extensive organised challenge to its authority. To return the Leningraders to the political mainstream, the Central Committee dispatched some of its most highly regarded members to win back the city's party cells factory by factory. Their confrontation with Zinoviev's supporters was of an intensity that evoked memories of 1917 in some of its participants.[21]

Unlike Kronstadt, the defeat of the Leningrad opposition did not involve an exchange of fire. The absence of military force should not however obscure the fact that this too was a conflict generated by enduring fissures within the victors' camp of the Russian civil war. Working class communists were rebelling against the NEP as a concession to the other major wing of the Red's social base, that is, the peasantry. Although the latter was more prone to violent uprisings against the emerging Soviet state, the

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[21] C. Black, 'Party Crisis and the Factory Shop Floor: Krasnyi Putilovets and the Leningrad Opposition, 1925-26', in: *Europe-Asia Studies* 46 (1994) 1, 107–126; Y. Kokosalakis, '"Merciless War" Against Trifles: The Leningrad Party Organisation after the Fall of the Zinoviev Opposition', in: *Revolutionary Russia* 28 (2015) 1, 48–68.

organisational enmeshment of the party with industry down to the factory floor – itself a response to the post-civil-war legitimacy crisis – had created a channel for proletarian unrest to seep into and destabilise the party apparatus.

Zinoviev's gambit had also demonstrated the precariousness of the broader party-state architecture constructed over the course of the civil war and its immediate aftermath. Bolshevik control of the state relied on regional party secretaries who, like Zinoviev, had established their own power bases. Though the Leningrad chief was a particularly prominent member of the Bolshevik leadership, there was no guarantee that other ambitious provincial leaders would not seek to leverage their power against the centre. The way Stalin and the CC ensured the secretaries' loyalty was by providing them with security of tenure against local challengers. For most of the interwar period, the centre would generally resolve conflicts in favour of these barons as long as they remained reliable executors of central policies. In the ten years that followed, the CC purged regional secretaries in only a couple of cases of serious misrule or insubordination.[22]

The political system that emerged following Red victory was a highly centralised single-party state that nevertheless relied on powerful provincial prefects and a complex network of activist

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[22] J.R. Harris, *The Great Urals: Regionalism and the Evolution of the Soviet System*, Place 1999; J. Arch Getty, 'The Rise and Fall of a Party First Secretary: Vainov of Iaroslavl'', in: J. Harris (ed.), *The Anatomy of Terror*, Oxford 2013.

participation. In 1937, this entanglement would emerge as one of the main dynamics fuelling the waves of mass repression that shook the USSR. What Western historiography has termed the Great Terror was triggered when Stalin and his leading circle withdrew their support for the regional secretaries, allowing the social discontent that had been brewing within the party's activist base to explode into a torrent of denunciations that provided a steady supply of targets for the security police. It was an attempt to reboot the political system by keeping its shape intact while violently getting rid of its core personnel.[23]

To be sure, the institutional make-up of the Soviet state owed much to the Bolsheviks' Marxist ideological commitments and cannot be attributed solely to the persistence of political dysfunctions inherited from the civil war. Nevertheless, the contradictions present within the Red camp inevitably provided the ground upon which Soviet institutions would have to be built as well as the immediate challenges they would need to confront. In that regard,

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[23] J.R. Harris, *The Great Fear: Stalin's Terror of the 1930s*, Oxford 2016, 1–10; W.Z. Goldman, *Terror and Democracy in the Age of Stalin: The Social Dynamics of Repression*, Cambridge 2007; idem, 'Stalinist Terror and Democracy: The 1937 Union Campaign', in: *The American Historical Review* 110 (2005) 5, 1427–1453; R. Thurston, 'The Stakhanovite Movement: The Background to the Great Terror in the Factories, 1935-1938', in: J.A. Getty 7 R. Manning (eds.), *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives*, Cambridge 1993, 142–160.

the legacy of the civil war was a crucial element in the Soviet
state-building project and its crisis in 1937. Shifting our
attention to the political landscape emerging in the aftermath of
the Greek civil war some thirty years later should help further
illustrate this point.

3. Reconstruction: Greece, para-constitutional monarchy

State power had emerged bifurcated from the civil war, split into
what the foremost scholar of Greek legal history has termed a
constitutional and a para-constitutional wing. The former
consisted of the official political system as a constitutional
monarchy, with an executive relying on the support of a
parliamentary majority. The other wing consisted of a network of
extra-constitutional but powerful actors including the military,
the US embassy and CIA mission, as well as the country's highly
interventionist royal family. The uneasy relationship between the
two wings of the state, as well as the management of victory, in
terms of the imperative of reintegrating the vast numbers of EAM
sympathisers while firmly excluding KKE from the political system,
emerged as the core issues of Greek politics after the civil war.[24]
The conflict between the two wings of the state was further
complicated by the internal divisions within the official

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[24] N.K. Alivizatos, *To Syntagma kai oi Echthroi tou sti Neoelliniki
Istoria, 1800-2010,* Athens 2012, chapter 10; Liakos, *Ellinikos
20os Aiōnas,* 373-375.

political system. As we saw earlier, the coalition assembled to wrest power from the hands of EAM consisted of the remnants of the security apparatus of the collaborator regime and the fractious components of the pre-war political system. Having been plastered over in the face of the existential threat posed by the prospect of revolution, serious ideological fault lines pertaining to the style and substance of Greek politics re-emerged with acute urgency after the last DSE detachments had withdrawn to Albania. Formally, the dividing lines in the victors' camp remained drawn around the perennial issue of the place of the palace in Greek politics, which had been complicated by the unbridled expansion of military influence over all key parts of the state apparatus. In this environment, the palace functioned as the interface for the intervention of the para-constitutional wing of the state in political life. Although the status of Greece as a constitutional monarchy had been secured by the 1946 referendum, the uncertainty surrounding the particular role of the country's exceptionally active monarchy provided a focal point for the articulation of distinct visions for the country's post-civil-war political development.

In this context, the right positioned itself as a hard-line anti-communist backer of the civil war state, as well as the chief ally of the palace. For its part, the liberal centre dropped republicanism for a political platform stressing a return to constitutional normality as the most urgent task of government. This alluded to the restriction of the monarchy to a role of reigning rather than ruling, but also to the limitation of the

unbridled power of the state's security apparatus and its
extensive network of paramilitary collaborators.[25] The non-
communist left remained fragmented and marginal, unable to carve
out a niche that could sufficiently differentiate it from the camp
of the vanquished and the politics of normality promoted by the
centre.[26]

The devastation wrought by the civil war notwithstanding, Marshall
Plan aid and US political backing had placed the victors' camp on
a secure footing.[27] Nevertheless, the deep fragmentation of the
anti-KKE block complicated the task of constructing a functioning
political system in the aftermath of the conflict. The fragility
of post-civil-war politics manifested itself in a succession of
unstable governments that were riven by internal feuds and
defections of prominent figures, rarely exhausting the full length

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[25] However, it should be noted that centrist figures had their own
links to anti-communist paramilitaries, especially in regions such
as Crete where monarchism was very weak.

[26] I. Nikolakopoulos, *I kahektiki dimokratia: kommata kai ekloges,
1946–1967,* Athens 2001, 99–101, 105–7; M. Mailis, *To astiko
politiko systima stin Ellada, apo to 1950 eōs to 1967*, Athens
2014, 76–80.

[27] UNRA, British and Marshall Plan aid made up between 20% and 40%
of Greek GDP in the period 1945-1951. See G. Stathakis, *To dogma
Truman kai to schedio Marsal. I istoria tis amerikanikis voithias
stin Ellada,* Athens 2004, 20-23.

of their mandate. In that regard, considering the first half of the 1950s is particularly instructive.

In 1949, there was still support among some political circles for a dictatorship to circumvent the dysfunctional coalition governments of the civil war era, especially following the death of the elderly liberal Prime Minister Sofoulis towards the end of the conflict. Such schemes were quashed when Papagos – the likeliest candidate for dictator in his position as Commander-in-Chief – publicly declared the prospect of non-parliamentary rule to be suicidal for Greece.[28] For parliamentary democracy to work, however, it was imperative that the splintered political groupings of the victors' camp were reconstituted into firmer formations capable of producing stable governments. With the pre-war parties enjoying little legitimacy, this realignment was initially structured around two individuals who, although long associated with the two main anti-EAM factions of the political system, had previously not been directly involved in party politics.

In January 1950, General Nikolaos Plastiras announced the formation of the National Progressive Centrist Union (EPEK). As an attempt to unite the liberal centre, Plastiras's initiative had a solid rationale. The general's republican credentials were impeccable and, having gained glory in the Greco-Turkish war of 1919-1922, he enjoyed extensive popularity among the country's impoverished refugee population, one of the main pools of support

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[28] S. Linardatos, *Apo ton emfilio stin chounta,* vol. 1, Athens 1977, 58-60, 199.

for EAM. Having also headed the government that negotiated the Varkiza agreement, he was clearly an establishment figure who was nevertheless seen as capable of compromise. If the centre was to function as a channel for the reintegration of the EAM support base into the emerging political system, Plastiras was ideally placed to lead this process.[29]

Plastiras's bid to consolidate the centre ground foundered on the reluctance of other centrist leaders to accept his primacy. The first post-civil-war election in March 1950 gave a comfortable majority to the centrist parties, who agreed to form a government with Plastiras as Prime Minister. Nevertheless, the King, who hated the republican general, offered the royal instruction to Sofoklis Venizelos of the Liberal Party to form the government. Venizelos promptly abandoned the deal he had made with Plastiras, forming a coalition with a minor right-wing party, which collapsed within three weeks. Plastiras then formed a new centrist government on 15 April, which was joined by the Liberals but not Venizelos as a minister.[30]

It is worth noting here that the anti-communist orientation of the post-civil-war political system was a significant factor in the continuing fragmentation of the centre, undermining its prospects of acting as a channel for the reintegration of the left into mainstream politics. Plastiras's government collapsed four months

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[29] Nikolakopoulos, *Kahektiki dimokratia,* 106, 147; Mailis, *To astiko politiko systima,* 74–75.

[30] Nikolakopoulos, *Kahektiki dimokratia,* 126

after assuming office, when the Liberals withdrew their support following a statement in which the general expressed his disapproval for the continuing use of the death penalty against political prisoners. This was followed by a bewildering succession of coalition governments, with Plastiras returning to office in October 1951 as the head of an EPEK-Liberal coalition. Crucially, the chronic instability of centrist governments strengthened the hand of para-constitutional actors, which led to a series of egregious political interventions by IDEA. On 30 May 1951, a group of officers launched a coup in the capital in the name of Field-Marshal Papagos, who, in a clear display of his personal influence, immediately ordered the putschists to stand down. In the following year, the IDEA-affiliated Air force Chief-of-Staff plotted a ludicrously Dreyfusesque purge in which several officers of the force were court-marshalled as communists. The Airmen's affair unfolded alongside the much more high-profile trial and execution of the leading KKE cadre Nikos Beloyiannis, which caused an international outcry involving global cultural luminaries of the calibre of Jean-Paul Sartre, Pablo Picasso and Charlie Chaplin. Against this background, the centrist parties appeared as ineffectual vehicles for pointlessly squabbling politicians, who could not or would not deliver on a policy of democratic normalisation.[31]

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[31] V. Dedes, *I Diki ton Aeroporon,* Athens 1987; Linardatos, *Apo ton emfylio*, 317-340; Nikolakopoulos, *Kahektiki dimokratia,* 154-156.

In the meantime, a major realignment was taking place in the ranks of the right. A combination of factors including the unpopularity of the monarchy, a reduction of US aid and a series of high-profile economic scandals had thrown the People's Party into deep crisis by late 1950. Against this background, leading right-wing politicians began to consider Papagos as a leader for a new party. The Field-Marshal, who had likely been making his own plans in that regard for some time, resigned his post as Commander-in-Chief on 28 May 1951 and announced the formation of the Greek Rally on 6 August of the same year, netting the support of several People's Party MPs.[32] It is indicative of the chaotic state of post-civil-war politics that the royal family felt even more threatened by the Field-Marshal's political ambitions than by its old nemesis, Plastiras. According to some accounts, the King attempted to have Papagos arrested, but was rebuffed by the Army Chief-of-Staff.[33] The reason for this panicked reaction was that Papagos threatened to make the palace redundant. Papagos enjoyed high personal prestige on the right and was seen as a reliable anti-communist partner by the Americans. Crucially, he had the backing of IDEA, which, as we have seen, had emerged as a vigorous player in the political system. The latter is a point worth unpacking, as it highlights the growing institutional autonomisation of the military engendered by the civil war. During the conflict, IDEA

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[32] Ibid., 134–5.

[33] A. Papachelas, *O viasmos tis Ellinikis Dimokratias. O amerikanikos paragōn, 1947-1967,* Athens 1997, 7.

had operated by ensuring the preferential promotion of its members to key positions, while also exerting pressure on senior politicians in pursuit of political outcomes that would hasten the military defeat of DSE. IDEA officers pushed actively for the investment of Papagos with effectively dictatorial powers as Commander-in-Chief in 1949. They then methodically sought to occupy all significant positions in Papagos's staff, in order to shape his exercise of said powers. By most accounts, they kept the organisation's existence a secret from the Field-Marshall who, though himself no stranger to conspiracies, had very little patience for anything approximating insubordination.[34]

Such manoeuvring indicates that the military did not merely serve as a power base for the ambitious Papagos. Shrewd senior officers took advantage of Papagos's powers to buttress the institutional interests of the armed forces in the post-civil-war political system, while also fast-tracking their own careers. By the time Papagos resigned as Commander-in-Chief to enter politics, IDEA had taken over critical parts of the military hierarchy while bypassing established promotion channels and patronage networks than ran through the palace. The Field-Marshall thus had the potential to unify the two wings of the state under his personal

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[34] D. Papadiamantis. 'Stratos kai politiki eksousia stin metemfyliaki Ellada (1949-1967)'. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, 2012, 27-37.

authority, and thereby confine the royals to a purely ceremonial role. As the palace derived its extra-constitutional political power from its status as a locus of institutional stability in an otherwise extremely fluid environment, it had every reason to prevent the consolidation of the party system. It took a series of forceful interventions from American officials to force the royal family to desist in its intrigues against Papagos, in a conflict that seriously damaged the prestige of the monarchy.[35]

This goes some way towards explaining the paradox of the parliamentary debate around the 1952 constitution, which was supported by Plastiras and the centrist parties, but opposed by Papagos's Rally for ceding too much ground to the monarchy.[36] The Greek Rally eventually came to power in November 1952 with a strong parliamentary majority following a majoritarian electoral reform. Papagos's three-year tenure as Prime Minister saw a limited stabilisation of the political system and a sharper delineation of its contours. The Field-Marshall promoted loyal staffers to key positions in the state and the military, sharply curtailing the influence of the palace. Though this move was a step towards overcoming the bifurcation of the post-civil-war state, Papagos could only strengthen his position in relation to the royals by reinforcing other elements of its para-constitutional wing. In terms of the country's long-term

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[35] Papachelas, *O viasmos tis Ellinikis Dimokratias* , 9–10.

[36] Alivizatos, *To Syntagma,* 280–289; Mailis, *To astiko politiko systima,* 115–117.

constitutional stability, perhaps the most consequential of these developments was the promotion of IDEA-affiliated officers to leading security positions. Both the Chief of the Army General Staff and the Director of the newly established State Intelligence Service (KYP) were IDEA conspirators who had been discharged from the military following the abortive coup of May 1951. Their return to active service was a signal by Papagos's government that it had no intention of purging the state apparatus of conspiratorial organisations that shared its political outlook.[37]

By the time of Papagos's death in 1955, the political system constructed by the victors of the Greek civil war comprised the following four elements: a dominant right-wing consolidated in the National Rally; a fractious centre consistently failing to unite around any of its leaders; a scheming palace exploiting political instability to prevent its marginalisation; and an increasingly aggressive network of military conspirators. There was little common ground among these forces beyond anticommunism, a fact reflected in the failure of the political system to develop an attractive national narrative to function as a common ideological reference point. Throughout the post-civil-war period, public discourse consisted primarily of stale Orthodox catechisms and appeals to antiquity seeking to marry familiar nationalist tropes with the country's new Cold War geopolitical orientation. Contrived and at odds with broader European cultural trends, this

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[37] Nikolakopoulos, *Kahektiki dimokratia*, 181; Papadiamantis, 'Stratos', 96, 102, 113.

value system held little attraction for the country's youth and intellectuals, who remained estranged from official politics. The most activist-minded among them eventually gravitated towards the left.[38]

Burdened by institutional instability and a smouldering legitimacy crisis, this political layout turned out to be short-lived. In the decade that followed Papagos's death, the right and centre failed to establish a functioning two-party system ensuring the stable rotation in government of the two main political factions. Though elections continued to be held, each contest was accompanied by intense political manoeuvring and public speculation in anticipation of a coup launched by some coalition of conservative politicians and the security apparatus. This only served to sharpen the pervasive sense of political crisis gripping the country, thus further increasing the space for intervention from the para-constitutional elements of the state. In the 1960s, successive bouts of government instability combined with swelling social unrest provided the opportunity for a group of officers

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[38] V.N. Makrides, „Orthodoxy in the Service of Anticommunism. The Religious Organization Zoë during the Greek Civil War", in: P. Carabott / T.D. Sfikas (eds.), *The Greek Civil War*, London 2004; A. Kazamias, „Antiquity as Cold War Propaganda: The Political Uses of the Classical Past in Post-Civil War Greece", in: ??? (ed.), *Re-Imagining the Past*, Oxford 2014); K. Kornetis, *Children of the Dictatorship: Student Resistance, Cultural Politics and the Long 1960s in Greece*, New York 2013), 14-16.

affiliated to an IDEA offshoot group, to launch a military coup that ushered in the seven-year long Colonels' Regime (1967–1974).[39]

4. Conclusion

Few careful observers of Greek political life were taken aback by the establishment of a military dictatorship in 1967. Politicians and the press had long speculated about the existence of a scheming junta of royalist generals, so that the only real surprise about the coup was the rank of the conspirators and their distance from the palace.[40] By contrast, the wave of repression that swept the USSR in 1937 came as a bolt out of the blue. Mass violence followed a period of sustained efforts by the Bolshevik leadership to provide solid constitutional foundations for the Soviet state.[41] The Russian and Greek civil wars thus gave rise to very different political systems that imploded in rather different circumstances. Nevertheless, jointly considering the two cases

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[39] O. Anastasakis / K. Lagos, 'Introduction: The Greek Military Junta's Exceptionalism in Historical and Comparative Perspectives', in: idem (eds.), *The Greek Military Dictatorship: Revisiting a Troubled Past, 1967–1974*, New York 2021.

[40] Papachelas, *O Viasmos tis Ellinikis Dimokratias,* 93, 132; Papadiamantis, 'Stratos', 229.

[41] S. Lomb, *Stalin's Constitution: Soviet Participatory Politics and the Discussion of the 1936 Draft Constitution* London 2017.

makes it possible to discern a common logic underlying the post-civil-war state building projects in the USSR and Greece. This is the imperative to consolidate the victors' camp into a stable, functioning political system.

In the Soviet Union, this attempt took the form of a highly centralist single-party state which also afforded extensive autonomy to its regional functionaries, while at the same time maintaining a complex system of activist input into public administration intended to diffuse social tensions. In Greece, the form of the constitutional monarchy overlay an intricate web of relations among diverse political actors that included both the formal political system and the para-constitutional wing of the state that had been crucial in securing victory for the anti-communist camp. In both cases, the elements of the post-civil-war political systems emerged or had already been present during the crisis of political authority that led to armed conflict. However, the particular way in which these parts related to each other was worked out over the course of the war itself. The Red coalition for Soviet power came to be a one-party camp only after differences between the Bolsheviks and the Left-SRs became unbridgeable. In Greece, the military had a considerable history of extra-constitutional interventions to look back to, but these had always been made for or against an established political faction. It was only within the context of the civil war that a military-political organisation like IDEA could form around anticommunism as a distinct political platform and eventually gain independence from both the major political parties and the palace.

Civil wars are not only military contests between competing centres of political authority. They are themselves dynamic political processes in which the warring camps develop into fledgling political systems. These are constructed out of the surviving elements of the antecedent system, the dysfunction of which was the main cause for civil strife in the first place. The upshot is that victory for one side does not automatically lead to political consolidation, as divisions within the victors' camp do not disappear with the military threat posed by vanquished. In both cases examined in this essay, the political systems developed by the victors cracked under the weight of contradictions inherent in their own ranks, rather than a failure to reintegrate the defeated side. Their fragility as post-civil-war polities owed as much, if not more, to the (re)emergence of conflict within the victorious camp than a resurgence of the contenders. Shattered by war and revolution, political authority in Russia and Greece remained highly fragmented even after their civil conflicts ended in total victory for one side.

None of this is to say that the collapse of the Soviet and Greek political systems was an inevitable consequence the civil war experience of the two countries. The aftermath of the conflict in both cases involved complex elite manoeuvring and institution building that were open-ended processes at the time that they were being played out. Their contours had been set during the respective civil wars, but their eventual outcome was the product of a combination of circumstances, contingencies and political decisions that took place after the end of armed clashes; they

could have turned out differently. In other words, we should not read history backwards. Due to space limitations, this essay has highlighted the civil war lineage of those particular elements of the political systems of the two cases studies – centre-periphery tensions in the USSR, and military institutional autonomisation in Greece – that brought them crashing down. However, these were not the only factors at play. Soviet specialists have proposed a number of explanations for the violent denouement of the 1930s – including international security concerns, fears of a military coup and the personality of Stalin –, none of which are meaningfully related to the Russian Civil War. Similarly, institutional instability had been the rule rather than the exception in Greece for most of the 20th century, due to a broad range of factors including uneven economic growth, rapid geographic expansion and military misadventures. Their effects continued to be felt in the aftermath of the civil war but were not attributable to it.[42]

Ultimately, civil wars create a new set of problems for already-dysfunctional polities. Old problems that remain unresolved must then be addressed within the context of these new conditions generated by civil strife, as do those novel challenges that are scarcely related to the conflict. This article has argued that focusing on the victors as a source of instability underscores this multi-factorial fragility of post-civil-war states. It also

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[42] Ibid., 4-5; G. Mavrogordatos, *1915: O Ethinkos Dihasmos,* Athens 2015.

opens up fruitful avenues for further comparative research.
Whence, for example, the relative stability of Francoist Spain,
White Finland and the Irish Free State?