

The Civil War in Greece

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At the end of the Second World War, the Greek Communist resistance movements rejected the restoration of the monarchy supported by Great Britain. The British saw the Greek monarchy as the best guarantee of the country's remaining within their sphere of influence. In September 1946, after a referendum, King George II, who was exiled in Cairo, returned to Greece. The Communists, supplied directly by Yugoslavia and the Soviet bloc via Bulgaria and Albania, immediately unleashed a civil war and set up a revolutionary government in Epirus. On 3 December 1946, Greece lodged an official complaint at the United Nations' Security Council, accusing Greece's three northern neighbours of supporting a guerrilla war and undermining its national interests.

From 1946 to 1949, the Communists engaged in violent conflicts against the Government forces who were receiving massive military and financial aid from Britain and, later, the USA. These countries feared that Greece, the last of the Balkan States to resist Soviet domination, would in turn fall to the Communists. As a neighbour of Turkey, Greece was an area of prime importance, from an economic and strategic point of view, for preventing Soviet domination of the eastern Mediterranean and protecting Middle East oil supplies. The United States was therefore committed to preserving the independence and territorial integrity of the kingdom and encouraged the authorities to establish a government of national unity and undertake a series of economic reforms. Greece also enjoyed the benefits of the Marshall Plan and gradually became part of the Western system, by joining the Council of Europe in 1949 and NATO in 1951. Meanwhile, the schism between Tito's Yugoslavia and the USSR deprived the Communist rebels of their main support and led to the partisans having to surrender in October 1949. The defeat of the Communist revolt in Greece, in which more than 50 000 people died, marked the end of the spread of Soviet influence in Europe.