

The Greek Civil War

A lesson plan developed by the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and brought to you as part of an Una Chapman Cox Foundation project on American Diplomacy and the Foreign Service

High School Grades 9–12

Objectives:

Students will understand and be able to explain: The internal and external factors that create civil wars; how different political perspectives impact the way people participate in and understand conflict, particularly in the context of Cold War polarization; how political polarization in Greece led to the Greek Civil War; how global political polarization led to a proxy war between the Soviet Union and the United States in Greece.

Standards: This lesson plan is aligned with the following [Virginia Department of Education History and Social Science Standards of Learning](#)

- **United States History: 1865 to the Present**
USII.1, USII.8
- **World Geography**
WG.1
- **World History and Geography: 1500 A.D. (C.E.) to the Present**
WHII.1, WHII.12, WHII.14

Time required: Two hours

Background information:

The Greek Civil War is often referred to as the first proxy war of the Cold War. At the close of the Second World War in Greece, violent tensions between nationalist and communist-oriented groups arose. Because of Greece's strategic value, the United States was determined to keep it from falling under Soviet control. Ultimately, the communists lost the war, but by the time the fighting concluded, around 100,000 people had died. The war left a legacy of trauma, displacement, and political polarization.

Context: (Cold War, post–WWII era, civil wars, Greece)

Lesson Preparation

Materials:

- Archival footage: Newsreel of [Allied forces provide relief in the Greek Civil War \(1944\)](#)
- Ambassador R. Nicholas Burns Oral History excerpt | Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
- Ben F. Dixon Oral History excerpt | Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
- Norbert L. Anschutz Oral History excerpt | Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
- Different political interpretations:
 - Clip of the Film [Eleni](#) from 1985
 - Mini interview: [Nicholas Gage](#)
 - *The New York Times* article: "[Greek Communists Protest Film 'Eleni'](#)"
 - *The Guardian* article: "[Britain's Dirty Secret](#)" (See Paragraphs 1, 5, 7, 8–10, 12, 19–23, 25–27, 30, 31, 38–40, 53, 61, 71, 72, and timeline.
- Primary Source analysis handouts and Venn diagrams

Additional Resources:

- Relevant background information, if needed, regarding the Greek Civil War.
 - [The Greek Civil War, 1946–1949 | Origins](#)
- Relevant background information regarding the movie and book *Eleni*
 - [MY MOTHER ELENI - The New York Times](#)

Lesson Procedure

Activity One: The Greek Civil War sequence—before, during, after

- Students will watch the brief newsreel from 1944 as a class
- Students will read *The Guardian* article
- Students will read excerpts from the oral histories of Ambassador R. Nicholas Burns, Ben F. Dixon, and Norbert L. Anschutz.

Recommended questions for students; students can also develop their own.

- 1) How did the newsreel from the year before the civil war foresee the conflict that was to come?
- 2) How does *The Guardian* article highlight polarization in society at the time of the war?
- 3) According to the oral history excerpts, how was the U.S. involved in Greece, and how did different groups within Greece respond to

this? Has this left a lasting impact on relations between the United States and Greece?

- 4) Given the information in the articles, does the Greek Civil War still impact contemporary Greek politics?

Activity Two: Understanding Different Perspectives within Greece

- Students should come prepared, having reviewed the oral history excerpts for homework.
- Students will watch the trailer of *Eleni* and the mini interview with Nicholas Gage.
- Students will read *The New York Times* article
- Recommended questions for students, who can also develop their own.
 - 1) The book the *Eleni* movie was based on was very popular in the U.S. when it was published in 1983. What were some reasons behind its popularity?
 - 2) Reflect on the *New York Times* article. What made the communists protest the movie so adamantly?
 - 3) Gage and some of the protesters lived through the same events. What are some reasons why they had such different interpretations of what happened?
 - 4) How do the perspectives of Anschutz and Dixon, Americans, differ from the perspectives of the people from Greece? How is it similar?
 - 5) As a Greek refugee who moved to the U.S., Nicholas Gage identifies as both Greek and American. How might that identity have impacted his political thinking on the issue?
- Students will be assigned to groups based on teacher's discretion. Groups will use the Venn diagram or analysis table demonstrating the various perspectives and how they differ and overlap. For example, students can compare and contrast the perspectives of Gage, the communists, Anschutz, and others.
- Bonus assignment: Students may write a journal entry from the point of view of relevant actors involved in the war. This could be a specific individual like Gage or Anschutz or, in contrast, a prominent nationalist or communist. The communist actor can be a hypothetical figure who represents the group.

Lesson Evaluation:

(1) Review the students' reflective writing. (2) Note what kind of details students were able to pull from the oral histories and articles. Did students pick up on how the opposing sides within the conflict might have felt? (3) Note whether or not students were able to make personal connections to the survivors' stories.

Credits:

Artemis Katsaris, Jordan Miner, and Maya Lytje

R. Nicholas Burns Oral History Excerpt

I think this is probably the time I need to tell you about what I call the battle of the monuments. It's all about the civil war and about Greek-American relations.

Because of the American intervention and the big American role in the Greek civil war and the Marshall Plan, Greece was one of the first and major recipients of the Marshall Plan aid, of the Truman Doctrine. There were several statues in Greece of Americans. There was a statue of President Truman on the major avenue in Athens. The statue of General Van Fleet, the American general who came and helped the Greeks win the civil war against the communists, was up in northern Greece, in Kastoria. There was a statue dedicated to the American Philhellenes in downtown Athens. These were the Americans who in the 1820s—people like Edward Everett — who came and assisted the Greeks in their war of independence against the Turks. And each of those statues was imperiled during my ambassadorship. The Communist Party had tried to blow up the statue[s] in years past. During the demonstrations of the war in Kosovo in 1999, a communist mob attacked the Truman statue, sawed it off at the ankles. The police were able to recover the statue; they put it in a warehouse.

I was concerned about this. I kept asking representatives of the Greek government when do you intend to reestablish the statue? They replied: "Well the time is not right. It'll be a provocation; the communists won't like it." I said President Truman authored the Marshall Plan. He saved Greece during the civil war. The statue must go back up. Well, the Greek government refused. Finally, after months I was able to convince the center-right mayor of Athens, who's a good friend, Dimitris Avramopoulos. He convinced the government and enabled the statue to go back up in time for President Clinton's visit in 1999.

On the statue of the American Philhellenes, the Americans who'd helped fight for Greece independence, well that was in a traffic circle in the busiest traffic area of Greece. You'd take your life into your hands walking out to try to see it,

completely covered by trees. You couldn't even see it. And someone told me it was there and I actually waded out in the traffic with my security guards, went to find it through the vines, thicket, and thorns, and I found it there. I complained to the government about that. They said "Well we can't do anything about that." But Mayor Dimitris Avramopoulos said, "I'll help you, Nicholas." He actually moved the statue to a park across the street from the American ambassador's house. He had it cleaned. It had been dark with soot from all the cars and we rededicated it in a ceremony with several hundred people. General Van Fleet's statue in Kastoria was similarly dragged down by communists and was thrown into the lake. I traveled to Kastoria and demanded that they dredge the lake and find the statue.

There was a fourth statue, dedicated to the American archaeologists who had dug out some of the great historic sites of northern Greece, that was also in disrepair, and we tried to raise funds to help restore that statue. So some of my time in Greece was spent in the battle of the monuments, trying to resurrect these statues because of this ideological fight between the left wing in Greece and the United States over Greek history, over the Greek civil war, and the military dictatorship. And I felt it was my job to be faithful to American history, to the positive contributions that Americans had made, and not allow the left to literally destroy these statues and tear them down and drag them through the streets. I felt it was my responsibility to get those statues back up, which we did, in 2000 and 2001.

Isn't that interesting though? And it's a metaphor for this larger theme: this ideological battle in Greece between the left and the right over the role of the United States in modern Greek history. People feel these things so deeply. Communists tried to eradicate America's contributions to Greece by sawing down statues and throwing them in lakes; it was what they did during the great anti-American riots and demonstrations in 1999. Fortunately we defended our history and triumphed in the Battle of the Monuments.

Source: [Permission granted by Ambassador Burns for use of this excerpt.](#)
[Ambassador Burns' full oral history transcript is estimated to be available on our website in 2025.](#)

Ben Franklin Dixon Oral History Excerpt

DIXON: Nineteen forty-eight, summer of '48. At that time, we were very much concerned. We had Tsaldaris and Venizelos, who were opposing political parties, but on the right. We made them join forces and have a government. Things were pretty bad. I mean, things in Greece had just been awful. The Greeks had been encouraged to join with the Andartes to fight the Germans. A lot of the Andartes, under Markos, turned out to be just strictly Communists who were trying to take over Greece. So it was not only fights between the rightist parties, but also, in the leftist parties, those who were leftist-inclined but patriotic to Greece, and those were leftist-supplied who were trying to follow the Soviet direction. This made for terrible squabbles in Greece. Terrible things were done. And the Greek government, in places where they were trying to operate, had big, in effect, camps in which they retained people they felt that were not trustworthy. The American government felt that they were not being very sure about some of the people. We felt they had more people detained than they should have, and it was causing a lot of dislocation and a lot of other political problems.

So one of the things, while I was learning there about Greece, I went down south and took a look around. The Peloponnese by that time had been pretty much cleared of the Andotti forces, but there were still some places here and there. The British police mission had a group in the Peloponnese. We had taken over from the British, but they were sort of supervising things down there. I went down and called on them, and they said they have an interesting situation. We went out, and they had cornered a bunch of Andartes in a building, the Greek security police or Greek army, sort of indistinguishable. And they had I don't know how many people in there. But the British were saying, "Look, they're cornered. Just call them and tell them to come on out. They're going to be there until they have to come out, so they might as well come out now." Well, they tried that, and they didn't come out. In a little while, the Greeks found a way of setting their house on fire. Which they did, and they began to stream out of there. And the Greeks shot them as they came out, so the British tried to stop them. Well, they finally did stop them, but it was an awful mess.

Q: What was your impression, at the time, of the Greek government? I mean, as an American.

DIXON: The Greek government, mainly run by us. We had a tremendous...we poured in, through the AID thing, people in almost every department of the Greek

government, to help them do their accounting, to do their...I don't know, you name it. And we had people there who were specialists to help them get the government back together and working. And that went on for a couple of years until they got the government sort of in place.

In 1945, they had had the Varkiza Agreement, which was supposed to distinguish between people who were loyal Greeks, who were leftist, or even on the rightist side, that had fought against the Germans, and the people who really looked to the Soviet Union for guidance, so to speak. It was that, I think, for the first time, made it pretty clear as to which side was which side. But it had not really penetrated out in the country very much. And, you know, the Andartes were controlling northern Greece at that time, so they had no real way of knowing what this was about.

Q: Many of those villages were just taken over by one side or the other. Back on the desk, what were our major concerns about Greece?

DIXON: Our major concern was to free Greece. We had 25,000 Greek children who had been taken into Albania, Bulgaria, and God knows where. We tried to get those children returned. We tried to keep the Greek government moderate and reconstructing the country. We tried to keep the Greeks out of stirring up the pot in Cyprus, where we were having a lot of problems. The British were not really respecting the civil rights of the Cypriots. They were not doing things that would make the Cypriots happy at staying Cypriots. We were trying also to ameliorate relations between Albania and Greece, and Bulgaria and Greece. The Bulgars were particularly difficult because they kept going into the Ebro River and coming into Greece and one thing and another. The Greeks were mainly responsible for what they called North Epirus, which was Albania, and they were doing a lot of things they shouldn't have been doing there. So we were interested in reconstructing the country, trying to get the government in a moderate posture and carrying out the reconstruction. We were trying to get a political easing-down of the animosities between the loyal leftists and the loyal rightists. A very important program was to train the Greek army to protect and defend itself. So we were concerned with military programs, aid programs, advice to the government, and all these other...

Q: What about the king? Did we have any particular feelings that the king was...?

DIXON: The king was welcomed back. He was more or less apolitical. His wife, however...

Q: Was this Frederika?

DIXON: Yes. She was the granddaughter of the Kaiser, cousin to the king of England. She was very fond of General Marshall, and she used to give letters to the embassy, which were sent to me, and I took them to General Marshall.

Q: He was secretary of state at that time.

DIXON: He was secretary of defense. He had been secretary of state. In '49, he was secretary of defense. One of the letters was asking that he get her estate returned to her in Austria. It was necessary to restate her estate in what they called the Grund Book in Austria. I set up the scheme to get this done, and I think they did do it. But the queen was always fiddling with political problems and politicians and so forth. And one of the things we tried to do was sort of calm her down a bit.

Q: How much control did you feel that we had, say, with the Greek parties?

DIXON: Well, I think we had no control over the leftists. You know, we were Santa Claus to the rest of them--except the leftists didn't acknowledge it--but we were Santa Claus to Greece. It was hard for them to, you know, do anything that we didn't like. And we really sat hard on a few things.

One thing we were not entirely able to stop was some graft that went on. I remember that Tsaldaris, who was the prime minister after I was there, was later accused of taking a bribe. He was running again for office, and he said it was untrue, filed a suit against the person that alleged this, and so forth. After he lost and was out as prime minister, the court case came up. And he said, in effect, that the article said, "Dressed in a gray suit, Prime Minister Tsaldaris went into the Customs House in Piraeus and accepted a bribe from so and so and so and so." Tsaldaris said he was not, he was wearing a brown suit. But all that time, he'd held off any trial of the thing, and that was the only thing that he...

Q: Were you there during something that's gained a lot of notoriety now, the Polk affair?

DIXON: Yes, I was in Thessaloniki after the thing had happened.

Q: Could you explain what it was, for the record, and then how we responded.

DIXON: Well, George Polk was a correspondent who had been in Athens. He was getting ready to go home, and he had been trying to talk to Markos.

Q: Markos being the head of the...

DIXON: Head of the Greek Andartes.

Q: Which were the Communist...

DIXON: Soviet-directed Communist organization.

Polk, through some sort of hokey-pokey, had been touched. You know, the Greeks are great for saying: I don't know anything, but my cousin knows this, and his friend is the man that does this and that and the other. Suddenly, out of all this kind of very Greek ambience, he had wandered into somebody who was going to introduce him to Markos, to get an interview with Markos. He went up to Thessaloniki, and what did he do? He talked to our people there in the Consulate General. Wally Gibson was the consul general. He talked to them, and I think they tried to suggest that there might be some hokey-pokey going on. But he went and met somebody. And the next day they found him floating in the bay. Some people thought he'd been in a rowboat and they'd shot him in the boat, or they'd maybe shot him ashore and taken him out in the boat and put him in the bay. It wasn't quite clear. But who shot him was a great problem. At that time, we felt it was very difficult to know who did it. It could have been done by the rightists; it could have been done by the leftists. None of it made much sense. There was no motivation for it on either side. We were very suspicious of all these... We had a number of things that said it was the left and it was the right, you know, all sorts of stories. None of them really made much sense. There was no motivation for it. So we came to the conclusion that something had gone wrong and this guy had known too much about somebody who was in the leftist operation who was in Thessaloniki. So when it didn't come off, they shot him. That seemed to be the prevailing opinion.

I understand there's now a book out which says, in effect, that Tsaldaris had some sort of draft scheme in which he was depositing money in some New York bank, and that Polk had found out about it and gone to Tsaldaris and said he was going to expose it unless he told him the whole story and so forth and so on, and that Tsaldaris had set this thing up. I think that's probably not true, but it's quite a mystery what happened there.

Q: It's one of those things that is played on, to show how the American government tried to cover something up.

DIXON: I haven't seen the book.

Q: No, I haven't. I read one by the brother of Miner, or whatever his... Anyway, I read one, and there does seem to be an attempt to show this being a cover-up, that it was done by the right rather than the left.

DIXON: Well, the leftists were trying very hard to push that story. I just don't know, and I don't think anybody really knows. The people in the Consulate General in Thessaloniki and the CIA, who was Harlan Beebe, I think had gotten a pretty good line on what had happened. But, as I say, there's no motivation for it, unless it was that Polk had gotten on to the leftist organization in Thessaloniki that were, in effect, well hidden from the Greek police and so forth, and when they didn't get him to see Markos, they were frightened and they shot him. It's not impossible that Tsaldaris may have done it. Not impossible, but I think it's unlikely.

Source: [Ben Franklin Dixon Oral History, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training \(ADST\)](#)

Norbert L. Anschutz Oral History Excerpt

This was in the fall of 1946...The American interests, of course, were to arrest the spread of Soviet influence. The Soviets, of course, had moved into Bulgaria and had supported Tito in Yugoslavia as well as the Communist elements in Albania. The object of Soviet East Bloc policy was to overthrow the more or less conservative government...Royalist Government...in Greece. During the war there was a considerable amount of fighting between the monarchical-fascists on the one hand and the Communists on the other hand. The [UN] Security Council investigation had been requested by the Greek Government and supported by the Western Allies, the United States, France, Britain, all of whom, of course, as members of the Security Council were represented on the Commission...When the Commission established itself in Athens, which was just

about the end of December, 1946, a considerable amount of effort was spent trying to determine what the modus operandi of the Commission would be. The Communists, as it were, the dissident elements in Greece supported by the Soviets and their allies, had been extremely active and were making a rather, I think, transparent effort to influence world opinion concerning the situation in Greece by alleging all sorts of atrocities and human rights violations, etc. by the government of Greece, which were inflicted on their opponents, again largely Left and Communist elements. The tactics of the...let me call them Soviets because they in effect orchestrated the resistance to the Security Council Commissions' activity. Their tactic was to allege all sorts of violations, not only activities along the northern border of Greece, but in an effort to show general discomfort and resistance to the Greek Government, they picked out alleged atrocities or problems in various parts of the country, including the Peloponnisos and in the Greek islands. In order to respond to these various allegations, the Commission was broken up into subcommittees in which most, if not all, of the participating nations had a representative. In my capacity, as the American representative on one of the subcommittees, we went to places like central Greece, to Larisa; to some of the Greek islands where there were prison camps; we went into the Peloponnese and, of course, later we went up to the northern border area. Later, the Commission as a whole, went into Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Albania...

While we were still in Greece, on March 7, 1947, I was in southern Albania, where the Truman Doctrine was announced. The Truman Doctrine, which provided for the support of Greece and Turkey against Soviet pressure, had been influenced, I think it is fair to say, to a degree by the reporting of the Commission. I do not say it was crucial or critical, but the reporting from our embassies...I think certainly tended to support the decision to declare the so-called Truman Doctrine. This was a decision which was taken before the final writing of the report and before the consideration of the report by the Security Council. But it was part of a general political reaction to Soviet pressure on Greece and Turkey...We, the United States government, under the Greek-Turkey program, was spending what was a very substantial amount of money at that

time. We had developed an aid mission and a military mission, which was to train and support the Greek armed forces. In a sense they worked well because the Greeks were so needy.

They were highly cooperative and with the American military supplies and some American military counseling from the Joint US Military Advisory Group, the sort of shattered Greek military organization was gradually put into some sort of workable organization. And the work of the guerrillas was somewhat circumscribed.

I think it is also fair to say that as the American assistance increased so did the assistance from Yugoslavia and [the] north increase. So there were some rather significant military conflicts during that period. But, basically, it went reasonably well, as we all know, and the guerrillas were vanquished or expelled. In that period too we had not only the military thing, but, for example, there was a campaign of abducting Greek children and sending them up to Bulgaria, Eastern Germany, and possibly Poland...

Source: [Norbert L. Anschutz Oral History, Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training \(ADST\)](#)

Handout Options for The Greek Civil War Lesson Plan

Analysis Tables

Directions: Complete the following tables by identifying the different groups or factions involved in the conflict, and what political position they held. Then, reflect on their goal in the conflict-what outcome did they want? Finally, for the rationale section, reflect on why they wanted that outcome? What about achieving that outcome was important to them?

Analysis Table: Factions

Group/Faction	Political Position	Goal	Rationale

Analysis Table: Factions (Example)

Group/Faction	Political Position	Goal	Rationale
EAMS	Communism	Creating a democracy where communist positions would be represented/com munists would have the opportunity to govern	Unhappiness with the monarchy, unhappiness with Greece's economic situation

Directions: Complete the following table with the names of individuals from the readings and resource material, like Norbert L. Anschutz, Nicholas Gage, etc. Reflect on what group they belonged to, and what their political position was. Reflect on what their goal for the conflict was-what outcome did they desire? Finally, consider their rationale for their beliefs and goals-why might they may have felt the way they did, or believed what they did?

Analysis Table: Individuals

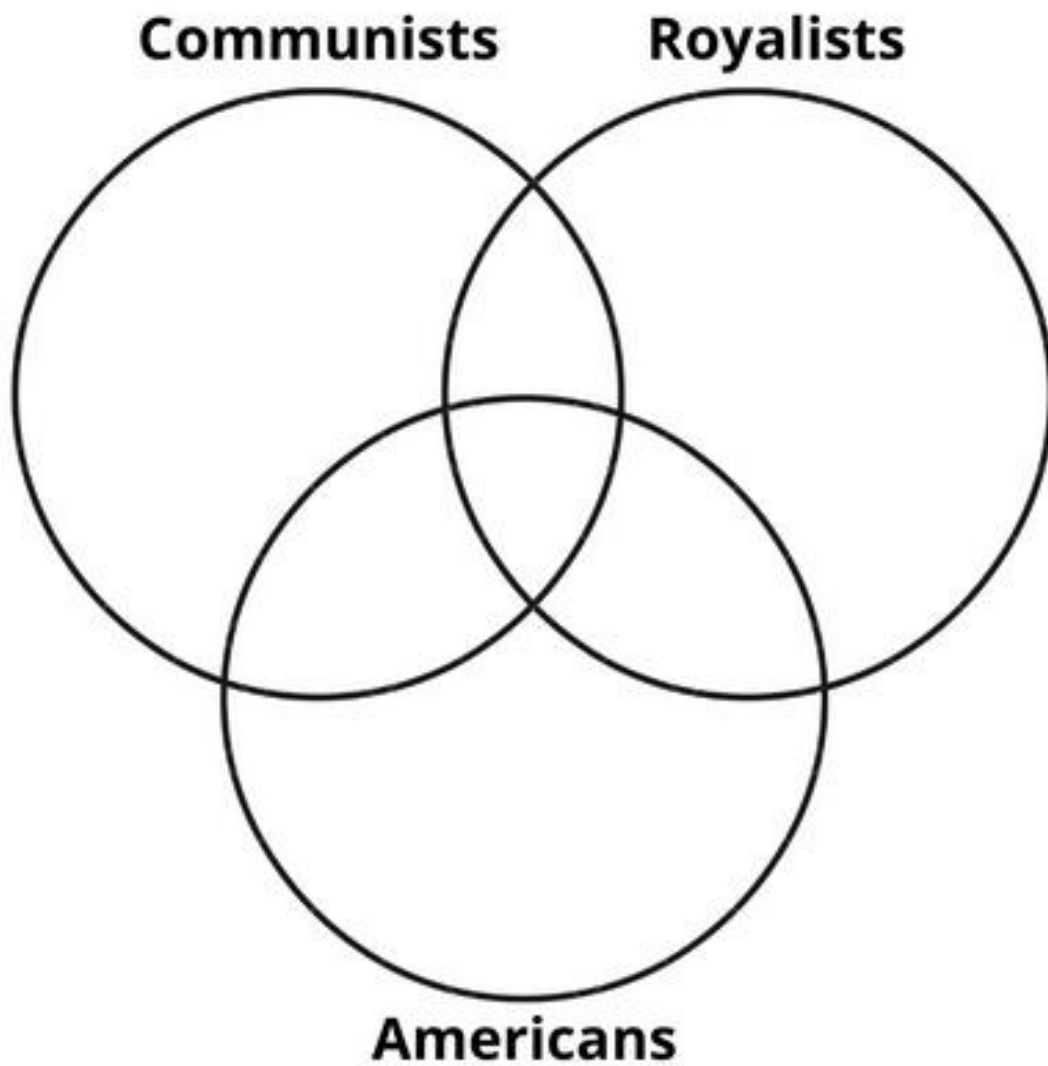
Person	Group	Political Position	Goal	Rationale

Analysis Table: Individuals (Example)

Person	Group	Political Position	Goal	Rationale
Norbert L. Anschutz	American, Foreign Service officer	Opposed to communism	Help the U.S. stop the spread of communism in Greece	If Greece became communist, it would fall into Soviet hands and block U.S. access to the Mediterranean

Venn Diagram

Directions: Fill in the Venn diagram by comparing and contrasting the opinions, positions, and actions of the groups involved in the conflict.



Venn Diagram Example

