

Attic Chronicle by Phocion

Failure in social engineering

Papandreou is marveling: Is the behavior of his Greek victims about to become unpredictable?

In the aftermath of a series of electoral losses for his ruling PASOK party, with the economy careening toward the edge of chaos, and the International Monetary Fund demanding a further round of austerity at the end of two and a half years of net disinvestment and skyrocketing unemployment, with a simmering revolt in the ranks of ministers and ruling-party bosses, Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou held a National Security Council meeting on March 8.

Present were the Prime Minister himself, also in his capacity as defense minister; Minister to the Prime Minister Lazaris; Minister of Interior Koutsogiorgas; Minister of Public Order Skoularikis; Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs Kapsis and Papoulias; Deputy Minister of Defense Drossoyannis; chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral Deyannis; Chief of the Air Force General Kouris; Chief of the Army General Kourfalas; and Chief of the Navy Admiral Pappas.

Papandreou delivered a report whose subject was a vote the previous day in the Appropriations Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives to set the levels of U.S. military aid to Greece and Turkey. Papandreou contested that that vote had been a deliberate signal from the Reagan administration to his government, intended to convey the idea that the White House favors a military weakening of Greece in favor of Turkey. The prime minister made allusions to a certain intent on his part to prematurely abrogate the

U.S.-Greek treaty of military cooperation signed between the two countries last year. An atmosphere of bravado and confrontation dominated the two hour meeting.

Approximately two hours after the Greek National Security Council meeting adjourned, a signal was sent by the captain of the Greek destroyer *Panther*, on routine patrol at the time in the northeastern Aegean, reporting the sighting of a Turkish naval flotilla conducting exercises with live artillery ammunition. The *Panther* reported that some of the fragments of the exploding shells may have fallen in its vicinity, perhaps within 800 meters from its position. It noted however that the Turkish vessels were within pre-announced exercise area in Turkish and international waters.

Deputy Defense Minister Drossoyannis, upon receiving the message from Admiralty Headquarters, notified his prime minister, who immediately ordered a second National Security Council meeting that afternoon. A grand theatrical orchestration followed.

The PASOK organization started mobilizing around the country, spreading rumors of major Turkish aggression. Programs on the government-run television system were repeatedly interrupted to lend credence to the rumors. In the evening, the government announced that "Turkey had committed its worst military provocation in the past ten years; that Greece ordered her ambassador to Ankara re-

called; asked the Turkish ambassador to Athens to leave; informed the U.S. chargé d'affaires in Greece that Athens considers the U.S. government the instigators of Turkey's 'barbaric action'; informed all NATO ambassadors of its action; and called for an emergency NATO meeting for the next day in Brussels."

The entire PASOK apparatus mobilized around a melodramatic proclamation to the people, calling men, women and children to rally around the embattled prime minister in this hour of "grave national danger."

The popular reaction was not what Papandreou had expected. Questions were raised from around the country, including from the ranks of the parliamentary opposition party, New Democracy. Indicative of Papandreou's low credibility with the electorate was the fact that the Greeks could not be aroused to support him even for such a popular pastime as venting traditional anti-Turkish prejudices. It was the second time in 16 days that Papandreou had attempted to co-opt chauvinist emotions in order to rally popular support behind his crumbling government. His anti-Albanian theme of Feb. 21 fell on deaf ears. Ditto for his March 8 anti-Turkish theme.

By the end of the second day of this tempest in a teacup, Papandreou looked ludicrous. A new announcement came from the prime minister's office saying that all previous measures were being cancelled, the ambassadors were not being recalled and "Turkey gave satisfactory explanations." A veteran opposition politician wickedly noted: "Papandreou just put his tail between his legs." "Among his legs," a wag corrected. The next five days were spent by PASOK demoscopic experts trying to figure out why the population has failed to display its perennial knee-jerk anti-Turkish reaction.