Cabinet conclusions on the Soviet position on Greece, 4 February 1946

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C.M. (46) 11th Conclusions

4th February, 1946

1. The Foreign Secretary informed the Cabinet of the line which the Soviet Delegation were taking in the discussions on Greece in the Security Council[[1]](#footnote-1). There was reason to think that this formed part of a considered Soviet policy in respect of the Mediterranean as a whole. In the discussions about the peace settlement with Italy which were now proceeding at the meeting of Deputies to the Council of Foreign Ministers, the Soviet Government were pressing their claims to Tripolitania and were even indicating some interest in Eritrea[[2]](#footnote-2). They seemed to be seeking to take advantage of the present situation to extend their influence on both sides of the Mediterranean.

It was possible that M. Vyshinsky might ask the Security Council to pass a resolution calling for the withdrawal of British troops from Greece. The Foreign Secretary said that he would resist such a resolution, and he doubted whether it would be carried. He had, however, been considering whether he should volunteer the suggestion that some government which had no interest in this dispute – e.g., the United States, one of the South American Republics or Norway – should make an independent enquiry into conditions in Greece. He would not put forward this suggestion until the Security Council had repudiated the imputations which were now being made against British policy in Greece; and it would also serve as a useful precedent if we wished at any time to suggest independent enquiries into conditions in countries subject to the influence of other Great Powers.

The Cabinet –

Took note with approval of the course which the Foreign Secretary proposed to follow in further discussions on Greece in the Security Council.

[TNA, CAB 128/5]

Keywords: Greece

1. On 21 January, the Soviet delegation to the UN, headed by Vyshinsky, tabled the “Greek Question” for discussion in the Security Council, asserting that ‘an extremely tense situation has arisen in Greece, fraught with severe consequences, both for the Greek people and for the upholding of peace and security.’ At the Security Council session on 1 February, Vyshinsky described a situation of chaos in Greece, of a wave of pro-monarchist bands, leading up to the suggestion that the presence of British troops in Greece was not justifying itself. Bevin objected that Vyshinsky’s account of the situation in Greece spoke less of the necessity for British troop withdrawals than it did for the imperative need for sending yet more of them. The discussion continued over the sessions on 4 and 13 February. The papers from these sessions can be found at the following location: http://www.un.org/ru/sc/meetings/records/1946.shtml [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Earlier, during the Cabinet discussion of the issue of Tripolitania on 25 September 1945, the Chiefs of Staff had indicated the significance of the territories of Somalia and Eritrea from the perspective of British strategic communications: they lie ‘on the long sea route to the Middle East if the Mediterranean were out of our control’, but also ‘on the short sea route to India, Australia and the Far East via the Red Sea’. They concluded that: ‘an unfriendly administration installed in it might be very embarrassing to us.’ Although the USSR was not mentioned directly, the Cabinet, as in the case of Tripolitania, came out in favour of collective trusteeship over Somalia and Eritrea (C.M. (45) 32nd Conclusions, Conf. Annex, 15/09/1945 // TNA, CAB 128/1). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)