

# Insurgents' Intelligence during the Greek Civil War\*

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The issue of insurgent intelligence is generally understudied. The case of the Greek insurgents and how they used intelligence to sustain their struggle during the civil war between 1946 and 1949 is no exception. However, the Greek insurgents managed to establish an impressive military and civil intelligence network which supported the fight of their army, the Democratic Army of Greece (DAG), and contributed to the resilience of the insurgency. The study of the Greek insurgents' intelligence network and practices confirms John Gentry's argument that violent non-state actors (VNSAs), such as insurgents or terrorists, focus primarily on tactical and warning rather than strategic intelligence, while they use counterintelligence (CI) to preserve the faith of the insurgents and information operations to shape their operational environment.<sup>1</sup>

The military component of the Greek insurgents' intelligence capacity focused almost exclusively on information on the enemy's whereabouts, configuration, armaments, movements and intentions. Special DAG formations such as scouts, snipers and the intelligence teams had as their mission to capture enemy soldiers. These soldiers were called 'tongues' and were considered as a valuable source

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of the type of intelligence that best served the needs of unit commanders in order to plan their attacks or avoid confrontation with large enemy formations.<sup>2</sup> Respectively, the contribution of the Intelligence Centers and their 'self-defense' network served the same warning and tactical intelligence needs. The Greek National Army (GNA) became obsessed with the destruction of the Intelligence Centers and the self-defense resorting to the controversial policies of evacuating villages from areas within the insurgents' range and mass arresting of suspected self-defenders and KKE sympathizers in order to deprive DAG of its source of intelligence.<sup>3</sup> In any case, the focus on tactical and warning intelligence indicates that the DAG and the Greek Communist Party (KKE) leaderships determined their intelligence needs at the tactical rather than the strategic level, an assertion that confirms Gentry's argument on the type of intelligence employed by VNSAs.

The civil intelligence network was established in the period before the actual outbreak of the war in 1946, dating back to the era of the triple occupation of the country by the German, Italian and Bulgarian armies. This network included groups such as the Organization for Protection of the People's Struggle (OPLA), the National Militia and the People's Militia, which were the basic pillars of the Greek Communists' CI network, although the overall contribution of each differed. The OPLA, which became the insurgents' main CI and espionage activity arm, was created by several secret communist factions within the security forces and reached an impressively high level of efficiency.<sup>4</sup> Operations against security forces' informers, enemy factions within the organization or former OPLA and KKE members who switched sides were part of its struggle to undermine the intelligence capacity of the enemy.<sup>5</sup> However, the executions of former OPLA and KKE members served another purpose as well. Such hits were used in order to discipline the members and supporters of the party and preserve the survival of the insurgency, confirming Gentry's argument on how VNSAs utilize CI. The contribution of the rest of the groups cannot be compared to that of OPLA for various reasons. For example, the service life of the National Militia was rather short since only 11 months after its establishment on April 1944 the KKE terminated its service on February 1945. When the Communists established in 1947 the People's Militia to undertake policing duties similar to that of the OPLA, the theater of war had already moved from the cities to the mountainous countryside. As a result, the People's Militia CI record was not that impressive.

Gentry's third assertion suggests that insurgents use information operations to shape their operational environments by influencing the perceptions and actions of friends, enemies, and relevant third parties. The political commissars of the DAG operated on a similar manner in order to ideologically educate the guerrillas, awaken the local population in order to support the DAG's fight, and damage the

fighting capacity of the GNA by attracting defectors.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the timing was not in favor for them. The GNA's policy of evacuating whole villages within the war zones and the increasing US military assistance which had improved the numerical and technological advantage of the GNA had given the Royalists the upper hand limiting the targets of the commissars' information and propaganda operations. This does not mean that in the case of the Greek insurgency Gentry's assertion is not confirmed. On the contrary, it highlights the significance placed by the insurgents on campaigns that shape their operational environment.

The intelligence model established by the Greek insurgents during the civil war was dictated by their respective intelligence needs. Some of the key features of this model are rather common among insurgencies. For example, the DAG focus on tactical intelligence that supports the activities of basic operational units, rather than the strategic-level political and other non-military information needs of senior leaders, strongly resembles the Colombian FARC's intelligence practices or those of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (Provisional IRA) in the period between 1969 and 1998 and reflects their actual needs in terms of intelligence.<sup>7</sup> In terms of CI and espionage, the way the OPLA and the militias were structured and operated is also common among insurgencies. For example, the Colombian FARC's organization included several similar militias and vigilance organizations designated to gathering intelligence and surveillance.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the high levels of insurgent penetration into governmental agencies that characterized the early years of the OPLA resembles the case of the Israeli Intelligence Service (Sha'i) during the Jewish insurgency against the British in Palestine in 1945-47.<sup>9</sup> Finally, the way the OPLA operated is similar to the espionage services of the Vietnamese Public Service Department in Ho Chi Minh's Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1945, or the underground insurgent groups of Irgun and the Stern Gang in the Jewish insurgency.<sup>10</sup>

All in all, the Greek insurgency confirms Gentry's argument on the type of intelligence VNSAs utilize. The DAG special formations and the Intelligence Centers focused exclusively on tactical and warning intelligence. The OPLA became the insurgents' main CI arm responsible for protecting their intelligence network and preserving the faith to the insurgency. Finally, the political commissars were responsible for shaping the operational environment using information operations. Undoubtedly, intelligence was a crucial factor in explaining the resilience of the numerically and technologically inferior DAG. Although other factors played a more important role in the eventual communist defeat, such as the conversion of the DAG into a tactical army, the cessation of the logistical support from Yugoslavia, and increased US military assistance to the GNA, the crushing of the insurgents'

intelligence network can be considered a significant steppingstone to the GNA victory, as both the DAG and GNA leaderships admitted.<sup>11</sup>

### Notes:

1. Gentry, 'Toward a Theory', 472-473.
2. ASKI, *O Ellinikos Emfylios*, accessed on 19 January 2017, <http://62.103.28.111/ds/rec.asp?id=74608>, 2; <http://62.103.28.111/ds/rec.asp?id=80581>, 6; <http://62.103.28.111/ds/rec.asp?id=81085>, 20; <http://62.103.28.111/ds/rec.asp?id=85175>, 2; <http://62.103.28.111/ds/rec.asp?id=85045>, 5. Also see Ferfelis, *Martiria Machiti tou DSE*, accessed on 21 January 2017, [http://emfilios.blogspot.gr/2013/05/blog-post\\_21.html](http://emfilios.blogspot.gr/2013/05/blog-post_21.html), par. 7; GES/DIS, *Archeia Emfyliou Polemou*, Vol. 11, 246,
3. Voglis, 'H Adinati Epanastasi', 308-309; GES/DIS, *Archeia Emfyliou Polemou*, Vol. 11, 281-282, 291, 308.
4. Chandrinos, *OPLA*, 57.
5. *Ibid.*, 60-61.
6. ASKI, *O Ellinikos Emfylios*, accessed on 28 August 2019, [http://62.103.28.111/ds/ds\\_archive.asp](http://62.103.28.111/ds/ds_archive.asp); <http://62.103.28.111/ds/rec.asp?id=87293>, 22; <http://62.103.28.111/ds/rec.asp?id=87471>, 52-57; <http://62.103.28.111/ds/rec.asp?id=87495>, 47-50.
7. Gentry and Spencer, *Colombia's FARC*, 465-466.
8. *Ibid.*, 460-461.
9. Charters, *Eyes of the Underground*, 166.
10. Goscha, *Intelligence in a Time*, 121-122.; Charters, *Eyes of the Underground*, 169-170.
11. Alexandrou, *To Imerologio*, 76, 83; GES/DIS, *Archeia Emfyliou Polemou*, Vol. 11, 315.

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