

# The Greek army and the 1922 refugee crisis: Military intervention in the aftermath of the Asia minor catastrophe

Marios Kyriakidis \*

*Docent at the Hellenic Army Academy, Higher Military Educational Institution, "Military Academy of Evelpidon"*

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## Abstract

The 1922 refugee crisis, triggered by the Greek military defeat in Asia Minor, led to one of the most significant forced population movements of the 20th century. While existing historiography primarily examines this crisis through diplomatic and humanitarian lenses, this study reframes the Greek Army's role as an active agent in both the displacement and management of refugees. Rather than treating the military as a neutral force or a mere facilitator of state policies, this research argues that the Army's intervention blurred the lines between humanitarian relief, strategic governance, and national security.

By analyzing military records, League of Nations reports, government decrees, newspapers, and oral testimonies, this study uncovers the Army's role in coordinating evacuations, managing refugee settlements, and enforcing social order. It also investigates the military's engagement with foreign aid agencies and its influence on state refugee policies. Theoretically, this research challenges conventional views of military humanitarianism by positioning the Greek Army's actions within a broader framework of crisis governance and state-building.

This study advances historical scholarship by demonstrating that the Greek Army did not merely respond to a humanitarian emergency; it actively shaped population movements, used refugee management as a tool of social control, and laid the groundwork for later military-state interactions in Greece's modern history. Ultimately, this research not only deepens our understanding of the 1922 crisis but also contributes to contemporary debates on the militarization of humanitarian aid and the strategic dimensions of refugee governance.

**Keywords:** Greek Army (1922); Refugee Crisis Management; Military Humanitarianism; Asia Minor Catastrophe; Crisis Governance; Forced Displacement and Security

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. The Military as a Humanitarian Force? Research Rationale & Importance

The Asia Minor Catastrophe of 1922 remains one of the most significant turning points in modern Greek history. The military defeat of Greece in the Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922) resulted in the forced displacement of approximately 1.3 million Greek Orthodox refugees from Asia Minor, leading to a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented scale (Clark, 2009). The Treaty of Lausanne (1923) officially mandated a compulsory population exchange between Greece and Turkey, further exacerbating the challenges faced by the Greek state. The influx of destitute refugees, many of whom arrived malnourished, diseased, and without possessions, placed an overwhelming burden on an already fragile economy, struggling with post-war instability (Kyriakidis, 2021).

\* Corresponding author: Marios Kyriakidis

In response, the Greek Army played a pivotal but understudied role in refugee management. Unlike typical military operations focused on defense and warfare, the Greek Army in 1922–1923 became a key institution for handling civilian displacement, resettlement, and security. Military units were involved in establishing refugee camps, distributing food and medical supplies, and maintaining public order in urban centers overwhelmed by the influx. Furthermore, military engineers contributed to the rapid construction of temporary housing and sanitation infrastructure, mitigating the risk of widespread disease outbreaks.

Despite the Greek Army's involvement, there were significant challenges. The lack of resources, political instability, and growing social tensions between native Greeks and refugees created an environment of uncertainty. While some historical narratives emphasize the Army's logistical efficiency, others suggest that military-run refugee camps suffered from poor conditions, corruption, and inadequate government oversight (Hirschon, 1998). Thus, evaluating the Greek Army's effectiveness in managing this crisis requires a nuanced and critical approach that goes beyond traditional military history.

This study is significant because it broadens our understanding of the military's non-combat roles in times of crisis. The Greek Army's response to the 1922 refugee crisis can be compared to modern military-led humanitarian interventions, offering a historical case study on the potential and limitations of military forces in handling mass displacement. Furthermore, analyzing this period provides valuable insights into how states use military institutions to enforce national policies, manage migration crises, and integrate displaced populations into society.

## 1.2. Historiographical Gaps & Research Question

Historiography on the Asia Minor refugee crisis has predominantly focused on political, social, and economic dimensions, with an emphasis on the refugees' long-term integration into Greek society (Alexandris, 1992; Koliopoulos & Veremis, 2002). Many studies explore how the League of Nations assisted Greece in resettling refugees through international loans and economic projects (Ladas, 1932). Others examine how the Greek state navigated the political repercussions of the population exchange and the broader implications for Greek-Turkish relations (Kitromilides, 1983).

However, one critical gap in existing scholarship is the lack of focus on the Greek Army's role in the immediate management of the refugee crisis. While there is some literature on military operations during the Greco-Turkish War, very few studies address how the Army transitioned into a humanitarian role following the war's conclusion.

A second historiographical gap relates to the effectiveness of military-administered refugee policies. Did the Army act as a stabilizing force, or were its interventions largely improvised and reactionary? Some sources suggest that military leadership lacked a clear plan, resulting in disorganized and often harsh conditions in refugee camps (Clark, 2009). Others highlight successful cases where the Army provided essential relief, particularly in rural areas where civilian infrastructure was nearly nonexistent (Hirschon, 1998). This divergence in perspectives requires further investigation.

Additionally, previous studies have not sufficiently explored the socio-political dynamics between the Army and local Greek populations, many of whom viewed refugees as an economic burden or a threat to regional stability (Voutira, 2003). An analysis of the Greek Army's role in conflict resolution—whether through policing, protection, or suppression—will help contextualize the military's function in maintaining order during large-scale demographic shifts.

### 1.2.1. Core Research Question

To address these historiographical gaps, this study poses the following research question:

*To what extent did the Greek Army function as an effective force in refugee management following the 1922 Asia Minor Catastrophe?*

This inquiry will evaluate:

- The Army's logistical capacity in handling mass displacement.
- The efficiency and shortcomings of military-administered refugee settlements.
- The interactions between the Army, the Greek government, and international organizations (e.g., League of Nations).
- The long-term implications of military-led refugee management on Greek national policy.

By examining the Greek Army's involvement in refugee management, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive reassessment of its humanitarian, logistical, and administrative functions during one of Greece's most challenging historical moments. In doing so, it aims to fill historiographical gaps and contribute to broader discussions on military-led humanitarianism. The findings of this research will be valuable not only for scholars of modern Greek history but also for those studying forced migration, military history, and crisis management in the 20th century.

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## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Theoretical framework.**

The 1922 Asia Minor Catastrophe marked a pivotal moment in Greek history, culminating in the displacement of approximately 1.2 million Greek Orthodox individuals from Turkey to Greece, thereby increasing the host population by 20% within a few months (Murard, 2022). This mass exodus not only altered Greece's demographic landscape but also posed significant socio-economic challenges. In the aftermath of the catastrophe, international organizations and foreign governments extended aid to alleviate the burgeoning crisis. The United States, through entities like the American Red Cross and Near East Relief, played a crucial role in providing assistance to Greek refugees between 1922 and 1923 (Klapisis, 2011).

These efforts underscore the global recognition of the crisis's severity and the imperative for coordinated humanitarian intervention.

#### *2.1.1. The Greek Army's Involvement*

While international aid was instrumental, the Greek Army's involvement in managing the refugee influx has been a subject of limited scholarly attention. Existing literature often emphasizes the army's logistical contributions, such as establishing refugee camps and maintaining public order. However, comprehensive analyses of the army's effectiveness and the challenges it faced remain scarce.

#### *2.1.2. Socio-Cultural Implications*

The influx of refugees led to the formation of a distinct refugee identity among those displaced from Asia Minor. This identity served as a coping mechanism for the trauma of forced displacement and played a significant role in their integration into Greek society (James, 2001). Understanding these socio-cultural dynamics is essential for comprehending the broader impact of the refugee crisis on Greek society.

### **2.2. Theoretical Framework**

#### *2.2.1. Just War Theory and Humanitarian Intervention*

Just War Theory provides a foundational ethical framework for evaluating the legitimacy of military actions, including humanitarian interventions. This theory delineates criteria under which the use of military force is justified, emphasizing principles such as just cause, proportionality, and legitimate authority (Hoag, 2015).

In the context of the 1922 refugee crisis, assessing the Greek Army's actions through this lens can elucidate whether their involvement adhered to these ethical standards.

#### *2.2.2. Humanitarian-Military Relations Frameworks*

The "Three C" framework - Cooperation, Coordination, and Coexistence - offers a nuanced perspective on the interaction between military forces and humanitarian actors. This model suggests that the nature of military involvement in humanitarian efforts can vary from direct engagement to mere coexistence, depending on the context (Grace, 2020). Applying this framework to the Greek Army's role can provide insights into the effectiveness and appropriateness of their actions during the crisis.

#### *2.2.3. Social Cohesion and Long-Term Integration*

The mass refugee inflow of 1923 had lasting effects on social cohesion in Greece. The provision of farmland, housing, and citizenship to refugees played a pivotal role in their integration and the subsequent development of rural areas (Murard, 2022).

Analyzing the army's role in facilitating or hindering this integration process is crucial for understanding the long-term socio-economic impacts of their involvement.

The existing literature provides valuable insights into the 1922 refugee crisis, international humanitarian responses, and the socio-cultural implications for Greek society. However, there remains a notable gap concerning a comprehensive analysis of the Greek Army's role during this period. Employing theoretical frameworks such as Just War Theory and the "Three C's" can offer a structured approach to assess the ethical and operational dimensions of the army's involvement. This study aims to bridge this gap by critically examining the extent to which the Greek Army functioned as an effective force in refugee management, thereby contributing to both military and refugee history.

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### 3. Data and research Methodology

The research methodology was determined based on the historical nature of the subject, the type of sources available, and the ultimate research objectives of this study. Given that the study examines the role of the Greek Army in the 1922 refugee crisis, it was necessary to follow the historical-pedagogical method, combined with source analysis and historical interpretation. This methodological approach allows for a comprehensive examination of the institutional, military, and humanitarian responses to the crisis, situating them within their broader historical and social contexts.

In the field of historical research, the scope is vast, encompassing multiple dimensions such as:

- The history of institutions and policies, which studies military involvement in humanitarian efforts, state intervention in crisis management, and the administrative organization of relief efforts;
- The evolution of refugee policies, examining how different levels of governance -military, political, and civil - responded to forced displacement;
- Military and social integration processes, assessing how the Greek Army facilitated or hindered refugee assimilation through infrastructure, security, and resource distribution;
- Critical evaluation of military-led humanitarian interventions, exploring both the successes and limitations of military involvement in crisis response;
- The role of national policies in shaping refugee experiences, particularly how Greece's national identity, political instability, and foreign interventions influenced the Army's approach to refugee management (Borg & Gall, 1989).

This historical research belongs to qualitative research methodologies and specifically examines the role of state and military institutions in shaping humanitarian responses, which marked one of the most significant refugee crises in modern Greek history. It explores the direct and indirect impact of the Greek Army on refugee settlement, security, and integration, shedding light on both institutional decision-making and social consequences.

Through archival primary texts, the study investigates official military records, governmental decrees, and international reports that document the Army's actions, its cooperation with civilian authorities, and the challenges it encountered in handling mass displacement. According to Mavroskoufis (2005), primary or direct sources are those that originate from the period being studied, while secondary or indirect sources are later interpretations and analyses of historical events. The study employs both types of sources to reconstruct the Greek Army's humanitarian role and critically assess its effectiveness.

This research presents significant methodological challenges due to its reliance on historical data and fragmented archival materials. As Verdis (2015) notes, historical inquiry often deals with incomplete records, missing data, and contextual changes that influence interpretation. Furthermore, causal factors that shaped the 1922 refugee crisis and the Army's response have since evolved or disappeared, making it necessary to contextualize historical events through contemporary historiographical debates.

Athanasίου (2003) highlights a fundamental challenge in historical research: *"The more remote the events being analyzed, the greater the difficulties in reconstructing them with absolute certainty."* This principle applies directly to the study of the Greek Army's role in refugee management, as contemporary sources may contain biases, omissions, or inconsistencies. Therefore, this study follows a critical approach to historical interpretation, verifying accounts through cross-examination of multiple sources, external and internal critique, and comparative analysis with other refugee crises of the early 20th century.

The historical analysis method is the primary tool used in this study. Mialaret (2002) asserts that historical analysis facilitates the systematic reconstruction of past events, allowing for the verification of facts and establishing cause-effect relationships. This method enables the study to:

- Examine the sequence of events leading to the Greek Army's intervention in refugee management;
- Investigate the Army's role in setting up refugee settlements, maintaining security, and distributing resources;
- Assess the effectiveness and limitations of military-led humanitarian efforts;

Understand the broader geopolitical and national policy implications of military involvement in refugee relief (Athanasίου, 2003).

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) define historical research as *"the systematic and objective identification, evaluation, and synthesis of evidence to establish facts and draw conclusions about past events."* In this sense, the study is an act of historical reconstruction, critically engaging with primary and secondary materials to offer an accurate and well-contextualized account of the Greek Army's humanitarian role.

Beyond its academic significance, historical research holds practical and social value. Topolski (1979) emphasizes that historical research clarifies concepts, examines the coherence of past policies, and assesses the alignment of historical events with broader objectives. In the context of this study, analyzing the Greek Army's role in refugee management contributes to:

- Understanding state responses to forced displacement, particularly in moments of crisis;
- Providing lessons for modern refugee governance, by evaluating past successes and failures;

Re-evaluating historical theories on military intervention in humanitarian affairs, offering a more nuanced perspective on civil-military relations (Nova-Kaltsouni, 2006).

Historical research also allows for the critical examination of past assumptions, leading to new interpretations that may influence present and future policy decisions. Hill and Kerber (1967) outline the key benefits of historical inquiry:

- Providing past solutions to contemporary problems;
- Identifying patterns in state responses to humanitarian crises;
- Highlighting the role of military forces in shaping national policies;
- Re-examining established historical narratives in light of new evidence.

By studying the Greek Army's involvement in the 1922 refugee crisis, this research seeks to contribute to historical knowledge and enhance contemporary debates on refugee policies, military humanitarianism, and state crisis management.

This research is grounded in historical-pedagogical methodologies, employing archival research, historical analysis, and qualitative interpretation to examine the Greek Army's response to the Asia Minor refugee crisis. By integrating primary sources, secondary analyses, and theoretical frameworks, the study aims to reconstruct the events of 1922–1923 with academic rigor and critical inquiry.

As Melanitis (1957) argues, *"Anyone studying historical crises must take into account the political, social, and economic conditions of the time. Education, governance, and military action cannot be isolated from the broader context in which they operate."* This principle underpins the methodology of this study, ensuring that the Greek Army's role in refugee management is analyzed holistically, with attention to its historical, social, and geopolitical significance.

Ultimately, this research does not seek merely to describe past events, but to engage critically with historical sources, reassessing established interpretations and contributing to a deeper understanding of military involvement in refugee crises throughout history.

## **4. Result and discussion**

### **The 1922 Crisis – War, Defeat, and Exodus**

#### **4.1. The Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922): Setting the Stage. Greek Military Objectives in Asia Minor and Their Collapse**

The Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922) was rooted in the ambitious Greek national policy known as the "Megali Idea," which aimed to expand Greek territory to include regions with significant Greek populations, particularly in Asia Minor (Kyriakidis, 2016). In May 1919, under the auspices of the Allied powers, Greek forces landed in Smyrna (modern-day İzmir) to protect the local Greek community and to assert claims over the region (Smith, 2022). The initial objective was to establish control over Western Anatolia, anticipating a favorable outcome in the post-World War I treaties.

However, the Greek military campaign faced significant challenges. The Turkish National Movement, led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, organized effective resistance against the Greek forces (Kyriakidis, 2021). Despite initial advances, the Greek army overextended its supply lines and faced logistical difficulties. The turning point came in August 1922, when Turkish forces launched a successful counteroffensive, leading to the rapid retreat of Greek troops (Kyriakidis, 2021). This defeat marked the collapse of Greek military objectives in Asia Minor.

#### **4.2. The Turkish Victory and Forced Greek Withdrawal**

The decisive victory of Turkish forces culminated in the recapture of Smyrna on September 9, 1922 (Mango, 2002). The subsequent burning of the city resulted in widespread destruction and loss of life, particularly among the Greek and Armenian populations (Milton, 2009). The fall of Smyrna symbolized the end of Greek aspirations in Asia Minor and led to the evacuation of remaining Greek forces and civilians. The Armistice of Mudanya, signed in October 1922, formalized the cessation of hostilities, paving the way for the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), which redefined the borders between Greece and the newly established Republic of Turkey (Kyriakidis, 2024).

#### **4.3. The Refugee Crisis: Scope & Scale**

The aftermath of the war precipitated a massive refugee crisis. Approximately 1.2 million Greeks were displaced from Asia Minor, Eastern Thrace, and Pontus regions (Clark, 2009). These populations had resided in these areas for centuries, contributing to the cultural and economic fabric of the Ottoman Empire. The sudden displacement led to significant humanitarian challenges in Greece, including housing shortages, unemployment, and social integration issues (Hirschon, 1998).

The Treaty of Lausanne, signed on July 24, 1923, included provisions for a compulsory population exchange between Greece and Turkey (Kyriakidis, 2024). This agreement mandated the relocation of Orthodox Christians from Turkey to Greece and Muslims from Greece to Turkey, affecting approximately 1.5 million people in total. The exchange aimed to create ethnically homogeneous nation-states but resulted in profound social and economic upheavals for the displaced populations (Ladas, 1932).

The period was marked by widespread atrocities, including massacres and forced deportations. The burning of Smyrna exemplified the violence inflicted upon civilian populations (Dobkin, 1998). Reports of systematic killings and ethnic cleansing campaigns underscored the severity of the situation. The international community faced challenges in responding effectively, as the geopolitical complexities of the post-World War I era limited the scope for direct military intervention. The focus shifted towards humanitarian assistance and the implementation of population exchanges to mitigate further conflict.

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## **5. The Greek Army's Immediate Response – Crisis Management or Chaos?**

The collapse of the Asia Minor campaign in 1922 triggered one of the largest humanitarian crises in modern Greek history. As approximately 1.2 million Greek refugees fled Asia Minor, the Greek Army found itself at the center of an immense logistical and administrative challenge (Kyriakidis, 2024). While traditional historiography has often portrayed the army as a neutral actor, responding solely to humanitarian imperatives, a closer examination suggests a more complex picture. The army's role in evacuations, the establishment of refugee camps, and the enforcement of public order was not merely reactive but deeply intertwined with state-building objectives and the preservation of political and social stability (Hirschon, 1998).

### 5.1. Military-Led Evacuations

The Greek Army played a central role in evacuating Greek civilians from Asia Minor's western coastline in the final weeks of the Greco-Turkish War. As Turkish forces advanced, mass panic spread among Greek and Armenian populations, many of whom fled towards the coast in hopes of rescue by Greek or Allied ships (Clark, 2009). However, evacuation efforts were hampered by severe disorganization, inadequate coordination between military and naval forces, and logistical failures.

In the days following the fall of Smyrna (September 9, 1922), thousands of civilians sought passage across the Aegean. The Greek military initially attempted to organize structured evacuations, prioritizing soldiers and select groups of civilians, but these efforts quickly disintegrated as desperate refugees overwhelmed ports (Smith, 2022). Naval resources were insufficient, and soldiers—who were themselves retreating - often competed with civilians for limited places on ships (Kyriakidis, 2021).

A notable failure occurred in Çeşme and Ayvalık, where Greek military units were among the last to be evacuated, leaving thousands of civilians behind. Eyewitness reports suggest that Greek officers were sometimes forced to turn refugees away, leading to mass panic and violent clashes at the docks (Hirschon, 1998). This highlights the army's prioritization of military withdrawal over civilian rescue, reflecting institutional limitations rather than a well-planned humanitarian operation.

The Greek Navy was overburdened and poorly coordinated. While some warships and civilian vessels were requisitioned for refugee transport, many overcrowded boats were forced to drift without adequate food or medical aid (Dobkin, 1998). Additionally, disease outbreaks and unsanitary conditions aboard refugee ships **led to** hundreds of deaths during the crossings (Hirschon, 1998). The absence of a unified evacuation command structure exacerbated the chaos, leading historians to conclude that the Greek Army's evacuation efforts were reactive rather than premeditated or effectively executed (Clark, 2009).

### 5.2. Refugee Camps & Quarantine Zones

Upon arrival in Greece, refugees were directed to hastily constructed military-administered camps in Athens, Piraeus, Thessaloniki, and smaller port towns. However, these settlements quickly became overcrowded and disease-ridden, leading to significant public health crises.

The Greek Army, already weakened and disorganized from the war, was tasked with setting up refugee camps on an unprecedented scale (Ladas, 1932). Initial efforts focused on securing large open spaces such as military barracks, abandoned warehouses, and urban outskirts to serve as refugee quarters (Hirschon, 1998). Basic provisions, including tents, food, and medical supplies, were sourced from the Greek Red Cross and international relief organizations, but these were inadequate given the sheer number of displaced individuals.

The refugee population in Thessaloniki alone swelled to over 150,000, exceeding the city's existing population (Clark, 2009). The military faced severe administrative difficulties, leading to disorganized food distribution, a lack of sanitation facilities, and growing frustration among refugees (Hirschon, 2003).

### 5.3. Case Study: Military-Run Camps in Thessaloniki and Piraeus

In Thessaloniki, military authorities initially used former Ottoman barracks and army training facilities to house refugees, but these quickly became overcrowded and unsanitary (Ladas, 1932). Reports indicate that some camps lacked running water, while food rations were frequently delayed, leading to severe malnutrition and disease outbreaks.

Similarly, in Piraeus, where thousands of refugees arrived daily, the Greek Army struggled to maintain security and hygiene. Quarantine stations were established to prevent the spread of diseases, **yet** cases of cholera and typhoid surged due to inadequate medical provisions (Hirschon, 1998).

The army assumed law enforcement responsibilities, imposing curfews and regulating movements within refugee zones (Clark, 2009). This military-led policing system often led to confrontations between refugees and authorities, especially as displaced populations demanded better conditions and more resources (Newspaper "Amalthea Smyrna", 1922).

Many native-born Greeks resented the newcomers, seeing them as economic burdens or even political threats (Hirschon, 2003). Tensions between refugees and locals frequently escalated into violent confrontations, especially in

cities where labor competition was high (Kiriakidis, 2024). The army's response was often forceful, suppressing protests and enforcing strict residency controls in refugee areas.

While the Greek Army's involvement in refugee management is often depicted as a necessary and humanitarian response, evidence suggests that its actions were also motivated by political and social stability concerns. The military's strict control over refugee movements, its repressive security measures, and its prioritization of order over welfare suggest a more nuanced interpretation of its role.

It must be made clear that the Greek Army's response to the 1922 refugee crisis was characterized by both logistical necessity and political strategy. While it played an essential role in evacuations, camp administration, and security, **its** failures in organization, its suppression of unrest, and its instrumentalization of refugee management for political stability complicate the traditional humanitarian narrative. The Army's actions must be understood within the broader context of post-war instability, where controlling refugees was as much a national security issue as it was a humanitarian imperative.

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## 6. Military Logistics, Resource Allocation & Strategic Interests

The Asia Minor Catastrophe of 1922 presented an unprecedented logistical challenge for the Greek state and its military. The Greek Army, tasked with overseeing refugee evacuation, settlement, and sustenance, faced severe constraints in resource allocation, infrastructure development, and political oversight. The traditional narrative of the army as a neutral force responding to humanitarian needs is overly simplistic. Rather than acting solely as an emergency response unit, the Greek Army strategically managed resources to stabilize political tensions, exert control over refugee populations, and maintain national security (Hirschon, 2003). The army's dual role - both as a logistical coordinator and as a political instrument - raises questions about the extent to which refugee management served broader military interests. The Greek Army assumed primary responsibility for food distribution to refugees, relying on military supply chains, international aid, and government rations (Clark, 2009). While initial distribution efforts were relatively structured, inefficiencies quickly emerged due to overwhelming demand, lack of coordination, and logistical bottlenecks. A primary issue was the uneven allocation of food supplies. Reports indicate that certain refugee camps, particularly those in rural areas, suffered from food shortages, while urban centers received disproportionate resources (Bank of Greece, 2021).

The army's role in rationing became a contentious issue, as allegations of favoritism and black-market trade surfaced (Ladas, 1932). Military officers - some of whom were politically aligned with different factions - were accused of diverting food supplies to groups deemed politically loyal or socially preferable. Despite these challenges, some military-led food programs were relatively successful, especially where local communities and the Greek Orthodox Church collaborated with military officers to establish soup kitchens. However, the army's bureaucratic inefficiencies, coupled with limited oversight, created inconsistencies in food distribution, reinforcing existing class and regional disparities (Hirschon, 2003).

### 6.1. Military Engineers & the Construction of Refugee Settlements

The Greek Army's engineering corps played a crucial role in constructing temporary settlements to house refugees. Using military construction techniques, engineers converted abandoned Ottoman military bases, expropriated land, and repurposed urban spaces into makeshift camps (Smith, 2022). The military's involvement in infrastructure development was both a necessity and a strategic maneuver - it ensured the rapid deployment of shelter but also allowed the army to control settlement locations and population movements. The quality of these settlements varied significantly (Veranis, et al., 2018). In major urban centers like Thessaloniki and Athens, some barrack-style accommodations were relatively well-constructed, equipped with basic sanitation and water access. In contrast, rural settlements often consisted of overcrowded tent cities with poor drainage and inadequate waste disposal, leading to high mortality rates from disease outbreaks, particularly typhoid and cholera. The army's dual role in settlement construction highlights a strategic dimension - by controlling refugee locations, it could prevent mass unrest, mitigate economic competition with local labor forces, and reinforce state authority over displaced populations.

The League of Nations played a central role in providing financial and material assistance to Greece, yet the Greek Army retained significant control over how these resources were distributed (Ladas, 1932). Between 1923 and 1926, the League's Refugee Settlement Commission allocated £10 million in reconstruction aid, yet much of this was channeled through military-led projects rather than independent civilian organizations. A key issue was whether the military had too much discretionary power over international aid distribution. In theory, these funds were designated for agricultural settlements, employment training, and infrastructure. However, army administrators often prioritized



projects that aligned with national security concerns, such as fortifying northern border settlements and reinforcing military outposts under the pretext of refugee housing (Bank of Greece, 2021). This strategic use of humanitarian aid underscores how the Greek military leveraged refugee assistance to strengthen state security rather than merely providing neutral relief.

## 6.2. British & French Military Advisors: Influence on Greek Refugee Policy

The presence of British and French military advisors in post-1922 Greece shaped not only defense policy but also refugee management. Both London and Paris viewed Greece as a crucial geopolitical ally and sought to stabilize its internal situation to prevent communist uprisings or Turkish incursions.

British and French advisors influenced two key aspects of military-administered refugee policy:

- **Population Resettlement as a Defense Strategy** – Western advisors encouraged the Greek Army to resettle refugees in border regions as a means of reinforcing national security, effectively using displaced populations as a human buffer (Ladas, 1932).
- **Military-Led Economic Development** – French officials, in particular, supported military-supervised agricultural programs, ensuring that refugee labor was absorbed into economic sectors beneficial to state interests.

While these foreign influences provided financial and logistical support, they also reinforced military dominance over refugee affairs, sidelining civilian-led relief efforts (Clark, 2009).

Rather than treating refugees purely as humanitarian subjects, the Greek military saw them as both a national security challenge and an opportunity. Military leaders influenced how and where refugees were settled, ensuring they were politically and economically integrated in ways that reinforced state control (Hirschon, 2003).

A significant but overlooked strategy was the incorporation of refugees into Greece's future military structure. By the late 1920s, thousands of Asia Minor refugees had been conscripted into the Greek Army, providing a new generation of soldiers for national defense (Ladas, 1932). This policy highlights how military-controlled refugee resettlement was not just about humanitarianism—it was about reinforcing the armed forces. The Greek Army's involvement in refugee management was far from neutral. While it fulfilled vital logistical functions, it also manipulated resource distribution, influenced foreign aid allocation, and strategically resettled refugees to serve national security objectives.

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## 7. The Aftermath – Military Legacy & Long-Term Impact

The 1922 Asia Minor Catastrophe precipitated a massive influx of refugees into Greece, profoundly influencing the nation's military strategies, societal structures, and policies. In the aftermath of the Asia Minor Catastrophe, Greece faced the monumental task of integrating approximately 1.2 million refugees into a country with a pre-existing population of about 5 million (Kontogiorgi, 2006). The Greek military played a pivotal role in establishing and managing refugee settlements, particularly in regions like Macedonia and Thrace, where the demographic balance was sensitive due to diverse ethnic compositions (Mavrogordatos, 1983).

Initially, these settlements were under military supervision to maintain order and facilitate the integration process. The military's involvement was crucial in constructing infrastructure, providing security, and ensuring the equitable distribution of resources. By the 1930s, many of these settlements had transitioned to civilian administration, reflecting a shift towards normalization and the successful integration of refugees into Greek society. This transition was marked by the development of infrastructure, economic activities, and social institutions within these communities, indicating a degree of self-sufficiency and stability (Kontogiorgi, 2006).

The success of these military-run settlements can be attributed to several factors:

- **Strategic Settlement Planning:** The military strategically settled refugees in areas where they could contribute to agricultural production, thereby revitalizing the rural economy and ensuring food security.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Military engineers played a significant role in constructing housing, roads, and irrigation systems, laying the foundation for sustainable communities.
- **Security Provision:** The presence of the military ensured the safety of refugees from potential external threats and internal conflicts, fostering a sense of stability.

However, challenges such as resource shortages, cultural integration, and economic hardships persisted. Despite these obstacles, the military's efforts in the 1920s laid the groundwork for the eventual normalization and integration of refugee communities by the 1930s.

### **7.1. How Many Refugees Ended Up Serving in the Greek Army?**

The integration of refugees into the Greek Army was a strategic move to bolster national defense and promote assimilation. While precise numbers are challenging to ascertain, it is documented that a significant portion of the male refugee population enlisted in the military during the interwar period (Mavrogordatos, 1983). This enlistment served dual purposes: providing employment and facilitating assimilation, while also strengthening the military's manpower.

The incorporation of refugees into the armed forces not only addressed immediate security concerns but also fostered a sense of national unity and identity among the displaced populations. Moreover, the military service offered refugees a structured environment to adapt to their new national context, bridging cultural and linguistic gaps.

However, this integration was not without challenges. Tensions arose due to differences in customs, language barriers, and competition for limited resources (Kiriakidis, 2024). Despite these challenges, the overall integration of refugees into the Greek Army contributed positively to national cohesion and defense capabilities.

### **7.2. The Refugee Crisis & Greek Military Reforms**

Did the 1922 Crisis Influence Future Greek Military Policies?

The 1922 refugee crisis acted as a catalyst for significant military reforms in Greece. The necessity to manage and integrate a large refugee population exposed deficiencies in military logistics and administrative capabilities. In response, the Greek military underwent organizational restructuring to enhance efficiency and adaptability.

These reforms included:

- **Establishment of Specialized Units:** The creation of units focused on civil-military operations facilitated better coordination between military and civilian authorities in managing refugee affairs (Gavra, 2017).
- **Infrastructure Development:** The military prioritized the construction of infrastructure to support large-scale mobilization and settlement projects, improving logistical capabilities (Kontogiorgi, 2006).
- **Policy Revisions:** Lessons learned from the crisis led to policy changes emphasizing flexibility and responsiveness in military planning, better preparing the armed forces for future emergencies (Mavrogordatos, 1983).

These reforms not only improved the military's capacity to handle internal crises but also enhanced its overall operational effectiveness. The experience underscored the importance of adaptability and comprehensive planning in military operations, influencing future policies to better address similar crises.

### **7.3. How Did Refugee Management Shape Army-Civilian Relations?**

The military's involvement in refugee management had profound effects on army-civilian relations. Initially, the army's role in providing shelter, security, and resources garnered public support and reinforced its position as a pillar of the state (Gavra, 2017).

However, challenges such as resource shortages and cultural integration led to tensions in certain regions. The allocation of land and resources to refugees sometimes caused friction with local populations, who feared economic competition and cultural dilution (Mavrogordatos, 1983). Over time, the military's efforts to facilitate economic opportunities and community development for refugees helped mitigate these tensions. Initiatives such as agricultural training programs and infrastructure projects provided employment opportunities and promoted economic self-sufficiency among refugees (Kontogiorgi, 2006). This collaborative approach fostered a sense of shared purpose and interdependence between the army and civilian populations, contributing to social cohesion and the successful integration of refugees into Greek society.

### **7.4. Lessons for Modern Refugee Crises. How does the 1922 Military Response Compare to Modern Military-Led Refugee Interventions?**

The Greek military's handling of the 1922 crisis offers valuable comparisons with contemporary military-led refugee operations.

- Similarities:
  - Use of military-run refugee camps (e.g., Syrian refugee settlements in Turkey, 2015–2023) (UNHCR, 2022).
  - Military oversight in national security concerns during mass migration (e.g., European border militarization during the 2015 refugee crisis) (Triandafyllidou, 2022).
- Differences:
  - Modern humanitarian frameworks (e.g., UNHCR guidelines) prevent excessive military control over refugees (UNHCR, 2022).
  - Greece's 1922 response was nationally led, whereas contemporary responses involve international coalitions (Triandafyllidou, 2022).

The 1922 refugee crisis highlights key policy lessons for modern refugee crises:

- Strategic Resettlement Matters – The military's role in refugee placement ensured economic survival and national security, a model still used in post-conflict regions today.
- Integration Requires State Support – Military management alone cannot integrate refugees; state institutions must provide economic and educational opportunities.
- Avoiding Militarization of Refugee Policies – While military oversight is crucial during crises, prolonged military control can lead to socio-political instability, as seen in failed refugee assimilation programs in modern conflicts.

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## 8. Conclusions – Rethinking the Military's Role in Humanitarian Crises

### 8.1. Summary of Key Findings

The Greek Army's involvement in the 1922 refugee crisis following the Asia Minor Catastrophe reveals a highly complex interplay between humanitarian intervention and strategic self-interest. The army demonstrated efficiency in logistical coordination, resource allocation, and emergency evacuation efforts, yet its actions were equally shaped by political objectives, internal corruption, and conflicts with local civilian populations.

The Greek military was pivotal in executing large-scale evacuations as the Asia Minor front collapsed. The organized withdrawal of military personnel and civilians, albeit chaotic at times, prevented even greater casualties and secured the movement of hundreds of thousands of displaced persons. The military's ability to mobilize naval and land transport, enforce structured movements of refugees, and establish temporary resettlement sites in urban and rural locations underscores its competency in emergency response logistics.

Moreover, the military's involvement in security enforcement and settlement construction provided stability in a period of social and political upheaval. Despite limited resources, military engineers constructed some of the first large-scale refugee housing projects in modern Greek history, many of which evolved into permanent settlements integrated into Greek society. The army's control over food distribution, sanitation measures, and disease prevention, while imperfect, was necessary given the scale of displacement.

Despite its logistical successes, the Greek Army's handling of the refugee crisis was far from a purely humanitarian endeavor. The mismanagement of supplies, favoritism in food distribution, and cases of resource hoarding by military officials highlight a significant element of corruption within the system. Several reports indicate that black markets flourished inside refugee camps, often controlled by elements within the military who sought to profit from the crisis rather than alleviate suffering.

Additionally, the military's strategic use of refugee resettlement was deeply tied to national security concerns. The decision to settle refugees along Greece's northern borders and in contested regions of Macedonia and Thrace was not simply a matter of available land but a deliberate attempt to alter the ethnic composition of key geopolitical areas. Refugees were not just recipients of military aid; they were deployed as settlers in zones deemed politically and militarily vulnerable—a pattern that continued in later conflicts.

Finally, clashes between the military and local Greek populations were a recurring issue. Many native-born Greeks saw refugees as economic competitors, cultural outsiders, and political liabilities, leading to outbreaks of violence in urban areas such as Thessaloniki and Athens. In several instances, military forces were deployed not as protectors of refugee welfare but as enforcers of state authority, cracking down on refugee protests and preventing spontaneous migration into wealthier urban districts.

A simplistic binary between humanitarianism and political strategy fails to fully capture the Greek Army's role in the 1922 refugee crisis. The army functioned as both a crisis manager and a state instrument, oscillating between logistical efficiency and political opportunism.

On the one hand, the army's role was undeniably humanitarian in nature - without its intervention, the mass displacement of refugees could have resulted in even greater catastrophe. Military-run camps, despite their deficiencies, provided essential shelter, food, and medical attention. The army's ability to rapidly construct infrastructure, enforce social order, and coordinate relief efforts prevented a complete collapse of Greece's already fragile state apparatus.

On the other hand, the military's actions were deeply intertwined with state security interests. Refugees were strategically settled, incorporated into military service, and used to bolster national defense. The army was not a neutral humanitarian actor but an extension of the Greek state, ensuring that refugees were assimilated in ways that served national, ethnic, and military objectives.

Thus, the Greek Army was neither purely benevolent nor purely self-serving. Instead, it embodied the dual nature of military intervention in humanitarian crises - balancing the urgent need for survival with the broader imperatives of state-building, political stability, and national security. This tension remains a defining feature of military-led refugee responses in both historical and modern contexts.

## 8.2. Future Research Directions

The lessons of 1922 did not fade with time - they were reapplied, refined, and reinforced in subsequent decades. During World War II and the Greek Civil War (1946–1949), the military played a nearly identical role in managing displaced populations, controlling migration routes, and suppressing potential unrest (Key research questions for further investigation include:

- Did the Greek military adopt more effective refugee management policies by the 1940s, or did it replicate the mistakes of 1922?
- How did Greek refugee policies influence Cold War-era military doctrines?
- What role did veterans of the Asia Minor refugee crisis play in military leadership during WWII?

A deeper examination of continuities between the Asia Minor refugee experience and later conflicts could yield important insights into the long-term effects of military-led humanitarian efforts.

Modern military-led refugee interventions, whether in Europe, the Middle East, or Africa, face many of the same logistical, ethical, and political dilemmas as Greece did in 1922. However, technological advancements, international legal frameworks, and humanitarian oversight have significantly altered the landscape. Potential areas for comparative study include:

- How do contemporary military refugee responses (e.g., UN peacekeeping forces, NATO humanitarian operations) compare to the Greek Army's approach in 1922?
- To what extent do modern militaries still balance humanitarian efforts with national security imperatives?
- How have international organizations, such as the UNHCR, mitigated military overreach in refugee crises?

Modern refugee policies increasingly emphasize human rights, voluntary resettlement, and international cooperation—a stark contrast to the Greek Army's top-down, state-centric approach in 1922. Yet, fundamental challenges remain: issues of logistical strain, border security, and socio-political tensions continue to shape refugee responses worldwide. The Greek case serves as both a historical warning and a template for navigating the intersection of military action and humanitarian necessity

## 8.3. Final Thoughts

The Greek Army's involvement in the 1922 refugee crisis encapsulates a broader, recurring dilemma: when states face mass displacement, should the military act as a humanitarian force or an enforcer of state policy? The answer, as evidenced by the Greek experience, is rarely clear-cut. The military is often the only institution capable of immediate crisis response, yet its actions are never free from political and strategic considerations.

Understanding the Greek Army's dual role in 1922 is essential not only for historical scholarship but also for modern refugee policy and military intervention studies. The challenges Greece faced - a sudden influx of displaced people,

resource constraints, political instability, and the need for rapid integration - remain highly relevant in today's global refugee crises.

Future research must continue to explore how militaries navigate these tensions, ensuring that humanitarian obligations are met without succumbing to the temptations of coercion, exploitation, or strategic manipulation. The Greek experience of 1922 provides both cautionary lessons and strategic insights, reminding us that the intersection of war, displacement, and military power remains as complex as ever.

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