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**The King, the Junta and the “Impartial Broker”:** A microscopic approach to the Johnson-Constantine meeting on 11 September 1967

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THE KING, THE JUNTA AND THE “IMPARTIAL BROKER”:  
A MICROSCOPIC APPROACH TO THE JOHNSON-CONSTANTINE  
MEETING ON 11 SEPTEMBER 1967

*Leonidas Kallivretakis*

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ABSTRACT: This article explores the relations between the Greek military regime and King Constantine, as they evolved during the first months after the April 1967 coup, focusing on the part played by the “American factor”. Tracing step-by-step Constantine’s contacts with US officials, from his conversations with the American Ambassador in Athens to his meeting with President Johnson, the author investigates the King’s perception of the US government’s position regarding a possible confrontation between him and the colonels and how that perception influenced Constantine’s final decision to launch a counter-coup in December 1967.

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On a warm Athenian afternoon in September 1964, King Constantine of Greece invited to his palace the American Ambassador Henry Labouisse.<sup>1</sup> “The conversation was friendly and intimate,” recalls the Ambassador, when suddenly “the King asked smilingly whether I wanted him to get rid of Papandreou”. When Labouisse asked him “whether he could if he wanted to”, Constantine replied that “he could not do so now”.<sup>2</sup>

It is important to understand that, at this time, there was no visible sign of conflict between the 24-year-old King and George Papandreou, the 76-year-old Prime Minister, whose accession to the premiership (after winning the February 1964 elections with a landslide majority)<sup>3</sup> coincided with Constantine’s accession to the throne, following the death of his father, King Paul, in early March.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Henry R. Labouisse (1904-1987) served as US Ambassador to Greece from 1962 to 1965.

<sup>2</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Greece to the Department of State, Athens, 4 September 1964, 3 p.m., in James Edward Miller (ed.), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Vol. 16, Cyprus; Greece; Turkey* [hereafter *FRUS, 1964-1968*], Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2000, document 153.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Clogg, *Parties and Elections in Greece: The Search for Legitimacy*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1987, pp. 48-49; cf. David Binder “Papandreou Party Wins in Greece”, *The New York Times*, 17 February 1964.

<sup>4</sup> “Statement by the President on the Death of King Paul of Greece, 6 March 1964”, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963-64*, vol. 1, Washington: GPO, 1965, p. 337; cf. “Greek King Dead”, *The New York Times*, 7 March 1964.



Henry R. Labouisse, US Ambassador to Greece, 1962-1965

On the contrary, many people saw in this coincidence an opportunity for a fresh start in the relations between the conservative palace and the Centre Union party, which had a chance to apply its mildly liberal programme for the first time, after ten years of successive right-wing governments.<sup>5</sup> Papandreou proceeded very cautiously from the start,<sup>6</sup> even allowing the King to impose a favourite, Petros Garoufalias, as Minister for Defence and General Ioannis Gennimatas as Army Chief-of-Staff,<sup>7</sup> in order to avoid alarming the “establishment” (*κατεστημένο*, a word that his US-educated son Andreas Papandreou introduced into the Greek political vocabulary).<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the “friendly” chat in the royal palace that

autumn afternoon of 1964 is an indication that even the slightest concession of power from the throne to the elected government was inconceivable from the very start.

This subject would occasionally surface in the conversations between the Ambassador and the King, as in the one that took place on 27 January 1965, when Constantine maintained that “some people” urged him “to act against the

<sup>5</sup> As George Mylonas, Minister for Education, put it: “The fact that a young, new sovereign was taking office, a sportsman and an openhearted character, was considered a good omen. We would be able to start anew with the royal family, and [...] might find a good *modus vivendi* with the new King. As things turned out perhaps it would have been better all round if King Paul had lived.” See George Mylonas, *Escape from Amorgos*, New York: Scribner, 1974, p. 103.

<sup>6</sup> In telegram 1261, sent from the US Embassy in Greece to the Department of State on 19 February 1964 (summarised in an editorial note in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, document 16), Labouisse commented that the main characteristic of the new Papandreou government was its “moderate nature”, noting that Papandreou had placed conservatives in key positions.

<sup>7</sup> Michalis Papakonstantinou, *Η παραγμένη εξαετία* [The troubled six years], vol. 1, Athens: Proskinio, 1997, pp. 163-165.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance: “The establishment in Greece is a joint venture between the royal circles, the foreign factor, the military cliques, the royalist and foreign-enslaved right-wing party, the organised monopolistic interests of big foreign companies and a few large Greek firms – through networking spread in public administration, in banks and even through professional trade-unionists in labour organisations, in every part of our public life.” Extract from one of Andreas Papandreou’s speeches, *Μακεδονία* (10 November 1966).

Papandreou Government”, but he did not consider such a move practicable, “at least at this time”, since Papandreou “still had a strong popular appeal among the Greek people”. At this point, Labouisse observed that he “could well understand the importance of his being reasonably sure of success before taking on the Prime Minister” and that if he (that is, the King) “acted prematurely he could do the regime irreparable harm”.<sup>9</sup>

It is also important to note that, in January 1965, there was not even a hint on the horizon of the so-called “ASPIDA conspiracy” and the alleged involvement of Andreas Papandreou, or of the heated correspondence between the King and the Prime Minister over the control of the Ministry of Defence, which eventually resulted in the resignation of the latter in July 1965 and subsequent political turmoil.<sup>10</sup>

Twenty-one months and five governments later,<sup>11</sup> in April 1967, the situation, from the King’s viewpoint, had almost reached an impasse. Even though the upcoming general elections, scheduled to take place on 28 May,

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<sup>9</sup> Airgram from the Embassy in Greece to the Department of State, Athens, 29 January 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, document 173.

<sup>10</sup> ASPIDA was a group of pro-centre and anti-right Greek army officers, allegedly associated with Andreas Papandreou; although denied by the latter, the accusation was adopted by his political opponents, by the army high command and by King Constantine himself, eventually resulting in the toppling of the Centre Union government in July 1965. For further reading, see Telegrams from the Embassy in Greece to the Department of State, Athens, 18 June 1965 and 5 September 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, documents 194 and 204; V. Kondratyev, “The ‘Aspida Affair’ and the Reactionaries”, *International Affairs* 12 (1966), p. 92; Keith Kyle, “Plots and Counterplots in King Constantine’s Greece: Behind the Aspida Trial”, *New Republic* (21 January 1967); Petros Garoufalias, *Ο “ΑΣΠΙΔΑ” και η πολιτική κρίση του Ιουλίου 1965* [“ASPIDA” and the Political Crisis of July 1965], Athens, 1977; Aris Bouloukos, *Υπόθεση ΑΣΠΙΔΑ* [The ASPIDA Case], Athens: Typos, 1989; James Edward Miller, *The United States and the Making of Modern Greece: History and Power, 1950-1974*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009, pp. 116-128, 145; Stan Draenos, *Andreas Papandreou: The Making of a Greek Democrat and Political Maverick*, London: IB Tauris, 2012, pp. 129-135.

<sup>11</sup> These included three governments composed of Centre Union “apostates” or “renegades” (of which only the last managed to stay in power for 15 months, with the backing of the right-wing ERE party), an interim government (supported by both Centre Union and ERE, for the sole purpose of organising elections in May 1967) and finally an ERE minority government, which dissolved parliament on 14 April 1967 and was charged with carrying out the above-mentioned elections, which never took place. For further reading, see “All the King’s Men”, *Time*, 3 September 1965, p. 36; Jean Meynaud, *Rapport sur l’abolition de la démocratie en Grèce (15 juillet 1965-21 avril 1967)*, Montreal, 1967; Elias Nikolakopoulos, *Η καχεκτική δημοκρατία: Κόμματα και Εκλογές, 1946-1967* [The cachectic democracy: parties



William Phillips Talbot, US Ambassador  
to Greece, 1965 to 1969

had been called by the right-wing ERE (minority) government, it was almost certain that the Centre Union party would win a majority in the new Parliament, “undoubtedly” representing a majority of the population, which was becoming “increasingly frustrated, angry, anti-monarchical and probably anti-Alliance”.<sup>12</sup> Under those circumstances, Constantine had indicated his belief to the US Ambassador, by then Phillips Talbot,<sup>13</sup> that “his throne and Greece’s attachment to the West are at stake” and that he was facing a choice “of yielding his country to

the Papandreou or establishing a dictatorship either before or just after scheduled elections”. The King had sought a statement of US support for the imposition of dictatorship, but Talbot affirmed he had made clear to him that the American government could not give “such advance approval” and that he had “seriously warned” Constantine of the dangers of “extra-constitutional action”.<sup>14</sup>

Summing up the results of his recent contacts, Talbot informed the State Department on 14 April that Palace circles, the Armed Forces and the ERE were “evidently building up steam for ‘constitutional deviation’, meaning dictatorship”, the most probable scenario being that the “current ERE government would be transformed into an emergency government with, initially, civilian Ministers backed up by armed forces under orders of King”.<sup>15</sup> The Army

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and elections, 1946-1967], Athens: Pataki, 2001, pp. 350-371; Miller, *The United States and the Making of Modern Greece*, pp. 122-133, Draenos, *Papandreou*, pp. 261-287.

<sup>12</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Greece to the Department of State, Athens, 14 April 1967, 0001Z, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, document 271.

<sup>13</sup> William Phillips Talbot (1915-2010) served as US Ambassador from 1965 to 1969. Before that he served as Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (1961-1965) during the Kennedy and early Johnson administrations.

<sup>14</sup> Department of State, “Greek Political Crisis”, 12 April 1967, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (hereafter NARA).

<sup>15</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Greece to the Department of State, Athens, 14 April 1967. This analysis was common knowledge, as it is indicated in Richard Eder’s report from

**3. King has indicated to Ambassador Talbot that he believes his throne and Greece's attachment to West are at stake in this crisis and that only a near miracle can save him from final choice of yielding his country to the Papandreou or establishing a dictatorship either before or just after scheduled elections. While King has sought a statement of U. S. support for imposition of dictatorship, our Ambassador has made clear to the King that we cannot give such advance approval and he has seriously warned the King of dangers of extra-constitutional action.**

King Constantine considered establishing a dictatorship "either before or just after scheduled elections" (US Embassy Telegram from Athens, 14 April 1967)

Chief of Staff, General Grigorios Spantidakis (another of the King's favourites) was already setting the stage for a military intervention to take place under royal auspices.<sup>16</sup> Among those involved in the preparation of these plans were the members of a so-called "inner group" under the leadership of a soon-to-become-famous officer, Colonel Georgios Papadopoulos. Therefore, as the higher military commanders were about to make their final decision, Papadopoulos' "rightist military conspiratorial group" (as it was referred to in CIA reports)<sup>17</sup> took action, literally "stealing the thunder" from the generals and carrying out a coup d'état on 21 April 1967.<sup>18</sup>

Far from offering a full analysis of the political and social circumstances that led to the military dictatorship,<sup>19</sup> the above narrative serves only as an

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Athens, that same day: "What is widely feared here is that the King may become convinced by his advisers that there is no other way to preserve the monarchy except to prevent a Centre Union victory. This argument becomes, in effect, a plea for suspending the Constitution and establishing a dictatorship" (*The New York Times*, 15 April 1967, reproduced also by the Athenian newspaper *Ελευθερία*, 16 April 1967); cf. "It is the King, however, who has wedged himself into a political corner, where the only option to the return of a Papandreou government may be an army-backed dictatorship. This is not an acceptable option and Constantine must know it" (*The New York Times*, 17 April 1967, reproduced again by *Ελευθερία*, 18 April 1967).

<sup>16</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, Secret Intelligence Information Cable, Athens, 9 March 1967, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, document 260.

<sup>17</sup> See Field Information Reports, 7 March 1966 and 20 December 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, documents 225 and 245.

<sup>18</sup> Charilaos Lagoudakis, "The April Coup", p. 25; Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Centre, Boston University.

<sup>19</sup> For a detailed analysis and broader perspective of that period, see Richard Clogg and George Yannopoulos (eds), *Greece Under Military Rule*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1972; John A. Katris, *Eyewitness in Greece: The Colonels Come to Power*, St. Louis: New Critics Press,



introduction, intended to summarise, in vivid way, the King's mentality and conception of his role as a constitutional monarch *before* the 21 April coup, thus contextualising his reaction *after* the coup, with particular regard to his perception of the part that the American "factor" played (or should have played) at that juncture.

Constantine's immediate reaction to the coup is well documented. Caught unawares,<sup>20</sup> as was most of the political and military leadership,<sup>21</sup> besieged by the troops and armoured units of the conspirators, first at his Tatoi country palace and then at the Ministry of Defence, after some hesitation and back and forth, he gave way, accepting the appointment of the first dictatorial government, in which he managed to include some non-military royalist personalities.

Later that evening, the American Ambassador found the King "blazingly angry", shouting about those "incredibly stupid ultra-rightwing bastards" who, "having gained control of tanks, have brought disaster to Greece". Unsure of what the following days or even hours would bring, Constantine asked Talbot "how long it would take helicopters to reach Tatoi to evacuate his family if needed" and

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1971; Nikos Alivizatos: *Οι πολιτικοί θεσμοί σε κρίση: Όψεις της ελληνικής εμπειρίας* [Political institutions in crisis: aspects of the Greek experience], Athens: Themelio, 1983; Christopher M. Woodhouse, *The Rise and Fall of the Greek Colonels*, London: Granada, 1985; Dimitris Charalambis, *Στρατός και πολιτική εξουσία: Η δομή της εξουσίας στη μετεμφυλιακή Ελλάδα* [Army and political power: the structure of power in post-civil war Greece], Athens; Exandas, 1985; Alexis Papachelas, *Ο βιασμός της ελληνικής δημοκρατίας - Ο αμερικανικός παράγων (1947-67)* [The rape of Greek democracy: the American factor (1947-67)], Athens: Estia, 1997; Nikolakopoulos, *Η καχεκτική δημοκρατία*; Sotiris Rizas, *Η Ελληνική Πολιτική μετά τον Εμφύλιο Πόλεμο: Κοινοβουλευτισμός και Δικτατορία* [Greek politics after the civil war: parliamentarism and dictatorship], Athens 2008; Draenos, *Papandreou*.

<sup>20</sup> During the first hours of the coup, at approximately 4.15 a.m., when the US Defence Attaché Colonel Oliver K. Marshall managed to communicate with the King, who was isolated at Tatoi, the latter confessed that he had no idea of what was happening, adding: "They are headed this way for me. Get word to Sixth Fleet. Get word to Washington and have them send your army in." This request for American military intervention would become almost an obsession for Constantine in the following days and months; see telegram 4746 from Athens, 21 April 1967, summarised in an editorial note in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, document 273; cf. Miller, *The United States and the Making of Modern Greece*, p. 147.

<sup>21</sup> On the night of the coup, 68 personalities were arrested, among whom were members of the government (including the right-wing Prime Minister Panayotis Kanellopoulos), MPs (including the Papandreou father and son), and high-ranking military officers. That same night and on the following days, 8,270 more persons were arrested across the country; 6,118 of them were later deported to the infamous Yaros concentration camp; see Leonidas Kallivretakis, *Πώς φτάσαμε στην 21η Απριλίου* [How we got to 21 April], Athens: Efimerida ton Syntakton, 2017, pp. 141-144.

whether there was any possibility for US Marines to land in Greece “to help him and Generals reassert their control over armed forces”.<sup>22</sup> Answering that same night, the State Department estimated that it would take 36 hours for American helicopters to reach Tatoi following an evacuation request. However, Washington instructed the Ambassador to disabuse the King “of any notion of a US military intervention”.<sup>23</sup>

Four evenings later, the King appeared “under considerably less strain”, giving Talbot the impression that he was “moving rapidly to adjust his relations with coup government”, having “moderate expectations of gradually regaining leadership of army and government”. He gave the Ambassador an account of his meeting with the coup instigators, asserting that he berated them once again “for having moved without his knowledge” and for broadcasting over the radio, on the morning of the coup, a phony Royal Decree declaring martial law that he had not signed and had no intention of subsequently signing. He then had pressed them “hard”, according to himself, on the need to demonstrate to Greece’s allies that their goal was a “resumption of constitutional government”, by setting up a committee of experts to prepare a “revised constitution that would be subjected to national plebiscite, after which elections could be held”. Talbot commented at this point that “it would be easy to announce such a scheme, but who would believe it?” He added that the US government was “uncomfortable at having Greek ally under military dictatorship”, pointing out that, given public and congressional opinion, it would be “extremely difficult” to deliver tanks and other military hardware to a regime “which has used American-made tanks to overthrow [an] established government”. Though he seemed to understand that argument,



“Greece: The Palace Coup”:  
Time magazine’s front page (28 April 1967),  
indicates that public opinion presumed that  
the dictatorship established in Greece  
was a royalist one

<sup>22</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Greece to the Department of State, Athens, 21 April 1967, 2030Z, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, document 275.

<sup>23</sup> Telegram 180319 to Athens, 21 April 1967, summarised in an editorial note in *FRUS*, 1964-1968, document 275.



Constantine expressed his hope that the US government “would not get [into] such an inflexible position” that would make it difficult to change its stance if the regime demonstrated “its readiness to return to constitutional rule”.<sup>24</sup>

The following month, though, Constantine once again raised the issue of an eventual confrontation with Papadopoulos and his comrades, expecting that his official visits to various military units scheduled for June would give him “a chance to test the loyalty and discipline of units to which he might want to turn”. His idea was to get his family out of the country and then to go north, where he would “base himself with loyal units” and broadcast to the nation that he was advancing on Athens “to reassert his command over the Armed Forces and his headship of the nation”. He considered that the success of his plan would depend “very substantially” on American actions. He was certain that the mere presence of the Sixth Fleet in the area would be enough to “turn the tide”, although, “should the need arise”, he was also hoping for a peaceful landing of US Marines, “as in Lebanon in 1958”.<sup>25</sup> Alarmed, the American Ambassador immediately tried to discourage the King’s expectations of “any involvement” of US forces, pointing out that it was “a long time since 1958” and conditions were different. Returning to the Embassy, Talbot “urgently” requested instructions from the State Department in order to handle any “further stages of development” of Constantine’s extravagant ideas.<sup>26</sup>

During his successive tours in Northern Greece and the Peloponnese, Constantine was “highly pleased” with his military contacts, feeling that he had the support of the most important army commanders.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, at a subsequent meeting on 30 July with the US Ambassador (who had just returned from Washington), he once more raised the possibility that, ultimately, he might have to confront the colonels’ regime. He also referred to the contacts he had with generals and other persons and seemed “reasonably expectant” that he

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<sup>24</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Greece to the Department of State, Athens, 25 April 1967, 2300Z, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, document 281.

<sup>25</sup> He was referring to the US military intervention in Lebanon in July 1958, mandated by President Eisenhower, in support of the pro-Western regime of Camille Chamoun, endangered from subversive moves backed by Syria and Egypt, in association with the recent revolution in Iraq; see Agnes G. Korbani, *U.S. Intervention in Lebanon, 1958-1982: Presidential Decisionmaking*, Westport: Praeger, 1991; Pierrick el Gammal, *Politique intérieure et politique extérieure au Liban de 1958 à 1961 de Camille Chamoun à Fouad Chehab*, Paris, 1991; Erika G. Alin, *The United States and the 1958 Lebanon Crisis: American Intervention in the Middle East*, Lanham: University Press of America, 1994.

<sup>26</sup> Letter from the Ambassador to Greece (Phillips Talbot) to the Country Director for Greece (Daniel Brewster), Athens, 26 May 1967, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, document 292.

<sup>27</sup> Airgram from the Embassy in Greece to the Department of State, Athens, 19 June 1967, Johnson Presidential Library.

could get adequate support to oust the Junta. He stated, however, that it was not his intention to precipitate action unless the US government "approved of his purposes", although he did not ask, as he had done in the past, about prospects of counting on the presence or logistical assistance of the American fleet. Talbot sought to make it clear to him that the US should not be expected to participate in any governmental change and that such a decision could only be taken by the King himself. Constantine said that he understood, but if it should become necessary for him to act, he would advise the US government in advance.<sup>28</sup> At this point, he spoke about his plans for an informal visit to the US, expressing his hope for a private meeting with President Johnson to discuss "the Cyprus issue and domestic developments in Greece".<sup>29</sup>

Constantine's request sparked a brief exchange of bureaucratic crossfire in Washington, between Secretary of State Dean Rusk and National Security Advisor Walt Rostow, since there was already a plan to invite the King for a visit in the spring of 1968. Rusk initially "thought it better to stick to that plan", while Rostow argued that a visit would be useful at any time, "since it would serve their purpose of strengthening the King's efforts to return Greece to democratic processes" and, as a response to the concerns about the military coup among "a large number of the Congressional liberals", it would be worth "hearing Constantine's side of the story". Rusk was finally convinced, and it was therefore recommended that the President should receive Constantine in the White House "for a small working luncheon with no other ceremonies".<sup>30</sup> On 4 August, Johnson eventually approved the invitation.<sup>31</sup>

In order to justify his trip to America, Constantine used a pretext, by joining sailing events<sup>32</sup> on Lake Ontario (from 28 August to 3 September) coupled with an

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<sup>28</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Greece to the Department of State, Athens, 7 August 1967, 1130Z, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, document 298.

<sup>29</sup> Constantine had been scheduled to make a goodwill tour of Europe and Canada. Following the April coup, the Western European portion of the tour was cancelled, therefore the King decided to utilise some of the days originally scheduled for Europe to make an informal visit to the US and request a meeting with the president; see editorial note 2, in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, document 300, with references to unpublished sources (including telegram 876 from Athens, 18 August 1967, Department of State, Central Files, POL 7 Greece); cf. Helen Conispoliatis, *Facing the Colonels: British and American Diplomacy towards the Colonels' Junta in Greece, 1967-1970*, PhD diss., University of Leicester, 2003, pp. 116-117 [available online: <https://lra.le.ac.uk/bitstream/2381/4220/1/DX227703.pdf>].

<sup>30</sup> Memoranda for the President by Dean Rusk (2 August 1967) and by Walter Rostow (4 August 1967), as cited by Conispoliatis, *Facing the Colonels*, p. 117.

<sup>31</sup> See above-mentioned editorial note 2, in *FRUS, 1964-1968*, document 300.

<sup>32</sup> Seven years earlier Constantine, then aged 20, had won a gold medal in sailing at the 1960 Summer Olympics, and since 1963 was a member of the International Olympic Committee.

official visit to Canada, and by accepting an invitation to attend the America's Cup in Newport, Rhode Island (8-12 September).<sup>33</sup>

As far as the meeting with Johnson was concerned, which of course had to be disclosed, it was decided to delay making a public announcement on it for as long as possible.<sup>34</sup> It was announced simultaneously by the White House spokesman in Washington and the Office of the Grand Marshal of the Court in Athens



“Royal Junta No, The King Must Go”:  
Demonstrators on New York’s First Avenue  
denounce Constantine’s visit to the UN  
headquarters (25 August 1967)

almost at the last moment, on 23 August,<sup>35</sup> although the rumours concerning it had been circulating for some days.<sup>36</sup>

So, Constantine left Athens on Thursday, 24 August, accompanied by his wife, Anne-Marie, his sister Irene, the Grand Marshal of the Court, Leonidas Papagos, and other courtiers.<sup>37</sup> The royal party stayed for three days in New York, where Constantine met with the Greek Orthodox Archbishop of America, Iakovos, and visited UN Secretary-

See *The Games of the XVII Olympiad: The Official Report of the Organizing Committee*, vol. 2, Rome: Organising Committee, 1960, pp. 979-986.

<sup>33</sup> Leonidas Papagos, *Σημειώσεις 1967-1977* [Notes, 1967-1977], Athens: Goulandri-Horn Foundation, 1999, pp. 17, 22.

<sup>34</sup> One of the reasons why US officials wanted to avoid any premature publicity on the King’s visit was “to preclude some of his Colonels climbing on the plane and coming to lunch with him”. See Memorandum for Richard M. Moose (special assistant to Walt Rostow) by Harold H. Saunders (National Security Council expert for Mideast), Press Guidance on King Constantine’s visit, 14 August 1967, as presented by Conispoliatis, *Facing the Colonels*, p. 117.

<sup>35</sup> *To Βήμα* (24 August 1967); Telegram 026580 from the Department of State to the Embassy in Greece, 24 August 1967, as cited by Conispoliatis, *Facing the Colonels*, pp. 117-118.

<sup>36</sup> On 18 August, Margaret Papandreou wrote to Professor George Lianis that “Sally is paying a visit to the States (official? unofficial?) and it is assumed that she will see Heap Big Chief [...] In any case, could you call Walt [...] and suggest that the President make a pitch for Mike in the discussion?”; see Margaret Papandreou, *Nightmare in Athens*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970, pp. 295-296. In Margaret’s code, “Sally” stood for the King and “Mike” for Andreas Papandreou. “Walt” stands most probably for Walter Heller, an economics adviser in the Kennedy and early Johnson administrations.

<sup>37</sup> Including the King’s general secretary Stelios Hourmouzios, his aide-de-camp Air Force Lt. Col. D. Papageorgiou, his Master of Ceremonies M. Geroulanos and the maids of honour Mary Karolou and Efrosyni Koryzi; see *Μακεδονία* (26 August 1967).

General U Thant, accompanied by the former head of his political bureau (and by then permanent representative of Greece to the UN), Dimitrios Bitsios.<sup>38</sup>

During that visit, the royal couple had a first bitter taste of what it was like to travel abroad representing (willingly or not) a country under dictatorial rule. As Constantine and his escort arrived at the UN headquarters, the actress Melina Mercouri (who had been recently stripped of her Greek nationality for criticising the military regime)<sup>39</sup> made an “uninvited” appearance, in a move that sent the protocol, security and press officials of the international organisation “into a tizzy”. She swept into the building carrying an envelope addressed to Constantine, while a small group of demonstrators, gathered in the drizzle across First Avenue (carrying signs such as “Royal Junta No, The King Must Go” and “Royal Junta, Your Days Are Numbered”), cheered her on, chanting “We Love Melina”. Embarrassed UN officials tried to escort the “volatile actress” out of sight of the royal couple, finally managing to shunt her into an auditorium, where she dragged “at least half the press corps” from the official royal reception to an impromptu press conference denouncing the dictatorship and the King for his silence on the military takeover. Next day she was in almost every newspaper, with one remarking “It was ‘Never On Friday’ for Melina Mercouri at the United Nations, but she managed to upstage the Greek King And Queen” and so on.<sup>40</sup>

On Sunday, 26 August, Constantine departed for Toronto, where he participated in sailing races (finishing in eighth position). Upon his arrival, a “boisterous” crowd of several thousand Toronto-based Greeks gathered at Queen’s Park, carrying



Actress Melina Mercouri gives a press conference at the UN headquarters denouncing the dictatorship and King Constantine (25 August 1967)



Greece’s royal couple arrives at Toronto Airport (26 August 1967)

<sup>38</sup> *To Βήμα* (24 August 1967), *Μακεδονία* (25-27 August 1967).

<sup>39</sup> *Τα Νέα* (13 July 1967).

<sup>40</sup> See, for instance, *The New York Times*, *Arizona Republic*, *Des Moines Register* and *The Kingston Daily Freeman* (26 August 1967).



“Down with the Dictatorship”:  
Greek demonstrators at Toronto’s Queen’s Park (26 August 1967)

placards with messages such as “We Are Freedom Loving People”, “Long Live Democracy”, “Down with the Dictatorship” and “Monarchy Must End in Democracy’s Birth Place”, singing the Greek national anthem,<sup>41</sup> denouncing Constantine’s responsibilities for the coup d’état and demanding the release of political prisoners in Greece,<sup>42</sup> with special reference to Mikis Theodorakis<sup>43</sup> and

<sup>41</sup> The Greek national anthem is based on a poem of revolutionary origins, named the “Hymn to Freedom”, inspired by the Greek War of Independence.

<sup>42</sup> See the local newspapers *Toronto Star* (“3,000 Greek-Canadians protest King’s visit”) and *Globe and Mail* (“Greek rally protests King’s backing of junta”), 28 August 1967; cf. Mina Noula, *Homeland Activism, Public Performance, and the Construction of Identity: An Examination of Greek Canadian Transnationalism, 1900s-1990s*, PhD diss., University of Toronto 2015, pp. 146-157. A faint reflection of those incidents can be detected in the Junta-controlled Greek press, mentioning how some Greek-Canadians warmly saluted Queen Anne-Marie on the streets of Toronto, deploring at the same time the attitude of some local Greeks, who were a “scanty minority”. See *Μακεδονία*, 31 August 1967.

<sup>43</sup> Mikis Theodorakis, the well-known composer, political activist and MP (for the United Democratic Left), escaped capture in the first days of the coup d’état, going underground and initiating the formation of one of the first resistance organisations, the Patriotic Front. He was arrested on 21 August 1967; see *The New York Times* (26 August 1967), *Τα Νέα* (5 September 1967), *Το Βήμα* (7 September 1967); cf. Papandreou, *Nightmare in Athens*, p. 304; for an account of his contribution in the struggle against the dictatorship, see Mikis Theodorakis, *Journal of Resistance*, New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1973; cf. George Logothetis, *Mikis Theodorakis: The Greek Soul*, Athens: Agyra, 2004, pp. 97-140.





“King Konstantine (sic) is Responsible for the Greek Tragedy”:  
Protesters in front of Toronto’s Granite Club (1 September 1967)

Andreas Papandreu.<sup>44</sup> On 1 September, the protesters gathered again in front of the Granite Club, where the royal couple attended a dinner organised by the

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<sup>44</sup> Meanwhile in Athens, the regime announced its decision to press charges of high treason against Andreas Papandreu and ten other people, charges that could result in a death sentence; see *The Sunday Times* (26 August 1967), *Tα Νέα* (30 August 1967); cf. Papandreu, *Nightmare in Athens*, p. 299. On August 28, Margaret Papandreu wrote to Stan Sheinbaum that “the time is very ripe with the publishing of the indictment – and the presence of the sailing boy in the States”, and underlined that “a real slick publicity job” was needed at the time of the king’s visit, “with the kind of timing that Melina [Mercouri] pulled at the UN”; *ibid.*, p. 300. The “publicity job” she was referring to, eventually erupted on 6 September, when most newspapers printed the declaration of two Greeks that they were forced by the Greek secret police to give “perjured testimony” against Andreas Papandreu; see *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* (6 September 1967), *Salt Lake Tribune* (7 September 1967) and *Somerset Daily American* (11 September 1967); cf. Papandreu, *Nightmare in Athens*, pp. 301-302; a special detailed article appeared later in *Ramparts* magazine (October 1967).



local official Greek community association. Constantine's arrival spurred "a wave of boos" by the demonstrators, who carried signs such as "King Konstantine is Responsible for the Greek Tragedy" and "Junta's King Refused Our Petition for Democracy in Greece".<sup>45</sup>

The following Saturday, 2 September, Constantine travelled to Ottawa, starting his official visit to Canada, which he completed five days later in Montreal, where he visited Expo 67. On this occasion too, several thousand Greeks residing in the Quebec capital demonstrated in front of Château Champlain, protesting at "the visit of King Constantine to the Montreal World's Fair", while a smaller group came to "salute the sovereign".<sup>46</sup> Eventually, the royal party departed from Quebec on Saturday, 9 September, flying to Newport, Rhode Island.<sup>47</sup>

Meanwhile, in view of Johnson's forthcoming meeting with Constantine, Rusk prepared, on 7 September, a memorandum for the President, including recommended answers to the issues that the King was likely to raise.<sup>48</sup> Starting from the assessment that Constantine believed that his role was to be "continuously pressing the coup leaders in the direction of a return to democratic processes" and that he would seek "presidential assurances" of US backing in an eventual confrontation he might have with the Junta, Rusk recommended that, although the King's effort to return "the country to constitutionalism" should be appreciated, he should be discouraged at the same time from "pushing the regime to the point of provoking a confrontation", since

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<sup>45</sup> See *Toronto Star* and *Globe and Mail* (2 September 1967); cf. Noula, *Homeland Activism*, pp. 157-161; according to the latter, "some of the dinner guests confronted the protesters and a fight broke out" (*ibid.*, p. 158).

<sup>46</sup> According to the local newspapers, "près de 4.000 membres de la communauté grecque" participated in that demonstration and "presque tout l'état major de la police de Montréal était sur les lieux. On estime que même à l'occasion de la visite de Charles de Gaulle, la police n'avait mis sur pied un dispositif de sécurité aussi important"; see *Le Devoir* (7 September 1967). The comparison of police mobilisation refers to Charles de Gaulle's visit to Expo 67, a few weeks earlier, where the French President uttered the famous phrase "Vive le Québec libre!" (a slogan used by French Canadians who favoured Quebec's independence from Canada), provoking thus a serious diplomatic crisis between the French and Canadian governments, which resulted in de Gaulle interrupting his official visit and returning to France on a French military jet; see *The Toronto Daily Star* (26 July 1967) and *The Globe and Mail* (27 July 1967); cf. Dale C. Thomson, *Vive le Québec libre*, Toronto: Deneau, 1988.

<sup>47</sup> Detailed reports on the royal tour were published in most Greek newspapers; see, for example, *Μακεδονία* (24 August-9 September 1967).

<sup>48</sup> Memorandum from Secretary of State Rusk to President Johnson, Washington, 7 September 1967, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, document 300.

the US did “not want to see armed conflict in Greece” and would not intervene “militarily in his behalf”. There was also reference to Constantine’s belief that his position vis-à-vis the Junta would be enhanced by the resumption of US military aid to Greece. In this respect, Rusk suggested that the King should be informed that full resumption of military aid was at that moment out of the question, because of strong public and Congressional opposition. However, the possibility of releasing a few of the items then currently suspended could be considered, thus bolstering the King’s position vis-à-vis the coup leaders and preventing, at the same time, US relations with Greece from “becoming frozen”. This memorandum foreshadowed the context within which the crucial meeting at the White House, four days later, would take place.

On that same day, though, there was still another memorandum, of very different content, also trying to make its way to Johnson’s desk. Stephen Rousseas, a Greek-American economist,<sup>49</sup> was in Copenhagen on September 7, meeting the social democratic Danish Prime Minister, Jens Otto Krag, to whom he delivered a message secretly smuggled out of Athens by Margaret Papandreou, based on her captive husband’s instructions, requesting its delivery to Johnson “before his scheduled meeting with King Constantine”. This message presented Andreas Papandreou’s positions on an exit from the dictatorship. In order to have “parliamentary democracy restored to Greece at the earliest possible moment”, Papandreou agreed to the need for a “transitional national unity government”, whose mission might last from “eight months to a year”, before any elections were held. He furthermore explicitly underlined that he had “no intention of challenging the King’s constitutional role” in the future and that he was “fully in favor of the



Greek-American economist Stephen Rousseas delivered Andreas Papandreou’s positions on an exit from the dictatorship to Danish Prime Minister Jens Otto Krag

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<sup>49</sup> For a detailed account of Stephen W. Rousseas’ implication in Greek politics, his relationship with Andreas Papandreou and the struggle against the Junta during the first year of the dictatorship, see his *The Death of a Democracy: Greece and the American Conscience*, New York: Grove, 1967, as well as his article “Memoire on the ‘Second’ Solution”, *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* 2/1 (1975), pp. 22-35; cf. Draenos, *Papandreou*, pp. 270-274, 285, 291.

continuation of Greece as a crowned democracy”, as well as “an integral part of the NATO alliance”. His only conditions were that “all political prisoners” would have to be “released”, that “none of the former political prisoners” would be “denied their civil and political rights” and that all would be “free to participate in the post-coup political life of Greece”.

At Krag’s request, the following day Rousseas prepared a brief, one-page memorandum summarising the above positions, which the Danish Prime Minister forwarded in good time to Washington, through diplomatic channels.<sup>50</sup> There is certain evidence that it was received by the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, Lucius Battle, “the day before King Constantine saw the President”, before eventually reaching Rostow.<sup>51</sup> However, it is very doubtful that Johnson ever saw it.<sup>52</sup>

The President received nevertheless another letter, this one addressed directly to him by Margaret Papandreou, in which she pointed out that her husband “has been charged with a crime he never committed; he is a political prisoner, not a criminal” and indicated that it was “within the King’s powers to give amnesty”, a gesture that “would be a decisive and popular act and would be the most potent proof of his intentions to lead the nation back to constitutional government, parliament and civil rights”. She pleaded with Johnson to “urge this course of action upon the King”. This letter was delivered to the White House on Monday, 11 September, at 09:55,<sup>53</sup> less than three hours before Constantine’s arrival.

That same morning, indeed, the King, accompanied by Papagos, flew to Washington, where he stayed all day, during which he visited the White House twice. His first visit, which lasted almost two hours (from 12:37 to 14:35), included a private meeting with President Johnson in the Oval Office for about

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<sup>50</sup> See Rousseas, *Death of a Democracy*, pp. 22-35.

<sup>51</sup> See Harold H. Saunders, Memorandum for WWR [Walter Rostow], Washington, 1 December 1967, Johnson Presidential Library.

<sup>52</sup> Although Rousseas had insisted for the message to be delivered “directly” to Johnson and not through the State Department, whose intentions he didn’t trust, obviously Krag found it difficult to bypass normal diplomatic protocol, instructing nevertheless his ambassador in Washington to request that the message be communicated to the President; see Rousseas, *Death of a Democracy*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>53</sup> In that same letter, Margaret underlined also that Andreas would abandon politics altogether, in order to return to his academic career; see Margaret Papandreou to President Lyndon B. Johnson, Athens, 3 September 1967, Johnson Presidential Library; cf. Papandreou, *Nightmare in Athens*, pp. 304-305.



“President Johnson Greets King Constantine of Greece at the White House”  
(UPI telephoto, 11 September 1967)

half an hour (12:37–13:12), followed by a crowded luncheon.<sup>54</sup> He then left at 14:35 for Congress and returned later to the White House, where he met once

<sup>54</sup> According to the White House official daily diary, in addition to Johnson and Constantine, there were also present, from the American side, Vice-President Hubert Humphrey, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, Presidential Adviser Walt Rostow and Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Lucius Battle and, from the Greek side, the Grand Marshal of the Court, Leonidas Papagos, and the Chargé d’Affaires of the Greek Embassy in Washington, Alkiviadis Papadopoulos. The names of the participants are also fully confirmed by the report of the Athens News Agency of that date, which was widely published in the Greek press. In his notes, Papagos mentions Humphrey, Rusk and McNamara, adding curiously the American Ambassador to Athens, Talbot, who was unlikely to have been present as no other source confirms this; the fact that he mentions him as “Battler Talbot” suggests a confusion with Assistant Secretary of State Battle. Equally curious is the information in the White House daily diary that, before the luncheon, Constantine received a call from his mother, “from Zurich”, to whom Johnson also spoke briefly. However, other sources do not mention a foreign trip by Frederika in that period; see The White House, *President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Daily Diary*, LBJ Library; cf. *To Βήμα και Μακεδονία* (12 September 1967); Papagos, *Σημειώσεις*, p. 19.

again with Johnson, in the presence of Rusk and Rostow. This second meeting lasted a little over an hour (17:12–18:17), but after Johnson left at 17:45, due to other obligations, Constantine continued the discussion with his two remaining interlocutors.<sup>55</sup>

It is uncertain if, during his second visit in the White House that day, Constantine was aware of a small group of about one hundred people gathered across the street, including once again Melina Mercouri. The demonstrators carried signs such as “Melina Mercouri is a Greek”, shouted “Down With The Fascist King” and “The King Must Go” and tried to get closer to the presidential residence, but were stopped by the police. Speaking to the reporters that hastened to the scene, the Greek actress called on Johnson not to provide any military aid to the dictatorial regime. “Freedom is all we need,” she said.<sup>56</sup>

For the content of the discussions the King held in Washington, our main source is the official US memorandum, which is probably incomplete, since it was based on the “recollections” of Rostow, who was not present for the King’s first tête-à-tête with the President in the Oval Office.<sup>57</sup> Some details are also included in Papagos’ narrative, published 32 years later (in 1999, yet before the American records became available in 2000); but his direct personal testimony is limited, since he was only present at the luncheon, although he includes some additional information, which obviously was given to him by the King.<sup>58</sup> And, of course, there is Constantine’s own narrative, which was published 48 years later (in 2015).<sup>59</sup> In all these sources, some points are in agreement, while others are not.

According to the official US account,<sup>60</sup> Constantine expressed to Johnson his lack of confidence in the coup leaders’ ability to come up with “coherent government policies”, on the grounds that they lacked “the talents to govern”.

He insisted in particular on his devotion to the concept of returning Greece to “constitutional procedures and democratic processes”, stating that

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<sup>55</sup> The hours mentioned here come from the official daily diary of the White House and are confirmed, to some extent, by the reports of the Athens News Agency; see The White House, *Johnson’s Daily Diary*; cf. *Μακεδονία* (12-13 September 1967).

<sup>56</sup> See, for instance, the newspapers *The Washington Post*, *Detroit Free Press* and *Lowell Sun* (12 September 1967); cf. the United Press International telegram, as reported by the Swiss newspaper *L’Impartial*, that same day.

<sup>57</sup> Memorandum of Meeting between President Johnson and King Constantine, Washington, 11 September 1967, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, document 301.

<sup>58</sup> Papagos, *Σημειώσεις*, pp. 19-22.

<sup>59</sup> Georgios P. Malouchos (ed.), *Βασιλεύς Κωνσταντίνος χωρίς τίτλο* [King Constantine without a title], vol. 2, Athens: Pelasgos, 2015, pp. 277-287.

<sup>60</sup> Any differences or additions in comparison with other sources will be noted.

he intended to get his family out of Greece if tensions between him and the coup leaders increased. Moreover, he would not hesitate to put his life at risk if the confrontation became unavoidable. He noted that on these issues he had some support from military commanders in the north of the country, but he acknowledged that, as time went on, the coup leaders were infiltrating all army commands with officers of “absolute loyalty to them”.

He identified possible dates for his prospective confrontation with the Junta either in December 1967, when the committee’s report on a constitutional revision was to be reviewed by the coup leaders, or in 1968, at the time of the plebiscite on the new Constitution. He did not, however, rule out confronting them on an earlier date if they attempted a “second round” in the showdown. However, he made it clear that, in any case, the confrontation would need to involve substantial issues and not questions, for example, like military appointments.<sup>61</sup>

He asked what the US would be prepared to do in the case of such a confrontation, raising the possibility of a landing of US Marines as a show of force or the positioning of the Sixth Fleet in Greek waters. At a minimum, he expected an official US statement in support of his efforts to return the country to constitutional rule. Johnson, for his part, pointed out that a military intervention “would not be feasible”, whereas the question of a public statement would be considered in the light of the circumstances at the time, thereby avoiding making a commitment in advance.<sup>62</sup> Constantine also pointed out the need to be able to communicate “with his people” in the event of a confrontation. Requesting the possible use of Voice of America radio transmitters (located in Thessaloniki and Rhodes), he received no straight answer.

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<sup>61</sup> In his own narrative, Constantine affirms that he made it clear to the Americans that he was “entirely against the Junta”, and that he intended to make a move. He avoided giving them an exact date, “because I did not trust them”; see Malouchos, *Βασιλεύς Κωνσταντίνος*, p. 287.

<sup>62</sup> Constantine repeatedly argued that he never asked for military assistance, but only political and moral support, which Johnson promised him; see Malouchos, *Βασιλεύς Κωνσταντίνος*, p. 286. In a discussion with Henry Tasca in 1971, he insisted that, when he visited Washington in September 1967, “he made plain all he was seeking was moral support, since US force would have been unthinkable”; cf. Telegram from the Embassy in Greece to the Department of State, Athens, 11 July 1971, 0855Z, in James Edward Miller, Douglas E. Selvage, Laurie Van Hook (eds), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume 29, Eastern Europe; Eastern Mediterranean, 1969-1972* [hereafter *FRUS 1969-1972*], Washington: GPO, 2007, document 319. However, according to Papagos’ description of the meetings, Rusk told Constantine that he should not expect “dynamic assistance” from USA and that “a bluff with the Sixth Fleet can create an escalation that we do not want”, replies that suggest that these issues were raised by the latter; see Papagos, *Σημειώσεις*, p. 21.



He finally made a plea for the restoration of US military aid to Greece, noting that the continued withholding of aid did not facilitate the achievement of US political goals and irritated the colonels, while its partial rehabilitation “linked to continued loyalty to the constitutional scenario” would be helpful.

For his part, Johnson made it clear that he could not commit himself until legislation was passed but stated that he understood the King’s argument.<sup>63</sup> The President also raised the political problems caused by the case of Papandreou and the other political prisoners. Constantine “explained the legal position” with Papandreou,<sup>64</sup> but did not seem to rule out the possibility of an amnesty, “once the legal procedures had been followed”.<sup>65</sup>

While there is still a degree of uncertainty as to the exact content of the confidential White House talks, what was said during the King’s visit to Congress (which was also supposed to be confidential) quickly became public,<sup>66</sup> with direct negative effects on the image of Constantine and with predictable consequences for his relations with the colonels. On Capitol Hill, the King met with members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and other senators and congressmen.<sup>67</sup> Although he was pelted with pressing questions “in an

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<sup>63</sup> According to Papagos’ recollection, Johnson stated that “as long as the current situation continues, there is nothing he can do”, while Rusk said that a law was to be passed by Congress in November and that, therefore, if there was clear evidence by then from the Greek government that the new Constitution would pass, aid would resume; see Papagos, *Σημειώσεις*, p. 20.

<sup>64</sup> See below his more detailed answer on this matter, later that day in Congress.

<sup>65</sup> Constantine affirmed later that he raised with Johnson the case of Ioannis Tsouderos, another Greek who had also studied in the US, was also the son of a former prime minister and was also in jail, for whom no one spoke, as well as the case of thousands of others, and that “they all must get out”; see Malouchos, *Βασιλεύς Κωνσταντίνος*, p. 284; cf. Papagos, *Σημειώσεις*, p. 19.

<sup>66</sup> According to Constantine, Johnson had warned him with the words: “My boy, do not tell those bastards anything you would not want to read the next day in the newspapers”; see Malouchos, *Βασιλεύς Κωνσταντίνος*, pp. 277-278; cf. Papagos, *Σημειώσεις*, p. 21.

<sup>67</sup> Present were, among others, the Committee chairman J. William Fulbright (D), senators Edward Kennedy (D), George McGovern (D), George Aiken (R), Birch Bayh (D), J. Caleb Boggs (R), Edward Brooke (R), Frank Carlson (R), Joseph Clark (D), John Cooper (R), Everett Dirksen (R), Clifford Hansen (R), Bourke Hickenlooper (R), Daniel Inouye (D), Thomas Kuchel (R), Eugene McCarthy (D), Gale McGee (D), Thomas McIntyre (D), Karl Mundt (R), John Sparkman (D) and Stephen Young (D), as well as Greek-American members of the House of Representatives Nick Galifianakis and Peter Kyros; see Memorandum for the Files, Visit of King Constantine: Coffee Hour with Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 11 September 1967, NARA, RG 84, Athens Post Files: FRC 72 A 5030, POL 7 Visits, King Constantine; cf. *Arizona Republic* and *Μακεδονία* (12 September 1967); for clarification of

MEMORANDUM FOR THE FILES

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Visit of King Constantine: Coffee Hour with Senate Foreign  
Relations Committee  
September 11, 1967

His Majesty King Constantine, accompanied by Marshal of the Court Papagos and the Greek Chargé, was received by the Committee on Foreign Relations for a coffee at the Capitol at 3:30 p.m., September 11. A list of those present is attached. The number included members of the Foreign Relations Committee, other Senators, and two members of the House of Representatives of Greek-American origin.

The King opened with a five-minute statement concerning the situation in Greece and then replied to questions. In his opening statement the King made it clear that he was fully committed to constitutional reform. He described briefly the turbulent political situation as it had existed over the past years and noted that when the colonels took over on April 21 the question arose in his mind as to whether to play a role of passive resistance or to be more active. He had chosen the latter course and pressed for constitutional reform. It was through his initiative that a very able and independent-minded committee of jurists had been set up to draft a constitution. The committee's mandate was not to change the basic provisions of the constitution, but to make necessary revisions to bring it up to date. He stressed his role in bringing civilians into the Cabinet and called Prime Minister Kollias, a former Public Prosecutor, a remarkably dedicated person. He asked for the Senators' "patience and understanding" in facing the Greek problems and in working towards goals which were in the best interests of the Greek people and which would avoid bloodshed. There was no direct reference to aid other than the need cited by the King to keep up the defense of Greece within the framework of NATO. In response to a question as to whom the United States arms would be used against, the King replied, "The enemies of the United States." The general tenor of the questioning was not hostile and only Senator Young of Ohio asked directly and pointedly, "What have you done about the release of the many prisoners and of Andreas Papandreou?" The King made a good impression by fielding the questions in a very direct and alert fashion. He was very frank with the Senators.

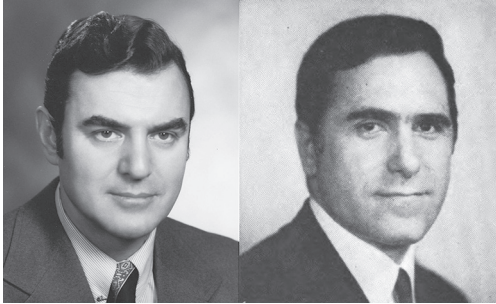
Senator Sparkman and Senator Dirksen asked about the elder Papandreou. The King replied that he was getting older but that he was nonetheless fine: "I hear about him through a mutual barber." It was when Senator Sparkman referred to "your government" at one point that the King quipped "not my government."

Regarding the younger Papandreou, he explained that he was in jail at present awaiting the trial which had grown out of charges made by

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Constantine meets senators and congressmen in Washington  
(Memorandum for the Files, US Congress, 11 September 1967)

some of the names, see United States Senate, *Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate: Millennium Edition, 1816-2000*, Washington: GPO, 2000.



The Greek-American Democratic Congressmen Nick Galifianakis (left) and Peter Kyros (right) participated in questioning Constantine on Capitol Hill

electrified atmosphere”,<sup>68</sup> he made a “good impression”, according to most sources, by fielding the questions in a “very direct and alert fashion”, and by “being very frank”.<sup>69</sup>

In his opening statement, Constantine noted that, when the colonels took over on 21 April, he had two options, that is, either to play a role of “passive resistance” or to be “more active”, and that he chose the latter, by pressing for “constitutional reform” and by bringing civilians into the government. He asked the senators show “patience and understanding” in dealing with the situation in Greece in order to “avoid bloodshed”. Asked about the timetable for constitutional reform, he described the various steps, acknowledging though that there was no “exact time limit”.<sup>70</sup> Regarding the military aid issue, Constantine underlined the need to “keep up the defense of Greece within the framework of NATO”. Asked “to whom the United States arms would be used against”, he replied: “Against the enemies of the United States.”

In response to a question as to what he had done “personally” about the political prisoners, he affirmed that he “had urged” the government to either afford them a prompt trial or to release them and that, as a result, about 4,000 prisoners (of the original 6,000 arrested) had been released. Regarding, more specifically, the case of Andreas Papandreou, Constantine stated that he

<sup>68</sup> Papagos, *Σημειώσεις*, p. 21.

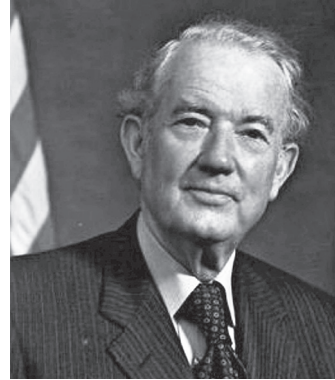
<sup>69</sup> Memorandum for the Files, Visit of King Constantine, p. 1; cf.: “The senators said they were impressed with the young monarch’s plea for time and patience while he tries to revive constitutional democracy in Greece,” *The Indiana Gazette* (13 September 1967); see also the particular statements of senators Edward Kennedy (“the king recalled his pledge of a return to democracy”), Joseph Clark, (who said the King was “frank”) and George Aiken (“the monarch was frank and charming”), as published in the *Arizona Republic* (12 September 1967).

<sup>70</sup> On this issue, the Greek-American congressman Peter Kyros noted that he was concerned about the genuineness of the intentions of the coup leaders as regards constitutional reform, because they kept referring to the fact that they had “a mission to accomplish” and a timetable could therefore not be set; see Memorandum for the Files, Visit of King Constantine, p. 2. Peter Nicholas Kyros (1925-2012), born in Portland, Maine, was the son of Greek immigrants and a Democratic representative to Congress, from 1967 to 1975; he later served as a State Department liaison to Congress (1980-1982); cf. “Peter N. Kyros, Democratic congressman from Maine, dies at 86”, *The Washington Post* (21 July 2012).

remained in jail and would be going on trial, on “charges made by the Public Prosecutor prior to the April 21 coup”.<sup>71</sup>

He stated, once more, that he never signed the suspension of the articles of the Constitution.<sup>72</sup> When at one point a senator, John Sparkman, began a question with the words “What is your government doing about”, Constantine hastened to interrupt him, by declaring emphatically: “It’s not my government!”

Although Constantine had made clear that the details of the meeting “should not be divulged”,<sup>73</sup> the phrase “It’s not my government” was leaked the following day to most American newspapers and later worldwide (as one might expect), pointing out that the “King of Greece” set himself apart from the “military junta that now



Democratic Senator John Sparkman’s question provoked Constantine’s declaration: “It’s not my government!”

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<sup>71</sup> This refers obviously to the request made to the Greek parliament, on 24 February 1967, by the public prosecutor Ch. Moustakis and the judicial investigator S. Sokratidis, for the lifting of the parliamentary immunity of Andreas Papandreou and Pavlos Vardinoyannis, in order for them to be charged with eventual political responsibility in the ASPIDA case; see *Ελευθερία*, 25 February 1967. In reality, given that parliament did not have the opportunity to vote on that request, those charges were never officially pronounced “prior to the April 21 coup”, as Constantine asserted. Addressing Congress, the King assured also his audience that, since 1965, Papandreou kept “close contact with the extreme left”, angering even his father; see Memorandum for the Files, Visit of King Constantine, p. 2; Reading the *Washington Post* reportage next day, that “as to Andreas Papandreou, the economist-son of a former prime minister, the King gave the impression that he felt the case against him was considerable”, Margaret Papandreou bitterly commented: “So the King had not yet understood that the threat against him and the monarchy came from the military clique which took over the government, not from the political personage of Andreas Papandreou”; see Papandreou, *Nightmare in Athens*, p. 305.

<sup>72</sup> *Arizona Republic* (12 September 1967).

<sup>73</sup> While replying to a question asked by Greek-American congressman Nick Galifianakis; see Memorandum for the Files, Visit of King Constantine, p. 3. Nick Galifianakis, born in Durham, North Carolina, was the son of Greek immigrants and served as a Democratic representative to Congress, from 1967 to 1973. His nephew, also named Nick Galifianakis, draws satirical cartoons in *The Washington Post*, while another nephew is the well-known comedian Zach Galifianakis; see North Carolina Secretary of State, *North Carolina Manual*, vol. 1967, p. 539; *Spartanburg Herald Journal* (4 June 1972); *The New York Times* (6 June 2009); *The Washington Post* (20 August 2010).



THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

*Mr Saunders  
informed  
re 195*

CONFIDENTIAL Wednesday, September 13, 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: Further Backgrounding on King Constantine

Two sources now--Senator Pell who saw Constantine in Newport and Minister Papagos who was with the King here--have suggested that we let out on background that the King raised the question of our resuming military aid.

The purpose of such backgrounding would be to counter the unfortunate Washington Post headline yesterday which quoted the King as saying the military government "is not my government." He'd like credit for at least raising the subject closest to the junta's heart so it would not look as if he came down here on a purely social fling.

State would do this with the weekly news magazines if at all. But since the King's main talks were with you, State wouldn't think of backgrounding this way without your permission. Is this much OK with you, or would you prefer continued silence on the subject?

*Walt* Rostow

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No \_\_\_\_\_

*IF TRUE  
IT IS OK*

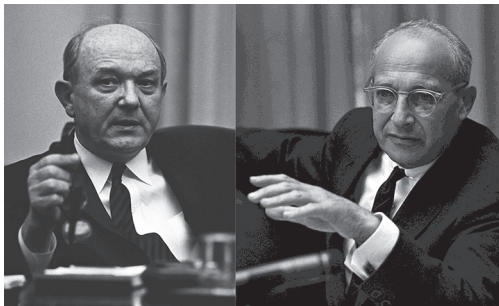
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Walt Rostow proposes leaking information to the press that the King raised the question of US resuming military aid to Greece (Memorandum for the President, 13 September 1967)

governs his country”.<sup>74</sup> Papagos tried hard “to soften the impressions so as not to create an unbearable situation in relations with the government”, by making a series of contacts, while in collaboration with the chargé d’affaires of the Greek Embassy, Alkiviadis Papadopoulos, he sent a report to Athens in an attempt to alter the image of “the Senate events”.<sup>75</sup> In order to counter the “unfortunate” leak, Rostow asked Johnson’s permission to divulge that, during his discussions in the White House, “the King raised the question of our resuming military aid”, thus giving him the credit for at least raising the subject “closest to the junta’s heart”.<sup>76</sup>

The epilogue of the visit was – supposedly – written during the return flight to Greece, in the early hours of Wednesday, 13 September. Paul Ioannidis (who was the captain of the Olympic Airways’ commercial flight that day but also the regular pilot of the King’s personal aircraft, a Grumman Gulfstream), affirmed that he received a message over the radio from Johnson, which he immediately delivered to Constantine. According to the pilot’s recollection, the meaning of that message was “clear”, in the sense that “he [the President] urged him [the King] to overthrow the junta and restore democracy”.<sup>77</sup>



Besides President Johnson, Secretary of State Dean Rusk (left) and National Security Adviser Walt Rostow (right) were Constantine’s main interlocutors at the White House

<sup>74</sup> The phrase became a headline in *The Washington Post* (12 September 1967) and similar circulated widely publications; cf., for example: “King Constantine of Greece yesterday set himself apart from the military junta which has ruled his nation since a coup last April”, *Arizona Republic* (12 September 1967); “King Constantine of Greece [...] disassociated himself from the actions of the military Junta now leading his country”, *The Indiana Gazette* (13 September 1967).

<sup>75</sup> Frederika kept also calling Washington “very troubled”, but Papagos has the impression that finally “the explanations given were accepted [from the Junta] without discomfort”; see Papagos, *Σημειώσεις*, p. 22.

<sup>76</sup> According to Rostow, this suggestion was made by Papagos, as well by Senator Claiborne Pell, from Rhode Island, who had met Constantine in Newport the previous day; Johnson wrote on the document “If true it’s OK”, but this author has no evidence if that gesture was finally carried out; see Memorandum for the President, “Further Backgrounding on King Constantine”, Washington, 13 September 1967, Johnson Presidential Library.

<sup>77</sup> Pavlos Ioannidis, *Κι αν δεν είσαι, θα γίνεις* [Even if you are not, you will become], Athens: Livani, 2008, p. 149.





“They Shook Hands Very Warmly”: Front page of the Athenian newspaper *To Bhma*, on the Johnson–Constantine meeting (12 September 1967)

Constantine refers also to this incident, using slightly different words: “Johnson sent to the cockpit a most warm telegram, in which he wrote that I had his full solidarity for the effort we made against the junta.”<sup>78</sup> This curious piece of information, mentioned for the first time by Ioannidis 40 years after and repeated by Constantine seven years later, is not confirmed by any other source.<sup>79</sup>

The rest, as the saying goes, is history. The King finally launched his counter coup on 13 December 1967,<sup>80</sup> roughly carrying out the plan he had already described to the American Ambassador the previous May. He flew to northern Greece, where he was received by some loyal military commanders and called on the Junta to cede power. His assumption that his “royal presence” among the troops would alone be enough and that

<sup>78</sup> Malouchos, *Βασιλεύς Κωνσταντίνος*, p. 286.

<sup>79</sup> Not even by Papagos, who was also on that flight, had an overall view of the issues at stake during the visit and, furthermore, he functioned de facto as Constantine’s principal political advisor at that time.

<sup>80</sup> Early in the morning of 13 December, the King summoned Talbot to Tatoi Palace and informed him that he had decided to move against Junta that very day. He said he would be grateful if the US could “endorse his move as step toward constitutional government” and “use all available persuasion to convince colonels it would be unwise for them to seek to oppose his action and thus thrust Greece into civil war”. Finally, he repeated his request for US radio stations in Greece to broadcast a taped statement in which he stated his decision “to bring about return to democratic normality”. The Ambassador immediately informed the State Department in Washington as well as Dean Rusk, who was in Brussels for a NATO meeting. He proposed that he be authorised to express to both the King and the Junta leaders the US government’s “strong hope questions of government in Greece can be resolved without bloodshed”, noting them that “warfare in this part of world can redound to benefit only of Communists” (which was quite a different intervention than the one Constantine had hoped for); he further added that he did not plan to have King’s statement broadcast from US facilities until it was at least clear “his maneuver has reasonable chance of success”. In fact, Constantine’s statement was never broadcast on VOA; see Telegram from the Embassy in Greece to the Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, Athens, 13 December 1967, 0915Z, *FRUS, 1964-1968*, document 344; Telegram from the Embassy in Greece to the Department of State, Athens, 13 December 1967, 1647Z, *ibid.*, document 346.

every order issued from above would be immediately executed, without having to fire a single shot, proved to be rather naive, since the younger pro-Junta officers reacted quickly by arresting several royalist generals and taking control of their units, while the rest of the undecided high-ranking officers either remained passive or quickly changed sides.<sup>81</sup> Less than 24 hours later, realising that his coup had failed, Constantine fled to Italy along with his family,<sup>82</sup> thus putting a *de facto* end to his reign, a status that would become *de jure* in 1974.<sup>83</sup>

The question remains as to what the King actually believed about the US position vis-à-vis his intention to confront the colonels. As mentioned above, in his confidences to Talbot in May,



“King Constantine Attempts to Overthrow the Military Junta”: Front page of Montreal newspaper *Le Devoir* (14 December 1967)

<sup>81</sup> During that day Kay Bracken, the chief political counsellor in US Embassy, “was full of disdain for the impetuosity and stupidity of the young King”, according to her subordinate Robert Keeley, who notes for his part: “I carried no royalist banner myself, but I argued with her that we had to offer him what support we could, that he simply had to succeed, otherwise we would be stuck with Papadopoulos for the indefinite future”; see Robert V. Keeley, *The Colonels’ Coup and the American Embassy: A Diplomat’s View of the Breakdown of Democracy in Cold War Greece*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010, p. 154.

<sup>82</sup> For various accounts of the royal countercoup, see *FRUS, 1964-1968*, documents 343-350; Woodhouse, *Rise and Fall*, pp. 43-48; Charalambis, *Στρατός*, pp. 247-256; Papagos, *Σημειώσεις*, pp. 41-56; Malouchos, *Βασιλεύς Κωνσταντίνος*, vol. 3, pp. 12-53; Papandreou, *Nightmare in Athens*, pp. 347-354; Peter Murtagh, *The Rape of Greece: The King, the Colonels and the Resistance*, London: Simon & Schuster, 1994, pp. 152-161; Keeley, *Colonels’ Coup*, pp. 146-160; Laurence Stern, *The Wrong Horse: The Politics of Intervention and the Failure of American Diplomacy*, New York: Times Books, 1977, 1977, pp. 52-57; Solon N. Grigoriadis, *Ιστορία της Συγχρόνου Ελλάδος: Η Δικτατορία* [History of contemporary Greece: the dictatorship], vol. 5, Athens: Kapopoulos, 1975, pp. 171-219; Konstantinos Kollias, *Βασιλεύς και Επανάσταση 1967* [King and revolution, 1967], Athens, 1984, pp. 83-107; Ioannis Kakolyris, *Λύκοι στις φωλιές των αετών* [Wolves in the eagles’ nests], Athens: Lotos, 1997, passim; Christos Lymperis, *Πορεία σε παραγμένες θάλασσες* [Course in troubled seas], Athens: Piotita, 2005, pp. 97-103; Antonis Kakaras, *Οι Έλληνες Στρατιωτικοί* [The Greek Military], Athens: Papazissi, 2006, vol. 3, pp. 23-94; Alexandra Stefanopoulou, *13 Δεκεμβρίου 1967* [13 December 1967], Athens: Fereniki, 2009, passim.

<sup>83</sup> After the downfall of the military regime, a referendum was held on 8 December 1974, resulting to the definitive abolition of the monarchy and the establishment of a republic.



United Press International Cablephoto  
**IN EXILE:** King Constantine and Queen Anne-Marie of Greece after arriving at the Ciampino military airport in Rome early yesterday after the failure of the King's attempt to overthrow the military junta. At center, a nurse holds Crown Prince Paul.

Constantine and his entourage arrive in Italy  
 after the failure of his counter-coup (UPI cable photo, 14 December 1967)

he had made it quite clear that he considered the success of his plan depended “very substantially” on US reaction.<sup>84</sup> In July he stated that his intention was not to precipitate action unless the US government “approved of his purposes”, adding that, if it should become necessary for him to move, he would advise the American government in advance.<sup>85</sup> During his visit to the White House in September, as we have already seen, he finally reduced his request for support to a simple US statement in favour of his efforts to return the country to constitutional rule, receiving the vague answer that such a declaration would be considered in the light of the circumstances at the time; he didn’t even get a straight answer on the use of Voice of America to broadcast his message to the Greek people.<sup>86</sup> On the contrary, as we know, his interlocutors’ intention was to discourage him from “pushing the regime to the point of provoking a confrontation”, since the US did “not want to see armed conflict in Greece”,

<sup>84</sup> Letter from the Ambassador to Greece, 26 May 1967.

<sup>85</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in Greece, 7 August 1967.

<sup>86</sup> Memorandum of Meeting between President Johnson and King Constantine, 11 September 1967.

although there is no clear evidence that its position was spelled out to him in so many words.<sup>87</sup> In any case, the general picture seemed rather negative. One wonders if Constantine understood it but decided to move anyway, hoping that an eventual success would reverse the tide, or if, instead, he was deliberately led into a fatal trap, through dubious double talk; or, thirdly, if he completely misinterpreted Johnson's southern charm and the diplomatically expressed concerns about his plans.<sup>88</sup> In any case, as in previous crucial conjunctures of his reign, he manifested once again a spiritual shallowness, accompanied by striking lack of political judgment.

One must not overlook though that, as Robert Keeley, political officer in the US Embassy, put it, "it was perhaps tragic but indeed a fact that after April 21 we had placed all our eggs in the King's basket. We had counted on him to exercise a moderating influence on the Junta, and we had furthermore counted on him to rescue us by throwing the Junta out if things went really sour."<sup>89</sup> According to another diplomatic source, up to the moment of the counter coup, the Americans had been telling the King, "Your Majesty, you are the only person who can pull this together. You have the full good wishes and support of the United States." But the King, unfortunately, interpreted the word *support* in a different way that it was intended.<sup>90</sup> Afterward, the King would tell an American confidant:

The impression I had was that not only would your country be in my corner but that you would have planes and ships off-shore – that you would make it clear the United States was hoping for a return to democracy and would broadcast the tape I gave to the Ambassador.

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<sup>87</sup> Though these phrases are included in the document prepared by Dean Rusk before the meeting, they do not appear in the above-mentioned memorandum of the actual meeting.

<sup>88</sup> In the conversation he held in 8 July 1971 with the American Ambassador Henry Tasca, on passing through Rome, Constantine insisted that President Johnson "told him that he could count on his moral support if he moved against the junta"; see telegram from the Embassy in Greece to the Department of State, Athens, 11 July 1971, 0855Z, *FRUS 1969-1972*, document 319; This is how Papagos describes Constantine's remark: "Johnson then [in 1967] urged the King, with pressure and persuasiveness, to bring the country back to legitimacy. The King replied that he was trying to and would continue trying to, but asked for the moral support of the president. 'You have it', Johnson told him"; see Papagos, *Σημειώσεις*, pp. 360-363.

<sup>89</sup> Keeley, *Colonels' Coup*, p. 154; cf. Margaret Papandreou's remark on 20 August: "Our fate is that the King may have to become the champion of democratic rule. But he is so inept, and so weak, and makes so many mistakes – that one cannot be sure he will decide on a line and carry it through"; see Papandreou, *Nightmare in Athens*, p. 298.

<sup>90</sup> Stern, *Wrong Horse*, p. 55.

Beyond that, I assumed there were other ways you could exert influence without being identified. From your Ambassador I got the impression that the United States would not remain indifferent, that there would be a showing of American interest.<sup>91</sup>

Two years later, in April 1969, while Brigadier Pattakos was officially received by the new American President, Richard Nixon, in Washington, the self-exiled King contented himself with a brief meeting with the new Secretary of State. William Rogers explained to his guest that, although the US government “had a basic interest in political evolution and constitutional development in Greece”, at the same time it “did not want to see Greece weakened militarily as a NATO ally”, noting that it is “our policy not to intervene in domestic matters”. According to the official memorandum of that conversation, Constantine replied that he now understood the American policy and “if this had been made clear to him when he was in Washington in September 1967, he might not have undertaken his action of 13 December and would have instead stayed in Greece to continue influencing the government”.<sup>92</sup> His admission probably answers our question as to whether he understood the US government’s position concerning his intention to confront the Junta.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>92</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, 2 April 1969, *FRUS 1969-1972*, document 244. Present at that meeting, besides King Constantine and US Secretary of State William Rogers, were Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs Stuart Rockwell, Country Director for Greece Daniel Brewster and Grand Marshal Leonidas Papagos. The latter, in his lengthy reference to the above conversation, recounts the King’s specific remark as follows: “If they had talked to him this way in America, when he visited Johnson in 1967, he would not have tried to get rid of the Junta”; see Papagos, *Σημειώσεις*, pp. 164-167.