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The Second Reign of George II: His Role in Politics*

Great Britain, France, and Russia, the protecting powers of Greece, installed the Glucksburg Dynasty in that country during 1863. George II, grandson of the first ruler in the dynasty, was its fourth member to rule the politically turbulent Greeks. He was twenty-three years old when his grandfather, George I, was assassinated in 1913, and four years later he was forced to accompany his father, Constantine I, into exile. On the death of his brother, Alexander, in 1920, George returned with his father to Greece to assume

The views expressed in this article are those of the author, and do not represent the views of the Department of Defense or any of its agencies.

*There is no definitive historical work available in the English language which details the internal politics of Greece during the second reign of George II and the accompanying dictatorship of John Metaxas. Perhaps the most comprehensive study of the period in Greek is Gregorios Daphnes's two-volume history, Η Ελλαδας μεταξυ δυο πολέμων, 2 vols. (Athens, 1955). The diary of John Metaxas, Το προσωπικό του ημερολογίο, 4 vols. (Athens, 1951-1964) (Volumes 1-3 edited by Christos Christides and Volume 4 edited by Phaidon Branas), gives the reader much insight into Metaxas's thought, and his relationships with the palace and the political world. Λόγοι οΕικοσεις του Ιωάννη Μεταξά, 2 vols. (Athens, 1969) contains the dictator's major speeches delivered during his regime. Panagiotis Pipinelis published a biography of King George II, Παναγιώτης Πιπινελής (Athens, 1951), but he devotes very little time to the prewar period. Several publications of the Metaxas government are available in the Greek language, but little mention is made in any of these of the relationship between king and dictator. Most other works produced in Greek about the four years immediately preceding the war are political diatribes for or against the regime. Several English language publications make reference to the prewar internal politics of Greece but concentrate primarily on Greece's external affairs. The two most recent books of value are John Campbell and Phillip Sherrard, Modern Greece (London, 1968) and Christopher M. Woudhouse, The Story of Modern Greece (London, 1968). Several articles concerning the internal affairs of Greece were published in the late 1930's. Best among these are Nicholas S. Kaltchas, "Postwar Politics in Greece," Foreign Policy Report, XII (September 1936), 146-167, and Sidney Waterlow, "The Decline and Fall of Greek Democracy," Political Quarterly, XVIII (1947), 95-105 and 205-219. A popularized and biased first person account by Arthur S. Gould Lee, The Royal House of Greece (London, 1948) is the most complete study in English of the Glucksburg dynasty in Greece and it does offer some interesting notes on the character of King George.

A more detailed bibliographical study of books and periodicals in both English and Greek covering the immediate prewar years in Greece appears in an unpublished Master's thesis, Everett J. Marder, "The Regime of the Fourth of August, The Dictatorship of John Metaxas, 1936-1941," University of Cincinnati, June 1970. This M.A. thesis concentrates on the dictator's rise to power and the creation of the social and economic programs of the regime.

The current article is based mainly on the unpublished dispatches of the American minister in Greece, Lincoln MacVeagh, who served in Athens from November, 1933, until June, 1941, and then returned for a brief period as ambassador after the war. All dispatches are contained in State Department files located in the National Archives, Washington, D.C. MacVeagh was an extremely competent observer with a deep interest in and knowledge of Greek affairs. His dispatches are objective, highly professional, and his evaluations are borne out in all cases by subsequent events. MacVeagh was minister of a power then not intimately involved either in Greek affairs or even in the greater affairs of Europe. He was able, therefore to observe and report what others did without the biases normally attributed to diplomats who have to concern themselves with their own nation's interests.
once more his role of crown prince. After his father's abdication in September, 1922, he was crowned King George II by the revolutionary committee that seized power in the country after the army's defeat in Asia Minor. There followed a period of rule by appointees of the military committee with King George reigning in name only. After an abortive attempt at a coup d'état in October, 1923, in which Constantine I's former chief of staff, John Metaxas, was implicated, the king was induced to leave the country while the revolutionary committee decided on what form of government Greece would have for the future. George declined to abdicate, but agreed to leave the country under duress. He ended his short, unhappy reign on December 19, 1923. On March 25, 1924, the National Assembly deposed the dynasty, forbade its members to reside in Greece, and confiscated the family's private property. Three weeks later, on April 13, a plebiscite confirmed the assembly's action with sixty-nine percent of the voters approving the ouster of the Glücksburgs.

During the nearly twelve years that Greece functioned as a republic, a large percentage of the population still believed that a constitutional monarchy offered Greece its best hope for political stability. After Eleftherios Venizelos' final defeat at the polls in March, 1933, the agitation for restoration increased. Those who remembered the cold and impersonal attitude of George II during his first reign were reluctant to give Constantine I's son another chance. His supporters maintained, however, that he had matured while in exile and was fully capable of the duties of reigning monarch. His main failure, said his critics, was his lack of understanding of his duties as king of a democratic people. Certain passages of former ambassador Henry Morgenthau's book, I Was Sent To Athens, raised the question as to whether the shortcomings attributed to George were the type that could be cured even by twelve years of exile. Morgenthau, maintaining that the king was not a statesman, felt that George did not have the slightest appreciation of the Greek people's right to rule themselves and considered himself a divinely appointed ruler in the sense of medieval monarchies.1

The king's proposed return had been opposed by many of Greece's most popular leaders. In a letter addressed to the king on October 3, 1935, while he was still in exile, and signed by Themistocles Sophoulis, George Kaphandaris, Alexander Papanastassiou, Alexander Mylonas and George Papandreou, the five Republican leaders claimed that the return of the house of Glücksburg was an "attempt to destroy the liberty of the greater part of the Hellenes and enslave them to the tyranny and interests of a dictatorial faction." Their claim was that "such a restoration... will place at the head of the state, not a chief and king of all the Greeks, but a crowned leader, and at the same time the prisoner, of a party."2 Doubts of the king's ability to reunite the Greek people, severely torn by political factionalism, were reinforced by both the liberal leader and elder statesman in exile, Eleftherios Venizelos, and the British crown representative in Athens, Minister Sir Sidney Waterlow. In a conversation with the American ambassador to Turkey, Robert P. Skinner (former US minister to Athens), Venizelos, who had been the symbol of the Re-

2. Minister Lincoln MacVeagh, Athens, 3 October 1935, to Secretary of State, 868.00/914, Department of State, National Archives. Such citations hereafter will be limited to author, date, addressee and file number. The city from which the dispatch originates will be cited when it differs from this citation. All dispatches cited are from Department of State files in the National Archives, Washington, D.C.