

Nikolaos Plastiras' Governments and the Greek-American Relations (1950-1952)

The years 1950 to 1952 marked a critical phase in Greek political history, particularly under the governments led by Nikolaos Plastiras, as the country grappled with the aftermath of World War II, internal political turmoil, and the broader geopolitical struggles of the Cold War. This period saw significant U.S. involvement in Greece, primarily driven by the Truman Doctrine and Washington's broader strategy of containing Soviet influence. The American government played a pivotal role in shaping Greek domestic affairs, providing economic aid, military support, and political guidance to stabilize the nation and counter communist insurgency during the Greek Civil War. This article explores the extent and nature of U.S. influence on Greek politics during Plastiras' administrations, highlighting key interventions, policy decisions, and diplomatic strategies. By situating Greece within the wider framework of Cold War diplomacy, it sheds light on how external powers shaped the country's postwar trajectory and long-term political development.

Keywords: *Plastiras, Cold War, Greek-American relations, Greek Civil War, Washington.*

Introduction

The focus of this study is twofold; first, it investigates how U.S. foreign policy objectives shaped political outcomes in Greece, including decisions on military aid, political appointments, and government stability. Second, it assesses the boundaries of American influence, recognizing the resilience of domestic political actors and the persistent impact of historical legacies such as the monarchist-communist divide. This dual focus reflects the broader historiographical debate concerning the nature of U.S. intervention: Was Greece effectively reduced to a client state, or did its internal politics retain autonomy despite significant external pressures?¹

Great Powers' intervention had a long tradition in the Balkans. According to Matthew Z. Mayer, the origins of this phenomenon can be traced back to the 18th century, particularly in the Russian anti-Ottoman activities in the "Peninsula of Haemus."² Characteristically, France, Great Britain, and Russia contributed to the creation of an independent Greek state in 1830, and the Russian government did the same in Bulgarian and Serbian cases during the 19th century.³ Besides, the

¹Ioannis D. Stefanidis, *En Onomati tou Ethnous. Politiki kouloura, alitrotismos ke anti Amerikanismos sti metapolemiki Ellada, 1945-1967* [In the name of the nation. Political culture, irredentism and anti-Americanism in post-war Greece, 1945-1967], Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2010; Zinovia Laliouti, *O anti Amerikanismos stin Ellada 1947-1989* [The anti-Americanism in Greece 1947-1989], Athens: Assini, 2016; Elisabeth Kirtsoglou, Dimitrios Theodossopoulos, "The Poetics of Anti-Americanism in Greece: Rhetoric, Agency, and Local Meaning", *Social Analysis* 54 (1), May 2010, pp. 106-124.

²Matthew Z. Mayer, "The Eastern Question Unresolved: Europe, the US, and the Western Balkans", *International Journal*, Winter, 2004/2005, Vol. 60, No. 1 (Winter, 2004/2005), p. 239.

³Mark Biondich, *The Balkans. Revolution, War, and Political Violence*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 1-94.

1 participation of those small countries in both the World Wars must be considered as
2 a result of external press.⁴ The interventions by the Great Powers in this region were
3 so frequent that, in 1935, the prominent political scientist Arnold Wolfers remarked,
4 “There is no crisis in the Balkans (...) apart from the general European crisis.”⁵

5 The manner in which powerful states such as Russia, Great Britain, France,
6 Germany, and, after World War II, the United States of America, interacted with the
7 Balkan countries bears significant resemblance to their approach toward colonies or
8 so-called “client states.” Specifically, their readiness to pressure governments in
9 countries like Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria through economic, political, or even
10 military means parallels similar actions undertaken in Latin America, Africa, and
11 Asia.⁶

12 However, it’s noteworthy that while Greece undoubtedly experienced external
13 pressures, especially after the Truman Doctrine’s implementation in 1947,⁷ its
14 political reality defies a straightforward neo-colonial classification. Greek leaders,
15 including Plastiras, skillfully navigated the complexities of U.S.-Greek relations,
16 pursuing independent policies when circumstances allowed while simultaneously
17 seeking American support for economic and military stability. Thus, this study
18 positions Greece as a politically contested space rather than a passive recipient of
19 foreign directives.

22 Methodology

24 The research methodology of this article combines qualitative historical
25 analysis with multi-source archival research to examine the evolution of Greek-
26 American relations during the pivotal postwar period. The core of the study rests on
27 the systematic examination of key primary sources, including diplomatic
28 correspondence between Greek, American, and British officials. Among these, the
29 U.S. State Department records and telegrams from American embassies in Athens
30 and London are of particular importance, offering a window into the strategic
31 calculations and policy priorities that shaped bilateral engagements. These sources
32 are supplemented by documents from British government archives, which help
33 contextualize the transatlantic dynamics at play.

34 Greek national archives also serve as a critical foundation for the study,
35 providing a domestic lens through which internal political developments and
36 leadership decisions are assessed. These documents include government memos,

⁴For the Greek case, see John S. Koliopoulos, *Greece and the British Connection 1935-1941*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978; Theodore A. Coulombis, John A. Petropoulos, Harry J. Psomiades (ed.), *Foreign Interference in Greek Politics: An Historical Perspective*, New York: Pella, 1976; Amikam Nachmani, “Civil War and Foreign Intervention in Greece: 1946-49”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 25, no. 4, 1990, pp. 489–522.

⁵Arnold Wolfers, “The Balkans and the Great Powers”, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Jan., 1935, Vol. 177, pp. 232.

⁶Rupert Emerson, “Colonialism”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 4, No. 1, (Jan., 1969), pp. 3-16.

⁷“Truman Doctrine (1947)”, *National Archives*, <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/truman-doctrine>. Retrieved on 2-9-2024.

1 political party communications, and personal correspondence from influential
 2 Greek figures such as Nikolaos Plastiras and Archbishop Damaskinos. By
 3 juxtaposing these with Anglo-American perspectives, the research aims to present
 4 a balanced view of the internal-external nexus that defined Greece's early Cold War
 5 experience.

6 In addition to primary sources, the study draws extensively on secondary
 7 literature to construct an analytical framework. This includes works from the fields
 8 of Cold War diplomatic history, postwar reconstruction, international relations, and
 9 political science, particularly those that analyze U.S. foreign policy strategies and
 10 European geopolitical realignments. Contributions by scholars focusing on Greek
 11 political history and transatlantic relations enrich the interpretation of events and
 12 help trace long-term patterns of influence and resistance.

13 This interdisciplinary and multi-archival methodology allows for a
 14 comprehensive understanding of how Greek political developments were both
 15 shaped by and reactive to foreign interventions. It also enables the identification of
 16 broader patterns of postwar diplomacy and power projection, embedding the Greek
 17 case within the wider framework of early Cold War international relations.

20 Literature Review

21
 22 The dependency of Greece on the Great Powers, particularly the United States,
 23 is thoroughly examined in Alexandros Kazamias' recent book, *Greece and the Cold*
 24 *War: Diplomacy and Anti-Colonialism in the Aftermath of Civil Conflict* (London:
 25 Bloomsbury, 2022). Also, Robert Frazier places Greece within the broader context
 26 of British-American relations in his monograph, *Anglo-American Relations with*
 27 *Greece: The Coming of the Cold War, 1942–1947* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan,
 28 1991). Similarly, Evanthis Hatzivassiliou characterizes Greece as a "frontline state"
 29 and provides a significant periodization in his work, *Greece and the Cold War:*
 30 *Frontline State, 1952–1967* (New York: Routledge, 2006). Additionally, John
 31 Iatrides' *Revolt in Athens: The Greek Communist "Second Round"* (Princeton:
 32 Princeton University Press, 1972) is a vital contribution, as it delves into the
 33 underlying reasons for foreign intervention in Greek affairs.

34 Additionally, in his pivotal article, "Shallow Waves and Deeper Currents: The
 35 U.S. Experience of Greece, 1947–1961" (*Diplomatic History*, Vol. 38, No. 1,
 36 January 2014), Hatzivassiliou explores the Greek-American relationship,
 37 highlighting Washington's policies aimed at keeping Greece within the "Western
 38 World" alongside the criticisms these policies have faced. The role of the United
 39 States in the shaping of Greek foreign policy was also analyzed by James Edward
 40 Miller in his book *The United States and the Making of Modern Greece. History*
 41 *and Power, 1950* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

42 As mentioned, moving forward from the existing bibliography, the central
 43 research question asks: To what extent did the United States influence Greek politics
 44 under Nikolaos Plastiras' governments? Sub-questions include: How did U.S.
 45 policy respond to shifting Greek political alliances? What role did domestic actors
 46 play in shaping U.S. decisions? And how did Cold War imperatives interact with

1 Greece's internal power struggles? These inquiries underscore the complexity of
 2 U.S.-Greek relations, where domestic political agency intersected with international
 3 geopolitical strategies. By addressing these questions, this article contributes to the
 4 understanding of Greece's political development in the postwar period and the
 5 broader dynamics of Cold War diplomacy.

8 **The First Post-war Plastiras' Government**

10 Nikolaos Plastiras played a pivotal role in Greece's turbulent political
 11 landscape during the post-World War II period. His return from exile in 1944
 12 coincided with the power struggle between the royalist government-in-exile, and the
 13 communist-dominated National Liberation Front (EAM). This conflict culminated
 14 in the December 1944 clashes in Athens, known as the "Dekemvriana," which led
 15 to British intervention and Plastiras' appointment as Prime Minister.⁸

16 Plastiras was seen as a moderate figure capable of bridging the divide between
 17 extreme left and right factions. His appointment was backed by the British, who
 18 sought a leader who could stabilize Greece while countering communist influence.
 19 Despite his anti-monarchist past, he was reluctantly accepted by King George II and
 20 the right-wing establishment due to his reputation as an honest and principled
 21 military leader.⁹

22 During his tenure, Plastiras faced immense challenges, including ongoing
 23 violence, political polarization, and British dominance over Greek affairs. In this
 24 context, he sought American support, recognizing the emerging geopolitical shift
 25 favoring the United States over Britain. In January 1945, he reached out to President
 26 Roosevelt, emphasizing Greece's commitment to democratic values and appealing
 27 for economic and military aid.¹⁰ Plastiras, who was often accused by his opponents
 28 as narrow-minded, seemed to understand already in January of 1945 that in the post-

⁸Evanthis Hatzivassiliou, *Greece and the Cold War. Frontline state, 1952–1967*, London: Routledge, 2006; Spyros Tsoutsoumpis, "Paramilitarism, Social Transformation, and the Nation in Greece during the Civil War and Its Aftermath (1940s–50s)", *Slavic Review*, Vol. 82, 2023, pp. 6-18; Menelaos Haralampidis, *Dekemvriana 1944. I mahi tis Athinas [The December events of 1944. The Battle of Athens]*, Athens: Alexandria, 2014, pp. 65-71; Katerina Dede, "O 'Mavros Kavalaris'. I viografies tou Nikolaou Plastira" [The 'Black horseman'. Nikolaos Plastiras' Biographies], in K. Dede, D. Dimitropoulos (ed.), *"Imatia ton allon" ["The others' glance]*, Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation/Institute of Historical Research, 2019, pp. 193-226..

⁹Robert Frazier, *Anglo-American Relations with Greece. The Coming of the Cold War, 1942–47*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991, pp. 77-78. Plastiras' historical record allowed him to straddle Greece's polarized political landscape. In 1922, he had been a leader of the coup that precipitated King Constantine I's abdication, aligning him with republican sentiments. Yet during the German occupation, he served as the nominal head of Zervas' EDES, a resistance organization that had declared its allegiance to the monarchy. This duality made Plastiras a logical, albeit ironic, choice as a mediator between EAM and the royalists. It's also noteworthy that, having been absent from Greece since 1932, he had avoided entanglement in the political divisions of the late 1930s and the occupation years, further bolstering his reputation as a neutral and unifying leader. See: Wilfred Byford-Jones, *The Greek trilogy. Resistance-liberation-revolution*, London, 1945, p. 192.

¹⁰*Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The Near East and Africa*, Vol. VIII, 868.00/1–945: Telegram, The Greek Prime Minister (Plastiras) to President Roosevelt, [Athens, 8 January 1945], p. 18.

1 war world, the United States and not Great Britain would be the most dominant
2 power of the Western World.

3 On their part, British authorities remained skeptical of his leadership, viewing
4 him as a temporary solution rather than a long-term stabilizing force. The signing of
5 the Varkiza Agreement in February 1945 marked a formal attempt to end hostilities
6 in Athens, with provisions for elections, disarmament, and political normalization.
7 However, neither side fully trusted the agreement's durability, and violence
8 persisted, particularly in rural areas where right-wing paramilitaries targeted former
9 resistance members. British officials, having never fully endorsed Plastiras, saw his
10 continued leadership as unnecessary after EAM's defeat in Dekemvriana. Thus, by
11 March 1945, both British and American diplomats expressed doubts about his
12 ability to govern effectively, leading to his resignation on 7 April following the
13 revelation of a controversial 1941 letter he had written to Vichy France.¹¹

14 Plastiras' first dismissal marked a pivotal moment in Greece's post-occupation
15 history, significantly contributing to the escalation of tensions that culminated in the
16 outbreak of the Greek Civil War (1946–1949). By removing a leader who sought to
17 navigate a moderate course, his ouster intensified the polarization between royalist
18 and communist factions, setting the stage for a prolonged and violent conflict.

21 **The art of appeasement: Plastiras' governments of 1950**

22
23 Between the fall of Plastiras' government in April 1945 and his reappointment
24 as prime minister in 1950, two key developments shaped Greek political and social
25 dynamics. The first was the break of the Greek Civil War (1946–1949), a brutal
26 three-year conflict that concluded with the decisive defeat of communist forces.¹²
27 The second was the growing influence of the United States in Greek affairs. With
28 Britain weakened by a multifaceted crisis and the Cold War intensifying,
29 Washington assumed the role of a global leader in countering Soviet influence. In
30 this capacity, it sought to control and stabilize the governments of smaller allied
31 nations, including Greece. In this case, American support played a critical role in
32 enabling the Greek Army to defeat communist insurgents in 1949.¹³

33 During this period (1945-1950), Plastiras adopted a relatively subdued role in
34 Greek politics. As left-wing journalist Solon Grigoriadis observed, Plastiras, known
35 as "the prime minister of the Dekemvriana,"¹⁴ operated on the periphery of the
36 political stage but remained engaged. Grigoriadis described Plastiras as a figure of

¹¹Haris Vlavianos, "Varkiza: Capitulation to the British?", in: *Greece, 1941–49: From Resistance to Civil War* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992, pp. 55-70; *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The Near East and Africa...*, 868.00/3–1445: Telegram, The Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Winant) to the Secretary of State, London, March 14, 1945, pp. 119 – 120; Brewer, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 205-206.

¹²See: Giorgos Margaritis, *History of the Greek Civil War 1946-1949*, Athens: Vivliorama, 2005.

¹³Spero Simeon Zachary Paravantes, *Britain and the United States in Greece. Anglo-American Relations and the Origins of the Cold War*; London: Bloomsbury, 2021, pp. 153-176.

¹⁴Solon Neok. Grigoriadis, *Istoria tis sighronis Elladas 1941-1974 [History of contemporary Greece 1941-1974]*, Athens: Polaris, 2011 [Kapopoulos, 1973], vol. 6, p. 18.

1 "square logic," lacking complex political ideology yet possessing a clear vision.¹⁵
 2 He sought to act as a conciliator in the post-Civil War era, advocating for a political
 3 landscape that allowed for coexistence and even equality for the oppressed Left.
 4 Indeed, it's evident that Plastiras believed that a path toward reconciliation, rather
 5 than continued repression, would appeal not only to leftist constituencies but also to
 6 centrist factions who prioritized national healing over perpetual division. This
 7 approach positioned Plastiras as a unique figure in Greek politics, attempting to
 8 bridge deep societal divides in a period marked by polarization and external
 9 intervention.¹⁶

10 At the same period, King Paul succeeded his brother, George II, who died in
 11 1947. The new Greek king, as his predecessor, initially continued to face Plastiras
 12 with hostility. In particular, he often accused him of his involvement in the Asia
 13 Minor Catastrophe (1922) and his subsequent anti-monarch political views.¹⁷
 14 However, the results of the election of 1950 and the American suspicion towards the
 15 second most significant leader of the center, Sofoklis Venizelos, forced him to accept
 16 the new appointment of the retired general as Prime Minister (March 1950). On his
 17 part, Plastiras restated his intention to cooperate with King Paul, as well as that he
 18 totally respected the Crown's rights. Gradually, the relations between the two men
 19 became warmer, characterized by mutual trust.¹⁸

20 However, King Paul's shift was not apparent approximately 15 days before the
 21 formation of Plastiras' government. During a private conversation with the
 22 American ambassador in Athens, Henry F. Grady, the two men discussed the
 23 political situation in Greece. From his part, Grady outlined his support for the
 24 formation of a centrist government under General Nikolaos Plastiras, reflecting the
 25 popular mandate from the recent election. Grady emphasized that Plastiras'
 26 leadership represented the most stable and logical solution, warning that bypassing
 27 him could lead to political instability and criticism of the monarchy, given the
 28 perception of palace interference. He further cautioned that sidelining Plastiras
 29 might push him toward an alliance with leftist figures.¹⁹

30 On his behalf, according to the ambassador, the King expressed reservations
 31 about Plastiras, fearing potential shifts in foreign policy toward Russia and harm to
 32 the military. Grady countered these concerns, citing assurances from Plastiras and
 33 other centrist leaders of their commitment to Western-aligned foreign policy and
 34 their intention to safeguard the military. While initially hesitant, the King appeared

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Grigorios Dafnis, *Sofoklis Eleftheriou Venizelos [Sofoklis Eleftheriou Venizelou]*, Athens: Ikaros, 1970, p. 457.

¹⁸Alexander Kazamias, *Greece and the Cold War. Diplomacy and Anti-Colonialism in the Aftermath of Civil Conflict*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022, p. 53; Grigoriadis, *Op. Cit.* p. 35-38. It's noteworthy that a CIA's report mentioned that in November of 1947 King Paul, being dissatisfied with the other Greek political leaders, expressed the opinion that Plastiras was the only "person to save the situation and must be used upon the fall of the present Government". See: CIA-RDP82-00457R001000750004-8, 5-11-1947.

¹⁹*Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa*, Vol. V, 781.00/3-1550: Telegram, *The Ambassador in Greece (Grady) to the Secretary of State*, March 15, 1950, Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1978, pp. 346-347

1 somewhat persuaded by Grady's argument, indicating that he might accept Plastiras'
2 leadership if these conditions were firmly upheld.²⁰

3 Grady's advice to King Paul played a crucial role in shaping the formation of
4 the second Plastiras government, which took office during a period of significant
5 political and economic instability in Greece. This government was tasked with
6 addressing the volatile post-civil war climate, and it set forth two primary objectives:
7 to reconcile and pacify the extremist factions on both the Right and the Left, and to
8 implement policies aimed at revitalizing the struggling Greek economy. The new
9 Prime Minister believed that achieving these goals required decisive reforms within
10 the military. He advocated for a substantial reduction in the size of the armed forces,
11 viewing this as a means to alleviate the economic burden on the state and diminish
12 the pervasive influence of hardline monarchist officers in political affairs.²¹

13 Plastiras' vision for curtailing military involvement in governance, however,
14 ran counter to the strategic interests of the United States. American leaders, deeply
15 invested in maintaining a robust, anti-communist military presence in Greece as part
16 of their broader Cold War policy, viewed Plastiras' initiatives with increasing
17 skepticism. This divergence in priorities led to mounting tensions between
18 Washington and Athens, ultimately resulting in a hostile stance from the American
19 administration towards Plastiras and his government.²²

20 The dissatisfaction of certain American officials with General Nikolaos
21 Plastiras' policies was expressed in stark terms on 17 July 1950, coinciding with the
22 departure of Lieutenant General James Van Fleet from Greece. Van Fleet, who had
23 led the Joint U.S. Military Advisory Group in Greece since 1948, had played a
24 pivotal role in the victory of government forces over communist insurgents during
25 the Civil War. Also, throughout his tenure, he was closely associated with pro-
26 monarchist circles and wielded considerable influence over Greek political affairs.²³

27 Before leaving Athens, Van Fleet instructed his associates to communicate
28 several opinions to King Paul, chief among them his pronounced hostility toward
29 Plastiras. He went so far as to assert that, in the event of international crises—such
30 as the Korean War—the Greek government under Plastiras would undermine the
31 Allied cause. Accordingly, Van Fleet recommended that the premiership be
32 entrusted to Field Marshal Alexandros Papagos instead.²⁴

33 This overt and provocative intervention quickly garnered attention in Athens,
34 with the press extensively reporting on Van Fleet's remarks. Moreover, Van Fleet
35 himself reiterated his views in subsequent statements to the American media.²⁵ In
36 response, Grady publicly criticized the general's comments, emphasizing that Van
37 Fleet had acted without proper authorization.²⁶

38 Whether Van Fleet's intervention reflected the stance of the U.S. government
39 or was merely the independent initiative of an impulsive officer remains unclear.

²⁰Ibid. See also: CIA-RDP78-01617A006100060015-8, 3-1950.

²¹Ibid.

²²CIA-RDP78-01617A002300200001-3, 17-3-1950, p. 6.

²³Grigoriadis, *Op. Cit.*, p. 42.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵“Van Fleet, Back From Greece, Thinks Cominform Gestures Are Cold-War Tactics U.S. Millions Well Spent Communist Army Outlawed”, *New York Times*, 1-8-1950, p. 14.

²⁶Grigoriadis, *Op. Cit.*, p. 43.

1 However, it is notable that on 31 July 1950, George McGhee, Assistant Secretary of
 2 State for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs, addressed the controversy
 3 in a memorandum to Deputy Under Secretary of State for Administration John
 4 Peurifoy, offering further insight into the U.S. administration's perspective on the
 5 matter. In this memorandum, McGhee mentioned the following:

6
 7 *We also believe Van Fleet's charge that we are "turning Greece over to the communists"*
 8 *and backing a "traitor" [Plastiras] probably reflects the opinion of the Palace, and*
 9 *especially of the Queen. It is generally recognized that Van Fleet cultivated close social*
 10 *relationships with the King and Queen. Van Fleet's statements of course misrepresent*
 11 *the Embassy's and the Department's position (...).*

12 *Plastiras' consistent record has been that of a patriotic, non-communist Greek. He does*
 13 *tend, however, to be fuzzy-minded, impetuous and emotional in his traditional*
 14 *liberalism, and this led him to pursue a lax and sometimes rash policy towards the*
 15 *communists and fellow-travelers.²⁷*

16
 17 The above short analysis proved the general American suspicion towards
 18 Plastiras, as well as the hostility of some monarchist circles against the Prime
 19 Minister. However, Plastiras' government didn't last for a while. The main reason
 20 was the Prime Minister's intention to show leniency to the defeated Left. This
 21 caused frustration not only from the monarchist Right but also from a part of the
 22 Centre. In particular, Sophocles Venizelos and the ministers who supported him
 23 decided to resign, something that resulted in the fall of the government on 21 August
 24 1950.²⁸

25 The available archival material suggests that the American factor had a crucial
 26 role in those political events. In particular, three days before his resignation (18
 27 August 1950), Plastiras had met the new Chargé in Greece, Harold B. Minor. During
 28 their conversation, Plastiras, seeking American advice, invited Minor to suggest a
 29 resolution to the ongoing government impasse. The experienced diplomat, however,
 30 declined, emphasizing that the crisis was an internal Greek matter. He also expressed
 31 hope that any resolution would be swift, remain within constitutional bounds, and
 32 secure parliamentary support.²⁹

33 Minor telegraphed to Washington about his meeting with the Greek Prime
 34 Minister. His brief highlighted Plastiras' precarious political position, his
 35 dependence on U.S. approval, and the broader struggle to navigate Greece's
 36 unstable post-war political framework. But even more important was the response
 37 of the U.S. Secretary of State to the American Embassy in Athens, which outlined
 38 Washington's stance on the political crisis. It explicitly dismisses the possibility of
 39 Plastiras heading a future government, deeming such an outcome undesirable. The
 40 directive also advises the Embassy to avoid making press statements, aiming to

²⁷*Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa..., 781.00/7–2850, Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian and African Affairs (McGhee) to the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Administration (Peurifoy), [WASHINGTON,] July 31, 1950.*

²⁸Grigoriadis, *Op. Cit.*, p. 46.

²⁹*Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa..., 781.00/8–1850: Telegram, The Chargé in Greece (Minor) to the Secretary of State, Athens, August 18, 1950.*

1 reduce perceptions of U.S. interference in Greek domestic affairs. Van Fleet's
2 incident was very recent, and Washington didn't desire a new anti-American
3 rhetoric to be spread among the Greeks.³⁰

4 Overall, while acknowledging that Plastiras' government displayed some
5 deficiencies in maintaining national security, the U.S. attributes much of the
6 criticism against him to political manipulation by opposition factions. This suggests
7 that Washington was wary of allowing political rivals to exploit security issues for
8 partisan gain. Significantly, the telegram rejects the so-called "Papagos solution,"
9 referring to Field Marshal Papagos assuming direct political power. While
10 acknowledging Papagos' military leadership as crucial, the U.S. preferred that he
11 remain focused on strengthening the Greek armed forces rather than entering
12 politics prematurely. However, the message leaves room for a potential Papagos
13 political role, emphasizing that such a transition should occur only through regular
14 elections, ensuring democratic legitimacy.³¹

17 **The last Plastiras' government (October 1951-October 1952)**

19 From the resignation of Plastiras' government to the last appointment of the
20 retired General as Prime Minister (August 1950-October 1951), despite the
21 deterioration of his health, the latter continued to play a key role in Greek politics.
22 Simultaneously, his relations with both Washington and the Greek Crown were
23 improved, especially because of the American hostility towards Sophocles
24 Venizelos. Characteristically, on 17 May 1951, the Secretary of State, Dean
25 Acheson, sent a telegram to the U.S. embassy in Athens mentioning that "under
26 circumstances contemplated (Venizelos as party pres and vice premier), we consider
27 Plastiras would be adequately insulated from undesirable influences."³²

28 Thus, Acheson expressed the opinion that a new Plastiras' government could
29 be desirable, even though Washington didn't stop to confront his intention to not
30 maintain a large army. With the Korean War in progress and the new leading figure
31 of the Right, Papagos, ready to play a more active political role in Greece,³³ the
32 United States considered once again Plastiras' premiership as a temporary solution
33 for the avoidance of turmoil in Athens. So, the American government was ready to
34 unenthusiastically accept it.

35 In this framework, Plastiras created his final government on 27 October 1951
36 cooperating again with Sophocles Venizelos. In the opposition was placed Papagos
37 whose newly-formed party had attracted the 36,53% of the voters at the elections of
38 September of 1951. The former high-ranking military officer believed that Greece
39 must be connected further to NATO and not reduce the number of its army. Those

³⁰*Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa...*, 781.00/5-1850: Telegram, The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Greece, Washington, August 19, 1950.

³¹*Ibid.*

³²*Foreign Relations of the United States, 1951, The Near East and Africa*, Vol. V, 781.00/5-1251: Telegram, The Secretary of State to the Embassy in Greece, Washington, May 17, 1951, Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1982.

³³atzivassiliou, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 12-13.

1 ideas, as well as his desire to send a Greek force to fight in Korea, brought him
2 closer to Washington.³⁴

3 On his behalf, Plastiras continued his previous efforts to heal the traumas of the
4 Greek Civil War. For instance, he accepted the inauguration of Left-wing members
5 of the parliament, even though the process was subsequently canceled by the
6 electoral court.³⁵ This situation was well-noticed by Washington. On 21 November
7 1951, the American ambassador in Athens, John Peurifoy (he had succeeded Grady
8 on 25 September 1950),³⁶ sent a telegram to Acheson, sharing details from his
9 meeting with the Right-wing politician Evangelos Averoff. According to him, the
10 latter once again accused Plastiras of reducing the Greek Army's strength and tried
11 to present himself as a respectful political figure ready to be attuned to the American
12 interest. However, the most significant point of this document is that Peurifoy was
13 sure that the Prime Minister faced several difficulties because of his illness.³⁷

14 Another issue for the Greek-American relation was the Plastiras government's
15 intention to reform the Greek electoral system. In a new telegram to the Department
16 of State dated 17 March 1952, Peurifoy reflected on the backlash from the pro-
17 government Greek press following a recent U.S. Embassy statement opposing the
18 proposed proportional representation electoral system. In particular, the
19 Ambassador asserts that key Greek political figures, including Prime Minister
20 Plastiras, former Prime Minister Sophocles Venizelos, and Minister of Interior
21 Ioannis Rendis, had likely planned to push the proportional representation law
22 through Parliament.³⁸

23 Also, Peurifoy credited timely U.S. intervention, including a direct appeal to
24 Plastiras and the Embassy's public statement, with blocking the measure. The
25 ambassador defended the U.S. stance, arguing that a shift to proportional
26 representation would have weakened the government's stability and jeopardized
27 American aid efforts in Greece. Thus, he justified U.S. actions as necessary to
28 safeguard American financial and strategic investments, emphasizing that while
29 discretion remains the goal, decisive action is sometimes unavoidable.³⁹

30 Peurifoy expressed his views during an interview with the newspaper *Akropolis*
31 on 19 August 1952. In his statement, he emphasized that new elections should take
32 place in Greece under the existing electoral system. Furthermore, he subtly criticized
33 Plastiras for his alleged connections with the Left, indirectly encouraging members
34 of parliament to withdraw their support for his government.⁴⁰ However, this
35 intervention did not yield the desired outcome, as 127 members of parliament

³⁴*Ibid*, p. 18.

³⁵Grigoriadis, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 107-108.

³⁶Benaki Museum, F. 20/118, Underwood to Venizelos, Washington, 7-9-1950.

³⁷*Foreign Relations of the United States, 1951, The Near East and Africa...*, Telegram, The Ambassador in Greece (Peurifoy) to the Department of State, Athens, November 21, 1951.

³⁸*Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Eastern Europe; Soviet Union; Eastern Mediterranean*, Vol. VIII, No. 425, The Ambassador in Greece (Peurifoy) to the Department of State, ATHENS, March 17, 1952, Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1988.

³⁹*Ibid*.

⁴⁰*Empros*, No. 33, 21-8-1952, p. 1.

1 continued to back Prime Minister Plastiras, compared to 118 who sought to bring
2 down his administration. This marked Plastiras' final political victory.⁴¹

3 Plastiras remained in power for only a few more months, but his government
4 faced mounting challenges that ultimately led to his resignation on 10 October 1952.
5 The internal problems included dissent within his coalition, criticism over his
6 economic policies, and persistent accusations of leniency toward leftist elements,
7 which alienated both conservative and centrist factions. These issues weakened his
8 leadership and eroded the political stability of his administration. In the general
9 elections held in November 1952, Alexandros Papagos secured a decisive victory.
10 Papagos' triumph marked a significant shift in Greek politics, symbolizing a
11 rejection of Plastiras' policies and leadership style.⁴²

12 Nikolaos Plastiras, despite his resignation and political struggles, remained a
13 respected figure for his efforts to promote national reconciliation in post-civil war
14 Greece. He passed away on 26 July 1953, just months after leaving the political
15 stage. His death marked the end of an era for one of Greece's most complex and
16 polarizing leaders, whose legacy continues to spark debate. While some remember
17 him as a visionary who sought to bridge the deep political divides of his time, others
18 critique his tenure as ineffective in the face of mounting pressures and ideological
19 conflicts.⁴³

22 Conclusion

24 The period from 1950 to 1952 demonstrated the profound influence of the
25 United States on Greek politics, particularly through its engagement with the
26 governments of Nikolaos Plastiras. The archival evidence presented in this article
27 confirms that U.S. interventions were frequent. American officials actively shaped
28 political developments in Athens, offering financial aid, military support, and
29 diplomatic backing in exchange for alignment with Western Cold War strategies.
30 However, reducing Greece to a mere client state fails to capture the complexities of
31 Greek-American relations during this era.

32 Despite significant U.S. involvement, Greek politicians did not function as
33 passive agents of American policy. Nikolaos Plastiras' career offers a compelling
34 example of how domestic leaders negotiated, resisted, and at times defied U.S.
35 directives. His political path, characterized by fluctuating relations with both
36 Washington and the Greek monarchy, illustrates the agency exercised by Greek
37 political actors even under heavy international pressure. Besides, Plastiras' tense
38 relationship with U.S. Ambassador John Peurifoy highlights this dynamic. Their
39 confrontations over issues such as the Greek military's size, electoral reforms, and
40 Plastiras' conciliatory stance toward the political left underscore that Greek leaders
41 retained the capacity to challenge American officials.

42 This study demonstrated that while the United States acted as a dominant
43 external power, its influence was neither absolute nor uncontested. Plastiras, for

⁴¹Benaki Muesum F. 22/6, n.d.; Grigoriadis, *Op. Cit.*, p. 144-145.

⁴²Kazamias, *Op. Cit.*, p. 73.

⁴³*Empros*, No. 322, 28-7-1952, p. 1.

1 instance, consistently sought to balance U.S. demands with his vision for Greece's
 2 political stability and national reconciliation. He showed political independence on
 3 key issues, including reducing the army and resisting excessive monarchist
 4 influence, despite strong American opposition. His eventual political downfall was
 5 partly the result of his refusal to conform entirely to U.S. expectations.

6 The broader historical context reinforces the argument that Greece was not a
 7 neo-colonial outpost but rather a contested political space where external pressures
 8 and internal political agency intersected. The interplay between a Great Power and
 9 a small nation, as seen in Greek-American relations, reflects a broader pattern
 10 evident throughout the Cold War. Similar dynamics unfolded in other countries
 11 caught in the geopolitical struggles of the era, where smaller states navigated the
 12 challenging terrain of alliance-building, dependency, and sovereignty. The case of
 13 Nikolaos Plastiras illustrates the nuanced reality of Greek-American relations,
 14 revealing a historical narrative shaped by both external interventions and resilient
 15 domestic leadership.

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