

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

116

~~TOP SECRET~~

April 22, 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: Greek Coup: Morning After Reflections

CLASSIFIED  
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REF 96-310

By CB Date 7-12-99

Where we stand. Athens is quiet and civilian activities are returning to normal today, but the King expects a showdown with the coup group momentarily over whether he signs a decree blessing the unconstitutional regime. There's also still no concrete leftist reaction. Only when we see whether the junta decides to brush the King aside for refusing to cooperate and when we get a better sense of the relative strengths of various groups will we see where we're going.

How we feel. Ambassador Talbot's summing up last night-- "the day of the rape of Greek democracy"--may be a little overdramatic. But we do regret the coup. Greece, like so many other countries, has been feeling its way to a new position in this world of relaxing East-West tensions. While some leaders like Andreas Papandreou wanted to go too fast, the planned May election could have provided a peaceful sorting out. Now the lines are drawn more sharply than ever.

The King's role. It's now clear that a small group within the army--not the King--triggered the coup. However, the New York Times editorial this morning is right in assigning him some of the blame. We know he had been considering an unconstitutional move to head off a Papandreou election victory because he feared the Papandreous would try to do away with the monarchy. He may even have ordered contingency planning within the army. But he does not appear to have given the go-ahead and is now prisoner of his own plans.

Why now? The coup officers claim the Communists were about to stage nationwide disturbances, but that sounds like a weak excuse. Talbot believes rightist military elements feared that the conservative party could not win the election and that a left-of-center victory would threaten conservative control of the army. Talbot thinks they decided that it would be easier to act now than after public and private pressure against dictatorship had built up--especially from the US.

Could we have headed it off? Probably our only chance would have been assuring the conservative party enough effective support to win the election. [REDACTED] Secretary  
Rusk (I think rightly) [REDACTED]

1.5(e)  
3.4(b)(1)  
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[redacted] doubted we should oppose the strong trend toward liberalization and reform [redacted] Ambassador Talbot weighed in heavily with the King against an unconstitutional solution, but of course the King did not trigger the coup. We might have let the army know we would cut off military aid, but that seemed going too far with a NATO ally.

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What next? The King's main choice--other than leaving the country-- is between denouncing the coup and trying to guide it. This is the issue in whether he signs the decree establishing martial law or not. We have not tried to influence him. We don't see any evidence yet that he has enough independent support to push the coup group aside now, and we hope he can avoid a showdown on this issue. The best long run hope is that he can gain control of the situation and guide Greece over time back to democratic government. Until we see reason for taking another tack, we will encourage him down this path. Meanwhile, we are moving one task group of the Sixth Fleet closer to Greece in case we want to evacuate either the King's family or, if the situation worsens, American dependents.

*W. Rostow*