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"Power and Politics: The Greek Army in the Modern History of Greece (1821–1949)"

Dr. Marios Kyriakidis

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

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***Corresponding author:** Dr. Marios Kyriakidis

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

Abstract

This study examines the Greek Army's role in shaping domestic politics during the modern history of Greece (1821–1949), highlighting its dual function as both a stabilizing force and an agent of political intervention. Through an analysis of key historical episodes, including the Goudi Coup (1909), the National Schism (1915–1922), and the interwar coups, the research explores how the army influenced governance, national unity, and state-building. The Greek Army's relationship with the monarchy is also scrutinized, from its role in consolidating King Otto's rule to its pivotal involvement in restoring and later undermining King George II.

The study employs an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on military archives, political memoirs, and secondary literature, to reveal how class, regional, and ideological divisions within the army mirrored broader societal tensions. Particular attention is given to the National Schism's long-term effects on military cohesion and its impact on the Greek Civil War (1946–1949).

This research argues that the Greek Army was central to the nation-building process, yet its entanglement in domestic politics often destabilized democratic institutions. By situating the Greek Army within comparative and transnational contexts, this study contributes to broader discussions on the political role of militaries in emerging nation-states.

Keywords: Greek Army, Modern Greek History, Domestic Politics, Nation-Building, National Schism, Military and Monarchy

1. INTRODUCTION

The Greek Army played a pivotal role in the political and social evolution of Greece from the War of Independence (1821–1829) to the conclusion of the Greek Civil War (1946–1949). Emerging from the fragmented and decentralized military forces that fought for independence, the army evolved into a national institution

tasked with both safeguarding the state and fostering unity among a diverse population. However, throughout this period, the Greek Army's involvement in domestic politics frequently extended beyond its military mandate, positioning it as a decisive actor in shaping the country's political trajectory. Its interventions, whether

in the form of coups, support for the monarchy, or alignment with various political factions, left an indelible mark on the nation's development.

The historical trajectory of the Greek Army reflects the broader struggles of modern Greek statehood. From its origins as irregular militias formed during the War of Independence, the army became a symbol of national aspirations and state authority under King Otto's reign. As the 19th century progressed, the army played a central role in territorial expansion during the Balkan Wars (1912–1913), establishing itself as a force of unification and defense. However, the interwar years and World War II revealed a more complicated narrative, as the army became increasingly embroiled in domestic power struggles, reflecting and amplifying societal divisions. By the time of the Greek Civil War, the army was both a tool of state policy and a battleground for ideological conflict, highlighting its dual function as a stabilizing and destabilizing force in modern Greek politics.

The study of the Greek Army's role in domestic politics is critical for understanding the broader framework of modern Greek history. Unlike many Western European nations, where militaries were often subordinated to civilian control, Greece's army frequently acted as a political actor in its own right, shaping governance and influencing political outcomes. This dynamic underscores the unique challenges faced by emerging nation-states in the Balkans, where ethnic, regional, and ideological divisions complicated the process of consolidating state authority. By examining the army's domestic political role, this research sheds light on the interplay between military power and civilian governance, offering a nuanced perspective on Greece's path to modernity.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical framework. Research Questions

The theoretical framework of this research is grounded in the intersection of political sociology and military studies, examining the role of the military as both an institution of state authority and a political actor. Drawing on theories of civil-military relations (Huntington, 1981) and nation-building (Anderson, 1983), the research positions the Greek Army as a pivotal force in shaping modern Greek statehood, particularly through its involvement in domestic politics.

The study also engages with frameworks on political intervention by militaries, exploring how the Greek Army's entanglement in political crises reflects broader patterns of military influence in politically fragile states. Central to this analysis is the concept of the dual role of militaries, where they serve both as instruments of state stability and as destabilizing forces through coups and factionalism. Theories of institutional identity are applied to understand how class, regional, and ideological divisions within the Greek Army mirrored broader societal tensions.

This framework leads to two key research questions by interrogating the mechanisms of the army's political influence and its consequences, which are central to this inquiry. Specifically, it asks: How did the Greek Army influence domestic politics in Greece? and What were the consequences of its involvement in political crises? The first question examines the mechanisms through which the army intervened in political affairs, whether through direct action, such as coups, or indirect influence, such as its alignment with particular factions or ideologies. The second question explores the long-term effects of these interventions,

particularly their impact on political stability, societal cohesion, and the development of democratic institutions.

One of the most significant themes in this analysis is the army's relationship with the monarchy. From King Otto's reliance on Bavarian advisors to King George II's restoration through military support, the monarchy and the army were deeply intertwined in Greece's political fabric. However, this relationship was often fraught with tension, as competing visions of governance and loyalty to different factions within the army created instability. For example, during the National Schism (1915–1922), the army split into royalist and Venizelist factions, mirroring the broader political divide between supporters of the monarchy and proponents of a republican government. This division not only weakened the army's effectiveness but also entrenched political polarization within Greek society, with consequences that persisted into the Greek Civil War.

Equally significant is the army's involvement in political coups, which became a recurring feature of Greek history during the 19th and 20th centuries. The Goudi coup of 1909, led by the Military League, marked the beginning of a new era in which the army positioned itself as a force for political reform. While ostensibly aimed at modernizing the military, the coup had far-reaching political implications, leading to the rise of Eleftherios Venizelos and a period of significant institutional reform. Subsequent coups during the interwar period, including those in 1923 and 1935, further demonstrated the army's capacity to act as both a stabilizing and destabilizing force. These interventions reflected not only internal military dynamics but also broader societal tensions, including class divisions, regional disparities, and ideological conflicts.

This study argues that the Greek Army was both a product and a driver of the political and social changes that shaped modern Greece. Its dual role as a stabilizing institution—through its contributions to nation-building and territorial expansion—and as a destabilizing force—through its frequent involvement in political crises—underscores the complexities of its historical legacy. The army's actions often reflected the challenges of unifying a diverse society within a volatile geopolitical environment, as well as the difficulties of establishing effective civilian control over the military.

By analyzing the Greek Army's role in domestic politics, this research seeks to contribute to a broader understanding of modern Greek history, situating the army within the context of nation-building, political development, and societal transformation. Moreover, it provides insights into the relationship between military institutions and political authority in emerging states, offering lessons that resonate beyond the Greek experience.

2.2 Research Studies on the Greek Army's Role in Domestic Politics and Historical Trajectories

The Greek Army's role in domestic politics has been explored in several key studies, yet critical gaps remain, particularly concerning the interplay of class, regionalism, and political intervention within the military. Samuel P. Huntington's seminal work, (Huntington, 1981), provides a foundational framework for understanding civil-military relations. Huntington emphasizes the professionalization of the military and its subordination to civilian authority. While his theory is globally influential, it offers limited insight into the specific historical and political complexities of the

Greek Army, particularly its frequent involvement in political crises and its entanglement with factional politics.

Mark Mazower (Mazower, 2001) examines the Greek Army during World War II, focusing on its role in resistance and collaboration. While Mazower provides valuable context for understanding the army's activities during the occupation, his work primarily addresses external conflicts and does not delve deeply into the long-term political consequences of the army's internal divisions or its broader role in domestic governance.

Richard Clogg (Clogg, 1979) offers a concise yet comprehensive overview of Greece's modern history, including the army's involvement in key events such as the National Schism and the Civil War. However, Clogg's focus is predominantly historical and lacks an in-depth sociopolitical analysis of how the army's internal dynamics, such as class and regional disparities, influenced its political actions.

John S. Koliopoulos (Koliopoulos, 1999) highlights the army's role in counterinsurgency during the Civil War, particularly in Northern Greece. While Koliopoulos provides a detailed microhistorical account of regional dynamics, his work is geographically narrow and does not address the systemic issues of the army's political intervention at the national level.

These studies have laid a strong foundation for understanding the Greek Army's historical trajectory but leave significant gaps. Specifically, there is limited research on how class dynamics within the officer corps and rank-and-file soldiers shaped the army's political actions. Similarly, the long-term effects of regional disparities and factionalism within the army, particularly as they relate to national cohesion, remain underexplored. Furthermore, while the army's relationship with the monarchy has been noted, its evolving role as a political arbiter in both republican and royalist contexts demands deeper scrutiny.

This manuscript seeks to fill these gaps by analyzing the Greek Army's domestic political role through an interdisciplinary lens, focusing on its internal social composition and its broader implications for nation-building and governance.

3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research methodology

The research methodology is rooted in a comprehensive historical and interdisciplinary approach, designed to explore the Greek Army's role in domestic politics from 1821 to 1949. By utilizing primary and secondary sources, this study systematically reconstructs past events, analyzes their causes and effects, and contextualizes them within broader political, social, and cultural dynamics.

Sources form the backbone of this research, encompassing archival documents, military records, newspapers, and secondary literature. Archival documents and military records offer direct insights into the army's organization, political interventions, and evolving role over time (Cohen & Manion, 1977). Newspapers provide contemporaneous perspectives on the army's actions and public reception, while secondary literature offers interpretive frameworks for analyzing the broader implications of military interventions (Mavroskoufis, 2005).

The research employs an **interdisciplinary approach**, combining historical analysis with insights from political science and sociology. This approach allows for an exploration of the army's

institutional development, its role in nation-building, and its impact on societal structures. By incorporating political theory, such as Huntington's work on civil-military relations (1981), and sociological perspectives on nation-building (Anderson, 1983), the study situates the Greek Army within broader global patterns while accounting for its unique historical and cultural context.

The **main method used is historical analysis**, defined by Cohen and Manion (1977) as "the systematic and objective identification, evaluation, and synthesis of evidence in order to establish facts and draw conclusions about past events." This method is applied to evaluate the Greek Army's role in key political events, such as the Goudi Coup (1909), the National Schism (1915–1922), and the Greek Civil War (1946–1949). Historical analysis also involves external and internal critiques of available evidence, establishing the reliability of sources and the coherence of narratives (Mialaret, 1999).

Historical research is inherently challenging due to the incomplete nature of evidence and the altered conditions of past events (Athanasios, 2003). Verdis Athanasios (Verdis, 2015) highlights the need for critical inquiry to reconstruct the symbolic and material interactions of societies under study. Despite these difficulties, historical research provides invaluable insights into past solutions to contemporary issues, long-term trends, and the effects of cultural interactions (Hill & Kerber, 1967).

This study does not merely describe historical events but seeks to re-evaluate and interpret them through the lens of political sociology, education, and social development. By understanding the interplay of politics, military power, and society, this research contributes to rethinking national consciousness and societal interactions, as emphasized by Melanitis (Melanitis, 1957). Through this interdisciplinary approach, the methodology underscores the vital link between historical understanding and contemporary relevance.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.2 Historical Context of the Greek Army (1821–1949)

The history of the Greek Army between 1821 and 1949 is inseparable from the broader processes of nation-building and state consolidation in modern Greece. Emerging from the fragmented and irregular militias that fought during the War of Independence, the army evolved into a formalized institution under King Otto, adopting foreign military practices and playing a pivotal role in territorial expansion. However, its entanglement with political movements and national crises underscores the complex relationship between the military, governance, and society in modern Greek history.

3.3 Formation and Early Years

The origins of the Greek Army lie in the revolutionary militias that emerged during the War of Independence (1821–1829). These irregular forces were composed of local klephts, *armatoloi*, and volunteers, as well as fighters drawn from the Greek diaspora. Despite their lack of formal training and cohesion, these groups relied on guerrilla tactics, local knowledge, and personal leadership to challenge Ottoman rule (Dakin, 1973).

However, the decentralized and factional nature of these militias posed significant challenges. Regional leaders, or "war chiefs," often prioritized personal or local interests over national goals, leading to internal rivalries that undermined the unity of the revolutionary cause (Clogg, 1979). The lack of a centralized

command structure also hampered efforts to coordinate military operations, prolonging the conflict and complicating relations with foreign allies.

After Greece achieved independence, the establishment of a national army became a priority. Under King Otto's reign (1832–1862), efforts were made to transition from irregular militias to a formalized military institution (Kyriakidis, 2016). This process included the creation of a standing army, the introduction of conscription, and the establishment of the Evelpidon Military Academy in 1828 to train officers (Woodhouse, 1998). Despite these reforms, the early Greek Army faced significant challenges, including resource shortages, lack of professional expertise, and resistance from regional powerholders who were reluctant to relinquish control.

3.4 Institutional Development

The Greek Army underwent significant modernization during the 19th and early 20th centuries, influenced by the military traditions of foreign powers (Kyriakidis, 2022). Bavarian advisors, brought in by King Otto, played a key role in shaping the army's early structure and organization. Drawing on Prussian models, they emphasized discipline, hierarchical command, and centralized control (Mazower, 2002). However, these reforms were met with mixed results, as the imposition of foreign practices often clashed with local customs and traditions.

In the late 19th century, French and British influence became more pronounced, particularly in the training and equipping of the Greek Army (Kyriakidis, 2016). French military doctrines, which emphasized offensive tactics and the strategic use of artillery, were adopted during the Balkan Wars (1912–1913). Meanwhile, British advisors contributed to the development of the navy and logistical systems, reflecting Greece's strategic reliance on maritime power (Clogg, 2002).

The modernization of the Greek Army coincided with its expanding role in territorial conflicts. During the Balkan Wars, the army was instrumental in securing significant territorial gains, including the annexation of Macedonia, Epirus, and the Aegean islands (Kyriakidis, 2021). These victories were celebrated as milestones in the realization of the "Great Idea" (Megali Idea), a nationalist vision aimed at uniting all Greek-speaking populations under a single state (Dakin, 1972). However, the rapid expansion of the state also placed new demands on the army, requiring it to integrate recruits from newly annexed territories and adapt to a more complex geopolitical environment.

3.5 Intersection of the Military and Politics

The Greek Army's involvement in politics emerged as a defining feature of its history, reflecting both internal dynamics and external pressures. From the mid-19th century, the army became increasingly entangled with political movements, often positioning itself as a mediator in moments of national crisis.

One of the earliest examples of this dynamic was the Goudi Coup of 1909, led by the Military League, a group of mid-ranking officers dissatisfied with the state of the army and the broader political establishment (Kyriakidis, 2021). The coup was aimed at modernizing the military and addressing systemic corruption but also had significant political implications, paving the way for Eleftherios Venizelos's rise to power and a wave of institutional reforms.

The army's entanglement with politics became even more pronounced during the National Schism (1915–1922), a period of deep political polarization between royalists, who supported King Constantine I, and Venizelists, who aligned with the Allied Powers during World War I. The division within the army mirrored the broader societal divide, with units often split along political lines (Kyriakidis, 2023). This fragmentation not only weakened the army's cohesion but also contributed to military setbacks, such as the catastrophic defeat in the Asia Minor Campaign (Kyriakidis, 2021).

Throughout the interwar years, the army continued to play a central role in Greek politics, frequently intervening in moments of instability. Coups and counter-coups became a recurring feature, reflecting the army's perception of itself as a guardian of the nation. However, these interventions often exacerbated existing divisions, undermining efforts to establish stable civilian governance (Koliopoulos, 1999).

It becomes obvious that the historical development of the Greek Army from 1821 to 1949 highlights its dual role as both a military institution and a political actor. From its origins in the War of Independence to its modernization under foreign influence and its entanglement in domestic politics, the army was a key driver of Greece's nation-building process. However, its repeated involvement in political crises underscores the challenges of maintaining a professional military in a politically fragmented society.

The examination of the formation, institutional development and political role of the army sheds light on the broader dynamics of modern Greek history. The Greek Army's trajectory reflects the interplay between military power, political authority, and societal transformation, offering valuable insights into the complexities of state-building in the Balkans.

5. Class Culture and Political Intervention

The Greek Army's role in domestic politics is characterized by its repeated interventions through coups, which shaped the nation's political trajectory in the 20th century. The army's involvement established a culture of military interference, particularly during times of political instability. From the pivotal Goudi Coup of 1909 to the cycle of coups during the interwar period and the authoritarian consolidation under Ioannis Metaxas, the army transitioned from a state institution tasked with national defense to a political actor with profound consequences for governance, state-building, and societal cohesion (Kyriakidis, 2021).

5.1 Establishment of a Precedent: The Goudi Coup (1909)

The Goudi Coup marked a turning point in the Greek Army's relationship with politics. Led by the Military League, a group of reformist officers dissatisfied with the state of the army and the political elite, the coup was ostensibly aimed at addressing military inefficiencies and national security concerns. However, its broader objectives included the modernization of Greek politics and a reorganization of state institutions to better serve the nation's territorial ambitions (Clogg, 2002).

The Military League's grievances stemmed from several factors, including the perceived neglect of the armed forces, corruption within the government, and Greece's defeat in the Greco-Turkish War of 1897. The League sought to depoliticize the military,

strengthen its role in national defense, and promote competent leadership. The Goudi Coup, executed in August 1909, forced Prime Minister Dimitrios Rallis to resign, paving the way for Eleftherios Venizelos, a prominent reformist from Crete, to assume power (Dakin, 1972).

Under Venizelos's leadership, many of the Military League's demands were addressed. Reforms included modernizing the army through foreign assistance, particularly from French military advisors, and restructuring state institutions to reduce inefficiencies. Although the Goudi Coup is often credited with ushering in a period of modernization, it also set a dangerous precedent for military involvement in politics, normalizing the idea that the army could intervene during moments of political crisis (Mazower, 2001).

5.2 The Interwar Years: A Cycle of Coups and Counter-Coups

The interwar years were marked by political instability, during which the Greek Army repeatedly intervened in domestic politics through coups and counter-coups. These interventions reflected the army's perception of itself as a guardian of the nation, as well as its alignment with competing political factions (Kyriakidis, 2021).

One notable example was the **1923 coup**, *The Leonardopoulos–Gargalidis coup attempt*, led by republican officers following Greece's catastrophic defeat in the Asia Minor Campaign (1922). The coup feared that the forthcoming elections would lead to an unprincipled regime (Newspaper "Empros, 1923). The relations of the coup's protagonists with royal circles, and particularly with Metaxas and the Palace, were seen by the opposing side as incriminating evidence against King George II. Although it failed almost immediately from the start of its action and Greek democracy was consolidated (Gazette of the Government, 1924), it also deepened divisions within the army, as royalist and republican factions vied for control (Clogg, 1979).

The events of **1935** marked a significant turning point in Greece's political history, culminating in the restoration of the monarchy. Earlier that year, in **March 1935**, a republican coup attempt led by **Nikolaos Plastiras** sought to preserve the republican regime and prevent the monarchy's return. This attempt, however, was suppressed by government forces loyal to the monarchist cause, further weakening the republican movement. Later that year, **General Georgios Kondylis**, a former republican who had shifted allegiance to monarchism, emerged as a dominant political figure. In **October 1935**, Kondylis orchestrated a coup that formally abolished the Second Hellenic Republic and declared himself Regent, paving the way for **King George II's** return to the throne.

While Kondylis justified his actions as a response to political instability and the perceived threat of communism, his coup was also driven by internal army dynamics and the desire of royalist officers to reassert dominance within the military and political system. These developments not only marked the end of the republican experiment in Greece (Gazette of the Government, 1935) but also reflected the army's continued entanglement in the nation's volatile political landscape (Daskarolis, 2012).

These coups underscored the army's fragmented nature and its entanglement in partisan politics. Instead of serving as a neutral institution, the military became a battleground for ideological and political struggles, further destabilizing the country. This cycle of intervention eroded public trust in both civilian and military

leadership, contributing to the broader instability of the interwar period (Kyriakidis, 2021).

5.3 The Metaxas Regime (1936–1941)

The rise of Ioannis Metaxas in 1936 marked a significant moment in the army's political role, as the military became a tool of authoritarian consolidation. Metaxas, a former general and staunch monarchist, was appointed prime minister by King George II during a period of heightened political turmoil and fears of communist insurrection (Vlachopoulos, 2012). Shortly thereafter, Metaxas established the 4th of August Regime, dissolving parliament and suspending the constitution (Kyriakidis, 2021).

Metaxas's regime relied heavily on the army and the security forces to maintain control and suppress dissent. Military officers were appointed to key government positions, and the armed forces were used to enforce censorship, arrest political opponents, and neutralize leftist organizations. The army became an instrument of state repression, aligning itself with the regime's nationalist and anti-communist ideology (Kyriakidis, 2021).

Although Metaxas introduced significant military reforms, including fortifying Greece's defenses in preparation for World War II, his authoritarian use of the army further entrenched the culture of political intervention within the military. The regime's reliance on the armed forces as a tool for governance blurred the boundaries between military and civilian authority, leaving a legacy of militarized politics that persisted beyond Metaxas's death in 1941 (Woodhouse, 1998).

6. The Greek Army and the Monarchy

The relationship between the Greek Army and the monarchy was a defining feature of Greece's political landscape from the establishment of the modern Greek state in 1832 through the Civil War period. The monarchy relied heavily on the army to consolidate power in the early years, but over time, divisions within the army, particularly during the National Schism, exposed the fragility of this alliance. The eventual restoration of King George II in 1935 and the army's subsequent role in the Civil War underscored the monarchy's waning influence over the military. This complex and evolving dynamic reveals the interplay between military power, royal legitimacy, and political stability in modern Greek history.

6.1 Early Relations: King Otto and the Bavarian Legacy

When King Otto ascended the Greek throne in 1832, he inherited a fragile and fragmented state still reeling from the chaos of the War of Independence. To establish and consolidate royal authority, Otto relied heavily on the Greek Army, which itself was undergoing a transformation from irregular militias to a structured national force. However, Otto's reliance on **Bavarian advisors and officers** - a product of his German lineage - created tensions within the army and the broader society.

The Bavarian influence on the army was profound, shaping its organization, structure, and hierarchy. Otto's Bavarian advisors introduced a **centralized command system**, emphasizing discipline and professionalization modeled after Prussian and Bavarian practices (Kyriakidis, 2022). The Evlepidon Military Academy, established in 1828, became a critical institution for training officers, many of whom adopted these foreign military traditions. However, this reliance on foreign expertise alienated segments of the Greek officer corps and exacerbated resentment

among local leaders who had been sidelined in favor of Bavarian imports (Kyriakidis, 2016).

Additionally, Otto's use of the army to suppress dissent highlighted its dual role as both a defender of the state and an instrument of royal authority. Notably, the army was instrumental in quelling regional uprisings and enforcing the centralization of power in Athens. However, dissatisfaction within the officer corps, coupled with widespread popular unrest, culminated in the **1843 Revolution**, where the army played a decisive role in forcing Otto to grant a constitution. This event demonstrated the army's capacity to challenge royal authority while underscoring its importance as a political force (Kyriakidis, 2016).

6.2 National Schism (1915–1922)

The National Schism was one of the most significant crises in modern Greek history, and its impact on the army was profound. The conflict, rooted in the competing visions of King Constantine I and Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos, divided the country into two camps: the royalists, who supported Constantine's pro-German neutrality during World War I, and the Venizelists, who advocated for Greece's entry into the war on the side of the Allies (Kyriakidis, 2023).

This political divide mirrored and exacerbated existing divisions within the army. Officers and soldiers were often forced to choose sides based on their political affiliations, regional loyalties, or personal convictions. Venizelos established a **provisional government in Thessaloniki** in 1916, creating a parallel military force loyal to his cause, while royalist officers remained aligned with King Constantine in Athens (Dakin, 1972).

The split within the army severely undermined its cohesion and effectiveness. Rivalry between the two factions hindered military operations, particularly during the Asia Minor Campaign (1919–1922), where political interference and mistrust between Venizelist and royalist officers, combined with the treacherous attitude of the Allies contributed to Greece's defeat (Kyriakidis, 2023). The schism also had long-term consequences for civil-military relations, entrenching political polarization within the military and weakening its ability to function as a neutral institution (Veremis, 2018).

Beyond the battlefield, the National Schism revealed the army's centrality to the political conflicts of the era. Both the royalist and Venizelist factions relied on the military to assert their authority, further blurring the lines between civilian and military spheres. This entanglement set a precedent for future military interventions in politics, perpetuating instability and undermining efforts to consolidate democratic governance (Veremis, 2018).

6.3 Restoration and Decline: The Role of the Army in the Fate of the Monarchy

The army played a pivotal role in the restoration of King George II in **1935**, following a period of republican rule under the Second Hellenic Republic (Gazette of the Government of the Kingdom of Greece, 1935). General **Georgios Kondylis**, a former republican who had switched allegiances, led a coup on October 10, 1935, that abolished the kingless republic and reinstated the monarchy. Kondylis's actions underscored the army's ability to dictate the political landscape and demonstrated how factions within the military could align with competing political ideologies for their benefit (Clogg, 2002).

However, the restoration of the monarchy did not guarantee its stability. King George II's reliance on the army to maintain control further politicized the military, deepening divisions within its ranks. By the time of the **Greek Civil War (1946–1949)**, the monarchy's control over the army had diminished significantly. While the army remained loyal to the government during the conflict, its internal cohesion was strained by ideological divides, with many rank-and-file soldiers sympathizing with the communist-led Democratic Army of Greece (DSE) (Koliopoulos, 1999).

The monarchy's diminishing influence over the army during the Civil War highlighted its broader decline as a political institution. Although the army ultimately prevailed against the communist insurgency, its role in suppressing domestic dissent further eroded public trust in the monarchy. By the time of King George II's death in 1947, the monarchy's legitimacy was deeply undermined, and its reliance on the army had become a liability rather than a source of strength (Mazower, 1991).

It should be clear that there is a complex interplay between military power, royal legitimacy and political stability in modern Greece. The army's involvement in the monarchy's rise and decline underscores its broader role as both a stabilizing and destabilizing force, reflecting the challenges of nation-building in a politically fragmented society.

7. The National Schism: Long-Term Effects on the Army

The National Schism (1915–1922) was one of the most significant events in modern Greek history, leaving an enduring impact on the Greek Army. This profound political and social division between royalists and Venizelists fragmented the military into rival factions, eroding its effectiveness during key conflicts like World War I and the Asia Minor Campaign. The schism also entrenched political loyalties within the officer corps and rank-and-file soldiers, perpetuating divisions long after the formal resolution of the crisis. These tensions resurfaced during the Greek Civil War (1946–1949), when the army's internal fragmentation undermined its cohesion as a national institution.

7.1 Divisions Within the Military

The National Schism caused a deep rift within the Greek Army, as officers and soldiers were forced to align with either the royalist faction led by King Constantine I or the Venizelist faction loyal to Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos. These divisions were exacerbated by the outbreak of World War I, during which Venizelos advocated for Greece to join the Allied powers, while Constantine sought neutrality due to his personal ties to Germany (Kyriakidis, 2021).

The creation of two parallel governments—one in Athens under Constantine and a provisional one in Thessaloniki under Venizelos—resulted in the establishment of separate military forces. The Venizelist army supported the Allies, while the royalist forces remained passive, effectively neutralizing a significant portion of Greece's military capacity (Clogg, 1979). This split weakened the army's operational effectiveness during World War I, undermining Greece's ability to capitalize on its strategic position in the region.

The divisions within the military persisted into the Asia Minor Campaign (1919–1922). Venizelist officers initially led the campaign to secure Greek territorial ambitions in Anatolia.

However, after the royalists regained power in 1920 and removed many experienced Venizelist officers, the army's command structure was destabilized. The replacement of key personnel, combined with the lack of unified strategy and the treacherous attitude of the Allies, contributed to the catastrophic defeat in 1922 and the subsequent population exchange between Greece and Turkey (Kyriakidis, 2021).

7.2 Political Polarization and Its Consequences

The schism entrenched political loyalties within the army, further complicating its role as a neutral institution. Officers and soldiers often aligned with one faction not only due to ideological beliefs but also because of regional and social pressures. Royalists tended to draw support from rural areas and conservative elements of society, while Venizelists were often backed by urban elites, intellectuals, and populations in newly annexed territories such as Crete and Macedonia.

This polarization was most evident in the officer corps, where promotions and assignments were frequently influenced by political affiliations. Under Venizelos, royalist officers were sidelined, while his return to power in 1917 saw the purge of pro-royalist elements. Conversely, when the royalists regained control in 1920, they reversed these measures, dismissing Venizelist officers and reinstating their own supporters (Kyriakidis, 2021). Such practices not only weakened the army's professionalism but also institutionalized factionalism, making it difficult to maintain a cohesive command structure.

Rank-and-file soldiers were similarly affected by the schism. Conscripts from different regions often held divergent loyalties, reflecting the broader societal divide. These divisions undermined morale and unit cohesion, as soldiers were less likely to trust or cooperate with those from opposing factions. The army's inability to transcend these political and regional differences further diminished its effectiveness as a fighting force, particularly during critical moments of national crisis.

7.3 The Legacy of the Schism in the Civil War

The long-term effects of the National Schism were most evident during the Greek Civil War (1946–1949), when the army once again became a battleground for ideological and political conflicts. Although the monarchy had been restored in 1935, the army remained deeply divided along political lines, with significant portions of the rank-and-file sympathetic to the communist-led Democratic Army of Greece (DSE) (Army Headquarters, 1971).

During the Civil War, the government forces were nominally loyal to the monarchy and aligned with Western powers. However, the army's cohesion was undermined by lingering divisions from the National Schism. Many officers, particularly those who had been aligned with Venizelos, were distrustful of the royalist leadership, while others were skeptical of the monarchy's ability to unify the nation.

The Civil War also highlighted the social and regional divisions that had been exacerbated by the National Schism. The communist insurgents drew significant support from marginalized rural areas, particularly in northern Greece, where resentment against the central government and the army was widespread. Government forces struggled to maintain loyalty among conscripts from these regions, many of whom defected to the DSE or refused to fight altogether (Koliopoulos, 1999).

Ultimately, the government's victory in the Civil War did not resolve the underlying divisions within the army. While the conflict marked the defeat of the communist insurgency, it also entrenched the army's role as a politically polarized institution, heavily reliant on foreign support. The schism's legacy persisted in the post-war period, shaping civil-military relations and undermining efforts to establish a truly apolitical military (Clogg, 2002).

The National Schism left an indelible mark on the Greek Army, transforming it from a cohesive national institution into a fragmented and politicized force. The examination of the long-term effects of the National Schism reveals the immense challenges of maintaining a professional and unified military in a politically polarized society. The Greek Army's experience highlights the broader consequences of political interference in military affairs, offering valuable lessons for understanding the intersection of politics, society, and military power in emerging nation-states.

8. Broader Implications of Military Involvement in Politics

The Greek Army's persistent involvement in politics during the 19th and 20th centuries profoundly influenced the trajectory of the modern Greek state. From its role as a nation-building force during the early years of independence to its destabilizing interventions through coups and political alignments, the army's dual function reflected both its capacity to shape the state and its potential to undermine it. The Greek case offers valuable insights for understanding the broader implications of military involvement in politics, particularly when compared to other Balkan and European states where similar patterns of military intervention occurred.

8.1 Nation-Building vs. Destabilization

The Greek Army's contributions to nation-building during the 19th century were essential to consolidating the nascent Greek state. Emerging from the revolutionary militias of the War of Independence (1821–1829), the army became an institution tasked with unifying a fragmented society, defending territorial gains, and establishing state authority. Key milestones, such as its role in the Balkan Wars (1912–1913), demonstrated the army's capacity to act as a unifying force, securing the annexation of Macedonia, Epirus, and the Aegean Islands. These achievements reinforced the army's position as a symbol of national pride and an agent of Hellenism (Kyriakidis, 2021).

However, the army's increasing entanglement in domestic politics introduced a destabilizing element to the state-building process. Beginning with the Goudi Coup (1909), the army positioned itself as a political actor, justifying its interventions as necessary for national reform. While this particular coup led to significant modernization under Eleftherios Venizelos, it also set a precedent for future military interventions. By the interwar years, the army's involvement in political crises had become a recurring feature, with coups and counter-coups undermining political stability (Veremis, 2018).

The National Schism (1915–1922) further highlighted the army's destabilizing potential. As the military split into royalist and Venizelist factions, its capacity to serve as a unifying institution was severely compromised. This fragmentation weakened the army during critical moments, such as the Asia Minor Campaign (1919–1922), contributing to Greece's catastrophic defeat. The schism also entrenched political loyalties within the military, perpetuating

divisions that would resurface during the Greek Civil War (1946–1949) (Kyriakidis, 2021).

Moreover, the army's role during the Metaxas regime (1936–1941) illustrates how military involvement in politics can undermine democratic governance. Under Ioannis Metaxas, the army was instrumental in enforcing authoritarian rule, suppressing dissent, and aligning itself with state propaganda. While Metaxas justified these measures as necessary for national unity, they further politicized the military and weakened civilian control, setting the stage for future instability (Koliopoulos, Veremis, 2010).

By the mid-20th century, the army's political interventions had eroded its legitimacy as a neutral institution. The Greek Civil War exemplified the long-term consequences of this entanglement, as ideological divisions within the military mirrored broader societal conflicts. Although the army ultimately triumphed over the communist insurgency, its role in suppressing domestic dissent deepened public mistrust, contributing to the monarchy's decline and the eventual rise of military authoritarianism in 1967.

8.2 Lessons for Comparative Military Studies

The Greek Army's political interventions offer valuable lessons when examined in a comparative framework alongside other Balkan and European states. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, militaries in the Balkans frequently played dual roles as nation-builders and political actors, reflecting the region's struggles with political instability, ethnic diversity, and external pressures.

Balkan Parallels:

In neighboring Serbia, the military similarly emerged as a key force in nation-building during the late Ottoman period. The Serbian Army's victories in the Balkan Wars bolstered national identity and territorial expansion, much like the Greek Army's role in Macedonia and Epirus. However, the Serbian military also became deeply involved in politics, culminating in events like the 1903 assassination of King Alexander I by a faction of officers. This intervention marked the beginning of a prolonged period of political instability, similar to Greece's own cycle of coups and counter-coups (Jelavich, 1983).

In Bulgaria, the military played a decisive role in shaping political outcomes during the early 20th century. The 1923 coup that overthrew Prime Minister Aleksandar Stamboliyski illustrated the Bulgarian Army's capacity to act as a political force, aligning itself with conservative and nationalist factions. However, as in Greece, this politicization of the military undermined its cohesion and contributed to long-term instability (Perry, 1988).

European Comparisons:

The Greek experience also resonates with military interventions in other parts of Europe, particularly in states transitioning from monarchies to democratic systems. In Spain, for example, the military's involvement in politics culminated in the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), where internal divisions within the army mirrored broader ideological conflicts between republicans and nationalists. Similar to Greece, the Spanish Army's alignment with political factions weakened its ability to function as a cohesive national institution (Preston, 1986).

In contrast, Western European states like France and Britain successfully subordinated their militaries to civilian control during the 19th century. These states implemented institutional safeguards to limit military influence in politics, allowing for the development

of stable democratic systems. The absence of such safeguards in Greece and other Balkan states highlights the challenges of building civilian-military relations in politically fragmented societies (Huntington, 1981).

Lessons and Implications:

The comparative analysis underscores the importance of institutional reforms to prevent military overreach in politics. In Greece, the lack of a clear distinction between military and civilian authority allowed the army to justify its interventions as necessary for national stability. However, these actions often exacerbated political divisions, undermined public trust, and weakened democratic institutions.

Furthermore, the Greek case illustrates how external pressures, such as alliances with great powers, can influence the military's role in domestic politics. During the Cold War, for instance, Western support for the Greek Army as a bulwark against communism reinforced its political power, delaying efforts to establish civilian control (Close, 2002).

The Greek Army's involvement in politics highlights the complex interplay between nation-building and destabilization. While the military played a vital role in securing territorial gains and consolidating the state, its repeated interventions in domestic politics undermined democratic governance and entrenched societal divisions. Comparisons with other Balkan and European states reveal both shared challenges and unique trajectories, offering valuable lessons for understanding civil-military relations in transitional societies.

By situating the Greek Army within a broader comparative framework, it highlights the need for institutional safeguards to limit military influence in politics. The Greek experience serves as a cautionary tale of the long-term consequences of politicizing the military, underscoring the importance of fostering professional and apolitical armed forces to ensure stable governance.

9. Conclusions

The Greek Army's involvement in politics during the formative years of the modern Greek state (1821–1949) profoundly shaped the trajectory of the nation's political and social development. From its inception as a unifying force during the War of Independence to its entanglement in the cycles of coups, ideological divisions, and political crises, the army transitioned from a military institution to a powerful political actor. This transformation had far-reaching consequences, both stabilizing and destabilizing, as it reflected and reinforced the tensions inherent in Greece's nation-building process.

The analysis of the Greek Army's role in domestic politics highlights its duality as both a nation-building institution and a destabilizing force. During the 19th century, the army played a crucial role in consolidating territorial gains, enforcing central authority, and integrating diverse regions into a cohesive state. Its contributions to national victories, such as those during the Balkan Wars, elevated the army's status as a symbol of Greek identity and statehood.

However, as Greece transitioned into the 20th century, the army's repeated involvement in political affairs exposed its capacity to undermine the very cohesion it sought to build. The Goudi Coup of 1909 set a precedent for military intervention in governance, blurring the lines between civilian and military authority. The National Schism (1915–1922) further divided the army into

factions, eroding its unity and effectiveness during key conflicts like World War I and the Asia Minor Campaign. These divisions, rooted in political loyalties and ideological differences, had lasting consequences, re-emerging during the Greek Civil War (1946–1949) and contributing to societal polarization.

By the mid-20th century, the Greek Army had become a deeply politicized institution. While it played a decisive role in suppressing the communist insurgency during the Civil War, its actions often exacerbated societal divisions, undermining its legitimacy as a neutral force. This legacy of intervention set the stage for subsequent military involvement in Greek politics, culminating in the junta of 1967–1974.

The Greek Army's historical trajectory offers critical insights into the relationship between military power and nation-building. In its early years, the army served as a unifying force, fostering a sense of national identity and acting as a stabilizer during periods of external threat. Its role in securing territorial expansions and integrating newly annexed regions highlights the army's capacity to act as a cohesive agent in a fragmented society.

However, the army's entanglement in domestic politics reveals the fragility of civil-military relations in politically volatile contexts. The cycles of intervention and counter-intervention during the interwar years, coupled with the army's ideological alignment with different political factions, underscore the challenges of maintaining military neutrality. In Greece, as in many other emerging states, the lack of clear boundaries between civilian and military spheres hindered the development of stable democratic governance.

The broader implications extend beyond Greece, offering comparative lessons for states with similar trajectories. The Greek Army's history illustrates how political interference can compromise military professionalism, erode public trust, and perpetuate instability. At the same time, it underscores the importance of institutional safeguards to prevent the politicization of the military and foster its alignment with democratic norms.

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