

Anti-Revisionism in Greece

‘The Rule of the Colonels’ - the military Junta 1967-1974

The rule of the Colonels refers to the brutal military regime that ruled the country from 1967-1974.

Archetypal in that its harsh rule implemented a brutal system of terror, torture and oppression that relied on well-documented killing, disappearances and sadistic techniques of physical and psychological torture,¹ there was also the deportation of leftist political opponents to the isolated islands in the Aegan.

Friday April 21st 1967 saw a dozen junior officers, with an intense hatred of leftists and communists stemming from the country’s civil war, vowing to rescue its Western, Christian ideals, take control of Greece in the name of a “National Revolution”. It ruled for seven years with textbook methods of state terror and torture overseen by a brutal military police force, targeting the Rights’ normal “enemies” – communists, trade unionists, liberal politicians, intellectuals, artists and students.

Just as during the civil war against the communist resistance, the nationalists and monarchists of the old order looked for outside help to quell the uprising, the Colonels regime had a critical helping hand from the United States in maintaining its survival. It was widely believed that the coup followed the planning developed by staff at NATO, under the code name *Prometheus*.

Many Greeks carry bitter memories of U.S. support for the 1967-74 ruling junta. When US President Clinton visited Greece in 1999, he obliquely offered what sounded like an apology when talking about a "painful" aspect of their recent history.

“When the junta took over in 1967 here, the United States allowed its interests in prosecuting the Cold War to prevail over its interests -- I should say, its obligation -- to support democracy, which was, after all, the cause for which we fought the Cold War.” Clinton said in his conciliatory remark, "It's important that we acknowledge that."²

¹ Amnesty International. *Torture in Greece: The First Torturers’ Trial* 1975. London: 1977

² Remarks BY President Bill Clinton and Prime Minister Simitis of Greece to the Government of Greece, Business and Community leaders. Inter-Continental Hotel Athens, Greece - November 20, 1999.

The Colonels acted when King Constantine II finally agreed to declared new elections for May 28th; the military feared the consequences to their power if, as expected, those elections returned the Centre Union Party and Papandreou to office.

The core of the *coup d'état* were Colonel George Papadopoulos, from 1959 to 1964 he was a staff officer in the Central Service of Information, the Greek equivalent of the Central Intelligence Agency, he became Prime minister, and Colonel Makarezos [Economics ministry] and Brigadier Stylianos Pattakos [Ministry of the Interior]. Although these were junior officers, the Colonels faced little to no resistance from within the military. There was a purge of military officers, numbering hundreds, and state employees eliminating possible conservative opposition and promotion of regime loyalists. Civil servants lost their tenure, professors, associate professor were fired as were judges, prosecutors and several leaders of the Greek Orthodox Church.

There were strained relations from the beginning between the mutinous 'Colonels' and other right wing and conservative elements. The King's monarchist officers and courtiers sought to stage a coup with the support of the navy within eighteen months of the establishment of the illegal regime. Thwarted, Constantine was side-lined in his self-imposed exile from Greece. The Junta blamed 'disloyal' officers for the attempt of December 1967. By 1973 Papadopoulos staged a referendum to declare Greece a 'presidential parliamentary republic' after disposing the King.

The Junta went after anyone suspected of being an opponent or potential opponent of the regime. The suspension of bourgeois civil rights saw the arbitrary arrest and deportation of about 6,000 people held in detention camps after only a few months. The main perpetrators of the violence through the regime was narrowly identified at the trial of the Junta as the military police, the *Elliniki Stratiotiki Astynomia* – ESA - associated with the Special Interrogation Section in Athens, ETA - the *Eidikon Anakritikon Tmima*. Documented in dozen of testimonies is the systematic abuse and torture that passes for interrogation techniques employed by men under the command of Major Theodoros Thefiloyannakos and his commanding officer, Brigadier-General Dimitrios Ioannidis.

The experience from the Greek Civil War of over a hundred thousand Greeks from both sides dying, the summary executions and brutal reprisals, and the thousands of the defeated left who went into exile, and thousands more filled the state's concentration camps – this was a legacy that would fuel much of the animosity and brutality the Colonels' regime would use upon the people two decades later.

The range of opposition to the Colonel's rule ran from monarchist to communists, with each element constructing their own resistance organisation, separate and in conflict with each other. There was the Pan Hellenic Liberation Movement – PAK – from which, the social

White House officials insisted after Clinton spoke that the comment about the much-hated junta was not a presidential apology. "He was making the point that in his view the United States should speak out for democracy."

democratic PASOK emerged, DA – Democratic Defence, and PAM – Patriotic Anti-Dictatorship Front which had expressed some internal resistance. Outside of Greece proliferation: both student-organised and solidarity movements in support of the resistance inside the country were formed throughout the diaspora.

The regime of the Colonels finally fell on July 24th 1974 the consequence of a growing catalogue that exposed its frailty : the regime's brutal suppression of student opposition at Athens Polytechnic in 1973, the intensifying military situation in Cyprus and attempted coup in July 1974 to replace President Markarios that led to the Turkish occupation of the north of the island, and an internal coup that ousted Papadopoulos and replaced him with the ESA mastermind Ioannidis for several months in 1974. The lack of domestic support saw the regime unravel.

Colonel Ioannidis' coup against the Cypriot President on the 15th of July 1974 – which involved the imposition of the Greek National Army and political figureheads who murdered Turkish Cypriots – saw Turkey invaded Cyprus to regain control of the island. The Greek response was destroyed by the Turks, and with no support from NATO or America, the Greeks were forced to withdraw from the disastrous intervention. It ironically led to the fall of the Colonels from their positions in power. One of the main goals of the coup was *enosis*, which was to be a union of Cyprus with Greece. It ended with the island divide by occupation.

On the 22nd of July 1974, very swiftly following the failed Cypriot invasion, powerful army officers signed a petition 'demanding the formation of a 'National Salvation' council' to be headed by former Prime Minister Karamanlis of the New Democracy Party. Karamanlis was able to reinstate the 1952 Constitution, and legalised the Communist Party.

On the 17th of November 1974, Karamanlis won the first elections held in Greece in over seven years. His election also resulted in a referendum to decide whether Greece should retain its monarchy. This referendum resulted in the collapse of the monarchy and the establishment of an official republic.

The 1975 trial of the Colonels saw the three main perpetrators tried and convicted for high treason, with the death penalty reduce to life imprisonment.

The Greek socialist party PASOK rose triumphantly to power in 1981, winning the election with 48.1 per cent of the vote.