

Stylianos Pattakos (1912-2016): Leader of Greece's CIA-backed military junta

By John Vassilopoulos
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Stylianos Pattakos, the last surviving leader of the 21 April 1967 coup that imposed a seven-year military dictatorship in Greece, died from a stroke in his Athens home on October 8, one month before his 104th birthday. Brigadier-General Pattakos was one of the three masterminds of the coup, alongside Colonels Giorgos Papadopoulos and Nikolaos Makarezos.

As Interior Minister between 1967 and 1971 and Deputy Prime Minister between 1971 and 1973, Pattakos was the junta's number two after Papadopoulos. Under his watch, 87,000 people were arrested without charge and tortured while in custody, and 10,000 political prisoners were rounded up and incarcerated, many on the concentration camp on the island of Gyaros. At least 22 people died while in custody due to torture, while many others died of their injuries after being released.

The regime carried out targeted assassinations of nearly 100 people, while around 4,500 were tried by court martial.

Pattakos defended the crimes of the junta of the colonels to the end. One high-profile case was that of Major Spiros Moustaklis, an Army officer arrested in May 1973 as a member of an anti-junta conspiracy led by naval officers. Moustaklis was detained for 47 days and repeatedly tortured, resulting in paralysis and loss of speech. Years later, during an interview, Pattakos stated that Moustaklis "got what he deserved," adding that "force is imposed by any means. What can't be untied must be cut with a sword."

Nonetheless, though Pattakos was tried and convicted of horrific crimes as a leader of the infamous junta of the colonels, the reactionary policies of Greek Stalinism and of Syriza (the Coalition of the Radical Left) ultimately allowed him to return to political life. He again emerged as a leader of the Greek far right,

this time in a symbolic and journalistic capacity.

Pattakos was born on November 8, 1912 on the island of Crete to a farming family in the small village of Ayia Paraskevi. He graduated from the Evelpidon Military academy in 1937 with the rank of Second Lieutenant in the Cavalry.

During the Axis Occupation of Greece in World War II, Pattakos joined the "Omios" resistance organisation, supervised by the Cairo-based Inter-Services Liaison Department (ISLD), an intelligence-gathering organisation established by the British overseas spy agency MI6. He took part in the 1946-1949 Greek Civil War on the side of the US and British forces, commanding an armoured company in Northern Greece fighting the Stalinist Democratic Army of Greece.

He steadily rose through the ranks, so that by the time of the coup, he was commander of the armoured division training school in Goudi, an Athens suburb. This post was of strategic importance, since it was on his orders that tanks were sent in the early hours of the morning to take control of communication centres, the parliament and the royal palace, thus gaining complete control of the city.

Plans for a coup had long been in the offing. Since 1965, Armed Forces Head General Grigoris Spandidakis had begun to appoint those officers who were to take part in the coup to key posts. The aim of the coup, planned with the US Embassy and the CIA station in Greece, was to prevent the elections scheduled for May 1967, the chief beneficiaries of which were predicted to be the liberal Centre Union Party and the United Democratic Left (EDA), which was linked to the Stalinist Greek Communist Party (KKE).

The fear in ruling circles was that a coalition

government of these two parties could shift Greece's foreign policy towards neutrality between NATO and the Soviet Union.

Under the plan of the so-called Generals' coup, Greek King Constantine was to declare martial law and suspend parliament in order to prevent the poll from taking place. In the end, the coup was unilaterally set in motion by lower-ranking officers, who feared that vacillations of the army leadership and the king in imposing martial law would prevent them from moving fast enough to halt the elections.

To some of his co-conspirators who were getting cold feet at the last minute, Pattakos reportedly said: "Listen here gentlemen, I have already set tanks in motion, I can't order them back. I will move alone, and whoever wants can follow."

After the fall of the junta in July 1974, Pattakos and the other leaders of the regime were put on trial. In August 1975, the court found them guilty of high treason and sentenced them to death by firing squad. These sentences were later commuted to life imprisonment by the conservative New Democracy (ND) government of Constantinos Karamanlis.

In 1990, Pattakos was released from prison on humanitarian grounds by the ND-led Mitsotakis government due to an apparent "imminent danger to his health." This was, of course, a juridical fraud that allowed Pattakos to return to political life. He lived for another quarter century and wrote a number of autobiographical works. For a time, he authored a regular column in the far-right newspaper *Eleftheros Kosmos*, as well as giving a series of TV and newspaper interviews.

Far-right circles cultivated a myth that Pattakos and the other junta leaders selflessly sacrificed themselves for the good of Greece. They pointed to Pattakos' relatively modest personal standard of living, due to his conviction after the fall of the junta—though, while in power during the junta, he awarded lucrative construction projects to his brother-in-law, Andreas Meintasis, who became very rich.

Underlying Pattakos' return to power was the broad shift to the right undergone by Greek Stalinism and the petty-bourgeois "left" forces emerging from the 1970s student movement, in the years leading up to the restoration of capitalism by the Stalinist regimes in the Soviet Union in 1991. In 1989-1990, the Synaspismos

(SYN) alliance between the KKE and other "Eurocommunist" and social-democratic forces repeatedly entered into coalition governments with ND.

Their purpose was to block the emergence of a revolutionary challenge from the working class, amid mounting opposition to the social-democratic Pasok party. In a politically criminal fashion, they sought to wipe the slate clean on the crimes of fascism and the military dictatorship. When SYN officials were appointed to head the Justice and Interior ministries, they burned police files on the Axis Occupation and the junta of the colonels.

These events set the stage for Pattakos' return to political life. He profited from the increasingly reactionary positions of Pasok and, after its formation in 2003, of Syriza, which currently rules Greece. In order to create a more stable political base to impose economically suicidal European Union (EU) austerity measures, these parties sought out alliances with far-right elements.

The last time it was in power, Pasok ruled in an alliance with the LAOS party, while Syriza upon coming to power last year formed a government coalition with the Independent Greeks (Anel) party. All of this further legitimated the rising influence of the far-right circles in which Pattakos moved.

At the end of his life, Pattakos supported the violent, neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party. He told *Parapolitika* in 2012, "Golden Dawn is here to stay," as it "is the only party that is up to the challenge." Golden Dawn sent an official delegation to Pattakos' funeral, including MP Konstantinos Barbarousis as well as local Golden Dawn officials.

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