

Are Obama and NATO plotting a military coup in Greece?

Bill Van Auken
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The sudden dismissal of the Greek military's high command Tuesday night, amid international uproar over a proposal for a referendum on an EU debt plan, has all the hallmarks of an action taken to preempt the threat of a military coup.

A measure of this political magnitude would not have been taken lightly. At the very least, one must assume that Prime Minister George Papandreou had strong reason to believe that his government, and possibly his own person, was facing an imminent threat from the country's military.

The Greek minister of defense, Panos Beglitis, a close political ally of Papandreou, summoned the four highest-ranking Greek military officers—the chiefs of the general staff, the army, navy and air force—to a hastily convened meeting to announce that they were being removed from their posts and replaced by other members of the Greek military brass.

Last month, Defense Minister Beglitis was quoted by the *EU Observer* web site as describing the Greek military hierarchy as “a state within a state.”

The Greek government should make public what it knows about the conspiracies of this “state within a state” and with whom it was allied. Given the record of Papandreou's PASOK party, however, this is exceedingly unlikely. The last thing that it and its pseudo-left apologists want is to alert workers to the dangers they confront.

A number of daily papers in Europe have raised the question of whether the sacking of the high command was aimed at preempting a military coup. These include both the *Telegraph* and *Daily Mail* in Britain. Among the more blunt pieces written on the matter came one from Gabor Steingart, the editor of Germany's main financial daily, *Handelsblatt*.

Under the headline “If I were Greek”, Steingart

acknowledges that the supposed rescue plan for the Greek economy is in reality another bailout of the banks at the expense of Greek workers, who will be compelled to pay for it through the wholesale destruction of their jobs, wages and social conditions. These measures will only deepen the country's depression and indebtedness, laying the groundwork for even more terrible austerity demands in the future.

Comparing the plan to the “shock” treatment implemented in the former Soviet Union, Steingart writes: “If I were from Greece I would be amongst those who are alert and worried. I would keep a wary eye on that military machinery which governed the country until 1974 and which might lie in wait for an opportunity for revenge. We know from many countries: Dr Shock is an enemy of democracy.”

The manner in which this affair has been covered—or rather censored from coverage—in the US media is telling. Neither the *New York Times* nor the *Washington Post*, the two publications that function as the newspapers “of record” within the US political establishment, have printed a word about the extraordinary shakeup within the Greek military command.

On Tuesday, the *Times* web site posted an article on Greece predicting that the Papandreou government was about to fall. The assessment would have clearly served as an explanation and justification for a coup taking place under conditions of a political breakdown. But, apparently, what the *Times* editors expected to take place didn't happen. It recalls the newspaper's premature celebration of the short-lived overthrow of Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez in 2002.

Now the media silence suggests that the editors at the *Times* and *Post* are desperately scrambling for a political line on what they clearly regard as a highly

sensitive matter.

One thing is certain, if a military coup was being prepared in Greece, given the stakes involved, it could only have developed with the approval of the major European powers—Germany, France and Britain—and, of course, the United States.

While the history of Greece is replete with the military's interventions in politics—no less than eight coups in the 20th century—the last military junta, which seized power on April 21, 1967 and ruled until 1974, bore the clear stamp, “Made in the USA”.

The so-called “colonels’ coup” followed two years of political instability that began with the Greek King Constantine’s removal of the government of Georgio Papandreou—the current prime minister’s grandfather—after he had himself attempted to replace the military command.

The leader of the coup, Col. Georgios Papadopoulos, was a former collaborator with the Nazi occupation of Greece in the 1940s, who in the postwar period entered the Greek army and received intelligence training in the US. He became the main liaison between the CIA and the KYP, the US-founded and US-funded Greek intelligence agency. Papadopoulos himself had been on the CIA payroll for 15 years.

The coup was carried out under the guidelines of a NATO contingency plan known as “Prometheus.” This plan was supposedly designed to forestall a communist takeover by the military seizing control and rounding up all those considered subversives.

The junta imposed martial law, suspending basic democratic rights. It soon imprisoned some 10,000 people, including political leaders, trade unionists, social activists, students and others suspected of opposing its counterrevolutionary agenda. Thousands were tortured. The junta’s police beat political prisoners with rubber hoses, shocked them with electricity, sexually violated them and ripped nails from their fingers. One of the junta’s most infamous torturers is said to have kept a red-white-and-blue symbol of US aid on his desk and to have told his victims, “Behind me there is the government, behind the government is NATO, behind NATO is the US. You can't fight us, we are Americans.”

These hideous crimes were carried out with the direct aid and approval of the liberal Democratic administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson.

In his first press conference after seizing power, Papadopoulos defended the ferocious repression unleashed by the junta. “We are facing a patient on the operating table,” he said. “Unless he is tied to the table, he cannot be cured of his illness.”

No doubt such logic has a great deal of appeal today within international financial circles, where Papandreou’s proposal to submit a program of drastic austerity measures to a popular referendum has been denounced as “irresponsible,” if not insane.

The Greek prime minister made the proposal based on his own political calculations, which have nothing to do with democracy. However, the very idea that working people would be allowed to vote on whether to accept massive social cuts in order to bail out the banks provokes the intense anger and dismay of the financial aristocracy in every country.

The brutal character of these measures and the immense social inequality that lie at their heart cannot be imposed by democratic means. The “patient” must be “tied to the table”.

In 1974, when the military last ruled Greece, during a period of economic and political upheaval that spanned the globe, two of the other countries cited as the next dominos likely to fall in today’s European sovereign debt crisis—Spain and Portugal—were also ruled by fascist military dictatorships. The same was true for most countries in Latin America.

The events in Greece signal that the age of the colonels and generals is returning. Under conditions of the deepest crisis of global capitalism since the Great Depression of the 1930s, the old mechanisms of bourgeois democracy can no longer contain ever mounting class antagonisms and international tensions.

While the threat of dictatorship manifests itself first in the weaker capitalist economies, it is like a disease that spreads from the extremities to the heart. There is no country in the world where working people can afford the illusion that “it can’t happen here.”

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