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Ioannidis, Cyprus, and the irony of history

LSE Ideas

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On 16 August 2010, [Dimitrios Ioannidis](#), one of the instigators of the April 1967 coup that brought the Greek Colonels to power, died. During the seven-year reign of the 'junta', Brigadier Ioannidis was director of the Greek military police (ΕΣΑ), and he was known as one of the hardliners of the regime. He rose to prominence in November 1973, when he masterminded, behind the scenes, a new coup that put an end to the liberalising efforts initiated by Georgios Papadopoulos, under the so-called 'Markezinis experiment'.

History showed its ironic face once again, as the 'invisible dictator' (as he was known during 1973-4) passed away on the 50th anniversary of the [independence of the Republic of Cyprus](#). Ioannidis' fate was tied to the Mediterranean island.

The Cyprus issue, which eventually brought about the demise of the military junta, was the most predominant foreign policy preoccupation of all the dictators (and especially of Ioannidis) throughout their tenure of power, for they thought that, as Koufoudakis has argued, 'removing this irritant from Greek domestic and foreign policy and interallied relations, was expected to increase the Colonels' prestige at home and end the régime's international isolation'. The first signs appeared in the summer of 1970, when a crisis was brewing up on the island, also as a consequence of the attempted assassination of [President Makarios](#) earlier that year.

Papadopoulos' handling of the situation in Cyprus, in conjunction with his initiatives in trying to mitigate foreign critics through pursuing a conciliatory line precipitated cracks within the junta, which appeared at that time to be far from united. The internal troubles peaked in the summer of 1970 when Papadopoulos (who was already both prime minister and minister of defence) decided, following Pipinelis' death, to assume the post of minister of foreign affairs, as well. Jealousy prevailed among Papadopoulos' critics, with the concentration of power in his hands being the real issue. The casualties of the acute internal crisis, which was resolved in September, were the prime minister's ability to confront the hardliners and his supposed efforts towards the gradual democratisation of the régime.

When, in November 1973, a coup overthrew Papadopoulos, British diplomats were quick to identify Ioannidis as the 'somewhat shadowy figure' behind the [new government](#). As a consequence of developments in Greece, however, the British government decided to adopt once more a wait-and-see policy, with greater caution dictated by parliamentary attitudes that were unfavourable to Ioannidis.

A few months later, and before celebrating fifteen years as an independent state, the Republic of Cyprus would cease to exist in its initial form. The coup that the Greek junta, under Ioannidis, launched against Makarios triggered an invasion by Turkey, which still occupies the northern third of Cyprus today, thus dividing the island. The 16th of August 2010 also marks 36 years since the occupation of Morfou, a town in the north of the island, which was founded by Spartans- big admirers of whom were the Greek Colonels.

The actions of the dictator that precipitated the division of Cyprus came back to haunt him; the 16th of August will from now on mark both the beginning of the Republic of Cyprus and the end of the man who tried to dismantle it. And this is an instance of irony that only History can create.

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