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# **The Greek Junta and the International System**

**A Case Study of Southern European Dictatorships, 1967–74**

**Edited by Antonis Klapsis, Constantine Arvanitopoulos, Evanthis Hatzivassiliou and Effie G. H. Pedaliu**

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## 11 ‘The situation in Greece’

### American human rights activism in the wake of the 1967 coup\*

*Sarah B. Snyder*

In the wake of the 1967 coup, prominent American academics were concerned about the fate of Greek political leader Andreas Papandreou, whom many of them knew personally. Their efforts to prevent Andreas’ execution and secure his release from prison evolved into broader advocacy aimed at the repressive regime.<sup>1</sup> Given the tepid condemnation of the coup and subsequent repression by Lyndon Johnson’s and Richard Nixon’s administrations, years of activism by Americans followed.

A transnational campaign against the politically repressive junta developed, and non-state actors played a significant role in forcing foreign governments such as the US to grapple with human rights concerns.<sup>2</sup> The plight of an identifiable political prisoner with many transnational connections such as Andreas Papandreou served as a rallying point for disparate actors in the US. A loosely linked collection of academics, members of Congress, concerned citizens, international human rights groups and ad hoc non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as the US Committee for Democracy in Greece, succeeded in keeping policymakers’ attention on human rights violations. Finally, Greece’s location in Europe and history as the birthplace of democracy meant that, for some, human rights abuses there were harder to overlook than those in places more culturally or geographically distant.

#### Congressional activism

Many American critics viewed the government’s attitude towards the Greek colonels in the context of their own opposition to the war in Vietnam and intervention in the Dominican Republic.<sup>3</sup> For example, Representative Donald M. Fraser, a Democrat from Minnesota, expressed concern about US support for the regime, especially in terms of military assistance and information policy, as well as public and private investment in the country. He pushed the State Department to do more than have a ‘hands off, no comment, position regarding the denial of human rights in Greece today’, indicating he was particularly troubled at reports that the Greek regime was torturing its political prisoners.<sup>4</sup> He also wrote to the Secretary of State and the White House to communicate apprehension about Andreas Papandreou, who had formerly been a professor at the University of Minnesota.<sup>5</sup> He

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later said his position on US policy towards Greece was shaped by the knowledge that US tanks had been used 'to suppress students who were protesting against the military junta's destruction of democracy in Greece'.<sup>6</sup>

Fraser travelled to Greece in May 1968, and his visit solidified his disagreement with US policy towards the junta.<sup>7</sup> While there, he sought to learn about political prisoners, the junta's administration of the country, and the relationship between the Greek and American militaries.<sup>8</sup> After his return, Fraser gave a speech in the House of Representatives on the repressive nature of the regime: 'Torture of political prisoners has occurred in some Greek prisons . . . Arrests and imprisonment of persons who speak critically in public continue. Thousands of Greeks have been imprisoned.' Fraser recommended steps to pressure the Greek junta, including American condemnation of the regime and a significant reduction in military assistance to the government.<sup>9</sup>

Fraser had like-minded colleagues in Congress such as Representative Benjamin Rosenthal (Democrat – New York) and Representative Don Edwards (Democrat – California) who kept attention on the situation in Greece. Rosenthal chaired the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe and held a series of hearings on US policy towards Greece. Edwards was also a leader of anti-junta activism, working among members of Congress to pressure the State Department and corresponding with interested observers outside of the government. For example, when the House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly, 321–42, to extend the lease of two destroyers and a submarine to Greece, Edwards released a statement characterizing it as a 'bad mistake' that 'constitutes approval of military dictatorship in Greece'.<sup>10</sup> In evocative language, members of Congress collectively wrote to the Secretary of State to express concern about the 'deprivation of liberty in Greece' and to ask that the US 'not close its eyes to the human indignities' occurring there; they sought to capitalize on the US' 'moral power', arguing: 'The world has looked to America for sensitivity to the human condition and for moral leadership.'<sup>11</sup>

Members of Congress, such as Edwards, registered their opposition to increasing military aid to Greece.<sup>12</sup> In congressional debate regarding American policy, Fraser said that the US 'ought to come down firmly on the side of free and open societies and firmly against those repressive and oppressive governments which are characterized by the present regime that rules Greece'.<sup>13</sup> In a letter to the Secretary of State, Representative Paul Findley (Republican – Illinois) raised concerns about 'the large number of political prisoners, the ruling military junta, the lack of personal freedoms by the people, [and] the fact that many of the supreme court judges have been dismissed and replaced by new justices'.<sup>14</sup> Members of Congress directed their attention not only at the executive branch, but also at Greek officials directly. In one instance, Fraser wrote to the Greek ambassador to the US to press his concerns about politically motivated arrests and the torture of prisoners.<sup>15</sup>

### Non-governmental activism

Fraser and Edwards both undertook steps on their own and acted in concert with a NGO devoted to the issue, the US Committee for Democracy in Greece, which

was part of a broader network of groups and individuals who were opposed to the Greek regime in Australia, Canada, Denmark, Great Britain, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland.<sup>16</sup> The committee, which was organized by many well-known Washington-based liberals, including Edwards, former Attorney General Francis Biddle, labour organizer Victor Reuther and Senator Claiborne Pell (Democrat Rhode Island), warned that the US risked tarnishing its international image if it failed to separate itself from the leadership in Athens.<sup>17</sup> The US Committee for Democracy in Greece published a bimonthly newsletter with a circulation of 35,000, one of several ways it sought to disseminate information on the regime's activities.<sup>18</sup> In one issue, the Committee cautioned: 'The presence of the Greek dictatorship is a constant threat to the unity of the Western world . . . By continuing assistance to the present regime, the United States would risk seriously undermining the entire Western alliance.'<sup>19</sup>

Other organizations expressed their concerns by disseminating advertisements, corresponding with members of Congress, donating to aid Greek prisoners, pressing for the release of political prisoners and fundraising to support public awareness activities. Minnesotans for Democracy and Freedom in Greece was primarily focused on achieving its aims through pressuring the US government.<sup>20</sup> To that end, it organized several hundred people to write to Fraser conveying their concern about the situation in Greece.<sup>21</sup> Involvement by Minnesotans was likely spurred by Andreas Papandreou's deep connections to the state: he had taught at the University of Minnesota for nine years. But Americans organized against the junta in many other corners of the country. Some, such as the California Committee for Democracy in Greece, raised funds to aid Greek political prisoners and their families, as well as to 'fight for Freedom in Greece'.<sup>22</sup> The American Committee for Democracy and Freedom in Greece wrote to Johnson asking him to intercede on behalf of composer Mikis Theodorakis and organized a silent 'March in Mourning' to mark the 'death of human rights and freedoms in Greece'.<sup>23</sup> The Boston Ad Hoc Committee for Freedom in Greece, the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, and Amnesty International USA undertook similar efforts to influence US policy.<sup>24</sup> Evidence of the development of a broader network of activists can be seen in the Inter-American Federation for Democracy in Greece, which was an umbrella organization overseeing 19 regional committees.<sup>25</sup>

The New York-based International League for the Rights of Man (ILRM) directed considerable efforts at Greek repression. For example, ILRM worked with US Representative to the UN Commission on Human Rights, Morris Abram, to pressure the Greek junta to free seven lawyers.<sup>26</sup> Washington-based lawyer George Vournas also witnessed a trial of 15 political prisoners in Greece on behalf of ILRM in March 1972. Of particular note was Vournas' observation that 'charges of beatings and torture . . . were either taken for granted or considered "normal procedures"'.<sup>27</sup> These efforts led relatives of Greek political prisoners, such as Mary Ciomp-Iliou, to write to Roger Baldwin, ILRM's executive director, asking that he intercede on behalf of their relatives.<sup>28</sup>



### The campaign to save Andreas Papandreou

Concerns about human rights violations in Greece drew wide attention as former colleagues, friends and supporters of Andreas Papandreou mobilized on his behalf in the US. After an academic career during which he taught at Harvard, the University of Minnesota, Northwestern University and UC Berkeley, Papandreou returned to Greece, where he became increasingly involved in politics.<sup>29</sup> His wife, Margaret, was instrumental in keeping international attention focused on her husband's plight and repeatedly appealed to the US Embassy in Athens for assistance. She wrote to economist and former US Ambassador to India John Kenneth Galbraith, Stephen Rousseas of New York University and George Linias at Purdue University to enlist their support for her husband. Academics from Minnesota, Leo Hurwicz and John Buttrick, as well as many others, campaigned on his behalf.<sup>30</sup> Overall, 250 economists reportedly wrote to the White House.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, Andreas' former colleagues were among those most attentive to Greek repression soon after the coup, and White House aides were cognisant of the extent to which Andreas' incarceration focused attention on US policy towards Greece:

Our major problem here in the White House is domestic concern for the safety of Andreas Papandreou . . . Andreas' friends – Walter Heller, Carl Kay-sen and others – have mounted a major telephone campaign, which some of us fear could cause real trouble.<sup>32</sup>

Margaret's efforts bore fruit when Galbraith called Johnson aide Joseph Califano at the White House to express the widespread concern for Papandreou's fate in academic circles. Johnson reportedly said of the campaign, 'This is the first issue in history on which all the American economists seem to have agreed'.<sup>33</sup> Galbraith reports that Under-Secretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach later telephoned him to report a message from Johnson: 'Call up Ken Galbraith and tell him I've told those Greek bastards to lay off that son-of-a-bitch – whoever he is'.<sup>34</sup> Economist Walter Heller, who was particularly active, wrote to Johnson:

The academic grapevine was crackling from coast to coast last night with the good news that you were taking a direct hand in the Papandreou case . . . The word of your quick and direct interest is spreading fast and favorably.<sup>35</sup>

The campaign by Andreas' supporters to pressure the Johnson administration had begun immediately.<sup>36</sup> His father-in-law, Douglas Chant, visited the US Embassy the day of the coup to seek American intervention to protect Andreas. Talbot reportedly told Chant that the US 'has and would by every means discourage Greek military leaders from any resort to violence or bloodshed'.<sup>37</sup> Talbot asserted that any harm suffered by political prisoners would 'greatly increase complications of already complicated situation'.<sup>38</sup> The next day, the State Department

asked Talbot how feasible it would be for him to speak to the newly installed Prime Minister about the 'possibility of obtaining release of younger Papandreou on condition that he be immediately ousted from country and forbidden to return'. The State Department was concerned that Andreas' execution would 'provoke a strong reaction outside Greece' and that poor treatment of political prisoners more generally 'would seriously damage the image' of the junta abroad, including in the US: 'execution of Andreas would give coup regime such a black eye that it might never gain favor of American public opinion'.<sup>39</sup>

The support for Andreas was varied and went well beyond economists. For example, former California Governor Pat Brown and California lawyer James Schwartz visited Margaret and met with Greek officials to advocate on Andreas' behalf at the end of May 1967. The two hoped to convince the Greek government to deport Andreas.<sup>40</sup> University of California-Berkeley Law Professor Frank Newman also undertook a trip to Greece, coordinating with Galbraith, Pell, Rousseas and Senator Joe Clark (Democrat – Pennsylvania) to develop a strategy to secure Andreas' release.<sup>41</sup> In addition, Paul Lyons, Executive Director of Amnesty International USA Archives (AIUSA), wrote to the Greek Interior Minister to request that a representative of AIUSA or another Amnesty group be allowed to visit Andreas in prison.<sup>42</sup>

The State Department's Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations offered assurances to members of Congress of US efforts on Andreas' behalf: 'Ambassador Talbot has made a series of strong representations in Athens on behalf of all the political detainees, including both Andreas and his father'.<sup>43</sup> Andreas later wrote in his memoirs:

There was some fear in the United States, I learned, that I was to be taken before a kangaroo court and summarily executed, and my friends in that country had been pressuring President Lyndon Johnson to intervene on my behalf. It was to the concern of those friends, I concluded, that I owed the fact that I was still alive.<sup>44</sup>

Margaret also believed this pressure had been essential and wrote to Johnson expressing appreciation for his 'swift humanitarian action' on behalf of her husband.<sup>45</sup> The actual influence of the US, however, is less clear.

### Beyond Andreas

Even after Andreas' release in December 1967, many inside and outside of Congress remained disturbed by the character of the Greek junta and urged the US to exert more influence on the regime's practices. Elise Becket, the mother of Amnesty investigator James Becket, sent countless letters to members of Congress about human rights violations in Greece, including a long letter to Senator Claiborne Pell making the case that torture was occurring in Greece.<sup>46</sup> As James describes it, 'She got involved because the family was involved'. It was with

Greece that she 'found herself as an activist'. According to her son, Elise even took her lobbying directly to the halls of Congress, roller-skating to enhance her effectiveness.<sup>47</sup>

Beyond Andreas' imprisonment, Americans were galvanized by reports of torture in Greece. More specifically, Amnesty's report on Greece highlighted the detention without trial of thousands of Greeks, persecution of relatives of those imprisoned and the 'widespread' use of torture in interrogations.<sup>48</sup> Other press reporting also inspired anti-junta activism. For example, *Look* magazine's May 1969 report graphically recounted methods such as *falanga*, which produces very painful swelling. The piece included horrifying accounts of torture and prolonged abuse of Greeks and drew considerable attention within the US and from the junta.<sup>49</sup>

Throughout the Nixon years, members of Congress and others attentive to Greek prisoners wrote to the administration in the hope that it would intervene in individual cases. In spring 1969 and onwards, a number of people sent letters specifically about imprisoned Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis.<sup>50</sup> In another example, Senator Birch Bayh (Democrat-Indiana) wrote to the US Ambassador to Greece about a young prisoner who may have been tortured and was in poor health:

I'm sure, Mr. Ambassador, that you share my belief that an integral part of our responsibility as citizens of this country is to our fellow man in other parts of the world. Thus, when one man suffers injustice and degradation, it is our burden, as well as that of his countryman, as long as his call for humanity goes unheard.<sup>51</sup>

And, just as when Andreas was arrested, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger received letters from former colleagues regarding the plight of Ioannis Pasmazoglou, a former Vice-Governor of the Bank of Greece who was being held for his anti-government activism.<sup>52</sup>

Members of Congress who wanted a firmer stance against the junta argued such a policy would benefit American standing in Western Europe.<sup>53</sup> Fraser and Edwards maintained pressure on the White House, writing to Nixon in April 1970 and asking him to indicate American disapproval of Greek judicial proceedings, allegations of torture and potential use of capital punishment.<sup>54</sup> Critics of US policy, such as Senator Ted Kennedy (Democrat - Massachusetts), accused the government of 'coddling' the Greeks and of 'cold and calculated indifference'.<sup>55</sup> Edwards argued that the US should instead be 'joining the international outcry against the excesses of the Greek dictatorship'.<sup>56</sup> In May 1970, Findley, who had visited Greece nine months previously, wrote to Nixon urging the maintenance of the American arms embargo. Similar to many others, Findley expressed concern for how resuming aid would be perceived by the Greek populace. In addition, he minimized worries that Greece would withdraw from NATO, arguing 'it has no other place to go'.<sup>57</sup> More concretely, in June 1970, liberal Senator Vance Hartke (Democrat - Indiana) introduced an amendment that would prohibit American military aid to the Greek junta, although it had little chance of success. Joseph

Sisco, chair of the NSC's Interdepartmental Group for Near East and South Asia, predicted that to squash congressional efforts to cut off security assistance to Greece, the administration 'will probably require increasing effort'.<sup>58</sup>

During the Nixon administration, NGOs remained engaged with US policy towards Greece, although with less influence than in the Johnson years. In a June 1969 meeting between members of the US Committee for Democracy in Greece and State Department officials, for example, Fraser urged the Nixon administration to develop an approach to the Greek regime that was more in line with US moral tenets.<sup>59</sup>

Building on long-standing connections, different NGOs began to cooperate regarding Greece. For example, the ILRM offered its mailing list of 6,500 names to the US Committee for Democracy in Greece, and AIUSA facilitated mailing its newsletter.<sup>60</sup> In addition, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the ILRM divided targets regarding Greek repression with the ACLU focusing on Washington and the ILRM directing its pressure at Athens.<sup>61</sup> In addition, the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) and Amnesty published a joint appeal by Greek political prisoners alleging torture by Greek military police.<sup>62</sup> And, after six Greek lawyers were detained in March 1973, American lawyer William Butler, Morris Abram, Canadian lawyer John Humphrey (who had previously headed the United Nations' Division of Human Rights) and British politician Sir Elwyn Jones travelled to Greece on behalf of the ILRM and the ICJ to investigate their condition.

Meanwhile, human rights abuses continued, but the junta was generally effective in limiting attention to them. Evidence of continued torture reached an international audience through a letter smuggled out of a Greek prison in November 1970 in which Alexandros Panagoulis, who had tried to assassinate the dictator George Papadopoulos, detailed tortures he had suffered, including whippings, *falanga*, beatings with an iron bar, cigarette burnings, sexual abuse, kicking, hair pulling, suffocation, sleep deprivation and other inhumane acts.<sup>63</sup>

Eighty-one members of Congress joined Edwards in asking Nixon in June 1971 to make a 'serious review' of US Greek policy given the 'strategic, moral, and political interests' affected.<sup>64</sup> Fraser also remained highly critical of US policy; in testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe, he argued that US policy 'towards Greece since 1967 has shown an extraordinary indifference to the fate of the Greek people'. He said:

The continued support by the United States of the Greek regime can only underline its contempt for the basic values which NATO was set up to preserve, and the hypocrisy of US assertions in support of the value of freedom under law.<sup>65</sup>

In July, Fraser urged that the US call for Greece's suspension from NATO.<sup>66</sup>

Recognizing that they did not share an agenda with the Nixon White House, members of Congress opposed to the junta escalated their tactics further.<sup>67</sup> In that same month, the House Foreign Affairs Committee voted to cut off US aid

to Greece, which was \$117 million at that point.<sup>68</sup> Representative Wayne L. Hays (Democrat – Ohio), who introduced the amendment, opposed the junta's anti-democratic nature, saying, 'I am not going to stand here and let anybody say that the nation that invented democracy, the nation from which the word "democracy" derives, from the Greek word "demos", cannot run a democracy in 1971'.<sup>69</sup> The *New York Times* editorial board supported the House vote, declaring, 'The Foreign Affairs Committee has projected the national interest on a broader canvas than that employed by the State and Defense Departments. It would be foolhardy for the Administration to ignore the meaning of its actions'.<sup>70</sup> In addition, members of Congress affiliated with the US Committee for Democracy in Greece wrote to supporters imploring them to pressure the Senate to follow Hays' lead.<sup>71</sup> The vote complicated US–Greek relations, but also gave US officials in Athens demonstrable proof of American frustration at the slow pace of Greek reform.<sup>72</sup> Although the amendment passed, it did not end aid because Nixon signed a waiver characterizing continued funds as in the national security interests of the US.<sup>73</sup>

Speaking in May 1974, Fraser was dismissive of US attention to human rights violations in Greece: 'Our country's performance in Greece in this area, is unfortunately, typical not only of our feeble efforts elsewhere but also of the prevailing standards operating among all countries today.'<sup>74</sup> Fraser's frustration with American inaction was shared by many liberals, and it laid the groundwork for more focused attention on international human rights and greater congressional activism in foreign relations. For example, Abram expressed frustration with what he termed the US' 'mute conscience', arguing that US leaders had not 'raised a peep against the barbarities of our junta allies in Greece'.<sup>75</sup> American activism against the junta marks a significant instance in which human rights violations prompted Congress to pass legislation cutting off aid to a repressive government.

## Conclusions

Americans concerned with human rights violations in Greece in the wake of the 1967 coup mobilized to protect Andreas Papandreou from execution, participated in fact-finding missions to reveal patterns of torture of Greek prisoners and worked to end US military assistance to the junta. These Americans were drawn to such efforts through their transnational connections to Greeks, such as Andreas, as well as a belief that the US should not support governments that torture their citizens. Their activism called into question one of the tenets of US foreign policy since the 1920s – that the US preferred reliable, stable allies. These activists challenged what David Schmitz has characterized as a 'lesser-of-two-evils approach to foreign policy'.<sup>76</sup> As the decade progressed, US support for military dictatorships in Brazil, Greece and Chile prompted further questions about the wisdom of US policy.<sup>77</sup> Historian Thomas Field has argued that militarization was a 'hallmark' of the global 1960s; with military regimes often came repression, which helps explain why there was increasing attention to human rights in the decade.<sup>78</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Few Greek-Americans were prominent voices in the collection of non-governmental and congressional efforts to influence Greek practices of US policy towards Greece.
- 2 Non-state actors have always played influential roles in shaping US foreign relations, but changes in the 1960s opened space for them to have an enhanced role in policymaking.
- 3 Adam Garfinkle, 'The Nadir of Greek Democracy' in Daniel Pipes and Adam Garfinkle (eds.), *Friendly Tyrants: An American Dilemma* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991): 71. See, for example, Austin, Texas, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, White House Central Files-Name File (hereafter LBJ Library, WHCF), Box 142, AMMO, Hans Göran Franck to Johnson, 4 August 1966; and New York, New York Public Library, International League for the Rights of Man (hereafter ILRM), Box 36, US Vietnam Correspondence, 1964–66, 'Human Rights in the Vietnam War', 21 April 1968.
- 4 St. Paul, Minnesota, Minnesota Historical Society, Donald M. Fraser Papers (hereafter Fraser Papers), Box 145.C.3.2 (F), Greece, 1967, Fraser, et al. to Rusk, 17 November 1967.
- 5 Fraser Papers, Box 145.C.3.2 (F), Greece, 1967, Macomber to Fraser, 10 May 1967; LBJ Library, WHCF, CO Box 36, CO 94 Greece 1/9/66–5/10/67, Rostow to Fraser, 3 May 1967; and *ibid.*, Fraser to Johnson, 28 April 1967.
- 6 Fraser Papers, Box 149.C.13.4 (F), 5/30/79 – Human Rights Conference for the Fed Bar Association.
- 7 Fraser Papers, Box 149.G.9.2 (F), Trip to Greece – May 1968, Memorandum, n.d.
- 8 Fraser Papers, Box 149.G.9.2 (F), Trip to Greece – May 1968.
- 9 Fraser Papers, Box 151.H.3.2 (F), *Congressional Record*, Donald Fraser, 27 May 1968.
- 10 San Jose, California, San Jose State University, Don Edwards Papers (hereafter Edwards Papers), Series I: Legislative Files, Box 73, Folder 38, Press Release, 2 October 1967; and Box 74, 'A Sad Easter in Greece', Folder 24.
- 11 Edwards Papers, Series I: Legislative Files, Box 74, Folder 35, Members of Congress to Rusk, 17 November 1967.
- 12 Edwards Papers, Series I: Legislative Files, Box 74, Folder 24, Edwards to Johnson, 27 September 1968.
- 13 Fraser Papers, 152.L.9.3 (B), Press Releases 1968, Press Release, 22 July 1968.
- 14 Springfield, Illinois, Illinois State Historical Society, Paul Findley Papers (hereafter Findley Papers), Departmental File, Box 51, State, 1969, Findley to Rogers, 13 October 1969.
- 15 Fraser Papers, Box 151.3.2 (F), Greece, 1967–68, Fraser to Matsas, 23 July 1968.
- 16 Fraser Papers, Box 151.H.3.3 (B), Greek Committee, 1968, Lyons to Colleague, n.d.
- 17 Helen Conispoliatis, 'Facing the Colonels: British and American Diplomacy towards the Colonels' Junta in Greece, 1967–1970', PhD Thesis (University of Leicester, 2003): 180.
- 18 Fraser Papers, Box 151.I.11.6 (F), Greece: U.S. Committee for Democracy, 1969, Fraser to Reuther, 6 January 1969.
- 19 Fraser Papers, Box 149.G.9.2 (F), Trip to Greece – May 1968, US Committee for Democracy in Greece, 'Greece – A Call to Conscience'; and Barbara Keys, 'Anti-Torture Politics: Amnesty International, the Greek Junta, and the Origins of the Human Rights Boom in the United States' in Akira Iriye, Petra Goedde and William I. Hitchcock (eds.), *The Human Rights Revolution: An International History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012): 201–21.
- 20 Edwards Papers, Series I: Legislative Files, Box 41, Folder 2, Minnesotans for Democracy and Freedom Newsletter #5, 2 November 1967.
- 21 Fraser Papers, Box 151.H.3.2 (F), Greece, 1967–68.
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## 12 The Becketts vs. the Colonels

### A study in the micro-evolution of global human rights activism in the 'long 1960s'

*Konstantina Maragkou*

Henrik Liljegren, an eminent Swedish diplomat, emphatically asserted that 'seldom has the engagement of two private individuals had such an influence on a major issue of European democracy and human rights'.<sup>1</sup> He was referring to Jim and Maria Becket, the husband and wife, who gained international acclaim for being 'instrumental in the international legal fight against the Greek Colonels', earning them accolades like 'legend', 'hero' and activist 'in the best sense of the word'.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, a plethora of findings from my current research on the legacies of the Greek Colonels' human rights transgressions thoroughly corroborate such statements.

This chapter will therefore aim to fully account for the phenomenal impact of these two fierce resisters and their metamorphosis into champions of global human rights advocacy. It will map out their lobbying actions and analyse how their unceasing, grassroots mobilization and transnational connections enabled them to make a critical contribution to the emboldening of the international human rights regime, with specific reference to torture. Ultimately, by highlighting the key importance of these two non-state actors, it will provide a case study of the bottom-up evolution of developments in the realm of international human rights protection, which underpinned the global repercussions of the Greek Colonels' era.

Following the recent, mushrooming interest in the genealogy of human rights, a great deal of attention has focused on the effect of campaigns against the illiberal Latin American regimes that emerged in the 1970s. Many scholars have pinpointed Latin American countries and Chile, in particular, as providing the 'breakthrough of human rights as the lingua franca of transnational activism',<sup>3</sup> and initiating a form of transnational advocacy.<sup>4</sup> Whilst these viewpoints hold undeniable merit, there is also ample evidence garnered by my current research pointing to the fact that the human rights struggle against the Greek Colonels was a precursor to the development of the transnational human rights movement of the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>5</sup> In addition, only a handful of studies have so far examined the vital role played by specific individuals, those 'who transition between the local and the global' – the 'rooted cosmopolitans', as Sidney Tarrow called them.<sup>6</sup> This chapter will add a significant missing segment to the emerging jigsaw.