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Athens trial men may face firing squad

from DAVID TONGE

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THE Greek Prime Minister's last-minute attempt to dictate to the Athens Court what verdict it should return in the climax to the dramatic trial of nine leaders of the Democratic Defence has created an obvious dilemma for the judges.

In his extraordinary intervention, Colonel Papadopoulos told the judges that they would be regarded as 'criminals' if they allowed humanitarian feelings to influence them.

This is seen here as the clearest possible indication that the Greek military junta will be satisfied with nothing less than the death sentence for at least Professor Karageorgeas, and perhaps some of the other leading defendants who include a second professor, a journalist, a general, an economist, an electrical engineer and two lawyers.

There is widespread feeling here that the trial will result in some of the accused being condemned to the firing-squad, thus creating the regime's first martyrs.

While this will produce a deep revulsion among the regime's opponents the trial has helped to make it clear that active resistance inside Greece is no longer possible and that major changes can only be initiated from outside the country. Here lies the crucial importance of the long-awaited recommendations which the American Ambassador, Mr Henry S. Tasca, has finally sent to Washington.

Through its control of arms supplies and its international prestige, America alone is thought to have the power to influence the Colonels. But the Pentagon and Administration are at complete odds as to whether they should use it.

Great Patriot

So far the Pentagon has been concerned only with Greece's strategic importance. But increasingly the State Department is realising that more is at stake. Domestically, the Administration cannot afford further clashes with the Senate, whose policies are moving in line with mounting public antagonism to the Colonels. The recent trials have worsened this, and any death sentences would bring it to a head.

A highly confidential report, probably written in the Embassy, analyses at length America's dilemma and says that since Mr Tasca arrived in Athens in January the Greek Government has done its best to present the US as aligned with the regime. But the report suggests that in the last analysis this is aimed at discrediting the US to the Greek public. It adds: 'Once this is achieved Papadopoulos will make a sudden turnabout and, in an all-out bid for the popularity he so badly needs, attack the US, the Western Alliance and NATO.'

'By playing the role of the Great Patriot, he might well get the popular backing he now lacks. Everybody who knew him before the coup referred to him as the Greek Nasser. Whatever has happened to his Nasserite tendencies? Why is the Pentagon so sure he will not putt Greece out of NATO?'

In a clear call for a strong statement, the report says: 'The reason why American pressure has been so ineffectual in the past is because the regime knew that they had the Pentagon on their side and because US pressure was kept secret. Should it be decided to apply real pressure this must be given publicity. Only thus can public sympathy be regained.'

The report ends by claiming that if America decided that Papadopoulos would be the least of evils facing America in Greece, this would be catastrophic for American interests in this part of the world.

'But in such an event I hope that America will protect itself and tie Mr Papadopoulos completely to any bargain,' says the author of the report.

'He and his supporters are not merely in to grab for themselves what they can. In all honesty they consider themselves as the divine saviours of their country. Therein lies their danger. I would not accuse Mr Papadopoulos of bad faith—though I have yet to see an act of good faith on his part. I would accuse him of distorted faith and of not knowing that it is distorted.'