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# AN ANALYSIS OF THE ACTIVITIES AND GOALS OF ARMENIAN TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS BETWEEN 1973-1986

(1973-1986 YILLARI ARASINDA ERMENİ TERÖR ÖRGÜTLERİNİN FAALİYET VE HEDEFLERİNİN ANALİZİ)

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**Abstract:** *The terrorism that was perpetrated by Armenian radicals in the past was the result of a hostile Armenian nationalism based upon anti-Turkish sentiment, which was used to attain short-term political gains. Transnational Armenian terrorist activities reached their zenith when these activities turned out to be a grave threat to multiple countries rather than to certain countries that Armenian terrorists had targeted throughout history. Particularly, terrorist organizations of the Armenian radicals carried out more than 300 terrorist acts in 20 different countries in less than 20 years. Between 1973 and 1986, such organizations earned a reputation as the most dangerous and notorious groups carrying out a series of assassinations of Turkish diplomats as well as their family members and third parties not involved in Turkish-Armenian ethnic tensions. This academic report aims to present a comprehensive analysis by taking the goals and results of the violent activities of Armenian terrorist organizations between 1973 and 1986 as its main focus.*

**Keywords:** *Terrorism, Armenian radicals, ASALA, JCAG, Turkish Diplomats*

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**Öz:** Geçmişte Ermeni radikalleri tarafından gerçekleştirilen terörizm, kısa vadeli siyasi kazanımlar elde etmek için kullanılan Türk karşıtlığına dayalı düşmanca bir Ermeni milliyetçiliğinin sonucuydu. Ulusötesi Ermeni terör faaliyetleri, bu faaliyetlerin Ermeni teröristlerin tarih boyunca hedef aldıkları belirli ülkeler yerine birden fazla ülke için ciddi bir tehdit haline gelmesiyle zirveye ulaşmıştır. Özellikle Ermeni radikallerin terör örgütleri 20 yıldan kısa bir süre içinde 20 farklı ülkede 300'den fazla terör eylemi gerçekleştirmiştir. Bu örgütler 1973-1986 yılları arasında Türk diplomatların yanı sıra aile üyelerine ve Türk-Ermeni etnik gerilimiyle ilgisi olmayan üçüncü şahıslara yönelik bir dizi suikast gerçekleştiren en tehlikeli ve kötü şöhretli gruplar olarak ün kazanmıştır. Bu akademik rapor, Ermeni terör örgütlerinin 1973-1986 yılları arasındaki şiddet eylemlerinin hedeflerini ve sonuçlarını ana odağına alarak kapsamlı bir analiz sunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Terörizm, Ermeni radikaller, ASALA, JCAG, Türk Diplomatlar

## **1. Overview of the Terrorism Perpetrated by Armenian Radicals**

The terrorism that was perpetrated by Armenian radicals was the consequence of a hostile Armenian nationalism that relied on an anti-Turkish sentiment utilized for short-term political gains.<sup>1</sup> Transnational Armenian terrorist activities reached their zenith in the last quarter of the 20th century when it turned out to be grave threat to diverse countries instead of only specific countries targeted by Armenian terrorists throughout the history. In particular, Armenian terrorist organizations conducted more than 300 terrorist acts in 20 different countries within less than 20 years. These were highly violent and hateful acts which resulted in substantial bloodshed and pain.

Armenian radicals engaged in more terrorist activities and gave a rise to more casualties than all other terrorist groups associated with “nationalist terrorism” from specific Middle Eastern and Western European countries operating concurrently, including violent Palestinian groups, ETA, and IRA.<sup>2</sup> Between 1973 and 1986, Armenian terrorist organizations acquired a worldwide reputation as the most pernicious, violent, and notorious groups in existence through carrying out a series of grisly assassinations of Turkish diplomats as well as members of their families together with several non-involved third parties murdered in the course of 188 terrorist acts around the world.<sup>3</sup> In total, 31 Turkish diplomats and their immediate family members were killed by extremists from the Armenian community in different countries around the world since the first Armenian terrorist incident, which took the lives of Turkish Consul General of Türkiye in Los Angeles Mehmet Baydar and his assistant Vice Consul Bahadır Demir in Santa Barbara, California/United States on 27 January.<sup>4</sup>

At least two main extremist Armenian terrorist organizations known for their deadly and carefully planned operational tactics, namely Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) and its Dashnak-affiliated rival, the Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide (JCAG), targeted and killed about 90 individuals and injured hundreds more through bombing attempts and brutal attacks that spanned Western Europe, North America, the Middle East and the South Pacific in the period from 1973 to 1986.<sup>5</sup> In

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1 Christopher Gunn, “The Rise and Fall of ASALA and Armenian Revolutionary Federation Terrorism,” *Review of Armenian Studies*, no. 31 (2015): 133.

2 Oleg Kuznetsov, *The History of Transnational Armenian Terrorism in the Twentieth Century: A Historico-Criminological Study* (Berlin: Verlag Dr. Koster, 2016), p. 96.

3 Michael M. Gunter, “Armenian Terrorism: A Reappraisal,” *Journal of Conflict Studies* 27, no. 2 (2007): 109.

4 Christopher Gunn, “Intra-or International Violence? The Origins of Armenian Terrorism,” *Review of Armenian Studies*, no. 25 (2012): 104.

5 Christopher Gunn, “The Rise and Fall of ASALA and Armenian Revolutionary Federation Terrorism,” *Review of Armenian Studies*, no. 31 (2015): 133.

particular, the Armenian terrorists committed more than 160 bombing attacks in crowded public places like airports, city squares, and bazaars in order to inflict utmost damage. Such bombing campaigns of the Armenian radicals destroyed more than 160 properties in different parts of the world, which cost almost a billion US dollars in damages. According to the reports of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) of the United States, Armenian terrorist activities accounted for 24.1 percent of entire terrorist incidents within the US between the years 1980 and 1986.<sup>6</sup> In spite of adopting an indiscriminate attitude towards the ethnicity of their victims by the end of their operations, these Armenian terrorist groups chiefly concentrated their violence on ethnic Turks, their business interests, and assets of the Turkish government.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, violent terrorist actions were directed at Turkish embassies and consulates, Turkish and other airline desks, and Turkish demonstrations in abroad so as to draw attention of international society to the long-lasting Armenian Question.<sup>8</sup>

The Armenian terrorist groups concentrated their activities and desires on three aims. Initially, they wanted to take revenge on the Republic of Türkiye owing to 1915 Events or the “Armenian Genocide” during which 1.5 million Ottoman Armenians lost their life according to the Armenian thesis. Secondly, they had an objective of compelling the present Turkish Republic to acknowledge that the ethnic strife in Eastern Anatolia in 1915 was a genocide by the Young Turk government against the Armenians during the Ottoman period. In that sense, they demanded official recognition of responsibility for the alleged pogroms, which Turkish authorities persistently rejected.<sup>9</sup> Thirdly; as an emotional demand, they aimed to push Turkish authorities to pay reparations for the families of the alleged genocide victims, and make compensations through returning lands in Eastern Anatolia that were said to be populated by Ottoman Armenians before.<sup>10</sup>

These are historical claims that are unconditionally admitted as true not solely by Armenian groups, but also by the considerable part of Western European and North American public opinion. That was the motive behind the terrorism of the Armenian radicals, including specifically killing guiltless diplomats

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6 Ergün Kırhkovalı, Armenian Terrorism in America and Turkish-Americans, interview by Erkan Demirağcı, *Tarih ve Günce*, June 20, 2018.

7 Gunn, *The Origins of Armenian Terror*, 104.

8 Ulf Björklund, “Armenia Remembered and Remade: Evolving Issues in a Diaspora,” *Ethnos* 58, no. 3-4 (January 1993): 347.

9 Ariel Merari, “Terrorism as a Strategy of Insurgency,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 5, no. 4 (December 1993): 236.

10 Eldad Ben Aharon, “Superpower by Invitation: Late Cold War Diplomacy and Leveraging Armenian Terrorism as a Means to Rapprochement in Israeli-Turkish Relations (1980–1987),” *Cold War History*, July 4, 2018, 5.

and many others.<sup>11</sup> In short; between the years 1973-1986, Armenian and pro-Armenian terrorist circles instrumentalized “terrorism” as a means of propaganda to bring the genocide allegations to the international public opinion. After noticing the positive reaction to the escalation of violence as well as the emergence of advantageous international circumstances, Armenian extremist groups endorsed terror as an instrument to attain their chief political objectives. It appears that they were exceedingly successful in advertising their claims through terrorist acts. Once the world public opinion was informed, this situation facilitated the parliaments of various countries to make decisions recognizing the genocide discourse.

ASALA and JCAG managed to operate for over a decade as they were capable of maintaining international activities owing to unwavering assistance of sympathizers in the Armenian Diaspora for terrorist acts that killed ethnic Turks. In other words, Armenian terrorism possessed potential international networks wherever Armenians dwelled.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, assaults on Turkish diplomats around the world did not impede their struggle for publicity (in fact, it boosted their publicity on many occasions), and the arrested terrorists did not encounter any serious prosecution.<sup>13</sup> In that context, the countries where the Armenian terrorist attacks took place neglected that these events possessed a political nature, and thereby they treated them as an ordinary criminal acts. Specifically, unless they targeted non-Turkish individuals, Western countries did not regard ASALA and JCAG as grave threats. What is more concerning is that while Turkish people suffered from the terrorism of the Armenian radicals, it was these Armenians and their supporters who portrayed themselves as victims. Hereby, international assistance was directed towards the Armenians who made their voice heard by means of terrorism.<sup>14</sup>

In particular, it has been asserted that radical Armenian terrorism may have a Soviet affiliation, purportedly in response to Türkiye’s alignment with the Western bloc. A number of foreign observers also subscribed to this conspiratorial perspective on terrorism, suggesting that Türkiye had fallen victim to a state-sponsored terrorist campaign orchestrated by the Soviet Union. According to Turkish military, the terrorists were trained in neighboring Arab nations and Bulgaria, with the Soviets overseeing the entire

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11 Justin McCarthy, “Armenian Terrorism: History as Poison and Antidote,” in *International Terrorism and the Drug Connection* (Ankara: Ankara University Press, 1984), p. 86.

12 Michael M. Gunter, “Transnational Sources of Support for Armenian Terrorism,” *Journal of Conflict Studies* 5, no. 4 (1985): 47.

13 Sadi Çaycı, “Terrorism and Asymmetric Threat: Activities against Turkey, from the Beginning of the 20th Century to the Present (Armenian Terror Activities and PKK Terror Organization Activities since 1915),” *Review of Armenian Studies*, no. 18 (2008): 95.

14 Deniz Altınbaş, “The ‘Armenian Question’ in European Union Institutions,” *Review of Armenian Studies*, no. 23 (2011): 158.

process.<sup>15</sup> The objective of this campaign was believed to be the destabilization of Türkiye to such an extent that its credibility as an ally would be called into question by NATO and the United States.<sup>16</sup> ASALA, which developed amicable connections with Moscow, was likely among numerous terrorist organizations endeavoring to undermine the stability of Türkiye, and it is plausible that they received clandestine assistance from the Soviet Union.<sup>17</sup> The assistance provided encompassed a range of activities, such as imparting training to terrorists, supplying arms through the global illicit arms trade, and extending both direct and indirect support. Especially, ASALA terrorists received covert assistance through training from the Soviet intelligence service KGB, while Syria provided protection and support to the terrorists due to long-standing political conflicts with Türkiye dating back to the accession of Hatay in 1939. Furthermore, Greek Cypriots also covertly supported terrorists following Türkiye's intervention in Cyprus in 1974.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, the fact that Western countries were hesitant to address the terrorism of Armenian radicals did not lead to suspicions about their sponsorship of these groups. On the contrary, their willingness to embrace an open society and democratic ideals was viewed as the main reason for their tolerance towards terrorist activities occurring within their own borders.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the said countries altered their posture once the Armenian terrorist activities started to harm non-Turkish individuals, especially after the indiscriminate violent actions of ASALA.

For instance, ASALA retaliated against France and Switzerland as the governments of these two countries captured its militants after they committed terrorist attacks, particularly after the 1983 Orly Airport attack.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, the Armenians residing in Türkiye, who had no contacts with these terrorist actions, were fearful of being caught in the middle of their fellow Armenian nationals living in the Diaspora and a shocked Turkish public. One of the tragic expressions of this depressive mood was the self-immolation of Artin Penik, a Turkish Armenian residing in Istanbul, as a protest against the atrocities of ASALA.<sup>21</sup>

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15 Sabri Sayari, "Political Violence and Terrorism in Turkey, 1976–80: A Retrospective Analysis," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no. 2 (March 9, 2010): 206.

16 Sayari, op. cit., 206.

17 Gunter, *Transnational Sources of Support for Armenian Terrorism*, 37.

18 Burak Kürkçü, "The Question of State-Sponsored Terrorism: Investigation of ASALA and JCAG in the Light of Available CIA Documents," *Insight Turkey* 23, no. 2 (June 10, 2021): 268.

19 Kürkçü, op. cit., 272.

20 Kürkçü, op. cit., 272.

21 Baskın Oran, "The Reconstruction of Armenian Identity in Turkey and the Weekly Agos," *Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*, no. 37 (2006): 128.

Nonetheless, Armenian terrorist organizations had actually no chance of attaining their publicly expressed objectives except for bringing the genocide claims to the attention of the international public as well as testing Türkiye's capacity. Contrary to their claims, the Turkish government was not in a position to modify its thesis on the Armenian Question, and the likelihood of violating the territorial integrity of Türkiye was implausible. Eventually, the terrorism of the Armenian radicals started to fade away in the second half of the 1980s when inter-group strife broke out between the two major terrorist organizations; the resulting violence decimated their members.<sup>22</sup>

## **2. Terrorist Organizations Established by the Armenian Radicals**

Armenian radicals utilized the names of diverse front organizations in conducting their terror operations.<sup>23</sup> In spite of multitude of organizational titles, there appears to have been solely two major terrorist organizations, namely ASALA and JCAG that was re-labelled as the "Armenian Revolutionary Army (ARA)" in 1983 (the decision to rename JCAG as ARA was driven by the realization that they were losing their youthful and proactive members to the more popular and highly energetic ASALA terrorist group).<sup>24</sup> In 1975, they were established in Beirut during the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War.<sup>25</sup> Both organizations started to assassinate Turkish diplomats and bombard facilities of the Turkish Republic, initially in Europe. Later on, their violent activities spread into North America and the Middle East before conducting more sophisticated assaults including hostage-taking and hijacking.<sup>26</sup>

ASALA was the first terrorist structure established during the latest wave of Armenian radical aggression. Possessing a leftist leaning, it portrayed the Armenian issue through a Marxist point of view. Furthermore, ASALA acquired a reputation as an exceedingly relentless terrorist organization. Being organized in the conventional terrorist cell structure, militants of ASALA seemed to have a capacity to access quite advanced arsenal, including anti-tank missiles and Soviet-made rifles and explosives. Besides, they were not short on financial resources as well as safe houses thanks to staunch auxiliaries in the Armenian Diaspora.<sup>27</sup> Through utilizing several different names,

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22 Gunn, *The Rise and Fall of ASALA and Armenian Revolutionary Federation Terrorism*, 133.

23 Erich Feigl, *A Myth of Terror: Armenian Extremism, Its Causes and Its Historical Context* (Freilassing: Edition Zeitgeschichte, 1986), p. 121.

24 Michael M. Gunter, *Armenian History and the Question of Genocide*, First Edition (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 63.

25 Björklund, *op. cit.*, 347.

26 Gunn, *The Origins of Armenian Terror*, 107-108.

27 Paul Wilkinson, "Armenian Terrorism," *The World Today* 39, no. 9 (1983): 346.

ASALA strived to produce an impression of a broad spectrum of engagement within the worldwide Armenian community to influence both the international public as well as their fellow Armenian nationals. Without doubt, the usage of so diverse organizational titles also aimed to complicate the maneuvers of counter-terrorist forces.<sup>28</sup>

In its endeavor to seize the leadership of the Armenian Diaspora, ASALA strived to correlate their cause with historical Armenian figures. For instance, some operations of the organization were named after (in)famous revolutionary Armenians such as Andranik Ozanian and Shahan Natalie. Besides, Gourgen Yanikian, who murdered two Turkish Diplomats in Santa Barbara in 1973, was regarded as the spiritual leader by ASALA militants.<sup>29</sup> Most importantly; as expressed by its leader Hagop Hagopian, ASALA attacked both verbally and practically not only its principal foe Türkiye, but also a number of states and organizations that hindered activities of the organization. For instance, after it undertook the responsibility for the assassination of the Turkish diplomat Galip Özmen and his 14-years daughter Neslihan Özmen in Athens in 1980, ASALA explicitly declared that their enemy was the Turkish government, NATO, and also reactionary Armenian forces.<sup>30</sup> With respect to ASALA's contacts with Europe, France was the top country in giving considerable support to the terrorist organization. The motive underlying was related to high number of Armenians residing in France. Besides, Greece not only safeguarded small units of Armenian terrorists, but also provided direct financial resources to their organizations. Additionally, there were firm contacts between ASALA and PKK terrorist organization for a long time. Especially, the capture of ASALA militants while they were among PKK ranks and the operation of a PKK representation office in Yerevan are known facts.<sup>31</sup>

Additionally, one Armenian terrorist organization remained secretive, namely the "New Armenian Resistance (NAR)". According to statements based on reports, NAR was an organizational title utilized by ASALA militants when they organized assaults on Soviet targets. The terrorist acts associated with NAR seem to have started with a 1977 explosion in an underground station of Moscow. Particularly, on 30 January 1980, NAR released a statement to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the execution of three Soviet-Armenian dissidents involved in the 1977 Moscow underground bombing. The central message conveyed in the declaration emphasized the importance of national independence, national sovereignty, and territorial integrity in a

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28 Michael M. Gunter, "Contemporary Armenian Terrorism," *Terrorism* 8, no. 3 (January 1986): 221.

29 Gunter, *Armenian Terrorism: A Reappraisal*, 117.

30 Gunter, *Contemporary Armenian Terrorism*, 222.

31 Altınbaş, *op. cit.*, 222-223.

reunified, independent, and socialist Armenia, rejecting any affiliation with either NATO or the Warsaw Pact. Hence, the Soviet oppression, which had an anti-Armenian character, was not ignored by NAR, as it had a profound impact on the patriotic individuals living in Soviet Armenia.<sup>32</sup> After the 1977 event, NAR committed 14 terrorist attacks, the last of which took place in 1982. NAR claimed responsibility for the bombings that occurred on 24 April 1982, in Federal Republic of Germany, targeting a Turkish store in Dortmund and a Turkish bank in Cologne. These were the final two attacks attributed to NAR, which was operating under a slightly modified name “New Armenian Resistance for the Independence of Armenia”. It is probable that individuals who shared a similar background as NAR eventually joined ASALA, even if only for a temporary period.<sup>33</sup> Throughout this period, the ASALA agenda likely remained of utmost importance.<sup>34</sup>

On the other hand, JCAG as a right-wing and ultranationalist terrorist organization is assessed to be the secret militant wing of one of the primary and most powerful Armenian political parties, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), or shortly the Dashnaks, whose origins traces back to 1890. The Dashnaks desired the re-establishment of independent and non-communist Armenia as well as the compensation for the alleged massacres of Armenians conducted by Turks. Realizing the militant and potentially more favorable leftist ASALA would be more appealing than the right-wing ARF, leadership of the latter established JCAG as its militant branch to sustain its ranks and contend with ASALA for recruitment.<sup>35</sup> The first terrorist act of JCAG was the assassination of Daniş Tunalıgil, the Turkish Ambassador to Vienna, in October 1975, only months after the first terrorist act of ASALA in Beirut.<sup>36</sup> In contrast with ASALA, JCAG evidently refrained from other international terrorist networks and concentrated on solely Turkish targets. For instance, after it took the credit for the assassination of Kemal Arıkan as Turkish Consul General in Los Angeles in 1982, JCAG authorities proclaimed that their primary targets were Turkish diplomats and institutions.<sup>37</sup>

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32 Francis P. Hyland, *Armenian Terrorism: The Past, the Present, the Prospects* (United States: Westview Press, 1991), pp. 80-81.

33 Hyland, op. cit., p. 77.

34 Hyland, op. cit., p. 84.

35 Gunn, *The Origins of Armenian Terror*, 107-108.

36 Laura Dugan et al., “Sudden Desistance from Terrorism: The Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia and the Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide,” *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 1, no. 3 (November 2008): 235.

37 Gunter, *Contemporary Armenian Terrorism*, 227-229.

### 3. Goals of the Terrorist Organizations

In general, the goals of the terrorist organizations established by the Armenian radicals can be summarized as the “three R’s”; namely, recognition of the so called Armenian genocide of 1915, financial reparations from the Turkish Republic for the victims of the alleged genocide, and restoration of the “ancestral Armenian homeland”.<sup>38</sup> For an Armenian population dispersed over several countries in the world, the ancestral homeland accounted for territories in Eastern Anatolia which had been historically populated by Armenians (and also by Ottoman Muslims, a fact disregarded by Armenian radicals) until they were exposed to relocation by Ottoman forces during the First World War period.<sup>39</sup>

First of all, all of those extremist Armenian nationalists in the ranks of terrorist organizations shared the principal goal, which was taking revenge for the 1915 events. Even though all those allegedly responsible for the atrocities in the Ottoman Empire were dead, Armenian terrorist groups insisted that the existing Turkish establishment had to take the blame for the crimes of the past, acknowledge the guilt of their predecessors, and make compensations. Despite ideological differences between Marxist ASALA and right-wing JCAG, they were almost fully concordant in the goals they strived to attain through terrorism.

Nevertheless, the two organizations were diverged over the third goal, the restoration of lands. While the Dashnaks in JCAG seemed to have envisaged an independent Armenia in Eastern Anatolia, ASALA evidently desired to establish an independent and completely sovereign Armenian state that encompassed the entire historic lands of the ancient Armenian kingdom, including Armenian Soviet Republic and historically Armenian-populated territories in Eastern Anatolia.<sup>40</sup> In that context; as an anti-Western terrorist organization, ASALA had an objective of uniting the Armenian world with the Soviet Union, and thus it contemplated Armenia under the domination of the Soviet Union as a basis for the revolution.<sup>41</sup> Besides, the establishment of a socialist and revolutionary government was also envisioned. At the end of 1981, ASALA publicly declared its eight-point political program in which revolutionary violence was accepted as the primary method to realize the

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38 Gunter, *Contemporary Armenian Terrorism*, 220.

39 Dugan et al., *op. cit.*, 233.

40 Robert Nalbandov, “Irrational Rationality of Terrorism,” *Journal of Strategic Security* 6, no. 4 (December 2013): 99.

41 Keisuke Wakizaka and Gökçe Yılmaz, “Interpreting Relations between Armenian Nationalism, Marxism and the Armenian Apostolic Church,” *Van Yüzüncü Yıl University the Journal of Social Sciences Institute*, no. 55 (2022): 32.

restoration of Armenian lands.<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, the likelihood of violating the territorial integrity of the Republic of Türkiye, particularly along the broadest border of NATO with the Eastern Bloc during the climax of the Cold War was quite utopian.<sup>43</sup>

On the other hand, a more immediate, yet less promulgated objective of ASALA was to stimulate national awareness and action within the Armenian Diaspora. The obsession of Armenian nationalists with genocide allegations stemmed from this factor, as it became a primary driving force. Their main objective was to protect the Armenian identity, which was in danger of slowly disappearing, by highlighting the importance of “historical justice” and channeling their hostility towards Türkiye and its people. According to ASALA members, this awakening was necessary due to the perilous state of a “deep sleep” that the policies of the Dashnaks had led the Armenian people into. The intention of ASALA was to confront the existing Armenian elites, who were led by the Dashnaks and were allowing emigration and assimilation to take place. In connection to this, many Armenians have referred to assimilation as “white genocide.”<sup>44</sup> It is also noteworthy that ASALA sarcastically highlighted the apathy of the Dashnak leadership towards the Armenian Territorial Question, which was implied when they named their armed group the “Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide.”<sup>45</sup> Hence, in addition to representation, mobilization of Armenians everywhere was also a vital goal for the leadership of ASALA.<sup>46</sup>

#### **4. Chronological Analysis of Prominent Armenian Terrorist Activities between 1973-1986**

The vicious cycle of organized terrorism by Armenian radicals in the last quarter of the 20th century did not start with a group action. Rather; it started with the terrorist act of a single individual, which represented a kind of lone-wolf terrorism.<sup>47</sup> On 27 January 1973, Gourgen Yanikian, a 78-year-old Armenian residing in California/the US, offered Mehmet Baydar and Bahadır Demir, two members of the diplomatic staff of the Turkish Consulate in Los Angeles, to repatriate two rare paintings from Ottoman period, and thus he invited them to his room in the Biltmore Hotel in Santa Barbara, California.

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42 Gunter, *Armenian Terrorism: A Reappraisal*, 118.

43 Gunn, *The Rise and Fall of ASALA and Armenian Revolutionary Federation Terrorism*, 136.

44 Gunter, *Contemporary Armenian Terrorism*, 220.

45 Gunter, *Armenian History and the Question of Genocide*, p. 65.

46 Dugan et al., *op. cit.*, 233.

47 Clark McCauley, “Group Desistance from Terrorism: A Dynamic Perspective,” *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 1, no. 3 (November 2008): 290.

When the two unsuspecting Turkish diplomats accepted the invitation, and then entered to the hotel room, Yanikian shot and murdered them in an individual act of revenge.

When he was interrogated, Yanikian reportedly expressed that Ottoman forces had slaughtered his brother and more than 25 relatives in the 1915 events. According to Yanikian, he had been haunted by memories of his childhood in Eastern Anatolia during the early twentieth century and had nurtured a deep desire for revenge for many years. He was born in Erzurum in 1895, and his family narrowly escaped the “Hamidian Massacres” by fleeing to Kars. Eight years later, while returning to Erzurum with only his mother and older brother to retrieve family records and gold, Yanikian allegedly witnessed the murder of his twenty-year-old brother by two Turkish soldiers. In response to the outbreak of the First World War, Yanikian left his studies at Moscow and joined the Armenian irregulars in their fight against the Ottoman Empire. Serving under General Dro’s command in the Armenian Volunteers, Yanikian claimed to have personally witnessed the brutalities inflicted by the Turks, including the suffering of his own family members.<sup>48</sup> Hereby, his assassination of Turkish General Consul Baydar and Vice Consul Demir relied on retribution for the so-called Armenian genocide. In the course of subsequent trial, Yanikian endeavored to change his murder trial into a case for the 1915 events.<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile, the reaction of Armenians around the world to this assassination clearly indicated that there was a considerable base of support on the side of Armenian communities for aggression against ethnic Turks.<sup>50</sup>

In fact, Yanikian possessed a strange personality. Prior to his act of terrorism, he was reportedly ostracized by Armenian society and viewed as an outsider. Based on the FBI investigation and court transcripts, there were both local police and FBI records on Yanikian dating back to the early 1950s. He was described as a delusional and incoherent individual with disturbed sexual tendencies, financial difficulties, and a deep sense of humiliation. Furthermore, he had been involved in fraudulent activities throughout his life. In his last moments, it appears that Yanikian was desperately yearning for redemption and recognition.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, it is intriguing to observe the selective amnesia surrounding the uncomfortable truths about him, as well as the transformation of his image into that of a hero within the Armenian community following his assault on the Turkish diplomats. This significant

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48 Christopher Gunn, “Murder & Memory: The Curious & Intertwined Legacies of Two Armenian Assassins,” in *Türk-Ermeni Uyu mazlığı Üzerine Ömer Engin Lütem Konferansları 2019*, ed. Alev Kılıç (Ankara: Terazi Yayıncılık, 2020), p. 58.

49 Birsen Karaca, “Armenian Terror during the Change in the Perception of and Reaction towards Terrorism,” *Review of Armenian Studies*, no. 31 (2015): 217.

50 McCauley, op. cit., 290.

51 Gunn, *Murder & Memory: The Curious & Intertwined Legacies of Two Armenian Assassins*, p.59.

piece of information sheds light on the extent to which Armenian radicals were prepared to stretch their justifications for their deeds. Eventually, Yanikian incited the Armenian Diaspora to violently mobilize against the Turkish government and to kill its representatives. In that context, the general assumption was that Yanikian's violent act became a catalyst for the Armenian terrorist activities conducted by ASALA and JCAG over the ensuing decade.<sup>52</sup>

After their establishment in 1975, ASALA and JCAG embraced international terrorism so as to bring an attention to their claims.<sup>53</sup> Ironically; rather than targeting ethnic Turks, ASALA's first terrorist act in 1975 targeted the headquarters of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Beirut, an institution providing aid to Armenian refugees in Lebanon. Especially, ASALA blamed the WCC for impeding the Armenian Cause for ancestral homeland through urging Armenian youth to emigrate to the United States.<sup>54</sup>

Most importantly, the first five years of several operations conducted by ASALA and JCAG coincided with a period of worsening relations between Türkiye and the Western countries as well as deterioration of the Western publics' opinion of Türkiye chiefly because of Turkish military intervention in Cyprus in 1974.<sup>55</sup> In particular, the relationship between the United States and Türkiye was negatively affected by the Turkish military intervention. Unexpectedly, this event led to increased political support for Armenians, who received backing from many members of the US Congress. These lawmakers not only disseminated anti-Turkish sentiments but also actively advocated for the Armenian Cause. Furthermore, Armenians aligned themselves with the influential Greek lobby, which shared their strong opposition towards Türkiye, particularly concerning the Cyprus dispute. This collaboration greatly enhanced their political influence and power in Washington.<sup>56</sup>

A comprehensive report was prepared by Turkish authorities regarding the suspected link between Greek Cypriots and this issue. The report consists of brochures and media excerpts containing statements credited to Armenians and Greek Cypriots, which are believed to substantiate the accusation. One example is when the Greek Cypriot leader Archbishop Makarios expressed his backing for Armenian Patriarch Koren in August 1977, pledging to offer both material and moral support to the Armenians with the aim of raising global awareness about the Armenian issue.<sup>57</sup>

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52 Gunn, *The Origins of Armenian Terror*, 107.

53 Gunn, *The Rise and Fall of ASALA and Armenian Revolutionary Federation Terrorism*, 144.

54 McCauley, *op. cit.*, 290.

55 Gunn, *The Origins of Armenian Terror*, 108-109.

56 Gunn, *The Rise and Fall of ASALA and Armenian Revolutionary Federation Terrorism*, 144.

57 Gunter, *Transnational Sources of Support for Armenian Terrorism*, 44.

The first operation of JCAG was carried out on 22 October 1975 when Daniş Tunalıgil, Turkish Ambassador to Austria, was assassinated. Until 1984 when the assassinations of diplomats ceased, militants of JCAG-ARA had murdered 20 Turkish diplomats and their immediate family members, whereas ASALA took the responsibility for solely 8 diplomatic assassinations.<sup>58</sup> In June 1977; Taha Carım, Türkiye's Ambassador to Vatican City, was killed by an ASALA militant in the garden of his house.<sup>59</sup> On 2 June 1978, automobile of Zeki Kunalalp who was Turkish Ambassador to Spain at that time was attacked by Armenian terrorists in Madrid. As a result of the terrorist attack, his wife Necla Kunalalp and his brother-in-law retired Ambassador Beşir Balcıoğlu lost their lives at the scene. Besides, a heavily injured Antonio Torres, the Spanish chauffeur, died in the hospital. This was the first operation of Armenian terrorists against relatives of Turkish diplomats.<sup>60</sup>

In December 1978, ASALA carried out the first international terrorist attack when it bombed the Turkish Airlines desk in Geneva.<sup>61</sup> Between the fall of 1979 and the summer of 1983, frequency of Armenian terrorist acts targeting mainly ethnic Turks drastically increased. These terrorist acts occurred in 12 different cities around the world. Evidently, the political turmoil in Türkiye during that period urged Armenian terrorist organizations to escalate their activities. These terrorist organizations took advantage of the political turmoil in Türkiye at that time, as they were convinced that the unstable political situation in the country would improve the chances of their demands being fulfilled. Throughout that period; assassinations, armed attacks, and bombings took the life of 19 people including Turkish officials and their relatives as well as American, French, German, Italian, Swiss, and Yugoslav nationals. In that sense, Armenian terrorist groups even enlarged range of their activities, and started to target non-Turkish victims so as to attract attention to the Armenian Cause and to retaliate the capture of their militants by non-Turkish authorities.<sup>62</sup>

On 12 October 1979, 27-year-old medical student Ahmet Benler, the son of Turkish Ambassador to Netherlands Özdemir Benler, was murdered by Armenian terrorists in the Hague.<sup>63</sup> On 17 December 1980; Şarık Arıyak, Turkish Consul General to Sydney, and his guard Engin Sever were killed by two Armenian terrorists on their way to the consulate.<sup>64</sup>

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58 Gunter, *Armenian Terrorism: A Reappraisal*, 115.

59 Hazel Çağan, "Armenian Terrorism and the Turkish Press (1973-1984)" (MSc Thesis, Middle East Technical University (METU), 2013), 42.

60 Feigl, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

61 Gunn, *The Origins of Armenian Terror*, 111.

62 Gunn, *The Rise and Fall of ASALA and Armenian Revolutionary Federation Terrorism*, 145-146.

63 Feigl, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

64 Çağan, *op. cit.*, 64.

The zenith of ASALA's activities was the "Van Operation" on 24 September 1981 when four ASALA militants seized the Turkish Consulate in Paris, murdered its Turkish security guard, injured the consul, and took 56 people as captive. When four Armenian terrorists surrendered to French security forces after 16 hours, sympathy for them was high among French Armenians.<sup>65</sup>

On 28 January 1982; Hampig Sassounian and Krikor Saliba, two terrorists from JCAG, ambushed and assassinated Turkish Consul General in Los Angeles Kemal Arıkan while he was at traffic in Westwood, California/the US. Shortly after the assassination, JCAG telephoned the Washington Bureau of the Associated Press so as to claim the responsibility.<sup>66</sup> Following the murder of Arıkan, each month a terrorist act against the Turkish officials took place in various parts of the world from April until August. On 8 April 1982; as a result of armed attack by Armenian terrorists in Ottawa, Turkish Counselor for Commercial Affairs Kani Güngör was paralyzed. Subsequently; Orhan Gündüz, Turkish Honorary Consul in Boston, was assassinated on 4 May. Later on; on 7 June, Turkish Administrative Attaché Erkut Akbay and his wife Nadide Akbay were killed in Lisbon. After the assassination of these diplomats; for the first time, a Turkish Military Attaché, Colonel Atilla Altıkat was assassinated by JCAG-ARA militants in Ottawa on 27 August.<sup>67</sup>

Meanwhile, the Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 not only caused ASALA to lose its training bases in the country, but also caused it to lose PLO's support for the organization. On 7 August 1982; two ASALA militants, Levon Ekmekdschian and Zohrap Sarkisyan, opened gunfire in a crowded waiting room at Esenboga Airport of Ankara. While Ekmekdschian was apprehended and then sentenced to death, Turkish security forces shot and killed Sarkisyan in combat. As a result of this terrorist attack; 9 people lost their life and 72 others were wounded.<sup>68</sup>

Following this terrorist act, cleavage among the ASALA leadership occurred. A faction under the leadership of Monte Melkonian defended that operations should be confined to Turkish officials, whereas a faction led by Hagopian was willing to commit attacks on third parties. The contention gave a rise to violent inter-group rivalry that resulted with death of militants from both factions.<sup>69</sup>

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65 McCauley, *op. cit.*, 291.

66 Gunter, *Armenian Terrorism: A Reappraisal*, pp. 111-112.

67 Çagan, *op. cit.*, 73.

68 Feigl, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

69 McCauley, *op. cit.*, 291.

On 9 March 1983; Galip Balkar, Turkish Ambassador to Yugoslavia, was murdered by two JCAG militants in Belgrade.<sup>70</sup> As the Armenian terrorism intensified, endorsement for the Armenian Cause decreased while concern for the Turkish victims escalated.

On the side of the Europeans, it was the Orly Airport attack that triggered them to oppose Armenian terrorist acts. On 15 July 1983, a bomb placed by the ASALA militants was detonated at the Turkish Airlines desk at the Orly Airport outside of Paris. As a result of the bombing attack, eight people including four French citizens, two Turks, an American, and a Swede lost their life either because of explosion or severe injuries. Besides; approximately 60 others were injured, and considerable amount of them remained infirm. The massacre perpetrated by Armenian terrorists found a great coverage in the international media. After the chief of the ASALA in France, Varoujan Garabedian, was sentenced to life for the bombing, he confessed that their original intent was to detonate a bomb in the plane of Turkish Airlines during its flight to Istanbul, which would have resulted with more casualties.<sup>71</sup> The Orly Airport attack is not only regarded as an abnormal incident among Armenian terrorist activities, but also it is portrayed as almost the end of the Armenian terrorist activities.<sup>72</sup>

In particular, the terrorism of the Armenian radicals never displayed the nonchalant attitude against international reactions after the Orly incident. In that period, there appeared a close collaboration between the United States, Canada, and Türkiye on counter-terrorism measures targeted at ending Armenian terrorist activities. Even countries that were formerly hesitant to denounce this terrorism, such as France and the Soviet Union, altered their attitude, and thus they moved from sympathy to repression. Besides, Armenians residing Western countries started to speak out against activities of ASALA. The diaspora's view of ASALA and terrorism may have been shaped by Western values, and their financial interests could have been at risk due to growing Western suspicion and hostility towards Armenian radicals, leading to heightened police surveillance. While it is difficult to differentiate between the overall Western response and that of the Diaspora, it is clear that both groups became increasingly uncomfortable with ASALA's decision to carry out a violent attack like the one at Orly.<sup>73</sup> Especially, the Orly attack induced a repression from the French security forces as well as an outrage

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70 Feigl, op. cit., 132.

71 Christopher Gunn, "Secret Armies and Revolutionary Federations: The Rise and Fall of Armenian Political Violence, 1973-1993" (PhD Thesis, Florida State University, 2014), 267.

72 Maxime Gauin, "Remembering the Orly Attack," *Uluslararası Hukuk ve Politika* 7, no. 27 (2011): 114-115.

73 McCauley, op. cit., 237.

among French Armenians.<sup>74</sup> In addition to expressing their indignation towards ASALA's actions targeting innocent civilians, the Diaspora also exhibited a strong aversion towards the escalating ASALA attacks on other established Armenian organizations.<sup>75</sup> Thus, Armenian nationalists started to view ASALA's actions as conflicting with the Armenian Cause, and its continued existence posed a danger to the patriotic efforts of the Armenian people. As the Diaspora distanced themselves from ASALA, the organization quickly fell into disarray and experienced a decline.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, those countries that sustained contacts with ASALA and JCAG-ARA were clearly warned by the previously sympathetic group of states denouncing terrorist activities.

In spite of this atmosphere after the Orly incident, the Armenian Diaspora maintained its commitment to supporting political violence against Turks, which enabled Armenian terrorist organizations to carry on their violent activities for two more years.<sup>77</sup> On 28 March 1984, a series of organized attacks were perpetuated against Turkish officials in Tehran. Two Armenian terrorists shot and injured Master Sergeant Ismail Pamukçu, who was assigned to the office of the Turkish Military Attaché in Iran, and First Secretary Hasan Servet Öktem.<sup>78</sup> On 20 November 1984; Evner Ergun, the Deputy Director for the UN Center for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, was assassinated in Vienna. On 12 March 1985, JCAG-ARA realized its one last attack in Ottawa. Three heavily armed Armenian militants raided the Turkish Embassy in Ottawa and murdered Claude Brunelle, the Canadian security guard, during the attack. Thanks to bravery of Brunelle, Turkish Ambassador Coşkun Kırca managed to escape.<sup>79</sup> On 28 November, French security forces captured notorious Armenian terrorist Melkonian in Paris. In the safe house of Melkonian, French authorities confiscated machine guns, explosives, and time schedule of Turkish ships' visit to ports in France. Remarkably, they also seized a picture of Adnan Bulak, Turkish Ambassador to France, and this gave a rise to speculation that Ambassador Bulak may have been the victim of next assassination.<sup>80</sup> By 1987, violent activities of Armenian terrorist organizations was almost zero.<sup>81</sup>

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74 Martha Crenshaw, "How Terrorism Declines," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 3, no. 1 (March 1991): 86.

75 McCauley, op. cit., 243.

76 McCauley, op. cit., 244.

77 Gunn, *The Rise and Fall of ASALA and Armenian Revolutionary Federation Terrorism*, 146.

78 Feigl, op. cit., p. 133.

79 Gunter, *Armenian Terrorism: A Reappraisal*, 115.

80 Feigl, op. cit., p. 138.

81 McCauley, op. cit., 291.

Ultimately; between 1973-1986, Türkiye experienced a significant loss of its diplomatic personnel as a result of the Armenian terrorist attacks, making it one of the most victimized nations globally. Many Turkish diplomats and third parties including civilian ethnic Turks and also foreigners were murdered at the hands of the Armenian radicals. The extremist Armenians' aim was to pressure Türkiye into acknowledging the so-called genocide, but this strategy proved counterproductive as it only intensified the Turkish public's resentment and made the country more resistant to Armenian demands. Even though the terror campaign succeeded in drawing attention to the Armenian cause, it ultimately failed to achieve its intended objective of compelling Türkiye to accept responsibility for the alleged genocide.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident that Armenian terrorist activities are lethal and secretive examples of contemporary international terrorism. In a short time, Armenian terrorists managed to bring the Armenian Cause to the attention of international public opinion through instrumentalization of terrorism, which peaceful and legitimate Armenian organizations could not accomplish.<sup>82</sup> Meanwhile, persistent pressures from impenitent Armenian Diaspora actors clearly hindered the condemnation of terrorism of the Armenian radicals in international arena. Consequently, indifference of Western countries to this terrorism along with sympathy for the Armenian Cause became prevalent.

Despite the violence and bloodshed, Armenian terrorist organizations never realized their grand objectives. In other words, they could not manage to achieve their three major goals, namely recognition of the so-called Armenian genocide, reparations, and restoration of the claimed lands in Eastern Anatolia. Instead, the terrorism of the Armenian radicals created an intense increase in indiscriminate terrorist attacks against not only ethnic Turks, but also non-Turkish third parties between the years 1973-1986. In the pursuit of justice for the 1915 events; at least 90 people were murdered and hundreds more were injured. Their violent activities occupied the agenda of the governments of Türkiye, Western Europe, and North America for years. Over time, the terrorist activities of Armenian radicals during that period reinforced the "Turkish thesis on the Armenian Question." This thesis connected the planned terrorist attacks with the equally horrific massacres committed by Armenian revolutionary committees against innocent Turks living in Eastern Anatolia during the Ottoman era.<sup>83</sup>

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82 Gunter, *Contemporary Armenian Terrorism*, 243.

83 Doğan Gürpınar, "The Manufacturing of Denial: The Making of the Turkish 'Official Thesis' on the Armenian Genocide between 1974 and 1990," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 18, no. 3 (May 3, 2016): 222.

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