

THE RISE AND FALL OF ASALA AND ARMENIAN REVOLUTIONARY FEDERATION TERRORISM

(ASALA VE EDF TERÖRİZMİNİN
ORTAYA ÇIKIŞI VE ÇÖKÜŞÜ)

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Abstract: *Between 1973 and 1988, Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) and Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) waged a campaign of violence against Turkey and its citizens. These terrorist organizations killed approximately 90 individuals and wounded hundreds more through a combination of attacks that spanned North America, Europe, the Middle East and the south Pacific and targeted ethnic Turks, assets of the Turkish government, and Turkish business interests. By the early 1980s, these two organizations earned reputations as the most dangerous, savage and mysterious terrorist groups in existence. Armenian terrorism, however had virtually no chance of reaching its publicly stated goals. ASALA and the ARF demanded acknowledgement of the Armenian genocide; reparations for the families of the victims; and possession of eastern Anatolia. Contrary to their aims, the Turkish government was not going to revise their history, and the prospect of violating the territorial sovereignty of the Turkish Republic was inconceivable. Yet, Armenian terrorism thrived for over a decade before abruptly fading away in the second half of the 1980s. Making use of the primary documents now available, this work will analyze the reasons why ASALA and the ARF took up arms in 1975, how they sustained themselves, and why they suddenly disappeared. It will argue that Armenian terrorism was the end result of a policy of aggressive nationalism based on anti-Turkishness that was introduced in 1959 and used for short-term and local political gains. Recognizing the success of this new policy, the ARF continued to promote anti-Turkishness throughout 1960s and early 1970s. After witnessing the positive response to the increasing violence and the emergence of favorable international conditions, the ARF embraced violence as means to obtain their ultimate political goal: eastern Anatolia. At the very same time, three Armenian intellectuals and a young Armenian terrorist with experience in various Palestinian organizations were creating a new terrorist organization of their own, ASALA. ASALA and the ARF/JCAG operated for over a decade, and were able to sustain themselves because of the steadfast support of the Armenian diaspora for a terrorist campaign that killed Turks. The campaigns finally ended after the violence not only became an end in itself, but had turned the two groups against each other in an inter-group struggle that decimated their ranks.*

Keywords: *Cold War, Terrorism, Armenian Terrorism, Armenian Diaspora, Armenia, Armenian Revolutionary Federation, Dashnak, Melkonian, Tehlirian, Yanikian, ASALA, Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide*

Öz: 1973 ile 1988 seneleri arasında, ASALA ve Ermeni Devrimci Federasyonu (EDF) Türkiye ve vatandaşlarına karşı bir şiddet kampanyası sürdürmüştür. Bu terör örgütleri gerçekleştirdikleri saldırılarla –Kuzey Amerika, Avrupa, Orta Doğu ve güney Pasifik’i kapsayacak şekilde- yaklaşık olarak 90 kişiyi öldürmüş ve daha yüzlercesini de yaralamış ve etnik Türkleri, Türk hükümetinin mallarını ve Türk işyerlerini hedef almıştır. 1980’lerin başına gelindiğinde, bu iki örgüt var olan en tehlikeli, vahşi ve gizemli terör örgütü olma unvanını elde etmiştir. Ancak Ermeni terörünün alenen beyan ettiği hedefleri ulaşmasının neredeyse imkânsızdı. ASALA ve EDF sözde Ermeni soykırımın tanınmasını, mağdurların ailelerine tazminat ödenmesini ve doğu Anadolu’ya sahip olmayı talep ediyordu. Hedeflerinin aksine, Türk hükümetinin tarihini gözden geçirmeye niyeti yoktu ve Türkiye Cumhuriyetinin toprak bütünlüğünün ihlal edilmesi düşünülemezdi bile. Ancak Ermeni terörizmi, 10 seneden fazla bir süre içerisinde kuvvetlenerek varlığını devam etmiş, 1980’lerin ikinci yarısında sonra ise ansızın sönüp gitmiştir. Artık erişilebilir olan birincil kaynak niteliğindeki belgeler sayesinde bu makale; ASALA ve EDF’nin 1975’de neden silahlandıklarını, varlıklarını nasıl sürdürdüklerini ve bir andan neden ortadan kaybolduklarını inceleyecektir. Makale; Ermeni terörizminin 1959’da ortaya atılan, Türk karşıtlığı üzerine kurulu olan, bir saldırgan milliyetçilik politikasının sonucu olduğunu ve kısa dönemli ve yerer siyasi kazanımlar için kullanıldığını belirtecektir. Bu yeni politikanın başarısının farkına varan EDF, 1960’lar ve 1970’leirn başı boyunca Türk karşıtlığını teşvik etmeye devam etmiştir. Artan şiddete yönelik olumlu tepkilere ve uygun uluslararası koşulların ortaya çıkışına tanıklık eden EDF, esas siyasi hedefleri olan doğu Anadolu’yu elde etmek için şiddeti bir araç olarak benimsemiştir. Aynı sıralarda ise, üç Ermeni entelektüeli ve bir takım Filistin örgütlerinde tecrübe elde etmiş olan genç bir Ermeni terörist, kendileri için ASALA adında yeni bir terör örgütü kuruyorlardı. ASALA ve EDF/JCAG, 10 seneden uzun bir süre faaliyet gösterdiler ve Ermeni diasporasının Türkleri öldüren bir terör kampanyasına olan sebatkâr desteği sayesinde varlıklarını sürdürdüler. Bu terör kampanyası; uygulanan şiddet bir araçtan amaca dönüştüğünde ve iki grubun birbirine düşman hale geldiği ve mensuplarının karşılıklı olarak yok edilmesine sebep olan bir gruplar arası çatışma sonucunda son buldu.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Soğuk Savaş, terörizm, Ermeni terörü, Ermeni diasporası, Ermenistan, Ermeni Devrimci Federasyonu, EDF, Taşnaklar, Melkonian, Tehlirian, Yanikian, ASALA, Ermeni Soykırımı için Adalet Komandoları, JCAG*

Between 1973 and 1988, the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) and the armed wing of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), first as the Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide (JCAG) and later as the Armenian Revolutionary Army (ARA) led one of the most unique terrorist movements to emerge out of the eastern Mediterranean during the early 1970s. Their terrorists killed approximately 90 individuals and wounded hundreds more through a combination of assassinations, bombing campaigns and violent assaults that spanned North America, Europe, the Middle East and the south Pacific and targeted ethnic Turks, assets of the Turkish government, and Turkish business interests.

Before fading in the late 1980s, ASALA and the JCAG/ARA were linked to various militant Palestinian factions, as well as other international terrorist organizations, international narcotic trafficking, international extortion rings and even to the USSR, Libya, Syria, Greece and Cyprus.¹ In a geographical and temporal environment where the Armenian organizations had to compete with such groups as the Italian Red Brigades, the German Red Army Faction, the Irish Republican Army, the Basque ETA, and the PLO for media exposure and government attention, the Armenians managed extremely well. In the early 1980s, various U.S. government officials described Armenian terrorists as the most dangerous, savage and mysterious group in existence, and in 1981 they actually accounted for the highest number of documented international terrorist attacks in the world.²

The groups' most ignominious acts were the murders of Turkish diplomats and their immediate family members, which took 31 lives between 1973 and 1984, and included the 1980 assassination of the Turkish administrative attaché to Greece and his 14-year old daughter by Monte Melkonian, a native Californian and an honors graduate of the University of California, Berkeley.³ What made

1 For just a sampling see Andrew Corsun, "Armenian Terrorism: A Profile," in Department of State Bulletin Vol. 82, No. 2065 (August 1982), 35; Michael Gunter, "Pursuing the Just Cause of their People": A Study of Contemporary Armenian Terrorism (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986); Anat Kurz and Ariel Merari, *ASALA—Irrational Terror or Political Tool* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), 39-52; Paul Henze, *GOAL: Destabilization: Soviet Agitational Propaganda, Instability and Terrorism in NATO South* (Marina del Rey, CA: European Institute for Security Research, 1981), 36; Andrew Mango, *Turkey and the War on Terror: For Forty Years We Fought Alone* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 12; Marvin Howe, "Turks Blame Cypriots for Attacks in Name of Armenians," *New York Times*, February 28, 1980; E.J. Dionne, Jr., "Armenian Terror: Tangle of Motives," *New York Times*, August 1, 1983; and *Armenian Terrorism, Its Supporters, the Narcotic Connection, the Distortion of History* (Ankara, Turkey: Ankara University, 1984).

2 "Armenian Terrorists," January 10, 1983, CIA, CIA-RDP88-01070R000100520004-4; "Patterns of International Terrorism: 1981," *Department of State Bulletin* Vol. 82, No. 2065 (August 1982): 16; and Gunter, "Pursuing the Just Cause of their People", 1.

3 Bilal N. Şimşir, *Şehit Diplomatlarımız* (1973-1994), Vol. 2, (Ankara, Turkey: Bilgi Yayınevi, 2000), 967-968; and Markar Melkonian, *My Brother's Road: An American's Fateful Journey to Armenia*, (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 84.

the Armenian terrorist campaign unique, however, was neither the diversity nor barbarity of its ideologues, nor had the sudden and violent reemergence of the Armenian Question five decades after it been settled by the international community with the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, but that it had virtually no chance of reaching its publicly stated goals.

ASALA and the ARF wanted first, to force the Turkish government to acknowledge that the ethnic conflict in eastern Anatolia in 1915 was an Ottoman-sponsored and directed genocide against the Armenians; second, to pay reparations to the families of these victims; and third, to return the

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provinces of eastern Anatolia to the Armenians. Contrary to the aims and aspirations of the terrorists, however, Turkey's government was not going to revise their country's history to adopt the Armenian version of 1915. By extension, therefore, discussions over reparations were meaningless. Finally, the prospect of violating the territorial sovereignty of the Turkish Republic, especially along the longest NATO border with the USSR during the height of the Cold War, was quixotic at best. Yet, Armenian terrorism not only continued, it thrived for over a decade before abruptly fading away in the second half of the 1980s, despite an upsurge in terrorism at the exact same time.⁴

This essay will analyze earlier research on

ASALA and ARF terrorism before summarizing what can be learned from a much broader review of the sources and the context within which Armenian terrorists operated, along with recently declassified documents from the U.S. State Department, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

Historiography

The literature and historiography of the broader fields with which Armenian terrorism is tangential: the Armenian diaspora; the Armenian Question; terrorism and the more familiar terrorist organizations of the late 20th century: the IRA, PLO, ETA, and the Red Brigades; U.S.-Soviet détente; and Turkish political history; are more mature and developed. What does exist tends to

4 "Terrorism Review," CIA, Dec. 14 1989, CIA Doc No/ESDN: 0000258747, CREST.

focus on the glorification and analysis of the ARF's Operation Nemesis during the early 1920s. This operation was designed to facilitate the ARF's decision to assassinate a number of prominent members of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), the last political organization to hold real power in the Ottoman Empire, and the government of Azerbaijan who were held responsible for the Armenian massacres of 1915 and beyond.⁵

The literature in English on ASALA, the ARF's JCAG/ARA, and their campaign of violence against Turkey to achieve the recognition of the Armenian genocide, the lands of eastern Anatolia, and reparations for the massacres of 1915, is comprised of essentially two books, "*Pursuing the Just Cause of their People*": *A Study of Contemporary Armenian* by Michael Gunter and *ASALA—Irrational Terror or Political Tool* by Anat Kurz and Ariel Merari.⁶ Both of these books were written in the mid-1980s, before it was clear that their campaigns had essentially run their course, and were primarily concerned with the origins of the groups. This material, by necessity, relied heavily on an account published by Monte Melkonian, one of the former key members of ASALA, who broke with ASALA's leader and created his own faction. While the information does provide important insight, its content was obviously slanted towards Melkonian's version, or desired version, of events. Over the past two and a half decades, these two small books on the subject have been supplemented by only a handful of Turkish government publications, a conference publication, a few scholarly articles, many of these by Gunter, a picture book to accompany a documentary, and a dissertation.⁷ Research that

5 Edward Alexander, *A Crime of Vengeance: An Armenian Struggle for Justice* (New York: Free Press, 1991); Lindy V. Avakian, *Cross and the Crescent* (Phoenix, AZ: USC Press, 1989); Jacques Derogy, *Resistance and Revenge: The Armenian Assassination of the Turkish Leaders Responsible for the 1915 Massacres and Deportations* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1990); Arshavir Shiragian, *The Legacy: Memoirs of an Armenian Patriot* (Boston: Hairenik Press, 1976); Vartkes Yeghiayan, *The Case of Soghomon Tehlirian*, 2nd Edition (Glendale, CA: Center for Armenian Remembrance, 2006); and *The Case of Misak Torlakian* (Glendale, CA: Center for Armenian Remembrance, 2006). At least three new publications on Operation Nemesis are being released in the spring of 2015. See Marian Mesrobian MacCurdy, *Sacred Justice: The Voices and Legacy of the Operation Nemesis* (Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2015); Eric Bogosian, *Operation Nemesis: The Assassination Plot that Avenged the Armenian Genocide* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2015); and the graphic novel by Josh Blaylock, *Operation Nemesis: A Story of Genocide and Revenge* (Devil's Due Entertainment, 2015).

6 Gunter, "*Pursuing the Just Cause*,"; and Kurz and Merari, *ASALA*. An academic book in French and a recent publication in Dutch also exist. See Gaïdz Minassian, *Guerre et Terrorisme arméniens* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002); Paul Moussault and Barbara Sahakian, *ASALA, de Nemesis voor de Armeense genocide - Stadsguerrilla tegen Turkije (1975-1988)* (Netherlands: Papieren Tijger, 2015).

7 *Armenian Atrocities and Terrorism: Testimonies of Witnesses* (Washington, DC: Assembly of Turkish American Associations, 1997); Ankara University, *Armenian Terrorism*; 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," in *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* Vol. 1, No. 3 (November

intersects, or overlaps, this period of Armenian political violence in broader studies, either devotes minimal attention to the topic, replete with careless or intentional misinformation, downplays its significance, or, simply outright ignores it.⁸ It should be acknowledged, however that additional scholarship on ASALA and the JCAG/ARA in the twenty-five years since the organizations have ceased operations were most likely impeded by four factors.

First, unlike, for example, the Red Brigades and the Red Army Faction, none of the Armenian operatives from either organization who were ever captured or detained were part of the leadership group. Furthermore, the ASALA and JCAG/ARA members who were caught refused to cooperate publicly with the arresting authorities, and so provided very little insight or information into the organizations, gave no interviews after they were released, and none have published detailed memoirs in the intervening years.⁹ Second, the headquarters of both ASALA and the JCAG/ARA were located in Beirut from 1975 until, at least in the case of ASALA, the Israeli invasion in 1982. Even if the operational leadership of ASALA maintained their own records, which is doubtful, it is unlikely that they survived the chaos of civil war and their subsequent relocation to Damascus, later Athens, after the Israeli invasion. While the ARF does maintain the organization's archive in Boston, MA, it is rarely opened for researchers and doubtful that the activities of JCAG/ARA were documented.

The third factor is that most of primary documents of these organizations would be in Armenian, and scholars with Armenian language skills have avoided the topic. This is the case with the *Spurk* archive at the U.S. Library of Congress.

2008): 231-249; Erich Feigl, *A Myth of Terror Exposed: Armenian Extremism, its Causes and its Historical Context* (Freilassing, AT: Edition Zeitgeschichte, 1987); Michael M. Gunter, "Armenian Terrorism: A Reappraisal," *The Journal of Conflict Studies* Vol. XXVII, No. 2 (Winter 2007): 109 – 128; "Transnational Armenian Activism," in *Beyond the Soviet Union: the Fragmentation of Power*, edited by Max Beloff (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1997), 23-57; "Contemporary Armenian Terrorism," *Terrorism: An International Journal* Vol. 8, No. 3 (1986): 213-252; "Transnational Sources of Support for Armenian Terrorism," *Journal of Conflict Studies* Vol. V, No. 4 (Fall 1985): 31-52; and Michael J. Kelly, "The Media and Terrorism: An Examination of News Coverage of Armenian Terrorism in Canada," PhD Diss., Carleton University, 1987.

8 Razmik Panossian, *The Armenians: From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars* (London: Hurst & Company, 2006), 310-311; Melkonian, *My Brother's Road*; Michael Bobelian, *Children of Armenia: A Forgotten Genocide and the Century-Long Struggle for Justice* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 158-160; Thomas de Waal, *Great Catastrophe: Armenians and Turks in the Shadow of Genocide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Melanie Toumani, *There Was and There Was Not: A Journey Through Hate and Possibility in Turkey, Armenia, and Beyond* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014).

9 The exception being the ASALA agent who revealed the critical information regarding Hagop Hagopian's residence in Athens, Greece in the fall of 1987 to the FBI.

Spurk was a leftist Armenian weekly published in Beirut whose owners and editors were two of the four founding members of ASALA. Undoubtedly rich in primary source material, over 80 percent of the archive is in Armenian. Finally, Turkish government documents on this most recent phase of Armenian terrorism either have not been declassified, or remain inaccessible to researchers, and only very recently have U.S. government documents on ASALA and the JCAG/ARA become available.¹⁰ Of those, the U.S. State Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation have released considerably more than the Central Intelligence Agency.

ASALA & the ARF's JCAG/ARA

The former narrative explaining the violent re-emergence of the “Armenian question” in 1975 cites three specific events that occurred during the late 1960s and early 1970s that galvanized and strengthened Armenian public opinion, and triggered their decision to act on their grievances against the Turkish government. The first event was the commemorations and anti-Turkish demonstrations held to mark the 50th anniversary of the events of 1915 on April 24, 1965 in both Beirut, Lebanon and Yerevan, Soviet Armenia.¹¹ The concurrent demonstrations in Lebanon are attributed with establishing April 24 as the official day of commemoration of the Armenian Massacres,¹² while the latter, which developed into a boisterous demonstration that was eventually suppressed by the Soviet authorities, extracted concessions from the Soviet government allowing for the annual commemoration of April 24th with public demonstrations and permission to construct a memorial to the victims and territories lost to Turkey in 1915 in Yerevan.¹³

The most commonly held belief is that the Armenian people spontaneously “awoke” during these commemorations: after fifty years, the Armenians were no longer willing to tolerate the indifference, apathy and political machinations of the Western governments that betrayed them between 1915 and 1923. They began to protest, demonstrate, and advocate for their cause, and demanded that the world, and particularly the Republic of Turkey, acknowledge that the massacres and relocations Armenians endured at the hands of the Ottoman Empire constituted genocide, and they wanted the Turkey to pay for the crimes of their predecessor. What this meant for the most vocal Armenian groups in

10 This author began submitting Freedom of Information Act Requests in the spring of 2010. Prior to that date, very little had been released.

11 Gunter, *Pursuing the Just Cause*, 31-32.

12 *Ibid.*, 31.

13 Bobelian, *Children of Armenia*, 5.

the mid-1960s, was an admission of guilt from Turkey, a formal apology, punishment (i.e. international condemnation), reparations, and the return of the historic Armenian homeland that they had lost some five centuries ago, or, at a minimum, the Armenia that President Wilson had drawn for them during the First World War.

The next major event occurred in January 1973, when a 78-year old ethnic Armenian-American named Gourgen Yanikian lured both the Turkish Consul General and Consul of the Los Angeles to lunch at a Santa Barbara hotel. Instead of returning a painting which had been stolen from the Ottoman Sultan's residence that he claimed to be in possession of, Yanikian shot and killed both men at point-blank range inside his hotel room. While Yanikian unsuccessfully attempted to turn his murder trial into an indictment of the Turkish government for the events of 1915, the proceedings stimulated the increasingly violent nationalism of not only the Armenian communities of California, but throughout the diaspora. While the subsequent investigation concluded that Yanikian carried out the murders on his own, his act became the model and inspiration for the assassination of Turkish diplomats around the world over the ensuing decade.¹⁴

The final act occurred in 1974, when a paragraph specifically labeling the events of 1915 as the "first case of genocide in the twentieth century" was deleted from a report on the prevention of genocide that was submitted to the UN Commission on Human Rights.¹⁵ Perhaps on its own, this deletion would have gone unnoticed, or at least uncontested, but in conjunction with the rising assertiveness of the various Armenian diaspora since 1965, and the relatively well publicized murders of the Turkish diplomats in 1973, the deletion caused indignation and exasperation on the part of Armenians worldwide. According to their political leadership, not only was their just demands 'ignored', but the international community was allied with Turkey in the mid-1960s and early 1970s to frustrate their 'peaceful and justified political demands' and thwart their efforts in the United Nations.

The Armenian youth, disappointed with the incompetence and inactivity of the Armenian diaspora's traditional parties, and inspired by the actions of Yanikian, took matters into their own hands. Eschewing non-violence, they adopted the 'language' of the times, and like the Palestinians, Irish, Basques, and radical Marxist-Leninist groups in West Germany, Italy and Japan, and embraced international terrorism as a means to give voice to their frustrations, ideals and

14 Gunter, *Pursuing the Just Cause*, 36-37; Kurz and Merari, 3; and Bobelian, 148-158.

15 Gunter, *Pursuing the Just Cause*, 36-37; and Kurz and Merari, 62.

demands. By 1975, these factors led to the emergence of two groups based in a hostile, violent and politically deteriorating Beirut: the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA), an Armenian terrorist organization that, ironically, carried out its first attack against the World Council of Churches, an institution helping Armenian refugees in Lebanon.¹⁶ Fearful that this new organization would undermine its position in the diaspora, and draw Armenian youth away from its ranks, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) activated an armed wing, known first as the Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide (JCAG).¹⁷ While the specifics of ASALA's origins were, until recently, unclear, the ARF is one of the original and most powerful modern era Armenian political parties, whose origins date to 1890.¹⁸

Although ASALA was a Marxist organization, and the JCAG leaned to the right, they were nearly unanimous in the goals they sought to achieve through their violent attacks: first, to force the Turkish government to recognize and admit that the forced relocations and Armenian deaths in eastern Anatolia in 1915 constituted an act of genocide; second, to force the Turkish government to make financial reparations to the survivors and, if necessary, their descendants, of 1915; and third, to liberate the Armenian provinces of eastern Turkey. The two groups differed, however, was over what the third aim actually entailed. The ARF appears to have envisioned a relatively ambiguous, independent Armenia carved out of eastern Turkey.¹⁹ ASALA sought an independent Armenia that encompassed all of the historic lands of the ancient kingdom, which inevitably meant some form of either collaboration, or conflict, with the Soviet Union and Soviet Armenia.²⁰ Due to

Due to their Marxist ideology, most observers believed that ASALA aimed at unifying Turkey's eastern provinces with Soviet Armenia. Agreements or disagreements over the details of their specific aims, though, turned out to be a relatively moot point. Not only did they ultimately fail to achieve their goals, but even contemporary (and subsequent) observers, during the height of the campaign, saw virtually no chance for the Armenian terrorists to force recognition, financial compensation or territory from the Turkish government.

16 Corsun, *Armenian Terrorism*, 31, 34; Popular Movement for the ASALA, ASALA Interviews (Great Britain, April 1982), 9; Gunter, *Pursuing the Just Cause*, 33; and Kurz and Merari, 21. Melkonian provides one of the more accurate descriptions of ASALA's creation, but does not relate the entire story.

17 Corsun, 32; Gunter, *Pursuing the Just Cause*, 55-56; and "Terrorism Review," CIA, July 29, 1985, 15.

18 Corsun, 33; Gunter, *Pursuing the Just Cause*, 55; Kurz and Merari, 17; and "Terrorism Review, CIA, July 29, 1985, CREST.

19 Corsun, 33.

20 ASALA Interviews, 31; Kurz and Merari, 1.

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Furthermore, in a recent study on the history of terrorism, the author admits that the Armenian terrorist groups of the 1970s and 1980s defy normal categorization, simply because these movements had “no hope of success.”²³ Other motivations have been suggested, including the desire to raise global awareness to the events of 1915, to “re-awaken” the dormant, or sleeping Armenian nationalism of the diaspora or even more simply, that the Armenian groups just wanted to murder Turks, and felt justified in doing so, in revenge for the massacres of 1915.²⁴ The JCAG, however, came out on at least one occasion to publicly to dispel this notion.²⁵ The reasons for the sudden disappearance of ASALA and the ARF's JCAG/ARA in the mid-1980s has also largely been left out of the narrative.

While the story will not be truly complete until all the relevant Turkish, Armenian, French, Cypriot and Greek documents are available to scholars, a closer look at the relevant sources and the voluminous amount of material declassified and released by the U.S. Department of State, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, the Ronald Reagan Library, and the Spurk archive, have shed a tremendous amount of light on the campaign of Armenian political violence between 1973 and 1988. Although the broad strokes provided by Gunter, Kurz, Merari and other early analysts are still largely valid, the new material provides an opportunity to fill in the many gaps that exist on the emergence of Armenian political violence in 1975, and, just as important, the reasons for its sudden disappearance in the mid-1980s.

21 Metin Tamkoç, “International Terrorism: The Russian Connection,” in *Armenian Terrorism, Its Supporters, the Narcotic Connection, the Distortion of History* (Ankara, Turkey: Ankara University, 1984), 64.

22 Gunter, *Pursuing the Just Cause*, 36; *Terrorism Review*, 16; and Kurz and Merari, 19.

23 Gerard Chaliand and Arnaud Blin, eds., *The History of Terrorism from Antiquity to Al Qaeda*, Kindle Edition (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2007), location 3046.

24 Gunter, *Pursuing the Just Cause*, 36; Kurz and Merari, 3; and Mango, *Turkey and the War on Terror*, 11.

25 Corsun, 34.

Towards A Broader Narrative of Armenian Political Violence

The rather strait forward and simplistic narrative described above conceals much of the truth and many of the nuances that make the story of Armenian political violence between 1975 and 1988 so tragic. First, the ‘re-awakening’ of the Armenian people in 1965, was not a spontaneous event, but rather the culmination of a deliberate attempt by the ARF and elements within the Armenian SSR to separate the massacres and deportations of Armenians by the Ottoman Empire from the much more convoluted “Armenian Question” in order to implement an aggressive policy of anti-Turkishness throughout the Armenian diaspora and the Armenian SSR. One of the most tragic components of this period, and one which would have severe ramifications for the period of Armenian political violence, was the successful transfer of responsibility for the crimes of 1915 to the entire, collective population of modern Turkey. For many Armenians, the ‘Turks’ of 1915 were no different from the modern citizens of the Turkish Republic: guilty, and worthy of whatever punishment came their way. The plan to instigate tension and encourage animosity between Armenians and Turks, however, was simply carried out in order to achieve political gains inside the Armenian diaspora. The ARF, the Armenian SSR, and the Soviet Union never had any intention of following through with the demands being made by Armenians around the world with anything other than empty promises.

The ARF continued its policy of anti-Turkishness for the remainder of the 1960s and early 1970s, and implored Armenians everywhere to help publicize the details of the Armenian Cause and the crimes of the Turkish government. Many in the diaspora heeded the call, and devoted their time and energy to publications, erecting monuments, organizing community events, and demonstrating, protesting and advocating for the Armenian Cause. The anti-Turkishness promoted by the ARF was embraced by the Armenian diaspora, particularly by the Armenian youth in the United States, where student activism was burgeoning in response to the Civil Rights Movement and anti-Vietnam war activity. Protests and demonstrations against the Turkish government became increasingly more aggressive in nature and acts of violence against Turkish government facilities occurred. The radicalization of Armenian youth in the United States did not go unnoticed by Turkey’s apprehensive diplomatic staff posted to the U.S., but the U.S. government and local authorities largely disregarded their concerns.

Tragically, their worst fears were realized in January 1973, when a deranged elderly Armenian named Gourgen Yanikian shot and killed the Turkish Consul General of Los Angeles, Mehmet Baydar, and his assistant Consul, Bahadır

Demir. Linking his act of murder to the actions of the most revered Armenian assassins, Soghomon Tehlirian, Yanikian urged the Armenian diaspora to take up arms against the Turkish government and to slaughter its representatives. Although unnoticed at the time, Yanikian's efforts to equate his murders with Tehlirian's assassination of Talat provided modern Armenian terrorists, and their supporters in the diaspora, with all of the justification they needed to carry out their crimes. Yanikian proved that the diaspora would support the assassination of any Turkish government official, and for those who carried the executions, adulation and glory waited. In only a few short years after the Yanikian murders, death sentences for Turks came to be expected, and would extend even to the spouses and children of Turkish civil servants.

Although there would be no assassinations between January 1973 and October 1975, 1974 was an important year for political developments and activity among Armenians worldwide, and in particular Armenian-Americans. While their efforts to have the events of 1915 labeled as "the first genocide of the twentieth century" indeed languished in the UN, the Turkish government's decision to lift the ban on domestic poppy production in mid-1974, and the Turkish intervention on Cyprus in July 1974, caused a deterioration in U.S.-Turkish relations. These events provided Armenians with an unexpected political boost, as they found no shortage of U.S. Congressmen who were willing to both propagate their anti-Turkish rhetoric and promote the Armenia Cause. An alliance with the much more powerful and established Greek lobby, which was also virulently anti-Turkish, especially during the Cyprus dispute, also greatly enhanced their political power and influence in Washington.

Despite the political progress being made by Armenians through non-violent and political efforts, in early 1975 two groups within the Armenia diaspora decided to pick up arms and embrace terrorism to advocate their demands for justice. While ASALA was a new voice that represented a new minority faction with the diaspora, the ARF was one of the oldest and most powerful organizations in the Armenian diaspora. While ASALA may have posed a very minor threat to the *ARF*'s rhetoric in Beirut, it was in no position to challenge the ARF's traditional authority in the diaspora. Instead, the ARF's decision to activate an armed wing can only be viewed as a product of the violent anti-Turkishness it had propagated since 1965, and the opportunities provided by the advantageous international climate of 1975 in regards to Armenian interests. Unlike most terrorist organizations, the ARF did not turn to violence because of political weakness or a lack of viable non-violent or traditional methods. Instead, when the ARF deployed terror as means for a political end it attacked from a position of strength and deliberate choice.

For the next decade, ASALA and the ARF competed viciously for the financial and moral support of the Armenian diaspora through propaganda, intimidation and violence. While many dismissed their campaigns as hopeless, it must be acknowledged that after their seventh assassination in four years, the Turkish government appears to have been willing to engage the Armenian diaspora leaders in dialogue and discussion for the first time in over sixty years. This was by no means a minor accomplishment, and something that the traditional representatives of the diaspora had never achieved. The actions of the ARF representative at the meeting made it clear, however, that as far as ARF was concerned, resolution for the Armenian Cause did not mean dialogue and reconciliation with Turkey, but rather the imposition of their own historical narrative and terms through terror, force or international pressure. Another attempt the following year, this time from the Turkish private sector, also failed.

The primary impediment to talks in the late 1970s was land. The ARF and ASALA wanted eastern Anatolia, and it was inconceivable that Turkey was going to willingly cede territory to the Armenian diaspora or the terrorist organizations that represented it. Tragically, a chance at reconciliation and a cessation of the terror was lost. Ironically, the wider diaspora

was not overly concerned with taking eastern Anatolia, and it became clear that the ARF did not speak for the entire diaspora. Likewise, ASALA, through their intimidation and attacks on Armenians and international relief organizations working to facilitate Armenians out of the Soviet Union and Beirut, proved that they too, did not speak for the diaspora. But while the larger diaspora did not agree entirely with the political platforms of the ARF and ASALA, it tacitly approved the means by which these two violent organizations were advocating the cause on their behalf, even when the violence was turned on non-Turkish academics. And by not speaking out unequivocally against terrorism, the Armenian diaspora helped prolong the existence of both groups.

Armenian political violence dramatically escalated between the fall of 1979 and the summer of 1983. During that period, assassinations, armed assaults and bomb attacks killed 19 Turkish officials, dependents and employees, as well as French, American, Italian, Yugoslav, Swiss and German nationals. There were also at least eight failed assassinations against Turkish officials

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that left two of the victims paralyzed for life. There was no dialogue or negotiations between the Armenian militant groups and the Turkish government during this period, only death, destruction and Turkish incredulity at the world's indifference to international terrorism. ASALA even began to broaden their scope, and attack non-Turkish targets in order to bring more awareness to the Armenian Cause and to secure the release of the increasing number of captured ASALA operatives. The ARF responded to the challenge, and increased the frequency of their assassinations.

As the violence continued, however, sympathy for the Armenian Cause waned while concern for the Turkish victims increased. First in the United States, after assassinations and bombing attempts in Los Angeles, Boston and Philadelphia, and then in Europe after a particularly brutal series of attacks in Brussels, Paris and Lisbon. For Europeans, it was a bombing attack at the Orly Airport outside of Paris that killed eight and wounded over sixty that turned them against the Armenian terrorism. Despite these attacks, the Armenian diaspora continued to support the violent campaign against Turkey until the very end, even after it became increasingly apparent that the violence was not the means through which to achieve the realization of the Armenian cause, but rather an end in and of itself.

Armenian terror was never the same after Orly. The United States, Canada and Turkey began to cooperate closely on counterterrorist measures aimed at ending Armenian terrorism, and the U.S., in particular, embarked on firm position against international terrorism. Even countries that were previously reluctant to condemn Armenian terrorism and go after ASALA and the ARF, like France and the Soviet Union, changed their policies. Those countries which did not speak out, or who maintained connections with ASALA and/or the ARF were put on warning. The Armenian diaspora, though, did not waiver in their commitment to their radical youth, and continued to defend, glorify and honor political violence. This support enabled ASALA and the ARF to temporarily weather the storm produced by the controversial attacks in Europe, and they continued their campaign of violence for two more years. Their ability to induce fear in Turkey, Western Europe and North America lingered on much longer and was a testament to their prowess as terrorist organizations. By the time the leader of *ASALA*, Haroutiun Takoushian, was assassinated in Athens in April 1988, however, Armenian terrorism had run its course.

While there are multiple theories as to why Armenian terrorism faded away in the mid-1980s, the evidence available suggests that in addition the new international political climate brought on by the New Cold war and the subsequent collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union

that left little room for international terrorist organizations, both ASALA and the ARF experienced violent internal dissension at the highest levels of the organizations' leadership, right before both groups engaged each other in a brutal street war on the streets of Beirut for political control of the Armenian diaspora. By the time the 'war' was over, the ideological, political, logistical and financial sources of support that had sustained the Armenian groups, and ASALA in particular, had enjoyed disappeared over night. Even its strongest supporter, the Armenian diaspora, had abandoned them for a greater cause: the liberation of the Armenian SSR and the war with Azerbaijan over the region of Nagorno-Karabakh. Many of the veterans of ASALA and, to a lesser extent, the JCAG/ARA who survived the internal violence in Beirut were eventually able to bring their violent skills to that emerging conflict in the Caucasus. At least one former prominent ASALA member, Monte Melkonian, was able to redeem himself and obtain a place reserved for only the most revered heroes of the Armenian nation for his efforts in the Karabakh war after his death on a Caucasian battlefield in 1993.

Conclusion

It is no small irony that 20th century Armenian terrorism begins and ends with the two greatest Armenian heroes of the twentieth century, Soghomon Tehlirian and Monte Melkonian, who took completely reverse paths to glory. Born in eastern Anatolia, but living in Yugoslavia, Tehlirian left the relative safety of Belgrade to volunteer to fight for the Armenian Irregulars in the Russian army. After proving himself an able soldier, he was selected and trained to be the ARF's greatest assassin: the man who killed Talat Pasha. After his death, Tehlirian was buried under a monument constructed in his honor in Fresno, California. Monte Melkonian, left California and the comfortable confines of Berkeley to become an ASALA assassin, only to end up idolized as the great Armenian military commander who helped 'liberate' Nagorno-Karabakh. Melkonian was buried with full military honors, and in the presence of the President of Armenia, in Yerevan's Yereblur cemetery. Tehlirian, the soldier-assassin, was born in the Caucasus and buried in California; and Melkonian, the assassin-soldier, was born in California and buried died the Caucasus.

In the end, the Armenian campaign of political violence between 1973 and 1988 is yet another example of the catastrophic dangers inherent in inciting an extreme nationalism based almost entirely on the dehumanization and hatred of the 'other', cloaked in unimpeachable self-righteousness and historical justification. It was also, by any measure, a complete failure. Despite the violence, fear, terror, and murder of innocent men, women and children,

ASALA and the ARF never came closer to achieving their goals than the alleged meeting between the Turkish Foreign Minister and the heads of ARF, Hunchaks and Ramgavars in 1977. Tragically, that opportunity was wasted. Instead, the drastic increase in attacks between 1979 and 1983, the indifference of its Western allies to the violence, coupled with sympathy for the Armenian Cause, and the relentless pressure from an unrepentant diaspora that refused to unequivocally denounce terrorism, forced the Turkish government and its citizens into an aggressive defense that still largely persists today.

Some claim that the terrorist attacks brought unprecedented attention to the Armenian Cause in the international media and academia, but considering the gains being made in the early 1970s in this regard before violence, this is a difficult argument to make. Judging by commentaries and interviews in the press during the attacks, many in the diaspora believed that any assassination of a Turkish official was a victory for the Cause. Even if this true, however, one must ask: at what cost? More Armenians were killed by ASALA and the ARF than Turks, even if we include those who were not employed by the Turkish government, and if the non-Turkish victims are added to the Armenian lives lost, the disparity is even greater. An observation or acknowledgement not found on the Facebook pages dedicated to Gourgen Yanikian, Monte Melkonian and Hagop Hagopian (Haroution Takoushian), or on the web page of the Hrair Maroukhian Foundation.²⁶

The only success obtained by ASALA and the ARF is that very few, even in the Armenian diaspora, seem to be aware that Armenian terrorist organizations existed, that they were staffed by hundreds of young Armenians, and that one of the most prominent, powerful, legitimate organizations in the diaspora, and now in Armenia, was involved. While these organizations were comparable in nearly every way to many of their contemporary international terrorist organizations like Baader-Meinhof, the Red Brigades, Black September and the PFLP, very few remember or discuss ASALA or the ARF's JCAG/ARA. And while the nearly 40 Turkish citizens murdered by these two organizations is not in any way comparable to the Armenian and Turkish civilians who died over the course of events in World War I, an open discussion and recognition of the havoc wrecked by ASALA and the ARF would undoubtedly contribute to the reconciliation process between Turkey, Armenia and the Armenian diaspora.

26 For Yanikian see: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Gourgen-Yanikian/106348076081281>; For Melkonian see: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Monte-Melkonian/142005402522448>; for a selection of iphone covers and t-shirts see: http://society6.com/araaslanyan/monte-melkonian_iphone-case; For Haroutian Takoushian (Hagop Hagopian) see: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Hagop-Hagopian/265312296878835>; For the Hrair Maroukhian see: <http://www.maroukhianfoundation.org/english/about-us/hrayr-maroukhian-a-visionary-leader>.

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