Cycles of Terrorism: A Question of Contemporary Counterterror and Harrassment Against the Armenians

Michael Gunter

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.coastal.edu/jops

Part of the Political Science Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://digitalcommons.coastal.edu/jops/vol14/iss1/7

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Politics at CCU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Political Science by an authorized editor of CCU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact commons@coastal.edu.
Cycles of Terrorism: The Question of Contemporary Turkish Counterterror and Harassment Against The Armenians*

MICHAEL M. GUNTER
Tennessee Technological University

Contemporary Armenian terrorism against the Turks has inevitably given rise to speculation concerning possible Turkish reprisals in the form of counterterror or harassment. The purpose of the following article is to analyze this situation.

Counterterror?—In 1983, the Turkish Foreign Minister Ilter Turkmen declared in an interview that: "it should be remembered that terror inevitably leads to counterterror." After the bloody ASALA attack on the Ankara airport that summer and the murder of another Turkish diplomat in Canada, the Turkish President, Kenan Evren, bluntly declared: "The Turkish nation is patient. But there is a limit to patience... From now on, the Turkish state, the Turkish nation will feel free to take retaliatory measures." Speaking immediately after the Orly bombing by ASALA in July 1983, Turkmen vowed: "The Turkish nation's retaliation will be as heavy as its patience has been great." Still another report at that time stated "the situation may ultimately require Turkey's sending 'death squads' to pursue individual members of the Secret Army [ASALA]." After a Turkish U.N. official, Enver Ergun, was assassinated by ARA on November 21, 1984, Salali Umer, a young Turkish doctor, was quoted as saying: "I have never had anything against Armenians before, but after the last attack, I met an Armenian in Cairo and I could scarcely control myself from—from doing something to him."

Other reports, however, indicated that "Turkish officials—rather than planning a counterattack—admit to a 'fatalistic' attitude in regard to Armenian terrorism." A Turkish diplomat about to go abroad, for example, declared: "Turks are generally not cowards, though they would be wiser if they were... If they [assassins] can kill a President of the United States, they can kill anybody." A Turkish news editor gave another reason why counterterror was not necessarily in the offering: "Our long history as a state and as an empire gives Turkey a psychological security... We don't feel the need to hit back like the Israelis." The same article in which this statement was carried added that Turkey "probably lacks the ability to carry out commando-style operations with the surgical accuracy of the Israelis." In addition, "a highly informed" Turkish source added that Turkish press reports that "hit teams were ready for action," were misleading. "Such teams are already deployed by the security forces but their mission is to combat any guerrilla attack within Turkey and not any operation outside the country." Similarly, Turkish President Kenan Evren stated in 1983: "We must be calm. It is they [the Armenian terrorists] who are barbarians. Let the world know that Turkey will have no part in irrational revenge."
It would seem unlikely, therefore, that Turkey is seriously contemplating counterterrorist strikes against Armenian terrorists. Unfounded and inaccurate claims on the part of certain Armenian sources and others concerning “Turkish terrorism,” however, obfuscate reality here. The false charges of Turkish conspiracy concerning the attempted assassination and abduction of a number of prominent Armenians are an excellent example of this tendency. Without any proof, Armenian sources have indignantly proclaimed: “Several Armenian centers and monuments have been bombed by Turkish agents in Paris and Beirut. Some young Armenians were assassinated in Holland, Greece, Lebanon and Iran.” A similar statement denounced “Turkey’s... murder of four alleged ASALA members in parts of Europe.”

The French press has generally attributed a number of hostile incidents against Armenians in that country to Turkish groups. In one such case, a so-called “Islamic Turkish Revolutionary Army,” claimed credit. Following the bombing of an Armenian memorial in Alfortville, France on May 3, 1984, a man with “an oriental accent” calling from The Hague claimed responsibility on behalf of the “Anti-Armenian Organization.” Earlier in 1984, a caller claiming to represent the “Turkish Organization for Armed Struggle” threatened to bomb the French Film Society during the screening of two Armenian movies in Paris. The threat forced the movies to be rescheduled.

Menacing letters signed by a so-called “Third Generation of Black Sea Turks Massacred by Armenian Guerrillas” were received by the Armenian Cultural Center in London. In the summer of 1983, William Lau Richardson, who professed to be a former CIA agent, claimed that a Turkish group in Canada offered him money to kill an Armenian woman in that country as a reprisal for the rash of Armenian terrorist attacks against Turks, but added that he had turned them down. Given Richardson’s checkered career, however, it is likely his story was bogus. On October 21, 1984, Levon Ouzounian, one of the wealthiest Armenians living in Cyprus and reputed “to have provided substantial financial assistance to ASALA,” was killed by a hit-and-run driver. The report of the incident “speculated that he [Ouzounian] could have been killed by Turks for his support of ASALA.”

More substantial, but still unverified, reports claimed that Dursun Aksoy, the Turkish diplomat assassinated in Brussels, Belgium in July 1983, was “a member of [a] special unit created by Turkish security agencies to track down and kill Armenians suspected of fighting for the underground organization [ASALA].” In addition, ASALA claimed that one of its members, Noubar Yelemian, had been killed in Holland on November 5, 1982, by “Turkish special units assigned to hunting down and killing Armenian terrorists or ASALA members.”

The two ASALA members killed by Monte Melkonian’s ASALA-RM faction in July 1983 (see above) were initially reported by ASALA as having been “killed by Turks as the result of a tip off by two ASALA informers.” Another ASALA report blamed agents of the United States CIA and the Turkish Intelligence Agency (MIT) for the deed. Both agencies
were said successfully to have infiltrated anti-Turkish Kurdish groups to carry the operation out.\textsuperscript{24}

After he was apprehended for an attempt to bomb the Kuwaiti Airlines office in Athens that instead resulted in the accidental death of his accomplice (Karnik Sarkis Vahradian), Vahe Khudaverdian "insisted that he and his friend were actually targeted by Turkish agents for an assassination."\textsuperscript{25} The "ASALA-RM History," written by a dissident ASALA leader however, declared that: "Mujahed [ASALA's leader] fabricated the lie that Karnik and Vahe were the targets of an MIT plot so as to cover-up the real nature of the event." In this case, ASALA-RM's interpretation of ASALA's accusation concerning Turkish counterterror was similar to that of the Greek court because Khudaverdian was found guilty and sentenced to fourteen years in prison.

After thus revealing how ASALA at times deliberately "fabricated...lie[s]" about Turkish counterterror, however, the "ASALA-RM History" did claim that Minas Simonian and Garabed Pashazian "were most probably the victims of true MIT sponsored plots." Simonian apparently was killed with a silenced pistol in late December of 1982 as he was driving in Beirut, and Pashazian was killed in March 1983 in his Beirut home. According to the "ASALA-RM History," the identity of both had been revealed by Levon Ekmekjian, the perpetrator of the Ankara airport attack, "as those who helped introduce him to ASALA during his ruthless interrogation and torture by Turkish police before he was hung." In addition, Pashazian's photo had frequently appeared in ASALA's Beirut organ, Armenia, and he also had made public statements on behalf of ASALA.

The Armenian tendency to exaggerate their innocence and the Turks' guilt recently was illustrated by the disappearance of Apo Ashjian, a Dashnak leader in Beirut, Lebanon, on December 29, 1982. On the first anniversary of this occurrence a Dashnak publication carried a front-page article about the matter and included a copy of a telegram sent to President Reagan which charged that Ashjian "was abducted under mysterious circumstances which lead us to believe this unconscionable act was perpetrated by Turkish agents."\textsuperscript{26} Another Armenian publication in the United States quickly picked up this issue, also blaming Turkish agents for attempts on the lives of Ara Toranian, an Armenian activist in Paris, France, and Melkon Eblighatian, an Armenian member of the Lebanese parliament. It then declared: "The most prominent example of these Turkish attacks against Armenians took place in Beirut, Dec. 29, 1982...when Abraham Ashjian...was abducted...while on his way to work."\textsuperscript{27}

Shortly afterwards, however, a more responsible Armenian publication, revealed that Ashjian probably "was a victim of a power struggle between a left- and a right-wing grouping within the Dashnak party in Lebanon," and added that: "Later the [Dashnak] party made the most of the incident to exploit it for itself and successfully portrayed him [Ashjian] as a victim of Turkish counter terror." The report also indicated that Eblighatian, the Lebanese-Armenian parliamentarian, probably had been
involved in similar intramural Dashnak violence.\textsuperscript{28}

What is more, Monte Melkonian, the ASALA-RM leader referred to above, stated in an interview with a French journalist that the attempts to kill the French-Armenian leader, Ara Toranian, had been made by ASALA itself. "Hagopian [Mujahed] has liquidated several of our comrades who opposed him. For example, the car of Ara Toranian...was rigged with a bomb by Hagopian's people."\textsuperscript{29}

ASALA, however, countered that it was Toranian himself who had bombed the Armenian memorial in Alfortville (see above) in May 1984, not the Turks as was generally believed.\textsuperscript{30} Similarly, an explosion, which resulted in minor injuries at the Marie-Nubar Armenian Student Center in Paris on June 23, 1984, was supposedly claimed by "a Turkish underground group."\textsuperscript{31} The report of this bombing, however, also revealed that the bombing might also have been the work of "radical [Armenian] students who have openly supported Armenian terrorism" and had had past disputes with the management of the student center. The claim that the Turks were guilty is thus questionable.

On November 29, 1984, a powerful bomb exploded in front of the Salle Pleyel in Paris, an hour before more than 2,000 Armenians were expected to attend a celebration honoring the anniversary of Soviet Armenian.\textsuperscript{32} Six Armenians were wounded, two seriously. The Turks, of course, were blamed for the deed. An elderly Armenian, who was in a nearby coffee house, for example, claimed he saw "two suspicious individuals...[who] looked like two young Turkish men" drop "a package and immediately take off." The French police quoted the elderly Armenian as stating: "I am certain they were Turks. I can tell a Turk when I see one." A young Armenian likewise exclaimed: "They definitely are Turks. They killed in the past and they are still murdering."

Since the perpetrators of this bombing have not been apprehended, however, other theories of who did it are equally as plausible. The anti-Soviet Dashnaks, for example, were one of the few Armenian groups in Paris who were not planning to participate in the event. Given the recent spate of intramural Armenian violence mentioned above, the possibility certainly exists that the Dashnaks or some other Armenian group were responsible for the bombing, not the Turks. It would certainly not be the first time that such a scenario of blaming the Turks for intramural Armenian violence had occurred.

Turkish military forces, with the permission of Iraq, did strike at Kurdish and ASALA units in northern Iraq in June 1983. At that time, ASALA claimed "22 of our revolutionaries, including one leading militant, have been lost."\textsuperscript{33}

Although official details have never been released, this author understands, through reliable sources in Turkey, that the problem was this. ASALA, operating with the indulgence of Kurds who for all practical purposes were running their own areas in northern Iraq autonomously (the Baghdad government being too preoccupied with fighting the war against Iran), tried to establish a base for operating into Turkey. When the Turks
discovered what was happening, they took the issue up with the Iraqis and received a “no objections” to their suggestion that they move in and clean ASALA out, at the same time helping the Iraqis control their Kurdish dissidents.³⁴

With Iraqi permission again, a similar Turkish incursion into northern Iraq occurred in October 1984. Published reports indicated that some “250 Armenian men, all members of ASALA...[were] fighting with these Kurdish forces.”³⁵

With the exception of these two military incursions, however, no definite proof of Turkish counterterrorist activities abroad against Armenians exists. Although the hand of individual, private Turks, embittered by years of contemporary Armenian terrorism, or the acts of official Turkish agents cannot categorically be ruled out in some of these other cases reported above—without any further proof it must be concluded these incidents are just as likely the result of Armenian agents provocateurs, Armenian intramural violence, or some other unexplained causes which might be seeking to perpetuate and/or provoke Turkish-Armenian animosities for their own reasons.

Harassment?—Armenian accusations from outside of Turkey that the Turkish government today harasses, persecutes, and even terrorizes its few (60,000c.) remaining Armenian citizens, pose a somewhat similar, but analytically distinct problem. As with the question of premeditated genocide during World War I, one is again presented with two so diametrically opposed positions that it is difficult to believe they purport to describe the same situation. In this case, however, the question concerns what is happening now, not what occurred seventy years ago, so presumably the facts can be more readily discerned.

The case against Turkey is broadly based: It is asserted Turkish Armenians suffer from cultural, educational, legal, and religious persecution. Armenians and those sympathetic to their cause fill their publications with examples. A few will suffice to illustrate the point. In a wide-ranging analysis, Professor Dickran Kouymjian of California State University, Fresno claimed that contemporary Turkish policy to eliminate Armenian historic monuments takes a number of different forms, including: (1) usage of churches as “convenient targets for artillery practice during maneuvers by the Turkish army in the East,” (2) employment of “finely cut stones used on the facades of Armenian churches” by Turkish peasants “in the construction of village dwellings,” (3) “conversion of Armenian churches into mosques, prisons, granaries, stables, farms, and museums,” (4) “destruction by failure to provide maintenance,” (5) “demolition for the construction of roads or public works,” and (6) “neutralization of a monument’s Armenian identity by the effacing of Armenian inscriptions.”³⁶

A weekly commentator in one American Armenian newspaper declared “that restrictions on Armenian church properties were endless and ultimately aimed to disappropriate the Armenian community.”³⁷
Armenian Patriarch in Istanbul, Shnork Kalustyan, was quoted by a well-known American periodical as stating: "There are bureaucratic discriminations. . . . We cannot build new churches or repair old ones. . . . But the Turks can build new mosques. . . . Our church properties are unfairly taxed. . . . We are second-class citizens."38 A young American Armenian law student who recently visited Turkey related how Kalustyan grew so tired of requesting permission from the Turkish government to paint the building which houses the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul "that, in an act of desperation, he climbed a ladder and tried to paint it himself. He was stopped by Turkish authorities."39 Another report told how the Patriarch was prevented from visiting "an Armenian children's camp on the island of Kenali [Kinali] . . . only a few steps from his own summer residence."40 Yet another account stated that "Armenian churches and institutions are frequent targets for bomb attacks" and claimed that "many other churches have been converted to barns or museums."41

Discussing the present-day plight of Turkish Armenians, "a recent returnee from Turkey" declared: "if they are to live in Turkey, they are forced to change their names. . . . Their language is forbidden as the language of instruction; the headmaster has to be a Turk."42 Yet another report explained that the reason "Turks are appointed sub-directors of all Armenian schools. . . . is to 'turkify' the Armenian schools as soon as possible."43 "Armenian students are not allowed to enter Armenian schools on the pretext that the students are not really Armenians,"44 affirmed an additional account.

A lengthy update on the present situation in Turkey reported that "during the summer of 1980, a group of Turkish students debarked on the island [of Kinali] shouting insults to the Armenians who were sunbathing there. Witnesses reported that the students threatened and harassed the Armenians who, filled with fright, fled the area. No action was taken against the group of students."45 Continuing, the same report related that "although few Turks like to admit it . . . popular opinion would like to see reprisals against the Armenian leaders for the killing of . . . Turkish diplomatic personnel. 'The Armenians should pack up and get out of Turkey,' one well-known Ankara journalist said."46

An eminent American Armenian author, who visited Turkey in the 1970's, claimed that two Armenians were hanged in Erzurum in eastern Turkey after Gourgen Yanikian, a seventy-eight year old Californian of Armenian descent, murdered two Turkish consuls in Los Angeles in 1973. He added that perhaps a dozen more were beaten in Istanbul, one so savagely he no longer could see."47 As the National Geographic article cited above summed it up: "It is the old hatred."48

In June 1982, it is claimed, Turkey threatened reprisals against Turkish Jews because Armenian scholars were invited to an international conference in Israel on the Holocaust and other genocides. The Turkish pressure, it is claimed, forced the Israeli government to withdraw its official support from the conference and led to nearly one-third of the 400 registered participants not attending.49 At the end of 1984, another report asserted that "the
Turkish government resorted without success to extensive measures of pressure, including threats and blackmail [against Turkish Jews], attempting to force the cancellation of several recent lectures sponsored by American Jewish organizations on the Armenian Genocide.”

The case of the Turkish Armenian priest, Father Manuel Yergatian (also known as Haig Eldemir), declared one Armenian source in the United States, “is typical of the Turkish government’s... oppression of Armenians in Turkey.” Yergatian was born in Istanbul in 1954. When he was only fourteen, he went to Jerusalem for theological studies at its Armenian Patriarchal Seminary. In 1973, he returned to Turkey to serve his required military obligation. Upon its completion, he was ordained a celibate priest in Istanbul in 1976. The following year he joined the St. James Brotherhood (Sourp Hagop) in Jerusalem.

On October 10, 1980, Father Yergatian was arrested while boarding a plane in Istanbul for Jerusalem. With him were four young Turkish Armenian boys he was taking to Jerusalem to study at its Armenian Patriarchal Seminary. The Turkish authorities charged Yergatian with being involved in activities against the integrity and security of the state. At the time of his arrest he was supposedly carrying cassette tapes of Armenian folk music, a map of historic Armenia, and the address of a well-known terrorist. He also was accused of currency violations and naming one of his dogs “Ataturk.” More to the point, the Turkish authorities believed Yergatian was taking the four young students to Jerusalem to have them trained as terrorists. (Sonner Nayir, one of the two Turkish Armenian terrorists convicted of the Orly bombing in 1983, had spent eight years at the same Seminary. The other, Ohannes Semerci, also had studied there.)

During his trial, one of the Jerusalem Seminary students testified Yergatian had taught that eastern Turkey belonged to the Armenians who had been mistreated in 1915 and should have their lands returned. The testimony also indicated that Yergatian had helped decorate the Seminary Hall for observation of Martyrs Day on April 24, 1980.

Armenian sources claim that the charges against Yergatian are trumped up. The “subversive materials” in his possession were simply the autobiography of Father Shigaher, who had described the massacres of 1915, while the map of Armenia was one published by the Mekhitarist fathers of Venice in 1888. The excess money he was charged with carrying simply belonged to the children he was escorting.

The real reason for Yergatian’s arrest, feel the Armenians, was his participation in the April 24, 1980 commemoration in Jerusalem. Also, add the same sources, the Turkish authorities were displeased he was rescuing Turkish Armenian “descendants of the survivors of the genocide from Turkification and giving them an opportunity to receive [an] Armenian education in Jerusalem.” During his trial, Yergatian himself denied any connection with Armenian terrorism, professed his loyalty to Turkey, and claimed that his imprisonment was in retaliation for Armenian terrorist attacks against Turkish diplomats.

During his long pretrial incarceration, charge Armenian sources,
Yergatian was “reportedly tortured by having his fingernails and toenails pulled out.” Finally, after a nine-month-long trial, he was sentenced on March 19, 1983 by the Istanbul Martial Law Command Court to fourteen years imprisonment and five years of internal exile. Recent reports state Yergatian’s health has deteriorated in prison and a representative of the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul has been refused permission to visit him.

During his visit to the United States in the fall of 1984, Shnork Kaloustyan, the Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul who usually assumes a pro-Turkish position, stated that: “Father Yergatian unfortunately had a lot of bad luck during his trials. First of all, he was the victim of baseless accusations by one of his students.” In addition, “when Armenian ‘terrorists’ captured the Turkish consulate in Paris [ASALA’s ‘Van’ operation in September 1981] one of their demands was the release of Father Yergatian, which naturally resulted in his case being subjected to further investigation... to see if he belongs to ‘ASALA.’ This made his case worse.” Finally, added the Patriarch, “during his trial, the notorious grave incident took place in Yugoslavia during which a Turkish diplomat [Galip Balkar, March 9, 1983] was assassinated.” Thus, concluded Kaloustyan, “his only proven guilt is that as a Turkish-Armenian, he had participated in an anti-Turkish rally for which he may have been sentenced to a few years in jail. However, the aforementioned and other incidents, unfortunately, directly or indirectly aggravated his situation.”

In May 1983, the famous and highly respected private international organization, Amnesty International (AI), adopted Yergatian as a prisoner of conscience. At that time AI pointed out that the facts of Yergatian’s detention and trial made it clear that he had not been convicted of any involvement in violence, but was imprisoned because of his Armenian ethnic origin. In addition, it should be added, a recent AI country report stated about human rights in general in Turkey: “Throughout the year Amnesty International continued to receive allegations that prisoners charged with political offenses had been tortured and that in some cases death had resulted.”

Such reports might lend credence to the accusations of Hrant Guzelian, a Turkish Armenian who was one of many witnesses for the defense allowed to testify at the trial of the ASALA group convicted in January 1984 of seizing the Turkish consulate in Paris. Guzelian testified he had been arrested in Turkey on charges he had been forcing Turkish boys to become Armenian. (Guzelian himself claimed that he was simply operating a youth center where Armenian boys brought from the interior of Turkey could be cared for and given educational facilities.) In prison, “he was tortured for a period of 22 days before being transferred.” Although he was found innocent for lack of evidence, he claimed “he was once again subjected to extensive beatings, five times within a 24-hour period.” This was because, before his release from prison, a soldier recognized him from a news story in a Turkish newspaper which identified him as “an Armenian enemy of Turkey.” Only because of the inefficient Turkish bureaucracy, which had not notified the passport authorities of his situation, was he able to leave
Turkey, Guzelian claimed.

Turkish response.—Turks, most Turkish Armenians, and their government paint a very different picture. A recent study of more than fifty Turkish Armenians found them to be “content, prosperous and patriotic to Turkey.” Repeatedly, Turkish Armenians emphasized, as did Lucika Martayan, a member of a wealthy industrial family, that “it is the outsiders, those living out of our country, who cause the only trouble we know—whether terrorists or those who don’t know the situation here.”

The position of Arman Manukyan is also of interest. He is the president of a hardware and tool company, a full professor of accounting at the University of the Bosphorus in Istanbul, and a member of the Turkish Foreign Minister’s Advisory Committee on Foreign Relations. In 1958, he received a two-year Fulbright Scholarship to study in the United States where his first child was born. His wife, Alis, is a leading soprano in the Istanbul State Opera. Some twenty other Armenians sing in the opera chorus. All were trained for free at Turkish state conservatories.

Manukyan himself visits the United States annually. “I could live anywhere in the world,” he declared, but “I want to live here. Why shouldn’t I? It is my home country. And I think my son will return to live here, too, after he finishes his American education.” Concerning the Muslim Turks, Manukyan stated that “we live as brothers without separation or difference...Christians and Muslims are not so different in our basic morals. We have the same life patterns and the same values here.”

Regarding the Armenian terrorists, Manukyan declared that they “could not have come out of our life here, which is peaceful and happy.” He added that “we have 33 of our own churches, 30 schools, our own sport and cultural clubs and halls, our own alumni associations. Life is liberal and free here. We don’t feel any pressures. If we did, most of us would leave.”

Karabet Arman, the chief physician at the Yedikule Armenian Hospital in Istanbul, said the Muslim Turks and Turkish Armenians are “kardes gibi,” or “like brothers.” He told how he had been trained in the Istanbul University Medical School. “In the 30 years since, I have been the head of three university clinics as well as the medical director of several prominent businesses.” He added that “the Armenian doctors are given full scholarships in Turkey and also all expenses to study in Germany, England, and the United States, like the Turks.” Although he often visits his brother in the United States, Arman declared that he did not want to emigrate. He also affirmed that Armenian churches are open every day, that Armenians feel equal and safe in the midst of the Muslim majority, and that during the religious festivals, “the bells of our churches ring so loud that even the voices of the muezzin [the Muslim cleric who calls the faithful to prayer] will be drowned in it.”

Ara Kuyumcuyan heads large iron, steel, and concrete companies. Hundreds of Turks work for him. In an interview, he declared: “My father was born in Istanbul. We Armenians have a very good life in Turkey.... We live in peace.” Another wealthy businessman, who said terrorists had threatened and blackmailed Armenians in foreign countries, asked that his
name not be used. He stated that “all people are equal here. . . . There is no attempt to discriminate. . . . Life is cok, cok iyi—very, very good here.” Still another Armenian studying electronic engineering in Switzerland was home for the summer. He too had friends who had been threatened by terrorists in Switzerland, but declared: “I definitely plan to return to Turkey to live and work. . . . I feel that I have a great future in Turkey in computers.”

Calouste Gulbenkyan, the late oil magnate, was quoted as saying: “Today in Turkey no distinction whatsoever is made between the Turks and the Armenians. The Turkish Armenians live peacefully and in prosperity.” Krikor Gunbeyan, a shoemaker, stated: “There is no discrimination among the citizens of the Republic of Turkey because of difference in language, religion and race.”

In reply to the foreign Armenian accusation that Turkish Armenians are afraid to tell the truth, the writer, Torkom Istepanyan, declared: “I may be accused of being a ‘hireling’ by some persons outside the country. Let them understand clearly that the blood in my veins is at least as much Armenian as theirs. In fact, it is the very purity of my blood that compels me to be faithful to the truth, and the truth is that we Turkish Armenians with our independent churches and community schools, live here in an atmosphere of complete freedom, far removed from futile vendettas.”

Ironically, the Armenian Patriarch in Istanbul, who was quoted above as criticizing the situation in Turkey, stated that: “The young people, the terrorists, have been exposed to misrepresentations. They have been fed distorted views on what happened in 1915.” He went on to tell how under the Turkish Republic the Armenians, like the other minorities in Turkey, have all the freedoms and responsibilities of citizenship. He even volunteered that the Turkish Armenians recently rebuilt the handsome new cathedral of St. Gregory the Illuminator in the heart of Istanbul’s business district.

During his visit to the United States in 1984, the Armenian Patriarch similarly stated: “Our government insures our freedom and safety and gone are some of the restrictions that had existed in the past relative to the day-to-day life of our community organizations.” When Armenian terrorists kill Turkish diplomats abroad, added Kaloustyan, “the Turkish government immediately takes measures to provide protection for us by posting policemen at Armenian institutions to prevent any retaliation.”

During the trial for the Orly bombers in March 1985, Professor Simon A. Hatchinlian, a Turkish Armenian lecturer at the University of the Bosphorus, testified for the prosecution. He “noted that as an Armenian living in Turkey, he has never been discriminated against from the time he served in the Turkish Army to the present.” Hatchinlian added “that he uses an Armenian name without anyone telling him to change it, enjoys all types of privileges granted to all Turkish citizens and that he has the respect of all his Turkish colleagues.”

Synthesis.—What then is the actual position of the Armenians in Turkey today? It is true that Republican Turkish policies towards minorities
have not always achieved the laic ideal. (What country has?) The claim in the 1920's that the Kurds were simply "mountain Turks," the notorious Varlik Vergisi (Capital Levy) of 1942-43 which blatantly discriminated against minorities, the anti-Greek riots over Cyprus in September 1955, and the Kurdish unrest in eastern Turkey during the 1980's are illustrative. What is more, of course, Republican Turkey only arose from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire after a desperate war against the Greeks in the West, and a lesser but still serious war against the Armenians in the East. Indeed, their deaths from this latter conflict are counted by the Armenians today when they number their loses during what they claim was the Turkish genocide against them.

Turkish sensitivities about minorities and a desire to have a Turkey for the Turks is understandable, however, given the former Empire's loss of vast amounts of territory in the past, the resulting forced migrations of Muslims from these lands to Anatolia, and the attempts by the Greeks and the Armenians—as well as the Allies—after World War I to carve out large sections of Anatolia for themselves. Turks came late to the idea of a nation-state, but after it had helped to destroy their multinational empire and threatened the very existence of their Anatolian heartland, they too learned to value one for themselves.

Certainly, it would not be reasonable to expect the residue of attitudes in Turkish society, which in the past resulted in de facto discrimination and sometimes hostile behavior, to be eradicated overnight any more than it proved possible to eliminate racial prejudices in the United States after the Civil War. In the Turkish case, as in the United States, however, practice has come to conform with law over time. There have been no outbreaks of anti-minority violence on any significant scale in Turkey for thirty years despite the actions of Armenian terrorists who have tried to foment it. Given the history of Armenian-Turkish relations in the past, especially as viewed from the Turkish perspective, the position of the Armenians in Turkey today is probably much better than could otherwise be expected.

Unofficial pressures to conform culturally and religiously undoubtedly exist in Turkey today, but how is this different than in any other country? The situation in Turkey is certainly not unique. In actual practice, despite the protestations of Armenians abroad, those in Turkey are probably better off than their co-ethnics in such other middle eastern countries as Iran and Syria.

As for the numerous bureaucratic problems Armenians face in Turkey today, these are often difficulties from which Muslim Turks too suffer. As anyone—native or foreign—who has dealt with it can attest, the Turkish bureaucracy is far from being the most efficient. This is regrettable, but in most cases probably not a valid criticism as far as the Armenian minority goes. Indeed, in the case of Hrant Guzelian, the Turkish Armenian who testified at the 1984 trial in Paris of the four ASALA agents, the inefficiencies of the Turkish bureaucracy apparently came to his aid. In short, therefore, these bureaucratic problems (which may often appear to be harassment to outsiders) are endemic to the country, not peculiarly aimed at
just one minority grouping. The solution lies in education and reform, not in biased diatribes.

What about the charges that ancient Armenian churches and other historical monuments are being allowed to fall into ruin or being otherwise mistreated? Although it is true that contemporary Turkish studies downplay the historical Armenian presence in eastern Anatolia, there can be absolutely no doubt that the governments of Republican Turkey have made strenuous efforts to preserve their vast archeological heritage. Anyone who has visited the country can attest to this fact. While isolated incidents of vandalism may occur and adequate funds for preservation are not always available, there is no evidence that the Turkish government is destroying historical Armenian churches and monuments as an official policy. On the contrary, as even foreign Armenians who visit Turkey can testify—historical Armenian sites in eastern Anatolia and ancient Cilicia are being preserved and protected better than might be expected for a country which is not yet blessed with all the necessary required means the more fortunate might possess.

At Aghtamar, for example, the famous island in Lake Van which once was the center of an independent Armenian Catholicosate, efforts recently have been made at maintenance and landscaping. Numerous tourists come to see the magnificent Armenian Church built more than 1000 years ago. The Turkish military has even built a helicopter pad on the island to facilitate VIP visits. The ancient Armenian capital of Ani, right on the Soviet border, is readily accessible, and the military, who control the area, provide permits and escorts for visitors. A number of French Armenians, among others, visit the site annually. The Armenian Cathedral in Kars has recently been cleaned up and restored.

On the other hand, some Armenian churches are still used for storing hay or firewood, and as stables. The complex on Mt. Varag east of Van is a case in point. But this is no different from the condition of numerous former Christian churches of denominations other than Armenian in many parts of Anatolia. In addition, one does not have to search far to find abandoned mosques, caravanserais, and great complexes of Muslim tombs, such as the ones at Ahlat on the northwestern shore of Lake Van, which are also in a sad state of neglect. Turkey has so many historical monuments that the entire national budget could be spent in any given year on their restoration and maintenance. Given the poor state of overall Turkish-Armenian relations during the past century and the economic problems of Turkey in recent years, the wonder is that so many historical monuments, including Armenian ones, are so well preserved and maintained. Armenian allegations to the contrary are specious, but they feed on themselves. Armenians living abroad believe them because they are fed a steady diet of disinformation, distortion, and outright falsehoods.

How about the accusation that the Turkish government threatened reprisals against Turkish Jews if Jewish organizations in the United States or an Israeli conference in Tel Aviv permitted Armenians to present lectures and papers on the Armenian genocide? According to an apparently reliable
Turkish source, the charges concerning such events in the United States are baseless. All the Turks attempted to do here was to request that Jewish organizations not permit Armenians to participate in conferences about the Jewish Holocaust or genocide in general. No threats, either overt or implied, were made. Regarding the 1982 conference in Israel, however, a certain Turkish official did make unauthorized pronouncements which might have been construed as threats. When this was discovered, the Turkish government disowned the statements.

Finally, how might the situation of Father Yergatian and others, whom Amnesty International has commented upon, be explained? First of all, of course, Turkey is not a completely Westernized country. Despite the westernization that has occurred since the inception of the Republic, cultural norms concerning what is and is not proper treatment of prisoners inevitably differ from the West. Torture does occur (although not to the extent some claim). This may be regrettable for Westerners raised with different values, but ought to be understandable, especially since, in most cases, it does not appear to be official governmental policy. Indeed, the government disciplines those who are discovered to be using it.

Furthermore, since Turkey is a democracy, it is more open than most other countries. Reports about prison conditions can be more readily made. To the superficial observer, therefore, it may seem that the situation may be worse than in many closed societies when in reality, of course, the flow of information is simply much less in these latter places.

In closing, one must realize that in the late 1970's, Turkey was in the grips of a vicious cycle of leftist-rightist terrorism that was claiming almost thirty lives per day, had brought some sectors of the economy to a standstill, and had seen the entire country overcome by fear. At last, on September 12, 1980, the military stepped in to restore order and began to pull the country back from the brink of collapse.

It was not easy. To paraphrase Abraham Lincoln, it might have been necessary to amputate a limb in order to save the body. Nobody pretends that the military used kid gloves. Few wanted it to. The public support for General Kenan Evren's measures was phenomenal. Even more incredible, moreover, was the relative leniency the military government showed towards those accused of terrorism. It is extremely doubtful a house in such terroristic disorder could have been set in order so lightly as was done after 1980.

Even more noteworthy, however, was the Turkish military's attitude towards genuine democracy. Despite dire predictions and much hypocritical criticism from the West, the military government held elections in November 1983 that resulted in the party it favored, placing last, while the one it preferred least, Turgut Ozal's Motherland Party, winning an impressive victory. True to the dictates of Ataturk, the military, having reinstated a stable democracy, stepped aside and permitted Ozal to assume power. Given the inherent difficulties involved, it would be very difficult to find a more impressive track record concerning democracy and the values Westerners associate with it. In conclusion, therefore, while isolated ex-
amples of prejudices and persecution against Armenians undoubtedly exist among the Muslim majority—the case against Father Yergatian might be one such example—there can be no doubt that today the Turkish Armenians enjoy a wide degree of real equality and prosperity.
There are two main Armenian terrorist groups. The Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) is a Marxist organization. In 1983, some of its members violently broke away to form ASALA-Revolutionary Movement (ASALA-RM). The other group, the Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide (JCAG), was created by the nationalist Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) or Dashnaks, a political party first established in 1890. Due to intra-Dashnak violence, the ARF renamed its terrorist arm the Armenian Revolutionary Army (ARA) in 1983. For an in-depth analysis of Armenian terrorism, see Michael M. Gunter, "Pursuing the Just Cause of their People": A Study of Contemporary Armenian Terrorism (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986).

2Cited in Turkish Daily News, August 30, 1982, p. 3.

Cited in Kaplan, "Armenian Terrorists Find New Bases."
Ibid.
Cited in Goltz, "Armenian Terror Rouses Turkish Anger."

"Turkish Threats," in Ibid., March 1, 1984, p. 2.
For this and the following citation, see "ASALA Supporter Said to have been Killed by Hit & Run Car on Cyprus," The Armenian Reporter, December 6, 1984, p. 12.
Ibid., September 8, 1983, p. 16.
For this claim see "ASALA Discloses Names of Former Members Involved in Various Acts," in Ibid., September 13, 1984, p. 12.
For the details of this event, see "Armenian Students' Center in Paris is Target of Bombing by Turkish Group," Ibid., August 9, 1984, p. 13.
This and the following details are mostly taken from the report in The Armenian Reporter, November 29, 1984, p. 1.
The following explanation, which dovetails with media reports at the time, comes from reliable Turkish sources which prefer not to be cited directly.
See the reports on this Turkish military strike in The Armenian Reporter, October 25, 1984, p. 1; and The Armenian Weekly, November 3, 1984, p. 1, 12.
Harut Sassounian, "Turkish-Armenians Live Deprived of Their Rights," in Ibid., December 8, 1983, p. 4.

23 Cited in Ibid., December 17, 1983, p. 11.
26 Ibid.
29 See the accounts in the New York Times, June 3, 1982, p. 1; and The Armenian Reporter, October 11, 1984, p. 12. See also, however, the Turkish reply in the New York Times, June 5, 1982, p. 3.


32 The following citations are taken from “Patriarch of Turkey Calls Father Yergatian a Victim,” The [Armenian] California Courier, November 7, 1984, pp. 1, 10.


Since the materials cited here concern the general situation in Turkey and not the specific condition of the Armenians, they are beyond the scope of my present inquiry. In addition, of course, they do not reflect the official Turkish position or explanations. Nevertheless, I have cited them in the interest of being as thorough as possible.

35 This citation and the following information were taken from The Armenian Reporter, February 16, 1984, p. 14.

36 Unless otherwise noted, the following discussion is largely based on “Armenians Attest to Happy and Prosperous Life in Turkey, Speak Out Against Terrorism,” Los Angeles Times, November 12, 1982, Part 1-B, pp. 8, 9; and also on Ralph J. Kaplan, “In Turkey, Armenians Put the Past Behind Them,” Los Angeles Herald Examiner, November 23, 1983, p. A11; and Facts From the Turkish Armenians (Istanbul: Jamanak, 1980).

37 This and the following citation are taken from The Armenian Reporter, November 15, 1984, p. 1.

38 This and the following citation are taken from “Istanbul Armenian Testifies for the Prosecution in Paris,” in Ibid., March 14, 1985, p. 17.

39 I would like to thank Paul B. Henze, who has travelled widely and frequently through Turkey for a number of years and is presently a foreign affairs consultant for the Rand Corporation, for much of the information upon which my following discussion is based.

40 The source of this information appears reliable, but prefers to remain anonymous.


42 For the official position of the Turkish government, see The Human Rights Situation in Turkey: Facts vs. Allegations (Ankara: Prime Ministry Directorate General of Press and Information, [1984]).