

## **Political Instability in Turkey During the 1970s**

by  
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### **INTRODUCTION**

On 12 September 1980, the military assumed power in Turkey, and General Kenan Evren, the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, became the new Head of State. Those unfamiliar with its progressive role as protector of Turkish secular democracy are inclined to view this military action in a negative light. A young mother in an Ankara slum, however, remembered the event as the first night in which there had been no shooting in the streets,<sup>1</sup> while the vast majority of Turks heaved a collective sigh of relief.<sup>2</sup>

After quickly restoring order, General Evren's military government in November 1983 allowed most of its power to pass to a center-right, civilian government, not of its first choice, headed by Turgut Ozal. Much broader-based elections in November 1987 gave Ozal a renewed mandate to pursue a majoritarian government and a program of free-enterprise, economic reform, while Erdal Inonu's Social Democrats emerged as an attractive loyal opposition of the left. It was clear that Turkish democracy had successfully weathered the terrible storms of the late 1970s and with confidence was preparing to enter the 1990s.

To understand fully the rationale for Turkey's new democratic and economic initiatives of the 1980s, however, one must also appreciate the chaotic and demoralizing troubles of the 1970s. The purpose of this article is to analyze this earlier period of political instability.<sup>3</sup>

### **THE SETTING**

It would not be misleading to state that the Republic of Turkey Kemal Ataturk established in the 1920s out of the ruins of the Ottoman Empire was the first new, third world state of the twentieth century. Modern Turkey antedated the host of other non-European states that began to emerge after World War II by a full generation.

In 1950 Ismet Inonu, Ataturk's successor, ended the one-party rule of the Republican Peoples Party (RPP) by allowing Turkey's first genuinely competitive elections. They resulted in his ouster from power. An exaggerated majority election system, not unlike that of the American, winner-take-all, electoral college, gave the victorious Democrat Party (DP) of Celal Bayar and Adnan Menderes 86 percent of the National Assembly seats, even though it garnered only 53 percent of the vote. Again in 1954, the election system worked to return Menderes to an even greater, exaggerated majority: 93 percent of the Assembly seats on the basis of 57 percent of the vote.

Thus when the Turkish military overthrew the increasingly oppressive Menderes regime in 1960 (but then overreacted by unfairly executing him a year later) it allowed the new constitution to alter the

electoral system to one of excessive proportional representation (PR) that eventually resulted in a system of rampant multipartyism that hindered, and eventually prevented, the emergence of any majoritarian government at all.

Even though the military again, this time indirectly, intervened via a "coup by memorandum" in March 1971 to end a period of terrorism and political instability, it allowed the divisive electoral system of PR to continue when it returned power to the civilians at the end of 1973. Accordingly, throughout most of the 1970s, the political balance of power in the Turkish Parliament was held by two small, right-wing, extremist parties (1) Necmettin Erbakan's National Salvation Party (NSP), which emphasized Islamic, fundamentalist principles; and (2) Alparslan Turkes's Nationalist Action Party (NAP), which supported a protofascist program of domestic corporatism, pan-Turkic irredentism, and a uniformed youth organization known as the "Grey Wolves." This system of stalemated, non-majoritarian, coalitional governments prevailed in the 1970s even though three out of four of Turkey's voters identified with its two main, moderate parties of that era: (1) Suleyman Demirel's center-right Justice Party (JP) and (2) Bulent Ecevit's center-left Republican Peoples Party (RPP).

### **POLITICAL DEADLOCK AND EXTREMISM**

From 1971 to the military coup in 1980, there were ten different governments in Turkey. Not a single one of them represented a majority party in the Grand National Assembly (Turkish Parliament). Indeed only five of them even constituted coalitional majorities formed from the parties represented in the Assembly. The others were either nonpartisan, technocratic cabinets indirectly installed by the military (1971-1974) or minority governments.

During this period, there were two general elections in Turkey. Both were inconclusive since neither one of the two major parties (the RPP and the JP) was able to win a majority.<sup>4</sup> Following the first election, Bulent Ecevit was able to put together a coalitional majority of his left-of-center RPP and Necmettin Erbakan's far-right NSP. This rather cynical, ideological contradiction in terms managed to last long enough to grant what many later would deem an ill-advised general amnesty to thousands to accused terrorists who had been rounded up after the indirect military intervention of 1971.<sup>5</sup> Then, although he successfully managed the intervention in Cyprus during the summer of 1974, Ecevit was forced to resign after failing to consolidate his position in a call for new elections.

After the longest ministerial crisis in modern Turkish history, the first of two so-called national front governments headed by Suleyman Demirel's moderate, right-of-center JP in coalition with the two extremist, right-wing parties of Necmettin Erbakan (NSP) and Alparslan Turkes (NAP) followed. As part of the bargain, both Erbakan and Turkes were made deputy premiers, with the result that decision making became all but impossible. One close observer wrote, for example, that

“it was not uncommon to hear a policy pronouncement by Premier Demirel flatly contradicted the next day by Deputy Premier . . . Erbakan.”<sup>6</sup>

Demirel's first national front coalition lasted from March 1975 until the general election of June 1977 presented Ecevit's opposition RPP with parliamentary seats (213) just short of an absolute majority in the 450-seat Assembly. Ecevit's attempt to parley this result into a successful minority government, however, quickly failed, and Demirel's second national front government returned to power a few weeks later.

Disappointed over his failure, Ecevit soon was able to entice eleven JP deputies to his side with the promise of ministerial positions and in January 1978 he entered his major governmental opportunity with a great deal of apparent good will. This euphoria soon vanished, however, amid charges of a cynical bargain for power with the eleven JP deputies who had defected, an escalating tide of anarchy and terrorism throughout the country, and a sinking economy that soon saw crippling shortages of important consumer items, raging inflation, and rising unemployment.

Demirel himself never forgave Ecevit for the manner in which he had come to power and through most of this period even refused to refer to Ecevit by name or as the Prime Minister, an adroit way in which to emphasize how the RPP government was “illegitimate.”<sup>7</sup> Near the end of Ecevit's term in office, Demirel blasted him as one “who seized the government with deceit, intrigue and cheating 20 months ago by putting aside the national will.”<sup>8</sup> When he had returned to power in 1980, Demirel on yet another occasion declared concerning Ecevit: “I have doubts about his sanity.”<sup>9</sup> For his part Ecevit once described Demirel as: “A party leader who has resorted to the most shameful methods in our political history, who has collaborated with criminals, the person who secured personal benefits from others, the leader of a party which lends deputies to other parties.”<sup>10</sup>

The personal invective with which Turkey's two main political party leaders smeared each other was more than amply matched by their followers. On a number of occasions “beatings, fights and foul language” broke out among them in Parliament.<sup>11</sup> Following by-election setbacks in October 1979, Ecevit resigned. Demirel formed a minority government, but the political paralysis only grew.

### **Institutional Causes**

Although it is not possible to explain this political deadlock and extremism to everyone's satisfaction, a number of points do seem relevant. First of all, the Turkish political culture had not yet fully been imbued with the concept of the loyal opposition. The 600 year old authoritarian heritage of the Ottoman Empire had lasted into the twentieth century, and although Kemal Ataturk's political promise had been one of democracy, his own legacy had been that of an authoritarian, one-party, tutelary regime. The first genuinely competitive elections in Turkey were only held, as noted above, in 1950. When they were held, party leaders such as Menderes in the 1950s and Demirel and Ecevit in the

1970s gave too much priority to narrow, short term party goals, while inhibiting the idea of legitimate opposition.

When in power, each party staked out its own political turf. In time the bureaucracy grew so politicized that even judges, police, university rectors, and other civil servants, as well as mayors and provincial officials, became openly partisan. Thus although both Ecevit and Demirel began as moderate proponents of western-style democracy, the dynamics of the party system increasingly polarized them and precluded their cooperation. Moreover it seems that the mutual hostility of the party leaders and their resulting inability to cooperate for the good of their country might have been the key factor in turning Turkey's multiparty, coalitional government system of the 1970s on to the road of disaster.<sup>12</sup>

The resulting mudslinging association of the RPP with communism and the JP with fascism began to take on more than just mere appearance. In one egregious example, a partisan of Turkes' NAP headed the customs and monopolies ministry under the Demirel government, even though the NAP was known to have close ties with drug smuggling activities.<sup>13</sup> Turkes himself was put in charge of internal security and the secret services. As the 1970s progressed, Demirel's JP increasingly became linked with militant Sunni fundamentalism, as well as rightist trade, teachers, and police unions or associations.

For its part, the RPP, given the dearth of other viable leftist parties, drifted further to the left, coopting extremists who had nowhere else to go. A number of members of the radical trade union DISK, for example, were also RPP deputies in the National Assembly. What had started out as the party of Ataturk in the 1920s and, as late as 1972, his chief lieutenant Inonu, had by the late 1970s become, in part, identified with Alevi (Shiite) leftists and Kurdish separatism. Indeed the electoral prospects of the far left had become so poor that by the mid-1970s Radio Moscow was asking Turkish Marxists to support the RPP.<sup>14</sup> In a post mortem analysis of what had happened, one of Turkey's leading journalists, Mehmet Ali Birand, observed: "In short, the rules of the game no longer existed in a free for all which dispensed with that principal tenet of democracy, namely, consensus. The people of Turkey looked on as passive spectators at this deadlock in the party political system."<sup>15</sup>

### **Sociological causes**

In addition to the institutional causes analyzed above, a number of sociological factors also contributed to the political deadlock and extremism Turkey experienced in the late 1970s. In his seminal study, Ted Robert Gurr argued:

The primary causal sequence in political violence is first the development of discontent, second the politicization of that discontent, and finally its actualization in violent action against political objects and actors. Discontent arising from the perception of relative deprivation is the basic, instigating condition for participants in collective violence.<sup>16</sup>

Building on Gurr's general insights, Paul Magnarella has identified a number of sociological factors which contributed to a sense of relative deprivation and thus helped lead to civil violence and terrorism in Turkey.<sup>17</sup> In the first place, the country's large population (45.4 million by 1980) and rapid urbanization exceeded its available economic opportunities. As Magnarella noted, relative deprivation became "markedly visible in the *gecekondus* (shanty towns) of most cities."<sup>18</sup> The mayor of Istanbul declared "terrorist organizations easily recruit gunmen from among the jobless in the *gecekondus*."<sup>19</sup> The importation of traditional feuds from the rural areas to the newly created urban areas stimulated more violence.<sup>20</sup>

In addition there were large differences in the distribution of wealth, as well as goods and services among the Turkish population. High rates of inflation, unemployment, and underemployment compounded the problem. By the end of the 1970s, inflation had exceeded 100 percent.<sup>21</sup> Violent incidents resulted directly from this deteriorating economic situation.

What is more, the increasing demand for, but limited supply of, higher education opportunities created additional difficulties. Serif Mardin explained:

In 1977, 360,000 students competed in the entrance examination to universities for 60,000 places. This leaves 300,000 candidates suspended in mid-stream, with no means of reintegrating them into the employment structure except as disgruntled minor employees with salaries that constitute a pittance by any standards.<sup>22</sup>

Even those who were admitted often found themselves alienated by the overcrowded classrooms and antiquated memorization methods. Moreover, many who finally did receive a diploma were unable to find employment.

The law on autonomy, which allowed Turkish universities a great deal of immunity from regular police regulation, permitted campuses in the 1970s to become small arsenals and hotbeds of terrorism. Writing in the late 1970s, Serif Mardin noted how old cultural norms reinforced these new legal opportunities:

Student violence, by and large, is directed against other students. The pattern of attack, retaliation, revenge and counter-offensive in which groups are involved is reminiscent of the mechanism of the blood feud in its regularity, symmetry and inevitability.<sup>23</sup>

Unwittingly the Turkish system of higher education was also contributing to the growth of the country's political deadlock and extremism.

### **Further deadlock**

This political deadlock and extremism had become so entrenched that when the Turkish military—which saw itself as the ultimate guardian of Turkish democracy<sup>24</sup>—delivered an "opinion" (actually a letter

of warning) on 27 December 1979 to "those political parties which could not introduce solutions to the political, economic and social problems . . . that have grown to dimensions threatening the integrity of the country,"<sup>25</sup> it fell upon deaf, paralyzed institutions. Demirel, for example, argued that it could not be meant for his government because it had only been in power for thirty days. Ecevit, on the other hand, determined that since he was now out of office, the warning was not intended for him. "It was as if this opinion [of the military] was directed at a vacuum,"<sup>26</sup> concluded the Turkish military after it finally assumed power nine months later.

The deadlock continued. When President Fahri Koruturk's term ended on 6 April 1980, the paralyzed political parties could not even perform their constitutional duty to elect a new chief of state. As political violence and anarchy (see below) began to take from twenty to thirty lives a day, the Turkish Parliament remained hopelessly deadlocked; more than 100 ballots were taken over a six month period. Prime Minister Demirel almost seemed to welcome the situation since it enabled a member of his own JP, as presiding officer of the Senate, to act as interim president.

After it toppled this deadlocked regime, the Turkish military declared: "Everyone observed that the political parties had driven into an impasse the election of the highest authority of the State due to calculations of their political interests . . . . The situation was a new example clearly demonstrating the impasse of the Turkish Parliament."<sup>27</sup> Elsewhere the new military government later declared:

The political parties, an indispensable element of any democratic society, could not reach a consensus on even the most important issues of state. Their partisan attitudes permeated even the smallest organs in the structure of society. The state institutions, universities, schools (of all levels), security establishments, labour organisations, local administrations, in short, every institution in the country fell under the influence of the political rivalry. These institutions could not function effectively in this atmosphere, and everything got worse.<sup>28</sup>

Even after this deadlocked regime had been toppled and Demirel and Ecevit taken into preventive detention, the two and their respective parties continued their sterile wrangling over the military's proposals for a new, 'above politics' cabinet. High-ranking officials offered positions by the military first rang up Demirel or Ecevit for advice and approval.<sup>29</sup>

"Jilted [sic] by what they saw as the incorrigible mendacity, prevarication and short-sightedness of the political establishment,"<sup>30</sup> the military leaders finally decided to "cut the Gordian knot" by abolishing all the political parties and banning their leaders from any renewed political activity for a period of ten years. Given the impasse they had led their country into, it is difficult to muster much sympathy for these leaders of the old order.

One more incident must be mentioned before ending this section. On 6 September 1980 Erbakan staged a massive rally of his NSP followers in the traditionally conservative and religious city of Konya to protest against the Israeli decision to make Jerusalem their capital. Although the military had already decided irrevocably upon intervention, this incident undoubtedly reaffirmed its intention. The description of this event later given by General Evren's new government illustrates graphically the challenge that was being issued to Turkey's secular democracy.

A big green flag (which symbolizes Islamic law) with Arabic writing was being paraded in front of the crowd . . . . After . . . it was announced that the National Anthem was going to be sung . . . it was observed that a group of the mob sat down on the ground and yelled . . . "we won't sing this march."<sup>31</sup>

## **ANARCHY AND TERRORISM**

The political deadlock and extremism detailed above inevitably slid into and reinforced outright anarchy and terrorism. Although it is difficult fully to appreciate just how serious this violence became, some indication is offered by the statistical analysis later released by General Evren's new government.<sup>32</sup> The figures that follow graphically illustrate the tremendous buildup of anarchy and terrorism before the military intervention on 12 September 1980 and its speedy demise afterwards.

### **Statistical analysis**

There was a total of 9,795 incidents of clashes and armed attacks during the overall period. Of these, 91% occurred before 12 September, while only 9% took place afterwards. At the same time a total of 6,732 incidents of arson and throwing of explosives took place. Of this figure, 94.5% occurred before the military intervention and only 5.5% after.

Out of a total of 4,388 incidents of robbery and unlawful acquisition which occurred during the overall period, 68% took place during the first period and 32% during the second. Furthermore a total of 2,591 student incidents took place at the educational institutions during the time frame examined. Of these, 97.7% took place before 12 September, while only 2.3% occurred afterwards.<sup>33</sup>

During these times, a total of 4,040 people lost their lives as a result of violence, a figure which includes the members of the security forces who were killed but excludes those from the ranks of the terrorists.<sup>34</sup> Of this total, 92% occurred before the military intervention and only 8% after. In all, 11,160 people were wounded as a result of terrorist incidents, 93.3% before and only 6.7% after 12 September. Concurrently, martial law forces confiscated a total of 804,197 weapons during the overall period. Only 4% of these were seized before the military takeover, while 96% were taken after.

Statistical data concerning the political persuasions of the captured terrorists are also useful. In the year following the 12 September

intervention, a total of 43,140 persons including 21,864 leftists, 5,953 rightists, 2,034 (Kurdish) separatists,<sup>35</sup> and 13,289 people whose political orientations have not been established were arrested.<sup>36</sup> The arrested leftists were responsible for the murder of 729 people and the wounding of 914. The detained rightists had killed 434, while wounding 508. The figures for the apprehended separatists were 224 and 251 respectively.

Most of the captured terrorists were males. The monthly income of 89% of them was below the TL10,000 national average of that time and 79% of them were bachelors. In terms of educational levels, the largest group of terrorists (36%) had a secondary school education. Those with only an elementary one constituted 28%, while illiterates accounted for 22%. University graduates (14%) were the smallest group.

The breakdown by profession of the captured terrorists listed: (1) students 23%; (2) unemployed 20%; (3) self-employed 15%; (4) workers 14%; (5) civil servants 10%; (6) teachers 7%; and (7) housewives 1%. In terms of age, the group between 16 and 25 constituted the largest at 57% of all the captured terrorists, those between 25 and 35—28%, and 45—11%, and over 45—4%.

Summing up these statistics, General Evren's new government declared: "A careful study of these figures and the causes of the incidents of anarchy and terrorism will clearly show how our youth have been victimized by anarchy and terrorism, the place of workers, teachers, and some civil servants in violence, and the effects of unemployment."<sup>37</sup> Evren's government also blamed certain "foreign states which for years had exploited every opportunity to realize their designs against this country" for this deadly spate of anarchy and terrorism.<sup>38</sup> Indeed evidence emerged after 12 September to indicate that the Soviet Union and Bulgaria had supplied weapons to the various Turkish terrorist factions, while Syria and the PLO had provided training facilities.<sup>39</sup> The purpose of this foreign intervention was to destabilize a crucial link in the NATO alliance.

On the other hand, Mehmet Ali Birand, a respected Turkish journalist who recently wrote a best-seller about the 1980 military coup in Turkey, admitted that with few exceptions "our knowledge today [1987] about the 'wave of terror' of the late 1970s is still as restricted to guesswork and circumstantial evidence as it was at the time."<sup>40</sup> Although mentioning the foreign arms shipments into Turkey, Birand pointed out that "the authorities . . . still remained in doubt as to *who* paid for those and the networks behind these death merchants."<sup>41</sup> Continuing, he suggested that such sociological factors as Turkey's rapid urbanization and the resulting decline of traditional rural life styles, as well as the "authoritarian personality" in the Turkish culture which made possible "extremist and messianic ideological mobilization,"<sup>42</sup> also played an important role.

### Specific incidents

Although the statistics cited above paint an overall picture of the situation, an analysis of some of the specific incidents can give a

poignancy to these events that otherwise would be lacking. After it came to power General Evren's government published a lengthy analysis to explain "what sort of conditions prevailed in the country to prompt them [the military] to assume the running of the state."<sup>43</sup>

One of the first spectacular incidents of anarchy and terrorism occurred on May Day in 1977 when some thirty-seven people were killed at a huge rally organized by DISK in Taksim Square, Istanbul. Although not adequately explained to this day, shots from the surrounding rooftops apparently were fired into the crowd of 200,000 which then panicked and stampeded most of the victims to death.

The report of an incident at Umraniye, Istanbul early in 1978 illustrated how vicious things were becoming.

The bodies of five workers, apparently murdered after torture, were found in this district . . . . The bodies of the victims . . . were so mutilated as to be almost unidentifiable. Their heads were crushed, eyes gouged out, genitals cut away. The barbarism surpassed belief. These criminals . . . were later to admit cold-bloodedly before the Turkish courts of justice, that they had committed this atrocity as execution of the verdict of their so-called "People's Court."<sup>44</sup>

Shocking as these two events were, both paled before the near civil war of sectarian killing that broke out in the southeastern city of Kahramanmaras in late December 1978. General Evren's government later described what had happened in this manner:

The country experienced one of its most terrible examples of mass terrorism when a massacre occurred at Kahramanmaras . . . . Security forces prove to be incapable in preventing the incidents. Gendarmery troops from Gaziantep and airborne troops from Kayseri are deployed . . . . Bloodshed goes on . . . . The Council of Ministers proclaims martial law in 13 provinces . . . . A consensus was barely reached. The balance sheet in . . . Kahramanmaras included 109 dead, 176 seriously wounded and 500 houses and shops destroyed.<sup>45</sup>

Five weeks later the single murder of Abdi Ipekci (the distinguished editor of *Milliyet*, one of Turkey's leading newspaper) was eventually to make Turkish terrorism even more notorious in the eyes of international opinion. This was because Ipekci's assassin was Mehmet Ali Agca. Apprehended several months later, Agca, an apparent member of Turkey's Grey Wolves, escaped from prison with inside help. On 13 May 1981, under circumstances still not entirely clear,<sup>46</sup> Agca attempted unsuccessfully to assassinate Pope John Paul II in St. Peter's Square in Rome.

Although these spectacular terrorist attacks made the headlines, Turkey also was increasingly being submitted to a daily drumbeat of

more mundane anarchical and terrorist incidents that "were escalating so rapidly that it became impossible to follow who was murdered or wounded and which banks were robbed or which offices were bombed."<sup>47</sup>

The intensity of this anarchy and terrorism continued to escalate in 1980. In January of that year armed clashes between several thousand troops and militant DISK workers at the Taris textile plant in Izmir rapidly spread to various other parts of Turkey's third largest city. "Izmir turned into a powder keg. Students also joined the clashes . . . The workers placed bomb placards in the way of the police and opened fire on fire fighting teams,"<sup>48</sup> stated General Evren's government.

The Tarsus incidents in southeastern Turkey occurred in April and resulted in the death of nine and the wounding of twenty. They were the result of a traffic fatality that leftist elements used to agitate the people into a confrontation with the security forces. "Everything turned into hell at once," the military later explained.<sup>49</sup>

In June right wing extremists assassinated the District Chairman of the RPP in Nevsehir, a small city some 200 kilometers southeast of Ankara. On 18 June, the RPP funeral delegation led by Ecevit travelled to that central Anatolian city, only to be met by a hail of stones and then bullets that wounded five. Abandoning the coffin in the middle of a narrow street, the members of the funeral procession ran for their lives. Unable to contact the Prime Minister (Demirel) for help, Ecevit finally was able to get a call through to the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces (Evren). "General Evren, I can't reach the Prime Minister so I am calling you. My deputies and I have come under gunfire. Our lives are in danger. We are unable to bury our dead. I seek your help and support."<sup>50</sup>

The military responded quickly and order was restored. The supreme irony of the Nevsehir incident, however, was that Ecevit, who as a leftist opposed extraordinary powers for the military, had to call upon it to protect himself and his supporters.

By 1980, 31 of Turkey's 67 provinces reportedly contained so-called "liberated zones," areas under the exclusive authority of one ideological faction or another, and closed off to the state's security forces. One of the most publicized cases occurred in the remote Black Sea coastal town of Fatsa.<sup>51</sup> Here radical leftists known as Dev Yol (Revolutionary Way) had set up an alternative regime complete with its own municipal services, "People's Court," and mayor. Only in July 1980 did the government move against Fatsa, and, as the military later explained, captured "some 300 militants of illegal organizations including the Mayor of the town . . . An operation carried [out] after 12 September, made clear . . . how this town was turned into [an] experimental site of a regime which was prohibited by our Constitution."<sup>52</sup>

On Friday, 4 July a bomb exploded near a mosque in Corum, a city some 200 kilometers east of Ankara, and the area was strafed with bullets. Rumors soon spread that "communists were burning and destroying mosques."<sup>53</sup> Sectarian fighting between Sunni and Alevis broke out "and more than 100 houses and shops were burnt and

destroyed on the first day. Nobody could enter the scenes of fire, not even the security forces . . . Jet fighters carried out deterrent flights over the town."<sup>54</sup> "A correspondent of the national daily newspaper *Milliyet* dispatched to Corum ahead of the armoured brigade barely escaped with his life when he was bundled back into his car and sent packing by right-wing paramilitaries manning road blocks controlling approaches to the city."<sup>55</sup> By the time order was finally restored, at least 23 people had been killed.

Less than three weeks later, left-wing terrorists gunned down former (1971-1972) Prime Minister Nihat Erim in Istanbul. While his funeral was taking place, Kemal Turkler, the former President of DISK, was assassinated by right-wing terrorists. Bankrupt and paralyzed, the old regime was approaching its inglorious and unlamented end. On 12 September the military stepped in.

### **POSTSCRIPT**

It is difficult not to admire the military for ending the political deadlock and extremism, as well as the terrible anarchy and terrorism that was threatening the very existence of the Turkish state in the late 1970s. Too many critics of the Evren government fail to appreciate the severity of the situation which existed. Nobody pretends that the military used kid gloves. Few wanted it to. The times called for extraordinary means, and the military proved up to the task. Indeed, given the trying circumstances, one might argue that Evren's government demonstrated relative moderation toward those who had come so close to destroying the state. It is doubtful that a house in such disorder could have been set in order any more lightly than was done after 1980.

Further, there can be no doubt that some of the charges of human rights violations and torture levelled against the regime were politically motivated by the very ones who had tried, but failed, to bring the Turkish state down. "Some of the traitors who fled abroad because of arrests at home following September 12, continued their activities against Turkey in foreign countries and attempted to disseminate through certain international organizations allegations that their supporters in Turkey are being subjected to torture and ill treatment."<sup>56</sup>

Nevertheless the continuing violation of human rights in Turkey today is too well documented to dismiss out of hand.<sup>57</sup> Indeed Evren's government has implicitly admitted such abuses. "These elements and other institutions supporting them [those critical of the Evren regime] have never talked about the massacres and torture implemented by the inhuman murderers responsible for thousands of killings and the creation of a climate of fear and intimidation over the Turkish people before September 12."<sup>58</sup> Similarly a well placed Turkish source more recently declared: "That torture, even if not systematic in the sense of being government-controlled, was so wide-spread and a common practice, that only those with political affiliations care about it. The common thief, burglar and what Turks call the 'simple criminal' would just accept it as a way of life."<sup>59</sup>

Teoman Evren, the President of the Union of Turkish Bar Associations, declared in June 1987:

Not enough action has been taken on torture. Statesmen have not taken definitive actions to end torture, and courts have not followed up torture allegations with sufficient care. The attitude of officials who do not pursue torturers encourages more torture. Statesmen make statements that give heart to torturers, for example, saying that torture takes place all over the world—in Sweden, in the United States.<sup>60</sup>

Both Ecevit and Demirel, who regained their political rights through a special referendum in September 1987, have also spoken out on the matter. Ecevit declared that “torture and arbitrary killings are continuing,”<sup>61</sup> while Demirel added “that 175 or 180 people have died from torture, and that torture is the policy of the current government.”<sup>62</sup>

In allowing this situation to continue past the time called for by the extraordinary events of the late 1970s, the Evren-Ozal government is now besmirching the good name of those who saved Turkey from collapse in 1980 and set it so successfully upon the road to subsequent democratic and economic renewal. It is encouraging, therefore, that the 1987 Helsinki Watch report on the situation in Turkey concluded:

The human rights situation in Turkey remains in a state of flux, but there are still good reasons for optimism. A number of important steps have already been taken by the government to improve the situation and a verbal commitment to human rights and democracy has been publicly made by most of the major political forces in the country . . . This provides a basis for our continued hope that Turkey will ultimately achieve a government that respects human rights in its actions as well as in its words and provides guarantees for their protection.<sup>63</sup>

It is to be hoped that this optimism is not misplaced.

#### Endnotes

1. John Kifner, “Ankara’s Slum Dwellers Grateful for Coup,” *New York Times*, 19 September 1980, p. A2.
2. See, for example, George S. Harris, *Turkey: Coping with Crisis* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985), p. 65; Lucille W. Pevsner, *Turkey’s Political Crisis: Background, Perspectives, Prospects* (New York: Praeger, 1984), p. 85; and Dankwart A. Rustow, *Turkey: America’s Forgotten Ally* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1987), p. 57. For a background analysis, see Jacob Landau, *Radical Politics in Turkey* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974).
3. For two useful, but earlier, analyses of the 1980 intervention see Feroz Ahmad, “Military Intervention and the Crisis in Turkey,” *MERIP Reports* no. 93 (January 1981); and Kemal H. Karpat, “Turkish Democracy at Impasse: Ideology, Party

and the Third Military Intervention," *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 2 (Spring/Summer 1981), pp. 1-43. For a general background see C.H. Dodd, *The Crisis of Turkish Democracy* (North Humberstone, U.K.: Eothen Press, 1983); and Frank Tachau, *Turkey: The Politics of Authority, Democracy, and Development* (New York: Praeger, 1984).

4. In the 1973 election the RPP won 33.2% of the vote, while the JP managed 29.8%. The two key right-wing parties, the NSP and NAP, tallied respectively 11.9% and 3.4%. Two other rightist parties that were more moderate, the Republican Reliance Party (RRP) and the Democratic Party (DP), won 5.3% and 11.8% of the vote respectively.

In the 1977 election the RPP's hopes for a parliamentary majority fell just short when it managed to win 41.4% of the vote, while the JP upped its totals to 36.9%. Meanwhile the NSP fell to 8.6%, and the NAP rose to 6.4%. The other two, more moderate rightist parties, the RRP and DP, were decimated winning respectively just 1.9% and 1.8%. For a further analysis, see William Hale, "The Role of the Electoral System in Turkish Politics," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 11 (1980), pp. 401-17.

5. After it came to power in September 1980, for example, the new military government argued: "The comprehensive amnesty proved one of the causes of the new wave of anarchy and terror in the subsequent years." General Secretariat of the National Security Council, *12 September in Turkey: Before and After* (Ankara: Ongun Kardesler Printing House, 1982), p. 15. This detailed explanation by the military of the reasons for its intervention will hereafter be cited as *12 September*. Also see on this point the recent account by the respected Turkish journalist, Mehmet Ali Birand, *The Generals' Coup in Turkey: An Inside Story of 12 September 1980*, trans. M.A. Dikerdem (London: Brassey's Defence Publishers, 1987), p. 18. Birand's study is based on interviews of 165 of the protagonists of the coup and previously unavailable documents.
6. Rustow, *Turkey*, p. 70.
7. On this point see Birand, *Generals' Coup*, p. 90.
8. *12 September*, p. 111.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 198.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
11. See the accounts in *ibid.*, pp. 36, 37, 84, and 93-94.
12. On this point, see Ilkay Sunar and Sabri Sayari, "Democracy in Turkey: Problems and Prospects," in *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy*, ed. Guillermo O'Donnell *et al.* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 182.
13. On this point see Rustow, *Turkey*, p. 131n7.
14. Pevsner, *Turkey's Political Crisis*, p. 60. On the left, see George S. Harris, "The Left in Turkey," *Problems of Communism* 29 (July-August 1980), pp. 26-42.
15. Birand, *Generals' Coup*, p. 48.
16. Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970). Elsewhere Gurr explained that "relative deprivation . . . [is] defined as actors' perception of discrepancy between their *value expectations* and their environment's apparent *value capabilities*." Ted Robert Gurr, "Psychological Factors in Civil Violence," in *Anger, Violence, and Politics*, ed. I.K. Feierabend *et al.* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1972), p. 37. For analyses of the economic and social changes that occurred in Turkey during the 1970s, see William M. Hale, ed., *Aspects of Modern Turkey* (London: Bowker, 1976); and Walter Weiker, *The Modernization of Turkey: From Ataturk to the Present Day* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1981).
17. Paul J. Magnarella, "Civil Violence in Turkey: Its Infrastructural, Social and Cultural Foundations," in *Sex Roles, Family and Community in Turkey*, ed. Cigdem Kagitcibasi (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Turkish Studies, 1982), pp. 383-401.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 387.
19. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 388.

20. On this point see Harris, "The Left in Turkey," p. 37.
21. For analyses of Turkey's economic situation in the 1970s, see William M. Hale, *The Political and Economic Development of Modern Turkey* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981); and Henri Barkey, "Crises of the Turkish Political Economy of 1960-1980," in *Modern Turkey: Continuity and Change*, ed. Ahmet O. Evin (Opladen: Leske und Budrich, 1984).
22. Serif Mardin, "Youth and Violence in Turkey," *European Journal of Sociology* 19(1978), p. 250.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 231.
24. The opening sentence of the military's lengthy explanation for its actions on 12 September speaks about "The Turkish Armed Forces . . . responsibility of 'safeguarding and protecting the Turkish Republic.'" *12 September*, p. ix. For further analyses of the military's unique political role in Turkish politics, see Dankwart A. Rostow, "The Army and the Founding of the Turkish Republic," *World Politics* 11(July 1959), pp. 513-52; Walter Weiker, *The Turkish Revolution, 1960-1961: Aspects of Military Politics* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1963); Ergun Ozbudun, *The Role of the Military in Recent Turkish Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Center for International Affairs, 1966); Metin Tamkoc, *The Warrior Diplomats: Guardians of National Security and the Modernization of Turkey* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1976); George S. Harris, *Turkey: Coping with Crisis* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985), pp. 153-73; and Nicholas S. Ludington and James W. Spain, "Dateline Turkey: The Case for Patience," *Foreign Policy* (Spring 1983), pp. 150-68.
25. Cited in *12 September*, p. 160.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 163.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 181.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
29. For the details of this incredible story see Birand, *Generals' Coup*, pp. 198-208.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
31. *12 September*, pp. 215-216.
32. See the report issued by the Turkish government *Anarchy and Terrorism in Turkey* [1982]. The following analysis is taken from this source and covers approximately thirty-seven months from 26 December 1978, the date of the proclamation of martial law following the Kahramanmaraş incidents (see below), up to 11 February 1982, and it broken down into four separate periods: (1) 26 December 1978-11 September 1979; (2) 12 September 1979-11 September 1980; (3) 12 September 1980-11 September 1981; and (4) 12 September 1981-11 February 1982. It should be noted that the first two periods took place during the rampant build up of anarchy and terrorism before the military takeover, while the third and fourth periods followed that event. To simplify the process of comparison, these four time periods will be combined into two: before the military intervention and after.
33. I have related some of my experiences as a Senior Fulbright Lecturer at the Middle East Technical University in Ankara during these troubled times (September 1978-June 1979) in Michael M. Gunter, "On Turkish Students," in *The Fulbright Experience, 1946-1986*, ed. Arthur P. Dudden and Russell R. Dynes (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1987), pp. 281-84.
34. A total of 230 members of the security forces were killed, 164 before and 66 after the military intervention. At the same time 348 terrorists died, 146 before and 202 after 12 September.
35. For an analysis of the Kurdish issue, see Michael M. Gunter, "The Kurdish Problem in Turkey," *The Middle East Journal* 42(Summer 1988), pp. 389-406; and "Kurdish Militancy in Turkey: The Case of PKK," *Crossroads* (forthcoming).
36. Some of these people were released after investigations established their innocence.
37. *Anarchy and Terrorism in Turkey*, p. 14.
38. See *12 September*, p. 6.

39. On this general point also see Paul B. Henze, "Organized Crime and Drug Linkages," in *Hydra of Carnage: International Linkages of Terrorism, The Witnesses Speak*, ed. Uri Ra'anani et al. (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1986), pp. 171-87; and the testimony given by Aydin Yalcin in "Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Security and Terrorism of the Committee on the Judiciary United States Senate on Turkish Experience with Terrorism," (Serial No. J-97-43), 97th Cong., 1st sess., 1981.
40. Birand, *Generals' Coup*, p. 51.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 51-52.
43. *12 September*, preface.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 56-58.
46. On the possible Soviet involvement here, see Claire Sterling, *The Time of the Assassins: Anatomy of an Investigation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983); and Paul B. Henze, *The Plot to Kill the Pope* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1985). For a conflicting opinion see Edward S. Herman and Frank Brodhead, *The Rise and Fall of the Bulgarian Connection* (New York: Sheridan Square Publications, Inc., 1986). Stephen E. Tabachnick has written an insightful review of all three of these analyses. See "Dedefining Reality," *American Book Review* (January/February 1987), pp. 9-10.
47. *12 September*, p. 143.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 170.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
50. Cited in Birand, *Generals' Coup*, p. 143.
51. For a balanced account of Fatsa see Barry Newman, "The Left, the Right and Hazelnuts: The Nightmare of a Turkish Town," *The Wall Street Journal*, 29 April 1983, p. 1.
52. *12 September*, p. 199.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 194.
54. *Ibid.*
55. Birand, *Generals' Coup*, p. 147.
56. *Anarchy and Terrorism in Turkey*, p. 19.
57. Amnesty International, *Continuing Violations of Human Rights in Turkey* (1987); and Helsinki Watch Committee, *State of Flux: Human Rights in Turkey* (1987), hereafter cited as *Human Rights in Turkey*. In addition see the other publications of the Helsinki Watch Committee entitled *Violations of the Helsinki Accords: Turkey* (1986); *Freedom and Fear: Human Rights in Turkey* (1986); *Straws in the Wind: Prospects for Human Rights and Democracy in Turkey* (1984); and *Human Rights in Turkey's 'Transition to Democracy'* (1983). Also see the various annual reports by Amnesty International and that organization's *Torture in the Eighties* (1984).
58. *Anarchy and Terrorism in Turkey*, p. 19.
59. *Briefing* (Ankara), 15 February 1988, p. 14.
60. *Human Rights in Turkey*, p. 52.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
62. *Ibid.*
63. *Ibid.*, p. 7.