

INTRA-OR INTERNATIONAL VIOLENCE? THE ORIGINS OF ARMENIAN TERRORISM¹

(ULUSAL YA DA ULUSLARARASI ŞİDDET?
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Abstract: *The violent re-emergence of the “Armenian Question” more than 50 years after being internationally settled by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, has conveniently been placed in a narrative that proves continuity in the Armenians’ struggle against the Turkish government. It is attributed to a series of specific events that triggered the Armenian violence and a number of more general factors that facilitated its emergence. This narrative, however, is flawed. This paper suggests that the origins of the radicalization of Armenian youth groups in the early 1970s was not a product of a century-old vendetta against the Turks, but resulted from an internal struggle for power and influence within the Armenian community. We also argue that this intra-Armenian violence, which began in Beirut, Lebanon and then spread internationally, has largely been overlooked by historians.*

Keywords: *Armenian Question, ASALA, JCAG, terrorism*

Öz: *1923 yılında Lozan Antlaşması ile uluslararası açıdan çözümlenmiş olan “Ermeni Sorunu”nun şiddetli bir şekilde yeniden ortaya çıkması, Ermenilerin Türk hükümetine karşı mücadelesinde devamlılık olduğunu iddia eden bir söylem içerisine bilinçli bir şekilde yerleştirilmiştir. Bu hareket Ermeni şiddetini tetikleyen bir seri olay ve bu şiddetin ortaya çıkmasını sağlayan daha genel daha genel faktörlere bağlanmaktadır. Ancak bu söylem hatalıdır. Bu makale Ermeni gençlik örgütlerinin 1970’li yıllardaki radikalleşmesinin, Türklere yönelik yüz yıllık bir öç duygusundan değil, Ermeni toplumu içerisinde bir güç ve etkinlik kazanma mücadelesinden kaynaklandığını iddia etmektedir. Ayrıca Ermeni gruplar arasında Lübnan Beyrut’ta başlayan ve uluslararası Alana sıçrayan bu şiddet hareketinin tarihçiler tarafından büyük ölçüde gözardı edildiği öne sürülmektedir.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Ermeni Sorunu, ASAL, Adalet Komandoları, terörizm*

¹ An older and shorter version of this paper was presented at the University of Padua Conference, on July 1-3, 2010.

INTRODUCTION

Between 1975 and the mid-1980s, at least two Armenian groups targeted and killed approximately 70 individuals and wounded another 500 through a combination of assassinations, bombing campaigns and violent assaults that covered North America, Europe, the Middle East and the south Pacific. The three deadliest attacks occurred in the summers of 1982 and 1983, when 20 people were murdered and close to 150 injured in separate attacks at the Esenboğa Airport in Ankara, Orly Airport in Paris, and at the Covered Bazaar in Istanbul.² Despite becoming more indiscriminate towards the nationality of their victims by the end of their campaign, these Armenian groups initially focused their violence almost exclusively on Turkish citizens, the Turkish government and Turkish business interests. Today, if they are remembered at all, they are primarily known for the assassinations carried out on Turkish diplomats and their families during the 1970s and 1980s.

By the time the deputy director for the UN Center for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs was killed in Vienna, Austria on November 20, 1984, 31 Turkish diplomats and members of their immediate families had been murdered by Armenian activists since the campaign first took the lives of the Turkish Consul General of Turkey, Mehmet Baydar, and Consul of Turkey, Bahadır Demir, in Santa Barbara, CA on January 27, 1973.³ Ostensibly, the aims of the terrorists were to force the Turkish government to acknowledge that the ethnic conflict in eastern Anatolia in 1915 was an Ottoman sponsored, and directed, genocide against the Armenians, to pay reparations to the families of these victims, and to return the provinces of eastern Anatolia to the Armenians.

This movement, even at the peak of its activity, had virtually no chance of reaching its stated goals. First, the government of the Turkish Republic certainly was not going to revise its interpretation and position on decisions made sixty years before by the government of the Ottoman Empire during World War I because of Armenian violence and threats of violence. By extension, therefore, discussions over reparations were meaningless. Finally, the prospect of violating the territorial sovereignty of the Turkish Republic, especially along the longest NATO border with the Soviet Union, during the height of the Cold War, was preposterous. Yet, Armenian terrorism continued.

2 Michael M. Gunter, *"Pursuing the Just Cause of Their People": A Study of Contemporary Armenian Terrorism*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), 70.

3 Ömer Engin Lütem, *Armenian Terror* (Ankara: Center for Eurasian Studies, 2007):

The violent re-emergence of the “Armenian Question,” more than 50 years after being internationally settled by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, has conveniently been placed in a narrative that proves continuity in the Armenians’ struggle against the Turkish government. It is attributed to a series of specific events that triggered the Armenian violence and a number of more general factors that facilitated its emergence. This narrative, however, is flawed. The available evidence suggests that the origins of the radicalization of Armenian youth groups in the early 1970s was not a product of a century-old vendetta against the Turks, but resulted from an internal struggle for power and influence within the Armenian community. This intra-Armenian violence, which began in Beirut, Lebanon and then spread internationally, has largely been overlooked by historians.

The available evidence suggests that the origins of the radicalization of Armenian youth groups in the early 1970s was not a product of a century-old vendetta against the Turks, but resulted from an internal struggle for power and influence within the Armenian community.

Before fading away in the late 1980s,⁴ the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) and the Justice Commandos Against Armenian Genocide (JCAG) were linked to various militant Palestinian organizations, including the Abu Nidal Organization and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, as well as other international terrorist organizations, international narcotic trafficking and extortion rings and even to the USSR, Libya, Syria, Greece and Cyprus.⁵ In a geographical and temporal environment where the Armenian organizations had to compete with such groups as the Italian Red Brigades, the German Red Army Faction, the Irish Republican Army, the Basque ETA, and the PLO for media exposure and government attention, the Armenians managed extremely well. In the early 1980s, various U.S. government officials described Armenian terrorists as the most dangerous, savage and mysterious group in existence,⁶ and in 1981 they actually accounted for the highest number of documented international terrorist attacks in the world.⁷

4 Mehmet Ali Birand, “Thanks to Nuri Gündes,” *Turkish Daily News*, February 10, 2007.

5 For just a sampling see Andrew Corsun, “Armenian Terrorism: A Profile,” in *Department of State Bulletin* Vol. 82, No. 2065 (August 1982): 35; Gunter, 90-115; Anat Kurz and Ariel Merari, *ASALA—Irrational Terror or Political Tool* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), 39-52; Paul Henze, *GOAL: Destabilization: Soviet Agitational Propaganda, Instability and Terrorism in NATO South* (Marina del Rey, CA: European Institute for Security Research, 1981), 36; Andrew Mango, *Turkey and the War on Terror: For Forty Years We Fought Alone* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 12; Marvin Howe, “Turks Blame Cypriots for Attacks in Name of Armenians,” *New York Times*, February 28, 1980; E.J. Dionne, Jr., “Armenian Terror: Tangle of Motives,” *New York Times*, August 1, 1983; and all of *Armenian Terrorism, Its Supporters, the Narcotic Connection, the Distortion of History*. Ankara, Turkey: Ankara University, 1984.

6 Radio TV Reports, Inc., “Armenian Terrorists,” January 10, 1983, CIA Records Research Tool (http://www.foia.cia.gov/search_archive.asp), ESDN: CIA-RDP88-01070R000100520004-4; and Gunter, 1.

7 “Patterns of International Terrorism: 1981,” in *Department of State Bulletin* Vol. 82, No. 2065 (August 1982): 16.

Twenty-five years after the apparent cessation of attacks by these Armenian groups, little is still known about the Armenian terrorists of the 1970s and 1980s. Most of the limited literature on ASALA and the Justice Commandos, written during the early and mid-1980s, was based on speculation, government announcements, press reports, and information leaked by the militants themselves. Further scholarship on ASALA and the Justice Commandos, which are not only part of the historiography on terrorism, nationalism, violence and diaspora politics, but also of the Armenian and Turkish tensions that persist today, has been impeded by three factors.

First, unlike the Red Brigades and the Red Army Faction, only a handful of Armenian operatives were ever captured and none, at least as far the records show, were part of the top leadership. Those members who were captured generally refused to cooperate publicly with the arresting authorities and so provided very little insight or information into the organizations. Secondly, the headquarters of both ASALA and the Justice Commandos were located in Beirut from 1975 until, at least in the case of ASALA, the Israeli invasion in 1982. Even if these organizations maintained their own records, it is unlikely that they survived the chaos of civil war and the subsequent evacuation after the Israeli invasion. Finally, government documents on either ASALA or the Justice Commandos are only now being declassified.

Piecing together the history of these violent Armenian groups forces researchers to work with the thin published record and what is slowly trickling out of the archives. Fortunately, enough material has been released from the archives to enable a reinvestigation of the origins of Armenian terrorism. What has emerged is enough to question the series of specific events that occurred in 1960s and 1970s that have been attributed to the increasing radicalization of the Armenian youth and their decision to employ violence in a struggle that had largely been dormant since the early 1920s.

The dominant narrative used to explain the violent re-emergence of the “Armenian question” cites four specific events that occurred during the late 1960s and early 1970s that galvanized and strengthened Armenian public opinion and triggered their decision to act on their grievances against the Turkish government. The first two events are the organized commemorations and anti-Turkish demonstrations held to mark the 50th anniversary of the events of 1915 on April 24, 1965 in Beirut, Lebanon and Yerevan, Soviet Armenia.⁸ The demonstrations in Lebanon are attributed with establishing April 24 as the official day of commemoration of the

8 Gunter, 31-32

Armenian Massacres,⁹ while the latter, which developed into a boisterous demonstration that was eventually suppressed by the Soviet authorities, extracted concessions from the Soviet government allowing for the annual commemoration of April 24th with public demonstrations and permission to construct a memorial to the victims and territories lost to Turkey in 1915 in Yerevan¹⁰.

Third, in January 1973, a 78-year old ethnic Armenian invited the Consul General and Consul of the Turkish Consulate in Los Angeles to lunch at a Santa Barbara hotel under the pretense of returning a painting which had been stolen from the Ottoman Sultan's residence. Instead, after lunch, both the Consul General and Consul were shot and killed at point-blank range. During the ensuing trial, the defendant attempted to turn his murder trial into an indictment of the Turkish government for the events of 1915. The trial, some argue, stimulated not only the Armenian communities of California, but the international diaspora as well. Although most claim that this individual had been working alone, many view his act as the model and inspiration for the assassination of Turkish diplomats over the ensuing decade.¹¹

Both groups began to assassinate Turkish diplomats and bomb Turkish government installations, initially in Europe, and then spreading to the Middle East and North America before they moved on to more sophisticated attacks, including hijacking and hostage-taking, later in the decade.

Finally, in 1974 a paragraph specifically labeling the events of 1915 as the “first case of genocide in the twentieth century” was deleted from a report on the prevention of genocide that was submitted to the UN Commission on Human Rights.¹² Perhaps on its own, this deletion would have gone unnoticed, or at least, uncontested, but in conjunction with the rising assertiveness of the various Armenian diasporas since 1965, and the relatively well publicized murders of the Turkish diplomats in 1973, the deletion caused indignation and exasperation on the part of Armenians worldwide.

By 1975, these factors led to the emergence of two groups based in a hostile, violent and politically deteriorating Beirut: ASALA and the Justice Commandos. Both groups began to assassinate Turkish diplomats and bomb

9 Ibid.,31.

10 Michael Bobelian, *Children of Armenia: A Forgotten Genocide and the Century-Long Struggle for Justice*, Kindle Edition (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), Location 2229-2296.

11 Gunter, 36-37; Kurz, *ASALA—Irrational Terror or Political Tool*, 3; and Michael Bobelian, *Children of Armenia*, 2724-2946.

12 Gunter, 36-37, & Kurz, *ASALA*, 62.

Turkish government installations, initially in Europe, and then spreading to the Middle East and North America before they moved on to more sophisticated attacks, including hijacking and hostage-taking, later in the decade. The specifics of ASALA's origins are unknown, but it is recognized as the original group and it is credited, by their own admission, with starting the terrorist campaign on January 20, 1975 with the bombing of the World Council of Churches' office in Beirut.¹³ The Justice Commandos, on the other hand, is an offshoot of one of the original and most powerful modern era Armenian political parties, the *Dashnaks*, or the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, whose origins date to 1890.¹⁴ Afraid that the youthful, aggressive, militant and, potentially, more popular ASALA would be more attractive than the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, its leadership created the Justice Commandos Against the Armenian Genocide to maintain its membership ranks and compete with ASALA for new recruits.¹⁵

Although ASALA was a Marxist organization, and the JCAG leaned to the right, they were nearly unanimous in the goals they sought to achieve through their violent attacks. Frustrated by the inability and indifference of the established Armenian political organizations and leaders to achieve the goals of the diaspora over the 60 years between 1915 and 1975, the two groups eventually arrived independently at three essential aims to their struggle: first, to force the Turkish government to recognize and admit that the forced relocations and Armenian deaths in eastern Anatolia in 1915 constituted an act of genocide; second, to force the Turkish government to make financial reparations to the survivors and, if necessary, their descendants, of 1915; and third, to liberate the Armenian provinces of eastern Turkey.

The two groups differed, however, over what the third aim actually entailed. The JCAG, and its successor, the Armenian Revolutionary Army, appear to have envisioned a relatively ambiguous independent Armenia carved out of eastern Turkey.¹⁶ ASALA sought an independent Armenia that encompassed all of the historic lands of the ancient kingdom, which inevitably meant some form of either collaboration, or conflict, with the Soviet Union and Soviet Armenia.¹⁷ Due to their Marxist ideology, most observers believed

13 Corsun, *Armenian Terrorism*, 31 & 34; Popular Movement for the ASALA, *ASALA Interviews* (Great Britain, April 1982), 9; Gunter, 33; Kurz, *ASALA*, 21;

14 Corsun, 33; Gunter, 55; Kurz, 17; & Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, *Terrorism Review*, July 29, 1985, 15. CIA Electronic Reading Room (<http://www.foia.cia.gov/>).

15 Corsun, 32; Gunter, 55-56; & *Terrorism Review*, 15.

16 Corsun, *Armenian Terrorism*, 33.

17 *ASALA Interviews*, 31; & Kurz, 1.

that ASALA simply aimed at unifying Turkey's eastern provinces with Soviet Armenia.¹⁸

Agreements or disagreements over the details of their specific aims, though, were a relatively moot point. Not only did they ultimately fail to achieve their goals, but even contemporary observers, during the height of the campaign, saw virtually no chance for the Armenian terrorists to force recognition, financial compensation or territory from the Turkish government.¹⁹ Furthermore, in a recent study on the history of terrorism, the author admits that the Armenian terrorist groups of the 1970s and 1980s defy normal categorization, simply because these movements had “no hope of success.”²⁰ Other motivations have been suggested, including the desire to raise global awareness to the events of 1915, to “re-awaken” the dormant, or sleeping Armenian nationalism of the diaspora or even more simply, that the Armenian groups just wanted to murder Turks, and felt justified in doing so, in revenge for the massacres of 1915.²¹ The JCAG, however, came out on at least one occasion to publicly to dispel this notion.²² What then, helped to produce and sustain this hopeless cause?

Most scholars who have researched ASALA and the Justice Commandos have acknowledged some more general factors, even if these factors remain unexplored, that contributed to the origins of Armenian violence in the mid-1970s. The first is the collapse of the Lebanese state, and what the violence and chaos surrounding the outbreak of civil war may have meant to the large, and one of the most concentrated, Armenian diaspora in Beirut.²³ The second, and also within the context of Lebanon, are conjectures on the potential political and social impact that the rise of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, due to the proximity of the Palestinian cause, had on the Armenians living in Lebanon.²⁴ The third is the increasing global attention paid to international human rights during this period, which started with the civil rights movements of the 1960s and culminated in the Helsinki Accords, which the Armenians attempted to use to their advantage.

Additionally, the first five years that ASALA and the Justice Commandos were in operation, was a period of rising tension between Turkey and the

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

19 Gunter, 36; *Terrorism Review*, 16; Kurz, 19.

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

21 Gunter, 36; Kurz, 3; Mango, 11.

22 Corsun, 34.

23 Gunter, 33-35; Kurz, 16-17; Mango, 11-12.

24 Ibid.

West and a general decrease in European and North American public attitudes and approval towards Turkey. The Turkish intervention on Cyprus in 1974, the subsequent partitioning of that island, the U.S. arms embargo imposed on Turkey in wake of the intervention, the territorial dispute over rights in the Aegean Sea between Greece and Turkey, which percolated throughout this period, and, finally, alleged human rights violations in wake of the Turkish military's takeover of the government in September of 1980, all contributed to the deterioration of the Western publics' opinion of Turkey.²⁵

A re-evaluation of the accepted origins of these Armenian groups exposes inconsistencies in the standard narrative and invites an investigation into the "deeper roots" of Armenian terrorism suggested by earlier scholars.²⁶ First, the contention that Armenian political terrorism originated independently with ASALA, a group whose members were a contingent of the diaspora youth in Beirut dissatisfied with the failures of traditional Armenian political outlets, appears to rest on a thin evidentiary foundation. Despite their perceived setback in the United Nations in 1974, the traditional channels of Armenian political expression

had made significant gains by 1975, including monuments dedicated to victims of 1915, annual commemorations, media exposure on April 24th of each year and, at least in the United States, an increase in non-violent Armenian student activism.²⁷

This raises key questions. Where were the Armenian youths getting their information on the ineptitude of the Armenian political system? Why did they believe they could achieve by force and violence, the recognition, reparations and territory that Armenian politicians had failed to secure? Objectives that they themselves should have recognized as unattainable within the context of the geopolitical situation they were operating under.

Second, the belief that the Justice Commandos Against the Armenian Genocide was organized by the Dashnaks in an effort to compete for youth

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25 Mango, 20.

26 Gunter, 36.

27 "Armenia Remembers," *New York Times*, April 24, 1965; "Massacre of Armenians by Turks Commemorated," *New York Times*, April 26, 1965; Richard F. Shephard, "1915 Genocide is Still Vivid to Armenians Here," *New York Times*, April 24, 1975; Bobelian, 2361-2581

membership with the suddenly more attractive ASALA falters under scrutiny. ASALA's first terrorist attack, against the offices of the World Council of Churches, on January 20, 1975, appears to have been relatively ignored by the international media at the time. The next two major attacks, assassinations of the ambassadors to Austria and France, and the French ambassador's driver, at the end of October 1975, have both been attributed to the Justice Commandos. The second confirmed attack by ASALA was not carried out until February 1976, when the first-secretary at the Turkish Embassy in Beirut was assassinated. The next five assassinations, between June 1977 and December 1979, are believed to have been the work of the Justice Commandos.²⁸ The first international terrorist attack by ASALA seems to have been a bomb attack at the Turkish Airlines office in Geneva in December 1978, almost four years after their campaign began.²⁹ The claim, therefore, that the JCAG was created to compete with an aggressive and assertive ASALA is unconvincing.

Finally, an aspect that has been overlooked, but one that may hold the most promise, is the dynamic within the Armenian community of Beirut itself. One of the more interesting events surrounding the origins of Armenian terrorism is the attack mentioned above on the World Council of Churches in January 1975. This attack was followed by another bomb attack of an affiliate of the World Council of Churches, the Armenian National Committee for Homeless Armenians in Rome on December 23, 1979.³⁰ In an interview after the attacks, ASALA claimed that the reason behind both attacks was that the World Council of Churches and the Armenian National Committee for Homeless Armenians were collaborating with Western powers to "facilitate the emigration of Armenian youth from the Arab world and socialist countries toward the United States,"³¹ and accused the WCC of belonging "to the CIA."³²

When asked specifically about the attacks on the ANCHA in Rome, the leader of ASALA replied that the ANCHA in Rome was in league with the United States and Turkey to "liquidate the Armenian question" through the emigration of Armenians away from their historical homeland, and were working under the protection of the Vatican and with the cooperation of the Armenian Church and the Dashnak party.³³ He went on to threaten further

28 Gunter, 68-69.

29 *Armenian Atrocities and Terrorism: Testimonies of Witnesses*, (Washington, DC: Assembly of Turkish American Associations, 1997), 81.

30 *ASALA Interviews*, 33.

31 *ASALA Interviews*, 9; Gunter, 31.

32 State Department Telegram, Beirut 1278, AMEMBASSY BEIRUT to USMISSION GENEVA, January 28, 1975 (<http://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-description.jsp?s=4073&cat=all&bc=sl>).

33 *ASALA Interviews*, 32-33.

attacks on both the Pope and the Vatican, if the “traffic of Armenian emigrants” did not stop.³⁴

It is significant that the first attack of a terrorist group allegedly dedicated to extracting an admission of guilt from the Turkish government for alleged crimes against the Armenian people would be directed towards the World Council of Churches in January 1975. An organization in Beirut, staffed by Armenian relief workers, that was helping other Armenians to escape the rapidly deteriorating conditions in Beirut. There is further evidence that ASALA was threatening, intimidating, and even possibly harming the Armenian residents of Beirut in a manifesto promising “punishment by death” to Armenians who did not abandon their “fascist organizations” and “rejoin the Armenian ranks” through ASALA.³⁵

Compounding the problem, or question, of stability within the Armenian community of Beirut was the sudden and sharp increase of Soviet Armenians being granted exited visas from the USSR, first noticed by the U.S. State Department in June 1975.³⁶ 59 percent more Soviet Armenians had applied for emigration to the United States by the end of April 1976, than had for the entire 1975 calendar year.³⁷ This wave of Armenian emigration peaked in 1980, when approximately 1,000 Armenians were leaving the USSR per month.³⁸ The majority of these individuals would ultimately end up in the United States, but many of them were initially granted permission only to go to Lebanon, where they continued their emigration process through the United States Embassy and with the help of the very same World Council of Churches bombed in January 1975.

The Armenians émigrés who ended up in Lebanon were subjected to a less than ideal environment as they waited up to two years for a visa to continue to the United States, as the State Department tried to cope with the sudden surge in applications. Not only did they arrive in the midst of ongoing civil war, but they were also subjected to an “intense hostile attitude from the local Armenians.”³⁹ Perhaps in response to this hostility, although they cited

34 Ibid., 34.

35 Ibid., 12. See also Department of State Telegram, GENEVA 6267, USMISSION GENEVA to SECSTATE WASHDC 5186, and August 11, 1975.

36 State Department Telegram, GENEVA 4171, USMISSION Geneva to SECSTATE WASHDC 3480, June 4, 1974.

37 State Department Telegram, MOSCOW 7704, “Subject: Soviet Emigration to the US—The Armenian Avalanche,” AMEMBASSY MOSCOW to SECSTATE WASHDC 3964, May 15, 1976.

38 “More Quit Armenia than Arrive,” *New York Times*, June 26, 1978; “Armenians Leaving Soviet for the US,” *New York Times*, May 25, 1980; Michael Binyon, “Armenians Kiss Russia Goodbye in Hordes,” *The Globe and Mail (Canada)*, May 26, 1980; & Barbara Slavin, “Soviet Union is Letting its Armenian People Go,” *New York Times*, July, 6, 1980.

39 Department of State Telegram, GENEVA 6267, USMISSION GENEVA to SECSTATE WASHDC 5186, August 11, 1975.

lack of sufficient funds, the World Council of Churches temporarily suspended applications for resettlement assistance in May 1976,⁴⁰ complicating the already precarious position of the Armenian refugees. Unfortunately, with the exception of the later assassination of some of the top leadership of ASALA and JCAG, very little attention has been paid to intra-Armenian violence during the most active period of Armenian terrorism.

In conclusion, we know much less than we should about the origins, motivations and mechanics of violence in the Armenian diaspora during the 1970s and 1980s. The explanation that this phenomenon naturally emerged from the frustration and discontent that had been simmering for over 50 years, and the timeline of events that supported this theory, are not supported by the evidence. Non-violent Armenian political activity steadily increased after 1965, and gains were being made. The origins of the terrorist campaign against Turkish nationals, the Turkish government, Turkish business interests and, eventually, anyone who got in the way, appears to have had less to do with a radicalized youth embracing violence to further their community's cause in defiance of ineffective political leaders, or anti-Turkish hatred, as it does with a political struggle between various Armenian diaspora factions over power and influence. The turning point in this intra-Armenian struggle was the Yanikian murders in Santa Barbara. After January 1973, it was clear that the Armenian diaspora would support, morally, financially, and politically, indiscriminate attacks against Turkish citizens, and within two years both ASALA and the Justice Commandos had begun their campaigns. It appears that murdering Turkish diplomats was the key in this early contest over power and influence within the Armenian community. Obviously, definitive answers will await the release of further documents additional research into the local Armenian political, media and church organizations of 1970s Lebanon, but it would seem that this research may contain more satisfying answers as to why a group of individuals would spend a decade murdering innocents for a hopeless cause.

The explanation that this phenomenon naturally emerged from the frustration and discontent that had been simmering for over 50 years, and the timeline of events that supported this theory, are not supported by the evidence.

40 Department of State Telegram, GENEVA 3610, USMISSION GENEVA to AMEMBASSY MOSCOW, May 11, 1976.

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