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Urbanization and Insurgency:
The Turkish Case, 1976-1980

Sabri Sayari, Bruce Hoffman

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The Turkish Case, 1976-1980

Sabri Sayari, Bruce Hoffman

Prepared for the
Under Secretary of Defense for Policy

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PREFACE

One of the likely changes that will affect future low-intensity conflict is the vast urbanization process that is occurring in many Third World countries. This Note analyzes the relationship between explosive population growth in and around cities and armed extremism through a case study of the urban terrorism campaign that erupted in Turkey between 1976 and 1980. It focuses on two key questions: Why were the cities the main arenas of organized political violence in Turkey during this period, and what role did rapid urbanization play in the creation of a favorable environment for terrorists?

The research reported here was sponsored by the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. It was carried out under the International Security and Defense Policy program of RAND's National Defense Research Institute, a federally funded research and development center sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The research was conducted under the Low-Intensity Warfare in the Year 2000 project. The object of this project is to consider what types of low-intensity conflicts the United States military may be confronted with over the next 10 to 20 years and what preparations will be necessary to meet these challenges. In particular, it seeks to identify changes that have occurred in the characteristics and nature of low-intensity warfare during the past decade and to determine how these changes will affect the conduct of low-intensity warfare in the future.

Forthcoming publications from this project will examine the changing low-intensity conflict environment during the 1990s, the present and future limits and constraints on U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine, insurgent communication and propaganda, and low-intensity conflict in the year 2000.

SUMMARY

Between 1976 and 1980, Turkey experienced one of the bloodiest terrorist campaigns of the 1970s. The intensity of terrorist violence that erupted in Turkey was evidenced by the nearly 4,500 Turks who were killed and the thousands of others seriously wounded between 1976 and 1980. As the pace of fatalities accelerated, terrorist organizations on the political scene proliferated. With the exception of the Kurdish terrorists, who began rural guerrilla operations in Eastern Turkey during 1979-1980, the terrorist groups mostly concentrated their activities in the largest Turkish cities. Six Turkish cities—Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Adana, Bursa, and Gaziantep—experienced an overwhelming majority of the terrorist incidents during the four years of violence.

Analysts of Turkish society and politics tend to see a close relationship between the hyper-urbanization of the cities and the growth of political terrorism during the 1970s. The emergence and escalation of political terrorism in Turkey took place just after the country's social scene had undergone rapid and far-reaching changes. Possibly the most important of these was the transformation of Turkey from a predominantly rural society to an increasingly urban one. The massive and unprecedented flow of villagers to the urban areas had led to striking changes in Turkey's major cities. The majority of rural migrants—more than three-fourths—gravitated to Turkey's five largest cities, leading to the creation of *gecekondus*, or squatter settlements, in districts around the sprawling metropolises. In addition to overcrowding in the major urban centers, the number of marginally employed or unemployed social groups increased tremendously. Their economically precarious status became an important source of social and political unrest in large Turkish cities.

The social composition of the terrorist groups in Turkey changed between the early and the late 1970s, supporting the view that the *gecekondus* became large recruitment pools for these groups in the latter part of the decade. Political beliefs and ideology, along with family and friendship networks, were instrumental in socializing these young people into terrorism. For many, however, there were other factors, equally important. Membership in terrorist groups offered a lucrative income through a sort of political gangsterism—e.g., bank robberies or extortion schemes—and through involvement with the underworld of drug trafficking and arms smuggling.

Gecekondus not only provided a large number of young people for the terrorist groups of the extreme Left and far Right, they also became the major arenas for bloody violence between, and sometimes within, rival extremist forces. Despite their highly ideological appearance, the bloody battles between the Marxists and the ultranationalists were not based simply on opposing political beliefs; they were also characterized by an element of "gang warfare," as different terrorist groups sought to control their turf, first in squatter colonies and later in other parts of the city. Migration to the city also caused the traditional cultural cleavages of rural Turkish society to spill over into the cities.

The hardships attending the economic crisis that Turkey suffered in the late 1970s further exacerbated the longstanding communal and group rivalries in the *gecekondus* between 1976-1980. First, the Marxist terrorist groups such as *Dev-Yol* and *Dev-Sol* attempted to break the community into angry factions by using acts of violence, then they championed themselves as the "defenders" of the minority social groups (Kurds and Alevis) against attacks from rival ethnic or religious majorities. The "defender" role also entailed establishing territorial control in the *gecekondus*. Later, the far-Right terrorists used the same tactic by aligning themselves with the Turkish and Sunni elements in bicultural *gecekondus* and urban settings. In addition, shortages of consumer goods enabled the radical forces to widen their influence among the urban poor by assuming control over the distribution of products that had virtually disappeared from the markets.

The escalation of violence in Turkey's *gecekondus* was also related to the eroding influence of personal and governmental authority over the inhabitants of the squatter settlements. Personal authority declined as traditional family-based authority ties weakened. Younger generations in migrant families were less inclined to accept the strict discipline of rural family households. Their involvement in terrorism—as well as in political gangsterism—was due partly to this decline of traditional authority in *gecekondus* households, since the self-control mechanisms of young people were no longer in place.

Of even greater importance was the collapse of governmental authority in *gecekondus* settlements. By the late 1970s, the various leftist, rightist, and Kurdish extremist organizations were openly challenging the government's authority in many parts of the country. This was especially pronounced in *gecekondus* areas of Istanbul and Ankara, where rival terrorist groups escalated the creation of so-called liberated zones in an apparent attempt to establish their own governmental structures in those areas. The ease with which the extremist forces carved out individual areas of control was due primarily to weakened or nonexistent governmental authority in some of the *gecekondus*; the police force's inability to

maintain law and order in the cities, and especially in *gecekondus*; and the terrorists' success in capitalizing on the grievances of the migrants, whose demands for electricity, water, and other municipal services had not been met. Some residents supported the establishment of the liberated zones as a protest against what they perceived to be the government's neglect of their needs.

The Turkish experience with political terrorism during the 1970s was unique among other western European countries afflicted by terrorism, largely because the swelling of Turkey's urban population created an environment ideal for nurturing the type of insurgency campaign waged by the extremist groups. As this study demonstrates, insurgents in Turkey seized control over defined geographic areas (the *gecekondus*), established an alternative form of government, exercised a crude form of sovereignty in those areas, and repulsed government efforts to reassert its control. The long-term goal was to sever the government's authority over its urban centers and thereby weaken both its resolve to withstand the terrorist onslaught and the support it received from the population. Eventually, the terrorists hoped to take all power from the government.

It would be simplistic to argue that in developing countries the explosive growth of large cities—such as Istanbul, Lima, Bogota, San Salvador, Mexico City, etc.—inevitably stimulates, much less produces, widespread political violence. Terrorism, as the Turkish case and many others suggest, is usually the product of multiple social, political, and economic factors. However, it would also be a mistake to view Turkey's experience as an aberration, an isolated instance of urban terrorism escalating uncontrollably into urban anarchy. Rather, the uncontrolled and unplanned expansion of large metropolises, coupled with frequent political and economic crises, can create conditions susceptible to extremist exploitation, providing fertile ground for wide-scale violence and rebellion.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Between 1976 and 1980, Turkey experienced one of the most intensive and bloody terrorist campaigns of the 1970s. When the country's military finally brought it under control following the coup in September 1980, the spiraling terrorist violence had claimed nearly 4,500 lives. Terrorism killed more people in Turkey during one week in 1980 than it did in Italy in an entire year or in West Germany in more than a decade. Since Turkey had experienced very limited armed extremism in its modern republican history, the massive violence of the late 1970s was a radical change in its political and social development.

The wave of political violence affected most parts of the country, including some of the rural Anatolian towns that are far removed from the much more politically active big cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir. Terrorists of the extreme Left and Right did provoke considerable violence in the provincial towns, particularly by exacerbating religious-sectarian (i.e., Sunni versus Alevi) and ethnic (i.e., Turkish versus Kurdish) social cleavages. Furthermore, a major leftist terrorist organization managed to establish a temporary hold on power in the small Black Sea coastal town of Fatsa.

But terrorism reached the rural Turkish hinterland in a significant way only after it had gained considerable momentum in the country's principal urban centers. Although the communal political violence that the terrorists provoked in the provincial towns claimed many lives, most of the terrorism-caused deaths were in the cities, with Istanbul—Turkey's largest city and home to millions of migrants from the countryside—the site of the greatest number of assassinations, bombings, bank robberies, and other forms of terrorist violence. It is safe to argue, therefore, that with respect to its origins, locus, and deadly effects, Turkish terrorism in the late 1970s was primarily an urban phenomenon.

Why were the cities the main arenas of organized political violence in Turkey? What role did rapid urbanization play in the creation of a favorable environment for terrorists? This Note examines the urban context of Turkish terrorism and provides some preliminary answers to these and related questions. The argument presented here does not assume that there is a strong and consistent relationship between rapid urbanization and political terrorism or that migration to the cities invariably leads to the radicalization of the urban poor.¹ Rather, it views the rapid growth of cities in many developing countries as creating a

¹For a critical discussion of the literature on this relationship, see Ekkart Zimmerman, *Political Violence, Crises, and Revolutions: Theories and Research*, G.K. Hall and Co., Boston, 1983, pp. 96-99.

set of conditions—structural, social, economic, and political—that are favorable to the organization and operation of hitherto rurally based insurgent groups.

II. RAPID URBANIZATION, SQUATTER HOUSING, AND TURKEY'S URBAN SOCIAL CRISIS

The emergence and escalation of political terrorism in Turkey took place just after the country's social scene had undergone rapid and far-reaching changes. Possibly the most important of these was the transformation of Turkey from a predominantly rural society to an increasingly urban one. Until the 1950s, an overwhelming majority of the Turkish population lived in the provincial small towns and villages scattered throughout rural Turkey. In 1950, only 18.5 percent of Turkey's total population of nearly 21 million lived in the urban areas (defined as areas of 10,000 population).¹ Istanbul, with a population of about 800,000, was the country's largest urban center. Other major Turkish cities lagged far behind Istanbul in population.

About 25 years later, following major changes in demographic and economic trends, this picture was radically altered by the explosive growth of Turkey's population. Until the 1950s, Turkey grew at a moderate rate despite official support for population growth. But after the mid-1950s, high fertility and declining mortality rates led to a rapid population rise. With annual growth rates averaging 2.6 percent, Turkey's population doubled between 1950 and 1975. These demographic trends soon led to a new phenomenon—heavy migration from the countryside to the cities. As high fertility rates, coupled with the introduction of mechanized agricultural methods, increased the pressures on the land, millions of Turks moved to the cities in search of better economic opportunities and living conditions. It is estimated that by the mid-1970s, approximately 650,000 villagers and townspeople were moving to the larger cities annually.² Consequently, the urban share of the total Turkish population grew from 18 percent to 41 percent between 1950 and 1975.³

¹Michael N. Danielson and Rusen Keles, "Urbanization and Income Distribution in Turkey," in Ergun Ozbudun and Aydin Ulusan (eds.), *The Political Economy of Income Distribution in Turkey*, Holmes and Meier, New York, 1980, pp. 270-271. For a concise overview of demographic trends in Turkey, see William Hale, *The Political and Economic Development of Modern Turkey*, Croom Helm, London, 1981, pp. 17-32.

²Ibid., p. 271. For a comprehensive study of urbanization in Turkey, see Michael N. Danielson and Rusen Keles, *The Politics of Rapid Urbanization: Government and Growth in Modern Turkey*, Holmes and Meier, New York, 1985.

³The annual rate of population increase has declined slightly in recent years compared with the 1960s and 1970s. Furthermore, between the early 1960s and 1970s there was a large-scale emigration to Western Europe, as nearly 1 million Turkish workers moved to West Germany and other European states in search of jobs. Today, the number of Turks—migrant workers and their families—in Western Europe is estimated to be close to 2 million. See Sabri Sayari, "Migration Policies of the Sending Countries: Perspectives on

Although the burgeoning population migration led to growth of cities throughout the country, urban expansion was especially striking in Turkey's large metropolises. For example, Istanbul's population more than tripled between the late 1950s and mid-1970s. (It is estimated that the city now has close to 7 million residents.) Turkey's capital, Ankara, and its third major city, Izmir, experienced similarly high growth rates during the same period. (Ankara's population today is estimated to be about 4 million, and Izmir's is more than 2.5 million.)

The massive and unprecedented internal migration has been a major source of social, economic, and political change in Turkey. In the context of this study, its major consequences include the following:

1. Overcrowding of the cities, especially Istanbul and, to a lesser degree, Ankara. The streets in both cities, particularly in the business districts and the central downtown areas, now teem with crowds made up mostly of young people—a reflection of the fact that half of Turkey's population is under 18 years of age. Overcrowding of the urban space has led to deteriorating public services, pollution, congestion, increased social tensions, and crime.⁴
2. Growth of marginally employed or unemployed social groups. Many migrants from the countryside have become part of the industrial labor force in the cities. Others have moved into unskilled or semiskilled jobs. But migration to the cities has also produced a new urban underclass of unemployed and underemployed people. Their economically precarious status has become a source of political and social unrest in large Turkish cities.⁵

the Turkish Experience," *THE ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, May 1986, pp. 87-97.

⁴Municipal authorities have often bluntly acknowledged that due to massive, uncontrolled, and unplanned growth, large Turkish cities have become almost ungovernable. Reports by foreign journalists usually note the consequences of rapid urbanization. For example, one observer states that "Istanbul is choking on its own growth" and describes the street scene as "four lanes of automobiles and bus traffic stalled in foul smelling gridlock, as thousands of pedestrians plod stolidly to work. Men with bathroom scales line the sidewalk offering to weigh a passenger for a coin, while throngs of young boys with huge brass-bound boxes offer shoeshines in reasonably fluent German." Charles P. Wallace, "Istanbul's Old Charms Fading with Pressure of Fast Growth," *Los Angeles Times*, May 25, 1987, p. 10.

⁵The unemployment statistics in Turkey are not reliable due to the absence of direct surveys of the labor market. The estimates of the unemployed in recent years have ranged from 10 to 20 percent of the workforce. For example, after noting that "high unemployment rates have been a constant feature of the Turkish labor market," a report by the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) suggests that the unemployment rate increased in the late 1970s as a result of economic slowdown and that it reached 18 percent in 1982. See *OECD Economic Surveys 1982-1983: Turkey*, Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development, Paris, April 1983, p. 16. Underemployment—best reflected in the ever-growing number of street vendors, some of whom have only a few customers a day—is estimated to account for an additional 10 to 15 percent.

3. Proliferation of *gecekondus*. During the past three decades, the urban landscape in Turkey has changed radically with the mushrooming of *gecekondus* (squatter settlement districts) around the sprawling metropolises. Between 1960 and 1985, the number of people who lived in the *gecekondus* increased from 1.2 million to 7.5 million, or close to 30 percent of the urban population.⁶ At present, while 70 percent of Ankara's inhabitants live in *gecekondu* areas surrounding the city, nearly half the populations of both Istanbul and Izmir are similarly settled in squatter colonies. It is estimated that more than three-fourths of the people who migrated to the urban areas during the past three decades now live in the squatter settlements that ring most of Turkey's growing cities.⁷

The rise of *gecekondus*—the term literally means “set up overnight”—is the practical response to the dearth of affordable urban housing and land. After securing lots and putting up makeshift structures, the migrants make additions and renovations; ultimately they turn their dwellings into more permanent housing. According to the Turkish law, *gecekondus* are “dwellings erected on the land and lots which do not belong to the builder, without the consent of the owner, and without observing the laws and regulations concerning construction and building.”⁸ Despite the illegal status of *gecekondus*, authorities have been reluctant to demolish these makeshift dwellings, choosing instead to overlook the invasion of state and private property. Political competition between parties for the electoral support of the *gecekondu* voters is the principal reason for the unwillingness of the authorities to apply sanctions against the illegal seizure of property.⁹

Conditions in Turkish *gecekondus* vary considerably, depending on their legal status, date of origin, and proximity to the city centers.¹⁰ For example, some of the oldest

⁶Rusen Keles, “Urban Turkey in the Year 2000: A Pessimistic Scenario,” in *Turkey in the Year 2000*, Turkish Political Science Association Publications, Ankara, 1989, p. 213.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 213.

⁸Law 775, July 20, 1966, cited by Danielson and Keles, “Urbanization and Income Distribution in Turkey,” p. 272.

⁹According to reports in the Turkish press, the municipal authorities have found it difficult to cope with the growing power of the so-called “*gecekondu* mafia” leaders who, through strong-arm tactics and influence peddling, take over large tracts of land, parcel them, and sell the parcels to the newly arriving migrants for huge profits. These powerful individuals reportedly employ small gangs to settle their scores with one another over disputed tracts of land and also use their power and influence with the city administrators to prevent the demolition of the newly built *gecekondus*. For details, see the reports in the Istanbul daily *Milliyet*, August 24-25, 1989.

¹⁰There is considerable literature on the social conditions in Turkey's squatter settlements. See, for example, Kemal Karpat, *Gecekondus: Rural Migration and Urbanization*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1976; Charles W.M. Hart, *Zeytinburnu Gecekondus Bolgesi* (The Zeytinburnu *gecekondus* settlement), Istanbul Ticaret Odasi Yayinlari, Istanbul, 1969; and Rusen Keles, *100 Soruda Turkiye'de Sehirlesme, Konut, ve Gecekondus* (Urbanization, housing, and squatter settlements in Turkey), Gercek Yaynevi, Istanbul, 1972.

gecekondu settlements in Istanbul have become integrated into the middle- and lower-middle-class neighborhoods. Long legalized and extensively rebuilt, they have access to all of the municipal services, including adequate schooling. In general, social conditions in these older *gecekondu* districts are much better than those in the ramshackle shantytowns surrounding the large metropolises in Latin America and Asia.

But Istanbul, like all other major Turkish cities, is also home to thousands of migrants who live in the *gecekondu* neighborhoods where living conditions are poor. The dwellings in these newer *gecekondu* districts are often severely overcrowded, with up to a dozen people—mostly small children and teenagers—living in 40 to 60 square meters of floor space.¹¹ The roads within the settlement are generally unpaved and, during the rainy seasons, packed with thick mud. These poorer *gecekondu* districts are generally without electricity, water and sewage systems, and adequate transportation facilities to the city. The quality of life in such squatter housing areas contrasts sharply not only with the middle- and upper-middle-class residential areas of Istanbul, but also with the city's older *gecekondu* districts, more established and better off.

The heavy inflow of migrants into the cities posed daunting problems for the city administrators in the late 1960s. The cities were unprepared to meet the ever-increasing demand for transportation, water supply, electricity, and a host of other public services. The strains on municipal resources grew during the next decade and reached a critical level in the late 1970s when Turkey was plunged into one of the most severe economic crises of its modern history. Until then, Turkish cities had traditionally been mostly dependent on the central government for their finances.¹² The near-bankruptcy of the Turkish economy during 1978-1980 led to a drastic reduction in the funds provided by the government to the cities. Consequently, municipal resources were stretched to the limit, and there were major problems in the delivery of even minimal public services. Although all the residents of major Turkish cities suffered because of these shortages and cutbacks, the urban poor living in the *gecekondu* areas were the hardest hit. For example, the shortages of basic staple items and consumer goods were felt much more severely in the squatter settlements than in the middle-class residential districts. More important, the slowdown of industrial production led to a sharp increase in unemployment and underemployment, with many workers losing their jobs and new entrants to the labor market unable to find employment. This, coupled with a

¹¹Danielson and Keles, "Urbanization and Income Distribution in Turkey," p. 271.

¹²This has changed significantly during the past decade, and municipalities have achieved considerable financial independence and initiative.

spiraling annual inflation rate that was estimated at close to 120 percent in 1979-1980, made life particularly difficult for the millions of migrants who had come to the cities in search of better economic conditions.

III. THE CITIES AND THE EMERGENCE OF TERRORISM

Turkish terrorism originated in the country's two largest cities, Istanbul and Ankara. In 1971, two Marxist terrorist organizations emerged on the political scene: the Turkish People's Liberation Army (TPLA) and the Turkish People's Liberation Party-Front (TPLP-F). Both were products of the student radicalism of the late 1960s. The political violence that seized the nation's universities resulted from a mixture of domestic and international developments, including growing ideological polarization in Turkish national politics, rapid expansion of university enrollments, emerging radical student protest movements in Western Europe and North America, and the rise of international terrorism.

Until the 1950s, Turkey's state-run universities were geared toward educating a select number of young people for recruitment into political and professional elite positions. But rapid population increase and heavy migration from the countryside strained the universities' elitist orientation. Not only did the social composition of the student body begin to change—as an increasing number of applicants came from rural families—but a university degree, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, no longer guaranteed upward social mobility.

The cultural dislocation experienced by the young people who came to study in Ankara or Istanbul, and many students' growing concerns about future employment, contributed significantly to the volatile atmosphere in the universities.¹ Extremist forces of the political Left and Right capitalized on this situation and directed disaffected students toward greater militancy in pursuit of radical ideologies. Following the 1968 student uprisings in Western Europe and North America, violence erupted in Turkey between the militants of the Marxist Left and the ultranationalist Right. The principal targets of student political violence from 1968 to 1970 were largely other students. However, as the intensity of the student violence increased, the leftist militants repeatedly clashed with the police in street protests against the government and against Turkey's close ties with the United States and NATO.

¹For a perceptive analysis of these issues and their role in generating political violence on the campuses, see Serif Mardin, "Youth and Violence in Turkey," *European Journal of Sociology*, XIX, 1978, pp. 229-254.

In early 1971, student radicalism moved toward organized terrorism. The TPLA and the TPLP-F were both offshoots of the radical leftist student organization *DEV-GENC*. The ideology and tactics of the revolutionary leftist militants were never clearly articulated, and there were extensive polemical debates within the movement over these issues. However, the revolutionary rhetoric of the TPLA and the TPLP-F was notable for its strong denunciation of "American imperialism" in Turkey and around the world, its advocacy of "armed propaganda" by a vanguard group—in a Leninist fashion—to raise the consciousness of the proletariat, and its admiration for the historical and contemporary examples of "national liberation wars." Although they paid lip service to Marxist-Leninist ideas and principles, the young Turkish militants appeared to be more knowledgeable of the writings of Mao Tse-tung, Fidel Castro, and Che Guevara.

The influence of Maoist strategies for a national liberation war waged by rural guerrillas in the countryside was evident in the writings of Mahir Cayan—the leader of the TPLP-F and the most prominent theoretician of the revolutionary leftist movement in Turkey. According to Cayan, the principal objectives of the "revolutionary struggle" were control of the rural areas and the mobilization of the peasantry under the aegis of the leftist forces. In Cayan's view, the cities would play only a secondary role in this process and would facilitate the creation of a revolutionary situation through militant political action by the workers and the students.²

Belief that the Chinese and the Cuban experiences applied to Turkey led a small group of leftist militant students to take to the hills near the city of Malatya in the southeastern part of the country during early 1971. However, after a few weeks of wandering in the countryside, the TPLA's self-styled rural guerrillas were spotted by the local villagers, who informed the local authorities. In a brief clash, the security forces killed most of the guerrillas. After this short-lived experiment in rural guerrilla methods and the failure to establish their presence in the countryside, the revolutionary leftist insurgents concentrated their activities in Turkey's two major cities, Istanbul and Ankara. Although Cayan and others continued to pay lip service to a peasant-based national war of liberation, in fact they quickly embraced urban guerrilla methods advocated by such writers as Carlos Marighela and practiced by such Latin American terrorist groups as Uruguay's *Tupamaros*.

²See Mahir Cayan, *Butun Yazilar* (Collected writings), Devrimci Sol Yayinlari, Istanbul, 1979, especially pp. 217-243, and *Turkiye Halk Kurtulus Parti-Cephesi (THKP-C): Dava Dosyasi-Yazili Belgeler* (Turkish People's Liberation Party-Front: trial dossier and documents), Yar Yayinlari, Istanbul, 1976.

The advantages of operating in the cities included greater anonymity and secrecy of organization, better means of communication and transportation, more hiding places and safehouses, larger groups of sympathizers and supporters due to the concentration of university students, greater choice in the selection of targets, and larger audiences for publicity and propaganda.

THE ESCALATION OF TERRORISM, 1976-1980

The wave of terrorist incidents in early 1971 exacerbated Turkey's political crisis and paved the way for a military intervention in March. Leftist terrorist groups remained active for over a year following the establishment of a military-backed government. But the security forces waged a successful campaign against the urban guerrillas and terminated the spree of political kidnappings, bank robberies, assassinations, and bombings. Most of the leftist militants were either captured or killed in clashes with the security officials. Three leaders of the TPLA received the death penalty, and other captured terrorists were given lengthy prison terms. However, this crackdown on Marxist terrorist organizations was not a lasting solution to Turkey's problems with armed extremism. After the resumption of competitive politics in late 1973, there was a resurgence of terrorism in the mid-1970s. This second wave of organized political violence accelerated at a rapid pace from 1976 to 1980, and it brought Turkey to the brink of large-scale social strife by the end of the decade.

The new wave of political terrorism originated once again in student unrest and clashes between extreme leftist and rightist groups on the university campuses. But although the violence emerged in a familiar pattern, Turkish terrorism developed differently this time in its intensity and scope, the nature and number of terrorist groups, and the extent of its destabilizing impact on Turkish society and politics.

The renewed terrorist violence was so intense that nearly 4,500 Turks lost their lives and thousands of others were seriously wounded between 1976 and 1980. As the fatalities accelerated, terrorist organizations proliferated on the political scene. The early-1970s terrorist incidents had been carried out by just two small radical Marxist groups with only a few active militants in their ranks. In sharp contrast, the second wave of violence was the work of a staggering number of terrorist organizations that included, in addition to the Marxists, the ultra-rightists and the Kurdish separatists. The intensity and ever-expanding scope of the armed extremism of 1976-1980 had a far more devastating effect on Turkey than the first wave of organized violence. By 1979, law and order had practically disappeared in many parts of the country; extremist forces had provoked bloody incidents of

communal violence and indiscriminate destruction between the Sunnis and the Alevis in several Anatolian towns, and rival terrorist groups had made considerable progress in establishing "liberated zones" in major cities.

The escalation of the country's political, economic, and social crisis encouraged the Turkish military's decision to intervene in September 1980. Suppressing the ideological and ethnic terrorist groups was high on the political agenda of the new military government, led by General Kenan Evren. The Turkish military accomplished this difficult task with remarkable efficiency. Within a year after the coup, the number of violent incidents had declined sharply, and most of the terrorists were captured, killed by security forces, or forced to flee the country.

Large Turkish cities were the centers of terrorist activity during the massive campaign of violence that seized Turkey in the late 1970s. While some of the principal leftist terrorist organizations, such as the *Dev-Yol* (Revolutionary Way) and the *Dev-Sol* (Revolutionary Left), claimed to follow Cayan's teachings, practical considerations led them to favor urban-oriented tactics over rural guerrilla methods. Six Turkish cities—Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Adana, Bursa, and Gaziantep—were the sites of an overwhelming majority of the terrorist incidents during the four years of violence from 1976 to 1980.³

Among these cities, Istanbul and Ankara were the centers of urban terrorism. Together they accounted for nearly three-fourths of all politically motivated violence. Of these two metropolises, Istanbul's share of terrorist incidents grew at a faster pace than Ankara's. In 1979, with an ever-rising number of daily assassinations, bombings, armed clashes, and other terrorist incidents, violence in Istanbul reached an unparalleled level. At the height of the terrorism, between November 1979 and July 1980, 29 percent of all the fatalities from terrorism in Turkey occurred in Istanbul. In the same period, the monthly *national* average for deaths from terrorism was 183, and Istanbul *by itself* had a monthly average of 53 fatalities. In the month of July 1980 alone—two months before the military takeover—83 Istanbul residents were killed in terrorist incidents.

³Rusen Keles and Artun Unsal, *Kent ve Siyasal Siddet* (The city and political violence), Ankara Universitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakultesi Yayinlari, Ankara, 1982, pp. 43-87. For a summary of the findings of this study in English, see *Turkey: Sociological Study of Urban Violence*, Joint Publications Research Service: West Europe Report, No. 1747, May 8, 1981. There are no official data on the distribution of terrorist incidents among various cities. The statistics offered by Keles and Unsal in their study represent a close approximation based on careful compilation of the available information. All the figures used in this section are taken from their book.

Analysts of Turkish society and politics see a close relationship between the hyper-urbanization of the cities and the growth of political terrorism during the 1970s. In particular, they emphasize the contribution of *gecekondus* to the escalation of armed extremism. For example, Kemal Karpat, the author of a pioneering study on the *gecekondus* phenomenon,⁴ argues that no other factor "contributed as much to social and political change and, indirectly, to political unrest in Turkey as the agglomeration of rural migrant settlements around the major cities of Turkey. . . . Alienated youth in the *gecekondus* and elsewhere in the cities provided a large recruitment pool for every militant, radical, and terrorist group."⁵

The changing social composition of the terrorist groups in Turkey between the early and the late 1970s supports the view that the *gecekondus* became large recruitment pools for terrorists in the latter part of the decade. As noted earlier, the terrorist organizations of 1971 and 1972 were led and staffed by a small nucleus of university students. Some of them came from middle-class and urban family backgrounds; others were the children of families who were either living in the provinces or had recently migrated to Ankara and Istanbul.⁶ While students or university drop-outs continued to dominate the leadership of the revolutionary leftist and far-Right extremist groups after 1975, their followers began to include large numbers of nonstudents, some of whom had only limited formal education. A sizable segment of these new recruits were young people who lived in the *gecekondus* and came from the poorer sectors of Turkish society. Political beliefs and ideology, along with family and friendship networks, helped draw the young and unemployed urban poor into terrorism.

However, for many who joined the terrorist organizations of the revolutionary Left and the extremist Right, there were other, equally important, factors. Membership in terrorist groups offered a lucrative source of income through a sort of political gangsterism, which could include bank robberies or extortion schemes. Young Turkish terrorists,

⁴Kemal Karpat, *Gecekondus: Rural Migration and Urbanization*, *passim*.

⁵Kemal Karpat, "Turkish Democracy at Impasse: Ideology, Party Politics, and the Third Military Intervention," *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, Summer-Spring 1988, p. 18. For similar arguments, see Danielson and Keles, *The Politics of Rapid Urbanization: Government and Growth in Modern Turkey*, pp. 130-131; Aydin Yalcin, "Communism and Political Violence in Turkey," paper presented at the European-American Workshop in Istanbul, September 1979, pp. 3-4; and Ilhan Tekeli, "Kent, Sucluluk, ve Siddet," (The city, criminality, and violence) *Turkiye' de Teror* (Terrorism in Turkey), Gazeteciler Cemiyeti Yayinlari, Istanbul, pp. 201-225.

⁶The discussion here is based on Sabri Sayari, *Generational Changes in Terrorist Movements: The Turkish Case*, The RAND Corporation, P-7124, July 1985.

particularly those belonging to the right-wing groups, were deeply involved in the drug trafficking and arms smuggling activities organized by individuals from Turkey's underworld of crime who collaborated with the Bulgarian authorities. There have also been allegations that many leftist and rightist terrorists were supported financially by foreign governments and organizations.⁷ All of these incentives made "ideological employment" an attractive choice for those second- and third-generation *gecekondus* youth who decided to take up arms and become followers in terrorist groups.

URBAN SQUATTER SETTLEMENTS AND RADICALISM

Gecekondus not only provided young recruits for the terrorist groups of the extreme Left and far Right, they also became a main arena of bloody violence between, and sometimes within, rival extremist forces. For example, a large number of the political murders in Istanbul took place in or near the squatter settlements, especially those that border middle-class districts (e.g., Sisli and Kadikoy) or those located near the historic, lower-middle-class neighborhoods (e.g., Fatih).⁸ Furthermore, since most terrorist attacks targeted members of rival terrorist groups, the majority of the dead and the seriously wounded were young militants who lived in *gecekondus*.

The intensity of the violence in the squatter settlements was due to several factors. First, despite their highly ideological appearance, the bloody battles between the leftists and rightists were not based simply on opposing political beliefs. They were also characterized by an element of "gang warfare"; different terrorist groups sought to control their own turf, first in squatter colonies and later in other parts of the city. Acronyms and slogans painted on nearly every available space in the *gecekondus* districts advertised a particular group's dominance over that area. The attempt by one extremist organization to control a squatter settlement or a city district brought conflict with a rival ideological force. Further indication of the "gang" coloration of the situation in the *gecekondus* came from the fact that terrorists belonging to rival ideological groups seemed to know one another.

⁷According to Turkish authorities, there was substantial support for and involvement in terrorist activities from the communist bloc. Turkish officials have argued that Turkey was the target of a large-scale destabilization campaign orchestrated by the Soviet Union with the active participation of Bulgaria, Syria, and the radical Palestinian groups. For a summary of General Evren's views on this issue, see the report in the political weekly *Yanki*, September 21, 1981. For a more recent restatement of this official view, see also the report circulated to the Turkish university administrators and professors by the Higher Education Council (the official state agency responsible for university administration) in 1987 titled *Türkiye'de Anarşi ve Terörün Sebepleri ve Hedefleri* (The causes and objectives of anarchy and terror in Turkey).

⁸Keles and Unsal, *Kent ve Siyasal Siddet*, pp. 65-71.

Second, historical communal and group conflicts in the *gecekondus* translated into intense political violence in the late 1970s. Several observers note how migration has caused the traditional cultural cleavages of rural Turkish society (e.g., Alevi heterodoxy versus Sunni orthodoxy; Turkish versus Kurdish identity) to spill over into the urban areas.⁹ The country's economic crisis exacerbated these longstanding communal and group rivalries in the *gecekondus* between 1976 and 1980. Intensifying group competition over dwindling jobs and other limited economic resources reactivated what Harris refers to as the "traditional feuds imported from the countryside to the city."¹⁰ The terrorists further polarized the different ethnic and religious-sectarian groups by initiating violent incidents. At first, the Marxist terrorist groups such as *Dev-Yol* and *Dev-Sol* implemented this strategy in the squatter districts of Istanbul and Ankara. Their idea was to break the community into angry factions through acts of violence, and then present themselves as "defenders" of the minority social groups (Kurds and Alevis) against attacks from rival ethnic or religious majorities. The role of defender also entailed establishing territorial control in the *gecekondus*. Later, the far-Right terrorists used the same tactic, aligning themselves with the Turkish and Sunni elements in bicultural *gecekondus* and urban settings.¹¹

⁹See, for instance, Mardin, "Youth and Violence in Turkey"; see also George S. Harris, "The Left in Turkey," *Problems of Communism*, July-August 1980, pp. 26-37.

¹⁰Harris, p. 37. In an essay written for the *New Yorker* in 1984, Joseph Kraft summarized Mardin's views and similar interpretations focusing on social cleavages: "The *gecekondus*, as one Turk put it, using a phrase from Western anthropology, became a museum of ethnic types. For example, a study of a *gecekondus* in Istanbul by a successful candidate in the latest parliamentary elections showed four different groups: one of migrants from the Black Sea, the so-called Lazs; another linking Kurdish elements from southeast Turkey; a third, also from the southeast, composed of Shiite Muslims, who are known as Alevis in Turkey, and are a minority among the predominantly Sunni Muslim population; and a group made up of recent immigrants from Bulgaria and Rumania. Mere social mobility put the groups in divisive competition with one another. When the palmy conditions of the postwar years yielded to stringency after the great oil price rise of 1973-74, the jostling for status deepened into feuding—particularly among the younger generation. Outsiders—including Communist agents but also right-wing nationalists allied with criminal elements—escalated the feuds to gang warfare. The cycle of settling scores by daily acts of violence intensified steadily and yielded the reign of terror that ended only when the military intervened in the third coup, on September 12, 1980." Joseph Kraft, "Letter From Turkey," *The New Yorker*, October 15, 1989, p. 137.

¹¹Although the strategy of generating intercommunal violence was used extensively in the *gecekondus* of Ankara and Istanbul, the largest single incident of political violence based on Alevi-Sunni hostilities took place in the relatively small Southeastern city of Kahramanmaraş. The bloody clashes there in December 1978 led to over 100 deaths and large-scale property destruction.

The third reason for the growing activism of the terrorists in the squatter settlements was the severe economic crisis of the late 1970s. Shortages of many consumer goods enabled the radical forces to widen their influence among the urban poor, as they assumed control of the distribution of products that had virtually disappeared from the markets. In large cities, this tactic was used almost exclusively by the militants of the extreme Left. The testimony of a former member of the *Dev-Sol* terrorist group, who later became a "repentant" and described his activities, sheds considerable light on this particular tactic.¹² According to his testimony, *Dev-Sol* sought to control Gultepe—Istanbul's largest squatter colony—by strong-arming itself into the role of supplier of badly needed consumer goods to the local inhabitants. To do this, *Dev-Sol* members first coerced the local merchants to stop selling scarce items, such as liquid petroleum gas (LPG) or margarine; then they delivered these goods personally to the *gecekondu* residents, hoping to win their support and loyalty. Furthermore, *Dev-Sol* also assumed a leadership role in carrying out a number of community-oriented projects.

Finally, the escalation of violence in Turkey's *gecekondus* was related to the decline of personal and governmental authority among the inhabitants of the squatter settlements. Personal authority declined with the weakening of traditional family-based authority ties. Younger generations in migrant families tended to be less inclined to accept the strict authority that existed in rural family households. Their involvement in terrorism—as well as political gangsterism—was due partly to this decline of traditional authority in *gecekondu* households, since it broke down the self-control mechanisms of the young people.

Another aspect of the authority problem was the changing nature of political authority and leadership in the squatter districts. Until the 1970s, Turkey's two major political parties—the center-right Justice Party and the social democratic Republican People's Party—provided much of the political leadership in *gecekondus*. However, during the 1973-1980 period, the smaller, minor political parties of the extreme Left and Right, as well as militant labor unions and professional associations that were allied with them, challenged the strict hold of those two traditional parties on the squatter colonies. The advances made by the extremist forces at the expense of the more moderate parties created a favorable environment for violent political conflict.

¹²See Ferman Ozturk, "12 Eylul Oncesi Gultepe ve Dev-Sol," in Aydin Yalcin (ed.), *Cilginlikten Sagduyuya: Itirafçılar Anlatıyor* (From madness to common sense: the repentants speak out), Forum Yayinlari, Ankara, 1987, pp. 177-181.

Of greater importance was the collapse of governmental authority in *gecekondus* settlements. By the late 1970s, the various leftist, rightist, and Kurdish extremist organizations were openly challenging the government's authority in many parts of the country. But this became especially pronounced in *gecekondus* areas of Istanbul and Ankara, where rival terrorist groups escalated the creation of so-called "liberated zones" (*kurtarilmis bolgeler*) in an attempt to establish their governmental structures in those areas. The ease with which the extremist forces carved out their own areas of control was due primarily to three factors: First, governmental authority was either weak or nonexistent in some of the newer *gecekondus* that were built on the distant peripheries of the large metropolises. Second, the police forces were totally incapable of maintaining law and order in the cities, especially in *gecekondus*. The police were badly understaffed,¹³ and their effectiveness was hindered by political and ideological conflicts in their own ranks. The formation of leftist and rightist police officers' unions severely crippled the force's capacity to enforce the law. Many lower-ranking police officials lived in *gecekondus* and became embroiled in communal and group conflicts, further diminishing their authority. Finally, the terrorists capitalized on the grievances of the migrants whose demands for electricity, water, and other municipal services had not been met. Some local residents supported the establishment of the liberated zones in protest against what they perceived to be the government's neglect of their needs. Others saw the "protection" offered by the terrorist groups as a means of thwarting a possible attempt by municipal authorities to apply the law and demolish their newly built *gecekondus*.

¹³For example, Istanbul's police force in the late 1970s was about 8000, of whom only 5000 were available for street duty on any given day. See, Keles and Unsal, *Kent ve Siyasal Siddet*, p. 53.

IV. CONCLUSION

During the 1970s, when urban terrorism was erupting throughout western Europe, no country experienced the intense level of violence that convulsed Turkey. Compared to the 4,500 persons terrorists killed in Turkey between 1976 and 1980, ten years of left-wing and right-wing terrorism in West Germany had claimed the lives of only 25 people. At the height of the Red Brigades' campaign in Italy, between 1974 and 1978, terrorists killed fewer than 70 persons. And even in Northern Ireland, where the conditions of escalating sectarian violence were perhaps most similar to those in Turkey, the death toll from terrorist acts between 1971 and 1980 was less than half that of Turkey.¹ Political terrorism in Turkey during the 1970s was unique largely because the swelling urban population created an ideal environment for the type of insurgency campaign waged by Turkey's organized extremist groups.

"The common denominator of most insurgent groups," a Central Intelligence Agency publication explains, "is their desire to control a particular area. This objective differentiates insurgent groups from purely terrorist organizations, whose objectives do not include the creation of an alternative government capable of controlling a given area or country."² As this study has shown, insurgents in Turkey seized control over defined geographic areas (located in the *gecekondus*), established alternative forms of government, exercised a crude form of sovereignty in those areas, and repulsed government efforts to reassert its control, creating, in effect, "liberated zones." The long-term goal driving this process was to sever the government's authority over its urban centers and thereby weaken both its resolve to withstand the terrorist onslaught and the support it received from the population. Eventually, the terrorists hoped to take all power from the government.

¹See Klaus Wasmund, "The Political Socialization of West German Terrorism," in Peter Merkl (ed.), *Political Violence and Terror*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1986, p. 192; and Vittorio S. Pisano, *Contemporary Italian Terrorism: Analysis and Countermeasures*, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., 1979, p. 174. Statistics for Northern Ireland were compiled by the Northern Ireland Information Office, Belfast, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom, and made available by the British Consulate in Los Angeles.

²Central Intelligence Agency, *Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., n.d., p. 2.

It would be simplistic to argue that explosive growth of large cities in developing countries—such as Istanbul, Lima, San Salvador, Mexico City, etc.—inevitably stimulates, much less produces, widespread political violence. Terrorism, as the Turkish case and many others suggest, is usually the product of multiple social, political, and economic factors. However, it would also be a mistake to view Turkey's experience as an aberration, an isolated instance of urban terrorism uncontrollably escalating into urban anarchy. Rather, the uncontrolled and unplanned expansion of large metropolises, coupled with frequent political and economic crises, can—as events in Turkey have shown—create conditions susceptible to extremist exploitation, providing fertile ground for wide-scale violence and rebellion.

In addition to the political and economic conditions that breathed life into the terrorists' campaigns, separate processes—one physical, one social—enabled the terrorists to transform these urban squatter settlements into no man's lands of liberated zones that they protected and fought over. With its warren-like alleys and unpaved roads, a *gecekondu* became as impregnable to the security forces as a jungle or forest base. The police were unable to enter these areas, much less exert control over them. The terrorists thus sought to sever the government's authority over its urban centers and thereby weaken both its resolve and its support among the people, with the aim of taking power first in the cities and then in the rest of the country. Turkey's experience illustrates how hospitable conditions (i.e., the proliferation of the *gecekondu*) enabled the terrorists to adapt an ostensibly rural insurgency strategy to an urban environment.

Socially, the terrorists were able to take advantage of the migrants' closely knit village connections that were reestablished in the *gecekondu*. Studies have shown that ideology had less to do with young people's gravitation toward terrorism in Turkey than did friendship and family ties.³ Accordingly, the terrorists were able to enlist critical support and attract recruits from the transplanted villager's extended family and friendship ties.

The young people of the *gecekondu* neighborhoods were susceptible to manipulation by the terrorist groups' largely educated leadership, who promised economic gain and improved living conditions in return for allegiance. The lucrative income derived from such terrorist activities as bank robbing, extortion, and drug trafficking further attracted the unemployed and disaffected *gecekondu* youth. Finally, the terrorists gave the *gecekondu*

³See, for example, Bruce Hoffman, "The International Symposium on the Rehabilitation of Terrorists in Turkey," *Terrorism, Violence, Insurgency Journal*, Vol. VI, No. 1, (Summer 1985), pp. 44-50.

populace what the government could not. The terrorists rewarded their followers with essential goods and various community services, including food distribution.

Turkey's urban-based terrorist problem thus has many parallels to other Third World or developing countries undergoing rapid urbanization and population growth. The Turkish terrorist organizations established their operational bases in the squatter communities surrounding many of the country's cities, drew their strength and sources of support and recruitment from these communities, and transformed the *gecekondus* into liberated zones, complete with terrorist shadow governments providing essential goods and services. This is, in fact, the reverse of the traditional insurgent strategy of first seizing control of the countryside before turning to the cities. Such a change in strategy and priority was made possible by increased urbanization and the large population clusters in and around the cities.

In this respect, Latin America in particular has similar potential *gecekondus*-terrorist bases, be it in the *pueblos jovenes* surrounding Lima or the slums on the outskirts of cities such as San Salvador, Bogota, Mexico City, and other major urban areas. This urban strategy, as Turkey's experience shows, affords insurgents the same benefits or advantages that they have had in rural areas: control over territory, the allegiance (whether voluntary or coerced) of a considerable part of a country's population, inaccessibility to security forces, and a reasonably secure base for operations around the very heart of the government and its administrative and commercial infrastructure.

**POSTSCRIPT: PRESENT CONDITIONS IN TURKEY AND PROSPECTS
FOR A RESURGENCE OF TERRORISM**

In the 1980s, Turkey has witnessed few terrorist incidents in its cities. The military crackdown on leftist and rightist extremist organizations following the 1980 coup has so far prevented the return of urban terrorism. The main challenge to the Turkish state during the past decade has come from Kurdish separatists, who have carried out rural guerrilla operations against the security forces in Eastern and Southeastern Turkey since 1984.

It is estimated that Turkey's population will reach 70 million by the year 2000.¹ The share of the urban population will increase from 50.3 percent at present to 70 percent by the turn of the century. Much of this growth will be concentrated in the largest cities—Istanbul will have about 9 million people, and the populations of Ankara and Izmir will be 5.5 million and 4 million, respectively. It is also estimated that the number of *gecekondus* will rise from 1.5 million units in 1985 to about 2.5 million in the year 2000.

These projections indicate that cities in Turkey will continue to experience increased crowding as well as spatial expansion in the coming decades. The development of urban infrastructures—transportation, electricity, drinking water, and so forth—will therefore pose major problems for the Turkish authorities. At the same time, finding employment for a relatively youthful population—much of which is densely concentrated in the squatter districts—will also remain high on the agenda of Turkish governments. Unless these challenges are met successfully, the explosive growth of Turkish cities is likely to remain an important source for political terrorism and violence in the near future.

¹Estimated figures in this section are from Keles, "Urban Turkey in the Year 2000: A Pessimistic Scenario," pp. 203-215.

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