

Destabilization of Turkey barely averted after hit attempt on premier

Whoever sponsored the June 18 assassination attempt against Turkish Prime Minister Turgut Özal, the investigation must be informed by the fact that its result would have been to throw Turkey into chaos, and with it, a large part of the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern region. The attempt, which may not be the last, occurred at a time when Turkey, the easternmost member of the NATO alliance, is playing a pivotal role in the region.

The hit on Özal might also be part of a broader "hot summer" strategy targeting leading Western figures. Just 24 hours earlier, German-speaking terrorists tried to blow up a hotel in Cadiz, Spain close to the Rota military base where NATO's Nuclear Planning Group was then meeting.

Yet, strangely enough, both terrorist operations were receiving scant attention in the press, less than a week after they occurred.

Setting Turkey back 15 years

What would have been the consequence of Özal's death? Turkish sources have described him as the guarantor of Turkey's Western orientation, both toward the European Community and NATO. A major feature of this is the ongoing reconciliation between Greece and Turkey, long engaged in a bitter quarrel over Cyprus. Though the reconciliation policy is backed by most of Turkey's political and social elite, there is no present alternative to Özal's personal leadership to implement it.

For example, the June 18-19 congress of Özal's Motherland Party heralded the integration inside the party of varying political factions, including former extreme right-wingers and Islamic fundamentalists. Bringing such divergent forces together is a political feat that only Özal could have accomplished.

As many have noted, without Özal, the party, which has a majority in the parliament, would simply dissolve, ending the political and social stability which has marked Turkish political life since the Army surrendered power to civilian politicians in 1983. This could set back Turkey's social and economic development 15 years.

Intelligence specialists say that were Özal killed, the Army would soon have to retake power, either through President Evren, or directly. With accusations flying in all directions,

Turkey's relations to its neighbors would deteriorate quickly, leading to a new crisis with Greece over Cyprus, and new tensions with immediate neighbors Syria, Bulgaria, Iraq, Iran, and the Soviet Union.

New Yalta dealings

At the May summit of Gorbachov and Reagan in Moscow, the United States and the Soviet Union failed to agree on how to impose their will quickly in the Middle East. Intelligence sources say that the only consensus reached was that the entire region, from Afghanistan to Greece, was up for grabs. Both powers would cooperate on an intelligence level, which would not preclude political rivalry.

Since that consensus, U.S.-Iran talks have stepped up, in part thanks to an agreement by Moscow to ease American efforts to obtain the release of hostages. In recent weeks, this has produced conflict with Turkey.

This was highlighted by the visit to Washington in the first week of June by Talal Talabani of the Kurdish Unity Party (PUK), which is headquartered in Teheran, Iran. (The Kurds occupy a territory that overlaps Iraq, Iran, and Turkey, and have traditionally resisted all three countries' authority.) In a slap at Turkey, the State Department rolled out the red carpet for Talabani. While Talabani's Kurdish separatists have primarily been fighting against *Iraqi* authority, Talabani early this year signed a cooperation accord with another Kurdish party, the PKK of Abdullah Ocalan, which is headquartered in the Syrian-controlled Bekaa Valley in Lebanon, and which has been responsible for almost daily massacres in Southeast Anatolia, Turkey.

Because of Syria's pivotal role in the hostage negotiations, Washington has applied little if any pressure on Damascus to stop these atrocities by Syria's Kurdish protégés against Turkish citizens.

Turkey is also under new pressure from Soviet quarters, which is related to recent months' turmoil in Soviet Armenia and Azerbaijan, regions with which Turkey has been associated for centuries. Most of the Armenian demonstrations on the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh (see page 42) were more anti-Azeri and anti-Turkish than anti-Soviet.

Last March, the Turkish government permitted the creation of an "Azerbaijan Information Center," which soon be-

came a virtual anti-Soviet government-in-exile of Azerbaijan. Moscow is now gearing up toward a military show of strength to bring both republics under control, while fostering a belt of upheaval from northern Pakistan to Baluchistan, Iran, and Kurdistan. This turns the tables on those Western strategists, notably former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, who thought they could foster an Islamic "arc of crisis" in that region which would undermine Soviet rule. For the Kremlin, Turkey becomes the NATO-member target of this reversed "arc of crisis."

The local factors

Presumably such geopolitical considerations and deals are alien to Prime Minister Özal's would-be murderer, 32-year-old Kartal Demirag. He is an ex-teacher who had been sentenced to 10 years in jail in 1986 for murder, but escaped under mysterious circumstances. As many have noted, Demirag looks like a carbon-copy of Mehmet Ali Agca, the would-be assassin of Pope John Paul II. Both belonged to the Grey Wolves of Alaspan Turkes. Demirag was reportedly safehoused by the National Liberation Front, an extremist splinter group principally based in West Germany, at the initiative of one Musa Sardar Celebi, a Frankfurt-based businessman who was interrogated for his past connections to Agca!

But as Turkish investigators have stressed, Demirag's political ties are a bit "too obvious." For a terrorist, he had left a great many leads behind in his hotel room. There was a network that supplied him with false papers and money. While such gross evidence seemed designed to mislead police, at least it establishes that Demirag was no "lone fanatic."

Prime Minister Turgut Özal himself stressed on June 21 that a mafia connection could not be ruled out. After all, he said, his economic policies have lost the cigarette-smuggling mafia at least 900 billion Turkish liras in recent months. Perhaps not enough to murder a prime minister for— but enough to accept a contract.

From there, the investigation proceeds down a well-known track. The cigarette-smuggling mafia leads to the Warsaw Pact's Bulgaria, where Marlboros are counterfeited and smuggled abroad. The same mafia deals in both drugs and weapons along a Middle East-to-Western Europe axis, and as in other countries, has penetrated high levels of the political parties and institutions in Turkey.

During the last six months Turkey has been rocked by the scandal that former Chief of Staff Gen. Necdet Urug and some other senior officers worked with the Istanbul mafia. The scandal prompted Özal to order an investigation into the intelligence service, MIT. On June 22, the *Wall Street Journal* aired the hypothesis a "lone" official of MIT may have been trying to take revenge by killing Özal. While this is unlikely, it would surprise no one if some officials in the army, the police, and MIT were found to have cooperated in the plot.

Are new 'Irangate' deals in the works?

by Thierry Lalevée

Is it a coincidence that rumors of the death of Iran's Ruhollah Khomeini began circulating in mid-June, at a time of intense negotiations between Iran and several Western nations, for the release of hostages? According to several intelligence specialists, the rumors are in fact a disinformation ploy, intended to convince gullible Western governments to bend over backward to appease the Teheran regime. If Khomeini is dead, or about to die, so the argument goes, who will question those who say that Iran's situation is rapidly changing, "potentially for the good," and that it is important to have a foot in the door?

By the time the disinformation ploy is effectively exposed, Khomeini may actually have died. But no one will have opposed the ongoing negotiations for what amounts to a resumption of the type of arms-for-hostages deals for which Lt. Col. Oliver North and others have been indicted.

If any conclusion is to be drawn from the Irangate scandal, it is that the bigger the lie, the better the cover it provides. Hence, what used to be terrorist nations and organizations have suddenly become transformed into "radical states showing signs of moderation," as Muammar Qaddafi's Libya is now described. It is not the regimes themselves that have changed, but for political expediency, the propaganda war has shifted.

The fallacy of this propaganda is shown most sharply in the case of the Middle East conflict, where Washington is day-by-day drawing closer to the Syria of President Hafez al Assad, who opposes negotiations with Israel, but also rejects any official talks with the PLO, which has just authored a new peace plan. It so happens that Syria occupies that part of Lebanon where the hostages are located, under control of the Iranian-backed Hezbollah.

The reality in the currently ongoing hostage negotiations is twofold. First, they are now receiving the backing of the Soviet Union, and were a direct issue of negotiations at the Moscow Summit at the end of May and beginning of June. General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachov has agreed to cooperate in the negotiations, notably through Soviet client state Syria, provided he is kept informed of the steps which are taken. Second, even though Khomeini is not officially dead, Iran's factional situation is extremely fluid. But to conclude