

BOOK REVIEW

'PURSUING THE JUST CAUSE OF THEIR PEOPLE' A STUDY OF CONTEMPORARY ARMENIAN TERRORISM.

Author: Michael M. GUNTER.

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The ongoing discussion on an internationally agreed definition of terrorism embodies a special interest to Turkey, which is targeted by violent groups. This is not, however, a new phenomenon as a costly campaign of terrorism against the Turkish officials, citizens and institutions inside or outside Turkey was in operation by certain Armenian groups nearly since 18th century. During those troubled years, an argument was echoed by the Armenian side that these activities should not to be called "terrorism" but simply "a just war" further justified by the alleged "Armenian genocide by Turks" in 1915.

First published in 1986, even the title of Professor Gunther's this study indicates that although it was placated "just" by the Armenians, they were no doubt acts of terrorism. On the presumption that the title indicates, it rather gives a comprehensive account of acts and their reasoning and nature.

The Introduction is a special section which gives not only a general description of the characteristics of terrorism but also a background to the Armenian terrorism. It is noted that the acts were perpetrated not only against Turkish elements abroad but also inside Turkey. In this wide spectrum, those who were doing

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business or cooperating with Turkey were targeted. The acts were in a large scale and mostly justified by what happened in 1915. The study accordingly gives an account of history of the "Armenian issue" that still dwells on. The Turks and the Armenians are said to be widely divided on the reasons for the emergence of the Armenian issue and its persistence. The author seems to suffice with giving a smooth listing of the events that took place until and during the World War I. He notes strikingly that "Since they were the weaker party, the Hunchaks and the Dashnaks, in a manner similar to what the Armenian terrorist are attempting to do today, began deliberately using terror against the Turks to incite Turkish reprisals and massacres". It should be added that the author gives a fairly sufficient account of "deportation and massacres" in the World War I in the light of first accounts of ambassadors and historians. In any account, the author emphasizes that there was no "premeditated genocide" of Armenians by the Turks although many Armenians perished as a result of war conditions and negligence.

The study then takes on the beginnings of the current Armenian terrorism by starting with the name "Nemesis" which is described as a secret Dashnak network and said to be responsible for killing many former Ottoman officials in exile in 1920s. In those years, the reasons behind the terror campaign also started to emerge and were mostly linked to feelings of revenge leading to a widespread support especially among the Armenian community.

The very recent wave of Armenian terrorism was said to have started on 27 January 1973 with killing of the Turkish council general and vice council in New York. As soon as these events started to take place so did the names of ASALA and then JCAG-ARA. The author accordingly devotes separate sections to reviewing of these notorious terrorist organizations.

ASALA (Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia) was subjected to a comprehensive analysis of origins and nature and found clearly responsible for assassinating many Turkish diplomats or their immediate family. The statements was that ASALA was doing more than it was despite splits inside ASALA. JCAG-ARA (Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide-Armenian Revolutionary Army) is linked to Dashnaks and dated back to 1890. The review also emphasizes the divergences between ASALA and JCAG-ARA.

Having noted that a simple account of terrorist acts might be misleading, Professor Gunter analyses in detail the modus operandi of these organizations trying particularly to reflect the scale and the effects. The period between 1978-80 being the peak of Armenian terrorism, 30 Turkish diplomats or their immediate family members are said to have been killed in the years between 1973 to 1984. The Armenian terrorism is described as having a large scale taking place in four different continents.

More importantly, the study analyses the financial support behind the Armenian terrorism pointing particularly to the donations from the Armenian community in various countries and even to the drug-trafficking. The personal characteristics of those who have taken part in the acts are also reflected.

As to the transnational support for the Armenian terrorism, he points to the link between ASALA and the similar groups in the western European countries and the sympathy for Armenians among the western countries giving credit to the belief among the Turks that a campaign of terror to weaken Turkey was planned and supported by outsiders. The study goes one step further and examines the link between the Armenian terrorism and particular States such as Lebanon, Palestinian, the Soviets, the United States, France and Cyprus. On the other hand, Greece, Syria and Iran are termed as those indirectly supporting the Armenian terrorism against their "historic enemy".

In all these events, were there any "Turkish counterterror and harassment"? This is a highly controversial issue as indicated by the author with a question mark after the title "Turkish counterterror and harassment?". The allegations seem basically stem from the statements of the Turkish officials including the then President Kenan Evren to the effect that Turkey would seek to punish those who had taken part in terrorist acts against Turkey and the Turks. For the reasons that the author contemplates on, there was simply no Turkish counterterror against the Armenians or Armenian terrorists.

However, whether or not there was a Turkish harassment against the Armenians and especially those living in Turkey seems to be a more important issue. The allegation is raised by the Armenians that "The Turkish Government today harasses, persecutes and terrorizes its few (c. 60,000) remaining Armenian citizens". It is argued that Armenian monuments and other

remainings are destroyed in many forms or the Armenian names are forcefully changed in Turkey.

Professor Gunter emphasizes the statements of many Armenians living in Turkey that the outsiders distort the real situation of the Armenian origin citizens of Turkey. In his synthesis, he says that although the Turkish treatment of the minorities have not always been at an ideal level, there were reasons since the late Ottoman years for this and these reasons were mostly unrelated to an idea of premeditated government policy. It is rather that Turkey today restores and cleans up the important Armenian sites in eastern Anatolia especially to protect them and facilitate the visits.

The author concludes as to the Armenian terrorism with an impressive expression that "It is obvious that the Armenian terrorist are a deadly, secretive and important manifestation of contemporary international terrorism". (p. 147) But, more than that, it is possible to see in the Conclusion the factors on which the Armenian terrorism against Turkey was based. All come to a point that Armenians associate themselves with the eastern Anatolia. But the author concludes as to this point that at this late date the Armenians have absolutely no international legal or even moral claim to eastern Anatolia. However, as a stateless people who suffered a wrong that has never been rectified and since they are a party to contemporary terrorist movement against Turkey, it behooves us to search for a possible solution to the current impasse.

It certainly reflects on the current situation between Turkey and the Armenians although the current Armenian stance against Turkey does not comprise violence or terrorism but an intensive political and sometimes legal campaign to secure the approval of the so-called "Armenian genocide". In this context, a sentence of dissatisfaction to the remarks of Professor Gunter should be added. The comments in the Conclusion unnecessarily concentrate on the treatment of the Armenians by the Ottomans and on the alleged "Armenian genocide". This should not distort the fact that nothing can be a justification for resorting to terrorism as a way of pursuing a goal. Moreover, as author emphasizes, what happened during the World War I and in 1915 was not, in any account, premeditated but rather happened for some other reasons that should be perceived as mostly related to the natural components of a war situation.