

The Armenian Terrorism in Italy: New Archival Sources

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Italy in the Years of lead (anni di piombo)

- the season of sociopolitical violence affecting the Italian State, with social upheavals, tensions between radical left and right-wing neofascist organizations often escalating in physical confrontations and killings
- and, most important, a long wave of domestic terrorism carried out by clandestine communist organizations and neofascist groups. The former aimed mainly to state representatives kidnapping and killing judges, law enforcement officials, managers, journalists and politicians (including in May 1978 the president of the leading government party Aldo Moro) while the latter was engaged in random mass killings by placing bombs in crowded places like banks, trains, squares during political rallies, stations, thus killing hundreds of innocent civilians
- 400 Italians died during gli anni di piombo, thousands wounded and apprehended, countless resources diverted to antiterrorism, major political crisis and changes as consequence, the most important the stopping to PCI from entering the government.





The international connection of Italian terrorism

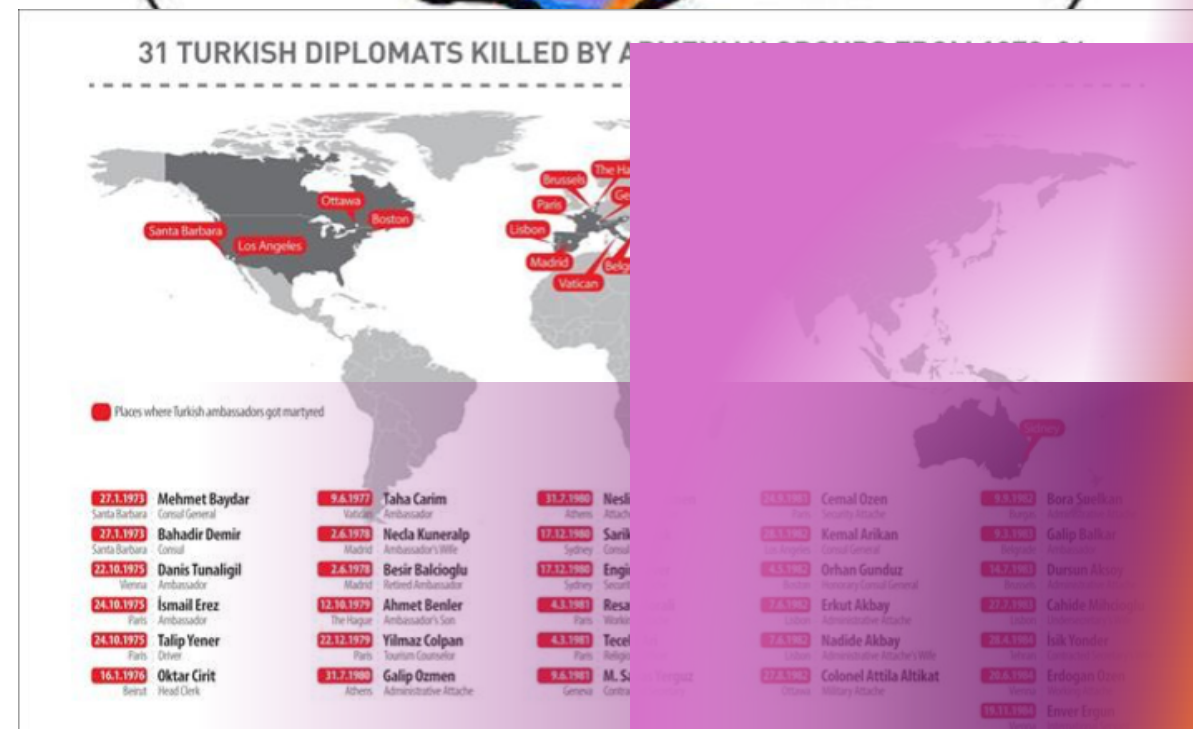


- Most recent historiography without abandoning the domestic framework insisted on the international or transnational nature of the years of lead. Terrorist organizations had deeply transnational and international connections with counterparts abroad: keen terroristic organizations, friendly regimes, even the two contending superpowers of the Cold War era.



The Armenian terrorist organizations

The Armenian terrorism, albeit mostly forgotten, was a crucial episode of the global rise of terrorist organizations which struck many countries worldwide from the early 70's to the second part of the 80's. The main target of Armenian attacks was the Turkish State and its diplomatic representatives. Turkish embassies, consulates, travel offices, mosques and cultural centers were targets and around 30 Turkish diplomats were assassinated in Los Angeles, Paris, Rome, Wien, Madrid, Belgrade, Athens, Sidney. The killing list included families of embassies staff, innocent non-Turkish bystanders randomly struck during attacks and bombings, even other Armenians considered "traitors" because too pro-Western or willing to emigrate from USSR. The main revendication was the recognition by Turkey of the Armenian genocide by the Ottoman Empire in 1915 and the cession of some regions in Turkey historically inhabited by ethnic Armenians.



Attacking Italy

- Italy was a natural target for Armenian terrorism and was attacked numerous times.
- Main reasons:
 - 1) Membership of Nato but also the soft spot of the Western Alliance
 - 2) Italy benevolent position towards Turkey and Muslim/Arabic countries in general
 - 3) The sophisticated PLO strategy towards Italy
 - 4) The presence of a large, massive, radical left in Italy and the support of some elements of the tiny Armenian diaspora in Italy as well as the BR
 - 5) The Vatican support (as well the Italian government) for migration and refugees from Armenian SSR. Rome as transit center



ASALA leaders and Italy

- Monte Melkonian sought shelter in Italy, while searched in Switzerland, there was protected by the Red Brigades and according to his biography resulted in converting the BR to a pro-Armenian, anti-Turkish stance
- Hagop Hagopian was the first ASALA leader to release an interview to an Italian-Swiss journalist in the then most popular weekly journal Panorama (400.000 copies) and threatened Italy and Vatican to stop supporting Armenian migration from USSR



The Armenian diaspora in Italy and the Armenian terrorism

- Italy has not significant Armenian diaspora
- Since mid 70s diaspora was deeply searched and investigated by Italian authorities
- The police suspected the Armenian monks of Venice of being supporters of JCAG and giving material resources (printing of leaflets). Investigation was inconclusive
- Only a tiny radical left group in Rome, the new Armenian left publishing the journal Zeitun, is confirmed to have connection with ASALA but no indictments of Italian citizens never resulted.

Attacking the Pope

- The Armenians were suspected being the real perpetrators of the assassination attempt against the Pope John Paul II in 1981, as a retribution for supporting refugees from Armenian SSR. The “Armenian Lead” was extensively searched in a very recent and impressive book by the Italian journalist and researcher **Ezio Gavazzeni**. According to **Gavazzeni** who extensively searched the Italian national archives and Wikileaks files focusing on the early 80s, ASALA vividly resented Vatican for its support of Soviet Armenian emigration and Ali Agca – the convicted perpetrator of the assassination attempt on Pope Wojtyla – was close to the Armenian groups and had travelled to Rome on the eve of the attack with an undisclosed Armenian.



From Moro to Scalfaro agreement

- In 1982-83 the then Minister of Internal Affairs Oscar Luigi Scalfaro (who later in 1992 was elected President of Republic) agreed to a secret deal with the Armenian organizations to end the attacks on Italian target, alike the one stipulated by Aldo Moro in the 70s. The lodo Scalfaro was a continuation of lodo Moro.
- the so-called and popularized “Moro doctrine” or “Lodo Moro” must be rethought.
- It was part of a larger strategy of the Italian state to contain the effects of the international terrorism on the Peninsula, being the Italian government, security offices and judicial power aware that terrorism was part of a global bipolar confrontation. It would be impossible or naïve searching for a single document, a smoking gun, with the terms of the agreement but it was “a process of dynamic negotiation” affecting almost two decades of Italian history.



The new sources at ACS

- The documentation herewith presented consists of ca. 450 pages: a significant part is included in the so-called “Renzi Directive”. The Renzi directive – called upon the name of the then Italian prime minister – was a massive declassification project done by the Italian government in 2015.
- The Armenian terrorism, albeit minor as compared to domestic terrorism, finds a place in the most confidential documents held secret until 2015. While the Armenian terrorism was almost ignored by public opinion, it was heavily regarded by authorities in cooperation with other Western agencies.



ANDREOTTI, CRAXI E MORO VISTI DALLA CIA



Conclusion

- Terrorism was neither only a criminal phenomenon nor a mere ideological uprising of discontent groups. It was a transnational process involving ideology, nationalism and global confrontation. The terrorist organizations were a serious challenge to the international order, an active way to wage the East-West conflict; terrorism became an international actor, disrupting western security, moving the balance power in Middle East, acting within the cold war. The Italian government and the Italian ruling class were dealing with terrorism as any other non-State or State actor of a very volatile and dangerous geopolitical environment. This is the conceptual framework leading to the Moro doctrine and Scalfaro doctrine and to the plain fact that ever since Italy was the only major European and Western power unaffected by international terrorism, even after the end of the Cold War and the September 11th, 2001, attacks.