



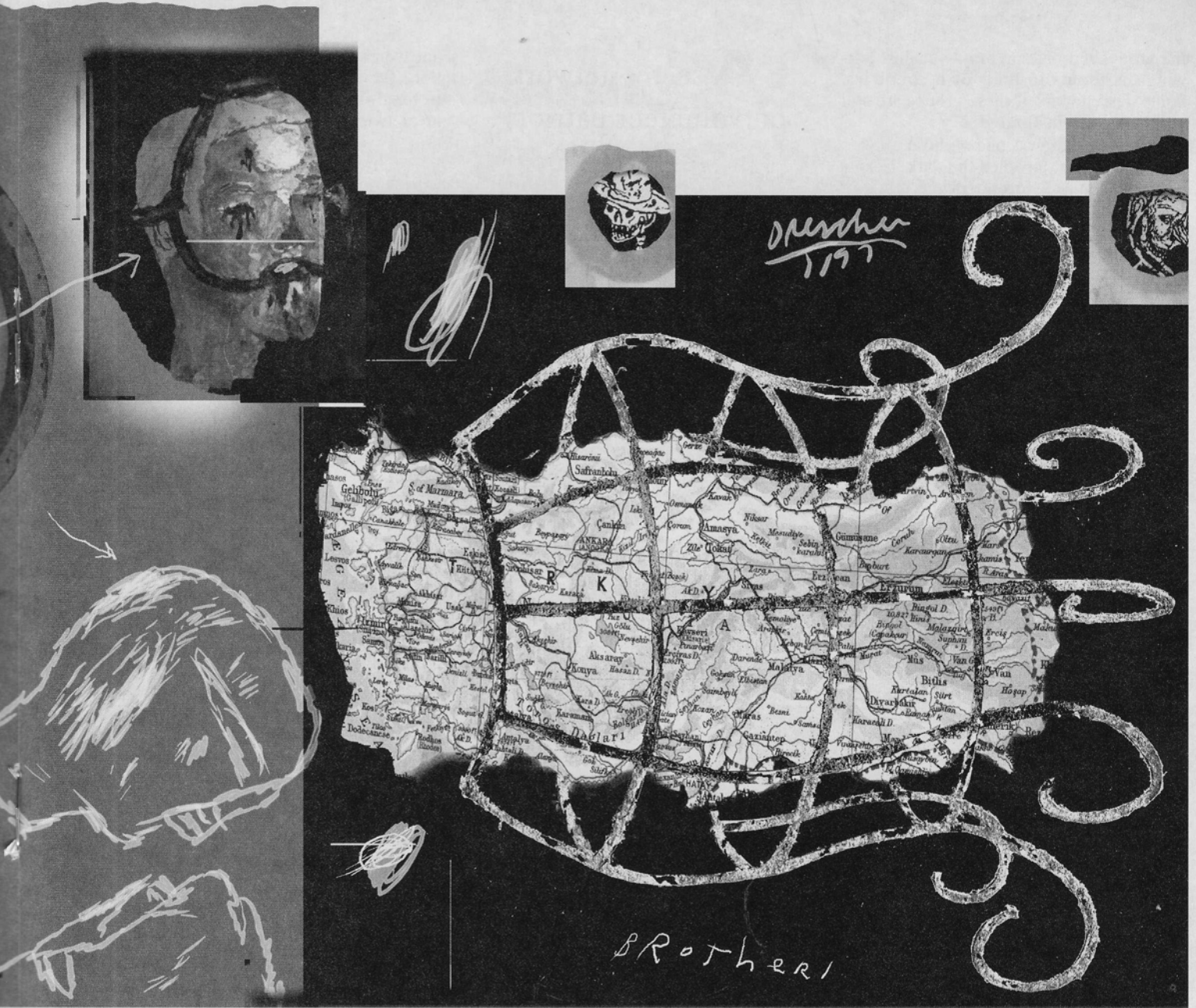
TURKEY'S T

A CIA legacy lives on

BY LUCY KOMISAR

On November 3, a truck crashed into a Mercedes Benz in Susurluk, ninety miles south of Istanbul, and killed three Turkish passengers: a fugitive heroin smuggler and hitman, a former high-ranking police officer, and a former "Miss Cinema." The lone survivor was a rightwing member of parliament. In the car's trunk, police found a forged passport, police identification papers, ammunition, silencers, and machine guns.

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HENRIK DRESCHER

TERRORISTS

Abdullah Catli, the fugitive heroin smuggler, had escaped from a Swiss prison. The dead beauty queen, Gonca Uz, was his girlfriend.

The police officer was Huseyin Kocadag, head of a Turkish police academy and a former Istanbul deputy police chief who reportedly organized hit squads in the southeast that kill Kurdish guerrillas and their supporters.

The survivor, Sedat Bucak, a member of parliament from the conservative True Path Party, is reportedly in charge of 2,000 Kurdish mercenaries paid by the government to fight Kurdish guerrillas.

The car crash has created a sensation in Turkey and has led parliament to hold hearings on the ties linking the True Path Party, the police, and thugs like Abdullah Catli. Newspapers in Turkey are making connections between what they are calling the "state gang" and a secret paramilitary force that for decades has attacked the left. But as Turkish investigators dig, they may come across one more hidden connection: The United States set up that secret paramilitary force at the height of the Cold War.

In the 1950s, the United States was concerned that the Soviet Union would con-

quer much of Western Europe. The CIA and the Pentagon came up with a plan to establish secret resistance groups within various Western European countries that would fight back against the predicted Soviet occupation. These groups were called "stay-behind" organizations: little cells of paramilitary units that would take on the Soviets behind enemy lines. Belgium, France, Holland, Greece, Italy, and Germany have all acknowledged that they participated in the covert network.

The United States funded these stay-behind groups for decades. Even though there was no Soviet occupation, some of

the groups did take up arms—against left-wing dissidents in their own countries. Some descendants of these groups are still at it, especially in Turkey.

Abdullah Catli was one of those.

“The accident unveiled the dark liaisons within the state,” former prime minister Bulent Ecevit told parliament in December. Now leader of a small opposition social-democratic party, Ecevit knows a lot about those liaisons. He first told me about them—and the American connection—back in 1990, when I interviewed him in his Ankara office, where he sat in a soft, brown chair sipping a cherry drink.

Ecevit is a genial, seventy-one-year-old man with a high forehead, deep-set eyes, a beakish nose, curly black hair, and a moustache. The son of a doctor and a painter, Ecevit is an intellectual and a poet who has translated T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. He graduated from the American-run Robert College and lived in the United States as a student and a journalist. He once led the major social-democratic party; there was a split, and he now heads the smaller of the two.

Ecevit became prime minister in 1973. He told me he was startled the following year when the Turkish military high command requested money from the prime minister's secret fund to pay for a new headquarters for the Special Warfare Department. General Semih Sancar, Turkey's army commander, told him about the department. He said the Americans had funded it from the start, but now they were allegedly pulling out. Sancar advised Ecevit not to look too closely at the matter. Ecevit investigated and found no such organization in the state budget.

“There are a certain number of volunteer patriots whose names are kept secret and are engaged for life in this special department,” a military briefer told Ecevit. “They have hidden arms caches in various parts of the country.”

At the time, Ecevit worried that these so-called lifetime patriots might have a rightist slant and would use their weaponry to advance their ideological goals. But he felt he was in no position to deny them funds. Ecevit's party was the largest, but it had won only a third of the votes. He was running a shaky coalition government. Ecevit released the funds the military wanted and never discussed the matter with the United States.

But the U.S. government surely knew about it. It set up the secret stay-behind organization and funded it for more than two decades.

Working out of the Joint U.S. Military Aid Team headquarters, it was known first as the Tactical Mobilization Group and then the Special Warfare Department. In 1971, after a military coup, it was dubbed the counter guerrilla force and turned into an instrument of terror against the left.

A secret network of ‘volunteer patriots’ wages war on its own people.

Journalist Ugur Mumcu, who was arrested shortly after the coup, wrote later that his torturers told him, “We are the counter guerrilla. Even the president of the republic cannot touch us.” (Mumcu, who continued to write in the daily *Cumhuriyet* about the counter guerrilla force and about the existence of rightist drug gangs connected to the government, was killed by a car bomb in 1993.)

Confirmation of the counter guerrilla force's existence has come from the highest sources. Former Army Chief of Staff General Kennan Evren, who led a 1980 coup, wrote in his memoirs that Suleyman Demirel, now president and in the late 1970s prime minister, asked then that the Special Warfare Department be used to combat terrorism. Evren said he refused, but that Demirel insisted, pointing out that the counter guerrillas had been used in 1971 against subversives.

General Evren acknowledged that the Special Warfare Department was involved in clandestine activities, citing the murder of nine leftwing militants at Kizildere in northern Turkey in 1972. He told a newspaper that civilians in the paramilitary organization run by the department may have been involved in terrorist incidents in the 1970s without his knowledge. Given the military's tight control over security, such ignorance is highly unlikely.

One notorious terrorist incident the stay-behind group may have been involved in occurred on May Day, 1977, when the major trade-union confederation organized a rally that brought several hundred thousand people to Istanbul's main Taksim Square. As the sun was setting, snipers on surrounding buildings started firing at the speakers' platform. The crowd panicked: Thirty-eight were killed; hundreds were injured. The shooting lasted for twenty minutes; several thousand police at the scene did nothing.

Ecevit, who was out of office at the time, went to see President Fahri Koruturk and told him he thought the counter guerrilla force might have carried out the massacre. “Give me a written statement,” Koruturk answered. He relayed Ecevit's fears to Prime Minister Demirel, Ecevit recalled, but nothing came of it.

When he ran for prime minister in late 1977, Ecevit denounced the counter guerrillas. When he became prime minister, he told Army Chief of Staff Evren, “During the Kizildere incidents, the Special Warfare Section is said to have been used. I

am worried about this civilian organization. There is no means of knowing or controlling what a young recruit may get up to after twenty years in such an organization.”

Evren replied, “There is nothing to worry about. We will deal with it.” So Ecevit blocked a parliamentary debate on the issue. At a news conference, he denied the existence of the counter guerrilla group and said his earlier charges were just suppositions. Signaling his fear of provoking the military, he said, “We must all be respectful toward the Turkish Armed Forces and help them in the realization of their desire to remain out of politics.”

Once when Ecevit was touring the country, a general in eastern Turkey gave a dinner in his honor. When Ecevit learned he had worked in the Special Warfare Department, he told the general, “I have deep suspicions about the civilian extension of that department.”

“The civilians work very honestly, very faithfully,” the general assured him. “There is nothing to be afraid of.”

Ecevit told him, “Simply as a hypothesis, it's quite possible, general, that one of those lifetime patriots might at a certain later date become the party chief of the Nationalist Action Party, which is involved in rightwing terrorism in this very town.”

“Yes,” said the general. “This is the case, but he's a very nice man.”

By the late 1970s, violence between the left and right threatened Turkey's stability. The chief violent group on the right was the neofascist “Grey Wolves,” the militant arm of the rightist Nationalist Action Party headed by Alparslan Turkes, a former colonel and a leader of the 1960 military coup.

Our dead heroin trafficker, Abdullah Catli, was a leader of the Grey Wolves when he was found guilty in absentia of organizing the 1978 murders of seven student members of the Turkish Labor Party.

After the car crash, Turkes admitted that Catli had worked clandestinely for the military and police, that he had worked “in the framework of a secret service working for the good of the state.” A former Turkish foreign-ministry adviser and the head of the intelligence anti-terror unit also told officials conducting the current parliamentary inquiry that Catli worked for Turkish intelligence.

Foreign Minister Tansu Ciller, a leader of the conservative True Path Party, praised Catli after the crash: “Those who fire bullets or suffer their wounds in the name of this country, this nation, and this state will always be respectfully remembered by us.”

The rightwing terrorism Catli was involved in during the late 1970s helped set the stage for the 1980 military coup, which the generals said was needed to save the country from anarchy.

The Pope's Assassins

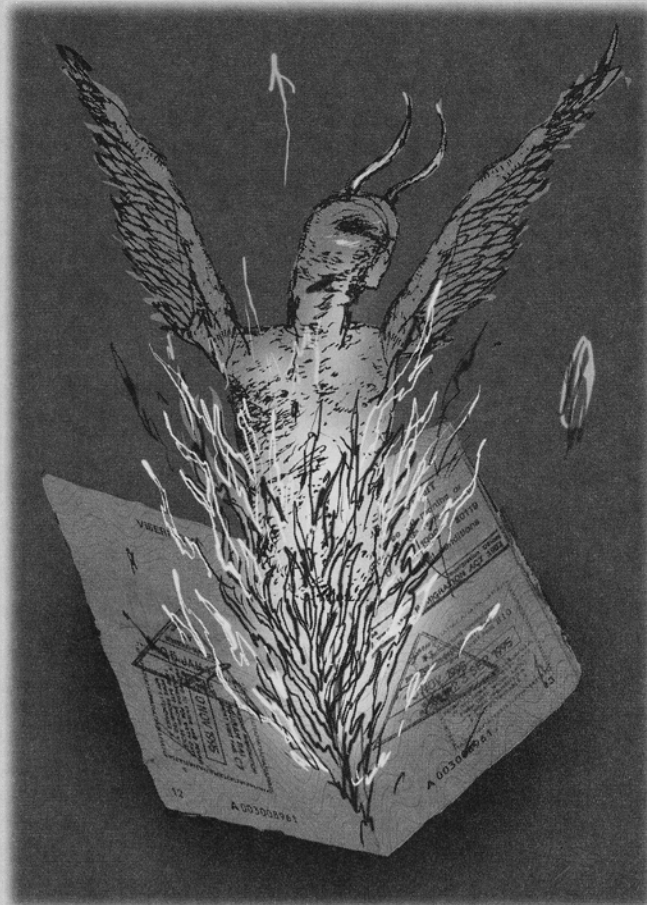
Abdullah Catli, the fugitive who died in the Mercedes Benz crash, was also connected to the man who tried to assassinate Pope John Paul II in 1981, Mehmet Ali Agca.

Both were members of the Grey Wolves. Both had worked together in a previous assassination effort. In 1979, Ali Agca killed a Turkish newspaper editor. Catli was in on the plot. When the police arrested Agca, they found a false passport belonging to Catli.

Catli then reportedly helped organize Agca's escape from an Istanbul military prison, and some have suggested Catli was even involved in the Pope's assassination attempt.

The CIA said the assassination attempt was the work of the Soviets, through their Bulgarian allies. This has never been proven, and a much more plausible case can be made that it was a rightist plot. The Grey Wolves are clearly implicated, and they are directly related to the Turkish counterterrorism force.

But why would a Turkish rightist squad have an interest in assassinating the Pope? The answer may lie with links between the "stay-behind" organizations in various European



HENRIK DRESCHER

Mehmet Ozbay was an alias—the very same alias that Mehmet Ali Agca had on his own passport.

—L.K.

After the 1980 coup, several hundred thousand leftists were jailed for three or four years without trial. Many were tortured. The parliamentary commission has called on Evren to testify about charges that terror squads were used routinely by the military junta and participated in roundups of leftists.

By the mid-1980s, the counterterrorists had a new target: the Kurds. Government security agencies began using paramilitary death squads against Kurds who started an armed struggle in 1984. In November 1990, six months after our interview, Ecevit repeated publicly that a clandestine paramilitary force existed in Turkey. Three weeks later, the head of the Turkish Army Operations Department and the commander of the Special Forces issued a statement that there was a special NATO organization in Turkey called the Special Warfare Department, whose mission was "to organize resistance in the case of a communist occupation." They said its secret member "patriots" were not connected to the counterterrorists. The spe-

cial NATO organization was, of course, the stay-behind operation the Americans had started.

In 1992, the commander of the Special Warfare Department, General Kemal Yilmaz, said, "The department is still active in security operations against armed members of the PKK [Kurdish Workers Party] in Turkey's southeastern provinces."

The U.S. State Department's 1995 human-rights report on Turkey was blunt. "Prominent credible human-rights organizations, Kurdish leaders, and local Kurds asserted that the government acquiesces in, or even carries out, the murders of civilians," it said. "Human-rights groups reported the widespread and credible belief that a counterterrorist group associated with the security forces had carried out at least some 'mystery killings.'"

The State Department's 1996 report on Turkey did not mention the counterterrorists, but said that " 'mystery killings' continued to occur with disturbing frequency." It also said, "The 1995 recommendations

countries, which all had a stake in blaming terrorism on the left.

Most is known about the Italian Gladio, Latin for sword, which worked with the Mafia and neofascists to prevent Italian communists from taking power through insurrection or the vote. Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti acknowledged the existence of the Gladio in testimony before an Italian parliamentary commission on August 2, 1990. He said Italy had used a "strategy of tension" to undercut the influence of the legal communist party.

That strategy was terrorism. The Gladio conducted bombings, and then blamed the bombings on the left. The assassination attempt on the Pope may have been part of this strategy of tension.

At the scene of the Mercedes Benz crash, Turkish investigators found Catli with a fake passport. "The person on this photo, Mehmet Ozbay, works as a specialist for the police directorate and he is allowed to carry guns."

of a parliamentary committee, designed to purge 'illegal formations' within the state which the committee said committed some mystery killings, were not implemented."

The Turkish embassy in Washington said it had no information on these illegal formations. Meanwhile, the parliamentary commission investigating the Mercedes Benz crash has recommended prosecuting the lone survivor of the crash, along with thirty-four others linked to the scandal, including several former police chiefs and officers.

As for Washington's role, the Pentagon would not tell me whether it was still providing funds or other aid to the Special Warfare Department; in fact, it wouldn't answer any questions about it. I was told by officials variously that they knew nothing about it, that it had happened too long ago for there to be any records available, or that what I described was a CIA operation for which they could provide no information. One Pentagon historian said, "Oh, you mean the stay-behind organization. That's classified." ■