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Sudden desistance from terrorism: The Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia and the Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide

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In this paper we examine the trajectories of two Armenian terrorist groups: the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) and the Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide (JCAG). Both groups began in the mid-1970s and by the early 1980s had become extremely active. However, shortly afterwards, attacks and fatalities attributed to ASALA and JCAG plummeted, and by 1988 both groups had effectively disintegrated. The pivotal historical event in our analysis is an especially brutal attack on Paris's Orly Airport in 1983, which we believe undermined the legitimacy of ASALA among its supporters in the Armenian diaspora and in the West. We use data from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) from 1975 to 1988 as well as extensive qualitative evidence to examine these issues. Based on Cox proportional hazard models, we find that both total ASALA attacks and ASALA attacks on non-Turkish targets significantly increased until the Orly incident, but significantly decline thereafter. Although JCAG was not involved in the Orly bombing and in general had a much more disciplined approach, JCAG attacks also declined rapidly following Orly. The results suggest that when a terrorist organization depends heavily on a diaspora, overreaching in terrorist targeting offers a strong opening for discrediting terrorism as a tactic, even discrediting terrorists who have not overreached.

Keywords: asymmetric conflict; terrorism; genocide

The starting point for our research is the recognition that endings can be more than the opposite of beginnings; endings can have their own logic and their own dynamics. Medical treatment sometimes advances before understanding and control of the causes of disease; major tranquilizers, for example, are useful against schizophrenia despite the lack of a general theory of the causes of schizophrenia. Similarly, research on the origins of criminal behavior has in recent years been complemented by research aimed at understanding desistance from crime.¹ Although Cronin,² Crenshaw,³ and Ross and Gurr⁴ have made similar arguments for the value of studying how terrorism ends, researchers have rarely used statistical models to test for possible explanations of desistance from terrorism (see Jones and Libicki⁵ for an exception).

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One approach to studying desistance from terrorism would focus on individuals, asking how an individual member of a terrorist group determines to desist from or turn against terrorism. Another, explored in this paper, focuses on the group level. Specifically, we explore how, in the 1980s, two Armenian terrorist groups moved from fast increasing activity to virtual disappearance in just a few years. The two groups of interest are the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) and the Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide (JCAG).

The changing fortunes of ASALA were especially dramatic (see Figure 1). ASALA began in the mid-1970s, and by the early 1980s had become extremely active. In 1982 alone, ASALA mounted 25 attacks, killing 18 people and injuring 111 others. However, immediately thereafter, attacks and fatalities attributed to ASALA plummeted, and by 1988, the organization had effectively disintegrated. JCAG was less active than ASALA in terms of either number of strikes or casualties, but, like ASALA, JCAG increased its activities into the early 1980s and ended its attacks by 1988.

In addition to showing fast decline from a high level of activity, ASALA and JCAG offer two features that recommend these groups for analysis. First, we had access to considerable detailed information about their personnel and operations over time. Second, these two groups are of comparative interest in that while they shared most of the same goals, they were also competitors who operated with very different strategies. In this paper we are especially interested in determining whether their rapid decline can be linked to a loss of legitimacy among the Armenian diaspora population that supported them and gave them cover.

The origin and explosive growth of ASALA

At the end of the First World War, the Armenian diaspora included roughly 1.4 million people in 34 countries.⁶ Armenians worldwide had been traumatized by

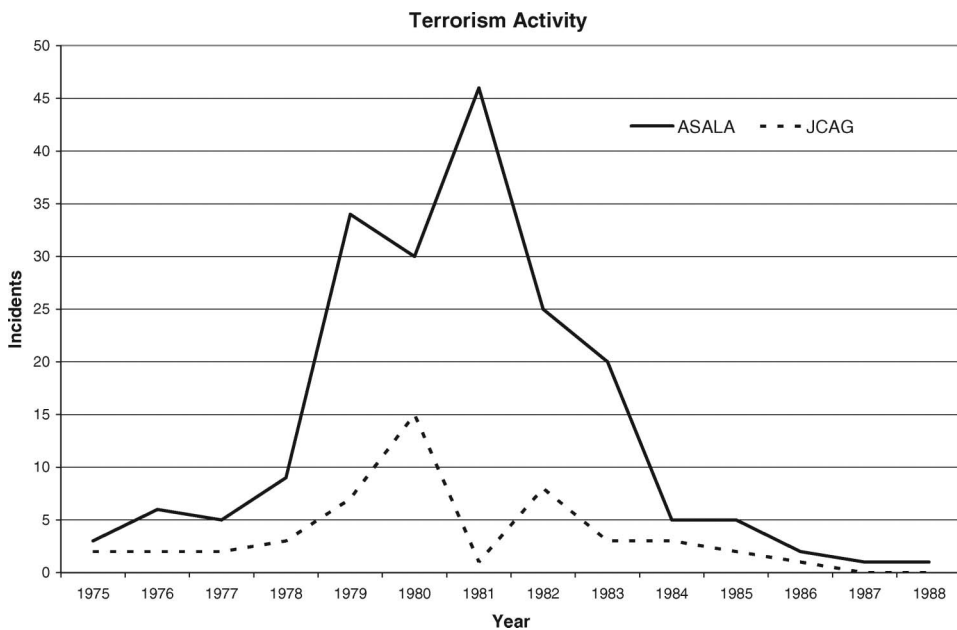


Figure 1. Attacks by ASALA and JCAG, by year, from 1975 to 1988.

the genocide that killed approximately 1 million Armenians in Turkey in 1915, a genocide categorically denied by the Turkish government. Fifty years after the genocide, Armenians felt considerable impatience with traditional leadership groups such as the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), who had been unable to advance recognition of the genocide, let alone advance national liberation for Armenians remaining in Turkey and the USSR.

This discontent laid the foundation for ASALA. In the 1960s and 1970s, the rise of national-liberation and student-protest movements signaled a worldwide increase in tolerance for political struggle, and this climate prepared Armenians to support violence in their own struggle. A precipitating event occurred in 1973 when Gourgen Yanikian, a 78-year-old Armenian resident of California, shot and killed two Turkish diplomats in a hotel room, reported the crime, and then waited calmly for his arrest. When questioned, he revealed that in 1915, Turkish soldiers had killed his brother and more than 25 members of his extended family.⁷

Yanikian's actions were to some a catalyst for the decades of political violence that ensued.⁸ It was an environment described by a former ASALA member as one in which "armed struggle was accepted as the principal means through which to realize the patriotic goals of the Armenian people."⁹

Thus, when ASALA appeared in the mid-1970s, the Armenian diaspora – and many citizens of Western democracies – had already made clear their sympathy for the Armenian cause in their reactions to Yanikian's violence. ASALA promised action toward obtaining Armenian goals, usually represented as the "3 R's": (1) recognition of the 1915 Armenian genocide, (2) reparations from Turkey for the genocide, and (3) restoration of the ancestral homeland.¹⁰ For a population spread over more than 30 countries, the ancestral homeland referred to the territories in Turkey that had been historically occupied by Armenians until they were forced out by the Turks before and during the genocide.

If the 3 R's were ASALA's long-term goals, its more immediate but less publicized goal was to arouse national feeling and action within the Armenian diaspora.¹¹ That is, the leadership of ASALA aimed not just to represent but to mobilize Armenians everywhere.¹² Born of a time, place, and people ready for armed conflict, the leaders of ASALA believed that the political goals of the diaspora required first a revolution in the minds of Armenians. Thus, "the attacks are the means for legitimization of the ASALA and its political fronts in the eyes of the Diaspora Eastern Armenians, to be accompanied by a delegitimization of the current leadership elites and by the creation of a revolutionary army and people that would eventually conduct a war of liberation against Turkey."¹²

On 20 January 1975, ASALA began its official challenge to ARF leadership by bombing the World Council of Churches' (WCC) headquarters in Beirut. This first attack directly addressed the diaspora's concern about increasing emigration of Armenian youth from ancestral homelands and the assimilation of these young people in Western countries. ASALA charged the WCC with having promoted the emigration of Armenians to the United States.¹³

ASALA was founded by four men, one of whom quickly became its leader: Hagop Hagopian, aka "Mujahed" or "Warrior." While Hagopian's style of leadership was ostensibly collegial, insiders' reports suggest an organization that resembled a dictatorship more than a central committee.¹⁴ During its embryonic years, ASALA consisted of only six or seven persons, of whom the most active were Hagopian and Hagop Darakjian. The half-Armenian, half-Arab Hagopian, who was alleged by some sources as having once been an aid to Abu Iyad of the Palestinian

Liberation Organization (PLO), was soon to prove himself the most public face of modern Armenian terrorism.¹⁵ Less public a figure, but equally vital to ASALA as a co-worker and leader, Darakjian assumed control of the organization for 6 months when Hagopian was wounded in an assassination attempt in 1976.¹⁶

According to Hyland, ASALA's financial support during this period was derived from many different sources and came in diverse forms, including especially funds solicited from the diaspora.¹⁷ The lack of any Armenian national territory meant a lack of secure bases and reliable funding. This lack was partially remedied by seeking the support and protection of other politically leftist groups, especially the PLO, which was in effect ASALA's patron and organizational model during this period.¹⁸ In addition, ASALA members (including Hagopian) were connected with Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK); some ASALA members were allegedly trained in PFLP camps.¹⁹ These connections and its frequently Marxist rhetoric gave ASALA's nationalism a decidedly leftist tilt in the Cold War competition between the United States and the USSR.

During its early years, ASALA limited its terrorist activities to a few bomb attacks on Turkish targets in Beirut. By 1980, the establishment of training camps in Lebanon allowed ASALA to build a more permanent organizational structure. Real estate, office space, radio broadcasts and a publication, as well as sustained personnel recruitment efforts, increased ASALA's salience and legitimacy. Its Beirut office functioned around the clock to coordinate operations and disseminate information.²⁰ As it strengthened, ASALA increased the frequency of assassination attempts against Turkish targets, especially diplomats, as well as initiating attacks against non-Turkish targets in support of Palestinian allies.²¹

Through all these developments, the Turkish government continued to deny categorically the existence of the Armenian genocide. Indignantly, Turkish leaders accused other countries of supporting Armenian terrorists. Turkey condemned Syria in particular for its sympathy with Armenian terrorism, and expressed its displeasure by building dams along the Euphrates that threatened Syria's water supply and electrical power.²² Despite the efforts of ASALA and other groups, as well as considerable international political pressure, Turkey refused to address Armenian grievances and denied any justification for terrorist attacks.

The high point of ASALA's career is commonly recognized as the September 1981 seizure of the Turkish Consulate in Paris, also called the 'Van operation.' The Turkish Vice Consul was seriously injured, and 56 hostages were taken in a well-coordinated action by four ASALA commandos. The commandos surrendered to the French authorities after 16 hours, but the attack generated unprecedented public and political support for the Armenian struggle.²³ At a demonstration of approximately 5,000 French-Armenians on 24 April 1982, ASALA flags, shirts, and badges were openly displayed in support of arrested ASALA commandos; hunger strikes by the prisoners were coordinated with demonstrations, popular meetings, and other forms of propaganda.

An ASALA insider recalled that "Armenians throughout the world began showing much more sympathy for the armed struggle, and solidarity with ASALA was expressed by Armenian elements that had previously been reluctant to accept what had frequently been portrayed as 'terrorism'."²⁴ Increased sympathy for ASALA during this period was matched by increasing support from the diaspora community. From Canada's 'Azad Hay' and Britain's 'Gaitzer,' to Iranian-Armenian groups,

Armenian organizations throughout the diaspora openly expressed sympathy, and some members of these organizations even joined ASALA ranks.²⁵ Indeed, the Van operation became identified as “the most successful step to date in the mobilization of the Armenian people.”²⁶

In Beirut in the summer of 1981, even before the Van operation, ASALA had organized a meeting in which a wide range of Armenian organizations declared themselves in support of an eight-point political program. According to Gunter,²⁷ this was the product of the various popular movements’ efforts towards eventually consolidating forces into a united organization covering a political spectrum from left to right. ASALA had moved quickly, developing broad support for both its organizational goals and its leadership aspirations.

Support from the international community, especially the industrialized Western democracies, was also at an all-time high after the Van operation. As Melkonian asserted, “Armenian armed propaganda had succeeded in creating a genuinely positive interest about the Armenian people and their plight within public opinion on an international level.”²⁸ This support extended to Western governments as well as the Western public. The Turkish government claimed that ASALA had concluded secret agreements with several West European countries (Switzerland, France and Italy were mentioned specifically) that stipulated implicit support as long as terrorist attacks did not hit any local targets.²⁹ The French government in particular was an outspoken Armenian sympathizer, both in relations with the diaspora and in diplomatic relations with Turkey. On multiple occasions, French politicians condemned Turkey for its denial of the Armenian genocide and voiced support for the Armenians’ struggle.³⁰ Apparent support from the West also increased the perception among the diaspora that ASALA was successfully advancing the Armenian cause around the world.

ASALA’s rival: JCAG/ARA

After 1890, the Armenian diaspora was led as a government-in-exile by the Hye Heghapokhaganneri Dashnagzootyun, also known as the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) or Dashnaks. Following its very first attack in 1975, ASALA emerged as a potent competitor to ARF. For many, ARF was perceived to be acquiescing in the migration of Armenian youth from their Armenian homeland, whereas ASALA was evidently prepared to stay and fight for it. Feeling the new power of youthful militancy around the world in the 1970s, and fearing the loss of younger, more radical recruits to a leftist ASALA, the more right-wing ARF established the Justice Commandos of the Armenian Genocide, or JCAG (later renamed the Armenian Revolutionary Army, or ARA) as its underground terrorist arm. JCAG’s first attack was the assassination of the Turkish ambassador in Vienna in October 1975, only months after ASALA’s January debut attack in Beirut.³¹

The speed with which JCAG followed ASALA into the political scene can be seen as an indication not only of the Armenian people’s receptiveness to terrorist alternatives, but of conservatives’ awareness of that receptiveness. As Tololyan³² notes of the battle for revolutionary legitimacy, since 1975 “the terrorists have competed with the more established Armenian organizations for the support and allegiance of the community.” Rather than lose its young people to ASALA, ARF founded its own terrorist group.

Unlike ASALA, JCAG had no charismatic leadership; there was no cult of personality within JCAG to rival the dictatorship of Hagopian. One of the few references to JCAG leadership identifies Abraham “Apo” Ashjian as having been head of JCAG³³ until he was assassinated in December 1982, perhaps by fellow Dashnaks who opposed his plans to cooperate with ASALA.³⁴ Ashjian was succeeded by Sarkis Aznavourian, who would himself be gunned down in Beirut, allegedly by ASALA.³⁵

Despite its lower-profile leadership style, JCAG suffered no disadvantage in recruitment, tactical efficiency, and fundraising. Hyland observes that “Once having taken the step of creating an outlet for the fervent anti-Turkish sentiment among younger Armenians in the diaspora, the ARF, with its roots deep in that diaspora, probably never lacked for recruits.”³⁵

ASALA’s decline

Following its rapid escalation of deadly attacks beginning in the mid-1970s, ASALA began to decline just as rapidly in the early to mid-1980s. Several important changes were taking place within ASALA at about the same time. First, ASALA’s operations were compromised by the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982, when organizational connections with Palestinian terrorist organizations resulted in ASALA’s expulsion from Beirut to the Bekaa Valley, 20 miles east of Beirut. In effect, the Lebanese civil war deprived ASALA of a base of operations, reduced its military capabilities to incidental attacks for a few months, and forced it into a period of adjustment and vulnerability.³⁶ This event may have put increased pressure on the ASALA leadership.

Second, under Hagopian’s leadership, attacks were expanding away from a focus on Turkish targets and an increasing number of attacks were against fellow Armenians. Hagopian also placed a growing emphasis on retributive bombings wherein the arrest of an ASALA commando was answered by a fierce bombing campaign to obtain the commando’s freedom. Insider accounts describe Hagopian as terrorizing his own commandos: censoring personal correspondence; denying freedom; withholding food, money, and identity documents; and even executing his own members for desertion.³⁷ Morale dropped significantly as ASALA experienced a slowdown in recruitment. These policies were forcing a widening rift between Hagopian and other ASALA supporters who favored sticking to Turkish targets.

And finally, by the early 1980s, ASALA had degenerated to outright extortion in fundraising within the diaspora.³⁸ Whereas JCAG had the financial backing of ARF, ASALA was forced to rely on soliciting the diaspora for support. Specifics about this kind of extortion are difficult to come by, as insider threats in a minority community are not easily pre-empted by police authorities. The usual approach is a combination of carrot and stick aimed at wage earners and especially owners of successful businesses. The carrot is an appeal to ethnic identity and sympathy. The stick includes reprisals against relatives, arson against businesses, and physical violence against recalcitrant donors. Recourse to involuntary contributions only increased dissatisfaction with ASALA among the diaspora community.

ASALA’s problems came together in its 15 July 1983 attack on Orly Airport outside Paris. An explosive device detonated prematurely in the terminal area by the Turkish Airlines counter, killing eight people (four French, two Turkish, one American, and one Swedish) and wounding over 50 more. The expansion of

increasingly inept attacks such as the one at Orly created a polarized and hostile climate within ASALA and in Armenian perceptions of ASALA.

Following Orly, the rift in ASALA resulted in the formation of a splinter group consisting of elements opposed to Hagopian's leadership.³⁹ The challenge was mounted by Monte Melkonian. Born in California in 1957, Melkonian graduated from the University of California at Berkeley with a major in ancient history and archeology and a taste for learning languages. He was a prominent ASALA member and planner of the Van operation. In July 1983, he left ASALA to form the splinter group ASALA-Revolutionary Movement (ASALA-RM), allegedly with the aid of Ara Toranian, the leader of the Paris-based Armenian National Movement.⁴⁰ Afterwards, ASALA never again mustered the kind of major attack represented by either the Van or the Orly operation.

Following Tololyan, we believe that these events were closely related to perceptions of ASALA held by the Turkish government and its citizens, Western governments and their citizens, and the Armenian diaspora community.⁴¹ The organizational changes in ASALA in the early 1980s appear to have only hardened the Turkish Government toward the Armenian cause. After the debacle at Orly, the Turkish government was only strengthened in its categorical refusal to recognize Armenian grievances. While less is known about changes in Turkish public opinion during this period, Melkonian claims that after Orly "the Turkish government was finding it easier to muster anti-Armenian chauvinism."⁴²

Reactions of Western audiences and the diaspora to the changes in ASALA cannot be easily separated. To a large extent, both shared similar cultural values with regard to the justification of terrorist violence for political change. Western reactions to high-profile attacks such as Orly undoubtedly had both a moral and a material impact on connections between the diaspora community and its support for ASALA. That is, the diaspora community's judgment of ASALA and terrorism was probably affected by Western value judgments, and the diaspora's material interests were no doubt threatened by increased Western suspicion of and hostility to Armenians (including police attention). But while it is difficult to separate the reactions of the West in general and the diaspora in particular, it is clear that both audiences were increasingly uneasy with ASALA's decision to carry out the kind of violent raid that had occurred at Orly.

JCAG's decline

Attacks by JCAG also diminished rapidly following the early 1980s, although, in several important respects, JCAG was very different from ASALA. Unfortunately, considerably less detail is available on JCAG than on ASALA. Nevertheless, the available information supports at least three major differences between the two groups. First, unlike ASALA, JCAG favored firearms, and used explosive devices only in isolated cases. JCAG's signature attack was a gunman stepping off a curb at an intersection in a large city, and firing several rounds into a Turkish official in an automobile.⁴³ This approach meant few targets were missed and few bystanders were killed or injured. JCAG never had a high-profile event, such as ASALA's Orly attack, where a large number of innocent bystanders were killed.

Second, JCAG has been described as maintaining a consistently high level of organizational capability.⁴⁴ From its foundation in 1975 until November 1986, it killed at least 20 Turkish diplomats and family members in well-planned attacks that

left only a few and minor civilian casualties. JCAG never experienced a divisive internal power struggle such as the one that opened up in ASALA following the Orly attack.

And finally, Hyland notes that ARF's fundraisers were "near legendary in their ability to generate large amounts of money for favored causes."⁴⁵ In the United States, a fundraiser for the legal defense of one arrested JCAG commando generated over a quarter of a million dollars. In relation to obtaining financial support from the diaspora, Kurz and Merari suggest that "It would appear as if the tensions between ASALA and the general Armenian community are far more pronounced than those between this community and the JCAG."⁴⁶

In sum, there are several important differences between ASALA and JCAG during this period, but their attacks declined together.⁴⁷ In the analysis that follows, we further explore these differences between ASALA and JCAG to consider their implications for the eventual decline of both groups.

Modeling the sudden desistance of ASALA and JCAG

The case studies reviewed raise at least three testable hypotheses regarding the rise and fall of Armenian terrorist strikes by ASALA during this period. First, we hypothesize that the decline of ASALA was attributable to growing disillusion with ASALA among Western countries and the diaspora. The disillusion may be connected to the pressure felt by the ASALA leadership after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon deprived ASALA of its major operational base in June 1982. But we suspect that the dissolution is linked especially to the increasing willingness of ASALA to target innocent bystanders, non-Turks and fellow Armenians, as symbolized especially by the brutal attack on Orly Airport on 15 July 1983. Thus, we predict significant increases in ASALA attacks before Orly, but significant declines afterward.

Second, again, assuming that Orly represents a watershed event, we predict that prior to Orly, as ASALA attacks more non-Turkish citizens, risks of further attacks (on both Turks and non-Turks) will also increase. However, after Orly, we predict that attacks against non-Turks will significantly lower the risk of continued attacks.

And finally, we reasoned that unsuccessful attacks by terrorist groups might decrease the amount of support they receive. Accordingly, we predicted that unsuccessful attacks by ASALA will be associated with a significant decline in the risk of future attempts. We test all three of these hypotheses for ASALA, but to allow comparisons, we perform the same analysis for JCAG.

Data and methods

To test our hypotheses we used data describing the activity of ASALA and JCAG from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) supplemented by several specific sources.⁴⁸ The GTD has been described in detail elsewhere (LaFree and Dugan⁴⁹), and we summarize here only the key features.⁵⁰ The GTD defines terrorism as acts involving "the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence to attain a political, economic, religious or social goal through fear, coercion or intimidation" and records characteristics of terrorism incidents reported from open sources. In recent years, the data collection has relied greatly on the Internet. For the years included in this analysis, data collection relied mostly on wire services (including

Reuters and the Foreign Broadcast Information Service), US State Department reports, other US and foreign government reporting, and US and foreign newspapers (including *The New York Times*, *The Financial Times* (UK), *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Washington Post*, *The Washington Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*).

Our analysis examines all terrorist attacks attributed to ASALA or JCAG (including alternative names such as the October 3 Movement or Guagen Yankiryan for ASALA, and Avengers of Armenian Genocide for JCAG) from 1975 to 1988. We begin the analysis in 1975 because this is the year that ASALA began its operations, and end in 1988, the last year that ASALA claimed responsibility for any attacks. We use Cox proportional hazard models to estimate the impact of specific terrorist attacks on the hazard of another attack for ASALA and JCAG, modeled separately.^{51,52} We use continuous-time survival analysis with the dependent variable measured as the number of days until the next attack by either ASALA or JCAG, and the independent variables measured at the time of the current attack.

Most applications of the Cox model estimate the hazard of a single event by using many observations. Often this event can only occur once, such as death. Here, we instead apply the Cox model to estimate the hazard of many events (terrorist attacks) by using only one observation (the group). By conditioning all events on one observation, we reduce the chances of dependence across observations. This method allows us to use the exact date of events, such as the Orly Airport attack, to model more precisely their impact on further attacks. Also, with this method we can exploit the temporal spacing between events to account for changes in patterns that may have otherwise been collapsed into aggregate units were we to rely on conventional time-series analysis.⁵³

The main methodological concern with repeated events in hazard modeling is that the error terms are dependent on one another. In other words, the timing to the next event might depend on the timing between previous events.⁵⁴ Because all events are generated from the same observation (or terrorist group), we reduce the chances of dependence across observations. However, the timing to the next terrorist attack might depend on the timing to the current attack, thus biasing our standard errors downward, making our findings vulnerable to type II error. To determine whether this is a problem, Allison⁵⁵ suggests testing for dependency by including the length of the previous “spell” (in this case, the length of time between attacks) as a covariate in the model for the current spell. We ran this test on both ASALA and JCAG models and found no evidence of dependency ($p = 0.722$ and 0.463). Thus, we are confident that the standard errors produced by our method are unaffected by dependency.

To test the hypotheses outlined above, we estimate models separately for attacks by ASALA and JCAG, using the following specification for the proportional hazard models in the analysis:

$$h(\text{Next Attempt}) = \lambda_0(\text{Next Attempt}) \exp(\beta_1 \text{Year} + \beta_2 \text{Orly} \\ + \beta_3 \text{Year} \times \text{Orly} + \beta_4 \text{Non-Turk} + \beta_5 \text{Non-Turk} \times \text{Orly} \\ + \beta_6 \text{Unsuccessful} + \beta_7 \text{Fatalities} + \beta_8 \text{Injuries}) \leftarrow$$

We estimate the coefficients associated with the hazard of a new attack by the same group (measured by the number of days until the next attack) as a function of an unspecified baseline hazard function (shown above as a function of λ_0) and other risk or protective variables that reflect our hypotheses (shown above as a linear function in the exponent).

Our first hypothesis is that as both Western and diaspora support declined following the attack on Orly airport, the risk of additional terrorist strikes by ASALA significantly decreased. We test this hypothesis by including a measure of the year (1975 to 1988), a dummy variable that indicates that the Orly attack had already occurred (0 for events falling on 1 January 1975 to 15 July 1983, 1 for events falling on 16 July 1983 to 31 December 1988), and a statistical interaction between the year and the attack dummy. If our hypothesis is correct, we would expect the estimate for the interaction term to be negative. As described above, the major competing event to the Orly attack in July 1983 was the loss of Lebanese bases in June 1982. While we argue that, of the two, Orly is likely to be the more important, we ran separate analyses for Orly and for the loss of the Lebanese bases. Because they produce nearly identical results, we report the results here based on the Orly incident, although alternative results based on the date of losing Lebanese bases are available on request.

Our second hypothesis is that new attacks following attacks on non-Turkish targets will sharply decline following the Orly incident. We include a dummy variable (1 = non-Turk, 0 = Turk) to indicate whether targets were of Turkish descent. We predicted that attacks on non-Turks increased the hazard of more attacks until the Orly attack and sharply reduced the hazard of more attacks afterwards. If we are correct, then the estimate for the non-Turk dummy variable should be positive, and that for the interaction should be negative. Over the entire series, 60.9 percent of ASALA attacks were against non-Turks and 25.0 percent of JCAG attacks were against non-Turks.

To test our final hypothesis, we create a dummy variable to determine whether an unsuccessful attack reduces the hazard of future attacks (1 = attack unsuccessful; 0 = attack successful). If our hypothesis is correct, the estimate for this variable will be negative. We defined success based on the type of event. For example, successful bombings detonate and destroy property or injure or kill individuals. Unsuccessful bombings are discovered, diffused, fail to detonate, or detonate early. We did not try to judge success in terms of the larger goals of the perpetrators, which are largely unknown to us. Based on this relatively narrow definition of success, 16.7 percent of the ASALA incidents and 10.4 percent of the JCAG incidents were coded as unsuccessful.

In addition to variables directly related to our hypotheses, we include in our models as controls measures of total fatalities and injuries. During the entire period spanned by the data, ASALA was responsible for 66 fatalities and 445 injuries and JCAG/ARA was responsible for 40 fatalities and 26 injuries.

Results

In Figure 1, we show the total number of strikes by ASALA and JCAG from 1975 to 1988. Total attacks by ASALA greatly outnumber attacks by JCAG throughout the period spanned by the data. From 1975 through 1988, ASALA and JCAG initiated 240 attacks, but 192 of these (80.0 percent) were claimed by ASALA. According to Figure 1, ASALA attacks rose steeply before reaching a high point in 1981 at 46. JCAG reaches a peak number of attacks in 1980 at 15 and then records steep declines (JCAG claimed responsibility for only one incident in 1981). Although JCAG has far fewer strikes, its attack trends are clearly related to ASALA trends, an observation confirmed by the fact that the two are significantly correlated ($r = 0.52$; $p = 0.05$; $n = 14$).

Figure 2 shows total fatalities attributed to each group. Trends for fatalities are generally similar to trends for total incidents, but are considerably lower in magnitude. Also, we can see that the fatality trends for ASALA and JCAG are much closer in magnitude than the activity trends – indicating that, compared to ASALA, JCAG’s ratio of deaths to incidents is much higher than ASALA’s (0.83 versus 0.34). Note also that the peak in fatalities for both groups is later than the peak for its activities; for ASALA, the peak for fatalities is 1982 – 1 year later than the peak for its activities; for JCAG, the peak for fatalities is 1983 – 3 years later than its peak for activities.

We present the coefficient estimates for the hazard models in Table 1. The columns present the findings for incidents perpetrated by ASALA and JCAG respectively. Turning to the first hypothesis, we see that the Orly attack was indeed a significant turning point for both groups. Recall, if our hypothesis is correct, then the interaction, $Year \times Orly$ will be significant and negative, indicating a significant decline in the hazard of attacks after Orly.⁵⁶ Table 1 shows that these are indeed the patterns observed in the data. For the period leading up to the Orly attack, there was a significant increase in total attacks ($Year$ is positive and significant) and there was a significant decline in the hazard of attacks following Orly ($Year \times Orly$ is significant and negative). Interestingly, the magnitude difference between the ASALA and JCAG results also suggests that the impact of Orly on the drop in attacks was actually greater for JCAG than for ASALA (although the difference is not statistically significant, $z = 1.41$). We return to this last point in the discussion below.

Our second hypothesis is that the risk of further incidents after attacks against non-Turkish citizens will increase until the Orly Airport incident, but will

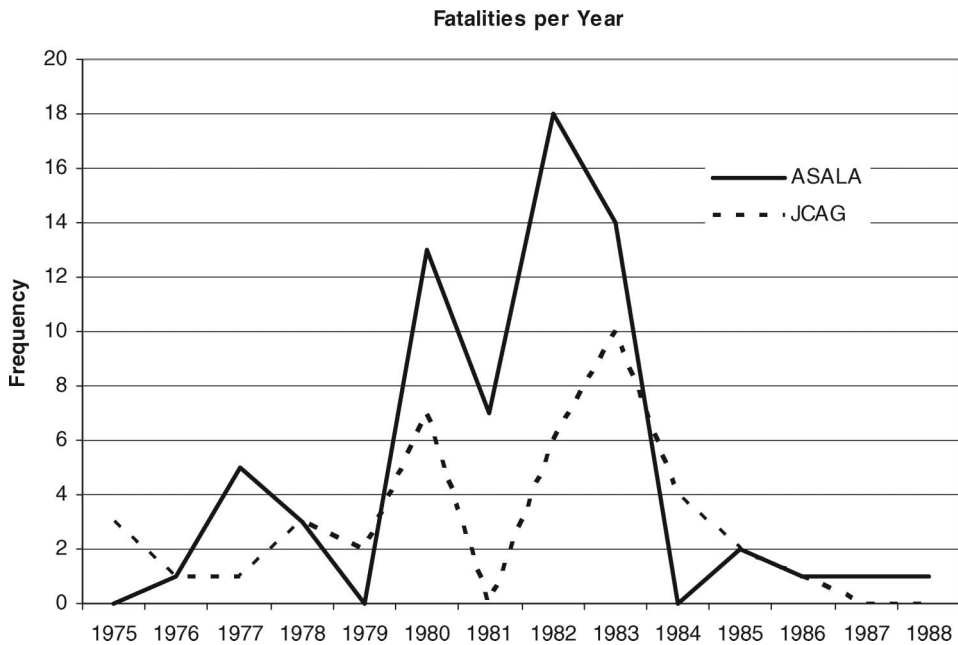


Figure 2. Fatalities attributed to ASALA and JCAG by year from 1975 to 1988.

significantly decline afterwards – as the displeasure of the Armenian diaspora and Western observers becomes apparent. Consistent with this pattern, Table 1 shows that as non-Turkish targets are attacked, the hazard of further attacks increases for ASALA (the *Non-Turk* measure is positive and statistically significant), but as predicted, after Orly, attacks on non-Turkish targets are significantly associated with a decrease in the hazard of further attacks (the *Non-Turk* × *Orly* interaction term is

Table 1. Coefficients and standard errors from hazard model predicting next attack.

Variables	ASALA (<i>n</i> = 191)	JCAG (<i>n</i> = 47)
Year	0.107**	0.217*
	0.044	0.098
Orly	1032.931**	5115.068**
	404.863	2088.777
Year × Orly	−0.521**	−2.578**
	0.204	1.053
Non-Turk	0.575**	1.574**
	0.176	0.423
Non-Turk × Orly	−0.906*	
	0.517	
Unsuccessful	−0.561**	−0.943
	0.205	0.576
Fatalities	−0.128	−0.551**
	0.105	0.165
Injuries	0.007	0.129
	0.148	0.148

p* 0.05; *p* 0.01. All tests are one-tailed.

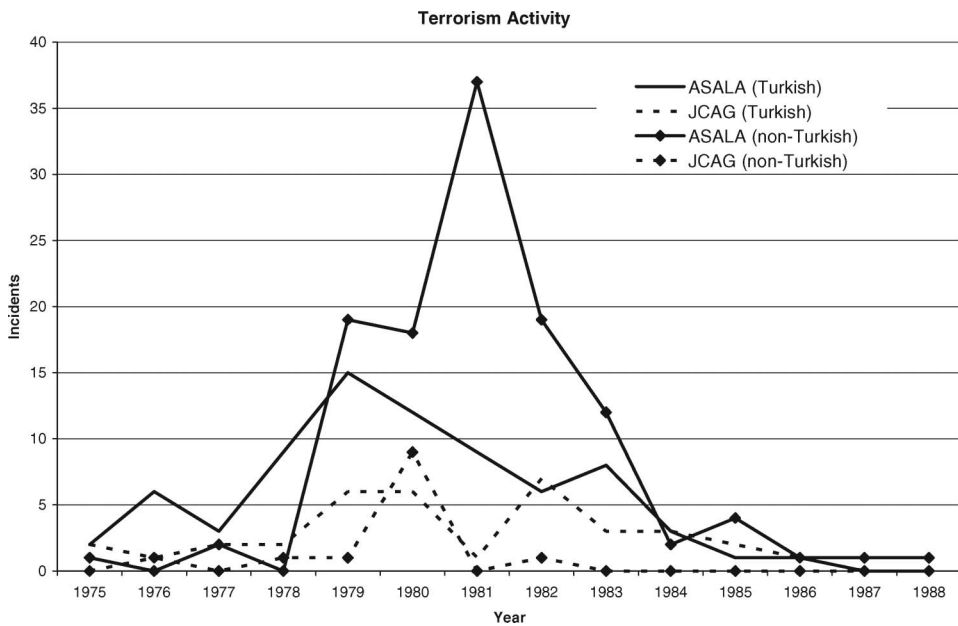


Figure 3. Turkish and Non-Turkish Attacks by ASALA and JCAG from 1975 to 1988.

significant and negative). For JCAG, there were not enough total attacks against non-Turks ($n = 12$) to estimate the risk of attacks against non-Turks before and after the Orly attack. As with ASALA, the JCAG findings show that attacking non-Turks was associated with increasing risk of additional attacks by JCAG for the series as a whole.

Figure 3 shows the changes in attacks against Turks and non-Turks by ASALA and JCAG over time. By disaggregating the trends, we see that until 1978, both groups mostly attacked Turkish targets. In fact, JCAG only attacked Turkish targets except for three incidents in the late 1970s, nine attacks in 1980, and one in 1982. Afterwards, JCAG strictly targeted Turkish nationals. However, ASALA mostly attacked non-Turkish targets after 1978.

Finally, our third hypothesis is that unsuccessful attacks will be associated with significant declines in the frequency of future attacks. We found that unsuccessful attempts were associated with a reduced risk of further terrorist strikes for both ASALA and JCAG, but that the results were only significant for ASALA. In general, ASALA appears to have been especially likely to be unsuccessful in years when they were attacking with greater frequency, although we have too few years to test this statistically. The finding that unsuccessful attacks have no significant impact on JCAG is likely a consequence of the fact that JCAG had very few unsuccessful attacks ($n = 4$).

Discussion and Conclusion

We argued earlier that for the Armenian diaspora and for Western sympathizers, the attack on Orly was a tipping point not only for ASALA operations but also for its public image. Broad targeting, extortion, and retailing of mercenary services effectively undermined the group's legitimacy in the eyes of both the diaspora and the West. After Orly, "all Armenian circles in France sympathetic to ASALA began to openly and unequivocally criticize Orly."⁵⁷ The Armenian support gained for ASALA in the 1970s to a great extent evaporated.

Not only did the diaspora share with the West an outrage over ASALA's actions against innocent civilians, but they also recoiled from the increasing ASALA attacks against other traditional Armenian organizations. By 1983, Hagopian had twice ordered the execution of Ara Toranian, the leader of the French Armenian National Movement (MNA). In turn, Toranian charged Hagopian with the assassination of ARF leaders in Lebanon.⁵⁸

Violence of Armenians against Armenians promoted division among a people who sought rather unity and action. As a result, a related variable contributing to ASALA's decline was the "bloody internecine quarrels [that] diminished [the] movement's legitimacy vis-à-vis its Diaspora constituency."⁵⁹ By August 1984, the feud between ASALA and its rival ARF-affiliated parties (including JCAG) escalated into open violence.⁶⁰

ASALA's declining support by Armenians is well expressed by Melkonian: "ASALA lost all legitimacy as a force which in any way defended or represented the interests of the Armenian people. There was nothing reminiscent of a patriotic national liberation struggle left in ASALA's actions. In fact, ASALA had long become something worse than a gang."⁶¹

Following Orly, other Armenian militants hastened to distinguish themselves from ASALA and its strategies. In particular, Melkonian's ASALA-RM declared

itself as having established “once and for all an Armenian revolutionary movement that would effectively prepare the Armenian people for their drawn-out national liberation struggle.”⁶² Consistent with Tololyan’s observation that changing attitudes of Armenians within the diaspora (as well as loss of secure bases) were the critical factor in the decline of Armenian terrorism,⁶³ ASALA’s activities were now perceived by Armenian patriots as antithetical to the Armenian cause, and its continued existence a threat to the Armenian people’s patriotic struggles.⁶⁴

International outrage over the attack on Orly was no doubt primed by the fact that it was an international airport. Travelers from many countries could imagine themselves among the victims of a bomb in this airport. Analysis of international news publications of the time confirms that Orly brought not only condemnation of ASALA but a more general condemnation of Armenian terrorism: “Orly effectively sabotaged any hope of getting the general public to understand, if not actually approve, a struggle with which the whole Armenian Diaspora identifies itself, if only emotionally.”⁶⁵

In Iran, ASALA’s atrocities were credited with offering “the already repressive regime which was long searching for means of increasing its control of minorities . . . more excuses to further pressure the Armenian community.”⁶⁶ Even the previously sympathetic French withdrew support for ASALA following Orly, a change that manifested itself not only in public opinion but in governmental responses. Thus, ASALA’s retributive campaigns for the release of captured commandos, while effecting a lighter sentence for those who were liberated, oftentimes resulted in heavier prison sentences for members who were accused of more serious offenses.⁶⁷

Furthermore, as Melkonian observes of post-Orly French actions, “using the wave of disgust generated by the atrocity, the French government was able to further threaten activists and discourage the Armenian community in general. In this way . . . Orly worked to rationalize the arbitrary repression of Armenians by the French government.”⁶⁸ The French government arrested over 50 Armenians activists, only two or three of whom were actually involved with ASALA; other Armenians were extradited by the French government during this period. In 1985, Monte Melkonian was sentenced to six years in a French jail; released in 1989, he made his way to Soviet Armenia. He died in combat in 1991, leading a force of 4000 Armenians in the fight to establish the Nagorno Karabagh Republic.⁶⁹

An obvious question from our analysis is why JCAG’s attack trajectory declined in parallel with ASALA’s, when the two groups arguably could not have been more different. As a terrorist operation, JCAG remained extremely effective. Even after ASALA’s debacle at Orly, JCAG continued killing Turkish diplomats and family members until November 1986.⁷⁰ ASALA was ideologically Marxist whereas JCAG was more right wing. ASALA killed non-Turks and even Armenians; JCAG did not (except in response to ASALA attack). ASALA lost its bases; JCAG did not. ASALA had charismatic and autocratic leadership; JCAG was more managed than led. ASALA’s finances deteriorated after Orly to the point that fundraising depended more on extortion; thanks to ARF, JCAG’s finances were solid. Thus, it might seem likely that as ASALA declined, its very different competitor JCAG would flourish and expand. Instead the two groups shared comparable fates at similar times.⁷¹

One could argue that because JCAG was founded by ARF as a competitor for ASALA, ARF would likely want to disband JCAG/ARA after ASALA declined. However, it is generally acknowledged that groups committed to terrorism are not easily turned from terrorism unless their goals are substantially achieved.⁷² That is,

turning off a terrorist group is not easy, especially in the case of a group, such as JCAG, that was operating with considerable success.

JCAG emerged as a terrorist group out of a convergence of ASALA's challenge to ARF, a political climate supporting radical political action worldwide in the 1970s, and a diasporan demand for action. Had the Armenian people's support for political violence persisted after Orly, perhaps ARF might have maintained its support for terrorism and JCAG/ARA might have wielded the lion's share of support from the Armenian people. But the controlled and efficient tactics of JCAG were overshadowed by ASALA's very public image. Armenian terrorism was associated in general with policies of indiscriminate terror when ASALA's broad targeting produced an equally broad diasporan disavowal of terrorism. A scan of English-language Armenian publications reveals that even France's Armenian population, among whom, a few years earlier, "such support for the Armenians is seen [as] nowhere else in the world,"⁷³ had by 1986 declared that it did not associate with those criminals with links to international terrorists.⁷⁴

The backlash against Armenian communities around the world also included a level of ethnic hostility. In a public condemnation of ASALA, French-Armenians feared that further acts of terror "will eventually make Armenians of these countries victims The Armenian community of France has already fallen victim of these threats. For a number of days, [there have been] racist expressions against Armenians in France."⁷⁵ Terrorist acts were denounced as an embarrassment to Armenians, and their continuation as harmful to Armenian interests.⁷⁶ Even in Australia, the conservative Armenian community was labeled "terrorists" by a 1984 government report.⁷⁷

In response, some Armenians published newspaper declarations that disavowed even *ethnic* ties to Armenian terrorists: "We therefore, condemn the use of violent acts against innocent victims that can only cause diversion of the public opinion from the real issue and damage the good reputation of the Armenian community . . . we strongly doubt that authors of such an irresponsible [terror] act can be of Armenian identity."⁷⁸ This disavowal of terrorism apparently did not differentiate between ASALA's broad use of violence and JCAG/ARA's more targeted approach.

We conclude, then, that disillusionment with ASALA's tactics of indiscriminate violence turned the diaspora and the West away from terrorist violence in general, even though JCAG had succeeded as a very discriminating group of assassins. By 1985, ASALA, the group that had championed cultural preservation and claimed the right to lead Armenians to national revolution, was reduced to a marginal status. JCAG, its right-wing counterpart, suffered an intertwined fate. That year, *The Armenian Reporter* declared, "The seventieth anniversary of the unsuccessful attempt to eliminate the Armenian nation was too momentous an occasion to be marred or trivialized by acts of terrorism."⁷⁹ As Tololyan notes, "The Armenian terrorist movement deeply miscalculated the kinds and amounts of violence and dissension which the Diaspora consensus could tolerate; it miscalculated equally badly the degree to which its own success depended on at least the silent acquiescence, if not the support, that such consensus enables – in part because the terrorists' initial successes led them to overconfidence concerning their ability to manipulate events and opinion."⁸⁰

ASALA got its start by doing more and risking more than existing Armenian organizations that had made little progress toward recognition and restitution for the Armenian genocide. The moral status of martyrs and those who risk martyrdom

is high,⁸¹ and ASALA and terrorism rose together in the estimation of the diaspora. As ASALA grew, its initial successes brought an influx of recruits and support that permitted even more activity, keeping it well ahead of rival JCAG. Its status rose with increased success. But as ASALA reached a pinnacle in terms of both number of strikes and their lethality, its excesses in targeting and its extortionate fundraising eroded its moral status, an erosion that was hastened by criticism of ASALA by rival Armenian groups.

A thought experiment can help indicate the importance of the appraisal of ASALA in the Armenian diaspora. Imagine a world in which ASALA's indiscriminate killing and extortion occurred just as they did occur, but in which ARF and JCAG/ARA did not exist. The result, we believe, would be a much slower decline in ASALA's status as the leading representative of Armenian culture and values – something more like the continuing acceptance of the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) by many in the Tamil diaspora, despite LTTE extortion and violence against Tamils. Thanks to ruthless action against competitors, the LTTE has no organized competition as representative of Tamil interests.

In another context, Napoleon famously estimated the importance of the moral to the material as three to one. In relation to diaspora support of terrorism, we believe the Armenian case suggests a similar ratio. The same point has been made by Merari, whose data show a parallel over time between Palestinian support for terrorist attacks against Israel and the number of such attacks.⁸² After Oslo, polls of Palestinians showed large declines in support for terrorism and similar declines in attacks recorded. As the promise of Oslo dissipated, Palestinian support for terrorism increased to new heights, and so did Palestinian terrorist attacks.

The difficulty in wielding a moral strategy against terrorism is that moral suasion will likely be ineffective when originating from outside a communal group. Turks denouncing ASALA made no difference, or even raised ASALA's status among Armenians. Europeans and Americans denouncing ASALA had some impact, but Armenians and Armenian organizations denouncing ASALA were crucial. When the diaspora turned against them, ASALA was lost, and lost quickly. This reasoning suggests that when a terrorist organization depends heavily on a diaspora, overreaching in terrorist targeting offers a strong opening for separating the terrorists from their base.

Perhaps the most general lesson from ASALA's rise and fall is a perspective on terrorist motivation. Terrorists want to mobilize and lead others to support their cause. Terrorists who claim to represent an ethnic or communal group want to mobilize and lead their own people in preserving communal culture and values. The most important audience of terrorist activity is therefore not the enemy but the terrorists' own sympathizers and supporters. Any terrorist group that loses sight of this target is vulnerable.

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