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OFFICE OF  
NATIONAL ESTIMATES

# MEMORANDUM

*Turkey: Winter of Discontent*

**Secret**

7 January 1971

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

7 January 1971

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Turkey: Winter of Discontent\*

NOTE

There has been increasing talk in Turkey in the past year about the possibility of a move by the military to take over the government. This Memorandum assesses the causes of discontent within the military and the general mood of Turkey. Briefly, it concludes that, though the discontent is real, and the military are likely to take more direct measures to influence the regime, the odds are against an outright takeover in the short term. The odds will shorten with time if the government continues to be as ineffective as it has been in the past year.

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\* *This Memorandum was prepared by the Office of National Estimates. It was discussed with representatives of the Office of Current Intelligence and the Directorate of Plans who are in general agreement with its judgments.*

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The military takeover in the 1960 temporarily propelled the armed forces into the central role in Turkish political life. Because of such factors as divisions of opinion within the military establishment, the prestige of the remaining civilian leaders, and wide attachment to the parliamentary process, the junta permitted a return to civil government in 1961.

2. Nevertheless, the officer corps has since continued to play an important part in politics. Especially through the National Security Council provided by the new constitution, the senior officers acquired a legal mechanism to press their views on the civilian regime. With the additional device of electing successive former Turkish military chiefs as President of the Republic, the top ranks of the armed forces felt well entrenched in the power structure. Partly for this reason, coup attempts led by middle grade officers in 1962 and 1963 lacked broad appeal within the services. After the failure of the second putsch, the top commanders took energetic steps to shut off plotting among the lower ranks. Until 1969 the risks of punishment effectively discouraged open discussions within the military establishment of possible moves against the civilian regime.

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3. In the past year or so, however, military discontent has begun to revive. The main reason for disquiet in the military establishment has been the administration's failure to transact the business of government effectively and to keep law and order. The parliamentary process in Turkey has been in some disarray since early 1970, when a group of more conservative members of the ruling Justice Party (JP), long at odds with the majority of the party, bolted to protest their exclusion from representation in the Cabinet by Prime Minister Demirel. Their defection posed a serious parliamentary challenge to Demirel, leaving him vulnerable to concerted opposition in parliament.\* As a result, the JP government has been unable to enact much legislation and has appeared to be floundering. This was evident in the lengthy delay in electing parliamentary speakers. It is also apparent in more substantive issues, such as Demirel's handling of the opium issue -- a matter in which evident US interest has aroused charges of American interference in Turkey. Today legislation providing for licensing of poppy cultivation faces rough sledding in parliament.

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\* *These defections reduced Demirel's support in parliament to the point where in February 1970 his budget bill was rejected. At present, after further parliamentary shifting, Demirel's party numbers 228 deputies out of 450 in the lower house; not all of these party members can be counted on to back Demirel in every parliamentary vote.*

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4. The officer corps is also concerned about what it considers a deterioration of law and order in recent years. Recurrent student disorders, involving clashes between rightist and leftist groups, have led to disruption of higher education. The civilian regime has found it difficult to handle these outbreaks which have seen some 18 deaths in the past two years. Labor violence too has become common. Demonstrations in June impelled Demirel to impose martial law for several months to restore order. Particularly to the senior commanders, the prospect of descent into anarchy is profoundly disturbing.

5. Demirel's personal prestige has also been hurt by the charges of corruption leveled against his family. Allegations that Demirel's brother had derived a sizable profit from government favoritism triggered opposition demands for parliamentary investigation of the financial situation of Demirel's family. The Prime Minister has not handled this issue with notable finesse. Instead he has used parliamentary maneuvers to frustrate any real investigation of the charges, thus feeding the suspicion that there may be some truth to these allegations. Even the recent vote to exonerate him on this issue has not ended the dispute. Parliament is already studying new charges.

6. A small but vocal group of civilian extremists have sought to stimulate military disenchantment with the course of civil rule.

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Following the 1969 elections, a handful of leftist radicals -- civilians and retired officers -- began publishing a weekly *Devrim* (Revolution) with the only scarcely concealed purpose of encouraging a military coup. They apparently believe that even though a military regime, particularly one led by the generals, might be initially inclined to move against the left, sooner or later any military administration would inevitably become leftist in outlook and give them greater opportunity for influence than they can now hope to have. Their efforts have been furthered by some young university faculty members doing their military service. No doubt the suggestions from these sources have contributed to the restiveness now visible in the Turkish military establishment.

7. In token of the military disquiet, the chief of the air force has twice in the past six months complained of the deteriorating political situation. The gist of his recent letter of criticism to President Sunay has leaked to the press -- adding new impetus to the questioning of Demirel's future and the future of civilian government. A New Year's message to the armed forces from General Tagmac, chief of the general staff, emphasized the essential loyalty of the military to the constitutional government, but also intense concern over trends toward "anarchy." It is clear that the senior generals are disillusioned with parliamentary bickering and inefficiency as well as with Demirel's lack of decisiveness and leadership. Although these concerns are not

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sharply focused and lack any ideological definition, they raise the question of what actions the officer corps is likely to take in the political arena.

8. Within the military establishment two kinds of moves against the government seem possible. On the one hand, middle grade and junior officers -- whether of rightist or leftist tendencies -- could attempt to take over the government.

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By its very nature, of course, plotting on this level must be tightly held; there is no assurance that the US would hear about it before an attempt was made. Yet there are many obstacles in the path of a coup not led by senior generals: it remains difficult to forge an effective and broad conspiratorial group of middle grade officers without tipping off their superiors. As in the past, junior conspirators would probably feel it necessary to seek to recruit a senior general to use as a figurehead for any action. Moreover, no clear issue has yet arisen around which a sizable mass of officers seems likely to coalesce. Hence, all things considered, the chances do not seem good that such elements will attempt a coup at least for some time to come; the chances that a coup by these officers would succeed appear even dimmer.

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9. A more likely prospect would be a move by the senior generals operating within the chain of command. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

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The generals might also act in order to head off a coup by their subordinates or to relieve the pressures they feel from below. The military commanders have been particularly assiduous of late in attempting to keep track of the sentiments and activities of their juniors. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

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10. Whatever its motivation, a move by the generals might not be designed to thrust them openly and completely into power as in 1960. In fact, President Sunay's open acknowledgment of the present restiveness of the senior commanders and his current round of consultations with civilian leaders are themselves a form of pressure on the political apparatus and a veiled warning of what could ensue if the mechanism does not provide more impressive government. A further step might take the form of private warnings to opposition leaders to cease disruptive activity in parliament. Conversely, military pressure of this sort could be brought to bear on the JP itself to impel it to undertake a coalition in order to end parliamentary paralysis or to take action against the right and left political

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extremes. Although the generals might be given pause by the lack of any obvious replacement if Demirel should be brought down, they might throw their weight behind some alternative civilian leader if Demirel does not give promise of more effective leadership.

11. Military pressures of this sort which did not clearly go beyond the broad latitude permitted by the constitution would be tolerated by most civilian politicians. Demirel himself may, indeed, be not entirely unhappy at seeing the armed forces discreetly flexing their muscles. The spectre of military intervention -- which Demirel himself has commented upon -- is sufficiently real in Turkey today to strengthen his hand in dealing with his troublesome opposition. This is obviously a two-edged sword, it risks provoking even greater intervention than Demirel would wish. Nor is it alone sufficient to cope with his mounting parliamentary problems. Nonetheless, it is one of the few weapons available to him in his otherwise unpromising parliamentary position.

12. While there is little that those outside the armed forces could do to block any concerted action by the top military command, we think that the odds are against any early take over of the government by the generals. Those at the head of the military establishment continue to respect the senior civilian leaders, especially Republican

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Peoples Party President Ismet Inonu, himself a former military hero, who is strongly opposed to the ouster of civilian government. Moreover, President Sunay, a former chief of staff who still evidently enjoys great prestige in the armed forces, has recently gone on record rejecting any solution that would violate the constitution. Without his blessing, many senior officers would be reluctant to shoulder aside the civilian regime; indeed, a major inhibiting factor continues to be the desire of the officer corps to avoid a struggle or showdown within the armed forces.

13. The generals also have doubts about the ability of the military establishment to govern well. The top commanders are aware of the poor showing of military rule after 1960 and the breakdown of discipline within the armed forces which accompanied it. Furthermore, the generals do not seem certain of exactly what they want to accomplish. Moreover, the domestic situation, though disturbing, has some strengths. For example, the economy seems reasonably sound after the devaluation in August which stimulated a greater volume of emigre worker remittances. In any event, elections normally scheduled for 1973 could be held within a few months if parliamentary chaos appeared otherwise insoluble.

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14. Over the longer run the prospects of a military take over may increase. There seems little likelihood that labor and student radicalism will decrease significantly. The radical left, which generally has lost hope that the parliamentary process will bring it to power, will undoubtedly continue to agitate the political scene. These fragmented elements are fired by desire to reorder Turkish society to increase the role of the state, to decrease the scope for private enterprise, and to cut Turkey's ties with the West. In time, their message is likely to become increasingly accepted outside the narrow confines of their present sympathizers, since it appeals also to the elite's widely shared aspiration for greater social justice. This ferment will further complicate the problem of promoting efficient parliamentary activity.

15. Among the Turkish elite there is a broad undercurrent of yearning for strong, decisive leadership. If this is not forthcoming or if there is no prospect that future elections would produce an effective parliament, the temptation to mount a military coup would grow. And in this case, the constraints that we now see upon open military intervention would have less force.

16. US reaction to a military coup in Turkey would probably not be a factor of great moment in the calculations of the plotters. Like elements of the civilian elite, some Turkish officers may judge

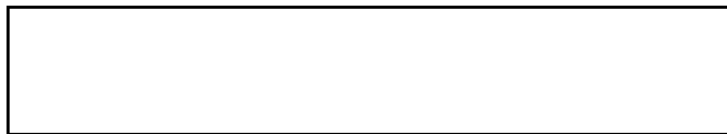
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that restoration of American military assistance to Greece demonstrates once again that Washington does not oppose military regimes per se. The senior generals appear to recognize Turkish dependence on US aid and would seek to assure its continuance after a coup. They probably believe that the value of US installations in Turkey could be used as a bargaining ploy in this effort. The younger officers are probably more infected with the suspicion of the US that has spread among the younger intelligentsia in Turkey in recent years. They would no doubt be far more prickly for the US to work with; their feelings of national sensitivity might take precedence over the obvious material benefits of maintaining close ties with Washington.

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MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director



I attach a Memorandum which we did not long ago  
and which, I am assured, is still as good as ever.

ABBOT SMITH  
Director  
National Estimates

Attachment:

Memorandum, dated 7 Jan 71 11 March 1971  
"Turkey: Winter of Discontent" (DATE)

FORM NO. 101 REPLACES FORM 10-101  
1 AUG 54 WHICH MAY BE USED.

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