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Dear Peter,

When a bomb went off in West Berlin's La Belle Disco not long after midnight on Saturday, the 5th of April, I was staying with friends just outside Kardamyli in the southern Peloponnesus. Because Kardamyli is a relatively isolated village and the newspapers arrive at least one day after their date of publication, two or three days passed before I learned that a 21-year-old US Army Sergeant and a 28-year-old Turkish woman had died in the blast and that an additional 230 men and women (including 79 Americans) had been injured. Only when I reached Athens did I discover that our National Security Agency had intercepted and decoded a series of messages sent from Tripoli to the Libyan diplomatic mission in East Berlin--first arranging for a terrorist to plant the explosive, and then, after the event, congratulating his local mentors on a job well done.

I cannot say that I was surprised at subsequent reports that President Reagan had ordered the US Navy and Air Force to retaliate by bombing selected targets in Libya. In late March, when officials from the Reagan administration defended their decision to order Operation Prairie Fire, which was held in the Gulf of Sidra on both sides of Muammar Gaddafi's "line of death," which provoked a series of Libyan attacks on the American fleet and its attendant aircraft, and which resulted in the sinking of at least two Libyan vessels and in repeated missile attacks on the SAM radar at Surt, they protested American innocence: we had merely intended to exercise the right of free passage through international waters; and, when attacked, we had found ourselves forced to exercise the right of self-defense. The American officials' description of the events which took place was accurate enough; their account of their own intentions was obviously disingenuous. There were reliable reports that the planning for Operation Prairie Fire had been directly inspired by Gaddafi's exultation at the results of the terrorist attacks that had taken

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place at airports in Vienna and Rome last December, and it was self-evident that those directing the American operation had hoped that Gaddafi would take the bait. In short, back in December or January, someone had decided to teach the Libyan Colonel a lesson. The evidence that he was in early April as yet unchastened could hardly fail to provoke reprisals considerably more severe than any seen up to that time. The United States had thrown down the gauntlet; our Libyan antagonist had picked it up; and there would be hell to pay.

I

Both at the time of Operation Prairie Fire and, later, in mid-April, at the time of Operation El Dorado Canyon, when thirteen F-111 fighter-bombers operating out of Great Britain joined twelve A-6 attack planes launched from the Sixth Fleet in bombing suspected terrorist training areas and communication centers in Libya, I was in Istanbul, well-situated to assess the Turkish response. I took it for granted that our allies in Europe, apart perhaps from Margaret Thatcher's Great Britain, would run for cover. Their behavior starting in 1973 at the time of the Yom Kippur War and continuing since left little doubt that they had long ago come to see NATO and the Western alliance in general as a strictly anti-Soviet affair confined to protecting Western Europe from a direct military assault.¹

Turkey just might be different. Or so I foolishly thought. After all, one of the two individuals killed in the La Belle Disco explosion had been a Turk; and, in general, the Turks were considerably more sensitive to the threat posed by terrorism than the other members of the Western alliance. Since 1973, more than thirty Turkish diplomats had been killed by Armenian terrorists, and there was good evidence that Gaddafi had bestowed his largesse on one or more of the Armenian groups just as he had bestowed it on Colombia's M-19 guerrillas, the Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front, the Irish Republican Army, the Basque separatist group ETA, and a host of other, less well-known troupes of assassins. Moreover, in the late 1970s and in 1980, a wave of terrorism within Turkey--largely due to domestic political tensions, but partly fueled by cheap arms smuggled in from the East Bloc through Bulgaria--had threatened to give rise to civil war. Because of their own bitter experience, the Turks had long been vociferous in demanding that there be a concerted effort on the part of all civilized countries to crush

1. Here, I hold the United States largely responsible. On the one hand, our allies have distanced themselves from us in much the way we distanced ourselves from them first over the question of decolonization and then later again at the time of the Suez Crisis, and in a sense we have simply reaped the harvest we sowed in the first two decades following the Second World War. On the other hand, we have given our allies a relatively free ride and over the last two decades we have consistently tolerated behavior on their part inconsistent with the permanent and aggregate interests of the alliance as a whole. Uncle Sam has a bit too often been Uncle Sap.

terrorism, and they had never been hesitant to level allegations against putative allies such as France and Greece that harbored anti-Turkish killers and displayed a pronounced sympathy for their cause.

I was mistaken about Turkey because I had not banked on the power of the sentiment of Islamic brotherhood here, because I had underestimated the resentment that Turks feel for the great powers in general and the United States in particular, and because I had paid insufficient attention to the economic relations linking Turkey with Libya. This last point needs emphasis. On the one hand, it would be relatively easy for the government of Turgut Özal to distance Turkey from the United States, and there would be no price. Turkey could hardly be singled out for echoing opinions given official support in France, Germany, Italy, and the Benelux countries, and Greece would almost certainly protest the American decision in terms likely to make American officials quickly forget Ankara's Janus-faced behavior. On the other hand, the price that might be assessed were Turkey to side decisively with the United States might be very high indeed. At the time of the bombing, there were more than thirty thousand Turkish guest-workers in Libya; Turkish construction companies had negotiated contracts with Libya totaling 4.5 billion dollars; and Gaddafi owed Turkish corporations hundreds of millions of dollars for work already done and goods delivered.² In any case, it would be foolish unnecessarily to provoke a man capable of unleashing untold numbers of well-trained terrorists on his enemies. Moreover, Turkey had a plausible excuse: in 1974, when Turkey had intervened on Cyprus, Gaddafi had made a grand gesture of offering Libyan help. The Congress of the United States, under pressure from the Greek lobby, had responded to the same event by cutting off military aid and imposing an embargo on the export of arms to our Anatolian ally. In this matter, the Turks had a score to settle.

And settle it they did. At the time of Operation Prairie Fire, the Özal government intimated that Turkey had no quarrel whatsoever with our view that, apart from a narrow band along the Libyan coast, the Gulf of Sidra lies within international waters but that she nonetheless looked askance at our insistence on enforcing our right to sail freely through such waters on occasions when that right is contested by the likes of Gaddafi.³ Later, when we retaliated for the

2. If the price of oil stabilizes at the current level as it seems likely to do, I doubt very much that the Turks will ever see much of what they are owed. This fact they have been as slow to realize as Libya's other creditors. The collapse in the price of oil has considerably reduced Gaddafi's freedom of maneuver and potential for exercising power without--at least until April--much reducing his influence: in time, however, Gaddafi's inability to help his friends with ready cash and military support and to harm his enemies through the terrorist network will become evident to all. I would guess that part of the point of Operations Prairie Fire and El Dorado Canyon was to demonstrate to her potential friends and enemies alike just how weak and feckless Libya really is.

3. Roughly speaking, Gaddafi bears a certain resemblance to a bully on a playground who draws a line and tells you that, if you cross it, he will beat you to a pulp. We responded on the supposition that anyone disinclined to being pushed around and intent on frequenting that particular playground would be well-advised to step across the line and test the young whelp's mettle. The Turks--and our European allies--have in this matter preferred to honor the demand without conceding its propriety.

West Berlin disco bombing, argued that Gaddafi had ordered a series of similar attacks on Americans and American installations in Europe, and therefore defended Operation El Dorado Canyon as a species of self-defense, the Turkish government criticized our action as contrary to international law and argued that we should have resorted to negotiation regarding our disagreements with Libya. There were even hints from various quarters that Turkey was prepared to mediate the dispute.

Popular sentiment was less precisely formulated but no less clearly on Gaddafi's side. I looked for but failed to find a single editorial or editorial column defending the American stance. Gaddafi's pro-Turkish stance in 1974 was often mentioned, and the newspapers were--as far as I could tell--unanimous in depicting the United States as a bully assaulting a Libya poor, defenseless, and completely at our mercy. Those that mentioned the disco bombing merely contended that the attack on Libya would serve only to stir up the hornet's nest of terrorism. More than one newspaper printed a cartoon showing Ronald Reagan as a prize fighter landing a knock-out blow on his own jaw.

Turks are almost invariably polite to foreigners. Moreover, like the English (and unlike, say, the Greeks), they keep their distance and leave you pretty much to your own devices--even if they know you reasonably well. But, at such a time, the rules break down. I was asked again and again by Turkish friends and acquaintances alike just what I thought of what we had done. Invariably, my interlocutors backed off when they saw that my only quarrel with the retaliatory attack was that we had been much too restrained and that we should have dealt the Libyan economy a real blow by bombing the facilities for producing and exporting oil. When I referred to Gaddafi as a terrorist, they nodded their agreement. But I could see that they nonetheless disapproved of our use of force.

The Turks have their reasons for holding this view. After all, the United States can afford to deal with the likes of Libya with little fear of serious retaliation. Turkey and countries in a similar state of development are not in a similar situation. In a world dominated by the super-powers, the small-fry generally have to let sleeping dogs lie. And when the super-powers make use of military force, these lesser states have no recourse but to hope and pray that all will turn out well. They can hardly help but resent their dependence (particularly when it brings danger and opprobrium on them) for it means that they all too often get dragged into quarrels that (they think) are not their own. This very nearly happened to Turkey when two of Gaddafi's minions bungled an attempt to bomb an American installation in Ankara shortly after the conclusion of Operation El Dorado Canyon.

II

On the evening of Friday, the 18th of April, the American Officer's Club in Ankara's swank Gaziosmanpaşa district was packed with more than five score merry-makers celebrating the wedding of an American soldier and his Turkish fiancée. Not long after the shindig had begun, Turkish police guarding the installation ordered two men who were approaching the club to stop, identify themselves, and justify their presence. When one of the two men hurled a briefcase he was carrying under a nearby van and both took to heel, the policemen alerted colleagues who nabbed the pair. The briefcase turned out to contain six fragmentation grenades of Soviet make, and the two men were subsequently identified as Ali Ecefli Ramadan and Recep Muhtar Rahoma Tarhuni, citizens of Libya. Had the duo succeeded in what they were evidently intending to do, a good many Americans and their Turkish friends would have lost their lives. In a crowded room, a single fragmentation grenade is said to be capable of killing or injuring fifty people or more.

Turkish press reports indicate that American diplomats immediately suggested to the Turkish police that the attack had been planned and organized by Libyan officials working out of the embassy in Ankara. Robert Strausz-Hupé, the American ambassador to Turkey, is said to have visited acting Foreign Minister Mesut Yılmaz shortly after the two men were apprehended and to have asked that Libyan Ambassador Mohammed Abdulmalik be declared "persona non grata."

Over the weekend, police interrogators learned that the American suspicions were at least in large part justified. In a session that was videotaped, Ramadan and Tarhuni confessed that they had been trained for their mission by Captain Abdullah Mansur of the Libyan Air Force in a special guerrilla camp. Back in January, not long after the terrorist attacks at the Rome and Vienna airports, Captain Mansur had paid a 15-day visit to Istanbul with Ramadan "to determine locations of US installations" and "targets." In April, Ramadan and Tarhuni were given \$1500 each and sent to Istanbul. Mansur Umrán, director of the Libyan Arab Airlines office in Istanbul, met the two men at the airport and conducted them to the office of Ali Mansur Musbah Al-Zayyani, Libyan Consul-General in Istanbul. They were introduced as "the people who will go to Ankara for action." The consul then advised the pair to travel to Ankara by bus in order to avoid the stringent security check given passengers at Turkish airports. This they did. In the meantime, Shaban Mohammed Hassan, a diplomat at the Libyan Cultural Center in Ankara, had smuggled the six grenades into Turkey. In the capital, on the 16th of April, the day after Operation El Dorado Canyon, the two men contacted Hassan and Abdulhamid Al Hadi Sadun of the Libyan Embassy. Hassan identified the target and, at 6 p.m. on the day of the attack, he passed on the grenades.

None of the evidence publicly available suggests that Ramadan and Tarhuni met Ambassador Abdulmalik during their sojourn in Ankara. It is nonetheless difficult to believe that he was unaware of their

mission. He has coordinated terrorist activity in the past. Back in April, 1980, when I was living in Washington, D.C., Abdulmalik was on the staff of the Libyan Embassy there. When it was discovered that he was hiring thugs to intimidate Libyan students studying at American universities, he was declared "persona non grata" and expelled from the United States. A few years later, when he was serving in the Libyan mission in Switzerland, the same scenario was repeated. My guess is that, when Strausz-Hupé visited Yilmaz, he had with him transcripts of Libyan diplomatic communications implicating Abdulmalik. In any case, the Turks proved less than eager to follow up on the American tip-off. No one acted to prevent Umran, Hassan, and Sadun from leaving Turkey a few days after the abortive attack, and there are reports that the Turkish Foreign Ministry discreetly asked the Libyan government to recall Hassan and Sadun immediately. By the time that the full ramifications of the confessions made by Ramadan and Tarhuni were known to the public, there was no one left in Turkey who could serve as a direct link between Abdulmalik and the two assailants.

The newspapers here provided relatively straight reports of the revelations but I did not detect any evidence that these reports had much of any effect on public opinion. One seasoned Turkish politician was clearly persuaded that he had nothing to lose and perhaps much to gain from identifying himself closely with the Libyans. In the midst of the probe, well after it was evident that the Libyan Embassy had been deeply involved in planning the bombing, Bülent Ecevit--who was leader of the socialist Republican People's Party and Prime Minister at the time of the Turkish intervention on Cyprus--paid Ambassador Abdulmalik a visit at the Libyan People's Bureau in Ankara. In a written statement released to the press on that occasion, he denounced Operation El Dorado Canyon as a "ruthless attack." "If Libya can make use of this atmosphere by peaceful means," he argued, "it can overcome many obstacles and leave the United States to face world public opinion with the responsibility for international terrorism."

Not long after his meeting with Ecevit, Abdulmalik gave an interview to Cumhuriyet, a distinguished, left-leaning Turkish daily. The tone of the interview reveals much about the character of Libyan rhetoric in this part of the world. When asked whether the allegations allegedly lodged against him by Strausz-Hupé were true or false, the Libyan Ambassador replied, "It is not important whether they are right or wrong, true or false. Turkey is not the US; that is what is important. This information comes from our enemy." When asked why he had been expelled from the United States and from Switzerland, he retorted, "Even if the charges are true, is Turkey the US? Can the relations between Turkey and the US be compared to the relationship between Turkey and Libya? ... If the Americans do not want me, does Turkey have to act according to their wishes?" He alleged that the bombing attempt at the American Officers' Club was a CIA and MOSSAD plot. Abdulmalik clearly hoped to enlist Turkish nationalism on the Libyan side.

In mid-May, Ramadan and Tarhuni were charged with conspiring to kill a group of people and put on trial. State Prosecutor Ülkü Coşkun

asked that Hassan, Sadun, and Al-Zayyani be indicted as well. In court, he argued that "diplomatic immunity should be restricted to diplomatic duties." He later told the press, "I have reached the conclusion that diplomatic immunity does not apply in cases of terrorism." The supplementary indictment stated,

The Vienna Agreement does not grant immunity to diplomats involved in acts of terror. Since terrorist acts are crimes against humanity and since many innocent people suffer as a result, it is not possible to accept that the Vienna Agreement would defend those persons involved despite their position or title. The defendant Ali Musbah Mansur Al Zayyani has known about the conspiracy to bomb the US Officers' Club and furthermore encouraged and supported Ramadan and Tarhuni who have been sent to Turkey for the specific purpose of carrying out that task.

The prosecutor's zeal caused the Turkish Foreign Ministry considerable embarrassment. Turgut Özal had made it clear from the outset that he would not let the Gaziosmanpaşa incident get in the way of Turkish-Libyan relations, and his Foreign Ministry had done everything possible to head off difficulties--but, at the start of the trial, Al-Zayyani, the second-highest ranking Libyan diplomat assigned to Turkey, was still in Istanbul. Eventually, the Foreign Ministry had to intervene on behalf of the three Libyan diplomats, and the three-judge panel dismissed the charges lodged against them.

At the trial, apparently under instructions from Günfer Karadeniz, the attorney hired on their behalf, Ramadan and Tarhuni altered their testimony in a fashion that brought it into accord with the tenor of Abdulmalik's interview with Cumhuriyet. Both Libyans charged that they were interrogated in a room decorated with American flags and that English was spoken throughout. Claiming that his earlier, videotaped testimony had been obtained through torture, Ramadan testified, "Throughout my detention I was tortured. They gave me electricity, put me in freezing water. Thus I was forced to give this testimony." The defendants demanded that State Prosecutor Coşkun, who had conducted their interrogation, be tried for torture. In his testimony, Ramadan admitted to having carried the grenades, denied that Tarhuni had known anything about his plans, and confessed only that he had hoped to blow up American military vehicles parked outside the Officers' Club.

On the 6th of June, the State Security Court dismissed the charge of conspiracy as unproven and found the two Libyans guilty of "carrying bombs without a license." Instead being sent to prison for a period of between twelve and twenty-two years, the two men were given a five-year sentence and fined 75,000 Turkish Lira (\$112).

The verdict deserves attention--for the case has important ramifications. On the one hand, the actual decision of the court can be justified only on a supposition that the Turkey's State Security Court would never openly admit: to wit, that State Prosecutor Coşkun extracted the original confession from Ramadan and Tarhuni by means

of torture.⁴ On the other hand, if the court had gone the other way and ruled that the confession was validly obtained, there would have been decisive evidence for the American claim that Gaddafi has been using Libyan embassies and consulates as staging areas for terrorist assaults against Americans, evidence sufficient to justify Operation El Dorado Canyon under international law as an act of self-defense. In short, the Gaziosmanpaşa incident left the Turks on the horns of a dilemma: if Ramadan and Tarhuni were guilty as charged, the Turkish stance regarding the American air raids was illegitimate; if they were not guilty as charged, it could only be because the Turkish government had employed torture to secure the original confession made by the two men.

To be frank, I simply cannot believe that the verdict was merely the considered judgment of the three-judge panel. In this part of the world, in Turkey as well as in Greece, politic in-fighting and the perceived national interest tend to dictate judicial results in sensitive cases of this kind. I suspect that the Özal government found itself forced to choose between abandoning its attempt to walk a tightrope between Libya and the US, and tacitly acknowledging what nearly everyone already assumes: that Turkish police and prosecutorial procedures lack integrity. In the end, it chose the latter course, and that fact speaks volumes about the importance of the Libyan connection for the current Turkish government.

Of course, the United States is of even greater importance; and, though we tend to let incidents of this sort pass, from time to time we have to be thrown a bone. To appease Washington, the Libyans had to be made to pay a price for being let off the hook. By the 30th of June, a number of Libyan diplomats had been recalled by Tripoli including Ambassador Abdulmalik, Consul-General Al-Zayyani, the Libyan Embassy's Counselor, its Military Attaché, and a number of Libyan diplomats of less exalted status.

Sincerely,



Paul A. Rahe

4. Let me add that, given what we have learned over the last few years concerning the methods habitually employed by the Turkish police, torture cannot be ruled out. Nor, of course, can one rule out the possibility that terrorists are more likely to tell the truth under torture than when protected by public scrutiny in an open courtroom.

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