

Opposition at Large: The İzmir Assassination Plot and the Conspiracy Trials

Another cornerstone in the process of silencing the political opposition in early republican Turkey is the 1926 plot to assassinate Mustafa Kemal in İzmir. Like the Sheikh Said Revolt in 1925, this attempt provided the Republican People's Party (RPP) government with another pretext to complete the process in which there remained to be no political opposition to the new regime and to the government in power. In the end, the process was so complete that there was not a single dissent for any bill brought to parliament until the new elections in 1927. Those deputies who remained in the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) voiced their dissent by not showing up for the vote. For example, when a vote of confidence for the government was requested on November 6, 1926, only half the deputies cast their votes. Mahmut Goloğlu correctly points out the fact that none of the bills had sufficient votes because of lack of participation in the first rounds. Only in subsequent rounds, which required bills to receive a majority of available votes, did the bills become laws.¹ It was in this political environment that many radical westernizing reforms (such as the alphabet reform of 1928) passed the TGNA with unimaginable ease and speed.

The İzmir plot and the following conspiracy trials can readily be seen as the continuation of a process that commenced with the *Takrir-i Sükun* of 1925. This was the final stage of the purging of the existing and potential opposition. At the end of the İzmir and Ankara trials in 1926, the opposition in parliament (the members of the closed

Progressive Republican Party [PRP]) and the potential opposition outside it (some former high-ranking members of the Committee of Union and Progress [CUP]) were purged.

The İzmir assassination plot of 1926 has been studied by a number of nonprofessional historians.² Therefore, in many cases, scholarship on this rather significant portion of early Turkish republican history lacks authority. However, these sources, overwhelmingly in Turkish, contain significant leads to primary sources. Among the available primary sources on the subject, memoirs are the most numerous. However, the reader must be careful about the reliability of these memoirs, for most of them are colored by the political ambitions of their authors at that time. Official documents, such as statements by government officials and Mustafa Kemal himself, are also limiting since all were party to this incident. There are, however, primary accounts by foreign sources, such as U.S. consular reports and also court proceedings (on the İzmir trials), that recently became available in print to researchers.³ All these sources allow us to expand our knowledge of the subject under examination.

This chapter reexamines the İzmir plot in the context of the elimination of political opposition. Many studies on the issue correctly conclude that the İzmir assassination plot served the government's interest in purging the opposition.⁴ However, exactly how this was done was not satisfactorily documented and critically examined.⁵ In addition to using the available primary and secondary sources, I introduce U.S. diplomatic archival sources into my examination. These sources are significant, for they give us information about how an outside power viewed the unfolding events. Needless to say, their perception was not free of error; however, the mistakes were unintentional and their biases inconsequential. These accounts also enable us to compare the information already utilized in secondary sources. Therefore, in addition to bringing in fresh data from the U.S. consular reports in the entire text, this chapter also includes a subsection that deals specifically with the U.S. archival sources and examines the implications of the information presented in them.

Much has been written about the following questions concerning the plot. Was there really a plot against Mustafa Kemal's life? In other words, did the Kemalists foment such a conspiracy to silence the opposition as claimed for the Sheikh Said Revolt earlier? What was the role of the PRP and the CUP in this plot? Were the executions of those who were accused of the involvement in the conspiracy justified? I address these questions only briefly since my aim is to demonstrate

how this plot was manipulated to silence the current and potential opposition to the government.

We know that the internal power struggle in Turkey was of great interest to the international community, especially for Great Britain but also for the United States. In the post-Takrir-i Sükun environment, foreign observers were almost expecting a move by Mustafa Kemal to complete the job he started after the Sheikh Said Revolt. Therefore, it was not a surprise that the İzmir plot would provide him with a second chance. After the uncovering of the plot, Sir R. Lindsay, British representative in İstanbul, informed Sir Austen Chamberlain, secretary of state in London, about the plot. In reference to rumors that the plot was fomented by Mustafa Kemal himself to silence the opposition, on June 23, 1926, Sir R. Lindsay judged that there was indeed an attempt on Mustafa Kemal's life but continued, "The [Turkish] Government is naturally not going to miss such a chance of enquiring into the activities of all possible opponents."⁶ The U.S. consular reports also agree with this assessment as Mark L. Bristol, the U.S. high commissioner in İstanbul, reported to the secretary of state on July 7, 1926, that "the conspiracy was real and that the plot itself had extensive ramifications."⁷ As will become clear in this chapter, Turkish sources also corroborate this assessment. Indeed, there was a failed attempt to kill Mustafa Kemal. Yet this attempt made Mustafa Kemal and the RPP government much stronger than ever before. It was surely "the second chance" to complete the unfinished business of silencing the opposition. Let us first start with a brief summary of what happened in İzmir in 1926.

THE UNCOVERING OF THE PLOT⁸

On May 7, 1926, Mustafa Kemal left Ankara for an inspection tour of the southern and western provinces of the nation. After Eskişehir and Afyon, he arrived at Konya on the next day. Following the route of Tarsus and Mersin, he spent some time in Silifke on his farm. After visiting Adana, back to Konya, and Bozüyük (in Bilecik), Mustafa Kemal spent 24 days (from May 20 to June 13) in Bursa, a historic town in the Marmara region. On June 14, Mustafa Kemal was in Bandırma. According to the itinerary, he was expected to arrive at İzmir on June 15, 1926. However, Mustafa Kemal unexpectedly delayed his departure for one day. It was in Bandırma that he received a telegram from Kazım Pasha, the governor of İzmir, informing him of a plot to assassinate him on June 15. It is interesting to note that Kazım Pasha waited one

more day to inform the prime minister, İsmet Pasha, in Ankara. We know from İsmet Pasha's memoir that he received the telegram from Kazım Pasha on June 16.⁹ We do not know the reason for the delay.

At this point, the reader should be informed that most of our information regarding the plot comes from the prosecutor's plea and court proceedings. It is clear from the testimonies of the accused in their trials that there was indeed a plan to assassinate Mustafa Kemal in İzmir. The prosecutor of the Independence Tribunal claimed that the plot to assassinate Mustafa Kemal was planned for a long time by the members of the opposition party, the PRP.¹⁰ Although there were several other previous attempts—none of which moved beyond the planning stage—the İzmir plot came closest to being executed.¹¹ Those who were primarily responsible for carrying out the plot were Ziya Hurşit (former representative from Lazistan), Laz İsmail, Gürcü Yusuf, and Çopur Hilmi, all of whom were captured in their separate hotels with guns, ammunition, and hand grenades. At least one of them, Ziya Hurşit, readily admitted that he was planning to kill Mustafa Kemal. During his interrogation, he informed the İzmir police that the former Ankara governor, Abdülkadir Bey; Sarı Edip Efe; and the İzmit representative for the opposition party PRP, Şükrü Bey, were closely involved in the organization process of the plot.

The plot was discovered based on information provided by Giritli Şevki, who was involved in the conspiracy. He, with the aid of his boat, was the person responsible for helping the killers flee to the Greek island of Chios (Sakız). According to the plan, Ziya Hurşit, Laz İsmail, Gürcü Yusuf, and Çopur Hilmi were going to wait at the corner of a street in İzmir for Mustafa Kemal's car to slow down to negotiate the sharp turn. They would then throw hand grenades into the crowd for confusion. Using the mayhem as a cover, they would shoot Mustafa Kemal and flee to Giritli Şevki's boat, which was docked at the harbor, and escape to the Greek island. However, a one-day delay in Mustafa Kemal's arrival in İzmir and the disappearance of Sarı Edip Efe (one of the plotters) changed everything. Afraid that the plot was about to be exposed, Giritli Şevki went to the İzmir police station and informed the authorities about the plot.

THE GOVERNMENT'S ACTIONS FOLLOWING THE PLOT¹²

At this point, we need to start with the most reliable sources to reconstruct the communication between Mustafa Kemal and the government.

We have a collection of telegrams published in full that were exchanged by Mustafa Kemal and various government and military personnel.¹³ What do these telegrams between Mustafa Kemal and İsmet Pasha (and some other sources) reveal about the nature of the İzmir conspiracy? The earliest available information regarding the conspiracy in these telegram collections was dated June 16, 1926, two days after the attempt was foiled. Mustafa Kemal's telegram to İsmet Pasha in Ankara acknowledges that an assassination attempt was avoided and warns that since the conspiracy was planned for June 16, there still might be co-conspirators in Ankara to take over the government on this date.¹⁴ Clearly, Mustafa Kemal was convinced that there were many unsatisfied elements in İstanbul—and perhaps in Ankara—waiting to overthrow the government. An alleged underground organization that resembled (if not manned by) the former CUP members, now active in the PRP, was the first suspect behind the plot.

Mustafa Kemal's other telegram was sent to İstanbul Police Chief Ekrem Bey, in which he singled out Sarı Edip Efe as one of the conspirators and requested his speedy arrest. Furthermore, Mustafa Kemal predicted that, based on the news from İzmir, there might be a meeting of co-conspirators (associates of Sarı Edip Efe). He urged the İstanbul Police to be diligent and prepared.¹⁵ This telegram shows Mustafa Kemal's sensitivity toward a possible government takeover or perhaps a counterrevolution. We saw a similar sensitivity by Mustafa Kemal in the case of the Sheikh Said Revolt and its aftermath.

Interestingly, İsmet Pasha's reply the next day to Mustafa Kemal was calmer: "we do not judge that the conspiracy is supported by a wider organization."¹⁶ This reply exhibits a stark contrast to his response to the Sheikh Said Revolt a year earlier. İsmet Pasha seemed to be convinced that the plot did not pose any danger to the regime; however, he was mindful of the opportunities it would provide to garner much-needed support from the public for the regime. In another telegram on the same date, İsmet Pasha registers his astonishment at foiling the conspiracy only a day before it was executed and only because of a regretful informant. However, İsmet Pasha's second point in the telegram was more revealing. "The incident is totally under control," suggested the prime minister. "There is no doubt that we should inform the public of it with grandeur (*azamet*) and display (*debdebe*). This indeed benefits us greatly."¹⁷ In other words, from its earliest stage, dealing with the plot destined to involve a public display. On June 18, 1926, Mustafa Kemal issued a press release claiming that the conspiracy was not against him in person but against the republic and the

principles on which it was based.¹⁸ It is in this context that Mustafa Kemal made his well-known statement, "Surely, my humble body will one day become dust, but the Turkish Republic will endure forever."¹⁹

Mustafa Kemal seems to be genuinely suspicious of the counter-revolutionary potential of the assassination plot. On June 18, 1926, in another telegram to Şükrü Naili Pasha, commander of the Third Army Corps in İstanbul, Mustafa Kemal requested that the army also had to be on high alert for the arrests in İstanbul and that suspicious officers needed to be paid careful attention to.²⁰ It is likely that he wanted to be sure of the loyalty of the lower-ranking officers in the military since it had been proven that no counterrevolution could be successful in Turkey without the support of the army.²¹

On June 18, 1926, four days after the foiled plot, Mustafa Kemal sent a telegram to Prime Minister İsmet Pasha and stated,

Based upon the confessions made by the arrested, I am of the following opinion: we are dealing with an organization operating clandestinely (*gizli çalışan bir komite*) under the control of the Progressive Republican Party whose sole aim is to capture the [political] power. The former Second Group members [the opposition in the First Assembly] are also included in this plot. . . .

This political organization also maintains an armed (*fedai*) section, the same way the CUP had. . . . The decision for the assassination was made collectively by all the members of [the PRP's] general committee. . . . It is telling that Rauf Bey left earlier for Europe, Kazım Karabekir met secretly with Ziya Hurşit in Ankara, . . . and Adnan Bey [Adivar] extended his stay in London. . . . Therefore, it is necessary to arrest and punish all leaders and some members of the PRP.²²

First of all, why was there a rush to accuse the PRP without obtaining all available information? For example, Giritli Şevki, who informed the authorities of the conspiracy, implicated the entire party in power, the RPP, and especially Kazım (Özalp) Pasha, then Speaker of the Assembly.²³ Furthermore, Ziya Hurşit, the assassin in charge, denied in no uncertain terms that Kazım Karabekir, Refet (Bele) Pashas, and Rauf (Orbay) Bey were involved in the plot.²⁴ Here, one can clearly see Mustafa Kemal's attempt to involve his political rivals in this plot (based mostly on suspicion).

In another telegram to İsmet Pasha on June 19, 1926, Mustafa Kemal insisted that Gürcü Yusuf and Laz İsmail, two other assassins, confirm that there were talks of Kazım Karabekir's presidency after the

assassination. Ziya Hürşit had commendations and letters (contents of which were not made public) from Rauf Bey and Ali Fuat Pasha, leaders of the PRP. Mustafa Kemal urged İsmet Pasha to arrest Kazım Karabekir.²⁵ We know that İsmet Pasha was not entirely sold on a blanket arrest of all PRP leadership, especially Kazım Karabekir and Ali Fuat Pashas.²⁶ However, with the insistence of Mustafa Kemal, İsmet Pasha caved in. The following example demonstrates how İsmet Pasha became convinced of the PRP involvement in the plot.

İsmet Pasha, on hearing of the arrest of Kazım Karabekir by order of the Independence Tribunal, then in İzmir, issued a direct order to Dilaver Bey, Ankara police chief, to release the pasha from custody.²⁷ However, when the news of the release reached İzmir, the Independence Tribunal threatened Prime Minister İsmet Pasha with arrest for interfering with a judicial process.²⁸ Secondary sources suggest that Mustafa Kemal stepped in just in time as an arbiter and invited the prime minister to İzmir for consultation.²⁹ On June 20, 1926, İsmet Pasha arrived at İzmir, and after several private meetings with Mustafa Kemal and the members of the court, he declared that, based on the information he had received in İzmir, he was convinced that the court was acting within its authority.³⁰ It is fair to state that İsmet Pasha was strongly urged by Mustafa Kemal not to interfere; therefore, the prime minister remained “neutral.” However, we do not know why he abandoned his hawkish attitude toward the opposition, an attitude that was evident during the Sheikh Said Revolt a year earlier. One can speculate that he was not comfortable with the growing tension among the people and especially the military. In any case, from this point forward, the government and especially İsmet Pasha stayed out of the trials in İzmir and also later in Ankara.

THE İZMİR TRIALS

Based on information collected from the accused, the Independence Tribunal began the trial on June 26, 1926.³¹ According to a statement released by the court, more than 50 people were arrested in different parts of Turkey and sent to İzmir for trial.³² Only a U.S. consular report gives us the full list of those arrested.³³ The PRP’s Kastamonu representative, Halit Bey, escaped the arrest because of a mistake of the court, confusing him with an independent deputy.³⁴ Among the arrested, there were several active members of the TGNA for the PRP. Since, as such, they enjoyed legislative immunity, they could have been

arrested only if they had been caught in the act of committing a crime (*en flagrant delit*) or with the sanction of parliament. We do know that this constitutional right was plainly violated, evident from the verdict that some of the deputies were found “not guilty.” By definition, however, if they were caught “red-handed,” their acquittal could have been impossible. This point was forcefully made by Rauf Bey (Orbay), one of the accused, in his memoirs.³⁵

The trial began with the prosecutor’s indictment on June 26. The prosecution’s main point was that this was not a simple act of a failed assassination attempt against President Mustafa Kemal. On the contrary, it was an attempt committed against the new regime and hence was punishable by death. The prosecutor demanded that the following individuals should be tried for having conspired to take the life of the president and that they should be convicted under Turkish Penal Codes 55 and 57.³⁶ The prosecutor’s job to prove that there was a plot against the life of President Mustafa Kemal was easy, as some of the conspirators, such as Ziya Hurşit, readily confessed to the plot.³⁷ The harder part, at least for the observers of the trial, was to prove beyond any reasonable doubt that the plot in fact aimed at toppling the government and that many PRP and former CUP leaders were directly involved in it. In order to establish such a connection, the prosecutor relied on the testimonies of some of the accused. For example, Ziya Hurşit admitted that he went to İzmir on July 12, 1926, in the company of Laz İsmail and Gürcü Yusuf to assassinate Mustafa Kemal on the latter’s arrival in the city. When asked by the president (chief judge) of the court, Ali Bey, whether any other people were involved in the plot (since such a tremendous undertaking could not be accomplished by four or five people), Ziya Hurşit replied that Şükrü Bey and Abdülkadir Bey were the only other two who were aware of the plot. In fact, the assassination was originally planned in Ankara first by killing the members of the cabinet as well as Mustafa Kemal. However, Şükrü Bey later objected to this scheme, saying that this was too risky and prone to failure. Ziya Hurşit admitted that he planned to accomplish this by bombing the Grand National Assembly when the president and ministers were present.³⁸ Ziya Hurşit further informed authorities that Şükrü Bey had earlier given him 400 Turkish lira and several revolvers to execute the plan. When Ziya Hurşit’s brother, Faik Bey, deputy from Ordu, heard of the plan, he rebuked his brother severely.

The Ankara assassination plot also came to the attention of Rauf Bey, who threatened Ziya Hurşit that he would turn him in if he did

not give up on such a plan. It is important to note that Rauf Bey, a one-time close associate of Mustafa Kemal and a major figure in the opposition, was later sentenced to 10 years in prison because of his failure to report the incident to authorities. In any case, when the Ankara plot failed, it was finally decided that İzmir was the safest place to execute the plan and escape abroad.³⁹

Desiring to establish a link between the opposition and the plot, the prosecutor and president of the Independence Tribunal asked Ziya Hurşit of the PRP's and Kazım Karabekir's involvement in the plot. Ziya Hurşit flatly denied any such involvement. The prosecutor had the depositions of Laz İsmail and Çopur Hilmi Bey, reporting that Ziya Hurşit had told them that the PRP had supported the plot. However, Ziya Hurşit himself denied the accuracy of this information; therefore, the prosecution was deprived of a firsthand accusation.⁴⁰

The prosecution's evidence came from the testimony of Sarı Edip Efe, who stated that "the assassination of [Mustafa Kemal] had been secretly decided at a meeting of the Progressive Republican Party; and that Kiazim Pasha, President of the Grand National Assembly, and Fevzi Pasha, Field Marshall were aware of the conspiracy."⁴¹ Sarı Edip Efe added that the ultimate plan was to elect Fevzi (Çakmak) Pasha as the president of the republic. The testimony of Sarı Edip Efe is significant for several reasons. He provided the prosecution with the rationale, however unsubstantiated it may have been, to accuse the PRP members. Based on this statement, significant members of the PRP, such as Kazım Karabekir, Ali Fuat (Cebesoy), Rauf (Orbay), and Refet (Bele), all of whom were worthy opponents of the government, were accused of a crime against the state, which carried the penalty of capital punishment. However, the greatest hole in the accusation was the following. Sarı Edip Efe based these accusations on the information he received from Ziya Hurşit also.⁴² However, Ziya Hurşit, supposedly the source of this information, repeatedly denied any involvement of the PRP leaders.⁴³

One of the accused, Faik Bey, who was the brother of Ziya Hurşit, stated in court that even if the RPP leaders were uninformed of the İzmir plot, they surely did know of the earlier plot in Ankara.⁴⁴ Thirty years after the incident, Faik Bey published his reflections on the plot, stating that "many years after my retirement from parliament [in 1927], I learned that the PRP had a higher [secret] committee in İstanbul than that of its known board of administration. The secret committee must have been the CUP in İstanbul. . . . Apparently, actions were taken based upon the decision and instructions of this committee."⁴⁵

In retaliation, on September 21, 1956, the weekly *Dün ve Bugün* magazine⁴⁶ published a response to Faik (Günday) Bey's claims in which it questioned the motives of revealing such information decades later.

In any case, Kazım Karabekir, in his statement to the court, denied any involvement in the plot. Furthermore, he openly criticized the government for its attempt to silence the opposition once and for all. His defense was similar to that in the Sheikh Said Revolt in that he refused to accept responsibility for a few misguided PRP members. As to the accusation for the toppling of the government (*taklib-i hükümet*), Kazım Karabekir stated that with not more than 15 members of the PRP in parliament, how could a political party topple a government of the RPP's strength? Without the assistance of the military, he continued, no government could be overthrown in this country.⁴⁷ When Ali Bey, the president of the court, said to Kazım Karabekir, "You established an opposition party in a period when the country could not tolerate any opposition," Kazım Karabekir simply responded by saying, "I disagree. Our nation is mature enough."⁴⁸ Ali Bey's line of questioning strengthens the belief that the court aimed also at punishing the political opposition simply because it existed.

On June 30, 1926, the prosecutor introduced an addendum to his original plea in which he extended the scope of the trial to fine-tune his accusations of the PRP and the CUP leaders. In the original indictment on June 26, 1926, the prosecutor signaled that the PRP members were currently being interrogated and that the official charges were pending. In the addendum, the prosecutor mentioned by name the following PRP leaders: Cafer Tayyar, Ali Fuat, Refet, Kazım Karabekir, Rüşti Pashas, Sabit, Halis Turgut, İhsan, İsmail Canbulat, and Münir Hüsrev Beys. Furthermore, the prosecution claimed that the PRP allied itself with a secret committee, consisting of former CUP members, to capture the government by force. The addendum concluded with a request from the court to prosecute the following CUP members: Faik (Ziya Hurşit's brother), Cavit (former minister of finance in the CUP governments), Necati (ex-deputy from Erzurum), Hilmi (ex-deputy from Ardalan), and Kara Kemal (in absentia) Beys. The charge carried the death penalty.⁴⁹

The significant issues are the following. The prosecution claimed that it included these names based on the alleged statements made in court by Ziya Hurşit. However, available court proceedings failed to establish that Ziya Hurşit made any such accusations against these CUP leaders.⁵⁰ Furthermore, we have a copy of the original addendum and another copy of the addendum that was provided to Kazım

Karabekir by the court. When compared, the two are not identical. In fact, Kazım Karabekir has a note on the corner of the “official,” longer version that he received during the trial. Kazım Karabekir marked a certain paragraph and scribbled that “this section is quite different in the copy we received.”⁵¹ It seems that the section about the accusations against the PRP members were omitted in the copy provided to the pasha. We do not know the reason for this discrepancy.

In any case, in July 1926,⁵² the second addendum by the prosecutor added several other people from the opposition to the list of accused. The list now included Rauf, Adnan, Rahmi Beys (in absentia), Bekir Sami, Feridun Fikri, Kamil, Zeki, Necati (Bursa), Besim, Necati (Erzurum), Selahattin, Ahmet Nafız, Kara Vasıf and Hüseyin Avni Beys, and Cemal Pasha (Mersin). In addition, Hafız Mehmet (who was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter as an ardent opponent of Mustafa Kemal) Vahab, and Keleş Mehmet were accused of conspiring against the government.⁵³ All these names belonged to the political opposition inside or outside parliament and, in the opinion of Mustafa Kemal, would always pose a danger to his vision and leadership for the new Turkey. Invariably, they came from the ranks of the Second Group (the opposition in the first TGNA), the PRP, and the former CUP.⁵⁴

Perhaps one of the most memorable aspects of these trials was the sessions in which the generals (pashas) who had been significant actors in the nationalist movement were on trial. These were the people who served the nationalist cause at the highest levels and were once the close associates of Mustafa Kemal himself. These generals included Cemal (Mersinli), Rüştü, Kazım Karabekir, Ali Fuat, Cafer Tayyar, and Refet Pashas, all of whom were members of the PRP in opposition. Some of these generals were still well respected in the military. In the end, all accused generals were found “not guilty” with the exception of Rüştü Pasha, who was executed. Claims have been made that the government was not unsure of the military’s reaction to execute or jail the pashas, and hence the court was lenient toward them. For example, Faruk Özerengin, a son-in-law of Kazım Karabekir, claimed that there were several armed military officers in the court ready to kill the members of the court if they issued death sentences for the accused generals and to trigger an uprising. Because of such fears, the pashas were spared.⁵⁵

Fahrettin (Altay) Pasha, one of Mustafa Kemal’s close associates, remembers the reason for the generals’ acquittal differently. In a meeting with Fahrettin Pasha and İsmet Pasha, Mustafa Kemal asked the former, “Ali Bey [the president of the Independence Tribunal] will

hang the generals, what do you make of it?" Fahrettin Pasha chose to be silent on this question, but İsmet Pasha demonstrated a level of apprehension. In response, Mustafa Kemal pressed, "How can we be sure of the future if we do not hang them?" According to Fahrettin Altay, who witnessed this exchange, İsmet Pasha convinced Mustafa Kemal of the dangers that such a move could pose. Finally, Mustafa Kemal was convinced and stated, "Alright then; let me talk to Ali Bey [the president of the court] one more time."⁵⁶ Fahrettin Altay's memoir hints at the authority of Mustafa Kemal over the court, contradicting the claim made by one member of the court, Kılıç Ali Bey, when he stated that "we received orders from no one."⁵⁷

In the İzmir trials, at least 36 people appeared before the court.⁵⁸ The ruling of the tribunal condemned the following 15 people to death sentences: Şükrü Bey (deputy from İzmit), İsmail Canbulat Bey (deputy from İstanbul), Arif Bey (deputy from Eskişehir), Abidin Bey (deputy from Saruhan), Halis Turgut Bey (deputy from Sivas), Rüştü Pasha (deputy from Erzurum), Ziya Hurşit (ex-deputy from Lazistan), Hafız Mehmet Bey (ex-deputy from Trabzon), Laz İsmail, Gürcü Yusuf, Çopur Hilmi, Sarı Edip Efe Bey, Albay Rasim, Kara Kemal Bey (former CUP leader), and Abdulkadir Bey (ex-governor of Ankara). The last two received their sentences in absentia since they were not captured by then. Kara Kemal killed himself on July 27, 1926, when surrounded by the police in İstanbul.⁵⁹ Abdulkadir Bey was arrested close to the border around Edirne while attempting to cross into Bulgaria on August 19, 1926, and was hanged on September 1, 1926.⁶⁰

Vahap Bey, nephew of Hafız Mehmet, was sentenced to 10 years of exile in Konya. Other accused people were released, including the generals Kazım Karabekir, Refet, Cafer Tayyar, and Ali Fuat. They must have been informed of the court's decision beforehand, for they declined to defend themselves in court after their initial statements. Only Rüştü Pasha begged for leniency, but, as mentioned, he was sentenced to death. We do not know why he was singled out.⁶¹ After their release, the generals were put under police surveillance for years to come.⁶²

Most important, the court decided that in order to shed light on the CUP involvement in the plot, there would be another trial in Ankara, where high-level CUP members would be tried for their involvement in the overthrow of the current regime and in the assassination plot. Seven people, who were transferred from İzmir to Ankara, were the following: Rauf Bey (deputy from İstanbul and former prime minister), Adnan Bey (former deputy from İstanbul and former minister of health), Rahmi Bey (former governor of Smyrna), Hilmi Bey (former

deputy from Ardahan), İhsan Bey (deputy from Ergani), Cavit Bey (former minister of finance), and Selahattin Bey (former deputy from Sivas).⁶³ Rauf and Adnan Bey were already in Europe and refused to return; therefore, their trials were in absentia. All these names were potential rivals to the leadership in Ankara with significant international and national clout.

Therefore, the Ankara trials promised to be more interesting than that of İzmir and were purely political in nature. Closer examination of these trials reveals not only the government's insistence on silencing this group—whose loyalty to the new regime would not be trusted—but also how defenseless these once-all-powerful people were.

THE ANKARA TRIALS⁶⁴

The İzmir trials clearly went farther than dealing with those who were directly involved in the conspiracy. It marked the final blow to the ill-fated PRP, which constituted the legal opposition in parliament. However, there was still potential political opposition outside parliament (namely, the former CUP elite) that could enter it in the next election in 1927. Accordingly, the Ankara Independence Tribunal seems to have had two objectives in separating the İzmir phase from that of Ankara. The first one undoubtedly was to eliminate these CUP elite who refused to submit to the government's will and who were, as such, deemed potentially dangerous. By doing so, the court aimed at establishing a point of reference to deter other lower-level CUP members who might entertain the idea of challenging the authority of the government (not necessarily the regime). The second objective was that the court, which ironically included some lower-level former CUP members, wished to collect information on the inner workings of the CUP, the secret knowledge to which they were not privy in the earlier periods. For example, Falih Rifkî Atay, a member of Mustafa Kemal's inner circle, later qualified the hostile attitude of Ali Bey, the president of the court, toward Cavit Bey, former minister of finance, as the enmity and jealousy of a former lower-level CUP member of the CUP elite.⁶⁵ The questioning of Cavit Bey was of great interest to foreign observers, as it dealt mainly with the Ottoman entry to World War I and the secret negotiations of the CUP members with European diplomats.⁶⁶

The Ankara trials commenced on August 2, 1926. The prosecutor claimed that the İzmir trials clearly demonstrated the existence of a

secret committee to overthrow the current government and that the PRP became the new face of the former CUP. The prosecutor, Necip Ali, mentioned that although the ideas in the political program that were penned by the former CUP elite in the house of Cavit Bey were protected by the freedom of ideas and consciousness (*fikir ve vicdan hürriyeti*), plans to realize them, which involved the assassination of the president, certainly constituted crimes against the state.⁶⁷ Accordingly, Necip Ali requested the punishment of 39 people. The following 16 people were to be tried based on Articles 57 and 58 of the Criminal Code (death sentence or exile for life): Dr. Nazım (member of the Central Committee of the CUP), Cavit Bey (former minister of finance and member of the CUP), Kör Ali İhsan Bey (responsible secretary of the CUP), Hilmi Bey (former deputy from Ardahan), Küçük Talat Bey (member of the Central Committee of the CUP), Azmi Bey (former chief of police of İstanbul), Kara Vasıf Bey (former deputy from Sivas and a member of CUP and the Second Group), Hüseyin Avni Bey (former deputy from Erzurum and a member of the Second Group), Selahattin Bey (former deputy from Mersin and a member of the Second Group), Nail Bey (former deputy from Kütahya and member of the CUP), İhsan Bey (deputy from Ergani and a member of the CUP), Mithat Şükrü Bey (secretary-general of the CUP), Hüseyin Cahit Bey (editor of *Tanin* and former deputy from İstanbul), Hüseyin Rauf Bey (deputy from İstanbul and former prime minister), Dr. Adnan Bey (former deputy from İstanbul), and Rahmi Bey (former governor of İzmir).

The prosecutor asked for the exile and imprisonment of the following 30 people based on Articles 55 and 58⁶⁸ of the Criminal Code: Hüseyinzade Ali Bey (professor at the Medical School), Hamdi Bey (member of the CUP), Hilmi Bey (former director of the posts and telegrams), Vehbi Bey (responsible secretary of the CUP), İbrahim Ethem Bey (resident secretary of the CUP from Bakırköy), Cemal Ferit Bey (secretary of the Union of Porters), Eyüp Sabri (member of the Central Committee of the CUP), Dr. Rusuhi (member of the Central Committee of the CUP), Ahmet Nesimi Bey (former minister of foreign affairs and member of the CUP), Salah Cimcoz Bey (former deputy from İstanbul and member of the CUP), Rıza Bey (retired major), Hüsnü Bey (responsible secretary of the CUP), Naim Cevat Bey (retired major and president of the Batum Congress), Tırnakçı Salim (member of the CUP), Said Bey (brother of Yakup Cemil of the CUP), Ali Osman Kahya (chief of boatmen), Salih Reis, Cavit Bey (police sergeant), Nazım Bey (former inspector of Public Debt), Çerkes Bey

(retired colonel), İzzet Bey (director of the Bakers Company), Rıfat Bey (former prefect of Üsküdar), Hasip (servant of Kara Kemal), Ahmet Muhtar Bey (responsible secretary of the CUP, Bakırköy), Neşet Bey (major of Bakırköy), Gözlüklü Mithat Bey (director of the National Products Company), Mehmet Ali Bey (director of the Bank of Economy), Rıza Bey (chief cashier of the Bank of Economy), İhsan Bey (representative of the National Trading Company, İzmit), and Hasan Fehmi Bey (representative of the National Product Company).⁶⁹

As can be seen, a great majority of the accused were affiliated with the CUP. A small number came from the Second Group. Names that are not associated directly with the CUP were those who the court thought would provide valuable information about CUP members. At the İzmir phase, almost all PRP members were already silenced; only Rauf Bey and Dr. Adnan Bey were included in the Ankara phase of the trials, simply because they were overseas and the government was not sure how to deal with them as yet. Erik Jan Zürcher in his *The Unionist Factor* correctly states that the Unionists were targeted, for Mustafa Kemal judged them as worthy competitors for power and some of them came from the *komitadji* (political assassin) background.⁷⁰

During the Ankara trials, the court gave more attention to the following issues than the plot itself: (1) the political activities of the CUP leaders in exile, (2) the nature of communication among the CUP leaders inside and outside the country, (3) the nature of the secret political maneuverings of the Unionists in the First and the Second TGNA, (4) the nature of the meetings of former CUP leaders at the house of Cavit Bey and at the office of Kara Kemal Bey, (5) the partially successful CUP agitations during the elections of the Second TGNA, and (6) the role of the CUP members in the formation of the opposition in the TGNA through the creation of the PRP.⁷¹

Most independent observers of the trials agreed that the prosecutor's accusations were not properly documented and that the court adhered to "the famous principle of the Napoleonic code that the accused is guilty until he can prove himself innocent."⁷² A British report judged the Ankara trials a farce: "The evidence of complicity in the conspiracy was negligible. The court had plainly made up its mind to secure the Ghazi's position by removing Javid, the best brain, and Nazım, the arch-conspirator, of the Committee of Union and Progress. . . . The country was thoroughly cowed and opposition was eliminated, or, at any rate, driven further underground."⁷³ A U.S.

observer noted that the court was not worried by the possibility that the political charges leveled against the CUP members violated the spirit, if not the letter, of the Lausanne Treaty.⁷⁴

In the end, death sentences in conformity with Articles 55 and 57 of the penal code were handed out to Cavit Bey (former minister of finance), Dr. Nazım Bey (member of the Central Committee of the CUP), Hilmi Bey (former deputy from Ardahan), and Nail Bey (responsible secretary of the CUP). Ten years of banishment, consistent with Articles 55 and 58, were accorded to Vehbi Bey (responsible secretary of the CUP), Hüsnü Bey (responsible secretary of the CUP), İbrahim Ethem Bey (responsible secretary of the CUP), Hüseyin Rauf Bey (former prime minister and deputy from İstanbul), and Rahmi Bey (former governor of Smyrna). In accordance with Article 64 of the Penal Code, Ali Osman Kahya (chief of the Corporation of Boatmen) and Salih Reis (chief of the Corporation of Porters) were sentenced to 10 years of banishment to their native city. The remaining 37 CUP members were acquitted. It is noteworthy that although Rauf Bey was named as the mastermind of the conspiracy, he did not receive the death penalty.⁷⁵ Understandably, there was a level of apprehension in court to condemn Rauf Bey, a significant member of the nationalist movement, to death.

To date, the İzmir assassination plot against the life of Mustafa Kemal remains one of the most controversial aspects of Turkish republican history. At this point, we need to examine the suspicions surrounding the plot more closely.

SUSPICIONS SURROUNDING THE PLOT

As mentioned previously, there have been many conspiracy theories that encircle the İzmir plot. They were raised by many in the opposition, including, Kazım Karabekir, Ali Fuat Cebesoy, and Rauf Orbay.⁷⁶ It must be noted that there is sufficient reason to be suspicious about the government's connection with the plot; however, there is no concrete or even convincing evidence that Mustafa Kemal or the government premeditated and fomented it. Like the Sheikh Said Revolt, the government utilized the plot to the maximum for political benefit.

Let us look at some of the suspicious facts surrounding the incident. For example, one can be justifiably suspicious of the date of the letter confessing the plot. We know that Giritli Şevki, one of the designated participants in the plot, came to the İzmir Police on June 14, 1926, with

the intention of turning in his co-conspirators. However, the letter that Şevki wrote to Mustafa Kemal bears the date June 15, 1926. If he surrendered to the authorities in İzmir on June 14, that would mean that he was not turning in a prewritten letter for Mustafa Kemal and that the letter was written the next day. The first suspicion is that he may have been instructed to manufacture such an allegation at the police station. However, this claim would be weak when we consider that perhaps he verbally informed the authorities and then was asked to document it in a letter. It would mean, however, that Mustafa Kemal's delay of visit was not the cause for Giritli Şevki's panic since he already knew that Mustafa Kemal was informed by the police and asked to delay his visit.⁷⁷ We do not know for sure what the reason was for Giritli Şevki's change of heart. Some sources suggest that it was possibly the hazy departure of Sarı Edip Efe from İzmir that struck fear in Giritli Şevki.⁷⁸

Another speculation about the plot was that Sarı Edip Efe was the agent of the government, charged to inform the authorities of the activities of the conspirators.⁷⁹ Hence, according to this view, the government (or Mustafa Kemal) was fully aware of the hatching of the plot. Kazım Karabekir, in his defense, was quite forceful in claiming that there was a good chance that this plot was allowed to happen, like the Sheikh Said Revolt, for the purpose of crushing what was left of the opposition in parliament. After all, Sarı Edip Efe's close association with Kazım (Özalp) Pasha, the president of the TGNA and member of the RPP, was common knowledge in Ankara. According to Kazım Karabekir, Sarı Edip Efe, who accused the PRP of being involved in the plot, needed to be questioned in court about his current association with the government.⁸⁰ What strengthens this assumption is that Sarı Edip Efe was not questioned on this subject and that during his trial he was silenced quickly by the president of the court when he stated, "My service to the government is being overlooked."⁸¹ We do not know what the nature of this service was. Samuel W. Honaker states,

The trial of Edib Bey had been eagerly awaited by the people of Smyrna, for there were various rumors in circulation with respect to his former connection with the Government as an individual who had possibly given money from the secret funds. The visitors to the courtroom were disappointed in the latter respect; no opportunity was given by the President of the Tribunal of Independence for the disclosure of details of that character.⁸²

The court seems to be unconcerned by the allegations, but we do know that this rumor created another suspicion about the plot.

In connection with Kazım Karabekir's allegations that the government was aware of such a plot, we also know that Mustafa Kemal was upset that the court allowed Kazım Karabekir to openly raise these questions. On July 5, 1926, when at a ball in Çeşme, a suburb of İzmir, an angry Mustafa Kemal invited members of the Independence Tribunal to the ball and clearly showed them his displeasure in allowing Kazım Karabekir to make such allegations in public.⁸³

To further corroborate this allegation, one can point out the interview given by Atıf Bey, the governor of Ankara, on June 29, 1926. According to this interview, the government was aware of the preparation of an imminent assassination attempt on Mustafa Kemal's life since the winter of 1926. Governor Atıf Bey clearly stated, "We knew of the plot and Ziya Hurşit was under our surveillance for a long time. We collected many documents and turned them in to the Independence Tribunal."⁸⁴ There does not seem to be any reason to question the accuracy of this information. Therefore, a suspicion certainly exists that Mustafa Kemal was monitoring the situation and was looking for an opportune moment to exploit it for his political benefit. However, the reader should not take this as proof of the government's involvement in the plot. It can, at best, be seen as evidence that Mustafa Kemal would have sufficient time, if he wished, to devise a counterplan to enhance his political standing.⁸⁵

There should be no doubt that the political environment of 1926 allowed plenty of room for suspicion regarding the government's involvement in the plot. However, one should not accept the circumstantial evidence as fact and form a solid judgment based on this. On the other hand, ignoring the possibility of Mustafa Kemal's prior awareness of such a plot and his desire to benefit from it would be equally irresponsible. We know that Mustafa Kemal manipulated the plot for political gain and eliminated the opposition entirely. At which point he devised such a plan to accomplish this goal does not change this fact. We also know that Mustafa Kemal was regarding the opposition as a hindrance to progress and a challenge to his leadership and, hence, was hoping to eliminate it. It is the judgment of this study that he acted pragmatically with a desire to silence the opposition. The legal and political moves were executed not idealistically but practically. It is, therefore, fair to state that Mustafa Kemal's political success was based more on his pragmatism than on his

idealism. The following section brings in primary sources that were not previously examined to further demonstrate this point.

THE İZMİR CONSPIRACY IN THE U.S. CONSULAR REPORTS

As stated before, we lack independent primary sources on the subject of the İzmir conspiracy. One of the most neutral primary sources comes from U.S. consular reports about the incident. These documents are significant and relatively more reliable than the rest, for they lack motive for manipulation. In other words, these sources were reporting their findings to Washington without any hidden agenda.

The first report about the İzmir conspiracy was sent on June 18, 1926, the same day the plot was made public by the U.S. high commissioner in Turkey, Rear Admiral Mark Lambert Bristol.⁸⁶ This was simply a short telegram informing the State Department of the plot. Bristol waited over a month to send a rather comprehensive report about the incident. However, on June 22, 1926, Bristol reported the information he collected from newspapers. He also reported a rumor that was circulating in Turkey during the trials in İzmir:

[The rumor has it] that the Government has either manufactured the entire conspiracy or else is utilizing an actual plot of a non-political nature as a pretext for discrediting the leaders of the Progressive Party, whose parliamentary and general political opposition it has been unable to silence despite its autocratic administration of national affairs. It is reported that this opposition has considerably increased since the conclusion of the Mosul treaty, which the Progressives denounce as an unjustified surrender of Turkish rights.⁸⁷

The reader may remember that such a rumor was also present during the Sheikh Said Revolt and the previously mentioned closure of the PRP in 1925. These rumors were indications that beneath the surface there existed suspicion and mistrust for the Ankara government, particularly in İstanbul and İzmir. We do not know how widespread this mistrust was. We do know that Ankara was fully aware of such feelings.⁸⁸

In another report on July 7, 1926, High Commissioner Bristol seems to be convinced that "the conspiracy was real and that the plot itself had extensive ramifications."⁸⁹ The report goes on to claim that "the government appears to be making a special effort to fix maximum

responsibility for the attempt on Progressive leaders. On the other hand, the depositions which have been taken to date tend to minimize their guilt and to make the government's case against them appear rather weak."⁹⁰ We know that since the Sheikh Said Revolt, critics of the government were suspicious of the government's secret plots to completely eliminate the opposition. This report clearly confirms that the Independence Tribunal did not make an effort to erase such an assumption.

A 13-page report written on August 3, 1926, reveals the judgment of the U.S. high commissioner about the İzmir trials by the Independence Tribunal. The general feeling of Bristol was that the trials were a show for the Turkish public and that the legal rights of the accused were not respected. A strong implication in the report was that the fates of the accused were predetermined. For example, Bristol pointed out that, contradicting the recommendation of the prosecution that Rüştü Pasha and İsmail Canbolat Bey deserved imprisonment, the court handed both of them death sentences. Bristol stated that one of the outstanding features of the court had always been the unity of action between the prosecution and the judges. Why, then, Bristol asked, did there seem to be a disagreement on the fate of these two people? He subscribed to the already circulating theory that the court wished to give the impression that the prosecution and the judge did not always see eye to eye—one of the most significant characteristics of a "real court." Hence, this was for "imagery" purposes.

According to Bristol, when the İzmir proceedings were examined in totality, they became unusually interesting from two points of view: the legal and the political. Legally, Turkish jurisprudence "did not distinguish itself for neither was the evidence as it appeared in court convincing nor were the trials conducted in a spirit of refined justice. The most flagrant departure from established principles being that the accused was allowed neither counsels for defense, nor appeal."⁹¹ Politically, the İzmir trials further discredited the PRP to the point that it would take a very long time for them to regain the prestige it formerly enjoyed. In this sense, the main goal of the İzmir trials was accomplished.

Referring to the Ankara stage of the proceedings, Bristol pointed out that one of the main differences between the İzmir and Ankara trials was that the former dealt with the issue of the plot, whereas the latter sought to "clear up political differences of long standing and dispose of, once and for all, the question as to what lines the Turkish Revolution shall henceforth follow."⁹² The expulsion of the PRP

members from the TGNA and the elimination of notable leaders of the CUP from the political scene were goals they wished to accomplish. In other words, the İzmir trials already discredited the PRP leaders in the eye of the public and ended their political careers as an opposition bloc in parliament.

However, there was another, more dangerous group that was preparing for the upcoming elections in 1927. The Ankara trials were specifically aimed at silencing the potential opposition that would come from these CUP members, some of whom were already serving in the ranks of the Ankara government. On this subject, Bristol reports that in order not to alienate those former CUP members in the RPP, the general tendency was to point out the distinction between former Unionists who served the Kemalist government and Unionists as adherents to a new national political party. This was the view of the daily *Cumhuriyet* of Yunus Nadi and also the view of Ali Bey (Çetinkaya), chief judge of the Independence Tribunal. Another daily, *Milliyet*, under the editorship of Falih Rıfkı (Atay), suggested that these trials should liquidate once and for all the Unionist problem. Yunus Nadi, a former Unionist himself, claimed that the Independence Tribunal was dealing not with the CUP per se but with the secret machinery of a certain group.

Bristol reported the position of another daily newspaper, *Vakit*, which suggested that the Independence Tribunal was competent only to try those implicated in the İzmir plot. Because of the stipulations of the Treaty of Lausanne, the court did not possess the legal jurisdiction to try the former CUP leaders for their political activities. This position is significant in that none of the Allied Powers further investigated the issue. This report clearly indicates that at least the U.S. diplomats were aware of the question.⁹³

On the contrary, another report by Charles E. Allen, the U.S. consul in charge, advised the U.S. secretary of state that "it would be extremely unwise to attempt, either directly or indirectly, to make any excuse for the executions ordered by the Tribunal of Independence in connection with efforts to secure the ratification of the Treaty of Lausanne."⁹⁴ The author suggests that since no U.S. interest or the interests of the minorities were violated, the United States should refrain from agitating the Ankara government so that those in the U.S. parliament would not have another reason to oppose the ratification of the Treaty of Lausanne despite the fact that "these executions are inexcusable for the reason that the tribunal . . . disregarded totally the elementary rights of the accused."⁹⁵

Another report from Charles E. Allen, the U.S. consul in charge in İstanbul, to the secretary of state gives brief biographical information and compares the backgrounds of those executed in İzmir on July 14, 1926. He suggests that aside from three vagabonds (Laz İsmail, Gürcü Yusuf, and Çopur Hilmi), all others had education that could be rated from fair to excellent. These were people “whose accomplishments compare favorably with those of any member of the present government.”⁹⁶ More important, notes Charles Allen,

with a few exceptions, these persons were active members of a wing of the Union and Progress Party to which Mustapha Kemal Pasha, even when he was a member of that party, opposed, the reason being, it is alleged, his own ambition and jealousy of others. There would, therefore, seem to be an excellent reason for suspecting that the execution of these persons was due as much to Mustapha Kemal Pasha’s fear and hatred of them as to their guilt.⁹⁷

Another significant report, prepared by Samuel W. Honaker from the U.S. consulate in İzmir, relayed the summaries of the court proceedings in İzmir and Ankara.⁹⁸ The report, prepared on August 12, 1926, seems to be one of the most comprehensive accounts of the İzmir trials (68 pages long). It informed Washington of events preceding the assassination plot, of the trials and of the Independence Tribunals, and of their previous activities in İzmir. The report does not include the complete account of the court proceedings; however, it is significant in that it contained information that was not previously reported. For example, the testy interaction between chief judge of the tribunal, Ali (Çetinkaya), and the accused Abidin Bey did not take place in the official minutes of the İzmir trials.⁹⁹ We learn that Abidin Bey reacted to a comment by the chief judge, Ali Bey, accusing him of not telling the truth. Abidin Bey responded that “he was a Deputy, and not a murderer like the chief judge of the Tribunal of Independence.” The report continued, “[Abidin Bey] was evidently referring to the incident between Ali Bey and Halit Bey [Pasha] during which the former shot and killed the latter in the building of the Grand National Assembly. The chief judge immediately ordered Abeddin Bey to maintain silence, but the latter refused and continued saying that ‘two years ago Moustafa Kemal Pasha had been loved and trusted by the nation but the hypocrites like the presiding officer had spoiled him, the President of the Republic and lowered him in the eyes of the people.’”¹⁰⁰ This incident took place on the third day of the trial but was not published in the newspapers or in the court proceedings of that

date. Clearly, the court blocked the publication of the exchange. We do know that the rumors of the killing of Halit Pasha by Ali Bey were circulating before. Why, then, was this interaction removed from the official proceedings? It raises the suspicion that perhaps there were other omitted incidents in the proceedings.

Another piece of information that is not available in Turkish sources is the intelligence that Sheldon Leavitt Crosby received regarding the desire of some deputies to dissolve the TGNA. Crosby reported,

An interesting possibility arising from the Smyrna and Angora proceedings is the dissolution of the Assembly. It has come to this Mission from confidential sources that a number of deputies have approached the President of the Republic on the subject of the desirability of dissolving the present Assembly because of the general atmosphere of suspicion which has been created by the recent hearings and which has even extended as far as at least to one cabinet officer. It is understood that informal conferences are even now being held between Moustapha Kemal, İsmet Pasha and a few of the more trusted deputies with a view to deciding upon the desirability of such action. Should the decision be in the affirmative, it will probably be seen that the Government is yet strong enough to obtain the Assembly's concurrence as required by the Constitution and also to maneuver the new elections entirely to its taste.¹⁰¹

Understandably, the government did not take the risk of dissolving parliament at the time since there were still many unknowns that would embarrass the government in the immediate elections. However, we do know that the next elections were a year away, affording the government sufficient time to control almost all seats of the TGNA (only six out of 288 deputies were "independent," the rest belonging to the party in power, the RPP).

One other observation by Crosby is also insightful. It seems that death sentences were handed out arbitrarily. For example, one of the questions that still remains today after the Ankara trial is why Cavit was executed but Hüseyin Cahit acquitted. The latter was equally despised by the government and potent enough to cause alarm. Crosby speculated that "the Government was responding to a popular agitation which for some time has prevailed in his favor and has elected this as a form of palliative to offset the effect of the executions of the other prominent Unionists."¹⁰² The U.S. chargé d'affaires points out a possibility, but we will never know the reason.

By now, the reader should be convinced that there was an attempt on Mustafa Kemal's life and that this plot was skillfully used by Mustafa Kemal to eliminate the opposition. However, not much has been said regarding the availability of a secret organization that aimed to overthrow the government and even change the regime. By all accounts, the Independence Tribunal performed poorly in proving that such a conspiracy did exist. However, should the court's lack of ability to pin down the accused with irrefutable evidence of a conspiracy to change the regime be interpreted in a way that no such conspiracy ever existed? In other words, was there a conspiracy against the regime prior to 1926?

We have documents suggesting that such a conspiracy may have existed. Before presenting these documents, the reader should be warned that there is no corroborating evidence or other independent confirmation for these claims. Therefore, they should not be taken as facts. Nevertheless, several U.S. diplomatic reports prepared by Mark L. Bristol, the U.S. high commissioner in İstanbul, may shed some light on this question.

On June 17, 1924, Bristol sent a report to the secretary of state in Washington detailing the information he collected from Osman Fahreldine (Fahrettin) Bey, private secretary to Seyyid Mahdi Ahmet al Sanussi (also known as Ahmet Şerif El Sanussi and Sheikh Ahmed Cherif El Senoussi in the original text).¹⁰³ According to this information, there existed a secret organization "which has as its avowed objects the return of Abdul Medjid to Constantinople and his restoration as Caliph."¹⁰⁴ Seyyid Sanussi was known for his closeness to the nationalist movement in Turkey and to Mustafa Kemal himself and originally supported the abolition of the sultanate and the establishment of a caliphate with purely spiritual powers. However, he seemed to be agitated by Mustafa Kemal's decision to abolish the caliphate altogether. Osman Fahrettin Bey informed the U.S. high commissioner that Seyyid Sanussi was now in sympathy with this secret organization. It is in this context that one finds information about an active secret organization aiming at a regime change in Turkey as late as 1924 and perhaps afterward. According to the informant, Prince Ömer Tosun of Egypt was collecting funds for the return of Abdülmecit to İstanbul as caliph, and he would give financial support to this secret organization. There is no name mentioned for the group, but the names of some members were recorded: İzzet Pasha (former grand vizier), Refet Pasha, Ali Rıza Pasha (former grand vizier), Kemal Bey (minister of supply in the CUP government), Yusuf Kemali Bey

(former deputy from Mersin), Selahattin Adil Pasha (military commandant of İstanbul in 1923), Velid Bey (editor in chief of *Tevhid-i Efkar*), Zeki Bey (deputy from Gümüşhane), Hoca Sabri Efendi (former deputy from Afyonkarahisar), Hulusi Efendi (former deputy from Konya), Ahmet Bey (notable of Diyarbakır), İsmail Nadi Bey (notable of Diyarbakır), Vehbi Bey (notable of Diyarbakır), Abdulfettah Efendi (notable of Van), Halil Efendi (notable of Van), and Abdulvatap Efendi (notable of Van).

When this list is compared to the list of the accused in connection with the İzmir assassination plot of 1926 and with the accused after the Sheikh Said Revolt of 1925, some of the names overlap. For example, (Kara) Kemal Bey, who was condemned to death by the Independence Tribunal in Ankara, committed suicide in 1926. Refet (Bele) Pasha later became a member of the PRP, and his name was associated with the İzmir conspiracy. He was later acquitted in İzmir in 1926. After the Sheikh Said Revolt, Velid Bey, along with some other oppositional journalists, was arrested and later released.

Furthermore, another U.S. document (867.00/1812) continues on the information gathered from the same Osman Fahrettin Bey. The quotation is lengthy. However, it makes significant claims; therefore, it is necessary to cite it in full:

The political leaders of the [secret organization] favor a much more active and immediate program. *Their ultimate objective is the overthrow of the present [Kemalist] Government and the establishment of a constitutional monarchy [emphasis added]. . . .* The future constitutional monarch of Turkey, in the opinion of these leaders, would be either Abdul Medjid Effendi or Selim Effendi, the eldest son of Sultan Abdul Hamid II. A meeting of the political leaders of the movement was held a short time ago at Erenkeuy. Some twenty-five persons, including Raouf Bey and Refet Pasha, were present. Raouf Bey spoke at length in favor of a constitutional monarchy for Turkey along English lines and declared that the republican form of government was not suited to Turkey. Refet Pasha said they had been willing to follow Moustapha Kemal Pasha as a military leader in the war against the Greeks, but they did not propose to follow him and his "gang" in a political dictatorship. He said the National Assembly should rule the country and not Moustapha Kemal Pasha. The tactics of these leaders are characterized by great caution. They have taken little or no action heretofore desiring to await the coming into effect of the

Lausanne Treaty in order to avoid the danger of placing Turkey in a disadvantageous position towards the Powers. They are now very discreetly spreading propaganda by means of agents who are working in various parts of Anatolia. Abdul Kader Bey [former governor of Ankara who was executed in 1926] . . . is working for the movement. The first definite move will be to force the dissolution of the Assembly and the holding of new elections which will doubtless return an even larger number of unruly Deputies than there are at present. Then will be the time for bringing out the idea of a constitutional monarch. It is interesting to note that it is proposed to bring back but one member of the House of Othman—the one selected as constitutional monarch. The others will not be allowed to return, but will be pensioned.¹⁰⁵

It is worth repeating that there is no independent confirmation for this intelligence. However, if accurate, this report is extremely valuable. At present, we do not have any reason to doubt the authenticity of the source. However, it is possible that for an unknown reason, Fahrettin Bey was feeding the U.S. embassy with false information. Nevertheless, it is equally possible that this information was correct. As such, the report brings Rauf Bey (one of the main leaders of the opposition) into the center of the conspiracy against the regime and confirms the fear of Mustafa Kemal of the existence of a secret organization for a regime change if not a counterrevolution.

In order to examine the accuracy of these documents, let us first place them in proper context. They were dated June 17 and July 26, 1924, just over three months after the abolition of the caliphate. We know that Rauf Bey and Refet Pasha, along with some other significant figures in the War of Independence (1919–1922), were increasingly upset with Mustafa Kemal and his new inner circle. We also know that four months after these reports, the first opposition party, the PRP, was established (November 17, 1924) and that Seyyid Sanussi was in Turkey with his small entourage. As it is known, he actively supported the nationalist movement in Turkey by issuing fatwas for the legitimacy of the Kemalist movement early on. After the abolition of the caliphate, he was involved in negotiations with Mustafa Kemal regarding the next caliph.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, it is historically possible that Osman Fahrettin Bey was in Turkey, where he was collecting intelligence.

Who was Osman Fahrettin Bey? Unfortunately, we do not have sufficient information as to his background and motivations. Mark L.

Bristol, the U.S. high commissioner in İstanbul, informs us that Osman Fahrettin Bey was an associate of people representing Bolsheviks and other Near Eastern countries to propagate Bolshevism.¹⁰⁷ With this background, it is possible that Osman Fahrettin Bey collected this information from foreign intelligence sources in Turkey. Perhaps he received such intelligence from the Bolshevik agents active in Turkey.

We know that the RPP was suspicious of Rauf Bey's loyalty to the regime in 1923 and accused him of not favoring republicanism. Rauf Bey refuted the accusation and maintained that he was in favor of people's sovereignty.¹⁰⁸ This document claims that in a meeting unknown to the government, Rauf Bey made speeches in favor of constitutional monarchy and that a secret organization was spreading antigovernment/pro-monarchist propaganda. We do know that both Rauf Bey and Refet Pasha held the view that Mustafa Kemal's regime was a "political dictatorship."¹⁰⁹ However, the RPP's accusations that Rauf Bey and Refet Pasha preferred constitutional monarchy over republic had never been independently confirmed until this document. The government must not have been privy to the information that was available to Osman Fahrettin Bey, for it would give the Independence Tribunals a more solid base for claims that opposition was in favor of a regime change by any means.

Another significant piece of information revealed in this document is the attitude of this mysterious organization toward the exiled Ottoman dynasty. Although these oppositional figures favored constitutional monarchy, they were willing to go only as far as allowing one member of the dynasty, the newly selected constitutional monarch, to return to Turkey. The other members would be compensated monetarily but would remain in exile. This attitude clearly demonstrates that even the opposition, which favored a form of monarchy, had limited tolerance of the dynasty, as they too regarded the Ottoman dynasty a worthy competitor for power.

Nevertheless, this information does not substantiate any claim that former CUP and PRP members were plotting to kill Mustafa Kemal; rather, they intended to pacify and replace him. In fact, İsmet Pasha later in his memoir hesitates to connect many of the accused with the İzmir assassination plot. Commenting on the guilt of the condemned, İsmet Pasha, years later, reflected, "I can only accept that Rauf Bey had an intuition for such a plot. I have never been convinced that he was involved in such a conspiracy."¹¹⁰ As to the CUP's involvement in the plot, İsmet Pasha is rather vague. The CUP members of the accused, according to İsmet Pasha, were "very dangerous people in

terms of their nature and temperament."¹¹¹ However, for Cavit Bey, one of the notables of the CUP, İsmet Pasha is more remorseful: "I have never entertained the possibility that Cavit Bey had any connection with the plot. What happened to him is the worst that could happen to a leader of a [political] organization."¹¹² In other words, İsmet Pasha admitted that Cavit Bey was sacrificed because of his leadership position in the CUP. İsmet Pasha's memoir registers a degree of hesitancy, wrapped in a surprise, to connect many of the executed members of the opposition to the plot.

CONCLUSION

There has been much debate about the nature and consequences of the İzmir plot against the life of Mustafa Kemal. Many conclusions in current scholarship are based on secondhand knowledge that cannot be fully sustained. The aim of this chapter was to categorize and scrutinize the available information on the plot and to promote further primary documents that would contribute to the debate. Conclusions that have been presented in this chapter can be put into three categories: those that are supported with conclusive evidence, those that are based on circumstantial or suggestive evidence, and those that are speculative. There should be little doubt that in 1926 there was an assassination plot against Mustafa Kemal in İzmir. Equally certain is that Mustafa Kemal manipulated this attempt to continue on his general policy of silencing the political opposition. As the previous chapter demonstrated, this process of silencing the political and intellectual opposition in the TGNA began a year before with the passing of the *Takrir-i Sükun*. We also know that the prosecution failed to prove the guilt of some convicted CUP and PRP members (such as Cavit and Rauf Beys) beyond any reasonable doubt. Moreover, we can safely state that there was visible discontent among people whose interests were harmed by the emergence of the new government and who were ideologically opposed to a republican and secular regime. Surely, some opposition members had personal reasons to oppose Mustafa Kemal and his authoritarian style of government.

Conclusions that we can draw based on circumstantial evidence are the following. We have only suggestive evidence that there was a well-organized and well-financed opposition in the country aiming at overthrowing the government and changing the regime. One can readily assume that the ultimate goal of the plot, if carried out, would be to

replace the government. It is probable that Ziya Hurşit was hoping to kill Mustafa Kemal and to create a power vacuum in the government, ultimately resulting in the replacement of those in power. We can also state that some members of the opposition (such as Hafız Mehmet) were aware of the plans to assassinate Mustafa Kemal, though they might not have known the specifics.

With reasonable confidence, we can also state that it was during the İzmir trials that Mustafa Kemal realized that he could use the plot as a pretext not only to silence the PRP leaders but also to eliminate the remnants of the CUP that had a great potential to weaken the government in the next elections in 1927. Otherwise, the condemned CUP members (besides Cavit, Şükrü, and Abdülkadir Beys) would be dealt with immediately along with the PRP members in İzmir. Unlike the tribunal's claim, there is no convincing evidence coming out of the İzmir trials that implicated a conspiracy organized by the CUP to overthrow the government. Encouraged by the lack of public outcry after the İzmir trials, the Independence Tribunal must have felt confident in taking on the CUP. However, the fact that a significant oppositional figure, Hüseyin Cahit (Yalçın), was found "not guilty" shows that the court was mindful of pushing their limits too far.¹¹³

It is interesting to note that İsmet Pasha's attitude toward the conspiracy trials of 1926 radically differed from his stance against the PRP after the Sheikh Said Revolt a year earlier. How can we explain his change of position toward the opposition? It is possible that İsmet Pasha was uneasy about the possibility that the Independence Tribunal would go out of control and destabilize the system. It is also possible that he was weary of the unknown reaction of the CUP's sympathizers.

Conclusions that can be considered "suggestive" include the following. It should be noted that "suggestive" does not mean incorrect; rather, it means based only on deductive reasoning. Therefore, it can only point to logical possibilities. For example, we can only speculate that Mustafa Kemal and a small group of his inner circle were aware of the specific plans for the plot. They decided to allow it to move forward with the preconceived aim that such a failed attempt would boost his waning popularity in the country and provide the government with a pretext to silence its opponents.

There are many other questions that can be answered only speculatively. For example, was there a master plan in the mind of Mustafa Kemal to eliminate the entire opposition? We know that he was unhappy with the PRP in parliament and the counterrevolutionary potential of the CUP network still active in the country. I submit,

however, that Mustafa Kemal advanced in his quest to silence the opposition only pragmatically. He surely wanted to push the members of the closed PRP out of the TGNA, where they still voted as an oppositional bloc. Erik Jan Zürcher concluded that Mustafa Kemal was also threatened by the prestige of some of the PRP members in the nationalist movement, a prestige that almost rivaled his own (such as that of Ali Fuat, Refet, Kazım Karabekir Pashas, and Rauf Bey). In addition, the social makeup and the followers of the PRP, which included the military elite, commercial groups, former bureaucrats, and so on, was a concern for him.¹¹⁴ Therefore, a period commencing with the Sheikh Said Revolt of 1925 was devoted almost entirely to silencing this opposition in parliament. However, he was also alarmed by the potential of the CUP network, especially those who refused to be absorbed by the RPP. The network, as it was proven time and again, was quite capable of carrying out extrajudicial/*komitadji* activities, such as political assassinations.¹¹⁵

A significant question needs to be posed here. Why was it that the CUP was not targeted after the Sheikh Said Revolt within the same context of the *Takrir-i Sükun*? The government had more reason to fear some CUP members than they did the PRP. I submit that one of the main reasons was the following. The RPP enjoyed the support and service of many former rank-and-file members of the CUP, and the government was not confident that the RPP could contain its members' reactions to the purging of their former leaders in 1925. However, their loyalty to the RPP government assured Mustafa Kemal that these former CUP members and their political interests were fully incorporated into the RPP regime. During the İzmir trials, it must have been decided that this problem should be solved once and for all. Such flexible political maneuverings are further evidence of Mustafa Kemal's practicality in establishing the new regime. It is a political pragmatism par excellence that was vital for the success of the establishment of modern Turkey as a Western-oriented secular republic. Mustafa Kemal's "vision" for the new Turkey must have been in constant negotiation with the opportunities that became available to him during his tenure as president of the Turkish Republic.

We know that high-level officers in the military remained loyal to the new regime. However, what was the position of the rank-and-file officers in relation to the Ankara trials and the purging of the CUP? We know that Mustafa Kemal was instrumental in securing a substantial pay raise for the armed forces from the TGNA on October 20, 1923, just nine days before the proclamation of the republic, and also in

forcing those military officers whose loyalty to the new regime was in question.¹¹⁶ We can speculate that the release of Kazım Karabekir, Ali Fuat, Refet Bele, and other generals calmed considerably the existing opposition in the military. The CUP-sympathetic military personnel were already forced out by the Damat Ferit governments prior to the republican regime. Therefore, expectedly, the military remained calm during this period.

Another significant question that requires reasonable speculation to answer is the nature of the CUP-PRP relationship. We know that CUP members were not a monolithic group; some of the members found employment in both the PRP and the RPP. However, was the PRP a front for those CUP members who wished to undermine the government? A British document can shed some light on this question. In a confidential conversation with Mr. Macartney of *The Times*, Hüseyin Cahit Bey of *Tanin* and a leader of the CUP stated on October 8, 1924 (little over a month before the formation of the PRP), that the popularity of Mustafa Kemal was on the wane and that the RPP did not enjoy support in the eastern provinces of the country. Therefore, Hüseyin Cahit suggested, an opposition party would be formed:¹¹⁷

[The new party was not intended] to reconstitute the old Committee of Union and Progress as the new opposition party, though undoubtedly many of the old organization would join it. Nor was it intended to afford cover to any anti-republican or other reactionary elements. The new party was to be an Opposition organized with the definite objection of opposing the Government on Constitutional and republican lines; and towards the President it would initiate no marked hostility, but would reserve its attitude until the President's attitude towards it was more clearly defined.¹¹⁸

Hüseyin Cahit Bey, who was spared from being executed in Ankara, seemed to confirm that many CUP members viewed the formation of the PRP with sympathy and intended to take part in it. However, the PRP was not an arm of the old CUP. In fact, many higher-level CUP members (such as Hüseyin Cahit and Cavit Beys) refrained from entering the ranks of the party. We can only speculate that CUP leaders had plans to form another party before the elections in 1927 and did not want to commit to the PRP. Once established, they might have thought, it would not be too difficult to recruit their former members back from the PRP and even perhaps from the RPP.

In any case, the Ankara trials effectively ended the short period of a power struggle in the early Turkish Republic. In the following decades until the switch to the multiparty system in 1945, the country was governed by a single party, the RPP. This period (1925–1926) created a political culture in Turkey in which even the subsequent governments in the multiparty system showed little or no regard for a healthy opposition. One can still see the remnants of this attitude in the present political environment in Turkey almost a century after it was initiated. The main difference is that Mustafa Kemal had a justified fear for a counterrevolution and for his life.