

## **Heroin, Organized Crime, and the Making of Modern Turkey**

**Review Number:** 1750

**Publish date:** Thursday, 16 April, 2015

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**ISBN:** 9780198716020

**Date of Publication:** 2014

**Price:** £65.00

**Pages:** 320pp.

**Publisher:** Oxford University Press

**Publisher url:** <http://ukcatalogue.oup.com/product/9780198716020.do>

**Place of Publication:** Oxford

**Reviewer:** Egemen B. Bezci

Ryan Gingeras' book *Heroin, Organized Crime and the Making of Modern Turkey* provides an original contribution to the history of modern Turkey, particularly regarding the question of continuity and rupture from the late Ottoman period to the Republic, by taking the country's opium production, security service and criminal underworld as its focus. Moreover, Gingeras tries to reveal the relationship between the country's interconnected underground criminal network of transnational heroin traders and the politicians and security officers. He argues that there has been a binary relationship between the Turkish intelligence apparatus and these criminal networks: the country's intelligence apparatus used these networks and gang members for several covert operations, which ultimately formed the country's deep state that committed arbitrary violence and extra-judiciary killings, while claiming to guard the Turkish state against 'internal and external' enemies. Gingeras argues that the Turkish Intelligence apparatus inherited its approach of exploiting the criminal networks for the sake of the *raison d'état*, from the Ottoman Empire's secret intelligence agency, Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa (The Special Organization) (p. 39). Thus, Gingeras, by focusing on the illegal opium trade and the criminal networks dwelling around this, surveys the complex web of relations within the Turkish domestic and foreign policy.

This book has five chapters. Each is dedicated to a phase in the historical development of the opium trade originating from Turkey and shows how it was shaped according to the increasing American and Turkish underworld connection, and the respective American and Turkish anti-narcotic policies. Moreover, at the end of each chapter Gingeras devotes a special section to conceptualizing the Turkish role in the global drug trade in the respective time period. His conceptualization of Turkish policies in the respective time periods, not only provides a framework for analysing Turkey's prominence for the American antinarcotic policies, but also reveals the difficulties in the intelligence liaison between Turkish and American officers. Gingeras also evaluates the origins of the Turkish criminal underworld. He traces back origins of the Turkish criminal underworld to the Ottoman campaign for centralization starting in the 19th century. He reveals that these gangs (Çete) initially emerged as a reaction both to Ottoman efforts to establish a tight centralized control over the Empire's vast territories ranging over three continents, and also as an ethnic reaction to the formation of nationalist paramilitary forces (mainly in the Balkans) and the drastic changes in the economic and social landscape due to internal immigration that occurred within the Empire. Gingeras thus accurately points out that the ethnic bonds and kinship affiliations which originated in the late Ottoman era also

flavoured the Turkish Republic's underworld in the 20th century. He particularly points out that although non-Muslim groups, such as the Greeks and Armenians, and to a limited extent Jewish groups, dominated the global drug trade originating from Turkey as late as the 1950s, subsequently the Laz syndicates (originating in the Black Sea region) as well as Kurdish gangs, took over the control of the various smuggling networks passing through the country (p. 123; p.86–7). These smuggling activities were not limited to narcotics but ranged in a wide spectrum from arms to tobacco, and even to tea and coffee.

Both the theme and scope of the book appealed to me as being intriguing for two distinct reasons. First, as a student of secret intelligence studies, as the book reveals extensive details about the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)'s predecessor, The Federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN)'s operations in Turkey. Moreover, the study offers insightful information on how the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) station in Turkey established close ties with the FBN and how both agencies closely cooperated in numerous covert operations. Indeed, the intelligence cooperation between the two agencies seemed to triumph. The CIA did not hesitate to use the FBN's ring of informants and FBN officers for its covert operations in the region. Moreover, the book reveals that the liaison between the FBN and the Turkish police, under the Directorate of Public Security (DPS), suffered much of the time from distrust and hesitancy over sharing information. Also, Gingeras reveals that although the FBN trained several Turkish officers in criminal intelligence and anti-narcotic law enforcement, the agency was also aware that the trainee Turkish officers was mostly conducting political espionage for the Turkish state even during their course of training. Second, Gingeras exposes the rise of Black Sea Laz Syndicates in the Turkish criminal underworld starting as early as 1920. For instance, one of the powerful figures in the drug trafficking Laz ?hsan (?hsan Sekban) rose in the ranks of the global drug trade and his name appeared in several CIA reports. Since my ancestors came from the Black Sea region, emigrating from Trabzon to settle in the outskirts of Istanbul around 100 years ago, I could relate many of the biographic details on the figures of the Black Sea underworld to the oral history that ran through my own family. It is particularly interesting to see how Black Sea seamen engaged in criminal activities, particularly smuggling, as a consequence of the destruction of their economic and social structures during the Russian-Ottoman wars and the First World War. Thus, Gingeras' book is particularly intriguing in the way it relates the oral history tradition with a more theoretical historical approach.

Gingeras' book is clearly the product of a serious investigation of the relevant primary archives in the United States, the United Kingdom and Turkey. The book is also enriched with memoirs and newspaper reports. Yet several problematic issues emerge pertaining to the available material. The intelligence documents from both CIA and DEA archives, depict the Turkish police and politicians engaging in corruption. But such a depiction of Turkish politics may reflect how much the American intelligence community and Foreign Service employed an orientalist lens in their assessment of Middle East countries. Such an approach results in missing certain pieces in the puzzle. For instance, when FBN agents met Servet Sürenkök, the head of DPS, to discuss complaints about their liaison process, Sürenkök did not act in welcoming terms to the FBN agents (p. 164). The FBN evaluated this situation as reflecting the 'Turkish Nationalistic character' and urged a reform in the Turkish police, including a change in its upper ranks. However, the reports missed out the fact that Sürenkök was a former military colonel and long-serving officer in the Turkey's secret intelligence organization (MEH). He was a highly respected individual who, as early as 1948, had authored a report on global geopolitics and Turkey's position in the post-war international structure.[\(1\)](#)

The FBN's report, which blamed their problems with the DPS on the Turks' intrinsic nationalism, misses the essential problem of rivalry and difference of approach between the Turkey's security agencies, namely military, secret intelligence and police. However, a more detailed elaboration on the difficulties of cooperation with Sürenkök, would also reveal how top officers from different roots within the country's

various intelligence agencies approached intelligence liaison with the United States.

Gingeras' other major argument is that Turkey's modern intelligence apparatus inherited several undesirable characteristics and traits from the Ottoman Empire's intelligence agency – the Special Organization. However, the book fails to address the issues surrounding the formation and the activities of Turkey's intelligence service. In particular, during the Turkish War of Independence, there were several secret intelligence cells operating for the Kemalist government. These networks were mostly assigned to delivering arms from the Soviets, and conducting espionage and counter-espionage against the Greek and British forces in Anatolia and Istanbul. Among these various organizations, the ones which followed in the path of the Ottoman Special Organization in terms of arbitrary violence were not greatly utilized by the Kemalist government; yet the Müdafâa-i Milliye (MM), a secret intelligence network that had distanced itself from the Young Turks' Committee for Progress and Union (CUP), was utilized and later integrated into the new Turkish state's intelligence apparatus.<sup>(2)</sup> Moreover, during the initial covert intelligence operations of the Ankara government in Mosul and Hatay, the intelligence officers were often criticized and pulled back from the missions on the grounds that their actions were 'maverick' and resembled the old practices of the Special Organization.<sup>(3)</sup> Numerous archival sources on these operations, and the extent to which the Turkish intelligence service engaged with paramilitary local groups, as well as Ankara's reactions towards using paramilitary forces, can be found in Turkey's Military archives (ATASE) archives based in Ankara, which Gingeras did not use for his book.<sup>(4)</sup> Gingeras states several times that there was a corrupt relationship between Turkish politicians and the intelligence service, bringing personal benefits for individuals on both sides, and that this resulted in the arbitrary use of the intelligence apparatus. However, he fails to refer to an incident from the first-hand testimony of the first Spymaster of the MEH, ?ükrü Ali Ö?el, who published an article describing how certain politicians attempted to use the intelligence apparatus for their personal benefit and that this made him resign from his post.<sup>(5)</sup>

Gingeras sheds new light on the intelligence liaison between the Turks, the British and Americans. Britain and Turkey established the Anglo-Turkish Security Bureau (Küçük Büro – Little Bureau in Turkish) as early as November 1940 <sup>(6)</sup>, while the Americans' OSS-Istanbul was founded in May 1943.<sup>(7)</sup> Significantly, the secret intelligence liaison between the Turks and the West involved utilizing the prominent smugglers in the region as well. For instance, Satvet Tozan emerges as a prominent figure both during the war and post-war period, who acted in the service of the Americans and British. Thus, Gingeras' book sheds light on the different approaches of the FBN and CIA in Turkey towards criminal networks. If Turkish archives were open to public investigation, it would be intriguing to reveal how Turkish police and intelligence service developed this liaison with their American and British counter-parts, and what extent the inter-agency rivalry and contradiction dominated this liaison. As it is, in Gingeras' book, he does not provide any information on such a rivalry and so, presumably, the United States records do not mention such rivalry. But if the author provides more elaboration on this, it would be a remarkable addition to our understanding of the liaison.

Gingeras draws the conclusion that the current debates about the 'deep state' and specific cases, such as Susurluk and Ergenekon, are closely connected to the Turkish intelligence agency's tendency to exploit criminal and paramilitary groups for its own purpose. Moreover, he concludes these networks were embedded and developed within NATO's Gladio operations, for arming paramilitary forces against Soviet aggression during the Cold War. He also adds that Turkish Intelligence carried on engaging with these paramilitary forces even after the end of the Cold War, utilizing them in the country's own counter-insurgency campaign. However, in the conclusion, although the author makes speculative claims on the operations of the Turkish security and intelligence service, he only cites journalistic sources to prove his claims. For instance, regarding the Susurluk accident of 1996, which revealed a corrupt relationship between politicians, criminal gangs and security officers, the author does not use the publicly available indictments, parliamentary testimonies and reports, but relies on journalistic books covering that topic. A similar approach is employed by the author when he elaborates on the Ergenekon case, commencing in 2007, when numerous figures from politics, the military, the police and the private sector were rounded up for allegedly attempting to overthrow the government. Moreover, the author makes a factual mistake by stating that

Ergenekon case was started when a cache of arms was discovered in a suburban town of Trabzon in June 2007 (p. 240). Actually, the arms were found in a suburb of İstanbul, namely Ümraniye, which is almost 1000 miles west of Trabzon. Also, the investigation, as apparent in the publicly accessible indictments, could not link the group with an ‘ugly series of state-executed crimes’. Furthermore, Ergenekon and other ‘coup plot cases’ were recently dissolved. Thus the conclusion of Gingeras’ book remains rather speculative on the ‘Turkish deep state’. Rather than looking for a Turkish deep state grandfathered from the Ottoman Empire, instead paying attention to corruption, inter-agency rivalries, personnel feuds between politicians and the arbitrary use of violence for individual aspirations would save the Turkish historiography from the widely embraced conspiracy mentality that dominates the Turkish academia as well as public and political spheres. Gingeras’ book is a remarkable contribution that paves the path for further studies on the topic.

## Notes

1. Servet Sürenk k, *Jeopolitik ‘Siyasi Coğrafya’ Anlamı* (Ankara, 1948).[Back to \(1\)](#)
2. Necdet Ekinci, ‘Kurtuluş Savaşı’nda İstanbul ve Anadolu’daki Türk ve Düman Gizli Faaliyetleri’, *Ankara Üniversitesi Türk İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü Atatürk Yolu Dergisi*, 14 (1994), 167–84.[Back to \(2\)](#)
3. Zekeriya Türkmen, ‘Özdemir Bey’in Musul Harekâtı ve İngilizlerin Karşı Tedbirleri (1921–1923)’, *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, 17 (2001), 49–80.[Back to \(3\)](#)
4. Especially on Hatay issue more archival source could be found in the series following this dispatch: ATASE archives. No: 7-037-1, ‘Information by MAH’s İükrü Ali Ögel’, Telegram from MAH, 16 January 1937.[Back to \(4\)](#)
5. İükrü Âli Ögel, ‘Millî Emniyet Hizmeti Nasıl Kuruldu?’, *Türk Kültürü*, 128 (June 1973), 605–7.[Back to \(15\)](#)
6. H.O. Dovey, ‘The intelligence war in Turkey’, *Intelligence and National Security*, 9 (1994), 59–87.[Back to \(6\)](#)
7. Barry M. Rubin, *Istanbul Intrigues* (New York, NY, 1992), p. 116.[Back to \(7\)](#)

The author is happy to accept this review and does not wish to comment further.

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