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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER

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MEMORANDUM

TURKEY UNDER MARTIAL LAW



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*Overview*

*The government's resort to martial law on Monday to quell Turkey's spiralling political violence was a painful political and ideological step for socialist-minded Prime Minister Ecevit. The move holds dangers for his government and opportunities for his political rivals if the tough action proves unsuccessful. Whether martial law will restore domestic tranquility will depend as much on the determination of extremists to persist as in the capabilities of Turkey's no-nonsense military.*



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The imposition of martial law for the third time since World War II, and the second in this decade, became official December 26 when the Grand National Assembly concurred. Ecevit had tried a series of more moderate measures during his first year in office aimed at curbing violence while preserving constitutional liberties, but they failed on both counts. They included a streamlining of the judicial system, improvements in law enforcement methods and personnel including the purging of those associated with



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25X1 extremist groups, and the selective use of military troops to augment the police in outlying provinces. Most recently, Ecevit banned the youth wing of Alpaslan Turkes' neo-facist National Action Party, which has spearheaded the violence from the right. That over 600 people were killed during Ecevit's first year in office--more than double the rate of deaths in the last year of his predecessor's reign--attests to this failure. [redacted]

#### Ecevit Wary of Martial Law

Ecevit's resistance to declaring martial law until the weekend disturbances in Maras left nearly 100 dead is rooted in politics and ideology. The Prime Minister had strongly criticized earlier martial law periods for their excesses, particularly against members of the left wing of his party who suffered most. In addition, Ecevit has exhibited a strong personal commitment to democracy and against military or other forms of authoritarian rule. Indications are that Ecevit consented to martial law only after a majority of his cabinet, and possibly the military as well, came out strongly in its favor. [redacted]

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#### Causes of Violence

Political violence in Turkey has numerous causes. These include the sharp cleavage between leftist "modernizers" and Islamic traditionalists and nationalists leading to the emergence of rival extremist groups. Their ranks have been augmented with youths radicalized by an outmoded educational system and poor job prospects. In addition to left-right differences and student discontent, the violence has been fueled by sectarian disputes between Sunni and Shiite Muslims and by Kurdish separatist aspirations in the impoverished eastern provinces where economic discontent obviously also plays a role. Whereas the violence in the large urban areas has been directed by one extremist faction against another and has taken the form of "gang warfare," that in the east has involved large numbers of people, in part because law enforcement is less efficient and the people are more malleable. [redacted]

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#### Extreme Right Defiant?

The more conservative opposition parties have charged Ecevit with coddling leftist extremists and there is little doubt that his government has been more vigorous in quelling rightist-inspired violence, particularly in the cities. The most recent pattern in the eastern provinces, however, has been one in which extreme rightists--possibly associated with Turkes--have incited the politically more conservative Sunni Muslims to attack members of the poorer Shiite minority who tend to support Ecevit's party or other leftist groups. [redacted]

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Ecevit has implied that the rioting in Maras was organized by Turkes' followers and there are indications he may be right. Ecevit's charges have fueled talk about a Turkes conspiracy to create disorder leading to the fall of the government and military intervention and has raised the possibility of additional government measures against Turkes' party. [ ]

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### Outlook

The immediate outlook for the Ecevit government, and in the longer term, for Turkish democracy, will depend on how effective martial law is in curbing domestic strife. Should the Turkish military secure peace, if only a temporary one, Ecevit will have bought time--time to attend to the underlying causes of violence and to related problems such as Turkey's failing economy, which is experiencing inflation and unemployment rates of over 50 percent and 20 percent respectively as well as severe foreign exchange shortages. The military authorities will be aided by the fact that extremist leaders, including Turkes, have been reluctant openly to incite their followers to storm the barricades. Indeed, Turkes has even denied any link with extreme rightist gangs. Nonetheless, the need to share power with military authorities in the 13 affected provinces could create strains in the government's razor thin parliamentary majority of two seats. [ ]

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Should extremist factions persistently challenge the martial law regime, Ecevit's prospects may quickly deteriorate. He will be subjected to conflicting pressures from within his government, his party, and the military, and may ultimately face the dilemma either of backtracking or adopting even more repressive measures. In such circumstances, his government would be in jeopardy, and it is difficult to know what might follow it. There are serious obstacles to most of the alternatives that have been suggested, such as a grand coalition, a government of "technicians", or a more active role for the President. And should none of these materialize, the military might rapidly lose its reluctance to try again the unhappy experiment in direct rule that it tried in 1971. [ ]

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