Remembering the Forgotten Genocide: Armenia in the First World War.

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Remembering the Forgotten Genocide: Armenia in the First World War

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by
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ABSTRACT

Remembering the Forgotten Genocide: Armenia in the First World War

by

Dana Renee Smythe

The Ottoman Empire was in serious decline by the late nineteenth century. Years of misrule, war, and oppression of its various nationalities had virtually driven the Turks from Europe, leaving the weakened Empire on the verge of collapse. By the 1870s the Armenians were the most troubling group, having gained international sympathy at the Congress of Berlin. As a result, violence against the Armenians had escalated dramatically by the turn of the century. They felt, however, that their fortune had changed when the liberal Young Turks seized power from the Sultan in 1908. Unfortunately, the Young Turks had a much more ominous plan for the Armenians. When they entered World War I as an ally of the Central Powers, they decided to use the cover of war to exterminate the Ottoman Armenians. Over one million Armenians were murdered, and the Turkish government’s crimes went unpunished in the postwar world.
DEDICATION

To my husband Mike,

the love of my life,

and

To my parents, E. C. and Ada Woodward,

for always encouraging me to follow my dreams
I want to thank Dr. Ronnie Day and Dr. Dale Schmitt for editing and proofreading my thesis. I especially want to thank Dr. Stephen Fritz for his invaluable assistance and encouragement while I was writing my thesis. His comments were insightful and often gave me a new direction to go in when I had writer’s block. He also very graciously translated the German documents in Chapter Three that provided me with a much better and more well-rounded understanding of the Armenian situation during World War I. Thanks again, Dr. Fritz.
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Figure 1. The Ottoman Empire At Its Greatest Extent. (Source, Collier’s Encyclopedia, 4th ed., s.v. “Turkey.”)
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE ARMENIAN QUESTION, 1875-1914

The Ottoman Empire was in a rapid state of decline in the nineteenth century due to years of misrule, corruption, and the persecution of its various minorities. As the different ethnic groups within the Empire came into contact with the ideas of the French Revolution, they became much more vocal about their discontent with the Sublime Porte, and, of all the nationalities, the Serbs and the Greeks were the first to advocate independence from the Ottoman Empire. ¹ Other groups, such as the Armenians, did not want to separate from the Empire but rather called for reform within the Ottoman government itself.²

The Armenians were an ancient race who had resided in the Caucasus nearly two thousand years before the invading Turks conquered their land in the sixteenth century. A number of wars between Russia and the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, had resulted in the Armenians’ division between the two Empires. As a whole, the Armenians were intelligent and thrifty, and their trade often brought them into contact with Western Europe, a fact that was unappreciated by the Turks who resented their education and wealth. Consequently, they often referred to the Armenians as the “Jews” of the Middle East. Despite being a progressive element within the Ottoman Empire, the Armenians, because

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of their Christian faith, were treated like second class citizens, a fact that they were desperately trying to change by the nineteenth century.³

The Ottoman yoke had never been easy for either its Moslem or Christian subjects to bear. The ruling classes had bought off the courts and the police. Government positions and special privileges were doled out in return for the courts and the police ignoring the abuses in the system that were occurring. Therefore, the rulers of Turkey were able to live as extravagantly as they pleased at the expense of their subjects who had to endure heavy taxation.⁴ Although life in the Ottoman Empire was difficult for all of its inhabitants, it was doubly hard for the Christian population which was relegated to a type of permanent underclass.⁵ Even though Islam did not discriminate on the basis of race or economic factors, it did believe that there were three basic inequalities in life. Women were inferior to men; slaves were inferior to their masters; and non-Muslims or infidels were inferior to Muslims. While women and slaves could not change their standing in society, Christians and Jews could convert to Islam. Non-Muslims did not have to remain second-class citizens if they didn’t want to. Therefore, those who chose not to convert, in the opinion of the Muslim ruling class, had no right to complain about being persecuted.⁶ Christians were in an impossible situation. They were subject to every form of discrimination and injustice imaginable, yet because Muslims dominated society and because the gendarmes and courts had been co-opted, they were without recourse. Although their Muslim counterparts


⁴ Yale, 26.

⁵ Suny, 97.

⁶ Ibid.
were under the same financial burden, they remained unsympathetic to and often took advantage of the Christians in the Empire.\textsuperscript{7}

By the 1870s the decadence of the government and the crushing taxation of its subjects had begun to take its toll. Of all the provinces, the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina was the worst due to poor economic conditions and to Serbian revolutionaries who were encouraging them to revolt against the Ottoman Empire. A bad harvest in 1874 proved to be the last straw, as Christian peasants armed themselves and engaged local Turkish gendarmes in a violent confrontation.\textsuperscript{8}

Inspired by the insurrection in Bosnia-Herzegovina, dissatisfied elements among the Christian population in Bulgaria also planned to join the fray in 1876. Unfortunately, the Turkish government discovered the plot before it could be put into motion, and a massacre of Bulgarian men, women, and children quickly followed. Although no exact figures exist concerning the number murdered, it is estimated that at least ten thousand Bulgarians were killed.\textsuperscript{9}

News of the massacres shocked the Great Powers, but they hesitated to become involved in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire. Ever since the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the governments of Great Britain, France, Austria-Hungary, and Russia had attempted to maintain the status quo in regard to the map of Europe.\textsuperscript{10} By the middle of the century, however, the Concert of Europe had broken down because of Russia’s interest in this very region. Ever since

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 98.

\textsuperscript{8} Yale, 84-85.

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 85-86.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 84.
Russia had acquired control of the Black Sea, the nation had desired to gain access to a warm-water port, specifically the Mediterranean, but this could only be accomplished by obtaining control of the Dardanelles. However, Great Britain and France were suspicious of Russia’s intentions, and they were afraid that the huge Eastern power would threaten their spheres of influence in the Middle East and Asia. Consequently, Britain and France fought against Russia in the Crimean War, supposedly to protect the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire. Russia was defeated, and for the next twenty years the country did not make any more attempts to gain access to the Straits.\textsuperscript{11} However, they remained intensely interested in the fate of the Christian population of the Ottoman Empire, especially the Slavs and the Armenians, and were angered by the Sublime Porte’s continued mistreatment of their co-religionists.

The summer of 1876 witnessed a number of upheavals in the Turkish government. Frustrated by the inefficiency and corruption of Sultan Ahmid Aziz and his Cabinet, conspirators, probably at the behest of two new Cabinet members, Hussein Avni and Midhat Pasha, kidnapped and deposed the Sultan in May. The following month he mysteriously died. His death was eventually ruled a suicide, although this ruling remains suspect. Murad V succeeded Aziz. Two months after his ascension to the throne, he was declared insane, and, on August 31, he too was deposed and replaced by his half-brother Abdul Hamid II.\textsuperscript{12}

Aware that the world was outraged by the atrocities in Bulgaria and concerned for the safety of the Balkan Christians, Abdul Hamid was afraid that the European Powers were going to intervene and possibly partition the Ottoman Empire. So far Great Britain and France had been the protector of Turkey, but the Sultan knew that their motives weren’t entirely altruistic. If


\textsuperscript{12} Yale, 89.
Britain and France were able to reach an agreement with Russia concerning a division of the spoils, then the Ottoman Empire’s fate would be sealed. Determined to prevent this, Abdul Hamid appeared to concede to the Western Powers’ demands for reform. The Sultan knew that the leaders of the Great Powers were scheduled to meet in December 1876 to decide what to do about the situation in Turkey. Realizing that he did not have much time to act, Hamid abruptly issued the first Turkish constitution the same month, promising reform and equality to all of the Empire’s inhabitants.13

The Sultan’s strategic move also allowed the governments of Britain and France to continue to support the Ottoman Empire without alienating their constituents—a plan which had seemed impossible in light of the Bulgarian massacres.14 Although Britain and France were certainly interested in the Ottoman Empire’s territory, the two nations had also found it very profitable to loan the nearly bankrupt country money at very high interest rates. This, along with their fear of Russia, was one of their primary reasons for preventing the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century.15 The greatest mistake that the British and French governments made was in believing that Hamid was sincere. Not only were they satisfied with the liberal constitution that he promulgated, they also encouraged him to flaunt his alliance with them in the face of the Russian government.16 Of course, this greatly angered the Russians, who decided that the time had come for more direct action.


14 Yale, 89-90.

15 Ibid., 84.

16 Craig, 252-253.
After ensuring in January 1877 that Austria-Hungary would not join forces with Great Britain against them, the Russians decided to come to the aid of nearly defeated Serbia and Montenegro, which had joined Bosnia and Herzegovina in support of their revolt against the Ottoman government. In April 1877 after completing military preparations, the Russians attacked Turkey, fully expecting to be in Constantinople within a month’s time. However, the Turks showed more resistance than the Russians had anticipated. The Turks were able to entrench themselves in the Bulgarian city of Plevna, which forced the Russians to turn from their march towards Constantinople in order to protect their flank. The Turkish Army was able to resist the Russian Army’s advance for several months, causing the Russian government to fear that Great Britain would come to the aid of the Turks if they continued to withstand the Russian onslaught. English Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli did want to join the conflict, but strong opposition from several Cabinet members prevented him from taking action. The English people also were calling for war against Russia. Public opinion, which only recently had been horrified by the Turkish massacre of the Bulgarians, quickly shifted to the side of the Turks as news of their protracted struggle against the Russians at Plevna reached Britain and as suspicion of Russia’s intentions heightened.

The Russian Army was finally able to break the Turks’ resistance in the winter of 1878 and on February 19, 1878, the Ottoman government was forced to sign the Treaty of San

17 Yale, 88-90.
18 Craig, 253-254.
19 Yale, 89-90.
20 Ibid., 86.
21 Ibid., 88.
According to the terms of the treaty, Russia would retain the areas in the Caucasus that she had occupied—Kars, Batum, Ardahan, as well as Bayazit and Alashkert. Bulgaria would become autonomous, and Austria-Hungary and Russia would jointly supervise Bosnia and Herzegovina. Furthermore, Article 16 of the Treaty stated that the Russian Army would continue to occupy the Armenian provinces until the Ottoman government implemented reforms. Although the Armenians were heartened by the treaty, Great Britain and Austria-Hungary were displeased by the Russian victory and by their conditions for peace. When Austria-Hungary promised to remain neutral during the Russo-Turkish War, she did so because Russia had promised to let her solely supervise the provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Treaty of San Stefano appeared to negate that arrangement. Great Britain was so angered by the terms of the treaty that she immediately dispatched ships to the Straits to signal her displeasure to the Russian government. The reaction of Lord Salisbury, the British Foreign Secretary, epitomizes the response of most of the British Cabinet to the Treaty of San Stefano:

It is impossible that the British government should look with indifference upon these changes in Asiatic Turkey…The defeat of Turkish arms and the mere retention by Russia of Batum, Kars, and Ardahan would produce among the populations of Syria, Asia Minor and Mesopotamia, a general belief in the decadence of Turkey, and a devotion to Russia—the power which was in the ascendant. Such a state of feeling would not be welcome to Britain…

22 Ibid., 89-90.

23 Nassibian, 6-7.

24 Craig, 254.

25 Ibid.

26 Nassibian, 6-7.
Weary from fighting the Turks and not wanting to engage the powerful British navy, Russia agreed to a conference to modify the terms of the Treaty of San Stefano.\textsuperscript{27} At this point, Prince Otto von Bismarck, chancellor of the newly-unified Germany, stepped in. Because Germany was allied with both Austria-Hungary and Russia, Bismarck feared the position that Germany would be in if hostilities broke out between his two allies. Consequently, he offered to mediate the dispute in the German capital of Berlin.\textsuperscript{28}

On June 13, 1878, the Treaty of Berlin was signed, thoroughly revising the Treaty of San Stefano. Austria-Hungary was awarded sole supervision of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Serbia was recognized as an independent state, and Bulgaria became autonomous, although she received much less land than had originally been awarded to her in the Treaty of San Stefano. Russia was allowed to keep Kars, Ardahan, and Batum, but she still did not gain control of the Straits.\textsuperscript{29} Yet of all the Powers, Great Britain, although she hadn’t even been involved in the conflict, was really the big winner in the Treaty of Berlin. In a secret conference with the Turks—the Cyprus Convention—the Turks agreed to let the British occupy the island of Cyprus in return for British protection from Russian aggression in Asiatic Turkey. In exchange, the Turks promised to begin implementing reforms in regard to its Christian minorities.\textsuperscript{30}

The Congress of Berlin was instrumental in internationalizing the Armenian Question.\textsuperscript{31} The world was shocked to learn of the maltreatment of the tiny Christian minority living in

\footnotesize{
\textsuperscript{27} Craig, 255.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 254-255.

\textsuperscript{29} Yale, 90-91.

\textsuperscript{30} Nassibian, 7.

}
eastern Turkey. Just as revisions were made to other articles of the Treaty of San Stefano, Article 16 was no exception. On the surface there didn’t appear to be much difference between Article 16 and Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin, but Akaby Nassibian, author of *Britain and the Armenian Question: 1915-1923*, disagrees with such a conclusion. He maintains that the subsequent revision of Article 16 had severe ramifications for the Armenians.\(^{32}\)

According to the original Article, the Russian Army, which occupied the eastern provinces, would ensure that the Ottoman government carried out the necessary reforms, including protecting the Armenians from marauding Kurds and Circassians. Ottoman officials were aware that the Russian Army would react swiftly and deal severely with any violation of the treaty. The Treaty of Berlin, however, reversed this situation. According to Article 61, the signatory powers would act together to make sure that the Ottoman government enacted the intended reforms.\(^{33}\) However, because of the distance to Armenia, none of the powers, with the exception of Russia, had the ability or the desire to enforce the terms of the treaty if Sultan Abdul Hamid II did not uphold his part of the deal.\(^{34}\) Despite this fact, the Russian Army was ordered to evacuate the Armenian provinces immediately. Great Britain was particularly adamant about this point, causing some to question just how concerned the British government really was about the Armenians’ situation.

In reality Article 16 was revised not out of concern for the Christians living under Ottoman rule but rather out of the desire to protect the British Empire in the Far East, especially India. British officers were afraid that if the Russian Army continued to occupy Anatolia, they

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\(^{32}\) Nassibian, 9.


\(^{34}\) Nassibian, 9.
could threaten the head of the Persian Gulf and consequently contact with India, by way of the valleys of the Euphrates and the Tigris. A Russian conquest of Armenia also right have an adverse moral effect on Britain’s Muslim subjects in India. Sir A.H. Layard, the British ambassador, issued the following warning to the British government: “The consequence [of a Russian conquest of Armenia] would be the greatest blow ever struck at the British Empire.”

Although this is an exaggeration, the British government believed that if the Russian Army remained in Armenia the Russians would gain control of all of Asia Minor and might threaten Great Britain’s most prized colonial possession—India. For these reasons, the British government insisted on amending Article 16 of the Treaty of San Stefano, with little regard for how this might affect the Armenian population.

Not content for Russian troops merely to evacuate Anatolia, the British were determined to prevent any further attempts by the Russians to undermine the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, representatives from Great Britain and the Ottoman Empire began secret negotiations in an effort to create an arrangement that would prevent any further loss of territory in Asiatic Turkey. Article 1 of the Cyprus Convention, which interestingly was signed on June 4, 1878, nine days before the signing of the Treaty of Berlin, laid out the terms between the two parties. It stated:

if any attempt shall be made at any future time by Russia to take possession of any further territories of His Imperial Majesty the Sultan in Asia, as fixed by the Definitive Treaty of Peace, England engages to join His Imperial Majesty the Sultan in defending them by force of arms. In return, His Imperial Majesty the Sultan promises to England to introduce necessary reforms, to be agreed upon later between the two

35 Ibid., 5.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
Powers, into the government, and for the protection of the Christian and other subjects of the Porte in these territories; and in order to enable England to make necessary provision for executing her engagement, His Imperial Majesty the Sultan further consents to assign the Island of Cyprus to be occupied and administered by England.38

The Cyprus Convention was a bitter blow to the Russian government. It angered them that Great Britain could gain such a major territorial concession without committing any troops or firing any bullets. However, the British, despite their diplomatic coup, were oblivious as to how difficult it would be to follow the course of action that they had set upon. It would have been a much more viable arrangement if Sultan Abdul Hamid II had been serious about implementing reforms. Unfortunately, he was not.39

Despite the revisions to Article 16, both the Treaty of San Stefano and the Treaty of Berlin had raised the hopes of the Armenian population. They believed that with the most powerful countries in the world mediating on their behalf Abdul Hamid would have no choice but to initiate reform. What they did not realize was that, although they might express their disapproval of the Ottoman government, none of the Great Powers were concerned enough actually to act on behalf of the Armenians. The British government had insisted on reform as one of the terms of the Cyprus Convention because it needed to justify its continued alliance with the Ottoman Empire to their citizens. Furthermore, mutual jealousies among the Great Powers prevented them from acting together to apply sufficient pressure on the Sultan to make certain that the reforms were actually carried out.40

38 Ibid., 7-8.
39 Ibid., 10.
40 Ibid., 17.
Abdul Hamid was a wily politician, and he was aware of the inconsistencies in the Cyprus Convention and the Treaty of Berlin. How could Great Britain be a protector of both the Ottoman Empire and the Armenians, especially if the Sublime Porte continued to persecute its Christian subjects?\(^41\) Would the British really terminate their alliance with the Ottoman Empire and jeopardize their influence in the Far East for the Armenians, a tiny minority that could offer nothing in return? Abdul Hamid was convinced that they would not. They would not send their troops to such a distant location, and the British certainly wouldn’t appeal to the Russians for help.

Consequently, the Sultan chose to maintain what Ronald Grigor Suny has termed the cruel status quo.\(^42\) The Russo-Turkish War gave him the perfect opportunity to suspend the 1876 constitution and to dismiss the representative parliament that he had established.\(^43\) The Armenians’ complaints and appeals for help to the European Powers also increasingly irritated the new Sultan. Abdul Hamid remained fearful of European intervention, and he was determined to protect the integrity of the Ottoman Empire without any outside help. The Great Powers’ intervention on behalf of the Balkan Christians had led to a dramatic reduction in the Ottoman Empire’s European territory. Although Abdul Hamid was unable to prevent the loss of his European possessions, he resolved not to make the same mistake with the Armenians.\(^44\)

Therefore, instead of implementing reform, he decided to crush what he believed were the first stirrings of an Armenian insurrection.

\(^{41}\) Yale, 91.

\(^{42}\) Suny, 105.

\(^{43}\) Yale, 107.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 91-92.
Abdul Hamid had every reason to be confident that he would be successful, especially because he had developed friendly relations with the government of newly-unified Germany. At first glance, it isn’t readily apparent what Germany and Ottoman Turkey had in common that would cause them to draw closer to each other. Germany had only achieved unification in 1871 after defeating France in the Franco-Prussian War. The nation appeared to be in its ascendancy, while the Ottoman Empire was in a rapid state of decline, as its various nationalities seethed with discontent. Yet, for all of their differences, the two countries were drawn together by one common fear—the Great Powers. Both realized that the Great Powers would only gain from their respective dismemberment.

After centuries of benefiting from German weakness, the French were less than thrilled with German unification, especially because it came at their expense. Otto von Bismarck, the first chancellor of Germany, realized the potential threat that France posed. He was particularly dismayed by how quickly the French had recovered from their losses during the Franco-Prussian War. Fearing French retaliation, Bismarck tested the waters in England and Russia to see if the two countries would remain neutral if war broke out once again between Germany and France. Not surprisingly, the governments of Great Britain and Russia reacted negatively to the possibility of renewed conflict. For this reason, Bismarck turned his attention eastward to the Ottoman Empire, seeking to gain political support that would contribute to the isolation of France.45

Therefore, with the backing of Germany, Abdul Hamid set out to defy both the Treaty of Berlin and the Cyprus Convention. By 1881, the Great Powers, aware that the Porte was determined to rule its subjects in whatever manner it chose and embarrassed by their inability or

unwillingness to help, realized the futility of continuing to protest the Ottoman government’s mistreatment of the Armenians. When Austria suggested that further objections were pointless, the European Powers chose to discontinue their mediation on behalf of the Armenians. Even Russia, the Armenians’ traditional protector, deserted them after the assassination in 1881 of Tsar Alexander II at the hand of revolutionaries. The government of Alexander III was determined to stamp out any progressive movement within Russia, and unfortunately the Armenians fell into such a category. Thus, for over a decade, the Armenians were abandoned to their fate under Abdul Hamid.

During this period of dormancy, two very different groups arose within the Ottoman Empire that opposed the policies of Abdul Hamid. These two groups, the Hunchak Party and Ittihad ve Terakki, were both committed to overthrowing the reigning Sultan, but their similarities ended there. The Great Powers’ decision to withdraw from Armenian affairs was very disillusioning for the tiny Christian minority, who had counted on the Powers to improve their situation. Consequently, a small group of Armenians decided that freedom for their people would only come as a result of their own efforts, and the Hunchak Party was formed in 1887. The Hunchaks were the first major Armenian Revolutionary Party, and they believed that the Ottoman government would never grant them equality within the Empire. Therefore, one of their primary goals was the creation of an independent Armenian homeland.

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47 Yale, 124.

48 Nassibian, 18.

49 Suny, 99.
Ittihad ve Terakki, or Union and Progress, also developed during this time. This group was made up primarily of Turkish students, who believed that Sultan Abdul Hamid had to be overthrown and reforms implemented if the Ottoman Empire were to survive into the twentieth century. Their main concern was the territorial disintegration of the Empire. They, like the Sultan, were afraid that the European Powers would partition Turkey, and they were appalled that minorities within the Empire would appeal to the Powers for help.\textsuperscript{50} These differences between the Armenian revolutionaries and the Committee of Union and Progress would eventually lead to hostilities and ultimately the first attempted genocide of the twentieth century. However, during the nineteenth century, both groups concentrated on the same objective—ridding the Empire of Sultan Abdul Hamid.

The Hunchaks realized that they were not strong enough to challenge the Ottoman government’s authority directly. They decided, therefore, to engage in subversive activity. Members of the Party knew that the Sublime Porte would react harshly, indiscriminately punishing the innocent as well as the guilty. However, the Hunchaks felt that this was the sacrifice that had to be made if the Armenian people were ever going to be free from the repressive control of the Turks. They were determined to create a conflict which the Great Powers could not ignore.\textsuperscript{51}


\textsuperscript{51} Suny, 105.
The Hunchak Party’s suspicions of the Sultan appeared justified when Abdul Hamid made a radical decision in 1891.\textsuperscript{52} The Sultan was convinced that if the Armenian revolutionaries were not dealt with swiftly their appeals to the Great Powers would lead to a further reduction in Ottoman territory. Therefore, he decided to support the Kurds, another stateless people, who had been traditional enemies of the Armenians for centuries, in their persecution of the Armenians. Abdul Hamid ordered Turkish military officers to organize Kurdish villagers into irregular armed units. The Kurdish units were known as \textit{Hamidiye}, and they were given special uniforms and repeating rifles to use against the Armenians, who were prohibited from owning weapons.

Ironically, the Kurds were originally considered to be more of a threat to Ottoman internal stability than the Armenians. They had revolted repeatedly throughout the nineteenth century and had often assisted invading Russian armies during the various Russo-Turkish Wars. Although the Turkish Army had always been able to suppress these insurrections, the Kurds were still virtually autonomous in mountainous eastern Anatolia, and they often used their power against the Armenians with little interference from the Ottoman government.\textsuperscript{53}

Armenians were often forced to pay taxes to the Kurdish leaders. They also were required to work a certain number of days per week for the Kurds, and they had to board and feed them in their own villages during the winter months. In certain areas, Armenians were even sold like animals, while the Kurds stole their houses and property.\textsuperscript{54} Abdul Hamid’s decision to support the Kurds gave official government sanction to these activities. Although the Armenians


\textsuperscript{53} Suny, 104.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
had clearly been more loyal to the Empire, the Sultan chose to support the Kurds because they too were of the Muslim faith. By doing so, he hoped simultaneously to eliminate two problems. He believed that his decision would guarantee the Kurds’ loyalty to the Empire in the future, while at the same time he would use them to silence the Armenians once and for all.\footnote{Ibid., 105.}

The violence between the Kurds and the Armenians continued to escalate in the 1890s. The most important battle between the two groups occurred in the summer of 1893 when they clashed in the Armenian subdistrict of Sassun. The hostilities began when the peasants of Sassun refused to pay the additional tribute—\textit{hafir}—to the Kurds.\footnote{Nassibian, 19.} Fighting broke out, and Turkish soldiers were called in to restore order. However, when the troops arrived, they only arrested Armenians and then proceeded to plunder the Armenians’ belongings. They then reported back to Bitlis that the Armenians were in a state of revolt. The remaining peasants fled to the mountains until the following spring, hoping to escape further violence. However, when they returned, they refused to pay taxes to the Ottoman government because the state had not fulfilled its obligation to protect them from the Kurds. The Turkish army and the \textit{Hamidiye} returned to Sassun, and a series of massacres began.\footnote{Suny, 105-106.}

For the first time in over a decade, the European Powers and the United States openly condemned the Turkish government’s actions against the Armenian population, and a commission of inquiry was established to investigate the situation in Sassun. The members of the committee concluded that the Sassunites had only acted in self-defense, but the Sublime
Porte continued to maintain that the measures it had taken against the Sassunites were necessary because they were in a state of rebellion.\textsuperscript{58}

The conflict in Sassun forced the Great Powers to look once again at the Armenian Question. However, by this time, a number of changes had occurred in the European alliance system, and they were reflected in how the European Powers responded to the crisis in Anatolia. The governments of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy—the Triple Alliance—all refused to participate in a conference to decide what should be done about the Ottoman Empire’s latest misdeeds.\textsuperscript{59} As early as the 1890s, Europe was already dividing up into two camps, a process initiated by the rapprochement between Russia and France in 1894. This move was unsurprising to at least one man, Otto von Bismarck. Bismarck’s primary goal as German chancellor had been to keep France isolated. He did this by allying with both Russia and Austria-Hungary. However, Kaiser William II did not see the wisdom in this approach. Therefore, he did not renew Germany’s Reinsurance Treaty with Russia, giving France the perfect opportunity to end her isolation.\textsuperscript{60}

William II also apparently had his own agenda where the Ottoman Empire was concerned. The Kaiser’s principal goal was to establish a “Mitteleuropa,” a central European sphere of influence largely for economic purposes that would extend from the Baltic to the Persian Gulf. He planned to accomplish this by building the Berlin-to-Baghdad railway. The Kaiser felt that Germany had been shortchanged because Great Britain and France had already seized the best colonies for themselves, but he believed that the construction of this railway

\textsuperscript{58} Hovannisian, \textit{Armenia: on the Road to Independence}, 27.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 27-28.

\textsuperscript{60} Craig, 426.
would help even things up a bit. The railway, which would run through the Ottoman Empire, would link the continents of Europe and Asia. However, in order to put his lofty plan into action, William needed to gain and to keep the favor of the Sultan. He did this by offering to finance the construction of the railway and by giving much-needed capital to the Ottoman government. The Sultan finally conceded to this plan in 1898 after a personal visit from the Kaiser. The British and the Russians were furious with the Germans because they were interested in exploiting this region themselves. William’s strategy not to alienate Abdul Hamid over the Armenian situation in 1894, therefore, succeeded in the long run. Consequently, only Great Britain, France, and Russia chose to pursue the matter with the Sublime Porte.

In the spring of 1895, these three governments presented yet another plan of reforms to the Ottoman Empire. Rankled, the Sultan refused to accept the reforms until October 1895 and then only after a number of modifications were made. Feeling a sense of accomplishment, the representatives of the three governments congratulated themselves on their diplomatic prowess and thanked Abdul Hamid for being so reasonable. However, unbeknownst to them, the Sultan had already set into motion massacres in the Armenian province of Trebizond. The carnage continued in Anatolia for several months, culminating in the summer of 1896 with a massacre of Armenians living in Constantinople. When the bloodshed finally ceased, approximately 200,000 Armenians were dead and thousands more had fled to Russia.

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61 Lewis, 50.


64 Ibid., 28.
In effect, Abdul Hamid, dubbed the “Bloody Sultan”, showed the world how he felt about the Great Powers meddling in Ottoman affairs, and true to form, the Great Powers did nothing to restrain him. Richard G. Hovannisian, one of the foremost scholars on Armenia, observed, “European intervention unsustained by force added to the tragedy of the Armenians…Once again, the nations of Europe…turned away from the tragedy to which they had contributed.”

The massacres of 1894-1896 were detrimental to the Hunchak Party. The Dashnaksutiun, which had split from the Hunchaks, became the major Armenian party after 1896. The Dashnaks were much more pragmatic, preferring autonomy rather than an independent Armenian homeland, and they were confident that European pressure combined with internal revolution would eventually dethrone Abdul Hamid. The Dashnaks were also willing to work with other opposition movements within the Empire to overthrow the Sultan. The most notable of these other groups were the Young Turks.

The origins of the Young Turk movement can be traced to the Imperial Military Medical School in Constantinople. There, four students, under the leadership of an Albanian named Ibrahim Temo, formed the Committee of Union and Progress, or Ittihad ve Terakki, in May 1889. The members of the secret group believed that Sultan Abdul Hamid was corrupt and needed to be removed from the throne before he caused the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

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65 Ibid.
66 Suny, 100.
The aim of these young men struck a chord especially within the young, and they quickly found adherents in other government schools.\textsuperscript{68}

It seems rather illogical for a revolutionary movement to sprout up within government military schools, but Ernest Edmondson Ramsaur, an expert on the nascent Young Turk movement, explains that the military schools were really the only place where organized opposition could develop. After Abdul Hamid ascended to the throne, he became obsessed with staying in power. He was very paranoid, and he developed an extensive network of spies whose sole purpose was to ferret out plots to depose him. In addition, the Sultan was afraid that the Great Powers were also out to destroy him, and this caused him to try to eliminate any Western influences from the Empire, except in one area—the government military schools. Abdul Hamid was no fool, and he knew that the West had superior militaries. Therefore, purely out of the desire for self-preservation, he allowed the British and the French to train the Ottoman Army in the art of warfare. This brought Turkish soldiers into contact with Western ideas and technology, thereby increasing their discontent with the present regime.\textsuperscript{69}

However, the British and French presence at the military schools did not diminish Abdul Hamid’s distrust of the Western Powers. His suspicious nature paid off when another student at the Military Medical School exposed Temo and his organization to the authorities. Interestingly, the Sultan’s reaction was not as harsh as one might have expected. Although several students were brought in for questioning, only a few were arrested. Perhaps Abdul Hamid thought that discovery would stamp out the movement, but, in any case, it did not. The movement continued

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 17-18.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 18.
to grow throughout the early 1890s, with its influence spreading outside the government schools.\textsuperscript{70}

However, by 1894 and 1895, the Sultan was again growing suspicious, and several members of the Committee of Union and Progress found it expedient to leave the country. Most resettled in Paris where earlier opponents of the Ottoman government had gathered, and they found it conducive to attack the Sultan through literature which was smuggled into Turkey.\textsuperscript{71} Preeminent among the European Young Turks was Ahmet Riza, chief editor of one such journal, \textit{Mechveret}, meaning Consultation or Deliberation.\textsuperscript{72} Riza remains an interesting figure in that he, as a Positivist, denounced the use of violence as a means to an end, and his beliefs often brought him into conflict with other members of the Committee, both in Paris and Constantinople.\textsuperscript{73} This was especially evident in 1896.

The Young Turks who remained in Constantinople concocted a plan in the summer of 1896, when the Armenian Massacres were at their height, to overthrow Abdul Hamid. They were afraid that if they did not act quickly, the Great Powers would intervene on behalf of the Armenians. Consequently, the coup was set for August 1896.\textsuperscript{74} Before it could be put into effect, however, the plot was discovered, and a number of the conspirators were arrested, but instead of being hung for treason, they were exiled to remote parts of the Empire. Considering the Sultan’s suspicious nature, the lenient sentence surprised everyone. It remains a mystery

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 19-20.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 21-22.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 23.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 26.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 30-31.
why he did not eliminate his opponents when he had the opportunity. Although the conspirators escaped with their lives intact, the Constantinople group did not recover from the arrests and deportations until after the turn of the century. During this time, Riza and the Young Turks in Paris kept the movement alive.75

The Paris group received an unexpected boost of support when Damat Mahmut Pasha, the Sultan’s brother-in-law, fled the Empire, with his two sons, Princes Sabaheddin and Lutfullah. Damat left Turkey because he too opposed Abdul Hamid. He had repeatedly urged the Sultan to restore the Constitution of 1876, but to no avail. Finally in 1899 he decided to flee so that he could inform the world of Abdul Hamid’s corrupt rule.76

Riza was not sure if the group should trust Dahmut, fearing that it might be a trap by the Sultan. However, he realized that if Dahmut was sincere, then the movement had gained a powerful ally. As time passed, it became evident that Damat was honestly concerned about the situation in the Ottoman Empire. It also was obvious that his declining health would not allow him to play a very big role in dethroning his brother-in-law. The task, instead, fell to his son, Prince Sabaheddin. In 1902, Sabaheddin suggested that all Ottomans opposed to Hamid meet to discuss the state of affairs in the Empire.77

A diverse group of Turks, Arabs, Greeks, Kurds, Armenians, Albanians, Circassians, and Jews, were present at the First Congress of Ottoman liberals which convened from February 4-9, 1902. However, their differences were too great to overcome. The main disagreement occurred over whether they should enlist the help of the Great Powers. Riza was adamantly opposed to

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75 Ibid., 33-34.
76 Ibid., 55.
77 Ibid., 65.
intervention and to any group which wanted independence or even autonomy from the Empire. However, the Armenians felt that their only hope lay in getting assistance from the Great Powers. This divergence of opinion was an ominous sign of things to come when the Young Turks actually did ascend to power. However, the Young Turks first had to resolve their own differences.

While Ahmet Riza was concerned about the welfare of the minorities within the Ottoman Empire, he believed that the problems mainly existed because of the present Sultan. After dethroning Abdul Hamid, he planned on installing a new Sultan whose power was limited by a liberal constitution. Riza also wanted to create a centralized government run by “good” Turks. His views were in sharp contrast with Prince Sabaheddin’s who believed that a decentralized government would allow Muslims and Christians to coexist peacefully. Both views were extremely naïve. However, of the two, Ahmet Riza was clearly more in touch with the spirit of Turkish nationalism, which was beginning to evolve within the Ottoman Empire itself.

In July 1908, Riza’s views prevailed when the Turkish Third Army Corps, which was stationed in Macedonia, revolted and began marching towards Constantinople. It was a preemptive strike because the Third Army feared that their movement was about to be discovered by Hamid’s agents. As news of the uprising spread, other units also joined the revolt. On July 24, 1908, fearing for his life, Abdul Hamid hoped to placate the conspirators by announcing that he was restoring the Constitution of 1876. The Young Turks accepted Abdul Hamid’s offer, and they decided to let him remain on the throne as a constitutional monarch.

78 Hovannisian, Armenia: on the Road to Independence, 29.

They also agreed to leave the Cabinet intact. The Committee of Union and Progress, however, reserved the right to intervene in government affairs if necessary. With that, the Revolution was over. In a matter of days, the Young Turks had accomplished what other groups had been attempting to do for nearly thirty years, and the entire Empire, believing that a new period of liberalism was being ushered in, rejoiced at their success. The Armenian Patriarch, Mateos Izmirlian, told the Armenians of Constantinople that the only way they could ever make up for the terrible losses that they had endured under the autocratic rule of Sultan Abdul Hamid was by wholeheartedly embracing the Young Turks. Dashnaktsutiun, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, also allied itself with the new government. Unfortunately, this confidence in the new movement was quickly shattered.

Almost immediately the Committee of Union and Progress was beset with a number of problems. On October 5, 1908, Bulgaria declared independence from the Empire. The next day, Austria-Hungary announced that it was annexing Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Crete stated that she was uniting with Greece. Not surprisingly, these announcements caused quite an uproar, especially among the reactionary forces within the Empire.

Although most had enthusiastically greeted the new regime, there were certain religious elements within the Empire who were unhappy about the recent turn of events. They felt that the Young Turks’ seizure of power would undermine Islam as the dominant religion in the Empire. Consequently, in April 1909, in conjunction with Abdul Hamid, conservative Islamic leaders attempted a counter-coup. They were unsuccessful, and Abdul Hamid was deposed. However,

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81 Libaridian, 209.

during the brief counter-revolution, the Armenian population at Adana was attacked and nearly 30,000 were massacred. It is still a mystery who was responsible for the massacre—the Islamic forces of reaction or the Young Turks?\(^83\) Needless to say, the events at Adana greatly subdued the Armenians and their support for the Committee of Union and Progress. They felt as defenseless under the new regime as the old.

The problems did not end with the Young Turks’ consolidation of power. From 1910 to 1913, the Ottoman government had to endure revolts in Albania, losses to Italy in Libya, and two Balkan wars. The result was an even greater reduction in their European territory and a consequent fiercer determination to hold on to what they had. Because its liberal policies were not working, the government began to move away from its policy of tolerance of the other nationalities and towards a virulent Turkish nationalism, “Ottomanisation,” which proposed homogenization within the Empire. However, not everyone agreed with the conservative turn that the Young Turk movement was taking. In 1911, Liberal Union, a splinter group, was able to form a Cabinet consisting of more moderate Ittihadists. The Ottoman Empire’s continued military defeats and loss of territory, however, left the Liberal Union vulnerable to a counter-coup.\(^84\) On January 26, 1913, desperate to prevent the total collapse of the Empire, a Young Turk officer named Enver Pasha shot the Minister of War and forced the Cabinet to resign. Then he, along with Djemal Pasha and Talaat Bey, formed a triumvirate that would rule over the Ottoman Empire for the next five years.\(^85\)

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\(^84\) Ibid, 30.

\(^85\) Nassibian, 13.
This seizure of power produced much trepidation among the Armenian population, which was already worried about the direction in policy that the Young Turks were taking. As early as October 1912 Catholicas Gevorg V asked the Russian government to intervene in Turkish Armenia. For purely selfish reasons, Tsar Nicholas II chose to revive the question of reforms within Anatolia. The Russian leader had been on quite shaky ground since the Revolution in his own country in 1905, and he felt that he might be to increase his popularity with the Russian Armenians by helping their brothers across the Caucasus. Nicholas was also worried about economic competition with the Germans in the Armenian provinces. By compelling the Ottoman government to enact reforms, he also hoped to eliminate German economic rivalry in eastern Turkey. Also, for the first time, the Russian government did not have to worry about being impeded by the British. In 1907, the two countries had resolved their differences about territories in the East and had formed an entente, and together with an earlier one with France, Great Britain found itself in a virtual alliance called the Triple Entente.86

Therefore in mid-1913, Russia developed a proposal for reforms that she submitted to the governments of Great Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. As expected, the Germans protested that the Russians were interfering in Ottoman affairs. Nevertheless, the six nations agreed to meet in Constantinople to discuss the proposal. There in June and July 1913 the major powers of Europe tried to reach some sort of consensus, but they remained deadlocked throughout the summer.87 The Russian Ambassador Giers and the German Ambassador Hans von Wangenheim, however, agreed to continue the talks as representatives for the Entente

86 Hovannisian, Armenia: on the Road to Independence, 31-32.
87 Ibid., 32-33.
Powers and the Triple Alliance respectively. Finally, in early 1914, the two were able to reach an agreement concerning Armenian reforms. 88

The February Reform Act provided for the creation of two Armenian provinces. One would incorporate the vilayets of Trebizond, Sivas, and Erzerum, while the other would be comprised of Van, Bitlis, Kharpuy, and Diarbekir. Furthermore, a foreign inspector-general would be chosen to supervise reforms in each province. 89 Hovannisian commented on the significance of these developments, “The act of February 1914 did not fulfill all Armenian expectations, but it did represent the most viable reform proposed since the internationalization of the problem.” 90

The implementation of the February Reform Act was delayed by the selection of appropriate inspectors for the area. Finally in April 1914, E. Westenek, the chief provincial administrator in the Dutch East Indies, and Major Hoff of the Norwegian Army were chosen. By summer, the two men were in their administrative districts, and at last, the Armenians had reason to believe that their situation was finally going to improve. 91 However, events that were beyond their control were propelling the Great Powers to a war among themselves. The summer of 1914 was filled with much promise and hope for the Armenians, but their greatest diplomatic triumph was about to be succeeded by their greatest tragedy—the almost total destruction of their nation and the first genocide of the twentieth century.

88 Ibid., 33-34.
89 Ibid., 38.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid., 38-39.
CHAPTER 2
THE WORLD WAR I GENOCIDE OF THE OTTOMAN ARMENIANS

By the year 1914 Germany and Turkey were as close as they had ever been. Of all the European Powers, only Germany had faithfully stood by the Ottoman Empire, refusing to reprimand the Sultan and later the Young Turks for how they conducted their internal affairs, especially in regard to the Armenians. Just as Germany’s influence had increased in the Ottoman Empire, Great Britain’s sway had eroded. The formation of the Triple Entente, in which Great Britain allied with France and Turkey’s historic enemy, Russia, severely strained the relationship between the British and the Turks. Their longtime friendship was further tested in the summer of 1914 when Great Britain’s ally, Russia, mobilized against the Ottoman Empire’s newest partner, Germany.¹

As the July crisis escalated, war between the Great Powers became increasingly likely. Consequently, Turkey became a much sought-after ally, not because of any contribution that it might make militarily, but rather because of its strategic location. Without access to the Dardanelles, there could be no movement between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. If Turkey sided with Germany and closed the Straits, then Russia had no way of sending or receiving aid from Great Britain and France. However, if she sided with the Entente, then Germany would effectively be encircled.² Dickran Boyajian, author of Armenia: The Case for a Forgotten Genocide, explained Turkey’s importance to the war effort succinctly:

It was the view of many British leaders that acquiring Turkey as an ally, or at least as a non-belligerent, would release as many as two million additional soldiers for the Western Front and shorten the war by as much as two years. Conversely, the Germans knew that control of Turkey would pin down in the Near East vast numbers of Allied troops and would reduce Russia’s part as an enemy to a small fraction of what it would otherwise have been.³

Although Feroz Ahmad, author of *The Making of Modern Turkey*, claimed that Turkey initially sought an alliance with Great Britain, this argument has little validity.⁴ While it is true that many in the Ottoman Empire feared British naval might, most, including a number of cabinet members, advocated a policy of neutrality. They believed that the Empire simply wasn’t strong enough internally or militarily to engage in another war, especially after their humiliating performance in the Second Balkan War.⁵ Despite the wisdom of this approach, others, specifically Enver Pasha, argued that if they remained neutral, the victors, be it Germany or the Allied Powers, would do what they had all longed to—dismember the Ottoman Empire. Enver emphasized that they had to side with someone in order to decrease the possibility of dismemberment at the conclusion of the war.

Even the triumvirate of Talaat, Enver, and Djemal were divided on this issue. Djemal, Minister of the Marine, had long been regarded as a Francophile, who detested the Germans.⁶ However, Enver felt much differently, and he proposed that the Ottoman Empire ally with

³ Ibid., 11.


<http://raven.cc.ukans.edu/~libsite/wwi-www/morgenthau/Morgen15.htm>
Germany. In 1909, Enver had served as Military Attaché to Berlin and was convinced of the superiority of the German military. Furthermore, he maintained that it was not in Turkey’s best interests to side with Great Britain because the British were allied with Russia. Enver pointed out that Turkey could finally achieve its pan-Turanian dreams of expansion into the Russian Caucasus if they sided with Germany and if they won the war, which he was confident they would.

Enver’s arguments eventually won out. On August 2, 1914, a secret treaty was negotiated between the figurehead Grand Vizier, Said Halim, and the German Ambassador to Turkey, Baron von Wangenheim. In it, the Ottoman Empire officially allied itself with the Central Powers. The wisdom of this move, in Enver’s opinion, was confirmed the following day when Great Britain announced, much to the chagrin of the Ottoman government, that in preparing for war they found it necessary to take over the contract of the Turkish ships, *Osman I* and *Reshadie*. The two ships were being built in Great Britain for the Ottoman fleet. The Turks were very angry over this declaration by the British, especially because the construction of the ships had been financed by popular subscriptions. However, Kaiser Wilhelm, ever the politician, quickly capitalized on the situation by sending two German warships, *Goeben* and *Breslau*, to make up for the ships that the British had kept. Realizing the implications of this, the British Embassy lodged a complaint with the Ottoman government, arguing that this violated

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7 Lewis, 59-60.

8 Davison, 115.


11 Hale, 46.
Turkish neutrality. The Turks responded with a lie, saying that they had purchased the ships from Germany.12

Despite mounting tensions between the Ottoman Empire and Great Britain and despite German pressure on the Turks to abide by the terms of the secret treaty, it was by no means certain whether Turkey would actually enter the war. A majority of the Cabinet, as well as the Armenian population as a whole, were advocating a policy of neutrality. If hostilities did break out between the Ottoman Empire and Russia, the Armenians would be placed in an impossible situation. Approximately 2,100,000 Armenians lived in Turkey while 1,700,000 resided in Russia. If the Ottoman Empire entered the war on Germany’s side, this would force the Armenians to either fight against one another, or if they did choose sides, they would be at the mercy of whichever side was victorious.13 This represented a no win situation for the Armenians, a fact that the more radical members of the Young Turks, who were bent on entering the war on Germany’s side, did not care about. They simply could not allow the Armenians to remain neutral in case war did break out between Turkey and Russia, and they were determined to find out whether the Armenian population would remain loyal in the event of war.

As fate would have it, the Eighth World Congress of the Dashnak Party, which had favored autonomy for Armenia within the Ottoman Empire, was meeting in Erzerum when war broke out between the European Powers. Although Turkey’s arrangement with Germany still remained secret, the Ottoman government ordered the army to mobilize. Realizing the

12 Wood et. al, 336.

predicament that they were in, the *Dashnaks* formed a committee to determine what their official stance would be if Turkey joined the war on the side of the Central Powers. After much debate, the committee decided that the best situation for Armenians would be for Turkey to remain neutral. However, in the event of war with Russia, they declared that Armenians would be willing to serve the Ottoman government as loyal subjects.\(^{14}\) The *Dashnaks* were convinced that the Young Turks would understand the position that they were in, but the *Ittihad* was not satisfied with merely a verbal declaration of allegiance. They wanted to use the Armenians as a subversive element among Russian Armenians.

Just as the Congress was drawing to a close, Behaeddin Shakir and several other Union and Progress members arrived with a proposal for the *Dashnaks*. They wanted the *Dashnak* Party to incite the Russian Armenians to revolt against the Tsar when Turkey entered the war. This would facilitate the Ottoman Army’s invasion of Russia. In return for their efforts, the Turkish Armenians would be rewarded with an autonomous homeland compromised of part of Anatolia and all of Russian Armenia. Shakir and the Unionists were also quick to assure the *Dashnaks* that they had already reached similar agreements with the Georgians and Russian Muslims. Despite the very appealing offer of autonomy, the *Dashnak* Party turned down Shakir’s proposal, not realizing that they were leaving themselves vulnerable to later accusations of disloyalty.\(^{15}\)

Bitterly disappointed by the Armenian position, the Unionist delegation reported back to the Ottoman government, erroneously, that the *Dashnaks* had refused their offer because they had already made a deal with the Russians to revolt as soon as the Russian Army entered

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 96-97.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 97.
Ottoman territory. Furthermore, even if the Ottoman Army was successful in its invasion of the Caucasus, delegation members claimed the Armenians promised to desert and join the Russian Army. Although these were blatant lies, the Committee of Union and Progress was only too willing to believe them and to use them as propaganda to stir up mistrust among the Muslim population against the Armenians.16

Throughout the fall, the Ottoman government continued to prepare for war by mining the Dardanelles and by establishing Tashkilati-Mahsuse, or Special Organization, which was created for the purpose of inciting the non-Russian minorities living in the Transcaucasian Mountains of the Russian Empire to rebel. The Special Organization was headed by two members of the Central Committee of Ittihad and by the head of Constantinople’s police force. Its center of operations was Erzerum, and Behaeddin Shakir, the same Ittihad member who had tried to convince the Dashnak Party to engage in subversive activities in Russia, was in charge of it.17 Interestingly the government had, upon the military’s request, authorized the release of criminals from all over the Empire so that they could serve in the Special Organization.18 These brigands, or chettes, were trained by Ottoman Army officials and were given weapons from the army’s supplies. The Organization had completed its preparations by October and had already infiltrated Russian territory before the Ottoman Empire ever entered the war.19

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 99.


By fall most of the general population realized that the Ottoman Empire’s entry into the war was only a matter of time. The government had already begun drafting both Muslims and Christians into the Army, and the Dashnak Party and the Armenian Patriarchate encouraged the Armenians to enlist so that their loyalty to the Empire could not be called into question.20 First the Armenian men between the ages of 20 and 45 were called to serve.21 Then those from 45 to 65 were called to work for the military transport system. In Constantinople itself Armenians actually outnumbered Turks in asking for training as officers in the reserve.22 Others, however, chose not to enlist, preferring to pay an exemption tax that released them from military service. Although the Turkish Army accepted such payment, those who had deferred were nonetheless drafted a few weeks later.23

Tensions were running high throughout the Empire as the population continued to wait anxiously for a proclamation of war. Finally, on October 25, 1914, Enver Pasha ended the speculation when he ordered the Ottoman fleet, commanded by the German Admiral Souchon, to attack Russian ships that were stationed in the Black Sea.24 On October 29, 1914, the Ottoman fleet bombed several Russian ships and coastal installations at Odessa. Four days later, Russia declared war on Turkey. Their declaration of war was quickly followed by similar declarations

20 Ibid.


24 Hale, 46.
from Great Britain and France. Although the Armenians were not surprised by the Ottoman Empire’s entry into the war, they were unsettled by the Sultan’s declaration on November 21, 1914, that the present conflict was a *jihad*, or holy war. Their anxiety was understandable because a *jihad* not only made it acceptable but also rewarded Muslims who killed unbelievers in the name of Allah. Although this declaration was made at Germany’s behest (they hoped this would induce the Muslims in British India and the Middle East to revolt), it mainly stirred up trouble between Turkish Muslims and the Armenians.

Enver Pasha, the newly-appointed Minister of War, arrived in Erzerum in December 1914 to assume command of the Third Ottoman Army which was stationed there. He planned to lead the Third Army on an offensive attack against the Russian Army in the Caucasus. The Young Turks were hoping that military successes against the Russians in this region would motivate Russian Muslims to revolt and ally themselves with the Ottoman Empire. The twentieth century thus far had witnessed Turkey’s being driven almost entirely out of Europe, but Talaat, Enver, and Djemal planned to compensate for their military losses by regaining the areas in the Caucasus that the Turks had been forced to cede to Russia in 1878. They also wanted to conquer Central Asia and reunite the Muslims from this region with Turkish Muslims. Two obstacles stood in their way, however, the Russian Army and approximately two million Armenians who lived in this area.

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25 Davison, 115-116.


Enver planned to take care of the Russian Army first. On December 18, his troops surrounded the town of Sarikamish planning to cut the Kars-Sarikamish railway line, thereby interrupting the communications of the Russian Army. His plan succeeded in catching the Russians off guard. However, Enver had failed to take into consideration the harsh, unpredictable winters which were customary in the Caucasus. At the height of his success, the weather suddenly changed. The temperature dropped to twenty below zero, and his horses and vehicles became stuck in snow that was over four feet deep. His troops fared no better. They did not have proper clothing or shelter to protect them from the harsh elements. The bitter weather, however, was the Russian Army’s salvation. It gave them time to regroup and to plan a counterattack, and the advantage quickly shifted from the Turks to the Russians. Yves Ternon, author of *The Armenians: The History of a Genocide*, noted, “The Russians were in a position to outmaneuver and annihilate the Third Turkish Army at their leisure.”

The Ottoman soldiers were in no shape to engage the Russians. They were exhausted and weakened by cholera and typhus. The months of January and February 1915 witnessed their retreat back into Anatolia with the Russians swiftly pursuing. There is no question that the Russian Army could have decimated them if they had so desired. However, their commander did not consider the Caucasus to be of primary importance and so the Russians halted their advance without delivering the fatal blow. Even so, the damage inflicted on the Ottoman Army

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30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid., 100-101.
33 Ibid., 100.
was devastating. Over seventy-five percent of the Third Army was either killed in battle or succumbed to the brutal weather.³⁴ To make matters worse, news reached the Young Turks in February 1915, less than a month after their loss at Sarikamish, that the British and the French navies were in the Aegean Sea and were planning to launch an invasion at Gallipoli in April. The Allies were threatening them at both ends of the Empire. At this point, as disaster seemed imminent, the Turkish government panicked.³⁵ Boyajian noted the reaction to this threatening situation:

From top to bottom Turkey was a nation unnerved. In this situation, Turkey, already partially dismembered by the loss of its Balkan territories, and threatened with extinction if it lost the war, as seemed only a matter of days in February and March 1915, sought an outlet for its fears and frustrations. Its Armenian population perfectly suited its need for a scapegoat.³⁶

Fearful that the collapse of the Ottoman Empire was at hand, the Committee of Union and Progress made a fateful decision in early 1915—one that would have dire consequences for the Armenians. Led by Talaat Pasha, Minister of the Interior, a select group of radical Ittihadists decided to solve the Armenian Problem, which had been plaguing their country for decades, once and for all. After the defeat at Sarikamish, the army and the government both blamed the Armenians for the loss, accusing them of collaborating with the Russians. Strangely, Enver Pasha was the one exception to this rush to condemnation, as he appeared to defend his Armenian soldiers when he commended them in a speech given on January 22, 1915, in

³⁴ Hale, 47-48.


³⁶ Boyajian, 14.
Constantinople. He thanked the Armenians for their faithful service to the Ottoman Empire on the Caucasian front and elsewhere.\(^\text{37}\) Even if Enver was sincere in his praise, which is questionable, his voice was not heard over the accusations of the other *Ittihadists*. It was not difficult for the *Ittihad* to exploit this fear of the Armenians with the Muslim population. Consequently, in February 1915, Talaat set in motion a plan to liquidate the Armenians, expecting little resistance from the rest of the inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire.\(^\text{38}\) Henry Morgenthau, U. S. Ambassador to Turkey, was in Constantinople during the Armenian Massacres, and he described the initial phases in his memoirs:

> If this plan of murdering a race were to succeed, two preliminary steps would therefore have to be taken: it would be necessary to render all Armenian soldiers powerless and to deprive of their arms the Armenians in every city and town. Before Armenia could be slaughtered, Armenia must be made defenseless.\(^\text{39}\)

The governors of the Armenian provinces were thus informed in March 1915, either orally or by cipher telegram, of the decision to exterminate the Ottoman Armenians. The government told them to be prepared to begin deporting the Armenians from their regions when the signal from Constantinople came.\(^\text{40}\) To assist them in this momentous task, the Special Organization was reassigned to Anatolia.\(^\text{41}\) Because the Special Organization consisted primarily


\(^{41}\) Dadrian, “The Special Organisation in the Armenian Genocide during the First World War,” 56.
of criminals, Talaat felt like they were perfectly suited to the task that lay before them. He believed that as hardened criminals they would be much less likely to treat their victims with compassion or pity or to object to their brutal assignment. Talaat also chose officials whose families had suffered greatly during the deportations of the Balkan Wars to accompany the Armenians on the deportation marches, accurately assuming that their desire for revenge would be taken out on the Armenians.

In February 1915, the first phase of this plan was implemented. Armenian soldiers were released from military service and reorganized into labor battalions, where they were forced to work on the roads and railways. These workgangs suffered much abuse from their Turkish masters. They were starved and beaten, and many were worked until they died from exhaustion. Others, after completing their designated task, were taken out in groups of 50 to 100, where they were massacred after they had dug their own graves. At this time, the Sublime Porte also announced that all Armenians who held government positions were dismissed from service. Furthermore, it declared that internal passports, which allowed the Armenians to move freely about the Empire, were no longer valid.

Meanwhile, rumors began filtering back to the Armenians about what was happening to their soldiers at the same time that the Turkish authorities informed them that the entire

42 Ibid., 81.


44 Lang, 25.

Armenian population was going to be disarmed. Notices were posted in every Armenian village and town, ordering them to surrender their arms.\textsuperscript{46} Ironically, under past regimes, the Armenians were forbidden to own weapons. It was only after the Young Turks came to power in 1908 that these discriminations were abolished. Ambassador Morgenthau maintained that the Young Turks reversed their earlier liberal policy because it would be much easier to do away with the Armenians if they were unable to defend themselves.\textsuperscript{47}

Most of the Armenians did not want to provoke the government, so they turned their weapons over to the local police. However, some were suspicious of the government’s intentions. They decided to hide their weapons, hoping that if there was another outbreak of massacres, they would at least be able to protect their family and their property.\textsuperscript{48} The authorities were aware that there would be some Armenians who would not comply with the order. Therefore, they began to make house-to-house sweeps in every village, demanding that the inhabitants deliver up their arms. The police began by surrounding the village so that no one could escape. In many cases, the villagers really did not have any weapons hidden, but the gendarmes refused to believe them and used this as a pretext to arrest the men and to destroy their property. If weapons weren’t immediately proffered, the police would begin a very thorough search of the premises. Walls were torn apart, floors and even backyards were dug up. If this search did not reveal anything, the man of the house was usually arrested and severely

\textsuperscript{46} Morgenthau, 3. <http://raven.cc.ukans.edu/~libsite/wwi-www/morgenthau/Morgen24.htm>

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 1.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 3.
tortured in an attempt to get him to confess to where he had concealed his weapons. Sometimes
the men were released from prison only to be rearrested later and killed.49

As word got out about the brutal way in which these searches were conducted, many
Armenians found it simpler to purchase weapons from their Turkish neighbors or even the
police, so that they could escape the harassment and violence of the gendarmes.50 When
weapons were found in a certain village, they were piled together and photographed. These
photographs were then distributed all over the Empire as proof to the Muslim population and to
foreign diplomats stationed in Turkey that the Armenians were planning an insurrection.51 Leslie
A. Davis was the U. S. consul to Harput, located in the interior of Turkish Anatolia, and he
recalled hearing about these searches. It was his belief, especially in light of the massacres, that
in most cases the Turkish authorities planted the weapons on the Armenians’ property
themselves. The government then used this “proof” to justify their increasingly harsh measures
against the Armenians.52

By spring, the situation in Armenia was volatile, as the population chafed under the
continued mistreatment of the authorities. Since the beginning of the war, the Christians had
borne the brunt of government requisitioning. They were forced to watch helplessly while the
army confiscated their best livestock and food while their Muslim neighbors contributed much

49 Leslie A. Davis, The Slaughterhouse Province: An American Diplomat’s Report on the
48.

50 Ibid.

51 G.S. Graber, Caravans to Oblivion: The Armenian Genocide, 1915 (New York: John Wiley &
Sons, Inc., 1996), 112.

52 Davis, 48.
This, combined with the searches for weapons and the murder of Armenian soldiers, made a bad situation unbearable. Finally, in April 1915, the situation exploded in the Armenian province of Van. Bordered by Persia on the east and the Caucasus to the north, the Armenian population of Van came under suspicion by Ottoman officials as the war with Russia raged on. The Turkish Army leaders believed that it was imperative for them to successfully defend this area because they considered Van to be one of the easiest ways for an invading Russian Army to penetrate the Ottoman Empire. The situation was further complicated by the Army’s knowledge that about two hundred Armenians from Van had fled to the Russian side since Turkey’s entry into the war. The Turks accused the Armenians of sedition, maintaining that the Russians were successful in that area only because there were Armenians helping them who had an intimate knowledge of the roads and the terrain.

The Turkish authorities in Van were not really interested in resolving the problems with the Armenians peacefully. In early 1915, the harsh Djevdet Bey, Enver Pasha’s brother-in-law, was sent to the province of Van to replace then-governor, Tashin Bey, who was considered much too lenient by the more radical Ittihad members. Apparently, Djevdet was sent to Van with instructions to exterminate the Armenians living there when the time was right. However, immediately after he arrived, Djevdet left Van to go reorganize the Turkish army stationed along the Persian border. While the Russians were advancing, he was savvy enough to placate the


54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

Armenians. However, when the Russian Army temporarily retreated at the beginning of April, the Turkish Army turned its frustrations against the Armenian inhabitants living around Van.\(^{57}\)

A number of Armenian women from the outlying villages were seized and raped by Turkish soldiers. The troops also burned a number of these villages after they had marched the young men out of town and murdered them. In a period of three days, over eighty Armenian villages were attacked and approximately 24,000 Armenians were killed.\(^{58}\) By this time, Djevdet Bey had returned to Van, and he asked four influential Armenians to visit the ransacked villages to persuade the remnant not to act rashly by retaliating. These men agreed to attempt to keep the peace. They visited each of the villages, encouraging them not to revolt. After interceding on behalf of the Turkish government, the men were murdered in their sleep on their way back to Van by Kurdish villagers.\(^{59}\) The Armenian population believed that Djevdet ordered their murders, and they were furious at such a betrayal.

To make matters worse, Djevdet then demanded that the inhabitants of the city of Van raise 4,000 Armenian men for service in the Army. The Armenians believed that this was simply a ploy to massacre these men. They tried to negotiate with the governor, offering to provide 500 men and to pay the exemption tax for the rest. However, this was unacceptable to Djevdet. Consequently, the Ottoman Army began digging trenches around the Armenian quarter of the city of Van, and as an Armenian woman was entering the city with her children, Turkish soldiers seized her. When two Armenian men ran to assist them, the men were shot, and fighting broke out between the two sides.\(^{60}\) At this point, the Armenians barricaded themselves in the city.


\(^{58}\) Ibid.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 3.
There were only about 1,500 Armenian men capable of fighting with approximately 300 rifles, but amazingly they were able to hold off about 5,000 fully armed Turkish soldiers for over a month until the advancing Russian Army liberated them.\(^61\) However, their victory was short-lived. Their triumph spelled disaster for the rest of the Armenian population.

The *Ittihadists* realized that the “Revolution” at Van gave them the perfect opportunity to implement the final stage of their plan to eradicate the Ottoman Armenians. In the middle of April, Talaat announced that military necessity and the need for internal security dictated the removal of subversive elements—the Armenians—to the Interior, to the Syrian and Arabian deserts. He maintained that the Government had proof that the Armenians were planning to attack the Turkish Army from the rear when they were engaged with the Russians. It was especially important, therefore, that Armenians living on the sensitive border area of the Caucasus be deported.\(^62\)

It is important to note that a number of Turkish historians and government officials disagree with this version of events that led up to the decision to deport the Armenians. They maintain that the Armenians knew that the Russian Army was advancing and had already begun revolting in the cities of Bitlis and Van.\(^63\) In the process, they massacred thousands of Turkish inhabitants living there. Furthermore, these historians maintain that the Armenians in Van had already risen up in rebellion on April 11, 1915, nine days before the alleged incident of April

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\(^60\) Ussher, 247-248.


\(^63\) “Armenian Atrocities & Terrorism: Perpetuating the Genocide Myth,” 1. <http://www.ataa.org/ataa/ref/at...perpetuating_the_genocid_.html>
The Ottoman government’s decision, therefore, to deport the Armenians in order to protect its Turkish citizens was, in fact, a legitimate claim.

Despite these arguments, there were a number of foreign missionaries who were in Van during this time, and their account of what happened corresponds with the Armenians’ version. For example, Clarence D. Ussher was a physician who had opened a hospital in Van, which treated both Turks and Armenians, and he maintained that it was the Turks who instigated the fighting. Furthermore, Ussher’s impartiality is evident because he also recorded the Armenians’ mistreatment of Turkish inhabitants after the Russians liberated Van. Although they spared Turkish women and children, the Armenians killed all the remaining Turkish male inhabitants that they could find. Ussher observed:

> In this respect [not murdering women and children] the Armenians showed themselves far more humane than the Turks. In other respects they did not comport themselves in a manner worthy of the splendid spirit they had manifested during the siege. They burned and murdered; the spirit of loot took possession of them, driving out every other thought…The leaders closed their eyes to what was going on. Our protests were in vain for two or three days—until the first madness passed. We remembered what they had had to endure from the Turk all their lives. Much of this loot was only recovered plunder. And many would not injure a Moslem and restrained others, because, they said, ‘We are Christians.’

Although Talaat stated that the Armenians living along the border were potentially the most dangerous, the first community to be deported was that of Zeitun, a community in the

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64 “The Armenian Question in Nine Question and Answer[sic],” 11. 
65 Ussher, 247.
66 Ibid., 285.
Amanus Mountains, far from the Caucasian front. Furthermore, the deportations of Zeitun commenced on April 8, 1915, twelve days before fighting broke out between Turkish soldiers and the Armenians of Van. Upon closer examination, Zeitun had long been an area where Armenian resistance flourished. As recently as February, there had been a dispute among the gendarmes and the Armenians. Thirty young Armenian men attacked local Turkish policemen who had raped several Armenian girls but because of their status were not punished. The authorities attempted to capture the young men, but they barricaded themselves in a convent and before the troops could get to them, they escaped into the mountains. To retaliate, the Turkish officials simply arrested the remaining Armenians and began the deportation process.67

The men were separated from the rest of the population and began marching to the Syrian Desert, while the women and children were sent by rail to the province of Konia before they too went to the desert. Usually about ninety women and children were packed into a single freight car that was meant to hold only about thirty-six men. The cars were two-tiered and open at the top. Women who gave birth along the way had their newborns taken from them and thrown off the train. A number of people became very ill because they were deprived of food and water and were forced to defecate in the cars.68 The deportation of Zeitun was an ominous sign of things to come for the remaining Armenians.

Apparently, Talaat’s primary goal was first to eliminate any of those who might organize the Armenians into effective resistance. On the night of April 24, 1915, he continued this policy. For two days, the authorities rounded up approximately six hundred prominent Armenians and


deported them to Asia Minor. These men were doctors, lawyers, teachers, scientists, politicians, and writers. Talaat promised that the government had taken this action merely as a precautionary measure, and the deportees would be allowed to return home when the war was over. Yet, out of the six hundred who were exiled, only eight lived until the end of the war.⁶⁹

Shortly after the arrest of the Armenian intellectuals, orders arrived for the deportation of the rest of the Armenians. Town criers entered the villages, announcing the appointed time of departure. However, before the deportations got underway, the Armenian men were rounded up and taken outside of their respective towns. The Turkish gendarmes made sure that no one escaped. Once the male inhabitants were gathered together, the gendarmes and the Special Organization turned on them and killed them. The police then returned to the town and ordered the remaining population (women, children, and the elderly) to prepare for deportation.⁷⁰

The time allotted to the Armenians before their actual deportation varied from village to village. In a few instances, they were allowed up to a week to get their things in order. However, in most cases, they were only given a day or two, and sometimes only a few hours.⁷¹ The deportees were only allowed to bring with them what possessions they could carry, but the gendarmes assuaged their fears, promising them that they would be allowed to return to their homes when the war was over. In the meantime, they assured them that the Turkish government would make certain that their property was protected. Kuvalé Metruké, also known as the Committee for Abandoned Goods, was allegedly formed for this purpose. Besides protecting their property, the Committee also was responsible for paying out of the Armenians’ property

⁶⁹ Nansen, 303.


⁷¹ Ibid., 24-25.
any outstanding debts that the Armenians owed. After doing this, the Committee was supposed to send the Armenians the remainder of their money when they arrived at their new location. \textsuperscript{72}

Some were naïve enough to believe this, but most were not. Consequently, the hours leading up to the deportation deadline were hectic as frantic Armenians rushed about trying to sell their belongings, believing that they would at least be allowed to take their money with them. U. S. Consul Leslie Davis described the scene in Harput immediately prior to the deportations there:

The people were preparing to leave their homes and to abandon their houses, their lands, their property of all kinds. They were trying to dispose of their furniture and household effects, their provisions and even much of their clothing… The streets were full of Turkish women, as well as men, who were seeking bargains on this occasion, buying organs, sewing machines, furniture, rugs, and other articles of value for almost nothing… The scene reminded me of vultures swooping down on their prey. It was a veritable Turkish holiday and all the Turks went out in their gala attire to feast and make merry over the misfortunes of others. \textsuperscript{73}

Davis reported that some Armenians attempted to mail their money to their intended destination, fearing that they would be robbed along the way. Others gave their money to American and German missionaries for safekeeping. Davis reported that in some instances he accepted their deposits himself. \textsuperscript{74}

Despite their assurances to the contrary, immediately after the deportations got underway, the Turkish government seized the Armenians’ property and redistributed it among the Muslim population. Furthermore, \textit{mouhadhirs}, Turkish emigrants who had been left homeless when the

\textsuperscript{72} Davis, 54-55.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 54.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 54-55.
Ottoman Empire lost part of its European territory during the Balkan Wars, were resettled in the Armenians’ homes.\textsuperscript{75} Gerard Libaridian, author of “The Ultimate Repression: The Genocide of the Armenians, 1915-1917,” maintains that by sharing the spoils with the population at large, the Turkish government ensured the compliance of those who might have otherwise helped the Armenians.\textsuperscript{76}

As hard as it was for the Armenians to leave behind possessions that it had taken them a lifetime to accumulate, the most brutal phase of the deportations lay ahead. Not only were they required to march for weeks on end, but the deportees were also subjected to unspeakable violence almost from the moment that they set out on their journey. Usually as soon as they got out of a town, the Kurds and Turkish officials, assisted by the Special Organization, swooped down on them, robbing them of what money and valuables they had brought with them.\textsuperscript{77} Even Kurdish women came down from the mountains with butcher knives, believing that Allah would reward them for killing the Armenian infidels. Armenian women and girls as young as ten were repeatedly raped, while the prettiest ones were carried off to the mountains by the Kurds or forced into Turkish officers’ harems. The gendarmes who were supposedly there to protect them also repeatedly violated those who were left behind.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{75} Arnold J. Toynbee, \textit{Armenian Atrocities: The Murder of a Nation} (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1915), 81.


\textsuperscript{77} Toynbee, 42.

\textsuperscript{78} Gibbons, 25-26.
The weather also compounded the deportees’ misery. The first wave of deportations coincided with the drought season, a time of intense heat.79 There were reports of guards forcing women to walk naked through the desert, exposing their bodies to the scorching sun.80 The deportees were also forced to march at a relentless pace, with no consideration shown for the elderly, pregnant women, or children. Those who lagged behind or collapsed were either bayonetted or simply left where they fell with no supplies in the vast desert. Even women who were in labor were forced along until they dropped. Once they delivered, their newborn was killed, and they were left to bleed to death.81

The gendarmes also withheld food and water from the Armenians.82 Apparently this was done upon Talaat’s orders. There were a number of foreign diplomats who were stationed in Constantinople during this time, and they were concerned by reports that they were receiving describing the Turks’ brutal treatment of the Armenians. Talaat realized that it was important to make the deportations appear legitimate so that no other nation would intervene on behalf of the Armenians.83 In response to their inquiries, Talaat acknowledged that a number of deportees had died on the marches, but he attributed this to a lack of supplies, to inadequate medical treatment, and to the harsh conditions. He also admitted that some Armenians had been murdered, but that these crimes were committed by the unruly Kurds and by overzealous gendarmes. It was not,

79 Lang, 27.
82 Lang, 27.
83 Bey, 52-53.
Talaat emphasized, a systematic plan by the Government to exterminate the Armenians, as some had claimed.  

In an attempt to make his reasons seem valid, Talaat ordered the Special Organization to massacre the Armenians in a more discreet manner. For instance, instead of leaving their bodies out in the open where foreign visitors might see them, the Special Organization was instructed to begin burying the corpses. Also, whenever possible, they should simply allow nature to take its course. Most would not be able to endure the endless marching without food and water. Therefore, the Armenians should be deprived of these necessities. In this way, natural selection would assist the Young Turks in their plan to liquidate the Armenians. Even on the banks of the Euphrates, with women and children literally dying of thirst, the gendarmes would not allow the deportees to drink and threatened to kill anyone who attempted to do so.

Travelers who encountered the deportees on their journey, as well as number of foreign missionaries who were living in the Ottoman Empire, tried to alleviate the sufferings of the Armenians, even though they were risking their lives to do so. Armin T. Wegner was a German missionary who resided in Aleppo, and he personally observed the plight of the deportees:

I have seen maddened deportees eating as food their own clothes and shoes, women cooking the bodies of their newborn babies. In ruined caravanserais they lay between heaps of corpses with no one to pity them waiting for death; for how

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85 Bey, 54.


87 Lang, 33.
long would it be possible for them to drag out a miserable existence, searching out grains of corn from horse dung or eating grass? 88

U. S. Consul Leslie Davis also witnessed the sufferings of the Armenians. He noticed that when the guards did distribute meager rations to the deportees, the Armenians often had to be beaten back with clubs because they were so hungry. 89 One particular group of deportees camped outside of Harput on their way to the desert, and Davis visited the camp. What he saw there remained indelibly impressed upon his mind. He later wrote that even Dante’s *Inferno* didn’t contain such a vision of hell as what he had viewed that day. Davis, horrified, noted that:

> Women with matted hair and sunken eyes sat staring like maniacs…Others were in the spasms of death. Children with bloated bellies were on the ground wallowing in filth. Some were in convulsions. All in the camp were beyond help…Today there is hardly a trace of the camp left, but whenever I have ridden past it I have always thought of the hellish scenes that took place there during the “deportations” of the Armenians. 90

Subjected to these horrible conditions, the women of the various deportation groups were forced to make heart-wrenching decisions day after day in regard to their children. Those who had very small children were in an impossible situation. The journey through the desert and the mountain passes were arduous, but it was doubly so for those who had to carry a child. Many times exhausted mothers, who couldn’t carry their children any farther, simply left them behind upon rocks or under trees. They also often had to choose which child to help. Should they try to help all of their children, even the weak and sickly? Or should they devote what little energy

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88 Bey, 77.

89 Davis, 75.

90 Ibid., 76.
they had to help the stronger ones because they had a better chance of survival?\textsuperscript{91} The marauding Kurds and Turks also showed no mercy to the deportees’ children. If they chose to carry off one of the Armenian women, they usually murdered her babies by dashing their heads against the rocks.\textsuperscript{92}

As a result of these agonizing decisions, many women lost their sanity. The few who managed to survive the massacres were often consumed with guilt over abandoning their children. Some preferred to commit suicide rather than sacrifice their children or to watch them die a slow, painful death. They jumped in the Euphrates with their children in their arms, or they killed their children themselves by throwing them down wells.\textsuperscript{93} Others tried to sell them or give them away. Davis recounted that on his visits to the deportation camps, women begged him to buy their children, offering to sell them for only a few \textit{piastres}. (One \textit{piastre} equaled about four cents.)\textsuperscript{94}

There were several Muslim families who did take in the Armenians’ children. Some took them out of benevolence, while others used them as servants or slaves. This, however, was against the express wishes of the government. Initially, the \textit{Ittihadists} decided to spare Armenian children under the age of fifteen, but they quickly changed their minds.\textsuperscript{95} They were fearful that

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{91} Donald E. Miller and Lorna Touryan Miller, \textit{Survivors: An Oral History of the Armenian Genocide} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 94.
\item \textsuperscript{92} Bryce, 35. \url{http://www.hri.org/docs/bryce/bryce2.htm}
\item \textsuperscript{93} Miller, 96.
\item \textsuperscript{94} Davis, 75.
\item \textsuperscript{95} Yves Ternon, \textit{The Armenians: History of a Genocide}, 252.
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when these children got older, they would seek revenge.\textsuperscript{96} Therefore, the Government chose to exterminate all those over the age of seven. Eventually, even this concession was considered to be excessively lenient, and only those under five were to be spared. Talaat believed that the children under five would not remember what had happened to their parents and would likely be “Turkified” in any case.\textsuperscript{97}

Some Armenian women were initially able to escape the deportations by marrying a Muslim and converting to Islam. However, such a decision required huge sacrifice. Not only were they required to renounce their faith, but they were also forced to relinquish their children to state-controlled orphanages, where they would be trained in the tenets of Islam. These last-minute conversions were eventually prohibited, and Muslims were forbidden to marry Armenian women. The Government also encouraged local officials to immediately round up those who had escaped deportation by marrying a Muslim and send them to the desert.\textsuperscript{98} Talaat sarcastically replied to protests that the deportees could still convert to Islam once they reached their new destination.\textsuperscript{99}

This left no way of escape for the Armenians. By September 1915, no Armenians were left in the six eastern provinces of Anatolia.\textsuperscript{100} They had met one of two fates: death or deportation. Despite the successful clearing of Anatolia, the Government was not finished with the Armenians, and in 1916, the massacres resumed.

\textsuperscript{96} Bey, 27-28.

\textsuperscript{97} Ternon, \textit{The Armenians: History of a Genocide}, 252.

\textsuperscript{98} Bey, 55.

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 64.

\textsuperscript{100} Suny, 64.
One of the most informative sources on the 1916 massacres are the memoirs of a Turkish official, Naim Bey, who was stationed in Aleppo. Immediately prior to the deportation of Zeitun in April 1915, the Government created a Deportation Committee to organize the deportation process. Midhat Shukru, the Secretary-General of the Ittihad Central Committee, headed this Committee. Its headquarters were located in Constantinople, while its operational center was in Aleppo—the final destination of most of the deportees. Abdullhad Nouri Bey, a representative of the General Deportations Committee in Constantinople, appointed Naim Bey the chief secretary of the Aleppo branch of the Deportations Committee. As such, Naim saw firsthand the plight of the Armenians. Not only are his Memoirs invaluable because he was an eyewitness to the Armenians’ sufferings, but also because he was very uncomfortable with what the Turkish government was doing to them. Because of his position, he was privy to confidential information that arrived almost daily from Constantinople. Moreover, because he felt that the deportations were wrong, Naim took the drastic and dangerous step of secretly copying by hand and photographing a number of cipher telegrams that the Deportations Committee at Aleppo received from Talaat, instructing them to exterminate the remaining Armenians. His meticulous records go a long way towards disproving Talaat's statement that the Government was not attempting to systematically kill all of the Ottoman Armenians.

Turkish denialists, however, claim that Armenian propagandists forged these documents. Authors Sinasi Orel and Süreyya Yuca maintain that the form, content, and dates of the Turkish

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102 Bey, 3.
103 Ibid., xi-xii.
documents are inaccurate, and they even question the existence of the individual, Naim Bey.\textsuperscript{104} However, Vahakn Dadrian, in a lengthy article entitled “The Naim-Andonian Documents on the World War I Destruction of Ottoman Armenians: Anatomy of a Genocide,” has refuted these charges by noting that Austrian and German records corroborate the authenticity of these documents. Furthermore, some of these same officials, including Walter Rössler, the German consul at Aleppo, have examined the \textit{Memoirs} and have attested that they were genuine.

Although Dadrian admitted that the cipher telegrams in the \textit{Memoirs} contained some irregularities, he maintained that this was characteristic of the inefficient Ottoman government and that a sophisticated forger would have not made such simplistic mistakes.\textsuperscript{105}

The first massacre of 1916 occurred in Res-ul-Ain, a tiny community originally established by Circassians. Despite its small size, Res-ul-Ain was important to the Young Turks because it was located along the Baghdad railway, and there were a number of Armenians camped there.\textsuperscript{106} Most of them were in pitiful shape. The long march, the brutality they had endured, the lack of food and supplies, and the ravages of typhus had destroyed their health, and they quickly became a burden on the rest of the population. The roads in Syria were covered with decaying bodies, which attracted wild animals from the desert. Furthermore, the local population was not immune to the diseases that the Armenians were carrying. A number of Arabs and Turkish soldiers contracted typhus or smallpox and subsequently died.\textsuperscript{107} The local


\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., xiv.

\textsuperscript{107} Lang, 32.
Kaimakam, or Mayor, Yousouf Zia Bey, complained to the Government about the Armenian camps, and he received the go-ahead to begin deportations. However, the governor of Der Zor, Ali Souad Bey, blocked this move. As a result of his disobedience, Ali was immediately dismissed from his post, but the Armenians remained in Res-ul-Ain.\(^\text{108}\)

In February 1916, as the former governor of Van, Djevdet Bey, traveled through Res-ul-Ain on his way to assume the governorship of Adana, he observed that a large number of Armenians were still there. He ordered Zia Bey to exterminate them immediately, but Zia also refused and he too was removed from office. His replacement, Kerim Refi Bey, was much more pliant, and he carried out the Young Turks' instructions to the letter.\(^\text{109}\) On March 17, 1916, the Armenians in Res-ul-Ain were led out of town ostensibly en route to yet another location, but after they had proceeded a couple of miles, a group of Circassians, led by Kerim, fell upon them and massacred them.\(^\text{110}\) Approximately 70,000 Armenians were killed at Res-ul-Ain.\(^\text{111}\)

The other two massacres of 1916 occurred at Intilli and Der Zor just as the Res-ul-Ain massacres concluded.\(^\text{112}\) Intilli, like Res-ul-Ain, was located along the Baghdad Railway. There were several thousand Armenian men working on the line there. Because they were valuable to the Turkish war effort, they had been spared thus far. However, the Government realized that the men's families were also at Intilli with them, and this was unacceptable. Therefore, the

\(^{108}\) Bey, 19.

\(^{109}\) Ibid., 25-26.

\(^{110}\) Ibid., 27-28.

\(^{111}\) Ibid., xiii-xiv.

\(^{112}\) Ibid., 33.
women and children of the Armenian workers were immediately deported. Of course, deportation was simply a euphemism for murder, and approximately 50,000 Armenians from Intilli were killed.

One of the cruelest perpetrators of the Genocide, Zeki Bey, emerged during the 1916 massacres. Naim Bey described how he inspired the Turks to continue killing the Armenians:

Zeki Bey would often bend down from his horse, take hold of a small child by its arm, turn it around once or twice in the air and dash it to the ground, killing it and breaking it to pieces; and he would say to his followers: 'Don't think that I have killed an innocent being. Even the new-born babes of this people (Armenians) are criminals, for they will carry the seeds of vengeance in themselves. If you wish to ensure tomorrow, kill even their children.'

The last major massacre occurred at Der Zor. In this final massacre, basically all of the Armenians who survived the deportation marches were killed. Approximately 200,000 Armenians were killed there.

With this massacre, the Armenian Genocide in essence was over. Sporadic violence against the Armenians occurred in 1917, but for all intents and purposes, the systematic destruction of the Turkish Armenians was complete. Of the two million Armenians who lived in the Ottoman Empire before World War I, an estimated 1.5 million were killed in the Genocide. Approximately 400,000 escaped the deportations by fleeing to Russia, but even there they were forced to contend with epidemic diseases, starvation, and poverty.

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113 Ibid., 32.
114 Ibid., xiii-xiv.
115 Ibid., 46.
116 Ibid., xiii-xiv.
117 Libaridian, 205-206.
When the Young Turks assumed power in 1908, hopes had arisen that they would usher in a new era of liberalism and tolerance. However, war interceded and a series of military defeats caused them to revert to a dictatorship, which conducted its internal affairs much like Sultan Abdul Hamid had. In their treatment of the Armenians though, the Young Turks implemented an even more brutal policy: deportations. It remains uncertain whether they chose this method because they didn't have any other effective way to kill such a large number of people, or whether they were really concerned about preserving their image with the Great Powers. Most likely it was a combination of both of these factors. Whatever their reasons were for this particular method, the Young Turks were successful in solving the Armenian Question, accomplishing more in their short reign than Abdul Hamid had in thirty years, as Talaat Pasha bragged. Unfortunately, it came at an unspeakable cost for the Armenians.

\[118\] Morgenthau, 11.

<http://raven.cc.ukans.edu/~libsite.wwi-www/morgenthau/Morgen25.htm>
CHAPTER 3

GERMAN COMPLICITY IN THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

There are very few aspects about the Armenian Genocide which are not hotly debated even today. One of the most controversial issues concerns the role that Germany, Turkey’s ally during World War I, played in the deportations and subsequent massacres of the Armenian population living within the Ottoman Empire. Because the present Turkish government adamantly denies that its predecessor, the Committee of Union and Progress, tried to exterminate their Armenian subjects, historians have found it virtually impossible to gain total access to documents that could either implicate or exonerate Germany. Furthermore, those who have attempted to uncover the truth have not been able to reach a consensus on their findings. Researchers sympathetic to the plight of the Armenians contend that given the degree of German participation in Ottoman affairs during World War I, it would have been impossible for them not to have known what was happening to the Armenians. Some go even further, accusing specific German military officers of inciting the Young Turks to take action against the Armenians because the German military believed that they were engaging in subversive activities with the Russians.

Defenders of Germany argue, however, that these accusations have only gained credibility in light of the German government’s actions against their own Jewish population during the Second World War. They also point out the number of German missionaries in Turkey during the massacres, who risked their own well-being to offer shelter and aid to the Armenians. Despite these arguments, the Armenians, as well as the Allied Powers, maintain that there was only one nation that might have prevented the murder of over one million
Armenians—Germany. After all, the Ottoman Empire was dependent upon German capital and resources. If Germany threatened to withhold aid from the Young Turks until they abandoned their plan to exterminate the Turkish Armenians, the Ottoman government would have to comply or possibly face dismemberment. Historians continue to question how the Genocide could have occurred given the considerable influence that the Germans had. Did they try to stop the killings, or were they, as some have suggested, co-perpetrators with the Young Turks in the attempted genocide of the Armenians?

Before this question can be answered, it is important to note that there were Germans of various capacities in the Ottoman Empire during the Great War. One factor—their occupation—more than anything else, usually determined their attitude to the Armenian atrocities. There were many German civilians, usually missionaries or journalists, who witnessed the death marches. There were also a number of official representatives of the German government, mainly military officers and diplomats who learned of the Young Turks’ plan to destroy the Armenian population. None of these groups have denied knowing that the Turkish government was taking harsh measures against the Armenians, but they often disagreed about how necessary these actions really were, and what Germany should do, if anything, in light of their ally’s actions.


The group that has most often been charged with complicity is the German military officers who were in Turkey during the War. The German Military Mission to the Ottoman Empire was established in 1913, under the leadership of Otto V. K. Liman von Sanders, in an attempt to improve the Turkish Army. Most of the German officers in the mission were given leaves of absences from their posts in Germany while they served as Ottoman officers. They were not only responsible to the Ottoman High Command, but they were also still subject to the German Supreme Army Command. As an added bonus, those German officers who were willing to be a part of the Mission had their rank increased one increment while they served in the Turkish Army.

The second group of officials present at the time of the massacres was the German diplomatic corps in Turkey. The most influential figure in this group was the German ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Baron Hans Freiherr von Wangenheim. The Ambassador played a critical role in negotiating the secret alliance that eventually brought Turkey into the war. As ambassador, Wangenheim not only had access to firsthand accounts of the massacres, but he also had the ear of key officials in the Committee of Union and Progress, specifically Enver and Talaat. The Ambassador has also come under sharp criticism for not intervening more actively on behalf of the Armenians.

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The final group to consider consists of the German civilians who were eyewitnesses to the Armenian Genocide. This group continuously besieged the German Ambassador and the Foreign Office with reports describing the massacres. By far, they were the most active in denouncing the Young Turks’ actions, and they often risked their own lives to aid the Armenians. The civilians, who were mainly Christian missionaries to the Turks, protested the continued German alliance with the Ottoman government, and they attempted to inform the German public about what was taking place. Those who maintain Germany’s innocence in the Armenian Genocide point to the selfless acts of these individuals to prove their case.

The German envoys and military officers stationed in the Ottoman Empire have been accused of complicity because they were official delegates of the German government, and it was believed that they could effect changes in Germany’s policy if they so desired. However, these two groups did not always concur on what was in Germany’s best interests. The military’s overarching goal was to win the war, by any means possible and at as little cost to Germany as possible. Although Wangenheim certainly wanted to win the war, he also wanted to protect Germany’s reputation and not to fuel the fires of Allied propaganda. He was especially afraid that if the world learned about the Armenian atrocities, then neutral countries like the United States might join the war effort against the Central Powers.

While critics of the German government’s continued alliance with the Young Turks have pointed out that all Germany had to do to stop the massacres was to withhold aid, the solution was not as viable as it seemed. If Turkey did not comply, then its collapse was imminent. The Ottoman Empire’s collapse would have seriously eroded the German military’s strategic situation. There was also another possibility. If Germany tried to take a hard line with the Young

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8 Blair, 20.
Turks, Turkey might defect to the Allied side. In either situation, Germany would lose a valuable ally.\(^9\) Although Germany certainly was wealthier and stronger militarily, both the Young Turks and the German government knew that Germany needed the Ottoman Empire more than the Empire needed Germany. Great Britain and France were looking for any way to end the war quicker, and if that meant persuading the Turks to switch sides, then they were willing to try it. As a result, the German government realized it had to tread very lightly where its Turkish ally was concerned. Therefore, when examining the actions of German officials, it is especially important to remember that all of their decisions were made with the outcome of the war weighing heavily on their minds. This certainly, however, does not exculpate those Germans who were aware of and also approved of the Young Turks’ actions against the Armenians.

The current research does tend to implicate some of the highest German military officers who were members of the German Military Mission to the Ottoman Empire. After the Turkish defeat at Sarikamish, German officers also believed that the Armenians in the eastern provinces were collaborating with the Russians. Some evidence even indicates that these officers might have been the first to suggest the deportation of the Armenians.\(^10\) To complicate matters further, however, German diplomatic reports also indicate the basic Turkish anxiety and insecurity in late 1914. For example, a dispatch from Trebizond on November 17, 1914, indicated not only that a Russian fleet had bombarded this Black Sea port, perhaps hoping to incite an Armenian rebellion, but immediately after the bombardment began large numbers of Armenians sought

\(^9\) Trumpener, 235-236.

\(^10\) Christoph Dinkel, “German Officers and the Armenian Genocide,” *Armenian Review* 44 (Spring 1991): 120.
shelter in the German consulate. Clearly, at this point, the Armenians felt that they had more to fear from the Turks than the Germans.

After the war, Minister of the Interior Talaat claimed in his memoirs that Fritz Bronsart von Schellendorff, Chief of Staff at Ottoman General Headquarters, suggested that the Young Turks should begin deporting the Armenians. According to Talaat, Bronsart called for a secret meeting in December 1914. It was attended by Talaat and Enver, as well as Bronsart, and Generals Liman von Sanders and Goltz. It was supposedly at this meeting that Bronsart declared that the German military had proof that the Armenians were engaging in seditious activity. The Turkish government, therefore, needed to deport them before they undermined the war effort. Indeed Wangenheim admitted in a memorandum of December 29, 1914, after receiving a report from the German consul in Adana, that Armenians in that area worried that the German government would support the Turkish persecution of Armenians.

Talaat’s accusations certainly aren’t very credible by themselves, especially because most consider him to be the mastermind of the Armenian Genocide. Naturally, he would try to shift the blame away from himself. However, Bronsart was not totally innocent either. Officials of the British High Commissioner’s office discovered another document during the Turkish Armistice that also implicated Bronsart. It revealed that Bronsart had signed an order on July 25, 1915, authorizing the deportation of the Armenians. He also stated that harsh measures should be taken against the Armenians who were in labor battalions so that they would not be able to

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12 Dadrian, The History of the Armenian Genocide, 256.

13 Wangenheim to Bethmann Hollweg, 29 Dec 1914, in Gust, Revidierte Ausgabe, 25.
hinder the deportation process.\textsuperscript{14} Even after the war, the former Chief of Staff remained unsympathetic to the Armenians. He refused to admit that any injustices had occurred, and he expressed disdain for the German consuls who had complained about the Turkish measures against the Armenians.\textsuperscript{15}

Lieutenant Colonel Boettrich, Chief of Railroad Services at Ottoman General Headquarters, was the only other German officer who signed a deportation order. On October 3, 1915, he ordered the deportation of thousands of Armenians who were working on the Baghdad Railway.\textsuperscript{16} The deportations were against the express wishes of the German engineers who were in charge of the project. They protested that the removal of qualified workers would not only slow the construction of the railway, but it would also impede the war effort. Unfortunately, their objections were to no avail, and the deportations were carried out as scheduled.\textsuperscript{17}

However, when higher German officials discovered that Boettrich had signed the order, they were very upset. The German Foreign Minister Gottlieb von Jagow notified General Falkenhayn of Boettrich’s action. Their main concern, however, was not for the deported Armenians, but rather how the Allied Powers would use this document to implicate the entire German nation. Franz Günther, the Deputy General Director of the Anatolian Railway, remonstrated:

\begin{flushright}
15 Dinkel, 105.
17 Kaiser, 82.
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Our enemies will some day pay a good price to obtain possession of this document...they will be able to prove that the Germans have not only done nothing to prevent the Armenian persecutions but they even issued certain orders to this effect, as the [Turkish] Military Commander has ecstatically pointed out.\textsuperscript{18}

Although Falkenhayn was displeased with Boettrich, he did not feel that his action warranted dismissal from his post.\textsuperscript{19}

Christoph Dinkel, a Swiss historian, has written a very detailed article, “German Officers and the Armenian Genocide,” discussing this issue. He observed that after the war, German officers deliberately continued to try to deceive the German public about the true nature of the massacres and their conduct in it.\textsuperscript{20} These officers continued to voice the Young Turks’ reasons for the deportations, maintaining that they were militarily necessary and that the Armenians had brought these actions upon themselves by their seditious behavior. During 1919, there were practical reasons why the German officers wanted to cover up the Genocide. The Paris Peace Conference was under way, and the German government was afraid that they would be forced to pay reparations to the Armenians if it was proven that these officers had known of or tacitly approved of the Young Turks’ aim to exterminate the Ottoman Armenians.\textsuperscript{21}

Consequently, several German officers wrote articles defending the actions of their Turkish ally. Bronsart was one of the most outspoken of these officers. He argued that the measures taken by the Turks against the Armenians were necessary for military reasons. Bronsart (much like Talaat claimed) maintained that in early 1915 the military had obtained

\textsuperscript{18} Dadrian, \textit{The History of the Armenian Genocide}, 262.

\textsuperscript{19} Kaiser, 84.

\textsuperscript{20} Dinkel, 118.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 83.
proof that the Armenians, with the help of the Russians, were planning an insurrection.

Furthermore, he argued that it was the Armenians who were committing terrible acts of violence against the Turks not vice versa. He claimed:

> Since all Muslims capable of bearing arms were in the Turkish army, it was easy for the Armenians to slaughter the defenseless population: They did not limit themselves to military attacks on the front and the rear of the Turkish Eastern Army which was engaged with the Russians, but they wiped out the Muslim population in those areas. They committed atrocities which I, as a witness, testify in candor were worse than the Armenian atrocities later attributed to the Turks…22

Bronsart did not deny that many Armenians perished on the deportation marches. He attributed this, however, to the lack of such basic necessities as food, shelter, medicine, and transportation. He continued adamantly to deny that the Turkish government deliberately planned to liquidate its Armenian population.23

Felix Guse was another German officer who as late as June 1921 persisted in defending the Young Turks. Guse was the Chief of Staff at Third Ottoman Headquarters, and he was stationed in the area between Russia and Turkey where most Turkish Armenians lived.24 He also iterated the “military necessity” theory, maintaining that the Third Ottoman Army (which had been routed at Sarikamish) had discovered a plot between the Armenian population and the Russian Army. In this plan, the Armenians had allegedly promised to revolt behind the Ottoman Army upon the Russians’ advance.25 However, Guse was eventually forced to concede that the

22 Ibid., 97.
23 Ibid., 81-82.
25 Dinkel, 95-96.
deportations were a preemptive measure because they had no way of actually knowing if the Armenians were really going to revolt.  

Contemporary reports paint a mixed picture of the situation in late 1914-1915. Some, as early as December 1914, referred to “Turkish irregulars,” working for the Turkish Party Ittihad, roaming Armenian areas and causing great unrest. By March 1915, regular Turkish police and the military, evidently acting on orders from “higher authorities,” carried out an extensive series of house searches and arrests, both directed in general at the Christian population, although falling most heavily on the Armenians. On the other hand, reports from German consular officials in March 1915 also cited rumors of “secret Armenian activities that, although they don’t conclusively point to a plan of revolt, have resulted in more aggressive actions.” More to the point, German reports in March emphasized the activities of Armenian deserters in shooting Turkish police and, in Zeitun, attacking a prison in order to free Armenian prisoners. In the Zeitun area, German diplomats noted open Armenian resistance against conscription, requisitions, and other measures of military mobilization. As late as April 15, 1915, a German report, referring to the numerous complaints of supposed and real Turkish persecutions, noted that Armenians were guilty of treason for aiding the Russians, and that Armenian soldiers in the Turkish Army had thrown their weapons away, a fact that German officers had confirmed. Still, nowhere did they remark on open Armenian revolts.  


27 Consular Reports From Erzurum (5 Dec 1914), Alexandrette (7 Mar 1915), Adana (13 Mar 1915), Aleppo (26 Mar 1915), Pera (29 Mar 1915); Memorandum of 12 Apr 1915; All in Gust, *Revidierte Ausgabe*, pp. 27, 31, 33, 35, 36, 40, 46.
What is most disturbing about these officers’ actions is that even though they were receiving reports from German consuls who were actually stationed in those areas that were supposedly in revolt, reports that showed the complexity of the situation, they still chose to believe the Turkish government’s allegations.\footnote{Dinkel, 119.} Vahakn N. Dadrian, author of \textit{The History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus}, also notes suspicious activity by Bronsart’s successor, Lt. General Hans Friedrich Leopold von Seeckt. After the war was over, Seeckt, much to the chagrin of the Young Turks, made off with a number of the records from the General Headquarter’s archives. These records could possibly have given historians a much clearer understanding of the German military’s position towards the Armenians. If the German military had nothing to hide, Dadrian reasonably asks, why did they feel compelled to remove these files, and why were the Young Turks so upset about it? Seeckt also helped the top seven \textit{Ittihad} leaders secretly escape the Ottoman Empire by night on a German destroyer after the Turkish Armistice was signed, knowing that if they remained in Turkey, they most likely would have been sentenced to death for war crimes.\footnote{Dadrian, \textit{The History of the Armenian Genocide}, 280.}

Dinkel maintains that it wasn’t until the murder of Talaat Pasha in Berlin in March 1921 and the subsequent trial of his killer Soghomon Tehlirian that the German people learned the truth (at least partially) about the genocide. The German public was very sympathetic to Tehlirian, whose entire immediate family had been killed in the deportations, which were instigated by Talaat. Dinkel notes,"…it [the trial] became an indictment of the Young Turk rulers who had been responsible for the Genocide and Talaat in particular…"\footnote{Dinkel, 93.}
The evidence has shown that several German officers did know about the deportations and actively encouraged them. The question that remains is what was the response of the other group of officials, the German diplomatic corps, stationed in Turkey to the atrocities. Dadrian maintains that the German Ambassador Wangenheim was a strong personality, who bullied Grand Vizier Said Halim into giving the order to attack Russian ships in the Black Sea, effectively bringing Turkey into the War. Yet this same man, according to Dadrian, exerted no pressure on the Young Turks to stop their brutal policies against the Armenians. In fact, the U. S. Ambassador to Turkey, Henry Morgenthau, who was Jewish, records in his memoirs, published after the war, a comment that Wangenheim had made to him concerning this issue: “I will help the Zionists,” he [Wangenheim] said, thinking the remark would be personally pleasing to me, “but I shall do nothing whatever for the Armenians.”

Was Wangenheim really this callous towards the Armenians? This certainly does not correspond with the picture that other sources paint of him, including Morgenthau himself ironically. In a telegram sent by Wangenheim to the German Foreign Office on October 15, 1915, summarizing a meeting with Morgenthau, Wangenheim noted that

Morgenthau emphasized repeatedly that he well knew that on the German side everything was being done to persuade the Turkish government to stop its actions against the innocent part of the Armenians…[and] that German consuls constantly and everywhere had looked after the unlucky Armenians.”

31 Dadrian, 268-269.


33 Telegram, Wangenheim to German Foreign Office, 15 Oct 1915, in Gust, Revidierte Ausgabe, 166.
Most, like Ulrich Trumpener, believe that if Wangenheim was guilty of anything it was putting Germany’s interests above those of the Armenians. Also, Wangenheim apparently did, at first, believe the charges that the Young Turks leveled against the Armenians. Trumpener states, “Despite mounting indications to the contrary they accepted for far too long the spurious claims of the Porte that its anti-Armenian policies were necessitated by widespread sedition in the eastern provinces.”34 This was especially true with regard to events in Van in April 1915, where evidently Armenians had actively aided invading Russian forces. In retrospect, however, a closer look at the chronology of events shows that Turkish actions against Armenians had began even before the Russian threat to Van. At the time, though, Wangenheim may not have been fully aware of this, although a flood of telegrams from German consuls in May could not have left him unaware of the unfolding tragedy.35

Immediately after the deportation of Zeitun in April 1915, a number of Armenian groups approached the Ambassador, asking for Germany’s protection, but Wangenheim refused to help them. In a letter to Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, Wangenheim reported that the Armenians’ request for aid was certainly justifiable in light of the Ottoman government’s actions, but he believed that German intervention would not save them. Furthermore, if the German government insisted on helping the Armenians, they almost certainly would anger the Young Turks, and Germany could not risk alienating its ally. Wangenheim, therefore, advocated a policy of non-intervention.36

34 Trumpener, 210-211.

35 Wangenheim to German Foreign Office, 27 and 30 April 1915; Telegrams of 1 May 1915, 3-4 May 1915, 6 May 1915, 18-19 May 1915, 20 May 1915; in Gust Revidierte Ausgabe, 57-58, 60, 68-72. See also the telegrams for June 1915, pp. 79-92, and August 1915, pp. 114-122, 127-146. In general, these reports increase in both length and detailed descriptions of the massacres over the course of the summer.
Despite the Ambassador’s initial resolve not to interfere in the Turks’ internal affairs, he was not aware of the Ittihad leaders’ decision to exterminate the Ottoman Armenians until late spring, and he continued to support, at least publicly, the Young Turks’ decision to deport the Armenians throughout April and May 1915. By June, however, Wangenheim was forced to modify his position. He was still receiving reports from German consuls who were stationed in the eastern provinces maintaining that the Turks’ actions were completely unjustified. One of the most outspoken consuls was Max Erwin von Scheubner-Richter who was in Erzerum. He reported that the only Armenians left in his province were women, children, and the elderly, and he questioned how this group could possibly pose a threat to the Turkish war effort. At the beginning of June 1915, he asked for Wangenheim’s permission to intervene on the beleaguered minority’s behalf, but Wangenheim flatly refused his request and ordered him not to interfere in the Turks’ internal affairs.37 However, less than three weeks later, Wangenheim in an abrupt about-face wrote to Scheubner-Richter, “…it is also urgently in our interest that the massacres of the defenseless (Armenian population) should cease. The duty of our local officials is to stop these incidents by all means available.”38

Scheubner-Richter continued to report on the atrocities for the duration of his stay in Erzerum. In fact, he pointedly noted in a “Memorandum on the Armenian Question” written on August 10, 1915, that

the Turkish government has used the situation offered by the war and the Armenian revolt in Van, Musch, Karahissar, and other towns forcefully to resettle the Anatolian Armenians in Mesopotamia…These govern-

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36 Trumpener, 205-206.

37 Dinkel, 107.

38 Wangenheim to German Consulate, Erzurum, 21 June 1915, in Gust, *Revidierte Ausgabe*, 86.
ment measures have unfolded in such a form that is identical to the extermination of the Armenians… Only by a forceful policy of extermination, a powerful destruction of the entire people, can the Turkish government…achieve its desired goal, the ‘solution’ of the Armenian question.”

Scheubner-Richter also reported on November 5, 1915 on a trip he had taken through the Armenian regions in which all of the Armenian villages were empty and destroyed—and that he had seen no male Armenians anywhere.

Reports from concerned German civilians also were pouring in detailing the sufferings of the Armenians. As news of the atrocities also began to leak to the outside world, it presented the German government with a new problem. Ambassador Wangenheim was concerned that the Allied Powers might use the Germans’ alliance with the Young Turks to implicate them in the Armenian Genocide. When Great Britain, France, and Russia issued a statement on May 24, 1915, announcing that the systematic destruction of the Armenian population would not be tolerated, Wangenheim felt that a display of solidarity was more important than joining with the Entente Powers in pressuring the Turks to stop liquidating the Armenians.

Therefore, with the Ambassador's help, the Porte issued its own statement, maintaining that the Entente Powers were to blame for the actions that the Turks had been forced to take against the Armenians. They accused the Allied Powers of encouraging the Armenians to revolt against the Ottoman Empire, in the hopes that the Empire, weakened from internal fighting, would not be able to withstand an Allied attack. Fortunately, however, the Ottoman government


had discovered the plot just in time. Because Turkey had the right, nay the obligation, to protect its own citizens, the government was forced to begin deporting the Armenian population. Therefore, because it was the Allied Powers who had planted these ideas of insurrection in the minds of the Armenians, ultimately they were responsible for whatever happened to them. While Wangenheim’s defense of the Young Turks’ Armenian policy certainly clouded the issue, it remains unclear whether his support contributed to more Turkish atrocities or whether the Ottoman government would have pursued this course of action no matter what Germany’s stance was. By late June 1915, however, Wangenheim was clearly uncomfortable with the Turkish government’s continued mistreatment of the Armenians, and it was becoming increasingly obvious to him that the Young Turks’ had a much more radical plan in mind for the tiny Christian minority.

Therefore, on July 4, 1915, in conjunction with the Austrian Ambassador, Wangenheim sent a memorandum to the Sublime Porte in which he urged the Young Turks to show restraint in their policies toward the Armenians. He added that he realized that the Ottoman government could not ignore the potential military threat that the Armenians posed, but he warned the Young Turks that if excesses continued to occur, the Allied Powers would seize this opportunity to try to persuade neutral nations, specifically the United States, to enter the war. Wangenheim went on to say that the German government also was disturbed by reports of the indiscriminate killing of entire communities, the innocent as well as the guilty.

42 Blair, 19.
43 Ibid., 20.
44 Trumpener, 213-214.
Three days later Wangenheim sent Bethmann Hollweg a letter stating that he believed that the Sublime Porte was not resettling the Armenians, but rather it was pursuing a policy of race extermination. The German Ambassador was very upset about the predicament that his country was in. He was aware that the Allied governments were using the Armenian atrocities in an attempt to discredit all of the Central Powers, but Germany in particular. Wangenheim hoped that the July 4th memorandum would convince the Young Turks to stop massacring the Armenians before Germany’s image was irreparably damaged.

Unfortunately, the Ambassador’s warning went unheeded. He reported back to Bethmann Hollweg on July 16, 1915, that, in his opinion, no amount of warnings would deter the Turks from the course that they had set upon. The Ambassador’s primary concern was that the Allied Nations would try to implicate Germany as well as Turkey in the Armenian Genocide, but he was convinced that his own written reports, where he had attempted to intervene on behalf of the Armenians, would demonstrate that these accusations were false.

Wangenheim left the Ottoman Empire in mid-July on sick leave, and his temporary replacement, Prince Fuerst zu Hohenlohe-Langenburg, also tried to intercede for the Armenians. His efforts were hindered, however, because the German government was more concerned with proclaiming their innocence in these affairs than actively trying to stop the massacres. This was a very valid fear upon Germany’s part. The Allies were already using tales of atrocity in Belgium and the Germans’ continued practice of submarine warfare to damage Germany’s reputation with the rest of the world.

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46 Trumpener, 215-216.

47 Ibid., 216.
This fear finally compelled the German government to act. In October 1915, after Wangenheim returned to Constantinople, Undersecretary of State Arthur Zimmerman told the Ambassador to order the Turkish government to declare publicly that Germany was not involved in the Armenian Massacres and that they had always sought to protect the tiny Christian population. Not surprisingly, Grand Vizier Halim refused to comply. Halim’s refusal placed Germany in a very difficult position. Although the Germans were angered by the Grand Vizier’s slight, their more pragmatic nature urged them not to do anything that might offend the Ottoman government and thereby jeopardize the entire war effort. Consequently, the Germans were forced to wait for the Young Turks to clear their names, hoping that they might become more amenable with the passing of time. Halim’s maneuver was a major coup for the Young Turks, and it solidified their belief that they had leverage over Germany and not vice versa. They were confident that they could continue to pursue their policies without having to fear any retaliatory action by Germany.

The stressful situation proved to be too much for Wangenheim, who was already suffering from a heart condition. Despite his earlier lack of concern for the Armenians, by the fall of 1915 he appeared to be genuinely upset by the massacres. He was especially troubled by his inability to reason with the Young Turks. On October 25, 1915, Wangenheim died in Constantinople, after failing to persuade the Sublime Porte to admit that Germany was not complicit in the Genocide. The Ambassador’s death dealt a tremendous blow to the German

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48 Ibid., 225.

government. However, Wangenheim’s successor, Count Paul von Wolff-Metternich, quickly proved that he was an able and competent replacement.

Metternich was very outspoken on the Armenian issue, and his candor quickly earned him the disfavor of the Ottoman government. In early December 1915, for example, Metternich emphasized in a report to Berlin that he had in the last week repeatedly raised the issue of “Armenian cruelties” in a serious way with Enver Pasha, Halil Bey, and Djemal Pasha, but to no effect. Terming Talaat Bey “the soul of the Armenian persecution,” Metternich concluded that only by making the Turkish government fear the consequences could the Germans put a halt to the Turkish destruction of the Armenians. Pointedly though, he also noted that for military reasons this was not likely.50

Interestingly, Metternich reported that both Enver and Foreign Minister Halil Bey would not broach the topic of the Armenians with Talaat. Therefore, he decided to approach the Minister of the Interior himself to protest the continued mistreatment of the Armenians. Given Enver and Halil’s unwillingness to help, Metternich was surprised when Talaat agreed that innocent Armenians had suffered. Talaat promised the new Ambassador that he would do everything in his power to prevent any further injustices from occurring. Unsure of Talaat’s sincerity, Metternich decided to give him the benefit of the doubt. However, five days later Metternich received a sharply-worded note that declared that although Germany and Turkey were military allies, German interference in Turkey’s internal affairs would not be tolerated.51

Although the new Ambassador was discouraged after such a rebuke, he continued to pressure the Sublime Porte to announce that Germany was in no way responsible for the

50 Metternich to Bethmann Hollweg, 7 Dec 1915, in Gust, Revidierte Ausgabe, 199-200.

51 Trumpener, 232.
Armenian Massacres. Finally in March 1916, the Ottoman government issued *Vertié sur le mouvement revolutionnaire arménien et les mesures gouvernementales* in which it officially denied that Germany had participated in or approved of the Armenian deportations.\(^{52}\)

Unfortunately, although Metternich worked tirelessly for this goal, he was unsuccessful in getting the Committee of Union and Progress to reverse its Armenian policy, and the Young Turks eventually had him recalled to Germany because of his continual protests on the Armenians’ behalf.\(^{53}\)

With Metternich’s recall, German diplomatic intervention on behalf of the Armenians for the most part came to a conclusion. This was true for two reasons. First, the German government had gotten what it wanted—an official statement from the Young Turks exonerating Germany. Secondly, the Armenian Genocide basically concluded at the end of 1916, although there were sporadic outbreaks of violence against the remnant of the population until the war ended.

Although the German diplomatic corps’ motives weren’t exactly altruistic, they did, beginning in July 1915, try to stop the Young Turks’ plan to exterminate the Ottoman Armenians. Could they have acted quicker or done more to help the beleaguered population? Yes, they probably could have, but it is doubtful as to whether or not this would have saved the Armenians. Furthermore, the diplomats also were forced to walk a thin line. They did not want to offend their Turkish ally, but they also did not want to appear apathetic to the plight of the Armenians. Unfortunately, they convinced no one, least of all the Turks, that they would take serious action against them if they continued to persecute the Armenians. The diplomats in

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 236.

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 127.
Constantinople were constrained by the war and by the German government in Berlin, both of which rendered them powerless to help. Sadly, the German war effort took precedence over the lives of more than one million Ottoman Armenians. Although the Allied Powers were quick to condemn Germany for its lack of action on behalf of the Armenians, it is doubtful if they would have acted any differently if the situation were reversed.\(^\text{54}\)

The German government was counting on its people to understand why it continued the alliance with Turkey in light of what the Turks were doing to the Armenians. However, there were certain German civilians who were present in the Ottoman Empire during World War I, who were eyewitnesses to the Genocide. Some of these people never forgave Germany for not preventing the massacres. One, Dr. Harry Stuermer, who was a journalist in the Ottoman Empire, broke all ties with Germany because of the government’s failure to help the Armenians. He wrote a number of accounts, which he sent to his paper and to the Foreign Office, but neither acknowledged what was happening. Consequently, Stuermer quit the paper, and he refused to return to his native land, becoming instead a citizen of Switzerland.\(^\text{55}\) Despite such protests and pleadings, the Wilhelmstrasse refused to intervene. Yet, after the war, the German government used these civilians, who did offer assistance to the Armenians, as proof that the nation as a whole was not complicit in the Genocide.

One of the most outspoken critics of Germany’s continued alliance with the Ottoman Empire was Dr. Martin Niepage, who was employed as a higher grade teacher at the German Technical School in Aleppo from 1913 to 1916. Because Aleppo was one of the final

\(^{\text{54}}\) Ibid., 268-269.

destinations of the deportees, Niepage, his coworkers, and his students witnessed firsthand the horrible condition that the surviving Armenians were in. Niepage was appalled by what he saw, and he decided to write a report on October 15, 1915, to the Reichstag, detailing the sufferings of the Armenians. The report was also signed by the Headmaster of the Technical School, by Dr. Eduard Graeter, who also taught at the school, and by the missionary Marie Spieker. The German consul Hoffman had also secretly taken photographs of the deportees, and these were smuggled out of the Empire with Dr. Niepage’s report. The report questioned the German government’s apparent lack of concern for the Armenians:

Amid such surroundings, how are we teachers to read German Fairy Stories with our children, or, indeed, the story of the Good Samaritan in the Bible? How are we to make them decline and conjugate irrelevant words, while round them in the yards adjoining the German Technical School their starving fellow-countrymen are slowly succumbing? Under such circumstances our educational work flies in the face of all true morality and becomes a mockery of human sympathy.

Niepage pointed out the hypocrisy of sending German teachers and missionaries to the Ottoman Empire when their own government refused to assist the helpless Armenians. At the conclusion of his report, Dr. Niepage stated that the German government must be willing to accept the consequences if it continued to turn a blind eye to the Armenians’ sufferings:

If we persist in treating the massacres of Christians as Turkey’s internal affair, which is not important for us except as making us sure of the Turk’s friendship, then we must change the whole orientation of our German culture policy. We must stop sending German teachers to Turkey, and we teachers must give up telling our pupils in Turkey about German poets and

56 Hofmann, 69.

57 Dr. Martin Niepage, The Horrors of Aleppo (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1918), 6-7.
philosophers, German culture and German ideals—to say nothing of German Christianity.58

Eventually, the Turkish government grew tired of Niepage’s sharp criticism. On September 25, 1916, Djemal Pasha, Minister of the Marine, informed the German Consul at Aleppo, Walter Rössler, that he was going to have Niepage and his colleague, Dr. Graeter arrested and convicted by a military court for continuing to express their discontent with the Young Turks’ Armenian policy. Unbeknownst to Djemal, however, the two men, realizing that they were in danger, had already left Turkey in June 1916.59

Dr. Armin T. Wegner was another critic of the Young Turks who witnessed and documented the plight of the Armenians. The twenty-nine year old entered the Ottoman Empire in April 1915 as part of the German-Ottoman Health Mission, just as the Young Turks were beginning to deport the Armenians. Wegner’s first destination after he arrived in the Empire was Baghdad where he served as a private in the wartime volunteer sanitation force which was attached to the Sixth Ottoman Army led by the German Field Marshall von der Goltz.60

Wegner did not learn about the deportations and massacres until 1916. Although the Turkish government strictly forbade it, Wegner visited the deportation camps at Aleppo and photographed the appalling condition that the deportees were in. He then smuggled these photographs and his letters detailing what he saw to the American Embassy at Constantinople. Unfortunately, Wegner’s attempt to publicize what was happening to the Armenians was discovered, and he was immediately dismissed from his post and sent to work among cholera

58 Ibid., 19.

59 Hofmann, 69.

60 Ibid., 65.
patients, which was tantamount to a death sentence. He managed to survive, however, but he was still held in custody before finally being allowed to leave Turkey in November 1916.\textsuperscript{61}

Wegner is most recognized for his work on behalf of the Armenians after the war. While the Paris Peace Conference was under way, he wrote an “Open Letter to the President of the United States of North America, Mr. W. Wilson, Regarding the Expulsion of the Armenian People to the Desert.” In the letter, Wegner not only asked President Wilson to provide the Armenians with an independent homeland, but he also used the opportunity to assure him that the German people were unaware of the Armenian Massacres. While he admitted that the German government had made an error in judgment by continuing the alliance with Turkey, he pointed out that all of the Great Powers had failed to keep their promise to protect Armenia that they had made in the Treaty of Berlin.\textsuperscript{62}

Perhaps the most prominent advocate for the Armenians was Dr. Johannes Lepsius. After the 1896 Massacres, Lepsius was so moved by the sufferings of the Armenians that he decided to form the \textit{Deutsche-Orient} Mission which provided aid packages to the Christians in the Ottoman Empire. Prior to World War I, Lepsius had made no fewer than six trips to the Orient, and as news of the Armenian atrocities began to leak out, he decided to return to the Ottoman Empire to see what he could find out.\textsuperscript{63} He arrived in Constantinople in late July 1915, and the Minister of War, Enver, received him shortly thereafter.\textsuperscript{64}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{63} Hofmann, 62. \\
\textsuperscript{64} Trumpener, 217.
\end{flushright}
Lepsius’ goal was to collect as much data as possible on the Armenian atrocities. He hoped to visit Anatolia to see for himself what was going on, but the Turkish government blocked this move. Consequently, Lepsius decided to spend the remaining time interviewing as many people as he could about what was happening to the Armenians. He visited the American Ambassador, Henry Morgenthau, and the Armenian Patriarchate. He also spoke with a number of missionaries from Germany, the United States, and Switzerland, as well as with several Turkish officials.

Lepsius returned to Germany after a three-week stay in Turkey. In such a brief period of time, he managed to collect a massive amount of evidence that he began to distribute to leading church figures and to journalists in an attempt to inform the German public and the world at large about the Armenian Massacres. On October 15, 1915, as a result of his efforts, fifty pastors sent a petition to the German government, urging it to do everything in its power to help the Armenians. They asked the government to prevent the Young Turks from deporting the Armenians, and they also wanted Germany to send aid to those who had already been deported.

Lepsius’ second step was to prepare A Special Report, detailing the atrocities. He sent a copy to each of the members of the Reichstag, and an additional 10,000-20,000 were to be distributed among the most influential Germans. However, the Turkish Ambassador to Germany, Ibrahim Hakki Pasha, protested the publication of the 303-page document, and the German government acceded to his demands. They refused to allow the members of the Reichstag to read Lepsius’ report, and they confiscated many of the other copies that had been

65 Ibid., 217-218.
66 Ibid., 217.
67 Ibid., 227-228.
printed. The Foreign Office also began to pressure Lepsius to keep quiet about the Armenian Massacres.68

Meeting defeat in Germany, Lepsius decided to go to Holland for the duration of the war. However, even there he was treated badly by the German Ambassador, who warned him not to comment on the Armenian issue. Although Lepsius refused to keep silent, he promised that he would not say anything that might hurt the German war effort.69 As soon as the war was over, however, he returned to Germany determined to be a voice for the Armenian people. In December 1918 he went to the German Foreign Office and asked if he could view all of the German documents concerning the Armenian question to determine for himself if the allegations of German complicity were true. Because the government had planned to publish a White Book denying any involvement in the Armenian Genocide, the Foreign Office decided instead to let Lepsius’ view its files and to allow his publication to speak for itself. Lepsius agreed only because the Foreign Office promised to give him complete access to the governmental documents.70

*Deutschland und Armenien, 1914-1918,* containing 444 diplomatic documents, was published in 1919. In it, Lepsius concluded that the German government was not involved in the Armenian Massacres. However, closer examination of the book later revealed that a number of key passages had been edited. Some have accused Lepsius of making these changes, while others have suggested that someone in the Foreign Office was responsible.71 It seems highly unlikely that Lepsius would have altered the documents, given his genuine, lifelong concern for


69 Ibid.

70 Hofmann, 63-64.
the Armenian people. In spite of the controversy surrounding *Deutschland und Armenien*, the massive publication is crucial in proving that there was a conspiracy by the Turkish government to exterminate its Armenian subjects.

The question remains—Could Germany, as Dickran Boyajian maintains, have saved the Turkish Armenians? It is very doubtful. Although the Germans were sympathetic to the Armenians' situation, they were not about to sacrifice their own national interests for the interests of a disparate minority. Does this mean that they were then complicit in the Armenian Genocide? No, a number of German civilians and diplomats tried unsuccessfully to get the Young Turks to stop the massacres. Clearly, there were certain high-ranking German military officers who were involved in the Armenian deportations, but the actions of certain individuals should not be projected onto a nation as a whole.

The Armenian Genocide was a terrible tragedy in which over one million men, women, and children lost their lives. Unfortunately, justice has not prevailed for them, and the Turkish government has added insult to injury by refusing to acknowledge what happened to the Armenian population during World War I. However, it would be an even greater injustice to accuse an entire nation of a crime that was clearly perpetrated, at least in Germany, by a select few.

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CHAPTER 4
THE ALLIES’ POLICY TOWARD THE ARMENIANS, 1917-1920

Throughout World War I, the Allied Powers continued to point an accusing finger at Germany for remaining allies with the Ottoman Empire, whose government was clearly trying to exterminate its Armenian population. The Allies charged Germany with complicity in these crimes and maintained that the Young Turks would be punished for their misdeeds when the war was over. On May 24, 1915, the governments of Great Britain, France, and Russia issued a joint declaration in which they protested the Sublime Porte’s mistreatment of the Armenians. They informed the Turkish government that unless it immediately stopped the massacres, the Ottoman Empire would be dealt with harshly at the conclusion of the war. The Young Turks, however, were undeterred by these admonitions. Consequently, the Allied Powers tried to encourage the Armenians by promising that they would never again have to live under the tyranny of the Turks. Although the Armenians had suffered terribly, they clung to these promises and hoped for a future free from Ottoman dominion.

When the war concluded in November 1918, the Armenians believed that the horrible nightmare had finally ended. They were confident that their friends, the victorious Allies, would be generous to them in the peace settlement in an attempt to compensate for all that they had endured. Unfortunately, the Armenians were to be disillusioned once again. After the war, the Allies began to distance themselves from the Armenian Question and tried to disengage themselves from the promises that they had made. It was very difficult for the Armenian people to reconcile the Allied Powers’ earlier assurances during the war with their lack of action after the war was over. Historians of the period have since argued that the Allies never intended to
help the Armenians until the changing tide of the war made it in their own best interests to do so. Sadly, it was also their concern for their own national interests that led them to abandon the Armenians in the postwar world.

Although the Entente Powers had issued a warning to the Turks as early as May 1915, approximately one month after the deportations began, they did not offer to help the Armenians until much later.\(^1\) Artin H. Arslanian, author of “British Wartime Pledges, 1917-1918: The Armenian Case,” maintained that it wasn’t until after the Russian Revolution in November 1917 and the subsequent withdrawal of Russian troops from the Eastern Front, including the Caucasus, that the Allied Powers pledged to help the Armenians.\(^2\) Russia suffered greatly during the First World War. Her soldiers had gone without the most basic necessities—adequate food, clothing, shelter, weapons—for too long. They had also sustained substantial casualties.\(^3\) Put simply, the Russian people were war-weary, a fact that Vladimir Lenin and the Bolsheviks realized. Consequently, when they seized control of the country, their overarching goal was to make a separate peace with the Central Powers. Lenin was so anxious to end Russian participation in the war that he agreed to very humiliating terms in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which was signed in March 1918.\(^4\)


The Russian withdrawal from the war effort was not a huge surprise to Great Britain and France. The governments of these two countries had known since the summer that the Russian Army was on the verge of collapse, and they had begun to make preparations for this possibility. Although the British and French had known about the atrocities being committed against the Armenians for nearly two years, they had not offered to help them even though their citizens were sympathetic to their cause. Great Britain specifically stated that she was fighting against German aggression and for the liberation of Belgium, not for the rights of Turkish minorities. The situation in Russia, however, forced the British government to redefine its war aims. Britain and France were concerned that German troops fighting in the East would now be redeployed to the Western Front. Although they were hopeful that the United States’ entry into the war would offset the loss of Russia as an ally, the Allies needed Armenian soldiers to continue fighting in the Caucasus if Russian troops abandoned the front. They felt, however, that they had to offer the Armenians something tangible to convince them to continue fighting. Therefore, in June 1917, Prime Minister David Lloyd George announced that the British government was not only fighting for Belgium but also for the liberation of Armenia.

Russia’s decision to opt out of the war had much more immediate ramifications for the Armenians. Russian troops had occupied four of the six provinces in Turkish Armenia, and their presence had guaranteed a measure of security for the surviving Armenians. However, Lenin’s insistence on peace without annexations or indemnities meant that Russian troops would be

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5 Arslanian, 519-520.
6 Ibid., 518.
7 Suny, 121.
8 Arslanian, 520.
withdrawing from the area, leaving the Armenians at the mercy of the Turks once again.\(^9\) Lenin was determined to prove that the Bolsheviks truly were anti-imperialistic. Therefore, in December 1917 he revealed in an “Appeal to the Muslims of Russia and the East,” that Great Britain, France, Italy, and tsarist Russia had secretly agreed in 1915 and 1916 to divide the Ottoman Empire into spheres of influence at the end of the war.\(^10\) (See Figure 2.) He openly denounced the secret treaties and stated that under no circumstances would Russia annex Turkish Armenia.\(^11\)

The Allied Powers did not seem to realize that the Armenians did not need much incentive to continue fighting. Their concerns about the Central Powers’ expansion into the Caucasus overshadowed the Armenians’ fear of renewed massacres. The Allies were particularly afraid that Germany would seize control of the oil-rich city of Baku. If this happened, the Germans would have valuable resources at their disposal, and the war could drag on indefinitely.\(^12\) Desperate to prevent this, the Allies decided to issue their first pledge of help to the Armenians. The British and French governments promised that if Armenian soldiers would continue to fight against the Turkish Army after Russian soldiers withdrew, then the Allies would establish an independent Armenian homeland at the end of the war. They also promised that the perpetrators of the massacres would not go unpunished. The Armenians, who had nothing to lose, quickly agreed to this proposition.\(^13\)

\(^9\) Suny, 123.

\(^10\) Ibid.


\(^12\) Arslanian, 519-520.

\(^13\) Ibid., 520.
Despite their promises to the Armenians, the British were clearly more concerned about ending the war as quickly as possible by any means necessary. Germany was seemingly as strong as ever on the Western Front, and Italy was having her own problems with Austria-Hungary. Lloyd George wanted to eliminate at least one of the Central Powers, either by defeating them or by negotiating a separate treaty. Therefore, unbeknownst to the Armenians, the British government approached the Turks at least three different times from December 1917 until the following summer, hoping to convince them to end their participation in the war. In these negotiations it became evident that Great Britain was willing to sell out the Armenians if it meant getting Turkey to withdraw from the war. The Turks, however, were unwilling to deal with the British government, and so the British continued openly to support the Armenians. From these secret exchanges it was apparent, however, that Great Britain’s interests were of foremost concern. The government really did not feel bound to honor any of the pledges that it had made if they interfered with British interests.14

The Armenians, however, were determined to try to uphold their part of the deal. The long-expected Turkish advance began in February 1918.15 Initially, the Armenian troops were able to hinder the Turks’ offensive, and they continued to fight even after British and French reinforcements arrived. The Turkish Army, however, had had sufficient time to recuperate from the damage that the Russian Army had inflicted, and they were motivated by the Bolsheviks’ abandonment of the Caucasus. They believed that their dreams of a pan-Turanian empire were finally within reach.16

14 Ibid., 522-523.
15 Suny, 124.
16 Arslanian, 519-520.
The Armenians were not the only ones to be thrown into upheaval by Russia’s withdrawal from the war. The other peoples of the Caucasus, specifically the Georgians and the Azerbaijanis, were stunned by the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Upon Turkey’s request, Russia was forced to return to the Turks the areas of Kars, Batum, and Ardahan, which had been awarded to the Russians in the 1878 Treaty of Berlin.\textsuperscript{17} Furthermore, they gave the Russian troops eight weeks (after the signing of the Treaty) to evacuate completely the areas of the Ottoman Empire that they had occupied.\textsuperscript{18} Turkey also insisted on the creation of an independent Transcaucasian state, which would allegedly serve as a buffer zone between Russia and the Ottoman Empire.\textsuperscript{19} Although the Transcaucasian peoples opposed the Bolsheviks’ seizure of power, they certainly did not want to be separated from Russia, and they continued to hope that Alexander Kerensky’s Provisional Government would reassume power.\textsuperscript{20}

As the weeks passed, their hopes began to fade, but they were still reluctant to declare their independence from Russia. The Turkish government, however, was becoming impatient and continued to pressure them to accept the terms of the Treaty. Although the Armenians, Georgians, and Azerbaijanis were mistrustful of each other, they all realized that if they lost Turkish Armenia and particularly Kars, Batum, and Ardahan then the Transcaucasian Republic would just be a mere satellite of the Ottoman Empire. They also realized that if they didn’t accept the Turks’ terms then hostilities would resume, which was equally undesirable.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{17} Hovannisian, \textit{Armenia: on the Road to Independence}, 103.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 104.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 103.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 106-107.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 130.
Therefore, they tried to stall their declaration of independence as long as possible, hoping that they might be able to reach a compromise with the Turks over the disputed areas. The Turks knew, however, that they had the upper hand, and they weren’t about to compromise on any of their terms. The Turkish Army eventually took the question out of their hands, seizing the territories by force.\(^{22}\) With nothing left to lose, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia announced the formation of the Transcaucasian Federative Republic on April 22, 1918.\(^{23}\)

The nascent Republic was in danger of collapsing from its inception. The three nationalities were suspicious of each other, and each jealously tried to advance its own interests at the expense of the other two. The Turks’ advance was also very unsettling for their ally, Germany, which was unsympathetic to the Ottoman Empire’s expansionist goals. By spring 1918, Germany was thoroughly disgusted with the Young Turks. They were embarrassed by the violent manner in which the Turks entered Kars, Ardahan, and Batum, and the German government felt that they were more concerned with expansion into the Caucasus than with the war effort. British troops were threatening the fronts in Palestine and Mesopotamia but the Turkish government seemed unconcerned because their Empire lay to the East. The German military also wanted to use the new route through the Caucasus to threaten India, hoping that this would force the British to sign an armistice, but with the Turks jealously guarding their new possessions, this plan could not be put into effect. Furthermore, Germany was interested in exploiting the abundant natural resources in the Caucasus herself. She desperately needed the oil and mineral wealth of the region, but again she had to contend with the Turks. There was basically a feeling that Turkey was ungrateful. After all, it was German power, not Turkish, that

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 151.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 160.
had forced the Russians to sign the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, a fact that the Turks appeared to have forgotten.\textsuperscript{24}

Therefore, the German government decided to circumvent the Turkish government’s authority in the region by secretly sabotaging the Transcaucasian Republic.\textsuperscript{25} Of the three groups, the Azerbaijanis, who were mostly of the Islamic faith and also had close ethnic and linguistic ties, had the least to fear from the Turks, and thus were least apprehensive about being a part of the Turanian Empire.\textsuperscript{26} The Orthodox Christian Armenians and Georgians, however, were extremely alarmed at the prospect of Turkish domination. Because Armenian officials had connections with the Allies, the German government decided to approach the Georgian representatives with an offer. It promised military protection from the Turks if Georgia would withdraw from the Federation and announce that it was forming its own independent state. By promising the Georgians protection, Germany would at least have some measure of control over Transcaucasia. The Georgians were won over by German assurances, and on May 26, 1918, thirty-four days after the Transcaucasian Republic was formed, Georgia withdrew from the Federation. Two days later, the Azerbaijanis also declared independence, and Armenia reluctantly followed suit later the same day.\textsuperscript{27}

The Armenians did not want to form an independent state, but the secession of Georgia and Azerbaijan from the Federation left them without any other viable alternative. Their isolation from Russia and the other peoples of the Caucasus left them in a very vulnerable

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 176-178.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 182-183.

\textsuperscript{26} Suny, 124-125.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 125.
position. Russian Armenians began to worry that they would meet the same fate that had befallen their Turkish brothers. The advancing Turkish Army was a serious concern of the Armenian representatives who had begun the arduous task of creating a government that could effectively deal with the many challenges that the Armenian people were facing.\textsuperscript{28}

While the Georgians and Azerbaijanis had found it profitable to abandon the Armenians, receiving assurances of protection from Germany and Turkey respectively, the Armenians could only rely on the Allied Powers’ promises to rescue them from their horrible ordeal at the end of the war.\textsuperscript{29} Despite its ties with the Allies, the Armenian government had to deal with the immediate threat that the Turkish Army posed. Realizing that it needed to concentrate on rebuilding the devastated populace and desperate to prevent more bloodshed, the new Republic sued for peace. On June 4, 1918, an armistice between the Ottoman Empire and the Armenian Republic was signed, and on July 19, the Armenian government arrived at its new capital in the Caucasus, Erevan.\textsuperscript{30}

Upon arrival, the Armenian officials were confronted with people in the throes of despair. There were thousands of starving, homeless, disease-laden refugees from Anatolia, and the new government simply did not have the resources to alleviate their suffering. Russia was unable to provide aid, and the Central Powers were unwilling. The Armenians once again prayed for the war to end.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 124-125.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 124-125.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 126.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
In the fall of 1918, the Armenians finally had reason to hope that the end was near. The British general Edmund Allenby inflicted devastating losses on the Turkish Army in Palestine and Syria, and the retreating Turks, fearing that the British Army would occupy the entire Empire, conceded defeat. The Armenians were ecstatic. The Mudros Armistice was concluded on October 30, 1918, between Turkey and the Allies (with the exception of the United States, which never declared war on Turkey), and less than two weeks later, Germany also sued for peace.32

The Great War was finally over! The Allies were victorious, and the Paris Peace Conference was scheduled to begin in January 1919. Armenia, the “Little Ally” as Winston Churchill termed her, was confident that her friends would compensate her people for all that they had lost during the War.33 Yet, little did she realize that she was about to be betrayed once again—this time by her putative protectors.

Although the Armenians were jubilant over the Mudros Armistice, a closer examination of the terms and their lack of enforcement clearly caused problems for the Armenians in the long run. First of all, the Armistice allowed the Turks to maintain a presence in the Armenian provinces. Furthermore, although the Armistice required the Turkish Army to demobilize, the Allies did not take the necessary steps to ensure that the Army in the interior provinces complied.34 The Mudros Armistice was concluded in haste because the Allies were still fighting Germany, but their neglect of the Armenian situation was a foreshadowing of things to come.

32 Terzian, 115-116.
33 Arslanian, 517-518.
34 Nassibian, 57.
The second disappointment for the Armenians came in January 1919. The Armenian government was convinced that as a nation belligerent to the Ottoman Empire, it should be awarded a seat at the Paris Peace Conference. The Armenian government pointed out that the Armenians had lost twenty-five percent of their total world population during the war, a number substantially higher than any other country. They, more than anyone else, deserved a seat at the Peace Conference. While the Big Four acknowledged Armenia’s sacrifice, they still refused to include her as a member. At first, they maintained that only established, independent countries could have a seat at the Conference. The Armenian representatives countered that Armenia was an independent state and had been since May 28, 1918, months before the hostilities concluded. They also pointed out that Armenian soldiers had been crucial to the war effort, slowing down the Turkish offensive after Russian soldiers began deserting en masse. Caught off-guard by these powerful arguments, representatives of the Big Four finally admitted that the Republic of Armenia could not have a seat because it existed on territory that formerly belonged to Russia. The Allies first had to decide what they were going to do about Russia before they could make any provisions for the Armenians. The Big Four, however, reassured the Armenian delegates that their situation would be dealt with as soon as they found a way to restore democracy to Russia.36

The Allies, despite their refusal to give Armenia a seat at the Peace Conference, protested their sincere desire to help the Armenian people. World opinion was still firmly in favor of an Armenian state, free from the control of the Ottoman Empire. David Lloyd George even admitted that British politicians were largely to blame for how the Armenians had suffered over


36 Ibid., 276-277.
the past four decades. He believed that the British government should not have interfered after the Russians defeated the Ottoman Empire in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878. The British government’s insistence on revising the Treaty of San Stefano had robbed the Armenians of Russian protection. Lloyd George also chastised his country for ignoring the Armenian massacres of 1894-1896 and 1909. Although at the time the British government was unwilling to get involved itself, it also refused to let Russia intervene for fear that Russian influence in the region would supplant that of Great Britain. Many innocent people lost their lives because of this political maneuvering, and the Prime Minister maintained that the Armenian Holocaust of 1915-1916 could have been prevented if the British had taken decisive action against the Turks earlier. Unfortunately, they had not, and their policy of nonintervention made them partly responsible for the death of over one million Armenians.\(^{37}\)

Lloyd George insisted that this time the British government would not abandon the Armenian people. They owed it to the Armenians to help them. He eloquently avowed:

> Having regard to the part we had taken in making these outrages possible, we were morally bound to take the first opportunity that came our way to redress the wrong which we had perpetrated...When therefore in the Great War, the Turks forced us into this quarrel...we realised that at last an opportunity had been given us to rectify the cruel wrong for which we were responsible...if we succeeded in defeating this inhuman Empire, one essential condition of the peace we should impose was the redemption of the Armenian valleys for ever [sic] from the bloody misrule... of the Turk.\(^{38}\)

So, in spite of the disappointments concerning the Mudros Armistice and their membership in the Peace Conference, the Armenians still believed that their needs would be

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\(^{38}\) Ibid., 811-812.
addressed by the Big Four. Consequently, the mood of the two Armenian delegations upon arrival in Paris in February 1919 was hopeful. Avetis Aharonian headed the official delegation for the Republic of Armenia, and Boghos Nubar led the delegation that represented Turkish Armenia. The two men quickly realized that it was in the Armenian people’s best interests if they conferred jointly on all major issues. Therefore, they decided to compose a joint memorandum to the Council of Four detailing the settlement they felt Armenia deserved.39

The memorandum was dated February 12, 1919. In it, Aharonian and Nubar requested the incorporation into the Armenian Republic of the six Turkish Armenian provinces, along with parts of Trebizond; Cilicia; and Russian Armenia. The two men acknowledged that the Armenians did not constitute a majority in all of these areas, but they argued that they had prior to the Genocide, with the exception of Cilicia and Trebizond. They requested Cilicia and Trebizond because control of these two areas would give them access to the Mediterranean and the Black Sea respectively.40 The delegates argued that it was imperative for the Republic’s survival to have access to both seas, without having to depend on the good graces of the Ottoman Empire and Soviet Russia.

In addition to these requests for territory, the Armenian representatives also asked that one of the Allies, preferably the United States, accept a twenty-year mandate for the new Republic. The delegation felt that this would give them sufficient time to rebuild without having to constantly fear Turkish or Russian reprisals.41 Besides protecting the new Republic, the mandatory power would make certain that the civilian population disarmed. They would also


40 Ibid., 277-78.

41 Lloyd George, 814.
punish the perpetrators of the Genocide; relocate the *mouhadhirs* (the Turkish emigrants who had resettled in the Armenians’ homes); and rescue Armenian women and children who were being held in captivity by the Muslim population. The two delegations also asked the members of the Peace Conference to force Turkey to pay reparations to the Armenian people. In return, the Armenians would pay a portion of Turkey’s prewar debt.⁴²

One of the most pressing concerns that the Armenian Republic faced in 1919 was the desperate economic situation that most of its inhabitants were in. Aharonian and Nubar pleaded with the Council officially to recognize the new Republic so that the government could apply for loans that could be used to help the Armenian people. Famine was widespread in the capital, and diseases were decimating the malnourished Armenians. By summer 1919, an additional 200,000 Armenians, which constituted about twenty percent of the Republic’s population, were dead. Refugees continued to pour in, however, but the government did not have the resources to help. Inflation had skyrocketed, and the currency that had been issued quickly became worthless.⁴³ Although the Allies knew that official recognition would help stabilize the Armenian Republic, they still hesitated because it was located on territory that once belonged to Russia.⁴⁴ Aharonian could not understand the Council of Four’s indecision when it clearly meant life or death for thousands of Armenians. How could the Allies continue to perpetuate the suffering of the Armenian people when their assistance would alleviate the suffering of so many? Richard G. Hovannisian, author of *The Republic of Armenia: The First Year, 1918-1919*, describes Aharonian’s tireless efforts on behalf of the Armenian people:


⁴³ Suny, 127-128.

In communiqués that soon became hopelessly repetitious Aharonian complained to Lloyd George, Clemenceau, Wilson, Balfour, Pichon, Lansing, and other prominent delegates that each passing day saw another 2,000 victims added to the death toll and that Armenia had become a horrendous cemetery, even though a simple declaration from the Peace Conference would have enabled her to negotiate for life-giving goods, clothing, and medicines.⁴⁵

On February 26, 1919, Aharonian and Nubar appeared before the Council of Ten to present their requests in person. Aharonian emphasized the importance of the Armenian soldiers to an Allied victory, and he urged the Council to unite the Turkish provinces with Russian Armenia quickly while Turkey was still weak. For his part, Nubar answered questions concerning the statistical breakdown of the different ethnic groups living in the areas that they wanted to annex. While he acknowledged that the Armenians did not comprise a majority in some of these areas, he maintained that the principle of self-determination should not be applied as rigidly in this instance. Nubar argued that the Turks in these areas should not be allowed to profit from the Ottoman government’s attempt to exterminate the Armenians.⁴⁶ The two men concluded by saying that the voice of all Armenians, both the living and the dead, should be taken into consideration when the Council determined the Armenian Republic’s borders.⁴⁷

Aharonian and Nubar’s presentation was powerful, but the Allies had already begun to disagree among themselves about the solution. First, there was the question of who was going to accept the mandate. Before the Bolsheviks seized power, Russia had been the most likely

⁴⁵ Ibid., 292-293.
⁴⁶ Ibid., 281.
⁴⁷ Ibid., 278.
candidate. However, her anti-imperialistic crusade eliminated her as a possibility. Great Britain insisted that her commitments to the Arabs and to Palestine already left her overextended and affirmed that she was in no position to assume any more responsibilities. France was interested in exploiting the mineral wealth of Cilicia but did not want to become entangled in the Armenian situation. No one really wanted Italy to accept the mandate because they feared that Turkish resentment might lead to a renewal of hostilities. In light of this, the Allies believed that the United States was the best choice, especially since U. S. President Woodrow Wilson had expressed on numerous occasions his interest in and his desire to help the Armenians. Furthermore, the American public was extremely sympathetic to the plight of the Armenians.

Wilson was willing to accept the mandate, but he told the other three that Congress would have final say whether or not the United States would become the mandatory power for Armenia. He cautioned that the American people might be skeptical of such an arrangement, especially because they were eager for American soldiers to return home. He was unsure of how receptive they would be to sending U. S. troops to such a distant location. The President promised, however, that he would do everything in his power to convince the American people and Congress to accept the mandate. Wilson, however, was not well, and in October 1919 he suffered a stroke which left him paralyzed. Consequently, he was unable to lobby on behalf of Armenia. On March 19, 1920, Congress not only refused to ratify the Treaty of Versailles, but

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48 Lloyd George, 812.
49 Ibid., 813.
50 Ibid., 815-816.
51 Ibid., 816-817.
it also declined the mandate for Armenia. After such a rejection, the United States also announced that it was withdrawing from the Supreme Council of Allies.⁵²

Great Britain, France, and Italy were thrown into a quandary by this turn of events. They had counted on America’s acceptance of the Armenian mandate. Lloyd George blamed Wilson for Congress’ refusal, maintaining that Wilson should have consulted his Republican opponents, like Henry Cabot Lodge, before making any commitments. If they had felt included in the peace process then, Lloyd George concluded, they would have been much more receptive to the idea.⁵³ However, William Linn Westermann, an American delegate at the Peace Conference, defended Wilson and blamed Congress and the American people for not accepting the mandate, accusing them of cowardice. As one of the Great Powers, he maintained that it was the United States’ duty to help the less fortunate peoples (especially Christian) of the world. Westermann predicted that there would be dire consequences because America had ducked its responsibility.⁵⁴

During Wilson’s absence, substantial changes had occurred in the other Allies’ attitude toward the Armenians. As early as May 1919, David Lloyd George began to reconsider his earlier ardent statements of support for an independent Armenian homeland. Although the Armenians’ request for a state that stretched from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea seems incredible today, in February 1919 the Allied Powers did not find their requests unreasonable. However, British subjects in India were very upset about this, and on May 17, 1919, the Aga Khan appeared before the Council Members. He pointed out that Great Britain’s Indian subjects

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⁵² Ibid., 839

⁵³ Ibid., 816-817.

had loyally fought for Great Britain in the World War and were crucial in defeating the Ottoman Empire. He maintained, however, that it would be in opposition to the principle of self-determination if Asia Minor was stripped from the Turks because they clearly were a majority in that region. He also observed that the more than seventy million Muslim Indian subjects of the British Empire concurred with this assessment.\(^5^5\) Aftab Ahmed Khan, another member of the delegation, continued, emphasizing the importance of the Ottoman Sultan, who also served as Caliph, the head of the Islamic world:

> The establishment of a foreign domination over Turkey would be seriously resented by all the Mohammedans. The impression would be that the conference is animated by a spirit hostile to Islam...The future relations of India and the British Empire depend upon your answer, and also the attitude of the entire Mohammedan world, whose discontent would have the most dangerous consequences.\(^5^6\)

India, of course, was Great Britain’s most prized colonial possession, and the British government certainly did not want to incur her disfavor over something as trivial as the Armenian provinces. France’s commitment to the Armenians also began to waver, especially after Alexandre Millerand replaced Georges Clemenceau. France had invested heavily in the Ottoman Empire, and she did not want to lose all of her investments if the Council decided to impose harsh terms on the Turks. In February 1920, Millerand suggested that the Allies take a more lenient approach, suggesting that Turkey could be governed through a Financial Commission.\(^5^7\)


\(^5^6\) Ibid.

\(^5^7\) Lloyd George, 822-824.
While they were trying to decide what they should do about Turkey, the Council Members learned that Mustapha Kemal (Ataturk) and his force of Turkish Nationalists had attacked and defeated French troops stationed in Marash, a district of Cilicia. (The French had arrived in Marash in September 1919 to protect the Armenians from the Turks.\(^{58}\)) After the defeat of the French, 11,000 Armenians in Marash were massacred.\(^{59}\)

France subsequently withdrew her troops from the Empire much to the dismay of the Armenian population. It gradually began to dawn on the Armenians that the Allied Powers were not going to keep their promises to them. It was a disillusioning realization for Abraham Hartunian, an Armenian Evangelical pastor who had survived the massacres of 1894-1896, 1909, and 1915-1916. Hartunian was in Marash after the French abandoned it, and he described the bitterness that he felt towards the Allies:

> Oh that we had realized from the start that all the Europeans were thinking only of their own gain and were ready to sacrifice the Armenians! Oh that we had known they were not our saviors, but murderers more cruel than the Turks! They had not declared war to save enslaved and powerless nations but to buy oil, mines, and land by giving these same nations in exchange[!]… Oh that instead of relying on them and respecting them we had relied on and respected the Turk! The Turk openly declared himself our enemy and destroyed us. The European, Judas-like, kissing us, betrayed us. The British, the Frenchman, the German, the Italian, the Russian—all the Christian powers of the world are our murderers.\(^{60}\)

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 830-832.

\(^{59}\) Suny, 129.

Obviously, the political climate in the Ottoman Empire had changed dramatically since the Mudros Armistice was signed. Ironically, the Turkish Nationals, emboldened by the Allies’ indecision, had sprung up in plain sight of British and French troops. After the Armistice was signed, there were two different political groups in the Empire. Sultan Mehemet VI led the group that seized control of Constantinople in December 1918. Members of this group proclaimed their opposition to the Young Turks, hoping that they might receive a more favorable settlement at the Paris Peace Conference. However, there was another group (eventually known as the Turkish Nationalists) that was determined to resist any settlement that might deprive them of lands which they felt rightfully belonged to Turkey. This group was led by Mustapha Kemal, the hero of Gallipoli.

The Turkish Nationalists received an unexpected boost of support when the new government in Constantinople began to arrest the perpetrators of the Genocide. Although a number of people were arrested, seven of the top Ittihadist leaders had already escaped to Germany. However, it was not until Damad Ferid, the Sultan’s brother-in-law, became Grand Vizier that the military tribunal, presided over by General Mustapha Nazim Pasha, began to prosecute the Young Turks in earnest. In April 1919, the tribunal handed down its first verdict. They convicted Kemal Bey and Major Tevfik Bey for ordering the robbery and murder of Armenians in the Yozgat district. Tevfik was sentenced to fifteen years of hard labor while Kemal was given the death penalty. Four days later, Kemal was hanged, but his execution had

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an unintended consequence—the Muslim population mourned his death and treated him as if he was a national martyr.63

The Turkish Nationalists also used Kemal’s death to foment opposition to the present regime’s appeasement of the Allied Powers, and they eventually established a rebel government in Ankara.64 Although Sultan Mehemet VI and Damad Ferid wanted to bring the rest of the Young Turks to trial, they were fighting a losing battle. The military tribunal continued to try lower-level officials, but few were punished. Within a year, the attempt to bring the Young Turks to justice ceased as the Turkish Nationalists grew in power.65

By 1920, the Nationalists had created a formidable army, and they found an unexpected ally in Soviet Russia. Although Russia had been the traditional protector of Armenia, the Bolsheviks did not like Armenia’s connections with the imperialistic Western Powers. By allying with Turkey, Soviet Russia could not only end her diplomatic isolation, but she could also use the alliance to gain the favor of her own Muslim subjects.66 It was a well-known fact that without outside help the Republic of Armenia would exist only as long as her two neighbors, Turkey and Russia, were weak, and with none of the Allies willing to accept a mandate for Armenia, it was only a matter of time before she collapsed.67

Perhaps ashamed of their treatment of the Armenians, the Allied Powers officially recognized the Republic of Armenia and gave it a large portion of northeastern Anatolia in the


64 Ibid,155.

65 Ibid., 156.

66 Suny, 131.

67 Ibid., 129.
The Treaty of Sèvres, which was signed on August 10, 1920. The proclamation seemed like a cruel joke to the Armenian people, who were already being threatened by an invasion on two fronts, the Turks in the south and the Russians in the north. In the fall of 1920, fighting broke out between the Turkish Nationalists and the Armenians, and the Soviet Army took this opportunity to enter Armenian territory. The Armenians were no match for either foe and were forced to sue for peace.69

The tiny Republic was subsequently divided between the two historic enemies. Under the Treaty of Alexandropol, Turkish Armenia no longer existed. Anatolia was to become the unitary Turkish republic. The Turkish Nationalists had finally achieved “Turkey for the Turks”, although it was not quite the Turanian Empire that they had envisioned. A much smaller Armenia was allowed to continue to exist as an autonomous republic of the Soviet Union, but it certainly was a far cry from the grand promises that the Allied Powers had made to her during the final years of World War I.70

The Armenian people suffered on an unprecedented scale during the First World War, but, encouraged by the Allies’ promises, they believed that they would have a much better future once the war was over. Yet, sadly, in the cruelest irony of all, the Allied Powers turned their back on the Armenians and allowed their murderers to reassert their power over them. Continuing a pattern that had begun with the signing of the Treaty of Berlin, the Allies succumbed to what was politically expedient. Armenia was depopulated and despoiled. She had

68 Ibid., 130.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid., 131.
nothing of any value to offer to the Allied Powers, nothing that might advance their own national interests. For this reason, the Allies abandoned Armenia.

They did not realize, however, that there would be consequences of horrible magnitude for their lack of action on behalf of the Armenians. Less than twenty years later, another mass murderer would rise to power in the very heart of Europe. As early as 1938, when Adolf Hitler was contemplating exterminating the Jews, he spoke in private of the lack of consequences for the perpetrators of the Armenian Holocaust. “Who still talks nowadays of the extermination of the Armenians?” he asked an associate.71 One wonders if the Allied Powers had taken more serious action against the Young Turks if the Jewish Holocaust might have been avoided altogether. If so, then the Allied Powers must bear a share of the guilt not only for their betrayal of Armenia, but also for their failure to prevent future attempts of genocide.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

The Ottoman Empire was in serious decline due to its inefficient rule and the government’s inability to deal effectively with the nationalities’ issue. As the ideas of the French Revolution spread throughout the Empire, different ethnic groups began to lobby for equal treatment. Unfortunately, Sultan Abdul Hamid was unwilling to effect any changes for fear that it might diminish his own power. Left with no other recourse, Serbs, Greeks, and Bulgarians all began to try to free themselves from the repressive control of the Sultan and to establish their own independent homeland.

The Armenians were not immune to such powerful ideas. They had endured centuries of mistreatment at the hands of the conquering Turks, but by the late 1800s they resented the pejorative slurs rayah (cattle) and giavour (infidel). Their cause received a major boost when Tsarist Russia, a long-time enemy of the Turks, took interest in their situation. Russia was concerned over their co-religionists’ plight, and she also wanted to undermine further the tottering Ottoman Empire.

The Russians coveted the Turkish-controlled Dardanelles, which would give them access to a warm-water port. In 1877 they launched a war against the Ottoman Empire, and after stiff fighting the Turks were forced in early 1878 to concede defeat and sign the humiliating Treaty of San Stefano. The Russian government made certain that the Armenians were provided for in the Treaty. Article 16 stated that Russian troops would remain in Armenia until the Sultan implemented lasting reforms. Interference by the British, however, made this treaty null and void, but the Armenian Question did capture international attention as a result.
The suffering of the Armenians appalled the Christian Great Powers, and they pledged jointly to protect their fellow Christians from any further abuse at the hands of the Turks. Sadly, the Great Powers had their own ulterior motives for revising the Treaty of San Stefano, not the least of which was the competing interests of Great Britain and Russia for zones of influence in this region of the world. While their commitment to the Armenians looked good on paper, it actually robbed the Armenians of the one Power that could ensure their safety—Russia. Forced by the new Treaty of Berlin to evacuate the eastern provinces, the Russians were unable to protect the Armenians. The remaining Great Powers, despite their pledges, were unwilling to commit troops or to send aid to a group that was so far away purely for humanitarian reasons.

The Armenians, however, firmly believed that the Sublime Porte would have to implement reforms or face the wrath of the Great Powers. They, therefore, became more outspoken about their demands for equality. This, unfortunately, only fueled the fires of Sultan Abdul Hamid’s resentment. He was afraid that the Great Powers were merely biding their time until they could divide the Empire amongst themselves, and he was angered by the Armenians’ repeated appeals to them for help. He was determined to preserve the Ottoman Empire and to put an end to the Armenian Question by bloody repression.

The Sultan was emboldened by his new friendship with the recently-unified Germany, which was also a rival of Great Britain and Russia for a sphere of influence in the Ottoman Empire. The German government, unlike the other two, was not willing to risk alienating the Sultan by delving into the internal affairs of the Turks. Therefore, she refused to use her sway with the Sublime Porte to intervene on behalf of the Armenians. By the 1890s violence against Turkish Armenians had escalated dramatically. The British, French, and Russians, who had reached a tentative rapprochement, tried to make the Sultan behave, but their unwillingness to
enforce reforms led the Ottoman government to believe that their threats were nothing more than idle words. Their latest attempt to help the Armenians, in fact, led to the greatest massacre at that time as over 200,000 Armenians were killed in the 1894-1896 massacres.

Meanwhile, a new secret political group, the Committee of Union and Progress, had sprung up within the Ottoman Empire. Also known as the Young Turks, this group opposed Sultan Abdul Hamid because they were afraid that his inefficiency and brutality were going to cause the downfall of the Empire. They, therefore, seized power in 1908, restoring the liberal constitution and proclaiming equality for all the inhabitants of the Empire. Unfortunately, the Young Turk regime was plagued with serious problems, and after a number of military setbacks, a triumvirate of Enver, Talaat, and Djemal Pashas seized power. They renounced the constitution and reverted to a military dictatorship.

The more radical members of this group believed that they had to homogenize the Empire if it was to continue to survive in the twentieth century. They wanted to create a Turanian Empire, which would encompass the Muslims of the Caucasus and Central Asia. Two million Armenians, residing in eastern Turkey, were an obstacle to this goal, however. By ridding themselves of the Armenians, they hoped to eliminate two problems at once: the barrier to a Turanian Empire and the persistent interference of Great Britain, France, and Russia on the Armenians’ behalf.

When World War I broke out and the Ottoman Empire entered the war on the side of the Central Powers, the Young Turks decided to use the cover of war to exterminate their Armenian citizens. Maintaining that the Armenians were acting as saboteurs and spies for the Russians, the Turkish government announced that it was deporting all of the Armenians to the interior (the Arabian and Syrian Deserts) for the duration of the war. Deportation was, however, only a
euphemism for mass murder as the Armenians quickly discovered. When a village was
evacuated, the men were separated from the women and children outside of town and murdered.
A much worse fate awaited the women and children. Turkish gendarmes, military officers, and
marauding Kurds repeatedly raped Armenian women and girls. Many women were forced into
harems, while their children were sold into slavery.

As word of the atrocities filtered out to the Allied Powers, Minister of the Interior Talaat
urged the perpetrators to be more discreet in the killings. Sadly, discreet did not mean more
humane. Those who weren’t murdered outright often died from the harsh conditions. The
deporrtes were forced to march through the burning desert without food or water. Many died of
starvation or succumbed to typhus or smallpox.

As the governments of Great Britain, France, and Russia learned of the extent of the
violence, they warned the Turkish government to stop the killings immediately or they would be
severely punished in the postwar world. The Entente also used the massacres to discredit
Germany, accusing her of complicity. The German government was really in an impossible
situation. They were receiving conflicting reports from Armenians, Turks, and even Germans
stationed in the Ottoman Empire. They knew that the Turkish government really had caught
Armenians consorting with the Russians, but they also knew that the Turks were indiscriminately
massacring the Armenians, regardless of age or gender.

When the German government finally realized that the Young Turks were engaging in
ethnic extermination, they lodged protest after protest with the Ottoman government but to no
avail. Germany realized that the alliance was on shaky ground, and she knew that she needed to
retain the Ottoman Empire as an ally. Although she felt that the Turks’ actions against the
Armenians were deplorable, she had to continue the alliance with Turkey, or she would have
very little chance of winning the war. If she lost the war, then the substantial casualties Germany
had suffered would be in vain. The Turkish government realized this, and they, therefore,
ignored Germany’s remonstrations. Although criticized by the Allies, the German government
chose to put its own national interests above those of the Armenian people, which was really no
different than what the Allies did after the war.

The Allied Powers, throughout the war, used the Armenian Massacres as propaganda to
discredit the Central Powers; to try to persuade neutral nations, like the United States, to join the
war; and finally to convince Armenian soldiers to continue fighting in the East even after
Russian soldiers had abandoned the front. In return for Armenia’s sacrificial service, the Allies
promised in the postwar settlement to right the terrible wrongs that had been committed by the
Turks. They maintained that the Armenians would never again have to live under the tyrannical
control of the Turks. They promised to create an independent Armenian homeland, with one of
the Great Powers (preferably the United States) accepting a mandate for the new state. However,
this plan was foiled when the U. S. Congress refused to accept the mandate. Further
complicating the situation was the rise of Mustapha Kemal and the Turkish Nationalists who
were determined to prevent the formation of an independent Armenian state.

In light of these problems, Great Britain, France, and Italy decided to disregard the
promises that they had made to the Armenians. In spite of all that the Armenians had endured,
the Allies refused to accept a mandate for the new Republic or to commit any troops for its
protection, which would have given the Armenians time to build up its strength without having
to worry about the Bolsheviks or the Turks. Instead, they chose to accept mandates where there
was abundant wealth to be exploited, which could potentially advance their own national
interests. Armenia was abandoned once again. The Armenian Republic lasted only two years as an independent state before being divided between Soviet Russia and Turkey.

Over one million Armenians were murdered in the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1916. Twenty-five percent of their total world population was destroyed by the machinations of the Young Turks. Yet, the Great Powers simply felt it was too costly to help the Armenians, they who had paid the highest cost of all of the belligerent nations. The crimes of the Turks went unpunished, and the sacrifices of the Armenian people went unrewarded. Betrayed by their friends and enemies alike, the Armenian people were sacrificed on the altar of political expediency and the national interests of the Great Powers. Justice has not prevailed for the Armenians. The Turkish government, to this day, continues to deny adamantly that the Genocide ever occurred. What is even more appalling is that so few know about the Armenian tragedy, the first attempted genocide of the twentieth century—the Forgotten Genocide.
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APPENDIX

Figure 2. Editorial Cartoons of the Armenian Genocide: a, Tears, Idle Tears; b, The Only Throne Left To Him; c, Raising Their Monument; d, The Turk. (Source, John Ahmaranian, comp. http://chgs.hispeed.com/Histories_Narratives_Document/Armenian_Genocide/armenian_genocide.html)
Figure 2 (cont.). Editorial Cartoons of the Armenian Genocide: e, The Core; f, Go Away; g, It Ain’t Polite To Interrupt; h, Prohibition’s Greatest Martyr. (Source, John Ahmaranian, comp. http://chgs.hispeed.com/Histories_Narratives_Documen/Armenian_Genocide/armenian.genocide.html)
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