

THE POLITICAL MILIEU OF THE ARMENIAN QUESTION

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The Origins of the Armenian Question

In 1877-78, the Ottoman Empire entered into a full-scale war with Tsarist Russia. It had no allies. Mediation efforts by the Great European Powers were to no avail. It was possible, even easy, to diffuse the situation; and yet, the ambitions, shortsightedness and mistakes of a few Ottoman statesmen had made war unavoidable. The only hope was that Britain, as it had done a quarter of a century previously, would side with the Sublime Porte to prevent Russia from advancing south. When this was not forthcoming either, the only option remaining was to trust that the modern armies and sophisticated navies of the Ottomans would be sufficient to defend against the Russians. Despite some strong offensives and a few important victories, Ottoman commanders mismanaged the war that ended in total defeat.

The war ended with the signing of the Treaty of San Stefano (3 March 1878), which in effect meant the complete retreat of the Ottomans from the Balkans. As such, it was not acceptable to the European Powers. A conference was convened in Berlin, resulting in the Treaty of Berlin (13 July 1878), which officially ended the Ottoman-Russian War and established a new political equilibrium in Europe.

Only the seven Great Powers attended the Congress of Berlin: Turkey, Russia, Germany, Great Britain, France, Austro-Hungary and Italy. German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, in the zenith of his power and influence, presided over the negotiations. The Congress, sometimes in direct repudiation of the basic articles of the 1856 Treaty of Paris, signed by the same seven states, laid the foundations for a new Europe. The Treaty of Paris had proclaimed the seven signatory states as Great Powers and had denied this status to other nations. Only these seven states could designate ambassadors, and all others had to be satisfied with appointing

only plenipotentiaries in dealing with each other and with the Great Powers. Important nations such as the United States of America, Japan, China and Spain fell into this latter category, although the U.S. and Japan were elevated to the status of Great Powers at the end of the 19th century.

The Treaty of Berlin was the second important step, after the 1699 Treaty of Carlowitz, designed to limit Ottoman influence in Europe. With the 1913 Treaty of London, which ended the Balkan War, the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire had been drawn back from the shores of the Adriatic to the Maritsa River in European Thrace. After the Treaties of Vienna (1815), Paris (1856) and Versailles (1871), the Treaty of Berlin was the last convention of the 19th century to shape the geography of Europe.

Other than the Kingdom of Greece, about a third of the size of the modern-day country, it created three new Balkan states: the principalities of Rumania, Serbia and Montenegro, which were severed from the Ottoman Empire to become independent states. Rumania in 1881, Serbia in 1882 and Montenegro in 1913 became kingdoms. An autonomous Bulgaria, with its capital in Sofia, and a semi-autonomous East Rumelia, with a capital at Filibe, were also created within the Ottoman state.

Although these states gained independence and autonomy because of Russia, in terms of foreign policy they leaned towards Germany, France and Britain. Despite huge sacrifices on its part in the war of 1877-78, known in Ottoman history as the "war of '93", Russia did not gain the land and territory it had hoped and, moving away from the Balkans, turned its attentions instead to the Caucasus. Here too, as its border neighbour, it faced the Ottoman Empire.

During the war of '93, the Ottoman Empire, in terms of importance and military strength was classed fifth among the world states behind Britain, Germany, France and Russia. Defeat in the war and huge war compensations meant that it could no longer retain this position. Abdülhamid II (1842-1918), ruling between 1876 and 1909, had taken over complete power from the Sublime Porte. Not only did he suspend the constitutional monarchy and dissolve the parliament, Abdülhamid thereafter ruled the country as an autocrat. In 1878, democratic rule was in place in Britain, France and Italy; in Germany and Austro-

Hungary, despite the existence of upper houses, the rule was autocratic; Russia was fully autocratic, even totalitarian.

Russia's traditional state policy centered on advancing south to the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas. In the war of '93, it had hoped to reach the Aegean *via* Bulgaria. It now tried to move forward through the Caucasus. For this, it needed to enter eastern Anatolia in order to reach the Gulf of skenderun, or the Gulf of Basra (the Persian Gulf), then part of the Ottoman Empire. Obviously not feasible to do this outright, it focused its long-range policies, from then on, using the Armenians of eastern Anatolia. To this end, it manipulated with Article 61 of the Berlin Treaty, which exacted reforms for eastern Anatolian Armenian subjects of the state.

Nations in the Last Quarter of the 19th Century

Before discussing the Armenian question, it is worthwhile to look at the political situation in Europe and the world in the last quarter of the 19th century. The world population was 1,326 billion in 1875, 1,491 billion in 1900, and 1,782 billion in 1915. The number of independent states were 58 in 1875, 53 in 1900, and 55 in 1915. The majority of the population was living in villages, hamlets and small towns. In 1875 the urban populations were as follows: 8 cities with over one million, 14 cities between 500,000 and one million, 168 of 100,000-500,000, 192 of between 50,000-100,000. By 1915, there were 25 cities with a population over one million, 50 between 500,000 and one million, and 327 numbering 100,000-500,000.

As one can infer from the number of states compared to today, the world was mostly ruled through a policy of colonialism. The Europeans had divided up Asia, Africa and Oceania between them. The greatest colonialists were Great Britain, France and Holland, followed by Portugal and Spain. Germany, Italy and the U.S. were late in following the trend. Even Belgium had huge colonies in Africa. Russia did not possess colonies as such, but was keen to rule over non-Russian groups. There was no policy of motherland-colony division in the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires. The Ottoman Government ruled far provinces, such as Bosnia, Libya and Yemen as natural parts of the state.

There were fewer and fewer independent states remaining in Asia and Africa. By 1915, independent states in Asia numbered

Turkey, Japan, China, Iran, Afghanistan, and Siam (Thailand), and in Africa, Ethiopia, and Liberia. Greece had separated from the Ottoman Empire in 1830, and by 1878 it had a population of 1,532,000 and territory extending 51,371 km². Gaining independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1878, Rumania's population was 5,300,000 and its territory 135,156 km²; Serbia had a population of 1,564,000 and territory of 45,427 km² while Montenegro possessed a population of 180,000 and land measuring 9,427 km².

The United States abolished slavery in 1865, much later than Turkey. Russia and Brazil were even further behind. Europe was leading the world with its hefty accumulation of capital and industry. At the end of the 19th century, oil and electricity were replacing traditional sources of energy. Steam ships totally eradicated sailboats. Telegraph lines and railroads were rapidly criss-crossing the landscape. The telephone went into use in the U.S. in 1876. The Ottomans were quick to adopt these technological innovations but failed in distributing them fully throughout its vast territory. The Ottoman Empire extended across three continents. Although embracing this technology much later than the Ottomans, Japan was in a position, due to its narrow geography, to install it quickly throughout the country.

The first Ottoman telegraphs line between Istanbul, Varna and the Crimea went into operation in 1855. By 1870 it had 36,059 km of line, putting it fifth behind the U.S., Britain, Russia and France. Railroad construction began in the same years with the Zmir-Turgutlu track. By 1875, its railroads extended for 4,632 km, the ninth largest in the world. In the same year, China and Japan had yet to start construction.¹

In this environment, the Ottoman Empire began experiencing problems with its Armenian population, just as it had with its non-Muslim subjects in the Balkans.

The Status of the Armenians

The Armenians were a distinct tribe of peoples from the South Caucasus. They lived under Byzantine rule for six centuries (395-1071), during which time they scattered throughout the Byzantine Empire. Although Orthodox Christian, they were reluctant to enter the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Patriarchate in Constantinople.

¹ *Almanach de Gotha*, 1873, p. 869.

This was considered heresy according to the Byzantine rulers, and they were driven from Constantinople. Their highest religious authority is the Armenian Gregorian Patriarch who resides in Echmiadzin in the Caucasus.

From 1071 onwards, they were subjects of the Seljuk Empire. Between the 15th and 16th centuries a majority of all Armenians were living under the rule of the Ottomans. The remainder lived in the Persian Safavid Empire. When Sultan Mehmed conquered Constantinople in 1453, there were no Armenians there. Designing Constantinople as a cosmopolitan seat of power, he resettled some Anatolian Armenians in various quarters of the city. Acting under his title of "Roman Emperor", the Sultan created (1461) an Armenian Patriarchate rather than handing them into the fold of the Ecumenical Patriarch. It is only natural that prayers at the Armenian Patriarchate in Istanbul were offered, from time to time, for the soul of the Sultan, who had created that independent church structure.

The Armenians were a hardworking people, known for their good craftsmanship and financial abilities. They were scattered throughout the state, although nowhere did they make up a majority of the population. During the 1878 Berlin Convention, Armenians of all denominations within the Ottoman Empire numbered around one million.

Some Armenians, particularly in the 19th century, converted to Catholicism from Gregorian Orthodoxy. The Ottoman Administration appointed a Catholic Armenian Patriarch in Istanbul. The Sublime Porte, although not happy with the conversion, did not meddle in the matter: Catholic Armenians were bound to the Pope, and the Pope was constantly provoking the European states against the Ottomans. Moreover, there were millions of other Catholics within multi-religious the state in Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia, Lebanon, in some areas of Bosnia and Albania and in Istanbul itself.

Although in small numbers, some Armenians in the 19th century, under the influence of Anglo-Saxon missionaries, converted to Protestantism. The Ottomans tolerated this new development and, again, did not interfere. There is no historical evidence that they intervened in their religious faith, their churches, masses, their capital or professions. The Armenians were particularly adept in domestic trade, foreign trade, banking,

jewellery production, construction work, architecture and medicine. Noted Armenians of the day were proud of their family history and lived in luxury in the capital. There is not the slightest evidence that their wealth caused any feelings of jealousy or resentment among the Turkish Muslim population. The situations of the Armenians in Anatolia, in the Arab countries, in the Balkans and in the other Ottoman territories were similar. Their Patriarch occupied a high position in the official state protocol and met freely with the high Ottoman dignitaries. They are referred to in Ottoman documents as the *millet-i sâd ka*, the “loyal community”. They refrained from breaking the law. The Ottoman Greeks, always in greater numbers than the Armenians, at times hated them; a point alluded to in the writings of ambassadors and travellers.

It is even possible to say that, among the non-Muslim groups, the Armenians adapted most to Turkish culture. They all knew Turkish and learned Armenian in the church schools. Many Armenian folk poets wrote their poetry in Turkish rather than Armenian. There are hundreds of Turkish words in the Armenian language. Their cuisine is the same as Turkish. Their customs are largely taken from Ottoman tradition. Many travelled to Europe for educational purposes, particularly to Italy. Armenian church and classical music is based on Turkish musicology. They trained many musicians and composers in classical Turkish music. One encyclopaedia of Turkish music lists over one hundred Armenian composers. Many Turks know of Baba Hamparsum, Asdik Ağa, Nikogos Ağa, Tatyos Efendi, Bimen en and Artaki Candan who all flourished under the patronage of Sultan Selim III.

With the Reform Edict of 1856, Armenians, like other non-Muslims, were able to become public officials. In the last 66 years of the empire, Armenians occupied all levels of public office on an equal footing with Turks. Ninety percent served their country loyally. It was generally thought to be extremely discourteous to treat Armenians differently from Turks. From 1856 onwards, Armenians, hitherto free in their private lives, served the state at the official level as well. In the military, they were employed as medical officers; some were even elevated to the status of *pa a* or ‘civilian general’. No other minorities produced medical officers; although there was no official ban on joining the armed forces, they did not choose to enter the military academies. From 1915 to the present day, Armenians have been serving as reserve officers.

It is worth reiterating that between 1856 and 1922, Armenians served at all levels of government. This was a period when it was considered out of the question for Muslims in European countries to be employed similarly. The highest position in the Ottoman Empire was that of *vezir*, equal to that of marshal in the army. Dozens of Armenians rose to this level. Hundreds of ranks, such as *Bâlâ* (equivalent to full general), *ûlâ* (comparable to lieutenant general), *ûlâ sânisî* (like major general) and *mütemâyiz*, filled by Armenians, are listed carefully in the state almanacs, or the *Sâlnâme-i Devlet-i Âliyye-i Osmâniyye*. As ministers, they were members of the Ottoman cabinet. One Armenian, Gabriel Noradounghian Efendi, even served as Foreign Minister. Abdülhamid II entrusted his huge financial estate to another Armenian, Minister of the Treasury, Agop Paşa.

Towards the end of the 19th century, however, the world's leading colonialist countries, Great Britain, France and Russia, were to meddle with the Ottoman Armenians and open the way for mutual bloodshed.

The Origins of the Armenian Question

Defeated by Russia, the Ottoman Government was forced to accept the Treaty of Berlin. According to Article 61, the Ottomans were to enact reforms for the Armenian minority in six of its eastern provinces: Sivas, Erzurum, Harput (modern day Elazığ), Diyarbakır, Bitlis and Van. There are now 21 smaller provinces occupying the same land area. These provinces were, then, divided into sub-provinces, called *sanjaks*. The Armenians made up a small minority in each province and *sanjak*. Despite some other Muslim and non-Muslim groups, the majority of the population was primarily Turkish and Kurdish.

Despite its goodwill, it was impossible for the Ottoman Administration to enact reforms for such a small and widely scattered minority in a region where the predominantly feudal populace lived in villages, and where significant urban centres were few and far between. It was a move that would threaten Muslim-Armenian relations; and that is exactly what happened. Although up until then Armenians, like other non-Muslims, had lived side by side with the majority Muslims, hatred and suspicion would no doubt now rear its head. In that case, what exactly did the Western nations want?

Firstly, they wanted to exert influence over a Christian group in eastern Anatolia, as they had done in the Balkans. The Greeks, followed by Rumanians, Serbs and Montenegrins, had all split from the Ottoman Empire to form independent states. The Bulgarians were awarded autonomy. There was even a tiny Maronite Catholic Arab autonomous state on Mount Lebanon. Nothing had yet been achieved for the Armenians. If an Armenian state could be founded in eastern Anatolia, they would forever be pawns to the European power that worked most towards this goal. Russia, Britain and France were all keen to reap this reward. Germany, as yet, did not exert enough influence in this region.

Secondly, even if no autonomous state came about, eastern Anatolia would be in turmoil. This scenario, too, was successful. When the bloodshed began, the Europeans would have the perfect excuse to exert pressure on the Sublime Porte and demand concessions. At the very least, they could occupy Ottoman attention and weaken the state. Not only would the Ottomans be undermined in the Caucasus, Ottoman links with its southern Arab provinces would also be severely disrupted.

This method of 'reform after reform' had succeeded in paving the way for autonomy for Bulgaria and Crete. The Turks there, however, had made up half or less of the total population, whereas the Muslim population in eastern Anatolia constituted an absolute majority. The area where reform was demanded was extensive, including even S vas.

Since 13 February 1878, Abdülhamid II had been reigning single-handedly over the Ottoman Empire. The Sultan had dissolved the Parliament, had not decreed new elections and although he stopped short of breaking up the Senate, he had not allowed it to convene again. The Constitution theoretically remained in force, but the first constitutional monarchy had ended. For over thirty years, Sultan Abdülhamid ruled an autocratic regime. Although rated third in the world, he had no trust in his navy, which had proved inefficient during the war with Russia. His faith in the army fared no better, since he saw its interference in politics in 1876 as irreparably damaging to the empire. He did accept, however, that a strong army, was of the utmost importance to his policies. He therefore maintained his seven armies, even at a period of time when the state was saddled with foreign debts. The army alone was costing the empire seven

million gold coins annually. The sultan was reluctant to use his armies, still among the world's greatest, in war with any nation. He had learnt that a victorious army would not necessarily gain anything from the Great Powers. He also realised that they would also be agitated if the army was used in internal turmoils. Despite this, he was forced to declare war on Greece in 1879. As discussed below, the Fourth Army, based at Erzincan, was used against the Armenians in 1894-95. Later developments proved that the use of the army against the Armenians was both extremely costly and also produced one diplomatic note after another from Europe. Paramilitary units were therefore formed to patrol eastern Anatolia. This prevented needless strain on the army and also allowed it to continue in its defence of the Caucasus border.

Eight years had passed since the Congress of Berlin. The Great Powers began to warn the Porte that Article 61 was not being implemented, that reforms for the Armenians in eastern Anatolia had still not been forthcoming. Sultan Abdülhamid's policy was one of playing the Great Powers off against the small Balkan states to prevent them from forming a bloc against the empire. He continued this policy for thirty years.

It was clear that Britain, France and Russia wanted to have control over events in eastern Anatolia. However, Germany, Austro-Hungary and Italy, as the other signatories of the Berlin Treaty, also felt they had rights over the region. Abdülhamid knew that Italy did not have the strength to meddle in the Armenian matter and therefore concentrated on separating Germany and Austro-Hungary from the triumvirate of Britain, France and Russia. Eastern Anatolia was not a part of the foreign policies of these two nations. Berlin and Vienna would gain no benefit, but rather quite the reverse, from British, French or Russian influence over the Armenians in the region. Knowing this, when Abdülhamid declared to the German Ambassador in Istanbul in 1895 that Article 61 was ridiculous and impossible to implement and that he would rather die than try to execute it, Berlin did not protest. Neither did Vienna.

The Russians were the first to take the Armenians in hand, by planning Armenian operations in eastern Anatolia. Although Russia was distinctly Pan-Slavist, it tried to break the Ottoman hold on the region and advance through to the Mediterranean by making use of the non-Slavic Armenians. For this plan to succeed,

it had to be certain that the Armenian minority was powerful in as many places as possible and to rid the region of the Muslim populace. The Muslims were mostly Turkish, but there were some Kurdish majorities in some sub-provinces. Other Muslim groups were less important.

Although it seemed a rather fantastic idea, the Russian-Armenian plan had proved successful elsewhere. Russia, for example, had succeeded in reducing the Turkic Tatars in the Crimea to a minority. Only recently it had driven the Azeri Turks from Yerevan, and what had once been an area with a 90% Muslim Turkish population bordering the Ottoman Empire, became a haven for resettled Armenians. The region from that point on was known as Armenia and became, with Russia's support, a base for attacks on eastern Anatolia.

While Russia was working towards creating an Armenian principality on Ottoman land, France and Britain were watching closely and waiting for opportunities. France and Britain could never accept Russian penetration into eastern Anatolia, and its control of the routes leading to skenderun and the Gulf of Basra. France had strong connections to the Armenians starting from the time of the Crusades; the Ottoman Armenians included an important Catholic contingent, which had put its trust in France. Britain was a world power; it had faith in its international policies, its mighty navy and its economic power.

Russia started sending arms and weapons to east Anatolian Armenians. It is important to stress that all denominations of the Armenian Church took the lead in betraying the Ottoman State. Some church leaders and stanbul bishops were also involved. Officially, Russia was neutral. The Armenians seemed to be rising against the state alone. Russia had the Armenians organised around committees. Russian Armenians formed the Marxist Hinchag group first in Geneva (Switzerland) in 1887. Their goal was to rid eastern Anatolia of Muslims and persuade stanbul to found an autonomous Armenian principality there. They started aggressive propaganda activities on the Ottoman Armenians. The "committee" killed those Armenians who would not contribute to the cause either financially or by providing men.

When the Hinchag reign of terror began to make even the West anxious, Russian Armenians formed the Dashnag committee in Tiflis (Georgia) again. This group differed by propounding a

socialist ideology. Their methods, however, were no different than those of the Hinchag, and they joined forces several times for attacks. Meanwhile, the Ottoman Armenians were content with their administration and did not show any inclination to rise against their own state.

Armenians in eastern Anatolia, armed and organised by the Russian Armenians, began to pillage and kill in raids on predominantly Kurdish-speaking Muslim villages. No mercy was offered to the old, women or children. The documents pertaining to these massacres are presented in scholarly articles in this book. Many countries have innumerable, detailed documents on this issue in their state archives. There are records of people left to die, pregnant women slain through the stomach, men castrated or finger, hands, arms, legs cut off. Muslims were herded into mosques, dervish lodges and religious schools set on fire. Rape was a particularly constant form of their violence, even applied against young boys and girls. The gangs retreated only after the Muslim villages, crops and vegetation cover included, were razed to the ground. Their aim was to terrorise the non-Armenian population into fleeing the region. Amidst the carnage, some gangs dressed up in Turkish clothing to raid Armenian villages, and publicise it to the West as clear evidence of Turkish brutality.

Russia was concerned about these over-enthusiastic methods, anxious that Russian Armenians could perhaps act in the same way towards their country; it also feared the emergence of Pan-Armenianism, moreover bolstered by alleged principles of socialism. Slowly, it started to withdraw its support, at least for the time being.

The Armenian population within the Ottoman Empire at this time was around one million. They were represented within the administration above their numbers. Fearful of the Armenian terrorist groups, they had put their trust in the European nations. The Armenian matter was now a regular item in the European and American press, its constant motif being 'Ottoman oppression'. The Armenian churches, clerics and European missions throughout the Ottoman Empire supported the movement. Many churches and consulates had become depots for storing arms. Weapons were routinely buried in the mountains to be later unearthed for use.

In 1894, on the instructions of Abdülhamid II, Mü ir Zeki Pa a, the head of the Fourth Army in charge of eastern Anatolia, began a

swift, harsh clampdown and recaptured the Kurdish villages. The European press immediately started an ugly campaign against the sultan and the operation. The Europeans had thought that the Ottomans would sit down for negotiations with the Armenians and their European patrons. This act of self-defence therefore came as a surprise. The famous French historian Albert Vandal used the term *Le Sultan Rouge*, for the first time, to describe Abdülhamid II.

Abdülhamid's administration was committed to protecting its Muslim subjects. The Armenians, firm in the belief that Russia, England and France would intervene any day, even organised some bloody demonstrations in important Ottoman centres such as Sivas, Trabzon, Erzurum, Van and Diyarbakır.

When Abdülhamid realised that his Fourth Army would be needlessly wasted in gang warfare in the mountains rather than in its real role to defend the empire against Russia, he formed a new unit called the Hamidiye Cavalry Regiment that remained until 1908. Well armed and able to act swiftly, the regiment was composed completely of Kurds. The units were mandated with patrolling their own rural areas and ordered to destroy the Armenian gangs whenever they came up against them. Regiment officers were made up of Kurdish tribal leaders and their sons and relatives. The highest rank was that of colonel. These officer ranks were only awarded to the Hamidiye regiment. They successfully protected the mountainous and rural areas of the region. The regular army or the gendarmes already protected the cities and towns.

The regiment, however, was not popular with the West and complaints were often taken to the Porte. This was the case although the sultan had been inspired by European examples of paramilitary legions. The Kurds, at that point in history, were not a favourite cause of the Europeans. They had to be removed from eastern Anatolia as much as possible so that the region could be left over to the Armenians, although there were not enough of the latter to repopulate the whole area. There was a good example to be had from Bulgaria, however. Previously numbering half the population, the Muslims of Bulgaria from 1877 onwards had been driven out or killed so that they were reduced to only a quarter of the total; this move was followed by the formation of an autonomous principality. The example, however, was not an

appropriate one. Bulgaria was tiny compared to the huge area encompassed by eastern Anatolia.

The only Ottoman sub-province, which had the highest Armenian population in comparison to Muslims, was the Sasoun district between the towns of Siirt and Mu . Here, there were 12,000 Armenians to 15,000 Muslims, almost all of them Kurds. This was the overriding reason the district was chosen by the committees as a pilot project. They planned to take over this area and sow the seeds of the Armenian principality.

The Armenian gangs descended in full force on the area and armed the local Armenian population by force. The Ottoman forces, however, were quick to suppress the revolt. Hundreds of Kurds and around 5,000-armed Armenians were killed. Europe was irate. The leader of the revolt, Hamparsum Boyac yan, had fled. Thirteen years later, he was to become a parliamentary representative for Harput under the Union and Progress Party. The Sasoun incident occurred in October 1894. One month later, some Armenians were killed on account of an Armenian uprising in Diyarbak r.

During the winter of 1894-95, European states exerted great pressure on the Porte. Citing greater Armenian casualties than Muslims in the uprisings, they demanded reforms for the Armenian people. A joint diplomatic note presented by Britain, France and Russia on 11 May 1895, demanded the appointment of new, untainted governors for the six provinces of eastern Anatolia; the abolishment of the Kurdish regiment, and the formation of Armenian gendarme units. On 3 June, the Porte refused the note and stated that none of the demands could be implemented. These were the most critical months of the Armenian question. Sultan Abdülhamid had, however, prevented Germany, Austro-Hungary and Italy from signing the note. Britain had removed its fleet from Malta to the Dardanelles. The Porte, nonetheless, had recognised that Russia had no advantages in meddling in the Armenian affair together with France and Britain. France was supporting Britain in remembrance of the Crusades. Britain was, in effect, on its own.

Armenian Uprisings in stanbul

The Armenians, however, did not understand that the Great Powers had effectively left them alone to make up with the Ottoman state. Committee members had received great sums of

money from Europe and were unwilling to relinquish this lucrative foothold. The European states in their turn continued to pay and protect the committee members since this gave them a means to berate the Porte. The committee also managed to coerce money out of the Ottoman Armenians.

After the successful clampdown on the Sasoun revolts, the Armenian Patriarch of Istanbul, Zmirliyan, planned a similar uprising in the city in full view of European eyes. A few hundred Armenians were armed, most of them living in the district of Kadırga, overlooking the Marmara Sea. They planned to demonstrate against the government outside the Porte on 30 September 1895. When Turkish soldiers at Sultanahmet obstructed them, they retreated in panic to Kadırga, where their houses were stocked with weapons. In Ottoman history, the incident is known as the “first Armenian affray”, since up until then Turks had caused many similar disturbances. The Istanbul Greeks had planned a comparable disturbance during the Greek Revolution but had not had the courage to carry it out. The Armenians, therefore, were the first non-Muslim group to dare cause such a disturbance since the conquest of the city. The Turks and Armenians in Istanbul for centuries had lived and worked side by side without enmity, as they do in this day. Within this historical context, rising against their state and running after a European-designed dream of an autonomous nation in Anatolia was incomprehensible to the Turks and greatly harmed relations between the two groups. Despite this, the Turks did not change their behaviour towards the Armenians in this or the second Armenian affray the following year. Even the horrific news reaching the capital from the eastern provinces did not change the centuries’ old conduct of the Turks towards their neighbours.

The second Armenian affray took place the following year on 26 August 1896, and was far more destructive than the first uprising; the plans centred around bombing attacks with intent to kill. Patriarch Zmirliyan had urged them forwards with false assertions that the allied navies of the Great Powers were about to pass through the Dardanelles on their way to occupy the city. The Patriarch’s words encouraged thousands of Armenians to revolt.

According to the statements of arrested Armenians afterwards, they had planned to dynamite the head office of the Ottoman Bank, to bomb the buildings of the Porte and kill the Grand Vizier

(Prime Minister). They were caught with dynamite and weapons while trying to enter the Bank, since Ottoman intelligence had learnt of the targets. One Armenian did manage to shoot at the Grand Vizier Halil Rifat Pa a but missed. Abdülhamid had been lenient with the first disturbance but, fearing that it would be repeated every year, now acted rather harshly. Ottoman soldiers, gendarmes and the police entered the Armenian district to arrest the perpetrators; they were fired at from the balconies. The ultimate aim, obviously, was to spur the forces to fire back at the civilian population and then protest this to the Europeans. Foreign missions in Istanbul were watching the events closely and sending minute-by-minute news to their capitals in Europe. Soldiers and police were given orders to arrest, not to open fire. In the event not one arrest was made, the soldiers did not force themselves into the houses but retreated immediately from the Armenian neighbourhood.

That night, especially made clubs from the celebrated carpentry workshop at Yld z, were distributed amongst the Istanbul dock porters, most of whom were Kurds. They were given orders not to carry any firearms or knives. Entering the Armenian district, they beat the young Armenian men, making sure not to touch women, children or the elderly.

After that date, the Istanbul Armenians have shied away from violent demonstrations. Patriarch Zmirliyan was dismissed and sent to Jerusalem. The Great Powers left Armenians to their fate. There were no further incidents involving Armenians in the capital for the next nine years. Even then, remembering what had happened in the past, they hired professional terrorists from Europe.

The Assassination Attempt-21 July 1905

The Armenian committees concocted a plan to kill Abdülhamid II, whom they had unjustly declared an enemy of the Armenian people, in order to draw the attention of the Great Powers and to create disorder in the empire. The plan was drawn in Switzerland, and a Belgian anarchist named Jorris hired. In 1905 nihilist and anarchist factions were active throughout Europe. Anarchist groups were involved in assassination attacks and responsible for the murder of two U.S. presidents, the French president and Tsar Alexander II. Now, assassination plans focused Abdülhamid II, one

of the most heavily protected statesmen of his day and now at the end of his third decade in power.

The Armenians had begun to see him as the only obstacle to the formation of an autonomous principality in eastern Anatolia. Jorris arrived in Istanbul with a group of professionals including women. The most convenient time for an assassination attempt on the sultan was when he attended the mosque for Friday prayers. This was a splendid imperial event, wholly religious within the mosque and full of military ritual on the journey there and back. It was the only opportunity for the citizens of Istanbul, Europeans and Muslim pilgrims from other countries to see the Caliph-sultan. The journey in the past was conducted by horse, but now he was transported in an open carriage so that he could see and be seen by the people. Jorris had a car constructed in Vienna especially for the assassination, and the parts were brought in individually to Istanbul. Inside was placed a *machine infernale*, a highly destructive time bomb, weighing a hundred kilos. The sultan was on his way to Friday prayers at the Yıldız Mosque just outside the palace walls. The ritual was observed closely for some weeks by the assassins to determine how long it took for him to go from the mosque door to his waiting carriage. The carriage carrying the bomb was made to appear like that used by women and positioned in between the mosque and the imperial carriage. As Abdülhamid emerged from the mosque, however, he was unexpectedly detained by *eyhülislâm* Cemâleddin, the chief of religious affairs. During the delay, the pre-timed bomb exploded. Some imperial bodyguards were killed instantly, and many more wounded. The sultan did not suffer any injuries.

The committee members were caught and punished. Jorris was also arrested and interrogated. Under interrogation, he agreed to pass over information on terrorist activities in Europe. He was paid 500 gold coins and released. Later sources, such as the memoirs of the sultan's private secretary Tahsin Paşa, reveal that he did indeed inform the Porte on sensitive intelligence from Europe.

The Adana Uprising: 16-19 and 24 April 1909

The second constitutional monarchy was declared on 23 July 1908. Abdülhamid's rule of despotism ended, but he still remained as the sultan. The first years, and particularly the first months of the constitutional government, were marked by euphoria of freedom. It was as if all restrictions had been lifted. The Armenian

Hinchag and Dashnag committees openly set up bureaux in cities throughout the empire, using them to store firearms and weapons. Neither had Armenian churches diverted from their previous policies. It was a way of reminding both Europe and the state that they were still intent on their aims. The next port of call for Armenian disturbance was the Ottoman province of Adana.

The Bishop of Cilicia, Musheg, ordered the Armenians to revolt. The date of the order, 13 April 1909, "31 March" in the *Rumî* calendar, coincided with a time of intense political internal turmoil in the capital. Heavily armed Armenians went on a rampage of pillaging and death in and around Adana for four days and nights. The Turks retaliated in kind. The uprising ended with about 17,000 Armenian and 1,850 Turkish deaths. The inequality in numbers was cause for natural concern from Europe, and the Minister of the Interior Talât Bey was declared even more of an enemy of the Armenians than Sultan Abdülhamid. Talât Bey sent his close friend Lieut. Colonel Cemâl Bey as provincial governor to Adana, despite his lack of required experience. Rather than investigating how the Ottoman forces had allowed armed Armenians to raid Muslim homes and kill whoever they found for days on end, Cemâl Bey declared a state of martial law and set up a military court for the trials. Only one Armenian was hanged as opposed to 47 Turks, including a religious cleric. This was one of the weaknesses of the Union and Progress Party, which had espoused union between minorities. The aim, ultimately, had been to demonstrate to both Armenians and Europeans an execution of justice. The incident is paraphrased from the memoirs of Cemâl Pa a.

The Armenian Relocation of 1915

The Ottoman Empire entered the First World War on 29 October 1914. Its total Armenian population, Orthodox Gregorian, Catholic and Protestant included, numbered almost 1,300,000. They made up a small part of the population even in the six provinces of eastern Anatolia. The sources for these figures are given in full in other articles in this book.

The Third Army protected the Caucasian front in eastern Anatolia against the Russians. At the end of 1914, Minister of War Enver Pa a arrived from Istanbul to personally take command of the army and direct the celebrated Sar kam offensive. The largest battalions of the Third Army froze to death or were taken prisoner

by the Russians. The army started to retreat in disarray from the Russian front, leaving it undefended.

With the arena relatively clear, the Russians began sending weapons to the Armenians. They also started to recruit Armenians from the Ottoman forces into Armenian gangs. The winter was extremely harsh, and the Armenian gangs began to cut off the supply routes of the army as well as attack units and Muslim villages. The latter were totally undefended, their men fighting in the army and the forces completely preoccupied with the Russians. Villages were followed by attacks on towns and cities. The gangs did not spare women and children, and the largely Kurdish Muslims were brutally massacred. Victims were not shot; methods of torture included the amputation of limbs one by one, leaving the mutilated to die slowly. They burnt everything in their paths. Another method was to herd women, children and the elderly into mosques and other buildings and set them alight. Women and children were raped in front of the crowds. The gangs were secure in the knowledge that the remaining Muslim population would flee eastern Anatolia for the west and the south, that a victorious Russia would help them create an Armenian state when the Ottoman Empire had been obliterated for good after the war.

The city of Van was an important provincial centre of the empire. Gangs entered the city on 20 April 1915, killing a great number of the Muslim population. When the Russian Army arrived one month later, they were shocked to find not one Muslim left. Lake Van was filled with corpses, dead and mutilated bodies were scattered throughout the city. The Armenian slaughter had far exceeded Russian expectations and desires. Russian officers reported back that the Armenian savageness defiled their honour as soldiers. As the Turkish forces approached, the Russians evacuated the city on 3 August 1915; the Turks entered two days later and reported the carnage. Van was resettled after 1918, but, at least initially, not one of the new inhabitants was an original citizen of the city.

The still much disputed Ottoman plan for relocation of the Armenians was taken after the massacre at Van. The state was facing the greatest threat to its existence, fighting Russia, France, Britain and other countries on several fronts. During the Armenian relocation, the fate of the empire was being decided in the Dardanelles. If the enemy succeeded in crossing the Turkish

Straits, its imposing fleet could easily take Istanbul. The whole imperial treasury was sent to safety in Konya. Sultan Mehmed Re ad V refused to leave.

Although care was taken in previous uprisings not to retaliate on those not actively involved in the armed conflict, the present situation called for a new approach. The solution decided on had been used effectively by many countries during both world wars and countless other confrontations. The Armenians of central and eastern Anatolia were made to migrate to the southern, Arab provinces of the same state. It is important to note that the provinces of Damascus, Aleppo, Beirut and Baghdad were more prosperous and developed than the land they were leaving. Nevertheless, it was still lamentable that a people had to leave their homeland of centuries for foreign lands. However, it is one of the tragedies of war. We have contemporary examples in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Chechnya. In the Armenian example, however, it must be noted that families were not separated but kept together as much as possible. The Armenian families in the east, then, mainly started to walk in convoys towards the south.

It was still winter, and various contagious diseases were widespread. Worse, the convoys were targets for attacks from groups of Kurdish bandits. The convoys were being accompanied by Ottoman gendarmes, who were not in a position to fire on the attacking Kurds. If they had, they would have faced retaliation and the dawning of a Kurdish question on top of everything else. The marauding Kurds were those who had had their families killed by the Armenians and were in search of revenge.

What is called a "genocide" by Armenians today is this policy of removal and of relocation. The journey also killed many Turkish soldiers, as well as Armenians, through hunger and the cold. It may be estimated that approximately a quarter of the Armenians being resettled died for several reasons. The figures are given elsewhere in this book. Those who reached the Arab provinces found employment and, after the war, large numbers emigrated to France and other countries in Europe and America. If there had been genocide, there would not have been Armenian diasporas in those countries. If there had been genocide, the Armenians living in the capital would not have been spared. Only a few Armenians were arrested in Istanbul. Armenian gangs were also involved in massacres during the journey, firing on the Turkish soldiers and

fighting with the Kurdish tribes. Ziya Gökalp, a member of parliament for Diyarbakır, the General Secretary of the ruling Union and Progress Party and one of its founding members, said that it was not a “massacre”, but, in many instances, a mutual killing.

The Armenians had to be evacuated from the region. Minister of the Interior Talât Bey to the provinces and sub-provinces sent the orders, which are currently in state archives and have been quoted in this book. The orders are for relocation and resettlement, not murder. The decision was discussed briefly in government and signed by the Grand Vizier Said Halim Paşa.

Armenian committee members later assassinated Talât Paşa at the age of 47 in Berlin (15 March 1921); Said Halim Paşa at age 58 in Rome (8 April 1921); and Cemâl Paşa at age 50 in Tiflis (22 July 1922). Enver Paşa was then in Turkestan, where he was also machine-gunned.

After World War I: 1918-1920

After the First World War, the Russian Armenians started demanding land from north-east Anatolia, a region they had since then stopped to inhabit. In a period starting from the end of 1918 until 1920 tens of thousands of Azeris in the South Caucasus as well as Turks in Anatolia were killed. At the same time, victorious nations were also demanding revenge. When the British, French and Italian forces occupied İstanbul on 16 March 1920, Britain hoped to form a war crimes tribunal to try Turkey for the Armenian relocation. Not one document ordering genocide was unearthed. The sub-governor of Boğazlayan, Kemâl Bey, was hanged, however. Those arrested, mostly Unionist statesmen, were sent to Malta; there was no evidence to convict them.

When the French forces invaded the environs of Adana, Maraş, Urfa and Gaziantep, they formed Armenian regiments. Turks were murdered here too. France evacuated the region, signed an agreement with the government in Ankara, and retreated to Syria taking the Armenians with them.

Similarly, when the Tsarist regime in Russia was abolished with the 1917 Revolution, the republics of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan were formed in the South Caucasus. Armenia wanted territory from both its neighbours and Turkey and engaged in massacres in the Erzurum-Kars region. The Commander of the

15th Corps, Kâzım Karabekir Paşa, drove the Armenian army back into Armenia. Signing treaties with both Armenia and Russia, the Turkish Government ended the war on the Caucasian front. The sultan and the Parliament never ratified the Treaty of Sèvres; so, although signed, it was never implemented. The Armenians, however, never forgot the independent state promised by the Treaty. With the Treaty of Lausanne, agreements regarding Kars and Gümrü went into effect. When the Soviet Union was abolished in 1991, Armenia declared that it did not recognise these agreements of 1920.

“The Armenian Question” Today

The war with Armenia under Kâzım Karabekir and the treaties signed by the Parliament are covered in detail in the other articles in this book. The Armenian question was now considered finished for good. When the Republic of Turkey was founded in 1923, it regarded the Armenian question as a problem pertaining to the Ottoman Empire and left it as such. In this environment of the 1970s, the Armenian ASALA terrorist group was formed in Lebanon. The Turkish consul and vice-consul in Los Angeles, while sitting in a hotel lobby, were shot to death by an elderly Armenian. This was followed by the assassinations of many Turkish diplomats throughout the world. While the Kurdish terrorist organisation, the PKK, was becoming increasingly active, nothing else was heard of ASALA, the Armenian terrorist group. Then, the Armenian diaspora, mostly in the U.S. and France, sometimes in consort with the newly independent Republic of Armenia and sometimes not, began to carry the genocide scenario into the international spotlight.

Although it is both illogical and unacademic for the events of more than eight decades ago to occupy the political arena today, this is exactly what is happening on the threshold of the 21st century. It should be added that during these decades, the Armenians have been successful in duping both politicians and historians with forged documents. Some Western historians have investigated the issue objectively; some of them have been silenced. Armenians have spent huge sums on rewriting history, and they are still continuing. They have raised the younger generations with tales of genocide perpetrated against their race by the Turks. It is even possible to say that for some the subject has become a sort of hobby. Not just Western nations, but also some

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Eastern and Muslim countries have become involved, solely to get concessions from Turkey, to agitate and disrupt its external relations. It seems that the issue will remain in the international political agenda for a time yet. But a wealth of reliable documents force us to offer a new set of arguments to place the controversy in proper perspective.