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# INTERNATIONAL SCHOLARS ON THE EVENTS OF 1915



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**December, 2022**  
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## INTERNATIONAL SCHOLARS ON THE EVENTS OF 1915

“For centuries they [the Armenians] had been loyal subjects of the Sultans even receiving the appellation ‘the Loyal Nation’. It was only under the influence of European nineteenth century nationalism that the Armenians began to stir.

**Firuz Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for  
Transcaucasia (1917-1921),  
(New York: 1952) p.8.***

To begin with, nothing could be further from the truth than the tenacious presupposition suggesting that the Turks and Armenians have been hereditary enemies over the centuries. The fall under Ottoman domination of a part of a people who had known many other foreign dominations had meant their placement in a multi-confessional and multi-ethnic empire. Admittedly, this empire was dominated by a Muslim ruling class which was also very cosmopolitan, and Christian and Jewish subjects there enjoyed the status of dhimmi. The Armenians were no exception to this general situation. Any notion of racism was absent in the relations of the rulers with their dhimmi subjects, to the extent that if one of them converted to Islam, nothing distinguished him from other Muslims.

**Gilles Veinstein, *Trois questions  
sur un massacre* (1994)  
*L'Histoire*, n°187, April 1995**

The Armenians had always been renowned as merchants and bankers; under the Tanzimat many became senior civil servants. Right up to 1914 there were Armenian ambassadors and Cabinet ministers serving the Ottoman State ... Of course, the Armenians had grievances, particularly in the mountainous areas of eastern Anatolia, where they were subject to the depredations of Kurdish tribes and of destitute Circassian refugees, not to mention venal Ottoman officials. But most Muslims were much worse off."

**Andrew Mango, "The Definition,"  
Times Literary Supplement,  
(September 17, 2004).**

Some Armenians were so well integrated into Ottoman-Turkish society that they even joined Türk Derneği, a Turkish nationalist cultural association. The Armenian community, like the other communities in the empire, was not monolithic. It was divided between the educated minority that had participated in the "Armenian renaissance" of the mid-nineteenth century when the Armenian language was recovered from its purely theological roots and the Turcophone majority, between Istanbul Armenians belonging to the commercial bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie and peasantry of the provinces. As late as January 1919, when establishing an Armenian state in Anatolia was a very real possibility, the American diplomat Lewis Heck wrote that according to Sir Adam Block, who knew and understood the Ottoman Empire intimately, the "Armenians were chiefly devoted to commerce and that, for example, the Armenians of Constantinople would not go to Armenia, nor would most of those had emigrated to other countries desire to go back to primitive conditions and real hardship."

**Feroz Ahmad, *The Young Turks and the Ottoman Nationalities: Armenians, Greeks, Albanians, Jews and Arabs (1908 -1918)*, (Salt Lake City: 2014) p.14.**

By driving out Turks and importing Armenians the Russians had created an Armenia in the Southern Caucasus. For the first time in centuries a sizeable region, the Erivan province, had an Armenian majority, albeit a slight majority. The historian George Bournoutian has estimated that before the Russian conquest Erivan (the Erivan khanate of Iran) had 87,000 Muslims and 20,000 Armenians; after the population exchange, 65,000 Armenians and 50,000 Muslims. Given the poor statistics of the time, the figures are very inexact. Nevertheless, an Armenia had obviously been created, carved out of lands that had previously held a Turkish majority.

**Justin McCarthy, Turks and Armenians: Nationalism and Conflict in the Ottoman Empire, (Madison, Wisconsin: 2015) p. 31**

## REASONS BEHIND THE RELOCATION DECISION

During the parliamentary election of 1912 the Dashnaks and the CUP still agreed on a common platform, but by early 1913 relations had become strained. In the eastern provinces of Anatolia Kurdish depredations were on the rise. Formally the Dashnaks were still committed to a program of reform and autonomy within the empire, but increasingly many Armenians tended to look to Russia as their only effective protector. A Hunchak congress held in Constanza (Romania) in September 1913 decided to move from legal to illegal activity, which included a plot to assassinate Talaat, the minister of the interior.

**Guenter Lewy, The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey: a Disputed Genocide, (University of Utah Press: 2005),**

By 1914 Dashnak and Hunchak branches in eastern Turkey had evolved into IMRO-style paramilitary organizations that devoted their primary energies to weapons smuggling, as an Okhrana agent attending a Dashnak conference in Berlin reported to the tsar...

Bracketing the campaign on both ends were ominous developments in eastern Anatolia, which confirmed for the Porte that the whole Armenian reform issue was just a Trojan horse for Russian imperialism...

Still, there was little question where the loyalty of most Armenians lay worldwide. The Russian Diplomatic Archives bulge with letters of support for the tsar sent in by Armenian leaders after the outbreak of the war in August, which all say more or less the same thing: "we pray with all our hearts for the victory of your arms, which will liberate Christians suffering under the Muslim yoke." (This particular letter was posted from four Armenian clerics in Paris on 29 August 1914—two months before there were any Muslim powers at war with Russia)... On 31 August 1914—two full months before the Porte declared belligerency—Lieutenant-General Yudenich, chief of staff of the Caucasian army, asked Yanushkevitch at Stavka for an extra 25,000 rifles and 12 million rounds of ammunition to arm the Armenian guerrilla bands being organized along the Ottoman frontier... The Russian army, then, actively sought to arm Ottoman Armenians even before Turkey entered the war, with the full cooperation of the Dashnaks, General Andranik, and Armenian leaders in Tiflis.

**Sean McMeekin, *The Russian Origins of the First World War*,  
(Cambridge, MA: 2011),  
pp.149,152-154**

Most tragic was the case of the Armenians, who at the beginning of the nineteenth century were still known as the Millet-i Sadika, the loyal community, and were described by a well-informed French visitor as the minority group most loyal to the Ottoman Empire and most trusted by the Turks. The change began with the Russian con-

quest of the Caucasus in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, and the creation of a Russian Armenia on the eastern border of Turkey, where the Armenian Church was established and recognized and where Armenian governors and generals ruled provinces and commanded armies. The political and cultural impact of Russian Armenia on the one hand, and the new national and liberal ideas coming from Europe on the other, powerfully affected the Ottoman Armenians, especially the rising middle class, and stimulated the growth of an ardent and active Armenian nationalist movement.

For the Turks, the Armenian movement was the deadliest of all threats. From the conquered lands of the Serbs, Bulgars, Albanians, and Greeks, they could, however reluctantly, withdraw, abandoning distant provinces and bringing the Imperial frontier nearer home. But the Armenians, stretching across Turkey-in-Asia from the Caucasian frontier to the Mediterranean coast, lay in the very heart of the Turkish homeland-and to renounce these lands would have meant not the truncation, but the dissolution of the Turkish state. Turkish and Armenian villages, inextricably mixed, had for centuries lived in neighbourly association.

**Bernard Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, (New York: 2002), p. 356.**

The Russians promised the Dashnaks that Russia would grant Armenians in eastern Anatolia autonomy within the Russian Empire if they would unreservedly support Russia in the war. Count Illarion Ivanovich Vorontsov-Dashkov, governor of the Caucasus, met with rebel representatives to offer Russian guarantees. The Dashnaks were not fools. Their leaders realized that the Russians could not be trusted. Calm analysis should have indicated that the Russians were no more willing than the Ottomans to allow Armenian independence. Surely past Russian actions in their Southern Caucasus provinces had given no indication that they would support even Armenian autonomy, much less independence. But the Armenian revolutionaries were caught up in the spirit of the



moment. The chance to realize their dreams, no matter how slight, overcame their better judgment.

**Justin McCarthy, *Turks and Armenians: Nationalism and Conflict in the Ottoman Empire*, (Madison, Wisconsin: 2015) p. 112.**

In the first half of 1915 the Armenian insurrection across the eastern provinces intensified. By April Van, Bitlis, Erzurum, and Sivas provinces were sliding into complete chaos, confirmed daily in reports coming in from the military command and provincial authorities of pitched battles, attacks on jandarma (gendarmarie) posts, the ambush of supply convoys and convoys of wounded soldiers, and the cutting of telegraph lines. What was happening could no longer be described as disparate uprisings; it was rather a general rebellion, orchestrated principally by the Dashnaks and encouraged by Russia. The victims included not just soldiers or jandarma or officials but the Muslim and Christian villagers who were the victims of massacre and counter-massacre.

**Jeremy Salt, *The Unmaking of the Middle East: A History of Western Disorder in Arab Lands* (University of California Press: 2008), p60.**

While the course of World War I was unfolding in the Middle East and shattering the Ottoman Empire, two national groups within the state openly aided the enemy. These were the Arabs and the Armenians. Wealthy representatives of the latter insisted that the Armenian people support the Ottoman government and the war; but the head of the Armenian Orthodox Church, residing in the Russian Caucasus, asseverated that the tsar was the protector of all Armenians. Thus, in Istanbul and the western cities of the empire Armenians complied with war orders, while in eastern Asia Minor the Armenian population, often following Westernized Armenian radicals such as

Pasdirmajian aided Russia by rebellion and in the region of Van and Erzurum by open warfare. In some districts the entire Muslim population was killed; and in April, 1915 an Armenian government was proclaimed in Van.

**Sydney Nettleton Fisher,**  
**Middle East: A History,**  
**(Routledge: 1960), p. 365-366.**

Russian operational planning for a general Armenian uprising in eastern Anatolia was underway long before Sarıkamış—before, indeed, Turkey's actual entry into the war ...

A delegation of Hunchaks reported to Tiflis command the first week of April 1915 that Armenian partisans were ready to rise "all over Cilicia" (vo vsei Kilikii). No less than 3,000 armed revolutionary cells, the Armenians claimed, had been created across this mountainous Ottoman region, from Adana to Aleppo, including Sis, Hacin, and Furnuz, near Zeytun, which was the epicenter of resistance, along with Dörtyol, along the coast near the railway chokepoint of Ceyhan (where Armenian agents were witnessed coming ashore in early March 1915, presumably having been carried on British warships from Cairo) ...

On about 13–14 April 1915, the Turks' worst nightmare came to pass, when partisans expelled government forces from Van and erected barricades around the city. No one knows exactly how many men the Armenians were able to put under arms at Van, but it must have been a significant number, as they ultimately held the city for more than four weeks against three full Ottoman Jandarma (police) battalions, the First Expeditionary Force sent by the Third Army, and untold Kurdish Hamidiye militiamen.

**Sean McMeekin, The Russian**  
**Origins of the First World War,**  
**(Cambridge, MA: 2011), pp. 161-169**

In 1914 the Russians formed four large Armenian volunteer units, and three more in 1915. These, though primarily raised in Russian Armenia, all included Ottoman Armenians, some of them deserters, some of them well-known public figures. One of these units was commanded by an Armenian former member of the Ottoman Parliament. Armenian guerrilla bands were active in various parts of the country and, in several places, Armenian populations rose in armed rebellion, notably in the eastern Anatolian city of Van and the Cilician town of Zeytun.

In the spring of 1915, when Armenian rebels had gained control of Van, the British were at the Dardanelles, the Russians attacking in the east, and another British force apparently advancing on Baghdad, the Ottoman government decided on the deportation and relocation of the Armenian population of Anatolia...

**Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East: A Brief History of the Last 2000 Years* (New York: 1995), p. 339.**

More than 12,000 Armenian males of fighting age went to Russia from eastern Anatolia immediately before the war or in its first months. There, many were trained in partisan and guerilla tactics. They returned to the Ottoman Empire to hinder military communications and attack villages and isolated military units, joining others that had never left eastern Anatolia, but had taken to the hills in small partisan bands, and Armenian deserters from the Ottoman army.

Some Anatolian Armenians joined with Russian Armenians in military units, called druzhiny (literally "fellowships," volunteer units) made up solely of Armenians, mainly volunteers from Russia. At the beginning of the war there were 4 druzhiny; each 1,000 strong; another was added soon after, and one more later in 1915. The druzhiny were very effective in the Russian invasion of Anatolia. They knew the territory, were dedicated to their cause, and had close connections with the Armenian revolutionaries and partisans. Other Armenians fled to Iran, where they

made up infantry battalions and cavalry squadrons that would aid the Russian advance. The various Armenian units were to spearhead the Russian advance in far eastern Anatolia.

**Justin McCarthy, *Turks and Armenians: Nationalism and Conflict in the Ottoman Empire*, (Madison, Wisconsin: 2015) p.118.**

From Cairo, Boghos Nubar, chairman of the Armenian National Assembly, encouraged the British to believe that such [Armenian] support was readily available, at the same time telling the French consul-general that Armenians, constituting 40 percent of the population of Iskenderun, in his estimate, were ready to support a French occupation of the Ottoman Empire.... By early 1915, reports of attacks on government officials, clashes with soldiers or jandarma, discovery of weapons caches, and the massing of armed men were coming from across the eastern and central provinces as well as the eastern Mediterranean, where the Armenians of Zeytun had been in a continuous state of renewed rebellion since late 1914. Other towns where Armenians were reported to be preparing uprisings included Trabzon, Amasya, Yozgat, Sivas, Tokat, Kayseri, Bitlis, Elazığ (Mamuret ül-Aziz), Van, Sebinkarahisar, and Diyarbakir. "Espionage centers" had been set up in Trabzon, Erzurum, Muş, Bitlis, Van, Sivas, and Kayseri to keep the Russians informed of the movements of the Ottoman army, with an "action committee" of Russians, Greeks, and Armenians established in Batum to gather information and foment uprisings on the Ottoman side of the border.

**Jeremy Salt, *The Last Ottoman Wars: The Human Cost, 1877-1923* (Salt Lake City: Utah University Press, 2019) pp. 224-225.**

By April 1915, Armenian guerrilla activities had picked up momentum. Roads and communication lines were cut. Henry Morgenthau, the American ambassador in Con-

stantinople, reported to Washington on May 25 that nobody put the Armenian guerrillas "at less than 10,000, and 25,000 is probably closer to the truth"... When not tying down Turkish army units, the Dashnaks were of significant help to the Russian army itself (leaving aside the 150,000 Armenian subjects of the czar who served in its ranks). Deeply familiar with the rugged mountains of eastern Anatolia, the Armenian volunteers were invaluable scouts and guides. In one famous episode, the legendary Armenian military leader Andranik Ozanian met with General Mishlayevsky, commander of the czar's forces in the Caucasus, late in the summer of 1914, pointing out the routes through which the Russian army could advance on Turkey.

**Guenter Lewy, "The First Genocide of the 20th Century?" Commentary, (December 2005), pp. 47-52.**

Czar Nicholas II had the Armenian nationalist organizations prepare for a war between Ottomans and the Great Powers of Europe .... the Armenian Revolutionary Federation/Dashnak Congress held at Erzurum just before the Ottoman Empire entered the war, while openly promising loyalty to the Sultan in the war, in fact, secretly allied itself with the Russians...most Ottoman Armenians, both nationalists and civilians, were actively involved in helping the invading Russian army.

**Stanford Shaw, The Ottoman Empire In World War I, pp. 859-892**

The root of the Armenian catastrophe lies not so much in the fact of treachery and collaboration ... but rather in the gap between Russia's enormous imperial ambitions and her limited means for achieving them. The reform campaign of 1913-14 had left little doubt at the Porte that Russia aimed to annex Turkey's six eastern provinces over which she had essentially declared proprietary interest, if not (yet) a formal protectorate. Like-

wise, the Dardanelles campaign and the diplomacy surrounding it— if not also the previous 500 years of history—made perfectly clear that Russia aimed to conquer Constantinople and the Straits. Any group inside Turkey rumored to be aiding and abetting the Russians near either of these fronts would not simply be suspected of disloyalty, but likely relocated for reasons of urgent military necessity...

**Sean McMeekin, *The Russian Origins of the First World War*, (Cambridge, MA: 2011), p. 159.**

All the Entente governments had in fact been employing the technique of deportations to save their empires from rebelling populations and terrorist bands, the Russians in Central Asia, the British in India and Egypt, the French in Algeria and Morocco, and the United States against 'Native Americans' West of Mississippi.

**Stanford Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire In World War I*, (Ankara: Turkish Historical Society, 2008). P. 1119.**

Relocation as a strategy and operational approach in war would reappear in various forms over the next seventy years. In the First World War, the Ottomans relocated some 400,000 Armenians to camps in the Euphrates valley while the Russians relocated well over a million Jews from the Pale (their western provinces and Poland). In the 1950s, the British in Malaya relocated over a quarter million ethnic Chinese into New Villages under the auspices of the Briggs Plan. At about the same time during the Kenyan Emergency, the British relocated over a million Africans to detainee camps. The French relocated over three million Algerians in the late 1950s to Regroupement Centres under the infamous Quadrillage system. The South Vietnamese employed the same principle in Vietnam, in the 1960s, by relocating hundreds of thousands of villagers into what they called Strategic

Hamlets. In the last cases of the twentieth century the Portuguese would use this approach in attempting to hold on to three of their African colonies. The number of people relocated in these campaigns is truly staggering...

In a somewhat different context, in 1942, the United States removed Japanese-American citizens from California to internment camps in the Nevada deserts in order to deal with a perceived fifth column threat to national security. Like the experiences of Jews from the Pale, this was campaign of fear-based pre-emption rather than an actual armed threat. Nevertheless, whether the process was called exile, relocation, deportation, detention or internment – and whether the destinations defined as concentration camps, zones of protection, Regroupement Centres, relocation camps, internment centres, new villages, strategic hamlets or reservations – the basic strategy of relocation employed to weaken or pre-empt a threat, either kinetically or non-kinetically, remained the same.

**Edward J. Erickson, A Global History of Relocation in Counterinsurgency Warfare (London, Bloomsbury, 2019) p.5.**

The Ottoman response to the Armenian Revolt was approximately the same as that taken by other twentieth-century governments faced with guerilla war: isolate the guerillas from local support by removing local supporters. The Ottomans knew that Armenian rebels were freely supported by Armenian villagers as well as by Armenians in the eastern cities that were home to leaders of their revolution. They, therefore, decided on a radical action: forced migration of the Armenian population in actual or potential war zones. The first orders to that effect went out on 26 May 1915...

**Justin McCarthy, Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821-1922 (New Jersey: Darwin, 1996), p. 193.**

## **OTTOMAN INTENTIONS AND EFFORTS TO PREVENT EXCESSES AGAINST ARMENIANS**

As news reached Istanbul that Armenians were being massacred on the way south, the government ordered the provincial authorities to catch and punish those responsible, "but the fact that these orders were repeated on numerous occasions would seem to indicate that they had little effect on the killing." On September 28, 1915, continuing reports of attacks on the convoys by Kurdish tribesmen, along with shortages of medicine and food and transport problems, compelled Talat Pasa to seek a full government inquiry. The following day the Council of Ministers set up a special investigative council, involving the Ministries of the Interior, Justice, and War, which it directed to work together in investigating the crimes that had been committed. The Finance Ministry was ordered to fund their work. Hearings were held across the eastern provinces, followed by court-martials, at which more than one thousand civilian officials or military personnel were found guilty "of organizing or failing to prevent the attacks" on the Armenians or of stealing their property. Muslims were also put on trial for crimes against Muslims. The sentences included imprisonment and some executions.

**Jeremy Salt, *The Unmaking of the Middle East: A History of Western Disorder in Arab Lands* (University of California Press: 2008), p66.**

The argument that the deportations in reality constituted a premeditated program of extermination of the Armenians of Turkey is difficult to square with many aspects and characteristics of the relocations.

**Guenter Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey: a Disputed Genocide*, (University of Utah Press: 2005), p 251.**



Thus, the massacres of Armenians throughout the Ottoman Empire, during the years 1894-1896, 1909 and 1915-1916, had deep social and political roots quite apart from the alleged savagery of Turks and Kurds long decried by Armenian apologists and Western missionaries and relief workers. It is most unfortunate for unbiased researchers of the Armenian Question that the great bulk of vast literature available in this field comes from pens of such authors, almost all of it bent on an ethnocentric course to demonstrate the supposed superiority of Christian Armenian culture of the 'unspeakable' Muslim Turk. Most of these writers pursue this scholastic aberration with much breast-beating for the questionable innocence of Ottoman Armenians in the matter of disloyalty to the Ottoman state throughout the Russo-Turkish conflicts of 1877-78 and 1914-17, rather than address the issue as a clash of nationalistic movements... Worse yet, Armenian scholars have consistently dwelled on Turkish massacres of their compatriots in all their grisly details without so much as a word on the equally savage measures taken by the Armenians of the Transcaucasus and eastern Anatolia against local Turkic populace from 1905 to 1920. Indeed, when questioned on such episodes, they even dismiss them as Turkish propaganda. Yet the evidence for accepting this fact is overwhelming. This not to excuse the massacre of Armenians as mere quid pro quo but to point up such violence as an evil endemic to Middle Eastern society in general. The long, lurid chain of massacres throughout the Levant since World War I, illustrates the point, not to mention the 'ethnic cleansing' now in progress in the Balkans and Transcaucasia.

More significant perhaps is the considerable body of evidence which indicates that Armenian revolutionists deliberately fomented massacres of their compatriots in Turkey for the purposes of turning them all against the Porte and of invoking intervention by the great powers. On the other hand, it was thanks to prompt action by local Turkish authorities, so often maligned for incompetence, corruption and faith by Western travelers and diplomats, that Cilicia proper and Elazig-Harput were spared from slaughter during the massacres of 1894-1896. During the episode of April 1909, Mersin and areas outside Cilicia

proper were similarly spared, with the one notable exception of Latakia on the northern Syrian coast....

This is not to deny, however, that a very substantial portion of Ottoman Armenians, most of them probably innocent victims of the acts of few thousand revolutionaries, perished as a result of the deportations. On the other hand, the figure of 1,500,000 deaths, so often cited by Armenian apologists, appears grossly exaggerated in the light of Ottoman census data and the numbers of survivors recorded in many sources.

**Robert F. Zeidner, *The Tricolor over the Taurus*, (2005), pp. 43-48**

These events [of 1915] must be seen within the context of an uneven struggle, but which was fought for real stakes and of a genuine Turkish apprehension – doubtless greatly exaggerated but not totally unfounded – affecting a poor Armenian population ready to assist the Russian invaders. The Young Turk government in Istanbul decided to resolve the issue by the old method – often used – of deportations. The deportees had to endure frightful hardships, which were intensified by the harsh conditions of the war in Anatolia, by the poor quality of their escorts – given the absence of virtually all able-bodied men, who had been mobilized – and by the predatory actions of bandits and many others who took advantage of the occasion. Nevertheless, no serious proof exists of a decision and plan of the Ottoman government for extermination of the Armenian nation.

**Bernard Lewis, "Clarifications Offered by Bernard Lewis," *Le Monde*, January 1, 1994**

[T]he Armenian population experienced the full force of Muslim resentment and suspicion caused by the disasters in eastern Asia Minor at the beginning of the war and the calls by Russian Armenians for Ottoman Armenians to join them in a struggle for freedom. Armenians were deported en masse from the eastern provinces and

many (probably between a quarter and a half million) died, either from starvation and hardship or from massacre mainly at the hands of Kurdish tribesmen. No direct documentary evidence has ever come to light to show that the Armenian massacres of 1915 were the deliberate policy of the Ottoman government but local officials connived at the murders and took few steps to protect the Armenians. Possibly there was little the Istanbul government could have done to control events...

**M. E. Yapp, *The Making of the Modern Near East 1792–1923*, (New York: 1987), p. 269–270.**

For an Ottoman bureaucracy pressed to meet demands for political and administrative reform among subject peoples as well as Turks, maintenance of order in outlying regions became increasingly difficult. Once clashes began to occur, no one — government or local communities — possessed the physical strength, the political skill or the powers of persuasion to contain disaster. It was not only Armenians of the Ottoman Empire who were affected, but Muslims as well. Everyone lost... When war broke out in 1914, the Russians again encouraged Armenian expectations and exploited the eastern Anatolian Armenians as a fifth column. In the end they did not intervene to protect Armenians when Ottoman authorities, in a life-and-death wartime situation, moved to deport them, nor were the Russian able to protect their collaborators against the vengeance of local Muslims when Ottoman authority collapsed. As had happened so often before during the preceding 150 years, Russia was willing to exploit Armenians for her own purposes but unprepared to make sacrifices on their behalf.

**Paul B. Henze, "The Roots of Armenian Violence: How Far Back Do They Extend?" *International Terrorism and the Drug Connection*, (Ankara: 1984), pp. 199–202.**

The historical question at issue is premeditation—that is, whether the Turkish regime intentionally organized the annihilation of its Armenian minority. According to the Genocide Convention of 1948, such an intent to destroy a group is a necessary condition of genocide; most other definitions of this crime of crimes similarly insist upon the centrality of malicious intent. Hence the crucial problem to be addressed is not the huge loss of life in and of itself but rather whether the Turkish government deliberately sought the deaths that we know to have occurred ... [A] number of facts about the deportations argue against the thesis that they constituted a premeditated program for exterminating the Armenians of Turkey ...

The documentary evidence suggests that the Ottoman government wanted to arrange an orderly process of deportation—even a relatively humane one, to gauge by the many decrees commanding protection and compassionate treatment of the deportees. But, leaving aside the justice of the expulsion order itself, the deportation and resettlement of the Armenians took place, as we have seen, at a time of great insecurity and dislocation throughout the country and in conditions of widespread suffering and deprivation among Turkish civilians and military personnel. The job of relocating several hundred thousand people in a short span of time and over a highly primitive system of transportation was simply beyond the ability of the Turkish bureaucracy.

**Guenter Lewy, "The First Genocide of the 20th Century?" Commentary, (December 2005), pp. 47-52**

In the spring of 1915, just as the Russian army (with an Armenian division in tow) came over the border, there was a revolt, encouraged by the Russians and the Armenians who lived under the Tsar...Many prominent Armenians in Turkey also encouraged or organised rebellions because, with the British about to land at Gallipoli and the French training an Armenian legion on Cyprus, they expected the Turks to collapse. In the eastern city of Van the Muslim quarter was smashed, and many inhabitants

were killed. The Ottoman government then decreed that Armenians — with many exceptions — should be deported out of areas where they could damage the defences, or sabotage the telegraph lines and railways. The deportees were sent to northern Syria, but on the way they were sometimes attacked by wild tribes, in some cases with the connivance of officials.

In 1916 — and this surely tells against 'genocide' — the Ottomans tried 1,300 of these men and even executed a governor. About half a million Armenians arrived in the south-east and a very great number then died of the disease and starvation that were so prevalent at the time. Muslims also died in droves. In addition, the figure given for overall losses by the Armenian representative at the Paris peace treaties was 700,000 — not 1.5 million as has been widely claimed.

Genocide? First of all, much depends on your definition. If we take the classic version, then there are serious difficulties. The British occupied Istanbul for four years and had a run of the archives. The law officers could not find evidence to convict the hundred or so Turks whom they had arrested.

**Norman Stone, "What has this  
Genocide to do with Congress?"  
The Spectator, 20 October, 2007.**

Interior Minister Talat Pasha, himself received many reports about attacks on [Armenian] caravans as well as on the deportees while they were waiting for weeks at a time at railroad stations and other collection centers as well as regarding the severe shortages of food, housing and healthcare. In reaction, he regularly sent out special agents to investigate each report, find out who was responsible for the attacks on or abuse of the Armenians, and arrange for their punishment.... This Investigation Committee, with various sub-committees sent to investigate in different provinces and districts ... continued operation until early 1918.... The records of the committees and courts martial have not yet been fully examined ...but

those examined to date produce the following statistics regarding the number of officials who between October 1915 and January 1917 were found guilty and punished in each province, many with punishment of death:

**Stanford Shaw, *The Ottoman Empire In World War I*, (Ankara: Turkish Historical Society, 2008). P. 1099.**

Survival among those who were relocated also proves that there was no genocide of the Armenians. The relocation of the Armenians was surely confused and disorderly. It was a disaster for the Armenians and it was one of the many disasters that faced all the peoples of the Ottoman Empire. However, those who were relocated were completely in the hands of Ottoman soldiers and officials. Had the Ottomans wanted, they could have killed them all. Yet most of the relocated Armenians survived. Ottoman records demonstrate that a large majority of the relocated Armenians arrived alive in Syria. It should be noted that these records were internal documents, intended only for government use, not for publication or propaganda; their authenticity can only be doubted by those who automatically reject anything Turkish. Common sense also refutes the idea of mass murder: The prominent Armenian historian Richard Hovannisian has estimated that 275,000 Ottoman Armenian refugees survived in postwar Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, and Iran. More than 100,000 Ottoman Armenians were in France, the United States, and elsewhere. These were survivors who had been under Ottoman control. They had not been killed. Indeed, one need only look at the millions of Armenians in the world today; had the Ottomans wished to kill their ancestors, most of those Armenians would not exist.

No one has ever found evidence of any Ottoman intent to kill all the Armenians. All evidence indicates that there could never have been such an intent.

**Justin McCarthy, *Turks and Armenians: Nationalism and Conflict in the Ottoman Empire*, (Madison, Wisconsin: 2015) p.195.**

The conditions of the Armenians, kept away from these more fertile settled regions, were shocking but mostly the consequence of completely inadequate food supplies, lack of proper sanitation, and the rapid spread of epidemic disease. If the Ottoman government is to be condemned, it is for failing to provide the safety and protection Talat had guaranteed, not for an unproven assertion that it sent the Armenians to eastern Syria knowing they would die.

The accusations against the government and Talat in particular must be weighed against a mass of documents, most bearing the interior minister's signature, instructing provincial officials to make sure that the Armenians were properly cared for and protected. In fact, the relocation turned into a disaster of epic proportions. Guarded only by thin lines of soldiers, jandarma, and other armed men, the Armenians were defenseless against onslaughts by tribal groups out for booty or perhaps taking revenge on wholly innocent and helpless people for attacks on Muslims by Armenian bands. Thousands died of disease, malnutrition, or exposure by the roadside or in makeshift camps even before reaching Syria.

**Jeremy Salt, *The Last Ottoman Wars: The Human Cost, 1877-1923* (Salt Lake City: Utah University Press, 2019) pp. 243-245.**

It is undeniable that the Armenians suffered, but their suffering has to be seen against the background of their own atrocities committed against the Turks wherever Armenians had the opportunity. Armenian nationalist activities were viewed by a government at war as insurgency, and on the local level relations between the two communities had so degenerated that very little investigation was needed from Istanbul to touch off uncontrollable violence.

**Norman Itzkowitz, Review of "Ulrich Trumpener's *Germany and the Ottoman Empire 1914-1918*," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Autumn, 1968), p. 516.**

The most dramatic episode of these years is the forced displacement of the Armenian population, from Eastern Anatolia to Mesopotamia, a decision of the triumvirate, to crush the Armenian support to the Russian invasion, and suppress the guerilla operations of the Armenian gangs on the Turkish territory. [...] After the capture of Erzurum by the Russians in 1916, the Armenian militias commit massacres against the Muslim populations.

**Thierry Zarcone, *La Turquie. De l'Empire Ottoman à la République d'Atatürk*, (Paris, Gallimard, 2005) pp. 42-43.**

It is important to underline that the Armenian communities are not the only ones to have been ground down by the plague of the war. In the spring of 1915, the tsarist army moved to the region of the lake of Van, dragging behind it battalions of volunteers composed of Caucasus and Turkish Armenians. [...] For each of the provinces which suffered from the Russian occupation and from the Armenian militias' acts of vengeance, an important demographic deficit appears in the statistics of the post-war years – adding up to several hundred thousands of souls.”

**Paul Dumont, “La mort d'un Empire”, in Robert Mantran (ed.), *Histoire de l'Empire ottoman*, (Paris, Fayard, 1989) pp. 624-625.**

[T]here is no doubt the Armenians suffered a great disaster... Although the numbers of Armenians who died at this time are greatly exaggerated by the Armenians and their supporters—and in addition many of the Armenians who were killed during this era died because the Armenians waged war against practically every nation they were physically able to come in contact with including not only the Turks and Kurds, but also the Russians, Georgians, and Azerbaijanis—there is still no doubt that hundreds of thousands of Armenians perished during 1915... The Armenian claim that they were victims of a



premeditated and unprovoked genocide does not ring true, however. Rather, what appears more likely is that there was an honest, but inaccurate belief among the Turkish leaders that they were faced with a widespread and coordinated Armenian uprising from within at the very time that their state was in mortal danger from without. Decades of what the Turks saw as Armenian provocations and even treason during previous wars, armed revolutionary activity between the wars, the creation of Russian-Armenian guerrilla groups in the invading Russian army during the present one, the defection of certain Ottoman Armenians to the enemy, the armed resistance to conscription on the part of Armenians in Zeitun, incidents of revolutionary acts and sabotage in the countryside, and the Armenian uprising in Van ... all led the Turks to conclude they were in real danger from a fifth column.

**Michael M. Gunter, *Armenian History and the Question of Genocide*, (New York: Palgrave, 2011) pp. 20-21.**

When more work is completed on the period I believe that historians will come to see Talat, Enver and their associates not so much as evil men but as desperate, frightened, unsophisticated men struggling to keep their nation afloat in a crisis far graver than they had anticipated when they first entered the war (the Armenian decisions were taken at the height of the crisis of the Dardanelles), reacting to events rather than creating them, and not fully realizing the extent of the horrors they had set in motion in 'Turkish Armenia' until they were too deeply committed to withdraw.

**Gwynne Dyer, *Turkish 'Falsifiers' and Armenian 'Deceivers': Historiography and the Armenian Massacres*, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Jan. 1976), pp. 99-107.**

## FORGERIES AND UNRELIABLE SOURCES

No authentic documentary evidence exists to prove the culpability of the central government of Turkey for the massacres of 1915-16. It is also significant that not one of the many thousands of officials who would have been involved in so far-reaching a scheme as a premeditated plan to destroy the Armenians has ever come forth to reveal the plot ... In the absence of this kind of proof, the Armenian side has relied upon materials of highly questionable authenticity, such as Andonian's Memoirs of Naim Bey or copies of alleged documents used by the Turkish military tribunals after the end of the war.

**Guenter Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey: a Disputed Genocide*, (University of Utah Press: 2005), p. 206.**

It could be objected that these [1919] trials had been organized by the political enemies of the accused, and that, in any case, not everything said by a Prosecutor General is necessarily true.

**Andrew Mango, "Minorities and Majorities," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 23, Issue 5, (1987), p. 519.**

But the last point, the crucial one of the debate, by its legal and political implications, is to determine if the massacres against the Armenians were perpetrated on the orders of the Young Turk government, that is, if the deportations were only a (cover-up) for a systematic policy of extermination, implemented according to various methods, but decided, planned, and controlled at the governmental level... It is true that official involvement is a precondition for us to apply to the Armenian tragedy the term, 'genocide', as used in 1944 and defined in the

Nuremberg Trials and the U.N. convention of 1948. But we must admit that we do not so far have proof that the government was involved in this way. The documents produced by the Armenians, in which Talat Pasha, Minister of the Interior, and other official top Ottomans explicitly order the slaughter of men, women, and Armenian children, designated as the "Andonian documents," after the name of their editor, were absolute forgeries, as historical research has shown.

**Gilles Veinstein, Trois questions sur un massacre" (1994) L'Histoire, n°187, April 1995**

Tracking down, within the multitude of papers from both sides about this question, the inaccuracies, questionable assertions, or even forgeries, is not very difficult. In particular, it seems established today that some of the essential objects put in the file by the accusation [i.e. the Armenian side] – for example, the Blue Book prepared for the British government by Bryce and Toynbee or the Memories of Na'im Bey published with the aid of Aram Andonian – cannot any way to be considered as irrefutable documents. Didn't Toynbee himself admit the Blue Book had been 'published and spread only as war propaganda'? And the authenticity of the alleged telegrams of Ottoman government, ordering the destruction of Armenians is today seriously contested.

**Paul Dumont, "La mort d'un Empire", in Robert Mantran (ed.), Histoire de l'Empire ottoman, (Paris, Fayard, 1989) pp. 624-625.**

There are many doubts as to the authenticity of the documents reproduced in Naim Bey's memoirs [edited by Andonian]... Turkish authors are not alone in their assessment that the Naim-Andonian documents are fakes. Dutch historian Erik Zürcher, writing in 1997, argued that

the Andonian materials “have been shown to be forgeries.” British historian Andrew Mango speaks of “telegrams dubiously attributed to the Ottoman wartime minister of the interior, Talât Pasha.” It is ironic that lobbyists and policymakers seek to base a determination of genocide upon documents most historians and scholars dismiss at worst as forgeries and at best as unverifiable and problematic.

**Guenter Lewy, Revisiting the Armenian Genocide, Middle East Quarterly, (Fall 2005) pp. 3-12.**

## **MISLEADING COMPARISONS WITH THE HOLOCAUST**

[The suggestion] that the massacre of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire was the same as what happened to Jews in Nazi Germany ... is a downright falsehood! What happened to the Armenians was the result of a massive Armenian armed rebellion against the Turks, which began even before war broke out, and continued on a larger scale. Great numbers of Armenians, including members of the armed forces, deserted, crossed the frontier and joined the Russian forces invading Turkey. Armenian rebels actually seized the city of Van and held it for a while intending to hand it over to the invaders. There was guerilla warfare all over Anatolia. And it is what we nowadays call the National Movement of Armenians Against Turkey. The Turks certainly resorted to very ferocious methods in repelling it.

There is clear evidence of a decision by the Turkish Government, to deport the Armenian population from the sensitive areas, which meant naturally the whole of Anatolia, not including the Arab provinces, which were then still part of the Ottoman Empire. There is no evidence of

a decision to massacre. On the contrary, there is considerable evidence of attempt to prevent it, which were not very successful.

The massacres were carried out by irregulars, by local villagers responding to what had been done to them and in number of other ways. But to make this, a parallel with the holocaust in Germany, you would have to assume the Jews of Germany had been engaged in an armed rebellion against the German state, collaborating with the allies against Germany. That in the deportation order the cities of Hamburg and Berlin were exempted, persons in the employment of state were exempted, and the deportation only applied to the Jews of Germany proper, so that when they got to Poland they were welcomed and sheltered by the Polish Jews. This seems to me a rather absurd parallel.

**Bernard Lewis, Statement on  
C-Span2, 14 April, 2002.**

The [Ottoman] policy of deportation logically allowed for continued life at the journeys end and indeed several hundred thousand Armenians survived such journeys. By contrast, the intention of the Nazis led to Auschwitz from which there was no escape.

**Steven T. Katz, "The 'Unique'  
Intentionality of the Holocaust",  
Modern Judaism, Vol. 1, No.2  
(Sept. 1981), 174-175**

1) There was no campaign of hatred aimed directly at the Armenians, no demonizing comparable to European anti-Semitism.

2) The deportation of Armenians, although on a large scale, was not total; in particular, it did not apply in the two large cities of Istanbul and Izmir.

3) The Turkish actions taken against the Armenians, although disproportionate in scope, were not based on nothing. The fear of a Russian advance in the eastern Ottoman provinces, the knowledge that many Armenians viewed the Russians as their liberators from the Turkish government, and the awareness of Armenian revolutionary activities against the Ottoman State, all of these factors helped create an atmosphere of anxiety and suspicion, which was exacerbated by the increasingly desperate situation of the Empire and the all-too-familiar wartime neuroses. In 1914, the Russian formed four large units of Ottoman Armenian volunteers, some of whom were well-known public figures.

4) Deportation on criminal, strategic, and other grounds had been carried out for centuries in the Ottoman Empire. The deportations practiced by the Ottoman regime did not target Armenians exclusively and directly. As one example, faced with the threat of the Russian advance and of the imminent occupation of his town, the Ottoman government of Van hastily evacuated the Moslem population, who were forced to travel along the roadways without transportation or food, rather than allow this city to come under Russian control. Very few Moslems survived this "friendly" deportation.

5) There is no doubt that the Armenians' suffering were a terrible human tragedy, which still haunts the memory of this people, as the Holocaust lingers in the memory of the Jews. A large number of Armenians died from starvation, disease, neglect, and also from cold, since the sufferings engendered by deportation continued through the winter.

There were unquestionably terrible atrocities, although not all on one side, as demonstrated by the reports of American missionaries before the deportations. These reports focused mainly on the fate of Moslem villagers in the Van region who fell into the hands of the Armenian volunteer units.

**Bernard Lewis, "Clarifications  
Offered by Bernard Lewis,"  
Le Monde, January 1, 1994.**

As amply demonstrated by the three arguments presented, any applicability of the term of genocide cannot be upheld: it would be overlooking the technical evolutionary character of the notion of genocide, a wrong interpretation of the retroactivity clause and the VCLT, and finally sidestepping the doctrine of *res judicata*. Moreover, the evolutionary character of the concept itself would not be served by misguiding it for historic events; no matter how morally righteous. Again from a legal standpoint it is imprecise. This is not making believe that the Armenian deaths as a result of the events of 1915 are absolved. Far from it, the Ottoman Empire received the full legal responsibility for the acts committed, but within the scope of the legal instruments of that day. Thus we can conclude that to term the events of 1915 as genocide is to detach genocide from its legal definition and to use it for political or moral purposes. Whether it is sound to keep hammering on a legal term based on non-legal considerations is doubtful. Not only would this not help the dire - economically torn country of Armenia to restore its economic ties with its neighbors, it also adds to a wrong conceptualization of the legal system and eventually could lead to a devaluation of the norm itself.

**Derk Jan van der Linde,  
"The Armenian Genocide Question &  
Legal Responsibility," Review of  
Armenian Studies, No. 24, 2011, p. 149.**

The intent to destroy constitutes a significant obstacle for genocide convictions. Indeed, for many (international) courts it has proved insurmountable and is the main reason why convictions for genocide under international law are extremely rare... We should also remain aware of the differences between the Armenian case and the Holocaust perpetrated by the National Socialists. The latter's classification as genocide is based upon documentary evidence (especially the infamous document of the Wannsee Conference on the Final Solution to the Jewish Question) that clearly proves the Nazis' intent to destroy the Jewish people... Concerning the question of Armenia, we can conclude from all of this that no final judgment

should be made before a report has been presented by an independent historical commission duly advised by international criminal lawyers.

**Kai Ambos, "The Armenian "Genocide?""**

102. It follows that in the present case the Court is not only, as noted by the Chamber in paragraph 111 of its judgment, not required to determine whether the massacres and mass deportations suffered by the Armenian people at the hands of the Ottoman Empire from 1915 onwards can be characterised as genocide within the meaning of that term under international law, but has no authority to make legally binding pronouncements, one way or the other, on this point.

106. ...Against this background, any attempt to draw a parallel with the Holocaust was unconvincing. The element that made the legal characterisation of the events of 1915 and the following years such a controversial issue was precisely the presence or absence of the special intent to destroy required for mass killings to fall within the legal definition of genocide. No such intent had been established by a national or an international court, which was not the case for the Holocaust, in respect of which the International Military Tribunal had, albeit without using the term "genocide", found such intent.


**European Court of Human Rights,  
Grand Chamber Case of Perinçek  
vs Switzerland (Application no.  
27510/08) Judgment, Strasbourg,  
15 October 2015.**










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