

GPN is privileged to present to its readers the Introduction to the book adapted by its editor for GPN, "The Asia Minor Catastrophe and the Ottoman Greek Genocide: Essays on Asia Minor, Pontos, and Eastern Thrace," 1913–1923, edited by George N. Shirinian (Bloomington, IL): The Asia Minor and Pontos Hellenic Research Center, Inc., 2012.

The “Great Catastrophe:” The Genocide of the Greeks of Asia Minor, Pontos, and Eastern Thrace, 1912–1923

George N. Shirinian

The term, “Great Catastrophe,” is used to describe the persecution of the Greek minority in the Ottoman Empire, their expulsion, the death of hundreds of thousands of civilians, and the destruction of the 3,000-year-long Greek presence in those lands. In this essay we review, albeit briefly and selectively, a series of social, economic, and political forces and events of the nineteenth and early twentieth century that brought the leaders of the Ottoman Empire to the decision to eliminate their Armenian, Assyrian, and Greek citizens as a solution to their perceived political problems.

The Multiethnic and Multireligious Nature of the Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire lasted for some 600 years, starting with the reign of Osman I in 1299 and ending with the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923. Stretching across the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe at its peak, the Empire consisted of a huge, diverse, and multiethnic population.

It is estimated that in the late eighteenth century, 85 percent of the population lived in the countryside and 15 percent in towns of 10,000 or more. Around 1800, the Balkan provinces held the majority of the Empire’s population, mostly Christian (Bulgarians, Greeks, Montenegrins, Serbs, Vlachs), with a significant Muslim minority, consisting of Bosnians (mostly Albanian), Turks, and Pomaks (Muslim Bulgarians). In the Asiatic provinces, the majority of the population was Muslim (mainly Arabs, Turks, and Kurds) but with significant Christian (Armenians, Assyrians, Greeks) and Jewish minorities.¹

The social and political organization of the population used to govern the diverse citizens of the Empire was known as the *millet* system. In this system, the communities were distinguished by their religion, and each religious community was allowed to manage its own affairs with substantial independence from central government control. Each *millet* had the right to use its own language; develop its own religious, cultural, and educational institutions; collect taxes from its members for the imperial treasury; and

have general jurisdiction over its own community. As one modern authority has described it, "The laws and traditions of Islam, the policy and practice of the Ottoman Empire, agreed in prescribing tolerance and protection for the non-Muslim subjects of the state, and in granting them a large measure of autonomy in their internal communal affairs. This toleration, however, was predicated on the assumption that the tolerated communities were separate and inferior, and were moreover clearly marked as such."² Consequently, the large number of non-Turkic and non-Muslim subjects of that Islamic state suffered as officially second-class citizens, with inferior legal rights and protections, lesser personal security, and higher taxation than the ruling Muslims. These minorities had to endure sometimes incompetent, often corrupt, and frequently harsh treatment at the hands of government officials. Over the centuries, their resentment grew deeper.

Beginning in the late eighteenth century, the Turkish-Muslim peasant did not modernize and gradually lost socio-economic status when compared to the more progressive Christian peasantry, which was strengthened by its middle class (merchants, intellectuals, clergy). The Turkish-Muslim segment of society did not have a middle class that could compete politically with the Christian one. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Turkish-Muslims ceased to be an economic force. Unable to comprehend the changes that were reducing their lot in life, Turkish peasants used religion as a basis of group solidarity, thus identifying with the Ottoman political elite. Eventually, the elite used this religious identification to solidify the lower strata of society and achieve political solidarity.³

During the Reform Period, 1839–1876 (discussed below), the Christian population of the Ottoman Empire surpassed the Muslim majority in education; this, in turn, led to an increasingly dominant role for the Christians in the economy. In 1861, there were 571 primary and ninety-four secondary schools for Ottoman Christians, with a total of some 140,000 students, a figure which far exceeded the number of Muslim children in school during the same time.⁴ By 1895, the gap had narrowed, but still only 6.5 percent of Muslims attended school, compared to some 9 percent of non-Muslims. The non-Muslims were found especially in the foreign and medical schools.⁵ "Over 90 percent of the industrial establishments with more than ten workers were owned by non-Muslims."⁶ In 1911, of the 654 wholesale companies in Constantinople, 528 (81 percent) were owned by ethnic Greeks.⁷ In 1915, a German observer noted, "The whole of the bazaar in Adana is Armenian. The cotton cultivation is also almost exclusively in Armenians' hands; trade with this commodity in Greek hands."⁸ At the same time, the Christian minorities preferred to continue paying the special head tax to avoid military service and pursue more lucrative careers. All this led to increasing levels of resentment against them on the part of the ruling Muslim majority.⁹

Independence Movements and Political Violence

The Serbian revolution (1804–1815) marked the beginning of an era of national awakening among the Empire's subjects, and was soon followed by the Greek War of Independence (1821–1829) and other nationalist independence movements, lasting for a century. These include Crete, 1841, 1866–1869, and 1897; Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1874–1876; the First Balkan Crisis of 1876; and the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913.

The Christian minorities had many complaints—over-taxation, depredations by Kurds, inequality under the law, and a by and large insecure situation in their traditional homeland—which the Ottoman authorities generally ignored, leading the minorities to seek help from outside the Empire. For example, the Assyrian Patriarch, Mar Rouil Shimon, wrote an official letter to the Russian king, Michael, dated May 14, 1868:

. . . We are a poor nation; my people have not enough grain to provide themselves with bread. . . . The Kurds have forcibly taken many of our Churches and convents, they constantly abduct our virgins, brides, and women, forcing them to turn Moslems. . . . The Turks are worse, they do not protect us, demand military taxes, poll tax, also the Kurds take our money for they consider us as “Zirr Kurr” (slaves—being Christians . . .). . . . Now, such being our condition, we beseech your mightiness, for the sake of Jesus, His Baptism, and cross. Either to free us from such a state or to procure us a remedy. . . .¹⁰

Mkrtich Khrimyan, former Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, tried to engage the European Powers in pressing the Ottoman regime for reforms for the Armenians during the peace negotiations at the end of the Russo-Turkish War. While the Treaty of Berlin (1878) did include provisions for reforms for the Armenians, the mutual rivalries of the European Powers interfered with their support for them, and Ottoman authorities did not implement them; therefore, Armenian political parties were formed in the 1880s to press their complaints for justice and a measure of autonomy. These parties included armed revolutionary groups who considered themselves heroes and freedom fighters but were viewed by the state as criminals and terrorists. This challenge by a subordinate nation to the authority of the ruling Muslim elite appeared as a sacrilege, and the rumour was spread that the infidels wanted to establish a Christian kingdom in eastern Anatolia.¹¹ Thus, when a refusal by Armenian farmers to pay exorbitant taxes during a bad harvest escalated to armed revolt in Sasun in 1894, Sultan Abdul Hamid had popular support to initiate a widespread series of massacres that continued for years. Government forces killed more than 200,000 Armenian civilians, furthering the development of mistrust between the entire Armenian people and the government leadership thereafter.¹²

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, many massacres, mass atrocities, and what we call today “crimes against humanity” took place. These occurred not only during the struggles for independence by various national groups and their fierce resistance by the Empire but also under other circumstances perpetrated by the Ottoman government and by civilian mobs on both sides. Examples include the massacre of Turks in Tripoli in 1821, the massacre of Greeks on Chios in 1822, Greeks in Missolonghi in 1823, the Janissaries in Constantinople in 1826, the Assyrians in Mosul in 1850, the Maronites in Lebanon in 1860, the Bulgarians in 1876, the Armenians in Bayazid in 1877, the Armenians in Alasguerd in 1879, the Christians in Alexandria in 1881, the Yezidis in Mosul in 1892, the Armenians in various cities in the eastern provinces in the years 1894 and following, the Armenians in Constantinople in 1896, the Slavs in Macedonia in 1903–1904, and the Armenians in Adana in 1909.

Thus, an atmosphere in which political and social disputes were addressed only with extremes of violence became the norm within the Ottoman Empire.

It has been said that the problem of violence in Ottoman society arose from the fact that between the seventeenth and nineteenth century, the Ottoman legal system had ceased to function actively in the management of social interactions. The idea of a civil society came into the Ottoman Empire only very late, despite the fact that Tanzimat reformers had sought to reintroduce the idea of law during the course of reforms. This inability to regulate social conflicts through legal means resulted in two problems. First, society itself fell into factions that engaged in vendetta. Second, the state chose authoritarianism as a means of keeping order, instead of a law code. A syndrome of vendetta and blood feud emerged in Ottoman provincial society within a complex network of regional conflicts and rivalries. A feud created bitter hostility between two communities that could extend for generations.¹³

It is part of the official Turkish interpretation of the history of Ottoman–minority relations that everything was peaceful up to the latter half of the nineteenth century, when, it is said, European intervention in Ottoman internal affairs incited the minorities to revolt against the government. Djemal Pasha, for example, one of the three main leaders of the Young Turks, summed up this feeling in his memoirs, as follows:

We are absolutely convinced that the policy of Russia alone was responsible for the enmity between Turkish and Armenian elements. Sixty years ago, or, to speak more accurately, until ten years before the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–8, there was no question whatever of any religious conflict between the two races, *i.e.*, religious differences between Mohammedans and Christians. In Anatolia, Rumelia, Constantinople, indeed throughout the Turkish Empire, the Armenians and Turks lived together in such harmony that Ottoman histories of that period do not even mention such a thing as the Armenian question.¹⁴

This interpretation has even been found convincing by some modern historians, as well. It does not take into account, however, the official neglect by the Ottoman government of the increasingly intolerable condition of the minorities, the sense of powerlessness and frustration the minorities felt for generations leading them to seek assistance from foreign governments, or the dedication with which the numerous efforts for reform or independence were made. One must acknowledge that Ottoman rule was very oppressive for those who were not part of the “ruling nation.”

Intervention by Foreign Powers in the Ottoman Empire

From the beginning of Ottoman foreign relations, special privileges known as “capitulations” had been granted to foreign states. Initially, these diplomatic and commercial concessions were intended to be reciprocal and to ensure the influx of goods to the Ottoman marketplace. By the eighteenth century, however, they were increasingly one-sided in favor of the foreign states and imposed by them upon the Ottoman state.

The capitulation system granted special privileges, such as exemption from taxes and other regulations, to the diplomats and merchants of foreign states. During the course of the eighteenth century, however, certain non-Muslim Ottomans, beyond those who were originally envisioned to do so, also managed to acquire these special privileges when they served as interpreters for foreign consulates. It has been suggested that the large number of non-Muslim Ottomans availing themselves of foreign protection indicates a significant loss of their confidence in the Empire. By the end of the eighteenth century, Austria had 260,000 protégés in Moldavia and Wallachia, and by 1808, an estimated 120,000 Ottoman Greeks had benefited from Russian protection. Not only was the Ottoman State deprived of their taxes, but the fact that they had the ear of foreign diplomats also called into question their loyalty to the sultan.¹⁵

With the Battle of Vienna (1683), the European nations had stopped the Ottoman's Empire's expansion militarily. After that, France, Great Britain, and Russia, in particular, looked for opportunities to extract territory or wealth from the Ottoman Empire by engaging in direct wars with it, encouraging rebellion among its subjects, and involving themselves in the internal affairs of the Empire. The Ottoman ruling elite not only resented this interference in their internal affairs, but also blamed the minorities for being willing tools of foreign interests.

During the peace negotiations in 1856 following the Crimean War, which had pitted Russia, on one side, against the Ottoman Empire, France, and Great Britain on the other, the European Powers all declared their interest in guaranteeing the territorial integrity and independence of the Ottoman Empire. Their real interest, however, was in preventing each other from gaining any advantage. The Ottoman leadership observed the rivalry among the European Powers and used it skillfully, if not always successfully, to help defend the Empire against intrusions into Ottoman sovereignty.

The Era of Reforms

In an attempt to address the complaints of the minorities, as well as to modernize the political, social, economic, and military structure of the Empire to better withstand challenges from within and without, successive sultans and their ministers initiated a series of reforms during an era known as the Tanzimat period (1839–1876). In 1839, the Hatt-ı Şerif [Noble Rescript] of Gülhane was proclaimed, promising to secure the life, honor, and property of the sultan's subjects; provide fair and public trials, with no execution of criminals until the defence was judged publicly; allow the heirs of a criminal their rights of inheritance if they were free of complicity in the crime; establish a fairer tax system; and develop a fairer system for conscripting, training, and maintaining soldiers for the sultan's army, so as not to overburden the capacity of some local areas. Later reforms dealt with education, the criminal and civil court systems, and the penal code.

The complexity and responsibility of the Supreme Council for administering reforms were too great, however, and many of the reforms were not fully implemented, or were poorly thought out. At the same time, the Supreme Council was a conservative institution, whose members resisted reform. The tax reforms of 1839 failed, and the decline in revenues strained the imperial treasury, so the old system of tax farming was

quickly restored in 1840. Even though new protections were added, corruption was common and over-taxation prevalent.

After the Crimean War, a new reform decree, the Hatt-ı Hümayun of 1856, prepared under strong pressure from the British and French ambassadors, reaffirmed the principles of Gülhane. It abolished tax farming and its associated abuses and promised equality for all Ottoman citizens, regardless of their ethnicity or religion. The Christian millets were encouraged to discuss and submit the reforms required from their perspective and were promised access to public employment, military schools and service, and the right to establish their own schools, though instructors and the selection of professors would be controlled by a mixed council. In the period 1861–1864, the Armenians, Greeks, and other millets were granted new national constitutions, which defined (i.e., limited) the political powers of the religious heads and created new national assemblies with a lay legal system compatible with the needs, aspirations, and philosophies of the middle class merchants and intellectuals. This reform helped unify various ethno-religious groups and helped stimulate the rise of national identity among them.¹⁶

These reforms challenged the traditional relationship between the ruling Muslims and the subject non-Muslims and threatened the privileged position the former enjoyed. One Ottoman Muslim intellectual and statesman, accordingly, wrote the following lament upon the issuing of the new edict:

Today we have lost the sacred, communal rights which our ancestors won with their blood. The Muslim community is the ruling community but it has been deprived of its sacred rights. This is a day of grief and sorrow for the Muslim people.¹⁷

By 1871, the leaders of the reform movement in the government were mostly gone, and a reaction against their legacy developed. Through a series of measures, Sultan Abdul Aziz took power back from the government and reasserted the supremacy of the sultanate. The Islamic nature of the Caliphate was reemphasized, restrictions were imposed on the activities of foreign missionaries, the sale of Christian scriptures in the Ottoman language was banned in 1874, and Ottoman Christians were dismissed from public office.

A new constitution was proclaimed at the end of 1876. All citizens were to be considered Ottoman, regardless of religion, and equal in the eyes of the law. All were free to pursue their own religion, though Islam remained the official state religion. Torture was prohibited. Non-Muslims had their own *millet* courts. In sum, the new constitution contained the same basic provisions for human rights as the previous failed reforms. The new sultan, Abdul Hamid, was endowed with supreme authority, however, in spite of there being an elected parliament. So, as a reaction to criticism by the parliament about his conduct of the Russo-Turkish War, Abdul Hamid dissolved parliament in 1878.

One result of the reforms was that because they had come about largely because of foreign pressure, the ethnic and religious minorities continued to seek foreign intervention to resolve their problems with the state. It was clear to the minorities

that the rulers of the Empire were not truly interested in their problems. Thus, the Christians sought reforms only for their own particular problems, while ignoring the problems of the general population. This gave rise to the feeling among Muslim citizens that the Christians did not care about their interests and were even committing treason. While the long-term effect of Tanzimat was to make Ottoman society more secular, it nevertheless also served to divide Christians and Muslims.

Muslim Refugees

From the 1840s on, a long-term problem of refugees immigrating to the Ottoman Empire developed. Russian policy of expanding its territory at the expense of the Ottoman Empire included forcing Muslims out of the newly conquered territories through attack and repression. Chechens, Circassians, Abkhazians, and others were driven out of the Caucasus in the 1860s and resettled in other parts of the Ottoman Empire. Those who settled in fertile areas in the Balkans and western Anatolia were able to make a living. Others, who were settled where they could barely survive, took to raiding their neighbours for their livelihood, causing major rifts between Christians and Muslims.

The Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 included mass atrocities on civilians perpetrated by both sides. Large numbers of Muslims fled during and after the war into Anatolia, enduring great hardship in the process. Some stayed in Bulgaria or settled under very difficult conditions in what remained of Ottoman Europe, from which they would be forced to flee again during the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913.

Fleeing persecution from the Balkans and the Empire's western regions, on one hand, and also from Central Asia, on the other, the Muslim refugees began to gain the attention of the Ottoman ruling elite. Starting in the 1870s, the idea of a pan-Islamic empire took hold. Moreover, after the Balkan Wars, some of the Muslim refugees from there, known as *muhacirs*, took violent vengeance on the Christians in Anatolia for grievances the Muslims had while living under Christian domination, thus creating new social conflicts in the Empire.

Financial Crises

Several factors contributed to the Ottoman financial crises during the nineteenth century. First, a series of free-trade agreements (1838–1841) between the Ottoman Empire and the major European countries resulted in a great increase in Ottoman foreign trade during the nineteenth century. However, an accompanying result was a large Ottoman trade deficit.

Second, the Crimean War (1853–1856) strained the Ottoman treasury and forced the government to take a series of foreign loans under terms that put it deeply and permanently in debt. Third, a combination of drought and flood caused a famine in Anatolia in 1873 and 1874. The loss of tax revenue led the government to levy higher taxes on the survivors, adding greatly to the human suffering.

Fourth, a crash of the international stock exchanges in 1873 marked the beginning of a major economic depression in Europe that lasted until 1896, making it impossible for the Ottoman Empire to obtain new loans. By 1876, with the temporary loss of revenues from Bosnia and Bulgaria, the Ottoman government was forced to

suspend all debt payments to the European banks. This further provoked the Europeans' increased involvement in the internal affairs of the Empire and helped promote the image of Turkey as "the sick man of Europe."

The Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878) and the Treaty of Berlin

When Russia declared war on the Ottoman Empire in April 1877, one of its tactics was to arm the local Christians to commit massacres against the Turks. The war ended with the Treaties of San Stefano and Berlin. The former Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople sought a place at the negotiating table to demand benefits for the Armenian community of the Ottoman Empire, which had many complaints about the harsh treatment of its citizens. Protections and promises of reforms for the Armenians were specified in both treaties, and Russia was named the official protector of the Orthodox subjects of the Ottoman Empire, that is, Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks. Greece, which had not actually participated in the war, gained Thessaly and part of Epirus in the settlement, and continued to seek Crete, the Aegean Islands, Constantinople, and part of Anatolia. The Armenians, on the other hand, though they had high expectations, ended up with nothing concrete, except the resentment of the Ottoman leadership.

The settlement was disastrous for the Ottoman Empire, which was forced to give up two-fifths of its territory, one-fifth of its population, and their associated revenues. At the same time, while Sultan Abdul Hamid perceived the actions of Greece in the treaty negotiations to be hostile to Turkish interests, he considered those by the Armenians, his own subjects, downright treasonous. He would take his revenge a few years later in the series of Armenian massacres that began in the spring of 1894. This violent suppression of the Armenians, with impunity for the sultan, informed the relations between Muslims and Christians on Crete, and armed conflict broke out between the two groups there in 1895, with the recurrent massacre of Christian civilians.

The *Megali Idea*

During the nineteenth century, the *Megali Idea*, the idea of a greater Greece, developed among the leadership in Greece. After the Greek War of Independence, the Greeks felt their borders were unsatisfactory, as less than one-third of all Greek nationals were included within the boundaries of the newly established state. Expansion would have to come at the expense of the Ottoman Empire, aided by Russian interest in taking advantage of that empire, as well as by European philhellenism. Thus, after attaining independence, Greece came into conflict, either diplomatic or armed, with the Ottoman Empire on several occasions—1841 (the Cretan revolt), 1854 (the Crimean War), 1863 (proclamation of King George I as "King of the Hellenes," rather than King of Greece), 1866 (the Cretan revolt), 1878 (acquisition of parts of Thessaly and Epirus arising out of the Congress of Berlin), 1885 (the Bulgarian crisis), and 1897 (the Cretan revolt).¹⁸

The Emergence of Turkish Nationalism

The Ottoman state was an empire, acquired through war and conquest. Its citizens were subjects, and during the long course of Ottoman rule, assumptions about Muslim superiority evolved into legal and cultural attitudes that openly discriminated against the non-Muslim minorities. The Empire's Muslim Turks saw themselves as the "ruling nation" (*Millet-i Hakime*), superior to the other nations and having the inherent right to rule over them. This was partly due to their own peculiar, self-centered interpretation of Islam, which allowed them to rule also over Arabs, Kurds, and other Muslim nations.

The Turkish nationalism that emerged from the Tanzimat era in the 1880s was initially cultural, rather than political, and focused on Turkish language and literature. Among new nationalistic organizations that formed during this period was the Committee of Union and Progress ("CUP") (*Ittihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti*),¹⁹ which later developed political ideas based on an ideology of Turkish racial supremacy and pan-Turanism. This ideology called for the "unification of the Turks—who share language, race, customs, and even for the most part, religion, and who are spread throughout the majority of Asia and Eastern Europe," and would result in the "formation of a vast political nationality . . . from the peoples of the great race," encompassing Central Asian Turks and Mongols "from Peking to Montenegro."²⁰ Especially after the Balkan Wars, they saw Turkey as the homeland for Turks alone and assumed that the Christian minorities were interested only in destroying the Empire. It has been said that the entire Tanzimat movement "was driven by its fear of the partition" of the Empire.²¹

During the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire endured a series of losses of its territories, including Bessarabia, Serbia, Abkhazia, Mingrelia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Kars, Ardahan, and Cyprus. It was felt that the Empire was surviving only because the European Powers could not agree among themselves how to dismember it. Thus, when British and Russian diplomats met in June 1908 to resolve the fate of Macedonia, Ottoman nationalists were certain that the final fate of the Empire was at hand.

The CUP launched a revolution in July 1908 to reintroduce the constitution of 1876, place limits on the monarchy, and provide stronger leadership to protect the Empire and keep it intact. The destabilization inherent in the revolution, however, encouraged the Austro-Hungarian Empire to annex Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria to declare full independence, and Crete to move toward union with Greece.

In the beginning, the CUP tried to be inclusive. It ran candidates in the parliamentary elections that year in alliance with the Armenian Dashnak Party and received a majority in the Chamber of Deputies. For a time, all citizens felt they were at the beginning of a new era of fraternity and equality.²² On April 12, 1909, however, there was an attempt at a coup by reactionary forces in the country. In addition to a clash of two armies in Constantinople, there was a wave of violent outbreaks across Anatolia, during which some 20,000–25,000 Armenians were massacred in Adana, in two separate episodes. Opposition to the modernization represented by the 1908 revolution motivated the coup, and as the Armenians were viewed as allies of the CUP and agents of modernization, they were targeted.²³ The Armenians of Adana were also more prosperous than their Muslim neighbors, which fostered additional resentment. It was not only resentful conservative Muslims who participated in the massacres but also Turkish troops under CUP command. The CUP leadership had begun to view the Armenians as the "other."

In August 1909, the Law of Associations came into effect, which, among other things, forbade the establishment of political organizations based on nationality or ethnicity. Immediately, Greek, Bulgarian, and other minority clubs in the European Ottoman territories were shut down. A series of other measures were enacted to impose an Ottoman Turkish identity in the educational system, restrict freedom of assembly, and freedom of the press. These were all unpopular. At the annual CUP party congress in Salonica in 1910, discussions were held outside of the plenary sessions, in which a plan for the forced homogenization of the population was discussed.²⁴

One analysis of Turkish national identity has concluded that it arose as a reaction to continual humiliation. For a nation that is conscious of its diminished status, it is natural to strive to prove that the opposite is true. The CUP leadership came to view the dissolution of the Empire as a life and death issue, and as they cast about for the reasons to explain it and find solutions for it, they could not accept their own arrogance, errors, corruption, and misrule; they decided it was the fault of the Christian minorities. As the Armenians came to be viewed as the “other,” they were considered dangerous because they were a nationality that laid claim to Anatolia, both the remnant and the heartland of the Empire. The fact that Armenians lived not only in Anatolia, where they were subjects of the Ottoman Empire, but also in Persia, where they were subjects of that country, and the Southern Caucasus, where they were subjects of the Russian Empire, only added to the suspicions about them. Even the Russian Tsars, ostensibly supporters of the Armenians, perceived them to be a subversive nation, whose international connections, once valued for their commercial relations, made their loyalties questionable. Thus, they enacted many harsh measures against the Armenians, including provoking a series of massacres in Baku in 1905 to suppress their perceived nationalism and independence.²⁵ Similarly, it was the minorities, the CUP leadership believed, who were interested in the dissolution of the Empire and who were collaborating with foreign powers to help bring it about.²⁶ They felt that only the most extreme and radical measures could prevent this and save the empire.

The Balkan Wars, 1912–1913

At the beginning of 1912, CUP leaders in Constantinople, anxious to restore Turkish military glory, organized large demonstrations in favour of war with the Balkan states. Newspapers called for reestablishing the Empire’s border at the Danube River and invoked the Ottoman martial spirit. Meanwhile, the opposition succeeded in forcing the CUP from power on August 5. The First Balkan War broke out in October between Bulgaria, Greece, Montenegro, and Serbia allied on one side, and the Ottoman Empire on the other. It ended with the stunning defeat of the Ottoman Empire, and almost all remaining European territories of the Empire were captured and partitioned by the victors, including Rumelia, the birthplace of almost the entire CUP leadership. In addition, Greece finally annexed Crete. Following upon decades of Ottoman military defeats and territorial losses, this not only fed the paranoia but also engendered a strong feeling for revenge among the CUP leaders.²⁷

After the Second Balkan War in 1913, which was fought primarily among the former Balkan allies, Albania and Macedonia seceded, and Italy retained the Dodecanese islands in the Aegean, which it had occupied during the Italo-Turkish War

over Libya in 1911–1912. Although the Ottoman Empire did see the return of Edirne, by 1913 it had lost the majority of its former subject territories—more than 60,000 square miles containing nearly 4,000,000 inhabitants.²⁸ As a result, not only did the Empire lose the revenues from those territories, but the demography of the Empire changed. Whereas once an estimated 65 percent of the Empire's population had been Christian, now the Christians were a minority and even more vulnerable than before.

Some 400,000 Muslims, out of fear of Greek, Serbian, or Bulgarian atrocities, left with the retreating Ottoman army, creating a major logistical challenge for the CUP leadership and also huge social and political problems.²⁹ Where were they to house such a large number of refugees, and how were they to integrate such a resentful mass into the Anatolian heartland, where there were still large numbers of Christian Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks?

Seizure of Power by the CUP

The losses in the two Balkan Wars caused tremendous shock to the Turkish psyche. On January 13, 1913, the CUP staged a coup and was firmly back in power. The CUP's policies were radically reformed so that Turkish nationalism became the party's principle, and the Empire came under the rule of a military dictatorship. Young Turk ideologue Ziya Gökalp articulated what this meant. Turks were the "supermen" German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche imagined; Turks needed to embrace their Turkishness; there must be an end to the illusion of Muslim-Christian equality. The nation was to be considered a "social totality," including "cultural unity," "economic unity," and "political unity." He attributed mystical and divine qualities to the nation, and in so doing, made nationalism a religion. Therefore, whatever was done in the name of nationalism would be good and right.³⁰

Anti-Greek Measures, 1913–1914

As part of the plan for economic unity, a number of guild associations were established. These were for Turks only, and Christians were specifically excluded. One important institution was established to help found new Turkish-owned companies and create a bourgeoisie composed only of Turks, replacing Christians, who had traditionally occupied that role.³¹ Its activities included the boycott of Greek and Armenian owned businesses and their wholesale confiscation, so that they could be turned over to Turkish owners and Turks placed in jobs monopolized by Greeks. Sir Louis Mallett, the British Ambassador in Constantinople, described the situation as follows:

In small towns such as Magnesia, and throughout the villages where the ubiquitous Greek petty trader is to be found, boycotting in a most severe form is being carried on. All Moslems or Greeks who are found entering raya shops are beaten, and all semblance of free commerce or equality is at an end while as things tend at present, the position of the Greeks and Armenians in many districts is becoming more and more untenable. This boycott is the direct result of Committee of Union and Progress influence, and Committee emissaries are everywhere instigating the people.³²

The plan was supplemented by the gathering of Greek youths into forced labor battalions under very harsh working conditions.³³

Such measures were designed to pressure the Greeks to emigrate. In a telegram to Berlin dated July 16, 1914, the German Ambassador to Constantinople, Baron Hans Freiherr von Wangenheim, reported on a meeting with the Grand Vizier, during which the latter stated his willingness to abandon the islands on the Turkish coast to Greece, if it would mean "the complete removal of the Greek population of the Asia Minor coast."³⁴ However, the European powers reacted strongly against these harsh measures. The CUP was forced to stop the Greek emigration and initiate a committee of inquiry.³⁵

Armenian Reforms

Ongoing grievances about frequent anti-Armenian violence continued to be ignored by the Ottoman authorities, and after the Balkan Wars, the Armenians renewed their demands for reform. Russia displayed renewed interest in the Armenians and became advocates on their behalf once again. The CUP was pressured to sign a reform agreement on February 8, 1914 and establish a reform commission. Plans were made to divide the Armenian provinces into two parts, under joint Ottoman Christian, Ottoman Muslim, and foreign administration. Laws and official pronouncements were to be issued in the local languages. Muslims and Christians would be represented fairly in matters dealt with by the councils and the police. The dreaded Hamidiye cavalry was to be demobilized. All this was widely perceived as opening the doors for a takeover by Russia and the beginning of the final partition of the Empire. An inspection commission was appointed in April 1914, consisting of Dutch and Norwegian representatives, to visit the region and make recommendations.³⁶ However, with the outbreak of World War I, the commission's work was halted.

The statements of several CUP leaders confirm that the Armenian reforms and the fear that these reforms would lead to the partition of Anatolia and the end of the Ottoman Empire were the final factors that led them to enter World War I and make the decision to forcibly homogenize the population by getting rid of all the minorities.³⁷

World War I

The CUP leadership, convinced that it could defeat Russia and turn the Empire's fortunes around, entered World War I on October 28, 1914, as an ally of the Central Powers (Imperial Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire) aligned against the Allied Powers (also known as the Triple Entente, i.e., Britain, France, and Russia) and began by bombing Russian Black Sea ports. At the same time they declared war, the CUP leaders dismissed parliament and effectively established a dictatorship. The wartime emergency situation provided them the opportunity to put into action their plans to get rid of the minorities.

Compounding the Armenians' image of being treasonous for appealing for European intervention for reforms in 1912 was the refusal of the Dashnaks to engage Russian Armenians in conducting a guerrilla war against the Russians in the Caucasus, along with the Special Organization, in spite of their having notified the CUP of their

intention to defend the sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire.³⁸ A series of military defeats in the first months of the war, including the disastrous defeat at Sarikamiş in January 1915, was a shock to the Young Turks, proud of their military heritage. Many Armenians fled to Russian Armenia, including several thousand who became volunteers in the Russian army. After initially praising the conduct of Armenian soldiers in this campaign in a letter to the Armenian Patriarch sent on February 26, 1915,³⁹ the Young Turks needed a scapegoat for their failure and convinced themselves that the defeat could only have been caused by the treacherous minorities, especially the Armenians.⁴⁰ They started a propaganda campaign, spreading the idea that there was a general Armenian rebellion; yet, German diplomatic officials in the field wrote to the embassy in Constantinople that they saw no possibility of rebellion.⁴¹ Starting in March, the Ottoman army was engaged in an extended, life-and-death battle at Gallipoli against British, Australian, New Zealander, and Canadian invading forces. It was against this desperate background that the Young Turks' final decision to eliminate the Christian minorities was made.

The Genocide of the Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks

While the roundup of Armenian intellectuals in Constantinople on April 24, 1915 is usually cited as the beginning of the Armenian Genocide, it is clear that repressive measures, including massacres, had been taken against Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks around the Empire prior to that date and that they had escalated quickly in intensity. On March 7, 1915, the German Vice-Consul in Alexandretta wrote to the German Ambassador in Constantinople, "During the last few days house-to-house searches took place at all the homes of the Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire residing here—Armenians, Syrians, Greeks—on order from higher up (most likely from Constantinople)."⁴²

Starting in April 1915, the leaders of the Armenian community throughout the Empire were rounded up, imprisoned, some were put on trial, and most were killed. (It is noteworthy that in 1921, the Kemalists similarly used the independence courts, *Istiklal Muhakemesi*, to indict Pontian Greeks, disallow any legal defence, and assign them the strictest sentences possible.) The Armenian men of military age were disarmed, put into forced labor battalions, and either worked to death or killed. The remaining population was forced to leave their homes, abandon most of their belongings, and set out on deportation routes that inevitably led to their death en masse, through murder, starvation, and disease. In the early stages, those who willingly converted to Islam were spared. In addition, many women and children were taken into Muslim households, where they were either adopted or became "slave" labor or concubines. In any case, they were forced to hide or suppress their true identities and were essentially assimilated as Turks. In the end, by the time of the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne, July 24, 1923, up to one and a half million Armenians had perished.⁴³

The Assyrian Genocide was part of the same process, sometimes taking place in the same locations and at the same time as the Armenians. The Assyrians too had suffered massacres in the 1840s and had been targeted during the Abdul Hamid-era massacres of the 1890s, losing some 55,000 lives then. The deportation of Assyrians from Van began in October 1914, and starting in March 1915, they began to be killed

along with the Armenians. Like the Armenians, they were massacred even in villages beyond the borders of the Ottoman Empire. Like the Armenians, they were driven from their homes and perished on the way, suffering kidnapping, rape, and sexual slavery. Like the Armenians, their property was confiscated, never to be returned. An estimated 250,000 Assyrians were killed by late 1919.⁴⁴

The Greek Genocide may be said to have evolved in three phases, before, during, and after World War I, and by both the regimes of the Committee of Union and Progress and the successor nationalist movement led by Mustafa Kemal. As described above, before the entry of the Ottoman Empire into World War I, there was a mass deportation of the Greeks in Thrace and along the Aegean coast. One source estimated that 115,000 Greeks were expelled from Eastern Thrace and sought refuge in Greece, 85,000 Greeks were deported from the same region to the interior of Asia Minor, and 150,000 Greeks were driven from the coast of Western Anatolia and went to the shores of Greece.⁴⁵ However, the deportation of Greeks was temporarily suspended partially due to German influence, out of consideration for the family relationship between the German and Greek royal houses, and partly to avert Greece from entering the war on the side of the Allied Powers.⁴⁶ But the roundup, deportation, and mass murder of the Armenians continued. During this period, one German consul reported the following:

[t]he government measures that have recently been introduced here show how thoroughly things are being done: some Armenian mothers had hidden their children with Greek families. Upon threat of heavy punishment, these poor creatures, among them babies, were torn away from their foster parents who showed only Christian kindness! The Greek Christians are trembling, and with good reason, for at the first opportunity they are sure to suffer the same fate as the Armenians: should Greece go over to the enemy camp, its brethren and sisters in faith in Turkey are lost!⁴⁷

Greece did enter the war officially on the side of the Allied Powers on June 30, 1917, although the Greek government of Venizelos declared that it considered the country to be in a state of war on the side of the Allies as of November 1916, when a declaration had been made by the revolutionary government in Thessalonica. The deportations of the Greeks resumed in 1916. The US Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Henry Morgenthau, described that process:

The Turks adopted almost identically the same procedure against the Greeks as that which they had adopted against the Armenians. They began by incorporating the Greeks into the Ottoman army and then transforming them into labour battalions, using them to build roads in the Caucasus and other scenes of action. These Greek soldiers, just like the Armenians, died by thousands from cold, hunger, and other privations. The same house-to-house searches for hidden weapons took place in the Greek villages, and Greek men and women were beaten and tortured just as were their

fellow Armenians. The Greeks had to submit to the same forced requisitions, which amounted in their case, as in the case of the Armenians, merely to plundering on a wholesale scale. The Turks attempted to force the Greek subjects to become Mohammedans; Greek girls, just like Armenian girls, were stolen and taken to Turkish harems and Greek boys were kidnapped and placed in Moslem households. The Greeks, just like the Armenians, were accused of disloyalty to the Ottoman Government; the Turks accused them of furnishing supplies to the English submarines in the Marmora and also of acting as spies. The Turks also declared that the Greeks were not loyal to the Ottoman Government, and that they also looked forward to the day when the Greeks inside of Turkey would become part of Greece. These latter charges were unquestionably true; that the Greeks, after suffering for five centuries the most unspeakable outrages at the hands of the Turks, should look longingly to the day when their territory should be part of the fatherland, was to be expected. The Turks, as in the case of the Armenians, seized upon this as an excuse for a violent onslaught on the whole race. Everywhere the Greeks were gathered in groups and, under the so-called protection of Turkish gendarmes, they were transported, the larger part on foot, into the interior. Just how many were scattered in this fashion is not definitely known, the estimates varying anywhere from 200,000 up to 1,000,000. These caravans suffered great privations, but they were not submitted to general massacre as were the Armenians, and this is probably the reason why the outside world has not heard so much about them. The Turks showed them this greater consideration not from any motive of pity. The Greeks, unlike the Armenians, had a government which was vitally interested in their welfare. At this time there was a general apprehension among the Teutonic allies that Greece would enter the war on the side of the Entente, and a wholesale massacre of Greeks in Asia Minor would unquestionably have produced such a state of mind in Greece that its pro-German king would have been unable longer to keep his country out of the war. It was only a matter of state policy, therefore, that saved these Greek subjects of Turkey from all the horrors that befell the Armenians. But their sufferings are still terrible, and constitute another chapter in the long story of crimes for which civilization will hold the Turks responsible.⁴⁸

It is noteworthy that at this stage of the genocidal process, the expulsion and deportation of the Greeks, while brutal and resulting in great loss of life, did not include large scale exterminatory massacres. This was because Venizelos had sent a warning to the Young Turk leaders about possible reprisals against Turkish nationals in Greece.⁴⁹ Yet Ottoman Muslims were now forbidden to pay debts they owed to Greeks, while Greeks had to pay compulsory levies to the Ottoman government, were thrown into prison, and starved unless they converted to Islam. Entire Greek villages were destroyed, murders and rapes continued, and refugees were distributed among Turkish villages in the proportion of 10 percent of the Muslim population in order to dilute their presence and identity.⁵⁰ From 1914 to 1917, more than 500,000 Ottoman Greeks were expelled from their homes and deported to the interior, with much loss of life.⁵¹

The third phase of the Greek Genocide took place after World War I. Following the armistice of Mudros (October 20, 1918), Greek forces occupied Eastern Thrace. The Greek occupation of Smyrna in May 1919 caused a strong reaction in Turkish popular opinion. Even though the British and French occupation curtailed political activity in Ottoman Turkey, a resistance movement grew. For the Turks, it was bad enough that Greek forces were on Turkish soil, but when the Greek army entered Smyrna, there were incidents of violence, "and a number of Greek civilians took advantage of the melee to round up Turks, or those they took to be Turks, and to club, kick, and abuse them. Turkish soldiers were marched out of the government barracks and some were likewise attacked. . . . Violence meanwhile erupted in the Turkish quarter and in outlying villages, where a number of Greeks decided to settle old scores by robbing, raping, and killing Turkish civilians." Many Turks and Greeks were killed, with an unknown number injured and molested.⁵²

On May 19, 1919, four days after the Greek landing at Smyrna, Mustafa Kemal (who later adopted the name Atatürk) landed at Samsun with orders from Constantinople to supervise the disbanding of the Turkish forces. Instead, he began to establish links with resistance groups and raise an army. Many members of the CUP, a good number of whom were wanted for crimes committed during the war, including the mass murder of the Armenians, flocked to him, where the occupied government in Constantinople unwittingly provisioned them with arms. By the time the Treaty of Sèvres was signed on August 10, 1920, effectively dismembering the Ottoman Empire, the Kemalists had established the Grand National Assembly in Ankara, and it was clear that the sultan's government in Constantinople was no longer in control of the country. As the Entente was not willing to commit to an extensive military occupation of Anatolia, it accepted the Greek offer to try to enforce the treaty militarily. This resulted in a full-scale war between Greece and Turkey, which lasted from 1920 to 1922.

Even before Kemal's landing at Samsun, deadly bands of *çetes* (organized brigands) had been engaged in continuous shooting, plundering, and raping of the defenceless Greek villagers in the Pontus region. With Kemal's support, they stepped up their campaign with the objective of clearing the Greeks from the region, massacring the Greek population in cities such as Trebizond, Amasya, Pafra, Merzifon, and many others.⁵³ By the spring of 1922, the bulk of the Greek population in the Pontus region, which was far from the war zone, had been deported to the interior. Along the way, tens of thousands perished from exposure, starvation, and disease. The dead and half dead were thrown into rivers and ditches.⁵⁴

Initially, the Greek army conducted a successful campaign that brought it to within striking distance of Ankara. However, owing to division within its leadership, the Greek army became overextended beyond its supply lines, and with the Entente backing away from its support for Greece, Turkey successfully routed the Greek forces on August 30, 1922.⁵⁵ During their retreat, Greek troops committed atrocities against Turkish civilians.⁵⁶

One of the most noteworthy incidents during the Greco-Turkish war was the destruction of the great city of Smyrna (modern Izmir) in September 1922. The majority of the population of Smyrna was Christian, and the city was known for being cosmopolitan, with a culture of racial and religious tolerance. The entry of the Turkish army on September 9 led to an event described by one historian thus: "What happened over the two weeks that followed must surely rank as one of the most compelling human dramas of the twentieth century. Innocent civilians—men, women and children from scores of different nationalities—were caught up in a humanitarian disaster on a scale that the world had never before seen."⁵⁷ Five days before even entering the city, the Kemalist government in Ankara had sent a note to the League of Nations stating that it could not be responsible for any consequences that might result from the actions of the Greek troops. The League responded that atrocities committed by one side do not justify those committed by the other.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the city was set afire and a terrible massacre of the Christian population followed.

On September 16, 1922, the League of Nations' High Commissioner for Russian Refugees, Fridtjof Nansen, received an urgent request for aid for the many thousands of Greeks and Armenians who had fled to Constantinople from Smyrna and Brusa. Other refugees had fled to Samos and Chios, and there were both Christian and Muslim refugees in Eastern Thrace. The Mudanya convention of October 13, 1922, which ceded Eastern Thrace back to Turkey, triggered a second massive wave of refugees to Greece. Nansen saw the refugee problem to be very serious, estimating that "there were probably no fewer than 750,000 destitute refugees, the greater part of whom were women, children and the elderly, scattered over every part of Greece, Thrace and the Aegean islands." During this exodus, thousands died of dysentery, typhus, and cholera. He saw the need for the refugees to settle on the land in order to be able to feed themselves. For that to happen, the men who were being held prisoner in Turkish labor battalions, where the mortality rate was very high,⁵⁹ would need to be set free. To make room for them to live, however, it would be necessary for Muslims to abandon their homes and emigrate to Turkey. About the same time, the Turkish Interior Minister in Ankara declared that his government had decided not to allow the further presence of Greeks on Turkish soil. It was under these circumstances that Nansen began to form the idea of a compulsory Greek-Turkish population exchange.⁶⁰

Peace negotiations began at Lausanne on November 21, 1922. Turkey obtained full sovereignty over most of the territory that makes up today's Turkish Republic and eventually rejected all claims for reparations. Accords were signed between Greece and Turkey regarding various aspects of the population exchange on November 30. Because one million Greek refugees had already been forced out of Turkey, the population exchange dealt with the remaining 400,000 Muslims from Macedonia and 200,000 Greeks from Pontus and Cappadocia. Whether the Greeks in Constantinople would be allowed to remain was still being debated, although in the end, they were

exempted from the population exchange. On January 3, 1923, in Lausanne, Greece and Turkey signed the treaty that provided for the compulsory exchange of populations between the two countries, involving some 1,300,000 Orthodox Christians and 585,000 Muslims. Greek Prime Minister Venizelos later described it as “expelling the Muslim population from Greece after the Greeks were kicked out of Turkey.”⁶¹ Thus ended the millennia-long, vibrant Greek presence in Asia Minor. It has been estimated that the loss of life among Anatolian Greeks during World War I and its aftermath was more than 735,000,⁶² and among the Pontian Greeks about 350,000.⁶³

A Note on the Term “Genocide”

While the term “genocide” is widely accepted in the case of the Armenians, there has been some reluctance to apply it to the cases of the Assyrians and Greeks. There are several reasons for this. First, ample research and documentation on the Armenian Genocide is available in the main western languages, while this is not the case for the other two. Second, there has been an active movement for the international recognition of the Armenian case as genocide for decades, while the movements on behalf of the Assyrians and Greeks are still relatively modest. Third, the various Turkish governments since the establishment of the Turkish Republic have made great efforts to deny that genocide occurred. They claim that whatever lives were lost were due to the government’s self-defence during civil insurrection and wartime exigencies, and that whatever happened, it can not be called genocide. Fourth, some argue that the fact that there was an agreement signed by both the Greek and Turkish governments for the 1922 population exchange supposedly proves that Turkey had no genocidal intent against its Greek citizens, and that if anything was wrong, the Greek government was no less culpable than the Turkish.

According to the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Article 2, which provides the internationally accepted legal definition, “genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”

Article 3 stipulates, “The following acts shall be punishable:

- (a) Genocide;
- (b) Conspiracy to commit genocide;
- (c) Direct and public incitement to commit genocide;
- (d) Attempt to commit genocide;
- (e) Complicity in genocide.”⁶⁴

There is no doubt that in the Armenian, Assyrian, and Greek cases, all five criteria in both Articles 2 and 3 apply.

The argument that lives were lost due to civil insurrection and wartime exigencies does not explain why whole populations were deported and killed far from the war

zones. In fact, consular officials of Imperial Germany, the military ally of the Ottoman Empire, reported again and again that there was no Armenian rebellion. The insurrection argument was well addressed in the final verdict of the post-WWI Ottoman Military Tribunals prosecuting the crimes committed against the Armenians.

Although some weak-minded persons were inclined toward sympathy with the enemy after they were gripped by the incitements and encouragements of the members of revolutionary groups, and although [many of] these persons participated in revolutionary movements and revolts in the areas of military operations, and especially in the lands of the enemy and in the areas under his occupation, this [does not and] cannot prove that the other members of their community in other parts of the Ottoman Realms were involved in the harboring of the[-se aforementioned] vile ideas. It is true that a segment of the Armenian nation did indeed participate in seditious actions such as these, which materialized from time to time, but the rest of the populace, contrariwise, proved their loyalty and devotion [to the Ottoman state] in numerous ways.

As was recorded above it is an absolute command for [all] government officials, regardless of their position, to devote themselves to the defense of the lives and legal rights of the population, which were entrusted to their protective hands as unto a benevolent father, without prejudice to national sentiment or personal rancor.⁶⁵

The argument that there was a mutually signed agreement for the population exchange ignores the fact that the Ankara government had already declared its intention that no Greek should remain on Turkish soil before the exchange was even discussed. The final elimination of the Greek population of the Ottoman Empire in 1920–1924 was part of a series of hostile actions that began even before Turkey's entry into World War I.

Owing to the fact that in the earlier stages of the deportation and expulsion of the Greeks there were relatively few outright massacres, some believe the term “ethnic cleansing” is more appropriate. This term was coined during the wars of secession of the 1990s in the former Yugoslavia to describe the forced, wholesale depopulation of an ethnic group from a region without necessarily involving its total annihilation. This is recognized both as a war crime and a crime against humanity.⁶⁶ One of the characteristics that distinguishes genocide as a unique crime in international law, however, is the element of genocidal intent, as stipulated in Article 2 of the UN Genocide Convention. In the absence of an admission of guilt by the perpetrator, which tends to be very rare, it is very difficult to prove genocidal intent. Nevertheless, from a strictly legal perspective, genocidal intent can be inferred from a pattern of systematic attacks on or the targeting of a group, atrocities on a large scale, or repetitive

destructive and discriminatory acts. This was a ruling of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia hearing the case of Slobodan Milosevic.⁶⁷

The quest for historical understanding is different from criminal investigation and prosecution. In historical cases, it may not be possible to reach the judicial standards of proof required for a court verdict; therefore, one must balance the legal aspects of the case with other considerations. To restrict historical enquiry to legal rules of evidence can actually impede historical justice.⁶⁸ Genocide is both a legal and a scholarly concept. Partly to help address the lack of scholarly attention being paid to the Assyrian and Greek experiences in relation to the Armenian Genocide, the International Association of Genocide Scholars issued the following resolution in December 2007, and in so doing, encouraged a new, holistic approach to what has up to now been treated as three separate subjects.

WHEREAS the denial of genocide is widely recognized as the final stage of genocide, enshrining impunity for the perpetrators of genocide, and demonstrably paving the way for future genocides;

WHEREAS the Ottoman genocide against minority populations during and following the First World War is usually depicted as a genocide against Armenians alone, with little recognition of the qualitatively similar genocides against other Christian minorities of the Ottoman Empire;

BE IT RESOLVED that it is the conviction of the International Association of Genocide Scholars that the Ottoman campaign against Christian minorities of the Empire between 1914 and 1923 constituted a genocide against Armenians, Assyrians, and Pontian and Anatolian Greeks.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Association calls upon the government of Turkey to acknowledge the genocides against these populations, to issue a formal apology, and to take prompt and meaningful steps toward restitution.

Finally, the study of genocide also incorporates a moral and educational component. One is reminded of the motivation of Raphael Lemkin, the man who coined the term “genocide” and devoted his life to the realization of the international law for its prevention and punishment. He wrote, “I identified myself more and more with the sufferings of the victims, whose numbers grew, and I continued my study of history. I understood that the function of memory is not only to register past events, but to stimulate human conscience. . . . These nations must be made to understand that an attack on one of them is an attack on all of them.”⁶⁹ Lemkin made clear elsewhere in this passage that he saw a continuing thread in the long record of man’s inhumanity to man. In this context, excessive exclusivity in the application of the term genocide can

interfere with our ability to see the broad sweep of past events, to appreciate their interconnectedness, and to learn the vital lessons of history.

Conclusion

It is hoped that this essay helps bring a measure of understanding and openness to the discussion of the Greek Genocide. This is a story of great human tragedy and suffering, of great power politics and miscalculation. By promoting awareness of this history, we hope to prevent the recurrence of another “Great Catastrophe.”

¹ Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, New ed. (London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2004), 9–10.

² Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*. 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 107.

³ Kemal H. Karpat, “The Transformation of the Ottoman State, 1789–1908,” in Kemal H. Karpat, *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History: Selected Articles and Essays* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 35–36.

⁴ One observer remarked: “The Greeks spend more money for educational purposes than any other nation in Turkey.” K.H. Basmajian, *Social and Religious Life in the Orient* (New York: American Tract Society, 1890), 177. The Greek Orthodox maintained by far the largest number of schools among the non-Muslims at 4,390. Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey. Volume II: Reform, Revolution and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808–1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 250.

⁵ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, 113.

⁶ Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 85.

⁷ Norman Stone, “Turkey in the Russian Mirror,” in *Russia: War, Peace, and Diplomacy: Essays in Honour of John Erickson*, ed. Mark and Ljubica Erickson (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004), 97 and note 38.

⁸ German Foreign Office Archives, 1915-08-21-DE-011-E. Franz Johannes Guenther, the Chairman of the Baghdad Railway in Constantinople, to the Chargé d’Affaires of the German Embassy in Constantinople, Neurath, August 21, 1915. Armenocide, <http://www.armenocide.de/armenocide/armgende.nsf/WebStart-En?OpenFrameset> (accessed March 16, 2011).

⁹ See, for example, the remarks of Ahmet Şerif, an Ittihadist intellectual, traveler, journalist, and Ottoman government official, who published the following after he visited the predominantly Armenian town of Hajin in March 1910: “From the faces of the schoolgirls and schoolboys life and vitality burst forth. Let us not lie: I did not feel admiration for this, but jealousy.” In 1911, after a visit to Samsun on the Black Sea, he wrote, “It is as if a general orphan-like spirit floats over the [Muslim] quarter. Laziness, an apathetic attitude toward life is the character that appears among the Muslims. In contrast, if you enter the quarter of the Christians, your heart feels happiness; you find superbly constructed houses, which testify to proprietors interested in life, and to their beautiful disposition, and clean and broad streets. In contrast to the immobility of the Muslims, the Christians are always on the move. In this respect, they enjoy the good things of life much more. . . . The difference is even more obvious in regard to education. Whereas the Christian citizens generally know how to read and write more or less, the Muslims are very much behind.” Hans-Lukas Kieser, *Nearest East: American Millennialism and Mission to the Middle East* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 76–77.

¹⁰ John Joseph, *The Nestorians and Their Muslim Neighbors: A Study of Western Influence on Their Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 99.

¹¹ Kieser, *Nearest East*, 58–59.

¹² For the development of Armenian political nationalism, see Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967). For the Abdul Hamid-era massacres, see Vahakn N. Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus*, 6th rev. ed. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 113–171; George Shirinian, “The Armenian Massacres of 1894–1897: A Bibliography,” 1999, www.zoryaninstitute.org/bibliographies/The%20Armenian%20Massacres.pdf (accessed January 7, 2012).

¹³ James J. Reid, *Crisis of the Ottoman Empire: Prelude to Collapse, 1839–1878* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000), 21–22.

¹⁴ Djemal Pasha, *Memories of a Turkish Statesman—1913–1919 by Djemal Pasha: Formerly Governor of Constantinople, Imperial Ottoman Naval Minister, and Commander of the Fourth Army in Sinai, Palestine and Syria* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1922), 241.

- ¹⁵ Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The History of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 469.
- ¹⁶ Kemal H. Karpat, "The Ethnicity Problem in a Multi-Ethnic Anational Islamic State: Continuity and Recasting of Ethnic Identity in the Ottoman State," in Kemal H. Karpat, *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History*, 726–727.
- ¹⁷ Finkel, *Osman's Dream*, 459.
- ¹⁸ Theodore George Tatsios, *The Megali Idea and the Greek Turkish War of 1897: The Impact of the Cretan Problem on Greek Irredentism, 1866–1897* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1984), 3, 5, 20. Harry J. Psomiades, *The Eastern Question: The Last Phase. A Study in Greek-Turkish Diplomacy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Pella Publishing, 2000), 9–12.
- ¹⁹ Starting in 1895, the influential branch of the group in exile in Paris also went by the name "Jeunes Turcs" (Young Turks). Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 87.
- ²⁰ Yusuf Akçura, *Uç tarz-i siyaset* (Constantinople, 1911), quoted in Ben Kiernan, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2007), 402.
- ²¹ The development of Turkish nationalism is a large subject with an extensive literature, upon which we can touch only briefly here. For more, see Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 47–108. The quote is found on page 54.
- ²² Feroz Ahmad, "Unionist Relations with the Greek, Armenian, and Jewish Communities of the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1914," in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, vol. 1, ed. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1982), 401; Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 210–211.
- ²³ Erik J. Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building: From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk's Turkey* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 73–83; Dadrian, *History of the Armenian Genocide*, 181–182; Bedross Der Matossian, "From Bloodless Revolution to Bloody Counterrevolution: The Adana Massacres of 1909," *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal* 6, no. 2 (2011): 152–173; Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 215–216.
- ²⁴ Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 218; Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, 75–76. Cf. Dadrian, *History of the Armenian Genocide*, 179–180.
- ²⁵ Ronald G. Suny, *Looking toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 26–27; Ronald G. Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 22 and note 3 on 167–168.
- ²⁶ Taner Akçam, *From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide* (London: Zed Books, 2004), 67, 73 76–78.
- ²⁷ Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, 85–87.
- ²⁸ Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 108.
- ²⁹ On the Muslim refugees and their numbers, see Justin McCarthy, *Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821–1922* (Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, 1995), 156–164.
- ³⁰ Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, 87–89.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 90–91.
- ³² FO242/251/188, Sir L. Mallet to Sir Edward Grey, Constantinople, February 26, 1914, Enclosure 1, Consul-General Barnham to Sir Louis Mallet, Smyrna, February 18, 1914. Cited in Dikran M. Kaligian, *Armenian Organization and Ideology under Ottoman Rule 1908-1914* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 217.
- ³³ See Speros Vryonis, Jr., "Greek Labor Battalions in Asia Minor," in *The Armenian Genocide: Cultural and Ethical Legacies*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Pub., 2007), 275–290. For descriptions of how the persecution and expulsions took place, see the compilation, *Letters on the Expulsion of Greeks from Asia Minor, and in Reply to Allegations of Ill-treatment Inflicted on Turks in Greek Macedonia* (London: Anglo-Hellenic League, 1914), drawn from such publications as the *Asiatic Review*, the *Fortnightly Review*, *The Near East*, and *The World*; also George Horton, *The Blight of Asia* (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1926, repr. London: Sterndale Classics, 2003), 28–33.
- ³⁴ Auswärtiges Amt, 16.7.1914; R 1913; A 14075; pr. 17.7.1914 a.m.; 16.7.1914 22:30/17.7.1914 12:30; Botschaft Konstantinopel an Auswärtiges Amt, Telegram Nr. 346. I thank Wolfgang Gust for bringing this document to my attention.
- ³⁵ Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, 104–108.
- ³⁶ See W.J. van der Dussen, "The Question of Armenian Reforms in 1913–1914," *Armenian Review* 39, no. 1-153 (Spring 1986): 11–28; L.C. Westenenk, "Diary Concerning the Armenian Mission," *Armenian Review* 39, no. 1-153 (Spring 1986): 29–89; Kieser, *Nearest East*, 81–82.

- ³⁷ Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, 102; Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide*, 207–209, 213–216; Kieser, *Nearest East*, 83–84.
- ³⁸ Kieser, *Nearest East*, 85; Kaligian, *Armenian Organization and Ideology under Ottoman Rule 1908-1914*, 220–222, 236.
- ³⁹ Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, 143.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 125.
- ⁴¹ Kieser, *Nearest East*, 85. For statements that there was no rebellion in Erzerum, see Wolfgang Gust, ed., *Der Völkermord an den Armeniern 1915/16: Dokumente aus dem Politischen Archiv des deutschen Auswärtigen Amtes* (Springe: zu Klampen!Verlag, 2005), 143, Document 1915-05-15-DE-012, and page 226, Document 1915-08-05-DE-002. For a statement on Mosul, see page 346, Document 1915-11-04-DE-001. For refutation of accusations that Armenians deserted from the army at Aleppo, see page 404, Document 1916-01-03-DE-001. (German and English versions also available at www.armenocide.de.)
- ⁴² Gust, *Der Völkermord an den Armeniern 1915/16*, 121, Document 1915-03-07-DE-011.
- ⁴³ For a study of the number of Armenians killed, see Levon Marashlian, *Politics and Demography: Armenians, Turks and Kurds in the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Zoryan Institute, 1991).
- ⁴⁴ On Armenians and Assyrians being killed in the same locations and at the same time, see, for example, David Gaunt, *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors: Muslim-Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia during World War I* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006), 81; David Gaunt, “Death’s End, 1915: The General Massacres of Christians in Diarbekir,” in *Armenian Tigranakert/Diarbekir and Edessa/Urfa*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2006), 316–317. For more on the Assyrian Genocide, see also Anahit Khosroeva, “The Assyrian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire and Adjacent Territories,” in *The Armenian Genocide: Cultural and Ethical Legacies*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Pub., 2007), 267–274; Hannibal Travis, “‘Native Christians Massacred’: The Ottoman Genocide of the Assyrians during World War I,” *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal* 1, no. 3 (2006): 327–371. Following Travis (page 350 note 2), the name “Assyrians,” as used here, is intended to refer to Assyrians, Nestorians, Chaldeans, and Syrian/Syriac Christians. Gaunt examines the issue of Assyrian population and mortality statistics in *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors* in his Introduction and Appendices 2 and 3. Statistics are also provided in Hannibal Travis, *Genocide in the Middle East: The Ottoman Empire, Iraq, and Sudan* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2010), 247ff., and on page 266 he describes 250,000 as “a figure which many journalists and scholars have subsequently accepted.”
- ⁴⁵ Stephen P. Ladas, *The Exchange of Minorities: Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey* (New York: Macmillan, 1932), 15–16.
- ⁴⁶ Vahakn N. Dadrian, *German Responsibility in the Armenian Genocide: A Review of the Historical Evidence of German Complicity* (Watertown, MA: Blue Crane Books, 1996), 227.
- ⁴⁷ Gust, *Der Völkermord an den Armeniern 1915/16*, 304–305, Document 1915-09-09-DE-002-E, German Vice-Consul Kuckhoff in Samsun writing to the German Embassy in Constantinople. (German and English versions also available at www.armenocide.de.)
- ⁴⁸ Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau’s Story* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1918), 324–325. For some examples of the atrocities during this period, see Constantinos E. Fotiadis, *The Genocide of the Pontus Greeks by the Turks, Vol. 13: Archive Documents of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Britain, France, the League of Nations and S.H.A.T.* (Thessaloniki: Herodotus, 2004), 19–21.
- ⁴⁹ Dadrian, *German Responsibility*, 229–231.
- ⁵⁰ Greek Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Persecutions of the Greek Population in Turkey since the Beginning of the European War according to Official Reports of Hellenic Diplomatic and Consular Agents* (London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1918), 12–20. The Young Turks’ demographic policy and its relation to the Genocide are discussed in Taner Akçam, *The Young Turks’ Crime against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 227–285.
- ⁵¹ Harry J. Psomiades, *Fridtjof Nansen and the Greek Refugee Crisis 1922–1924* (Bloomington, IL: The Asia Minor and Pontus Hellenic Research Center, 2011), 13.
- ⁵² Marjorie Housepian, *The Smyrna Affair* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 50. Some examples of atrocities are described in Giles Milton, *Paradise Lost, Smyrna 1922: The Destruction of Islam’s City of Tolerance* (London: Sceptre, 2008), 140–148; and Horton, *The Blight of Asia*, 49–51.
- ⁵³ For details of this campaign, see Fotiadis, *The Genocide of the Pontus Greeks by the Turks*, 21–26, 56ff passim.
- ⁵⁴ Psomiades, *Fridtjof Nansen and the Greek Refugee Crisis 1922–1924*, 14–15.
- ⁵⁵ Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 143–147, 155; Psomiades, *The Eastern Question*, 25–28.
- ⁵⁶ Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 163.

⁵⁷ Milton, *Paradise Lost. Smyrna 1922*, 4, 6.

⁵⁸ Constantine G. Hatzidimitriou, ed., *American Accounts Documenting the Destruction of Smyrna by the Kemalist Turkish Forces, September 1922* (New York: Aristide D. Caratzas, Publisher, 2005), 8.

⁵⁹ “The life-span of a Greek or Armenian in a Turkish labor battalion was generally about two months.” Psomiades, *Fridtjof Nansen and the Greek Refugee Crisis 1922–1924*, 48.

⁶⁰ Harry J. Psomiades, “Fridtjof Nansen and the Greek Refugee Problem (September–November 1922),” *Bulletin of the Centre for Asia Minor Studies* [Athens] 16 (2009): 295–299. An article in the *New York Times* suggests that the idea of a population exchange originated with Ismet, chief negotiator for the Turkish delegation at Lausanne. Edwin I. James, “Turks Proclaim Banishment Edict to 1,000,000 Greeks,” *New York Times* (December 22, 1922): 1.

⁶¹ John S. Koliopolis and Thanos M. Veremis, *Modern Greece: A History since 1821* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 93. A detailed examination of the number of refugees can be found in Ladas, *The Exchange of Minorities*, 643–645.

⁶² Hatzidimitriou, ed., *American Accounts*, 2–3.

⁶³ Michalis Charalambidis, *The Pontian Question in the United Nations* (Thessaloniki: Pontian Society of Thessaloniki “Euxinos Leschi,” 2004), 15. Constantine Fotiadis, *The Genocide of the Pontus Greeks by the Turks*, Vol. 13, 32, give the figure of 353,000, citing G. Valavanis, *Synchroni Genike Istoria tou Pontou* (Athens, 1925), 24. Taner Akçam reviews the statistical estimates in *A Shameful Act*, 106–107.

⁶⁴ William A. Schabas, *Genocide in International Law: The Crime of Crimes*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 668.

⁶⁵ Vahakn N. Dadrian and Taner Akçam, *Judgment at Istanbul: The Armenian Genocide Trials* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 292.

⁶⁶ For a detailed discussion of the legal implications of the term “ethnic cleansing,” see Alfred de Zayas, “Ethnic Cleansing: Applicable Norms, Emerging Jurisprudence, Implementable Remedies,” in *International Humanitarian Law*, ed. John Carey, William V. Dunlap, and R. John Pritchard (Ardsey, NY: Transnational Publishers, Inc., 2003), 283–313.

⁶⁷ Travis, ““Native Christians Massacred,”” 345 and note 251. Travis cites *Prosecutor v. Milosevic*, Decision on Motion for Judgement of Acquittal, IT-02–54-T (16 June 2004), <http://www.un.org/icty/milosevic/trialc/judgement/040616.htm> (accessed 13 October 2006), para. 120, which cites Jelisić Appeals Judgment, para. 37, which itself cites Akayesu Trial Judgment, paras. 698–734.

⁶⁸ Tony Barta, “With Intent to Deny: On Colonial Intentions and Genocide Denial,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 10, no. 1 (2008): 111.

⁶⁹ Steven L. Jacobs, “Raphael Lemkin and the Armenian Genocide,” in *Looking Backward, Moving Forward: Confronting the Armenian Genocide*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2003), 126.