

What Is Genocide?

The Armenian Case

by Michael M. Gunter

Shortly after the World War II, genocide was legally defined by the U.N. Genocide Convention as “any... acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such.”¹ The key word from the perspective of this article is “intent.” For while nobody can deny the disaster wrought on the Armenians by the 1915 deportations and massacres, the question is whether or not it can be defined as genocide—arguably the most heinous crime imaginable.

THE AMBIGUITY OF GENOCIDE

The strict international law definition of genocide has not prevented its application to virtually every conflict involving a large number of civilian deaths from the Athenian massacre of the inhabitants of Milos in 416 B.C.E., to the Mongol sacking of Baghdad in 1258, to the fate of the native North American Indians, to Stalin’s induced famine in the Ukraine in the early 1930s, to the recent conflicts in Bosnia, Burundi, Chechnya, Colombia, Guatemala, Iraq, Sudan, and Rwanda, which is not to deny that some of these cases do indeed qualify as genocide.

The liberal use of the term has naturally stirred numerous controversies and debates. Israel Charny offers little help by arguing that any

massacre constitutes genocide, even the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear meltdown.² At the other end of the spectrum, Stephen Katz views the Holocaust as the only true genocide in history.³ In between these two polar definitions, Ton Zwaan has attempted to distinguish between “total” and “complete” genocide and “partial” genocides.⁴

Even the U.N. definition suffers from some ambiguities owing to being a compromise among all signatories. Thus, the convention legally protects only “national, racial, ethnic, and religious groups,” not those defined politically, economi-

1 *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, 78 U.N. Treaty Series (UNTS) 277, adopted by the General Assembly, Dec. 9, 1948, entered into force, Jan. 12, 1951.

2 Israel W. Charny, “Towards a Generic Definition of Genocide,” in George J. Andreopoulos, ed., *Genocide: Conceptual and Historical Dimensions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), pp. 64-94.

3 Stephen Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

4 Ton Zwaan, “On the Aetiology and Genesis of Genocides and Other Mass Crimes Targeting Specific Groups,” Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, University of Amsterdam/Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, Nov. 2003, p. 12.

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Intent or premeditation is important in defining genocide; a large loss of life is not in itself proof of genocide.

cally, or culturally, giving rise to varying interpretations of its intentions. For example, while the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia convicted seven Bosnian Serbs of genocide for their role in the July 1995 Srebrenica massacre of some 8,000 Bosnian Muslims,⁵ the International Court of Justice, in its judgment in

Bosnia vs. Serbia, focused on Serbia's "intent" rather than "outcome" regarding the murder of Bosnian Muslims, absolving it of the charge of genocide.⁶ Clearly, these contradictory decisions have added to the confusion of what genocide legally constitutes.

Likewise, the debate whether the Darfur events constituted genocide continues apace. U.S. secretary of state Colin Powell characterized Darfur as a case of genocide based on a U.S. government-funded study, which had surveyed 1,136 Darfur refugees in neighboring Chad.⁷ By contrast, a study commissioned by U.N. secretary-general Kofi Annan concluded that while the Darfur events should be referred to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for crimes against humanity, they did not amount to genocide.⁸ Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch also declined to characterize the violence in Darfur as genocide while the Arab League and the African Union took a similar position, emphasizing instead the civil war aspect of the conflict.

For their part EU, British, Canadian, and Chinese officials, among others, have shied away from calling it genocide. Samantha Power, the author of a Pulitzer Prize winning study on genocide, favored the term ethnic cleansing to describe what was occurring.⁹

When in July 2008, ICC chief prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo accused Sudanese president Omar Bashir of genocide and asked the court to issue an arrest warrant, many in the Arab League and the African Union criticized the genocide charge as biased against their region.¹⁰ It remains to be seen how wise the ICC has been in bringing genocide charges in this case. Clearly, there was a lack of agreement on what did or did not constitute genocide in Darfur. Such a situation illustrates the ambiguity surrounding the concept of genocide.

In an attempt to alleviate these problems, scholars have offered such additional detailed concepts as "politicide" to refer to mass murders of a political nature, "democide" to describe government-perpetrated mass murders of at least one million people, ethnocide, Judeocide, ecocide, feminicide, libricide (for the destruction of libraries), urbicide, elitocide, linguicide, and culturicide, among others.¹¹ In addition we now have such concepts as crimes against humanity, war crimes, and ethnic cleansing.

Why this semantic disarray? Henry Huttenbach has argued, "Too often has the accusation of genocide been made simply for the emotional effect or to make a political point, with the result that more and more events have been claimed to be genocide to the point that the term has lost its original meaning."¹² Jacques Semelin has similarly explained: "Whether use of the word 'genocide' is justified or not, the term aims to strike our imagination, awaken our moral conscience

5 David Rhode, *Endgame: The Betrayal and Fall of Srebrenica, Europe's Worst Massacre since World War II* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), p. 167; Jacques Semelin, *Purify and Destroy: The Political Uses of Massacre and Genocide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 34-5, 65-6, 138-9, 195-8, 213-20, 245-6; "Report of the Secretary General Pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 53/35: The Fall of Srebrenica," U.N. doc. no. A/54/549, Nov. 15, 1999.

6 *The Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Bosnia and Herzegovina vs. Serbia and Montenegro)*, case 91, International Court of Justice, The Hague, Feb. 26, 2007.

7 "Documenting the Atrocities in Darfur," Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, and Bureau of Intelligence and Research, U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C., Sept. 2004.

8 *The Guardian* (London), Feb. 1, 2005.

9 Scott Straus, "Darfur and the Genocide Debate," *Foreign Affairs*, Jan.-Feb. 2005, pp. 128, 130.

10 Public Radio International, July 28, 2008; Voice of America, July 22, 2010.

11 Semelin, *Purify and Destroy*, pp. 319-20.

12 Henry R. Huttenbach "Locating the Holocaust under the Genocide Spectrum: Toward a Methodology of Definition and Categorization," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 3 (1988): 297.

and mobilise public opinion on behalf of the victims.” He adds: “Under these circumstances, anyone daring to suggest that what is going on is not ‘really’ genocide is immediately accused of weakness or sympathizing with the aggressors.” Thus,

The term genocide can be used as a propaganda tool by becoming the hinge for a venomous rhetoric against a sworn enemy. Given the powerful emotional charge the word genocide generates, it can be used and re-used in all sorts of hate talk to heap international opprobrium on whoever is accused of genocidal intent. ... The obvious conclusion: The word is used as much as a symbolic shield to claim victim status for one’s people, as a sword raised against one’s deadly enemy.¹³

Intent or premeditation is all important in defining genocide “because it removes from consideration not only natural disasters but also those man-made disasters that took place without explicit planning. Many of the epidemics of communicable diseases that reached genocidal proportions, for example were caused by unwitting human actions.”¹⁴ Although some would disagree, the fate of the North American indigenous people is a case in point as they died largely from disease, not intent. Therefore, a large loss of life is not in itself proof of genocide. Ignoring intent creates a distorted scenario and may lead to incorrect conclusions as to what really occurred.

13 Semelin, *Purify and Destroy*, pp. 312-3.

14 Kurt Jonassohn, “What Is Genocide?” in Helen Fein, ed., *Genocide Watch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 21.



The liberal use of the term “genocide” has stirred numerous controversies and debates. Despite an international law definition, the word has been applied in some questionable instances. The deliberate murder of more than a million Cambodians by the Khmer Rouge, some of whose victims are pictured here, was undoubtedly a horrific crime, but does it fit the definition of genocide?

THE ARMENIANS

What then of the Armenian case? Unfortunately, as the well-known journalist and scholar Gwynne Dyer concluded more than thirty-five years ago, most Turkish and Armenian scholars are unable to be objective on this issue resulting in a situation of “Turkish falsifiers and Armenian deceivers.”¹⁵

The main purpose of this discussion, therefore, is not to deny that Turks killed and expelled Armenians on a large scale; indeed what happened might in today’s vocabulary be called war crimes, ethnic cleansing, or even crimes against humanity. To prove genocide, however, intent or premeditation must be demonstrated, and in the Armenian case it has not. It must also be borne in

15 Gwynne Dyer, “Turkish ‘Falsifiers’ and Armenian ‘Deceivers’: Historiography and the Armenian Massacres,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, Jan. 1976, pp. 99-107.



Bosnian Serbs sit behind their defense lawyers prior to a session at the U.N.'s International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague, May 11, 1998. The tribunal convicted seven Bosnian Serbs of genocide for the Srebrenica massacre of some 8,000 Bosnian Muslims. However, the International Court of Justice, another U.N. organ, focused on Serbia's "intent" rather than the "outcome," absolving it of the charge of genocide in the court's judgment in Bosnia vs. Serbia. Clearly, these contradictory decisions have added to the confusion about what legally constitutes genocide.

mind that what occurred was not a unilateral Turkish action but part of a long-term process in which some Armenians were guilty of killing as many Turks as they could in their attempt to rebel. Christopher de Ballaigue argues that "what is needed is a vaguer designation for the events of 1915, avoiding the G-word but clearly connoting criminal acts of slaughter, to which reasonable scholars can subscribe."¹⁶

Arnold Toynbee, the renowned historian who coedited the Blue Book compilation of Turkish atrocities during World War I,¹⁷ later wrote:

were all that people said they were, the other side of the coin was obscured by the flood of Greek and Armenian propaganda painting the Turks as completely inhuman and undeserving of any consideration while suppressing all facts in favor of the Turks and against the minorities."²⁰

More recently, Edward J. Erickson, a military historian, concluded after a careful examination: "Nothing can justify the massacres of the Armenians nor can a case be made that the entire Armenian population of the six Anatolian provinces was an active and hostile threat to Ottoman na-

16 Christopher de Ballaigue, *Rebel Land: Among Turkey's Forgotten Peoples* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), p. 104; M. Hakan Yavuz, "Contours of Scholarship on Armenian-Turkish Relations," *Middle East Critique*, Nov. 2011, pp. 231-51.

17 James Bryce, compiler, "The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915-16," *Parliamentary Papers Miscellaneous*, Great Britain, no. 31 (London: Joseph Cavston, 1916).

18 Arnold J. Toynbee, *The Western Question in Greece and Turkey: A Study in the Contact of Civilizations* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1922), pp. vii-viii.

19 Arnold J. Toynbee, *Acquaintances* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 241.

20 Laurence Evans, *United States Policy and the Partition of Turkey, 1914-1924* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), p. 272.

tional security.” This said, Erickson added: “However, a case can be made that the Ottomans judged the Armenians to be a great threat to the 3rd and 4th [Ottoman] Armies and that genuine intelligence and security concerns drove that decision. It may also be stated that the Ottoman reaction was escalatory and responsive rather than premeditated and pre-planned.”²¹

On the other hand, Taner Akçam, a Turkish sociologist who has prominently broken with his country’s official narrative, concluded after compiling weighty evidence that the “Ottoman authorities’ genocidal intent becomes clear.”²² This conclusion was challenged by Turkish researcher Erman Sahin who accused Akçam of “dishonesty—which manifests itself in the form of numerous deliberate alterations and distortions, misleading quotations and doctoring of data—casts doubt on the accuracy of his claims as well as his conclusions.”²³ In a later critique of Akçam’s subsequent work, Sahin concluded: “These are substantive matters that raise serious concerns as to the author’s theses, which appear to be based on a selective and distorted presentation of Ottoman archival materials and other sources. ... Such errors seriously undermine the author’s and the book’s credibility.”²⁴

More recently, Akçam claimed that despite Turkish attempts to “hide the evidence” through systematic “loss” and destruction of documents, his new work in the Ottoman archives “clearly points in the direction of a deliberate Ottoman government policy to annihilate its Armenian population.”²⁵ Maybe, but maybe not. Equally likely is that any destruction of documents at

the end of World War I was simply designed to protect military secrets from falling into enemy hands, something any government would want to do. More to the point, Akçam also states that “the clearest statement that the aim of the [Ottoman] government’s policies toward the Armenians was annihilation is found in a cable of 29 August 1915 from interior minister Talat Pasha” in which he asserted that the “Armenian question in the eastern provinces has been resolved. ... There’s no need to sully the nation and the government[’s honor] with further atrocities.”²⁶ This document, however, does not prove genocidal intent except to those determined to find it. Rather, Talat’s statement might

simply mean precisely what it states: The Armenian deportations, although resulting in many atrocities and deaths, have solved the issue.

In a carefully nuanced study, historian Donald Bloxham concluded that what happened was premeditated and therefore genocide.²⁷ Though stating in an earlier article “that there was no a priori blueprint for genocide, and that it emerged from a series of more limited regional measures in a process of cumulative policy radicalization,”²⁸ he, nevertheless, used the term genocide because of the magnitude of what happened and because “nowhere else during the First World War was revolutionary nationalism answered with total murder. That is the crux of the issue.”²⁹ At the same time, he wondered “whether recognition [of genocide] is really going to open the door to healing wounds and

The concept of genocide did not exist until it was formulated during World War II.

21 Edward J. Erickson, “The Armenians and Ottoman Military Policy, 1915,” *War in History*, no. 2, 2008, p. 167.

22 Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2006), p. 187.

23 Erman Sahin, “Review Essay: A Scrutiny of Akçam’s Version of History and the Armenian Genocide,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Aug. 2008, p. 316.

24 Erman Sahin, “Review Essay: The Armenian Question,” *Middle East Policy*, Spring 2010, p. 157.

25 Taner Akçam, *The Young Turks’ Crime against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 19, 27.

26 Ibid., p. 203.

27 Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Ronald Grigor Suny, “Truth in Telling: Reconciling Realities in the Genocide of the Ottoman Armenians,” *American Historical Review*, Oct. 2009, pp. 930-46.

28 Donald Bloxham, “The Armenian Genocide of 1915-1916: Cumulative Radicalization and the Development of a Destruction Policy,” *Past & Present*, Nov. 2003, p. 143.

29 Ibid., pp. 143, 186.

reconciliation, as we are often told, or whether it is a means of redressing nationalist grievances. Is it an issue of historical truth, morality and responsibility, or of unresolved political and material claims?"³⁰

Finally, it should be noted that the Armenian claims of genocide are encumbered by intrinsic legal and philosophical problems. This is due to the fact that any finding under inter-

national law of genocide in the Armenian case at this late date would constitute a legally untenable ex-post-facto proclamation, namely: Make a crime of an action which, when originally committed, was not a crime. The concept of genocide did not even exist until it was formulated during World War

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II by Raphael Lemkin, while the genocide convention only entered into force in 1951.

THE MANIFESTO OF HOVHANNES KATCHAZNOUNI

Hovhannes Katchaznoui was the first prime minister (1918-19) of the short-lived Armenian state following World War I. It is useful to turn to his April 1923 address to the Armenian revolutionary and nationalist Dashnak party congress, held in the Romanian capital of Bucharest. While not gainsaying "this unspeakable crime ... the deportations and mass exiles and massacres which took place during the Summer and Autumn of 1915,"³¹ Katchaznoui's speech constitutes a remarkable self-criticism by a top Armenian leader. No wonder that many

Armenians have done their best to remove this telling document from libraries around the world. It is, therefore, useful to cite what Katchaznoui had to say at some length:

In the Fall of 1914, Armenian volunteer bands organized themselves and fought against the Turks because they could not refrain themselves from fighting. This was an inevitable result of psychology on which the Armenian people had nourished itself during an entire generation. ... It is important to register only the evidence that we did participate in that volunteer movement to the largest extent. ...

We had embraced Russia wholeheartedly without any compunction. Without any positive basis of fact, we believed that the Tsarist government would grant us a more or less broad self-government in the Caucasus and in the Armenian *vilayets* liberated from Turkey as a reward for our loyalty, our efforts, and assistance.

We overestimated the ability of the Armenian people, its political and military power, and overestimated the extent and importance of the services our people rendered to the Russians. And by overestimating our very modest worth and merit was where we naturally exaggerated our hopes and expectations. ...

The proof is, however—and this is essential—that the struggle began decades ago against the Turkish government [which] brought about the deportation or extermination of the Armenian people in Turkey and the desolation of Turkish Armenia. This was the terrible fact!³²

K.S. PAPAZIAN'S PATRIOTISM PERVERTED

A decade after the publication of Katchaznoui's speech, but still much closer to the events of World War I than now, Kapriel

30 Ibid., p. 232.

31 Hovhannes Katchaznoui, "The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnagtzoutiun) Has Nothing To Do Anymore," Arthur A. Derounian, ed., Matthew A. Callender, trans. (New York: Armenian Information Service, 1955), p. 2.

32 Ibid., pp. 2-3.

Serope Papazian produced a most revealing critique of the Dashnaks' perfidy, terrorism, and disastrous policies that had helped lead to the events in question. Written by an Armenian who bore no love for the Turks, but hushed up, ignored, and virtually forgotten by many because its self-critical revelations do not mesh with the received Armenian thesis of innocent victimization, Papazian's analysis³³ calls for close scrutiny.

Authored just after the notorious Dashnak murder of Armenian archbishop Leon Tourian in New York City on Christmas Eve 1933,³⁴ Papazian began by expressing disdain for the group's "predatory inclinations" before examining the "terrorism in the Dashnaks' early [1892] program," which sought "to fight, and to subject to terrorism the government officials, the traitors, the betrayers, the usurers, and the exploiters of all description." Having analyzed the movement's ideological and operational history, Papazian explored what actually transpired during World War I:

The fact remains, however, that the leaders of the Turkish-Armenian section of the Dashnagtzoutune did not carry out their promise of loyalty to the Turkish cause when the Turks entered the war. ... Prudence was thrown to the winds ... and a call was sent for Armenian volunteers to fight the Turks on the Caucasian front.



Historian Edward Erickson: "Nothing can justify the massacres of the Armenians ... However, a case can be made that the Ottomans judged the Armenians to be a great threat to the [Ottoman] Armies and ... that the Ottoman reaction was escalatory and responsive rather than premeditated and pre-planned." These Armenian fighters, pictured in the late 1890s, lend support to the Ottoman fear of a potential fifth column.

Thousands of Armenians from all over the world flocked to the standards of such famous fighters as Antranik, Kery, Dro, etc. The Armenian volunteer regiments rendered valuable services to the Russian Army in the years of 1914-15-16.

On the other hand, the methods used by the Dashnagtzoutune in recruiting these regiments were so open and flagrant that it could not escape the attention of the Turkish authorities ... Many Armenians believe that the fate of two million of their co-nationals in Turkey might not have proved so disastrous if more prudence had been used by the Dashnag leaders during the war. In one instance, one Dashnag leader, Armen Garo, who was also a member of the Turkish parliament, had fled to the Caucasus and had taken active part in the organization of volunteer regiments to fight the Turks. His picture, in uniform, was widely circulated in the Dashnag papers, and it was used by Talat Pasha, the arch assassin of the Armenians, as an excuse for his policy of extermination.³⁵

33 Kapriel Serope Papazian, *Patriotism Perverted: A Discussion of the Deeds and the Misdeeds of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, the So-Called Dashnagtzoutune* (Boston: Baikar Press, 1934).

34 See Christopher Walker, *Armenia: The Survival of a Nation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), p. 354; Maggie Lewis, "Armenian-Americans," *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), Nov. 18, 1980.

What then should be made of Papazian's *Patriotism Perverted*? Without denying that the Turks played a murderous role in the events analyzed, his long-ignored and even suppressed

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revelations indicate that the Armenians were far from innocent victims in what ensued. Indeed, Papazian's text makes it clear that incompetent but treacherous Armenians themselves were also to blame for what had befallen their cause. It is

unfair to fix unique blame upon the Turks.

GUENTER LEWY'S CRITIC

A major contribution to the debate over the Armenian atrocities, Guenter Lewy's *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey*,³⁶ rejects the claim of a premeditated genocide as well as the apologist narrative of an unfortunate wartime excess, concluding that "both sides have used heavy-handed tactics to advance their cause and silence a full and impartial discussion of the issues in dispute." In his view, "the key issue in this quarrel is not the extent of Armenian suffering, but rather the question of premeditation: that is, whether the Young Turk regime during the First World War intentionally organized the massacres that took place."

Lewy questions the authenticity of certain documents alleged to contain proof of a premeditated genocide as well as the methods of Vakhakn N. Dadrian,³⁷ one of the foremost current Armenian scholar-advocates of the genocide thesis, whom he accuses of "selective use of sources ...

[which] do not always say what Dadrian alleges" and "manipulating the statements of contemporary observers."

As for the argument that "the large number of Armenian deaths ... [offers] proof that the massacres that took place must have been part of an overall plan to destroy the Armenian people," Lewy counters that it "rests on a logical fallacy and ignores the huge loss of life among Turkish civilians, soldiers, and prisoners-of-war due to sheer incompetence, neglect, starvation, and disease. All of these groups also experienced a huge death toll that surely cannot be explained in terms of a Young Turk plan of annihilation."

So how does Lewy explain what happened to the Armenians? "The momentous task 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 Ottoman bureaucracy. ... Under conditions of Ottoman misrule, it was possible for the country to suffer an incredibly high death toll without a premeditated plan of annihilation."³⁸

Lewy's book was reviewed prominently and positively in two leading U.S. journals of Middle East studies. Edward J. Erickson noted the finding that "both camps have created a flawed supporting historiography by using sources selectively, quoting them out of context, and/or ignoring 'inconvenient facts,'" concluding that "simply having a large number of advocates affirming that the genocide is a historical fact does not make it so."³⁹ Robert Betts, while claiming that "for the Turkish government to deny Ottoman responsibility for the Armenian suffering makes no sense," also stated that "what emerges from Lewy's study is the dire state of the empire and its population in 1915 and its inability to protect and feed its own Muslim citizenry, let alone the Armenians."⁴⁰

35 Papazian, *Patriotism Perverted*, pp. 7, 13, 15, 21, 38-9.

36 Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2007.

37 For examples of Guenter Lewy's critiques of Dadrian's writings, see "Revisiting the Armenian Genocide," *Middle East Quarterly*, Fall 2005, pp. 3-12; idem, *The History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus* (Providence and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1995); idem, *Warrant for Genocide: Key Elements of Turko-Armenian Conflict* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1999).

38 Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres*, pp. ix, 47, 51, 83-6, 250, 253, 258, 282.

39 Edward J. Erickson, "Lewy's 'The Armenian Massacres,'" *Middle East Journal*, Spring 2006, p. 377.

40 Robert Brenton Betts, "The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey: A Disputed Genocide/The Armenian Rebellion at Van," *Middle East Policy*, Spring 2008, p. 177.

Moreover, such distinguished scholars of Ottoman history as Bernard Lewis,⁴¹ Roderic Davison,⁴² J. C. Hurewitz,⁴³ and Andrew Mango,⁴⁴ among others, have all rejected the appropriateness of the genocide label for what occurred. On May 19, 1985, sixty-nine prominent academics in Turkish Ottoman and Middle Eastern studies (including Lewis) published a large advertisement in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* criticizing the U.S. Congress for considering the passage of a resolution that would have singled out for special recognition “the one and one half million people of Armenian ancestry who were victims of genocide perpetrated in Turkey between 1915 and 1923.” Instead, they argued that such questions should be left for the scholarly community to decide.

Indeed, the Armenian massacres of 1915 did not come out of the blue but followed decades of Armenian violence and revolutionary activity that elicited Turkish counter violence. There is a plethora of Turkish writings documenting these unfortunate events, just as there are numerous Armenian accounts.⁴⁵ The Armenians, of course, present themselves as freedom fighters in these earlier events, but it is possible to understand how the Ottomans saw them as treasonous subjects.

Moreover, throughout all these events, the Armenians were never more than a large minority even in their historic provinces.⁴⁶ Yet they exaggerated their numbers before World War I and their losses during the war. Had the Armenian

fatality figures been correct, very few would have survived the war. Instead, the Armenians managed to fight another war against the nascent Turkish republic in the wake of World War I for mastery in eastern Anatolia. Having lost, many Armenians claimed that what transpired after World War I was a renewed genocide. As Christians, the Armenians found a sympathetic audience in the West whereas the Muslim Turks were the West’s historic enemy. Add to this the greater Armenian adroitness in foreign languages—hence their greater ability to present their case to the world—to understand why the Turks consider the genocide charge to be grossly unfair, especially since the Armenians have adamantly rejected any culpability on their part in this tragic event.

CONCLUSION

Without denying the tragic massacres and countless deaths the Armenians suffered during World War I, it is important to place them in their proper context. When this is done, the application of the term “genocide” to these events is inappropriate because the Turkish actions were neither unilateral nor premeditated. Rather, what transpired was part of a long-continuing process that in part started with the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78, which triggered an influx of Balkan Muslims into Anatolia with the attendant deterioration of relations with the indigenous Christian Armenians.⁴⁷

To make matters worse, Patriarch Nerses, an Ottoman subject and one of the leaders of the Armenian community, entered into negotiations with the victorious Russians with an eye to achieving Armenian autonomy or even independence. This was followed in coming decades by

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41 See, for example, Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 356.

42 *The New York Times*, May 19, 1985.

43 Ibid.

44 Andrew Mango, *Atatürk: The Biography of the Founder of Modern Turkey* (Woodstock and New York: The Overlook Press, 1999), p. 161.

45 See, for example, Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties through the Nineteenth Century* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963); Garegin Pasdermadjian (Armen Garo), *Bank Ottoman: Memoirs of Armen Garo* (Detroit: Armen Topouzian, 1990); James G. Mandalian, ed. and trans., *Armenian Freedom Fighters: The Memoirs of Rouben der Minasian* (Boston: Hairenik Association, 1963).

46 See Justin McCarthy, *Muslims and Minorities: The Population of Ottoman Anatolia and the End of the Empire* (New York: New York University Press, 1983), p. 115.

47 M. Hakan Yavuz with Peter Sluglett, eds., *War and Diplomacy: The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2011), pp. 1-13.

continued Armenian nationalist agitation, accompanied by the use of terror, aimed at provoking retaliation, which they hoped would be followed by European intervention. When World War I broke out, some Armenians supported the Russian enemy. Kurdish/Muslim-Armenian animosities also played a role in this process.⁴⁸

Armenian communities in large cities were spared deportation because they were not in a position to aid the Russians.

As for the necessary attribute of premeditation to demonstrate genocide, there are no authentic documents to such effect. Although there are countless descriptions of the depravations suffered by the Armenians, they do not prove intent or premeditation. The so-called Andonian documents that purport to demonstrate premeditation are almost certainly

a fabrication.⁴⁹ And in response to the Armenian contention that the huge loss of Armenian lives

illustrates premeditation, what then should be said about the enormous loss of Turkish lives among civilians, soldiers, and prisoners-of-war? Were these Turkish deaths also genocide or rather due to sheer incompetence, neglect, starvation, and disease? And if the latter were true of the ethnic Turkish population, they were all the more so in respect to an ethnic group that had incurred upon itself suspicion of acting as a fifth column in a time of war.

Even so, Armenian communities in such large Western cities as Istanbul and Smyrna were largely spared deportation probably because they were not in a position to aid the invading Russians. Is it possible to imagine Hitler sparing any Jews in Berlin, Munich, or Cologne from his genocidal rampage for similar reasons? If, as the Armenians allege, the Turkish intent was to subject their Armenian victims to a premeditated forced march until they died of exhaustion, why was this tactic not imposed on all Armenians? Therefore, without denying outright murders and massacres that today might qualify as war crimes, it seems reasonable to question the validity of referring to the Armenian tragedy as genocide.



48 See Janet Klein, *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), pp. 50, 131, 183.

49 Aram Andonian, ed., *The Memoirs of Naim Bey: Turkish Official Documents Relating to the Deportations and Massacres of Armenians* (London: 1920. Reprinted, Newtown Square, Pa.: Armenian Historical Research Association, 1964). For the case

against the authenticity of these documents, see Sinasi Orel and Sureyya Yuca, *The Talat Pasha Telegrams: Historical Fact or Armenian Fiction?* (Nicosia: K. Rustem and Bros., 1986). For the counterclaim that newly found Ottoman archival source material vindicates the Andonian documents see, Akçam, *The Young Turks' Crime against Humanity*, p. xviii, fn. 22.



Family Values Saudi Style

The Arabic reads:
“Please, entrance is
forbidden to women
without a guardian
[lit. a male with
whom sexual
activity is by
definition never
allowed].”