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THE GENESIS OF THE ARMENIAN QUESTION

The relocation of the Ottoman Armenians within the Ottoman Empire in May 1915 is one of the most studied events of the early 20th century. There are many reasons why the discussion has been continued for so long and why it remains of particular interest today. Perhaps the most important of these is the claim by some observers and authors that the number of deaths which occurred during the relocation reached over one million.[1].

The relocation of some Armenian communities in 1915 was a war-time military necessity. The misfortunes suffered by Armenians during those times are accepted to have been the outcome of war-time conditions.

Especially in American archives, there is no shortage of material to convince the unbiased observer that the relocation of Armenians in 1915 was a temporary, military necessity. The editor of the "*Blue Book*", Arnold Toynbee, frequently cited in the genocide literature, in fact, referred to this decision as "a legitimate security-measure.[2]. "

With claims about extermination of Armenians being in the news at the time, Arthur Tremaine Chester, an American who spent many years in Turkey and was the son of the well-known Admiral Chester (who also had lived in Turkey for years, and whose writings in the American press had shown him to be no friend of the Turks), decided to take up his pen in defense of truth. In one of his articles, "*Angora and the Turks*", Chester discusses the relocation of the Armenians under the subheading, "The Relocation of the Armenians on Account of Treachery". There, he says:

"We hear a great deal about the deportation of Armenians from the North- east of Turkey during the World War. The facts are that the Turks sent an army to the Russian border to defend their country against the threatened Russian invasion. The army consisted of Turkish subjects of all nationalities, being drafted just as ours are drafted. At the front, the Armenians used blank cartridges and deserted in droves. This was bad enough, but the Armenians were not satisfied with this form of treachery. The provinces in the rear of the army had a large Armenian population, and these people, feeling that there was an excellent chance of the Russians defeating the Turks, decided to make it a certainty by rising up in the rear of the army and cutting it off from its base of supplies. Let me draw a parallel imaginary case. Suppose that Mexico was a powerful and rival country with which we were at war, and suppose that we

sent an army to the Mexican border to hold back the invading enemy; suppose further that not only the negroes in our army deserted to the enemy but those left at home organized and cut off our line of communication. What do you think we as a people, especially the Southerners, would do to the negroes? Our negroes have ten times the excuse for hating the whites that the Armenians have for their attitude toward the Turks. They have no representation, although they have an overwhelming majority in large sections of the South, and have nothing to say in the making or administration of the laws under which they are governed. South of the Mason and Dixon line they are practically a subject race, while the Armenians in Turkey have not only full representation but special privileges not accorded by any other country. "The Turkish Government ordered the Armenians deported from the districts they menaced. That they did not have railways and other means of transportation was not their fault, and the deportation had to be carried out on foot. That this was not done in the most humane manner possible is undoubtedly a fact, and the Turkish Government has condemned the unnecessary cruelties that occurred; but I feel confident that if America had been put in the hypothetical situation above referred to, it would have stopped that insurrection if it had had to kill every negro in the South, and would not have gone to the tedious and laborious defensive act of deportation, in spite of our extensive means of transportation." [3].

The relocation decision taken by the Ottoman Government has to be evaluated calmly yet comprehensively, *based on the facts*, in terms both of its causes and implementation.

Now, let's have a look at the process leading to the relocation. First of all, up until the relocation, Armenians continued to occupy important posts in the Ottoman bureaucracy. They became senior civil servants, governors, general inspectors, diplomats, ambassadors, and even cabinet members. Being close to the government also made them the most sought partners for European businessmen for their investments in the Ottoman Empire.

An overview of the list of Armenians in the service of the Ottoman Empire from 1876 to 1915 reveals that there were twenty-nine civilian generals, twenty-two cabinet members, four senators, five under-secretaries of state, seven ambassadors, eleven consul-generals, thirty-three parliament members, eleven university professors, and numerous directors, governors, deputy governors, and other high ranking civil servants.

Just to highlight the importance of the positions held, the Foreign Secretary of the State in 1912 was Gabriel Noradounghian, and the Ministers of Finance, Trade, and Postal Services were all Armenians in the years preceding World War I. Even Abdulhamid II, often wrongly depicted as the enemy of the Armenians in Western historiography, favored Armenians and promoted them to the highest positions during his reign. There were 110 high-ranking Armenian officials among his staff. Just to give few examples, Artin Dadian Pasha was one of his Ministers at the Foreign Ministry. Agop Ohannes Kazazyan Efendi was the Minister in charge of the Imperial Mint.

Sarkis Bali Balian was his favourite architect who built his palace. Mıgırđıç Sinopyan was the Director of the Department of Statistics. Michael Pasha was his Minister for Public Works. In fact, he entrusted his entire private budget and its management to Armenians.

Thanks to the privileges granted by the Sultans, Armenians had become very effective in the cultural and intellectual life of the Ottoman Empire. They freely published books, papers and national bibliographies. The Armenian press in particular was very vivid and productive. According to some estimates, 64% of the Armenian newspapers in the world was published within the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, it is believed that Armenians played a principal part in the birth of contemporary Turkish theater and the first modern theater was also brought to Istanbul by the Armenians in 1868.

In brief, the widely held view that Armenians were victims of Turkish injustice and that they were harshly treated as second-class citizens within the Ottoman system must be questioned. Firstly because, there was no such concept of 'minority' in the Ottoman Empire, in the sense we understand it today. In the Ottoman Empire, if there were first class citizens, they would be the ones in the ruling circles regardless of their ethnic, or religious or linguistic origins. And Armenians would be among them. As a matter of fact, C. Oskanyan noted that "Armenians were the basic part of Turkish daily life because the Turks left all branches of industry to Armenians. Sentimental similarities between the Turks and the Armenians formed a unity based on trust [4]".

Indeed, in general, there was no comparison between material position of the Armenians and any ordinary Muslim. They dominated Ottoman trade and commerce as intermediaries of the European merchants. Their traditions and life styles were not any different from the Turks. Helmuth von Moltke, who was in Turkey from 1835 to 1839, named them the "Christian Turks". He further noted that the Armenians adopted Turkish customs and even the Turkish language, although the *Rums* preserved their own characteristics. When Moltke stayed as a guest in the house of Mardiraki Sebastiani, a rich Armenian, he also observed that "Armenian women cannot be differentiated from Turkish women, because they wore a dress covering everything except part of their nose and eyes in public"...The Armenian cuisine was practically identical to the Turkish cuisine".[5] Kazım Karabekir Pasha also describes his Armenian neighbours as being almost identical to Turks: dressing, eating, and behaving like Turks.[6].

What upset the balance among the various subjects of the Ottoman Sultan was the European intervention and European-style nationalism. First of all, European Powers unilaterally declared themselves 'protectors' of their religious cohorts in the Empire. The Russians pretended as the protector of the Eastern Orthodox, the French of the Catholics, and the British of the Jews and the Protestants.

Through the endeavors of the Great Powers in the first half of the nineteenth century, the Armenian community was compartmentalized. In addition to their geographical dispersion, they were also separated through newly formed religious identities. They became Gregorian, Catholic and Protestant Armenians, who fell under different Great Power influence. Divided by religious difference, they increasingly looked to nationalism as a cohesive force. Moreover, missionary activities further widened the

gap between the Armenians and their Muslim neighbors, in that they contributed enormously to the radicalization of the Armenian youth. Increasing number of Armenians immigrated to the United States for education and work, with the help and guidance of the Protestant missionaries. Thus Ottoman Armenians gradually viewed themselves as superior in every sense in comparison to the other religious communities within the Empire, especially against their Muslim rulers.

Why The Armenians Had To Be Moved

To transfer a great mass of people many hundreds of kilometers away from where they live poses many challenges. It is not a project to be undertaken lightly at any time, and it presents particular difficulty during time of war. That is why the Ottoman Government at the time must have had legitimate and just cause for taking the Armenians from the war zone and sending them elsewhere within the Empire. Investigation shows that there were indeed many reasons, complex and interconnected, which made the forced migration necessary. The Armenian community was seen by the enemies of Turkey as a means of destabilizing the state, disrupting the war effort, and even as a military force to be deployed behind the front lines. Starting long before the First World War, Great Powers encouraged amongst this ancient community separatist aspirations which they did not tolerate amongst their own minorities at home.

At the conclusion of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878, the Ottoman Empire signed with Russia the Treaty of San Stefano. In the sixteenth Article the Ottoman Empire "was obliged to introduce reforms to the areas where the Armenians constituted a majority", despite the fact that in no Ottoman province did the Armenians constitute any sort of majority. In any case, this article introduced official Russian interference into Ottoman domestic affairs and constituted the first step towards bringing about the autonomy of the areas in the East where majority of the Armenians had lived. This article, however, also disturbed Britain and France, though for very different reasons.

Britain could see that Russia had chosen Armenian guardianship as a way of gaining access to warm waters through the mechanism of an autonomous Armenia, and this sea access would offer Russia the prospect of becoming master of the India trade route. In order to exert pressure on Russia, Britain, with French support, announced that it would not recognize the San Stefano Treaty and prompted Russia and the Ottoman Empire to agree to a new treaty by the same name at a meeting in Berlin in 1878. In this new treaty, Britain succeeded in replacing Article 16 of the San Stefano Treaty with what became Article 61. In its new form, the process of reform implementation would involve not only Russia, but western powers as well, if not as parties, then as having observer status.

A further condition of the Article was that reforms be implemented without delay, according to the needs of the Armenians in the provinces where they were to be found. The Ottoman Government would have to inform signatory states about measures taken

toward the realization of these reforms. In addition, these states would supervise the implementation of the measures and reforms introduced. Indeed, it was as if the western powers had calculated that such improvements would bring about nationalist tensions amongst people in these regions, most of whom were not Armenian, and that conflicts might be stimulated between them. For example, Article 61 clearly states that "with the measures to be taken, the Sublime Porte ensures the Armenians' feeling of peace and security against Circassians and Kurds...."[7].

The Armenian Patriarchate considered that these decisions constituted *a gold mine*, paving the way for an independent Armenian state. It was, in fact, precisely so. The European states, Britain especially, were beginning to manipulate the Berlin Treaty's Article 61, using it as a vehicle for intervention against the Ottomans. Furthermore, Britain was putting pressure on the Ottoman Government, through the 1878 reforms, for other plans it was preparing. There is no doubt that the reform plans of England envisaged more or less the creation of an autonomous "Ottoman Armenia".

At the same time, Britain's "Armenian reform", which had previously entangled Austria and Germany, later aroused the suspicions of Russia, the chief player in this matter. Russia, which had not taken kindly to Britain's appropriation of the Armenian Question, consequently withdrew most of its support for the Armenian community in the Ottoman Empire. Undoubtedly, a factor in this decision was Russia's annexation of new territories in southern Caucasia during Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878. After the Treaty of Berlin, Russia did not deem it necessary politically to give the Armenians support and turned its attention to Central Asia. In conformity with this policy shift, Russia had to pursue peaceful relations with the Ottoman Empire.

Furthermore, as a result of Britain most prominently taking the lead in exerting pressure on the Ottoman Government, the Ottomans' eastern Anatolian reforms would have had a negative effect on the neighbouring Russian Armenians. Perhaps as a precaution, the Russian Governor of the Caucasus closed down five hundred Armenian Church schools in 1885. The schools were reopened a short while later, but in 1896 they were again closed and secular schools controlled by the Russian Education Ministry were instituted in their place. The Armenians boycotted these schools, which had been financed through the requisition of a portion of their Church property, and continued on with their Church-based education in secret.

For all these reasons, Russia's relations with the Armenians remained an open question for another ten to fifteen years. Despite the spread of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) (1890) into the Russian territory and declarations of mutual affection, the chill continued. In order to continue to have good relations with the Ottomans, Russia still regarded Armenian militias as "separatists" and "untrustworthy elements". This situation did not change until the beginning of 1902, when the honeymoon between the Ottoman and Russian empires came to an end because of the Bulgarian secessionism which was supported by Russia. After 1905, with Dashnak now split into two groups, and the subsequent need to address this imbalance if Russia

went to war with the Ottoman Empire, Russia again began to move toward giving support to Ottoman Armenians.

Britain, meanwhile, in response to this policy by Russia, and in order to defend the security of its India trade route and to stop Russia or France from seizing its African colonies, Egypt most prominently, continued with its standard aims. It expanded Protestant solidarity by stirring the already active American and English Protestant missionaries in the region into further action. Abusing the Ottoman guarantee of freedom of religion, they opened thousands of schools and other charitable institutions in the Ottoman Empire, thus taking with them even more Armenian children. An American journalist, Clair Price, who came to Turkey in 1922, reveals how the missionaries approached the Armenians:

"Due to the existence of the politico-religious community system, American missionary work in Turkey has taken a direction which its founders could hardly have foreseen. Very early in their work, the missionaries discovered that Moslems will not change their faith and, debarred from work among Moslems, devoted themselves to work among the Christian communities, particularly the Gregorian Armenian community. Here they found a ready response, but a response which sprang from motives of a partially political rather than an exclusively religious nature. For the missionaries, in the minds of the Armenians, were foreigners who represented a power even greater than the Sultan himself, and who enjoyed the diplomatic status conferred by the capitulations." [8].

Thus, the missionaries who came to Turkey to spread Christianity among the Muslims, ostensibly with only a religious aim, actually constituted a fully political-religious formation active among Armenians. In the end, the missionaries typically acted by joining with the Armenians, who were aiming politically at a Bulgarian-style secession for Ottoman Armenia. Furthermore, whether knowingly or not, the missionaries were steadily diminishing the tolerant Ottoman religious environment in which they were working.

Now, let's look at very briefly how Armenians reacted to the post-Berlin developments in the Near East. In the immediate aftermath of the Berlin Treaty, Armenians formed various revolutionary organizations: the Black Cross (1878), the Protectors of the Fatherland (Pashtpan Haireniats) (1881), the Armenian Revolutionary Party (1885), the Hunchakian Revolutionary Party (1887), and the ARF (1890). Various groups were launching intimidating attacks against their own co-religionists in order to coerce them into joining the organizations, and they had begun to carry out massacres of the Muslim populations in order to wreck any chances of Armenian-Turkish rapprochement. The Erzurum uprising and the events at Kumkapı, in 1890, as well as the first Sason uprisings in 1894, were the first successful actions carried out toward the achievements of their aims.

From 1895 onward, the uprisings spread across a wider area and increased in number. The uprisings in Merzifon, Kayseri, Yozgat and Samsun between 1892 and 1894 were small-scale uprisings aimed at testing out the patience of the Kurds and other Muslims in the region, as well as the reaction of the Ottomans. Foreign intervention in all of these disorders encouraged the Armenians to organize even larger revolts. In 1895, Armenians carried out an uprising in Maras; and there was the Babiali demonstration of September 18, 1895, which was organized by the Hunchaks, supposedly in revenge of killings of Armenians in Sasson. The pardoning of those responsible encouraged and led to the first large, serious Armenian uprising in Van in 1896. This revolt drew the attention of the Great Powers and western public opinion to the Ottoman Armenians and sowed the seeds of mutual hatred between Muslims and Christians.

Following the Van uprising, attacks among the peoples increased. The uprising, because it incited hatred between Turks and Armenians and had become a pretext for Great Powers to put pressure on the Ottomans, further encouraged the terror organizations. The Hunchakian and Dashnak groups did not hesitate to direct this increased public support into further action. One such action was the raid carried out on the Ottoman Bank on August 26, 1896, which was undoubtedly planned with the aim of increasing outside pressure, and it achieved this aim fairly well. In these uprisings around the middle of the 1890s, around 15,000 Armenians lost their lives. However, missionaries and news agencies announced a number as high as 200,000-300,000, thus kindling western public hatred for the Muslim Turks and sympathy for the Armenians. The Van uprising in particular, which was portrayed as having been a massacre of Armenians, brought about outside intervention and propelled the Armenians fully to the point of revolt. The Hunchakian, in particular, with its slogan of full independence, became especially emboldened. In 1893, the *Haik* newspaper, published in Armenian in New York, declared the following, which represented the traditional aims of the Hunchakian: "... if it is necessary to save half of our people, we must be prepared to lose the other half". Also, on page 288 of the same newspaper, the following is stated:

"Experiences have shown that the political reconstruction of the nation through diplomatic action is impossible. Positive and energetic means are needed in order to bring about diplomatic intervention. These means are fire and sword, which call for soldiers and money." [9].

The volunteer units which the Hunchakians had formed in order to achieve this aim through armed revolt became active in Caucasus, Europe, USA, as well as in eastern Anatolia. The units were termed "detachment of troops", and with them the Hunchakians conducted a series of sweeping operations in order to draw the Armenian people to their side. They assassinated some leading Armenian figures in order to draw lines and to give clear message to the Armenian people that they would tolerate no opposition to their cause. An example of such an action is the killing of the Mayor of Van, Kapamaciyan, who had remained faithful to the Ottoman government and who had blamed the Armenian organizations for the uprisings; Kapamaciyan was killed on

December 10, 1912 by terrorists as a result of his stance. Furthermore, aiming to break the dialogue between Muslims and Armenians, the Detachment groups launched attacks on Armenian villages wearing Muslim attire.

It was these uprisings which eventually required the strong solution of forcible population movement, in the context of a state under attack from the greatest powers of the time. Terrorist attacks intensified during period when there was mobilization for war. Russia, which by means of its spies had increased its activities in the area from the beginning of 1913, instigated Armenian disloyalty to the Ottoman State. In particular, Dashnak members who were caught in Trabzon, Van and Erzurum spying for Russia, confessed that their aim had been to create a security problem there.

As a result of Armenian terrorism and rebellions and Ottoman attempts at suppressing them, and Great Power involvement again, the Armenian question for the Ottoman Empire reached a new level on February 8, 1914. This is the date when the Ottoman Empire was forced to approve the "Reform Plan" under pressure from the Great Powers. This treaty, signed by Grand Vizier and Foreign Minister Prince Said Halim Pasha and the Russian *Chargé d'Affaires* in Istanbul Constantin Gulkevich, and which is also known as the Yeniköy Treaty, and which was communicated to the Great Powers by means of diplomatic notes, gave the Armenians what in fact amounted to independence.

When examining the details of the Reform Plan, it becomes plainly evident that the vilayets in which Armenians were concentrated, namely Bitlis, Diyarbakir, Erzurum, Harput, Sivas, Trabzon and Van, had been effectively removed from Ottoman sovereignty. This is because, according to the treaty's first paragraph, the administration of these provinces was to be placed under two foreign inspector-generals. These inspectors were to serve for a five-year period, and were to take up judicial and administrative matters, police and gendarme in the relevant regions. At a time of their choosing, military units could be placed under their orders. They would have the authority to remove and punish civil servants, and could bring about an appointment of sorts of ranked bureaucrats. In short, these inspectors had been entrusted with functions that involved high levels of authority in justice, security and general administration of the said regions.

Russia had again come to presenting itself internationally as the defender of the Armenians. Furthermore, although Russia may not have been sincere, it began propagandizing that it was planning the establishment of an independent Armenian state. Indeed, Russia was even preparing to establish an army for an independent Armenia. This was proven especially by the large volunteer units established by the Russians, which were comprised of Armenians, four in 1914 and five in 1915. Being made up exclusively of Armenians, it was clear on whose side of the war they stood. At any rate, these units were made up of Ottoman Armenians, some of whom were army deserters and also included noted public figures. The Armenian commander of one of these units was a former member of the Ottoman parliament. A security problem between Turks and Armenians had thus emerged.

Parallel with this lack of mutual trust, according to all interpretations, those most prominent in the CUP, then in power, were viewing the Treaty as the first step toward Armenian independence and secession from the Ottoman Empire. There was no other support for the agreement, other than from Said Halim Pasha himself and for this

reason, its details were not revealed publicly. The Ottoman Government, therefore, considered measures to make it impossible for the treaty to be implemented. This was how the Armenian organizations also chose to recognize the agreement, and demonstrated with their actions that they were preparing to become a "fifth column" in Russian East Anatolia. That was the situation when the First World War broke out and Armenians in the war zones saw this as the historic moment to enter into cooperation with the Russians. That was why Armenians eventually had to be distanced from those sensitive regions.[10].

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ГЕНЕЗИС АРМЯНСКОГО ВОПРОСА

Переселение османских армян в Османскую империю в мае 1915 года является одним из наиболее не изученных событий начала 20 века. Возможно, самым важным

из них является утверждение некоторых наблюдателей и авторов о том, что число жертв, произошедших во время переселения, превысило один миллион человек

Переселение некоторых армянских общин в 1915 году было военной необходимостью во время военных действий. Несчастья, пережитые армянами в те времена, признаются следствием условий военного времени.

Особенно в американских архивах нет недостатка в материалах, чтобы убедить непредвзятого наблюдателя в том, что переселение армян в 1915 году было временной военной необходимостью. Редактор «Синей книги» Арнольд Тойнби, часто цитируемый в литературе о геноциде, на самом деле назвал это решение «законной мерой безопасности».

Решение о переселении, принятое османским правительством, должно оцениваться объективно и всесторонне, на основе фактов, с точки зрения его причин.

. Во-первых, вплоть до переселения армяне продолжали занимать важные посты в османском руководстве. Они стали высшими государственными служащими, губернаторами, генеральными инспекторами, дипломатами, послами и даже членами кабинета министров. Близость к правительству также сделала их наиболее востребованными партнерами европейских бизнесменов для их инвестиций в Османскую империю. Обзор списка армян на службе Османской империи с 1876 по 1915 год показывает, что было двадцать девять гражданских генералов, двадцать два члена кабинета, четыре сенатора, пять заместителей госсекретаря, семь послов, одиннадцать консулов. Тридцать три члена парламента, одиннадцать университетских профессоров и многочисленные директора, губернаторы, заместители губернаторов и другие высокопоставленные государственные служащие. Просто чтобы подчеркнуть важность занимаемых постов, госсекретарем иностранных дел в 1912 году был Габриэль Норадунгян, а министрами финансов, торговли и почтовых служб в годы, предшествовавшие Первой мировой войне, были армяне. Даже Абдулхамид II, часто ошибочно изображаемый врагом армян в западной историографии, благоволил к армянам и продвигал их на самые высокие посты во время своего правления. В его штате было 110 высокопоставленных армянских чиновников.

Благодаря привилегиям, дарованным султанами, армяне стали играть очень важную роль в культурной и интеллектуальной жизни Османской империи. Они свободно публиковали книги, статьи и национальные библиографии. Особенно яркой и продуктивной была армянская пресса. По некоторым оценкам, 64% армянских газет мира издавались в Османской империи. Однако во время мировой войны армяне предали Турцию и перешли на сторону врага, поэтому Османское руководство было вынуждено принять решение о депортации армян с зоны военных действий.