

The Determinants of the Armenian Genocide

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by

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I. The Methodological Problem

Given the existing confusion in the contemporary literature about the concept of genocide, I should like to offer my definition of the term at the outset. Without it, my presentation of the Armenian case of genocide may contribute to the same state of confusion. By the same token, the setting forth of such a definition may prove helpful beyond the compass of the Armenian case; it may, elucidate some of the intricacies that are involved in the task of conceptualization.

Unlike in most definitions of genocide which mainly revolve around the issue of what genocide actually *entails*,¹ in my definition of genocide, the emphasis is on those conditions in the configuration of which genocide is seen *materializing*. There are four such major conditions.

1. Genocide presupposes a conflict existing between a potential perpetrator and a potential victim-group. Moreover, it is a conflict that is lingering, does not lend itself to resolution through accommodation and peaceful means, and is, therefore, burdened by the ballast of its history. 2. There has to be a critical disparity of power relations in the sense that the potential perpetrator has overwhelming strength vis a vis a relatively impotent victim. 3. There has to be a suitable opportunity to exercise that power leverage-optimally and at minimum cost to the perpetrator. In the absence of such an opportunity even the most powerful, the most motivated and the most adept potential perpetrator is likely to hesitate and prefer to bide its time. 4. The resolution of the conflict is eventually attempted through radical means involving massive violence that is organized, lethal and exterminatory in thrust. Thus, genocide may be said to represent the

confluence of four major determinants: (1) the history of a protracted conflict, (2) critically disparate power relations, (3) the opportunity structure, (4) an attempt at a radical resolution of the conflict through organized and massive violence.

Unlike in the case of exact sciences, in history, and especially in social sciences, the designing of the methodology for the study of a difficult subject matter has to be attuned to the peculiarities of that subject matter rather than conform to existing standard procedures. One of the major peculiarities of the subject matter of the Armenian genocide is the enormous difficulty of investigating and researching it in terms of primary sources identified with and at the disposal of the perpetrator camp. The insistence and persistence with which the Turks, past and present, deny the historical reality of the Armenian genocide has but one major consequence for research in this field: the non-availability of the corpus of pertinent official documents.

These twin facts, denial of the crime, and of the existence of any evidence, necessitate a particular line of research as far as the task of documentation is concerned. The evidence to be marshalled has to have a special quality, namely, it has to be compelling. This is the most, if not only, viable way to overcome the handicap intrinsic to a form of denial that is abidingly implacable. In order for the evidence in question to be compelling, however, it has to have the following four attributes: (a) reliable, (b) explicit, (c) incontestable, (d) verifiable. This means that certain categories of available evidence that may be deficient in this respect have to be discounted. One such category concerns the depositories of the state archives of three countries which comprised the Entente Powers in World War I, i.e., Great Britain, France and Russia. As the sworn enemies of Ottoman Turkey, which belonged to the opposite camp, i.e., the Central Powers, led by Imperial Germany and Imperial Austria, any material emanating from them is by definition suspect as propaganda material. By the same token, Armenian survivor accounts and any other type of Armenian documentation is likewise suspect in terms of victim bias. Obviously, these exclusionary steps are dictated by a methodological exigency noted above and do not signify that what is being left out is necessarily suspect or worthless. On the contrary,

British, French and Russian state archives contain a mass of invaluable data in this connection; the same may be said about Armenian survivor accounts. The sole purpose of the exclusion is to obviate, if not preempt, objections and dismissive criticisms that are likely to come from the perpetrator camp and others one way or another identified with that camp.

Through such elimination, one is left then with three residual categories that with certitude meet the criteria set forth above for the securing of compelling evidence.

1. An exiguous number of randomly surviving official Turkish documents. Despite the resolute efforts of the leaders of the Young Turk regime, the so-called Ittihadists, or CUP (Committee of Union and Progress) men, to remove and/or destroy all the files containing incriminating evidence, some such material escaped the mechanisms of removal or elimination. The Turkish Military Tribunal, set-up during the Armistice to investigate the crimes committed against the Armenians in connection with the wartime “deportations and massacres” (*tehcir ve taktil*), made ample use of this material. Before being introduced as exhibits of probative, legal evidence, each one of the official documents, contained in this material, was authenticated by competent ministerial officials who then affixed to these documents the notation: “it conforms to the original” (*aslina muafikdir*).²

2. A second group of official Turkish documents that is equally compelling includes statements made by members of the Ottoman Parliament, comprising the Chamber of Deputies, i.e., the Lower House, and the Senate, or the Upper House. These statements were made during the series of debates that took place in the months following the end of World War I and covered the subject “Armenian deportations and massacres.”³ An ancillary group of official Turkish documents, equally, if not more, important in weightiness, involved the findings of the Inquiry Commission of the Fifth Committee of the Ottoman Chamber of Deputies (*Beşinci Şube Tahkikat Komisyonu*). During the Hearings conducted by this official body of the Ottoman Parliament, a number of wartime Cabinet Ministers, including two Sheik-ül-Islams and a Grand Vizier, made a

number of revelations and even confessions regarding the circumstances surrounding the wartime organized mass murder of the Armenians.⁴ It should be noted here that these series of investigations in the Armistice period were in part prompted by the pressures the victorious Allies exerted upon the vanquished Turks. The latter were exhorted by the former that unless the authors of the wartime crimes against the Armenians were prosecuted and severely punished, the terms of the impending peace settlement with Turkey would be stiff. Thus, the investigative and prosecutorial initiatives were to some extent efforts to placate and mollify the Allies which had occupied parts of Turkey, including Istanbul, then the Ottoman capital, and were at the time in some control of the direction of post-war Turkish political trends. Notwithstanding, it bears emphasizing here the fact that the string of verdicts of the Turkish Military Tribunal and the documents secured by the Ottoman Parliament's Inquiry Commission involved authenticated evidentiary material. They originated from the vortex of wartime governmental measures and as such were impervious to any exertions of post-war politics. In brief, the judgments issuing from Istanbul hearings and trials were almost entirely predicated upon authenticated wartime official documents as was exactly the case with the Nuremberg trials.

3. The third category of compelling evidence concerns the vast corpus of official documents deposited in the state archives of Germany and Austria. The paramount importance of these documents cannot be overestimated for the following reasons. As noted above, these two countries were the political and military allies of Ottoman Turkey during the war. It is inconceivable that amidst the tribulations of what proved to be a life-and-death struggle, the representatives of these two powerful empires could even consider of wrongly or unjustly discrediting the leaders of their Turkish ally thereby inevitably undermining the alliance. As a matter of fact, these representatives for several weeks after the initiation of the genocide without much hesitation embraced the thrust of the charges of Turkish authorities that the Armenians were engaging in rebellion, espionage and sabotage and other treasonous acts, and that they had to be

repressed and rendered harmless. But the subsequent avalanche of reports from the interior of Turkey which German and Austrian consuls, vice consuls, gerents, military officers dispatched to their supervisors in Istanbul, Berlin and Vienna, impelled these superiors to discount, and even dismiss the Turkish assertions and take cognizance of the details attending the unfolding of a gigantic mass murder. Most importantly, the reports, which were prepared about what British historian Arnold Toynbee called “this gigantic crime,”⁵ and which were marked either “confidential,” “secret,” or “top secret,” were not intended for publication. Rather, they were intended for in-house i.e., for strictly internal use. This fact alone should suffice to impart to the documents in question not only an optimal degree of reliability, but authenticity as well.

By any standard of sound methodology, there could be no basis to call into question the compelling character of the dual type of material evidence proposed here, involving, on the one hand, authenticated official Turkish documents and, on the other, the testimonies of the highest officials of Turkey’s twin allies serving in wartime Turkey. These are documents whose reliability, explicitness, incontestability and verifiability can hardly be challenged. As such, they are the most effective weapon to not only counter but invalidate the entire corpus of denials. But one may proceed beyond the task of countering and invalidation. One may in fact proceed to reconstruct the Armenian genocide in terms of its key determinants-based on the ensemble of the documentary evidence thus gathered in which these determinants prominently configure.

II. The Key Determinants of the Armenian Genocide

A. Premeditation

Contrary to a host of assertions that the anti-Armenian measures were the result of wartime crises and exigencies enveloping Turkey, and that, therefore, they have to be assessed in the context of wartime dynamics, the evidence points to the existence of pre-war desiderata.

Even when granting the incidence of genocide, some Western scholars and legal experts suggest that the resulting genocide, was rather “an aberration,” a by-product of the war. In his conclusion that the wartime experience of the Armenians was indeed “an example of genocide,” Benjamin Whitaker, the British member of the UN Subcommission on Human Rights, who was commissioned to research and report on the historical precedents of the World War II Holocaust, in 1985 felt constrained to inject this caveat in his final report.⁶ But both Turkish and German evidence clearly demonstrates that a pre-war provisional decision was already reached to radically solve the festering Armenian question at the first opportunity that may present itself by eradicating the Armenians themselves. In the Key Indictment of the Turkish Military Tribunal it is underscored that Dr. Nazım, one of the principal architects of the Armenian genocide, is described as having admitted to a provincial governor-general that the measures against the Armenians were “determined upon following extensive and full deliberations” (*ariz ve amik düşünülerek*).⁷ Moreover, in the verdict in the Bayburt trial series the Tribunal specifically emphasized the fact that “the crimes were premeditated.”⁸ In the Yozgat, Trabzon, and Erzincan trial series the Court emphasized the same fact as it invoked Article 170 of the Ottoman Penal Code which prescribes death for premeditated murder.⁹ The concept of premeditation is defined in Article 169 of the Code in terms of the Arabic word *ta’ammüden*, derived from the rootword *‘amd*, which means “intent based on prior deliberation.”¹⁰ Since the United States was neutral until April 1917 when it joined the Entente Powers against the Central Powers that included Turkey, and, therefore, in a position to observe the details of the then unfolding genocide and report through her representatives, a respective American testimony may be adduced here to corroborate the fact of premeditation. Henry Morgenthau, American Ambassador to Turkey, kept a regular diary during his service in that country. The August 3, 1915 entry touches on this problem of premeditation. In it, Talât is quoted as saying, “The Union and Progress Committee

had carefully considered the matter in all its details and that the policy which was being pursued was that which they had officially adopted ... the result of prolonged and careful deliberation.”¹¹ For his part Lieutenant-Colonel Stange, a German officer who was an eyewitness of the mass murder in the eastern provinces of Turkey, in his “secret” report to the German Military Mission to Turkey, confirmed the presence of “a long before entertained plan (*einen lang gehegten Plan*) of a thorough reduction, if not extermination, of the Armenian population.” He furthermore indicated that military needs were a secondary consideration but were used as “a welcome pretext [in order to exploit] the favorable opportunity”¹² afforded by the war.

B. Genocidal Intent

Spontaneous or improvised outbursts of violence, however instigated or sponsored by central authorities, are rarely sweeping in their thrust or optimal in their outcome. In order for a mass murder to have comprehensive dimensions and in the end become reasonably successful there has to be a radical, i.e., genocidal, intent animating these lethal measures. Here, premeditation and intent are factors that operate interdependently; in fact they are entwined.

As in the case of premeditation, in the present case too, official Turkish documents as well as German testimony leave no doubt that the intent of the anti-Armenian measures was unmistakably genocidal. In its verdict in the Yozgat trial series the Turkish Court Martial explicitly stated that the covert objective of the wholesale deportation of the Armenians was the latter’s destruction, adding, “There can be no doubt and hesitation about this” (*şüphesiz ve tereddütsüz bırakmadığından*).¹³ In the Key Indictment this question is addressed also by quoting once more Dr. Nazım mentioned above. He is on record for having declared that the anti-Armenian measures were intended to “solve the Eastern [i.e., Armenian] question” (*Bu teşebbüsün Şark meselesini halledeceğini*). As the Key Indictment declared, the whole enterprise had the trait of a

“final solution” (*hall ve fasl*).¹⁴ To parenthetically refer once more to an authoritative American source, Secretary of State Robert Lansing in a rare attempt to intercede on behalf of the Armenians denounced the “studied intention on the part of the Ottoman Government to annihilate a Christian race. The true facts, if publicly known, would shock the whole civilized world.”¹⁵

Perhaps the most categorical and explicit confirmation of the fact of premeditation and genocidal intent was supplied by IIIrd Army Commander Mehmet Vehip (*Kaç*). He too was an Ittihadist officer but according to Lewis Einstein, Special Assistant, United States Embassy in Istanbul April-September 1915, he was “a chivalrous soldier.”¹⁶ When in February-March 1916 he assumed command of the IIIrd Army, whose zone of authority encompassed the six provinces, for which the Armenian Reforms were envisaged, plus the Trabzon province, his predecessor, General Mahmud Kâmil, had all but completed the obliteration of the massive Armenian populations of these provinces in the 1915-16 period. But there were still thousands of Armenian labor battalion soldiers working for the army in various capacities but mostly as artisans and as construction crews. Upon the request of the military authorities in charge of the Baghdad Railway Construction project, General Vehip in the summer of 1916 ordered the transfer from Sivas to the section of Bozantı, near Adana, of some 2,000 of these Armenian labor battalion soldiers. They were dispatched but never arrived at their destination. Upon investigation it was discovered that they were brutally massacred in the valley of Kızıldere, near Pemerek. Through a court martial Vehip executed on the gallows the gendarmery commander in charge of the transfer, Mescizade Captain (Kör) Nuri and his cohort, Special Organization brigand, Çerkez Gadir. Thereafter Vehip issued a proclamation to his army declaring that “having established through a trial the fact of the murder of the labor battalion contingent which I had ordered transferred to the command of the IVth Army, the gendarmery commander of Şarkışla, Captain Nuri Efendi, has been executed by hanging (*amele kafilesini itlaf etdiği ba muhakeme sabit olduğundan...salben idam edilmiştir*).¹⁷ Moreover, Vehip tried to court martial

Ahmet Muammer, the governor-general of Sivas province, as well; it developed that Muammer had ordered the massacre, according to the testimony of the convicted Nuri. But Interior Minister Talât removed Muammer from General Vehip's jurisdiction by appointing him *vali* of Konya province.¹⁸ According to the disclosure of a Special Organization leader who worked with Dr. Behaeddin Şakir in the eastern provinces, General Vehip was even intent on arresting and imprisoning the latter.¹⁹ In his 1918 report to the Military Tribunal Vehip described Şakir as the man who "procured and engaged in the command zone of the IIIrd Army the butchers of human beings ... he organized gallowbirds as well as gendarmes and policemen with blood on their hand and blood in their eyes."²⁰

Vehip's daring act to expose the nature and dimensions of the mass murder committed against the Armenians was the least conditioned by the post-war circumstances of the defeat and demise of the Ottoman Empire. As described above, already during the war he had ventured to take to task the highest civilian echelons of Ittihad party by his punitive forays against them. In Berlin on June 4, 1918, the top political and civilian leaders of Imperial Germany, led by Foreign Minister Kühlmann, altogether 20 officials, had gathered for a policy conference. In the course of the conference, Major General Otto von Lossow, the wartime German Military Plenipotentiary in Turkey, declared: "Vehip on several occasions told me that he was vehemently opposed to the campaign of exterminating the Armenians" (*ein Feind der Armenierausrottungen*).²¹ After describing the specifics of that campaign, Vehip in his written deposition for the Turkish Military Tribunal summarized (*hülâsa*) his findings as follows:

The massacre and destruction of the Armenians and the plunder and pillage on their goods were the results of decisions reached by Ittihad's Central Committee...The atrocities were carried out under a program that was determined upon and involved a definite case

of premeditation (*mukarrer bir program ve mutlak bir kasd tahuında yapılan işbu mezalim*).²²

C. The Organization and Supervision of the Genocide

Neither premeditation, nor genocidal resolve are in and of themselves sufficient to effect a genocidal outcome, even though they are necessary factors to secure such an outcome. What is so urgently required for this purpose is the ability to organize and supervise the undertaking. In brief, functionaries are needed who can be trusted, who are committed enough to execute orders from above without relenting or hesitation, and above all, who are efficient. Nowhere in the entire macabre drama of the genocide under review is the organizational make-up of a monolithic political party is seen proving itself so crucial for swift task performance as in the roles the Ittihad party assigned to these provincial commissars who served as party's omnipotent controlling agents.

So that the scheme of genocide might be implemented without a hitch, Ittihad especially availed itself of that component within its structure which subsumed three kinds of party leaders vested with particular authority: 1. So-called Responsible Secretaries (*Kâtibi Mesul*); 2. Delegates (*Murahhas*); and 3. General Inspectors (*Umumi Müfettiş*). The only responsibility of these Party representatives was to exercise control over the administrative machinery in the provinces and to supervise the unimpeded application of the genocidal operations. From this standpoint, they possessed superordinate authority and could impose their will upon the provincial governors.²³ Both in Trabizon and in Garin (Erzurum) that is indeed what happened. Trabizon's Responsible Secretary Nail rescinded the governor's prior authorization whereby children, the ill and infirm would temporarily be exempt from deportation.²⁴ The same incident took place in connection with Erzurum's Governor Tahsin. In other places, such as Angora,

Yozgad, Aleppo, Ankara and Kastamonu, governors-general who hesitated or objected to converting the order for deportations into an order for massacre would be, at the urging of these Ittihadist power-wielders, relieved of their posts without ado.²⁵ The party's yoke was inexorable and far-reaching, and as the Third Army's Commander-in-Chief, General Vehip, stressed in his prepared testimony, government officials in the provinces, "submitted" (*inkiyad*) to the authority of the party's chiefs.²⁶ All of these authorities were selected and appointed with the utmost care by the Ittihad Central Committee, and in large part they were former army officers.²⁷ They were intermediary links in the party's hierarchical structure. Though subordinate to the supreme authority of the Central Committee of the party headquartered in the Ottoman capital, they were often consulted for decisions at several levels by that superordinate body. Moreover, for the details of the local and regional arrangements relative to the deportations and massacres, they closely worked with local and regional party "clubs" to render the operations as smooth as possible.²⁸ Recognizing the pivotal role of these provincial party functionaries, the Military Tribunal tried and convicted many of them in a separate trial series called the Responsible Secretaries trials.²⁹

Erzurum's German Vice Consul Scheubner-Richter on July 28, 1915 for the first time reported of the operation in that province of "a parallel government" (*Nebenregierung*) coexisting side by side with the regular provincial government. He attributed the severity with which the deportations were being carried out to the influence of the men of this extra-legal group whom he identified as members of Ittihad party. After the governor-general had agreed that sick people, families without male members, and women living alone were to be excluded from deportation, the Ittihadist Committee intervened and vetoed the arrangement. Consequently, the governor's relatively humane treatment of the deportees was supplanted by the application of a measure of cruelty that will lead to "the certain death" (*sicheren Tod*) of the victims. "These Committee men

are bluntly admitting that the purpose of their actions is the total obliteration (*die gänzliche Austrottung*) of the Armenians. As an authoritative person word for word declared, 'We will have in Turkey no more Armenians after the war'.³⁰ The same consul in his subsequent report, marked "secret," provides additional details about the involvement of the Ittihadists in "this policy of extermination" (*Ausrottungspolitik*). It appears that General Mahmud Kâmil, at the time the Commander-in-Chief of the area's major military forces, i.e., the IIIrd Army, was completely cooperating with what the consul calls "the Committee and its dark and shadowy men" (*dunkle Hintermänner*). Even though "in my judgment there is no evidence whatsoever (*fehlen jegliche Beweise*) that the Armenians have prepared a general uprising," the anti-Armenian measures have degenerated into "a campaign of vengeance, destruction and robbery." (*Rache-, Vernichtungs- und Raubfeldzug*).³¹

Colonel Stange, mentioned above, not only confirms the decisive role of the party men in the organization and execution of the deportations in the eastern provinces, but he specifically identifies the principal actors involved. Of these Filibeli Hilmi was the key assistant to Dr. B. Şakir; but he was also the party's Responsible Inspector for the entire region (*Müfettişi Mesul*). Erzurum's deputy Seyfullah was not only an Ittihadist, but was secretly enrolled in the cadres of the Special Organization also. Stange's list acquires particular significance by the inclusion of the names of two men who masterminded the exterminatory deportations of the six provinces, plus Trabzon province, namely, Dr. B. Şakir and General Mahmud Kâmil. The latter "ruthlessly and constantly pushed for the expediting of the deportations...despite the fact that he must have known of the massacre of the Armenians who were dispatched with the previous convoys. This line of conduct is consonant with the statement he made to the Consul [who was Scheubner-Richter, as noted in the preceding paragraph] that 'After the war there will be no more an Armenian Question'.³²

This radical role of the Committee is taken up in another Consular dispatch involving the

treatment of Adana province Armenians. Consul Eugen Büge in his September 10, 1915 report to his Embassy in Istanbul indicates that by that date the number of Armenians “murdered” in the course of deportations “exceeds the number of those killed in the 1909 Adana massacre.” He attributed this campaign of murder to “the local party chief” (*der hiesige Komiteeführer*) who threatened to launch a general massacre against all Armenians if the Armenians of Adana should be spared deportation.”³³ [That party chief was Ismail Safa. V.N.D.]

Perhaps the most energetic exposure and decrrial of the decisive role of the party chieftains is provided by German Ambassador Wolff Metternich who ended up being relieved of his post because of the rather undiplomatic and forceful protest he made against that undertaking, In his report of June 30, 1916, Metternich expresses his despair to his Chancellor in Berlin after completing his meetings with War Minister Enver and Interior Minister Talât who, he believes, seem to be acquiescing to the will of the Central Committee of the party. “Nobody has anymore the power to restrain the multi-headed hydra of the Committee, and the attendant chauvinism and fanaticism. The Committee demands the extirpation of the last remnants of the Armenians, and the government must yield. The authority of the Committee is not limited to the Ottoman capital where Ittihad is organized and functions as a party in power. That authority of the Committee reaches into all the provinces. A Committee representative is assigned to each of the provincial administrators, from *vali* down to *kaymakam*, for purposes of assistance or supervision ... Turkification means license to expel, to kill or destroy everything that is not Turkish, and to violently take possession of the goods of others ... People such as Talât, who possess the honest will to carry Turkey forwards—even though he too appreciates only power politics—, must submit to the multi-headed hydra.” Here is the original German text.

*Es hat aber niemand hier mehr die Macht, die vielköpfige Hydra
des Komitees, den Chauvinsimus und Fanatismus, zu bändigen.
Das Komitee verlangt die Vertilgung der letzten Reste der*

Armenier, und die Regierung muß nachgeben. Das Komitee bedeutet aber nicht nur die Organisation der Regierungspartei in der Hauptstadt. Das Komitee ist über alle Wilajets verbreitet. Jedem Wali bis zum Kaimakam (Landrat) herab steht ein Komiteemitglied zur Unterstützung oder zur Überwachung zur Seite... Türkisieren heißt, alles nicht Türkische vertreiben oder töten, vernichten und sich gewaltsam anderer Leute Besitz aneignen...

Leute wie Talaat, die den ehrlichen Willen haben, die Türkei vorwärts zu bringen, obgleich auch er nur Machtpolitik kennt, müssen sich der vielköpfigen Hydra fügen,³⁴

D. The Implementation of the Scheme of the Genocide

The success of any scheme of mass murder can only be measured by the scale of the victimization it can generate. The success of a genocidal undertaking hinges, therefore, on the efficiency with which a targeted group is decimated, if not wiped out altogether. Neither premeditation, nor genocidal intention, nor even careful organization are conditions that are adequate to warrant ultimate success. The incremental dynamics of the mechanisms of genocide require that another, and perhaps more critical, condition kicks in to complete the process of aggregation. That condition involves the securing of the cadres whose mission it is to take care of the actual business of mass killings. The organizational task in genocide can only be brought to fruition through the efficiency of these killer bands. They have to be selected with utmost care, reinforced in their propensities for lethal violence, and provided with apt incentives to be relentless and merciless in the execution of the mission with which they will be entrusted. In

other words they have to be fit in terms of their backgrounds, properly motivated, and animated by the prospects of ample rewards.

The Ittihad party leadership, its Central Committee in particular, led by the two physician-politicians, Drs. Nazım and Behaeddin Şakir, after much pondering and collective deliberations, came up with a solution, a solution that is unprecedented in the annals of human history. They decided to release tens of thousands of convicts and repeat criminals in describing whom a high ranking Turkish military officer used the word “bloodthirsty criminals” (*kanlı katil*).³⁵ The Ittihad party’s supreme body, by special arrangement, set free these criminals from the empire’s large prisons and engaged them for massacre duty. In order to do that however, it needed the aid of the Justice, War, and Interior Ministries. Because these ministries were governed by directors appointed by the party, the matter was easily resolved. The prison administration, which was under the supervision of the Justice Ministry, greatly eased the task, forbidding the respective district attorneys to protest against this illegal activity. The War Ministry sent to the Turkish Parliament Colonel Behiç Erkin, in order to persuade the legislative body’s members that these condemned criminals would be serving the fatherland. The Justice Ministry did the same, sending there its senior advisor Yusuf Kemal. In other words, practically all authorities in the government set to work with the aim of realizing the Ittihad party’s criminal designs. The party leaders even succeeded in enacting a law that imparted an air of legitimacy to this measure. But the appearance of legitimacy was just that, appearance; it was belied by twin facts: 1. the law was passed through misrepresentation, if not outright deception; the claim was made that the released criminals would serve in the regular army. 2. it was enacted long after the mass murder of the Armenians had run its course.³⁶

The wartime operational chief of the Special Organization conceded, with as much, or perhaps with as little, candor as he felt he could afford, the direct involvement of that organization in the eradication of the Armenians under the cloak of “deportations.” These

“deportations” were described as “internal security” measures. Here is what Esref Kuşçubşi stated, after declaring that the activities of the organization

were kept so very secret that even Cabinet ministers were unaware of them ... The Special Organisation was a secret body designed to achieve the internal and external security of the Ottoman state. Its services were such as the forces at the disposal of the government absolutely could not perform...I had assumed duties in missions involving the secrets of the Armenian deportations (*Ermeni tehciriyle alâkadar...hadiselerin iç yüzünde vazife almış bir insan olarak*)³⁷

In his testimony in December 1914 before the Fifth Committee of Inquiry of the Ottoman Chamber of Deputies, wartime Grand Vizier Said Halim Paşa admitted that “The creation and use of the Special Organization occurred outside the purview and knowledge of the government.”³⁸ In the course of the same Hearings, ex-Justice Minister Ibrahim disclosed that for the purpose of enrolling in the Special Organization, “a sizeable number of convicts (*mühim bir yekuna balig*) was set free (*tahliye*)...”³⁹ Another fragment of candor by an ex-İttihadist confirms that the Central Committee, in this particular case Dr. Nazım, was in charge of setting up what he calls the organizational framework of “this army of murderers” (*katiller ordusu*).⁴⁰ The method of operation was rather simple. The killer bands of the Special Organization, often assisted by local gendarmery units and even parts of civilian populations, would be deployed at strategic points. Upon the arrival of the deportee convoys, being in transit to their purported destinations, i.e., the deserts of Mesopotamia, they would be set upon and slaughtered mercilessly. In his Senate speech on November 21, 1914, the distinguished Ottoman statesman, Resid Akif Paşa, revealed

that in his office of President of the Council of State (*Şurayı Devlet*) he came across secret documents showing that the formal order of deportation, issued by the Interior Minister, was synchronized with the issuance of the informal instructions of the party's Central Committee, directing the Special Organization killer bands (*çetes*) to commence "the great massacres" (*mukatelei âzime*).⁴¹

These bands were mostly active in the eastern provinces specifically involving the *vilayets* Van, Bitlis, Erzurum, Harput, Diyarbakir, Sivas, plus the vilayet Trabzon on the Black Sea littoral. Nevertheless, the populations of parts of Ankara and Adana provinces, and above all the survivors of the treks of deportation in areas of Deir Zor, Rasul-Ain and Mosul, in the Mesopotamian desert, were likewise subjected to gruesome massacres by assorted killer bands. In recognition of this fact, the Turkish Court Martial in its Key Indictment and ancillary Indictments, as well as in its string of Verdicts, repeatedly cited the Special Organization as the principal instrument of the massacres against the Armenians; at the same time it underscored the pivotal role of the Central Committee of the party in forging that instrument. The origin, nature and function of the Special Organization, relative to the enactment of the Armenian Genocide are phenomena deserving utmost attention; especially in terms of the close relationship between it and the leadership hierarchy of Ittihad party.

The combined and integrated role of all these agents in the unfolding of the three interrelated phases of the Armenian Genocide, decisionmaking, organization and implementation, is succinctly expounded by the noted expert on Ittihad, Eric Zürcher who framed his conclusion on this matter thusly:

There are indications that, while the Ottoman government as such was not involved in genocide, an inner circle within the Committee of Union and Progress under the direction of Talât wanted to 'solve' the Eastern Question by the extermination of the Armenians

and that it used the relocation as a cloak for this policy. A number of provincial party chiefs assisted in this extermination, which was organized through the *Teşkilât-i Mahsusa* (The Special Organization) under the direction of its political director (and CUP central committee member) Bahaeddin Şakir.⁴²

Conclusion

There are two separate levels at which one may try to distill some limited conclusions from this essay. One is confined to the case at hand. The most signal feature of the Armenian genocide concerns the paramount, if not overriding, role that a monolithic, political party played in its overall enactment. The significance of this fact is that the state is seen here playing a subsidiary or ancillary role as it is reduced to a manipulable instrument of party ideology and party policy. The ability of such a party to succeed in the genocidal initiative is inextricably interwoven with not only the party structure in general, but with the secretive, conspiratorial component of that structure, in particular. Another striking feature of the case under review is the disparity of the power relations between victim-and victimizer-group; counterposed to the overwhelming power of the latter is the apparent and near-total powerlessness of the former. This yields the vulnerability factor, a factor that facilitates the scheming of most genocides by most perpetrator groups.

The deliberate and systematic release of bloodthirsty criminals from the prisons of the empire is reflective of the resolve of the perpetrators to be optimally effective through mercilessness; the fiendishness of the method may be a measure of their frustrations and anger accumulated in the protracted phases of the Türko-Armenian conflict. Finally, it may be observed that the scant Turkish documentary evidence could be secured only when defeated Turkey was

weak and, therefore, meek, and consequently accommodating. As soon as Kemalism gained a foothold in the interior of Turkey, gathered strength through insurgency, and could defy the victors, the mood for accommodation evaporated, and was supplanted by defiance and denial. In brief, not only the enactment of genocide is intimately connected with the advantages of power but its denial also.

The other level of distillation involves an attempt at extrapolation. Since this is only a case study, one can hardly venture to make any generalizations about the subject matter as a generic problem. But certain characteristics emerging from this case study are significant enough to depict them and to bring them into some plausible relationship with a more or less comparable case, namely, the Jewish Holocaust. That relationship is cast into relief by the most overriding feature of the Armenian genocide, i.e., the decisive role of a monolithic, political party in the conception, decisionmaking, organization and implementation of the Armenian genocide. A parallel role played by the Nazi party in the enactment of the Jewish Holocaust is sufficiently relevant and significant to warrant a brief juxtaposition of the two cases in terms of this single common denominator, namely, the overriding genocidal role of monolithic, political parties,

Holocaust and genocide literature is dominated by a central theme about the fundamental problem as to who the ultimate authors of genocidal initiatives are. Due to the application of massive and lethal state force and the complex organization needed to mobilize such force through institutional channels, the vast majority of scholars involved in genocide studies depict the state as the supreme author in this respect. After all, the sovereign state is the embodiment of legitimate power that, at will, can be converted into coercive force by simply applying and exerting that power. Moreover, the levers of state organization are equipped to handle the task of streamlining the genocidal enactment. The works of noted author Irving Louis Horowitz and Raul Hilberg's emphasis on the role of bureaucracy and civil servants epitomize this conceptual orientation.

The flaw in this approach is that it issues from a perspective in which the relationship of

formal authority to informal authority is not properly assessed.

As they proceeded to entrench themselves in their respective positions as monolithic parties—in the course of which they had to overcome obstacles, resistance, and threats—they drifted into progressively more radical ideologies and postures. Their drive for supreme domination culminated in the seizure of the reins of power over the respective states. In the modern history of sovereign states, this is perhaps the most dramatic and portentous juncture, where the bearers of informal authority overwhelm the formal authority of the state apparatus. What is even more critical, however, is the fact that with seizure of power the informal authority of the party does not evaporate or subside. Merging with the formal authority of the state organization that the party now controls, it emerges in a reinforced mold of informal authority, holding sway over the key agencies of the government identified with that state. This is a process of intrusion in and permeation and domination of the state apparatuses, as a result of which the functions of the state are subverted for the benefit of the party and party programs and ideologies are superimposed upon governmental agencies. In brief, for all practical purposes, the state is reduced to a tool of the party and its ideological interests.

These considerations suggest, therefore, that the focus of attention be shifted from states to political parties capable of displacing state power and substituting for it party power and leverage. A state, thus divested of or impaired in the free use of its means of authority, can hardly be considered a determinant in the conception and enactment of the crime of genocide. It is a historical fact of paramount import that the architects of the genocides of the Jews and Armenians were placed in the highest leadership strata of the Nazi and Ittihadist parties. This means that in order to examine and comprehend the overt as well as covert aspects of both genocides it is necessary to examine the leadership, ideology, structure, and inner workings of the two political parties that, in fact, became substitutes for the governments they supplanted and usurped. As Ambassador Morgenthau observed, “The Young Turks were not a government; they were really an irresponsible party, a kind of secret society, which, in intrigue, intimidation, assassination,

had obtained most of the offices of state,”⁴³ Commenting on the Nazis in the same vein, a German author recently noted that the German “state apparatus was controlled by the staff of Hess and party-chancellery of Martin Bormann.”⁴⁴

The distinct and nearly exclusively genocidal roles of the two political parties are underscored by the fact that the party executioners had sworn their oath of allegiance not to the state, nation, country, or any other symbol but to Adolf Hitler and national socialism, on the one hand, and to Ittihad and its mission on the other. In interpreting this ritual, Robert Jackson, chief counsel for the United States at Nuremberg, wrote this:

The membership took the Party oath which in effect, amounted to an abdication of personal intelligence and moral responsibility.

This was the oath: “I vow inviolable fidelity to Adolf Hitler; I vow absolute obedience to him and to the leaders he designates for me.”

The membership in daily practice followed its leaders with an idolatry and self-surrender more Oriental than Western.⁴⁵

Likewise the Ittihadist operatives, agents, and killer-band leaders were sworn party loyalists and felt hardly any obligation to the state. Their oath included the commitment that should they ever reveal a party secret or disobey a command of the central authorities of the party they would be targeted for destruction. Special Organization Chieftain Major Yakub Cemil, who played a major role in the Armenian genocide, openly declared: “If my fatherland’s interests required that I kill my father, I would not hesitate for a moment.”⁴⁶ Informal authority has optimal scope for exercise, because, unlike a state organization, it does not have to observe fixed or preordained rules and regulations. Precisely for this reason, it can afford to be irresponsible and dispense with the need for accountability to established and legitimate authorities. These are

conditions that not only allow but stimulate, if not encourage, deviant or criminal behavior. The genocidal enterprises reviewed here were essentially the by-products and consequences of the exercise of informal authority by political parties that held the levers of power of a state but also had covert genocidal agendas.

The organizational makeup of the two parties was such as to allow the leadership strata to rely on a level of discipline on the part of the committed party faithful that exceeded the functionality of the most dutiful bureaucrats engaged by the two respective states. Some illustrations are in order. The Third Reich of the Nazis was administered and controlled by a network of *Gauleiters*, all of whom were devoted—if not fanatic—party luminaries. The entire system of internal security, police, intelligence, and the rest was run by select and trusted party zealots. These were the essential components of the gigantic machinery through which the destruction process was consummated with the help of a network of co-opting or submissive functionaries of the state representing formal authority.

Similar patterns obtained in the Armenian case.

Nor can one underestimate the reward system set up by the party organization to promote its designs and goals. As in the case of the Nazis, so in the case of the Ittihadists, a system of adroitly arranged rewards elicited a high level of compliance from party members to requests and commands that were such as to compromise the integrity of the latter, reduce their capacity for compunction, and obviate guilt feelings. When guilt is shared with fellow partisans within the context of pressing party desiderata, inhibitions tend to attenuate themselves and guilt feelings are more or less smothered. There arise so-called *emergent norms* that elicit from the party faithful a deviant form of conformity.

To sum up, in the course of the genocides under review here, the state organizations in the Third Reich and the Ottoman empire were almost reduced to irrelevance as the Nazis and the Ittihadists gained optimal control of these organizations, including the key governmental agencies, such as cabinet ministries and legislative bodies and consequently used the state

agencies as submissive and manipulable instruments. The analysis of the two genocides, therefore, has to be primarily anchored on the genesis, structure, leadership, reward system, and overt and covert designs of these two parties, considered to be the actual authors of these twin genocides. In doing so, it is essential to be cognizant of the potential of the undefined spheres of informal authority adept at overpowering the instances of formal authority. The target population of the Armenian genocide—as well as of the Jewish Holocaust—largely became a victim of the resulting coercive interplay of these two types of authority. In other words, when informal authority overwhelms formal authority, given the existing secret agendas of the former, it does not necessarily supplant the latter but is reinforced by it for operational, functional efficiency.

Notes

1. For a brief review of such existing definitions see Leo Kuper, *Genocide. Its Political Use in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), Ch. 3, Theories of Genocide, pp. 40-56; Ben Kiernan, “Genocide and ‘Ethnic Cleansing’” in *Encyclopedia of Politics and Religion*, Congressional Quarterly Books, forthcoming 1998; Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide. Analyses and Case Studies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 23-27. For an earlier attempt at definition see Vahakn N. Dadrian, “Typology of Genocide,” *International Review of Sociology* 5,2 (1975): 201-212.

2. For details see Vahakn N. Dadrian, *History of the Armenian Genocide. Ethnic Conflict From the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus*, 4th ed. (Providence/Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1998) 322 pp.

3. Vahakn N. Dadrian, “The Complicity of the Party, the Government, and the Military. Select

Parliamentary and Judicial Documents” in *The Armenian Genocide in Official Turkish Records*. Special Edition of the Journal of Political and Military Sociology, 22, 1 (Summer 1994): 47, 51, 53, 54, 58, 59, 85.

4. *Harb Kabinelerinin Isticvabı* (The Wartime Cabinets Hearings) (Istanbul: Vakit Publications. Memoirs and Documents series no. 2, 1933).

5. Viscount Bryce, ed., (Arnold Toynbee, compiler), *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-16* (London: H.M.’s Stationary Office, Miscellaneous no. 31, 1916), 653.

6. U.N. ESCOR comm. on Human Rights, Sub-Comm. on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities (38th sess.) (Item 57) p. 7, U.N. Doc. E/CN. 4/Sub. 2/1985/SR. 36 (1985).

7. *Takvimi Vekâyi* (The official gazette of the Ottoman Parliament whose supplements (*ilâve*) served as the judicial organ of the Turkish Military Tribunal investigating the crimes perpetrated against the Armenians during the war). No. 3540, p. 8.

8. *Tercimani Hakikat* (Armistice-time Turkish daily that carried the full text of the verdict). 5 August 1920.

9. For the Yozgat verdict see *Takvimi Vekâyi* [n. 7] no. 3617, p. 2; for that of Trabzon see *ibid.* no. 3616, p. 3; for that of Erzincan see *ibid.* No. 3917, p. 5.

10. John A. Stratchey Bucknill and H.A.S. Utidjian, *The Imperial Ottoman Penal Code* (A translation from the Turkish text) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1913), 124-25.
11. Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story*, (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1918), 333.
12. German Foreign Ministry Archives (*Auswärtiges Amt*, henceforth A.A.) Botschaft Konstantinopel (henceforth K) 170, 23 August 1915, report. Log entry no. 3841.
13. See note 9.
14. *Takvimi Vekâyi* [note 7], pp. 4, 8.
15. *U.S. National Archives*. Record Group (henceforth R.G.) 867. 4016/299. 1 November 1916 cipher to Josef C. Grew, American Chargé in Berlin.
16. Lewis Einstein, *Inside Constantinople During the Dardanelles Expedition* (New York: Dutton, 1918), 151.
17. The text in Ottoman Turkish, but in Armenian characters, of Vehip's proclamation to his army is in the Armenian newspaper *Ariamart*, 10 December 1918 issue.
18. Cited in the account of A. Mouradian, "Muammer Intchbes Tchartel Dvaw Zinvorneru" (How Muammer had the soldiers massacred). *Zhoghovourtee Tzain*. 15 December 1918 issue. The author was hired by General Vehip to tutor his son in the art of painting and whom Mouradian interviewed and elicited this information.

19. A Mil, “Umumi Harpte Teşkilâtı Mahsusa” *Vakit*, 23 January 1934, instalment no. 80 of a long series of articles.
20. Dadrian “The Complicity” [n. 3], 64.
21. *Zentrales Staatsarchiv. Potsdam*. No. 245819/9 Bl. 241. A23848. 4 June 1918 Protokoll. Folio 241.
22. Dadrian, “The Complicity” [n. 3], 62, 64-5.
23. Galip Vardar, *İttihad ve Terakki İçinde Dönerler* (the inside story of İttihade Terakki) S.N. Tansu, ed. (Istanbul: Inkilâp, 1960), 60-1.
24. Dadrian, *History of the Armenian Genocide* [n. 2], 406.
25. *Takvimi Vekâyi* [n. 7], no. 3571, p. 130.
26. Dadrian, “The Complicity” [n. 3]: 64.
27. Vardar, *İttihad ve Terakki* [n. 23], 77.
28. Vehip Paşa’s affidavit in Dadrian, “The Complicity” [n. 3], 65.
29. *Takvimi Vekâyi* nos. 3586, pp. 161-4, 3589, pp. 165-75, 3772, *Verdict*, pp. 1-6.

30. A.A., K170, no (4674), folio 63.

31. A.A. Türki 183/39, A28584, 5 August 1915 “secret” report containing five separate Enclosures (*Anlage*).

32. See note 12.

33. A.A. Türki 183/38, A27578.

34. *Ibid.* 183/43.

35. The reference is to Aziz Samih, the chief of staff of Reserve Cavallery Army Corps consisting of these brigands and repeat criminals. Aziz Samih, *Büyük Harpte Kafkas Cephesi Hatıraları* (Memoirs of World War I Caucasus front) (Ankara: Büyük Erkânıharbiye, 1934), 67, 68.

36. Dadrian, “The Complicity” [n. 3]: 57-61.

37. Cemal Kutay, *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Teskilâtı Mahsusa ve Hayber’de Türk Cengi* (The Special Organizations During the First World War) (Istanbul: n.p., 1962), 18, 36, 78.

38. *Harb Kabinelerinin* [n. 4], 308.

39. *Ibid.*, 537.

40. Falih Rifkî Atay, *Zeytindağı* (Mt. Olive) (Istanbul: Ayyıldız, 1981), 36.
41. Dadrian, "The Complicity" [n. 3]: 85.
42. Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey. A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993), 121.
43. Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story* [n. 11], 11.
44. Peter Longerich, *Hitler's Stellvertreter: Führung der Partei und Kontrolle des Staatsapparates durch den Stab Hess und die Partei Kanzlei Bormann* (München: Saur, 1992).
45. Robert H. Jackson, *The Nürnberg Case as Presented by Robert H. Jackson, Chief of Counsel for the United States*. (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1971), 40.
46. Quoted in Vardar, *İttihad ve Terakki* [23], 279-80.

