THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE OF
1915–1916: CUMULATIVE
RADICALIZATION AND THE
DEVELOPMENT OF A DESTRUCTION
POLICY*

From late summer 1914, Armenian settlements on either side of the Ottoman borders with Persia and the Caucasus were plundered by Ottoman forces, and the Armenian menfolk were killed. From 24 April 1915, prominent members of the Ottoman Armenian community were incarcerated en masse in Constantinople. From late March to late May, arrests and limited deportations from Armenian communities were also conducted in the Cilicia region to the south-east, around the Gulf of Alexandretta. Thereafter, in a wave spreading westwards and southwards throughout the empire from the provinces of eastern Anatolia — the areas of heaviest Armenian population — the Turkish government, led by the Ittihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti (Committee of Union and Progress: CUP), implemented an increasingly radical programme of deportation and murder.

Communal leaders and civilian men were incarcerated and/or murdered outright. The women, children and elderly were forced to emigrate to the southern desert regions, in modern-day Syria and Iraq, and along the way their numbers were decimated by depredations — rape, kidnap, mutilation, outright killing and death from exposure, starvation and thirst — at the hands of gendarmes and soldiers, irregulars, and Muslim tribespeople. Many surviving this process then perished from privation or disease in desert concentration centres, where they were left without provision and, in mid 1916, subjected to a further spate of massacres. A total of at least one million Armenians died, more than two-thirds of those deported. Many of the kidnapped, some of the other surviving women, and an indeterminate number of orphans were forcibly converted to

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Islam — in total 5 to 10 per cent of the Ottoman Armenians.\(^1\) Up to 400,000 survived the First World War within the empire, with a particular concentration in Constantinople, from which there were only selective deportations of the leadership and provincial sojourners.

The historiography of this carnage is marked by crude controversy. Besides the denial that the fate of the Armenians constituted genocide, at the heart of the Turkish nationalist literature is the untenable claim that whatever was done was justified by national security in the face of Armenian insurgency.\(^2\) Conversely, opposing scholars, particularly those from the Armenian diaspora, have sought to explain the killing entirely in terms of the prior genocidal intent of the CUP, and to this end have sometimes employed dubious evidence to suggest destruction ‘plans’ conceived well in advance of the genocide.\(^3\)

The polemical battle has centred upon a false dichotomy of ‘ideology’ versus ‘pragmatism’ as the basis for governmental measures. On the one hand, the thesis that Armenian revolt objectively ‘provoked’ the CUP to their actions makes no sense if it is accepted that widespread indiscriminate massacre occurred (and the weight of neutral documentation demands it must be). Armenians as a whole were ultimately targeted on the basis of their group identity, and this can only be explained by the CUP’s increasingly radical ideology of ethnic exclusivity. On


\(^{3}\) For critiques of some such explanations, see Gwynne Dyer, ‘Correspondence’, Middle Eastern Studies, ix (1973); Gwynne Dyer, “Turkish “Falsifiers” and Armenian “Deceivers”: Historiography and the Armenian Massacres”, Middle Eastern Studies, xii (1976).
the other hand, just as Nazi racism is insufficient to explain why the 'final solution' happened where, when and how it did,\(^4\) circumstance in 1914-15 was crucial to the development of the most radical of all policies. For the 'Armenian side', fighting the Turkish apologist line has involved downplaying any notion of Armenian agency, lest it be read as 'justifying' CUP action as a pragmatic response. Yet Armenian nationalist activity within and beyond the Ottoman empire was one important catalyst for the destruction process. This was a catalyst (or rather a series thereof) in the proper sense: an element that alters by its introduction the situation to which it is introduced, therefore not a 'pretext' or legitimating excuse, as some contend.\(^5\)

This article examines the proximate causes of the genocide. Space precludes full analysis of the longer-term causes, which include the history of Turkish–Armenian relations and particularly the nature of the CUP regime. The radicalism of that regime will, to a certain extent, have to be taken as a given, and can be examined in detail elsewhere.\(^6\) The article contends, however, 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. Until late May 1915, anti-Armenian operations were often carried out reactively and, in the eyes of the CUP, pre-emptively, as well as pro-actively. This does not mean that Turkish operations were rational in their intent or extent — the Turkish–Armenian dynamic was a hugely unequal one, the disparity of power was vast, and CUP perception was heavily coloured by chauvinism. Nor does it mean that Turkish operations were any the less vicious — I am attempting to explain, not to excuse. The extreme nature of CUP policies can be traced entirely to perpetrators acting on ideological precepts and pushing for ever-more indiscriminate measures. Nevertheless, only by the early summer of 1915 may we speak of a crystallized policy of empire-wide killing and death-by-attrition. Amongst other things, this article is a plea for the normalization of the study of state-sponsored mass


\(^6\)See the works cited in this article at nn. 1, 34, 90, 116, 123.
murder, and for a recognition that it emerges, like many other governmental policies in a spectrum of regimes, often piecemeal, informed by ideology but according to changing circumstances.

I

INTERPRETATIVE CONTEXTS

Several interconnected developments affected Muslim–Christian, and specifically Turkish–Armenian, relations: the rise of nationalism amongst the subject peoples of the empire; the territorial disintegration of the Ottoman polity; and hegemonic Great Power intervention in its affairs — all key elements of the ‘eastern question’. The history of the empire in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries consists largely of the attempts to address these problems, and they provide the milieu for the radical trajectory of CUP ideology as one ‘solution’ after another failed to stem physical, political and economic encroachments on Ottoman sovereignty.

The most sophisticated recent additions to the historiography of CUP population policy stress the extent of the demographic reshaping of Anatolia. The longer-term demographic Islamization of the empire from the mid nineteenth century — as Muslim refugees flooded in from the Balkans and the Caucasus — is a key factor in understanding how the Anatolian Christian populations were marginalized, and why an infrastructure and mindset for orchestrated population movements of both Muslims and Christians was in place in 1915. (The Armenian deportations would be marshalled by the department for the settlement of tribes and immigrants within the ministry of the interior — İskâm Ashayîr ve Muhacîrîn Umûmi Mûdürîgî.)

Population transfer (siürgün) had been used since the fourteenth century to import Muslim colonists into conquered or depopulated regions, developing over time to incorporate punitive group deportations. The difference in the decades of Ottoman decline was that transfers were not always determined by the Ottomans,

7 Fuat Dündar, İstihat ve Terakki’nin Müslümanları İskân Politikası (1913–1918) [The Muslim Resettlement Policies of the Union, and Progress Committee (1913–1918)] (İstanbul, 2001).
being influenced instead by what parts of the empire were removed, and then how the new Christian regimes treated their Muslim populations. In 1860 a general migration administrative commission had been established to cope with the influx of Circassians in particular.9 Further migrations after the Russo-Turkish war of 1877–8, and then in the Balkan wars, left the empire with a greater preponderance of Muslims than ever before, and in a polity whose centre of gravity had shifted decisively eastwards, away from Christian Europe.

The Turkish–Armenian dynamic developed its own virulence within this larger matrix of demographic change. The Armenian fate was exceptional even amongst the Ottoman peoples during the First World War. While Lazes, Circassians, Albanian, Bosnian and Georgian Muslims, ‘Gypsies’,10 and some Arab and Jewish groups11 were all moved around the empire during the War, no group was more comprehensively dislocated than the Armenians, and no other group was subject to the near-total murder that decimated Armenian numbers. This is also true in relation to the Kurds, hundreds of thousands of whom were deported (but not attacked en route) in 1916–17,12 and to the other Ottoman Christian groups, the Greeks and the Nestorians (‘Assyrians’), who also fell victim to massacres in Anatolia.13 Explaining the scale and singularly murderous nature of the Armenian deportations is as important as explaining the deportations themselves.

The eastern crisis of 1875–8 and the ensuing conflict with Russia were seminal in alienating the Armenians. Bulgaria’s success in freeing itself in all but name from Ottoman suzerainty left a deep impression on the new sultan, Abdülhamid II: namely a real fear of the threat to the Ottoman construct of great power-sponsored nationalism. Conversely it provided a model

10 Dündar, İttihat ve Terakki’nin, esp. 92–173.
11 On Arabs, see ibid, 92–107; see also Hasan Kayah, Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1918 (Berkeley, 1997); on Jews, see Isaiah Friedman, Germany, Turkey and Zionism, 1897–1918 (Oxford, 1977).
12 On CUP Kurdish policy, see Dündar, İttihat ve Terakki’nin, 137–55, 272–3.
13 On the Nestorians, see Gabriele Yonan, Ein vergessener Holocaust: Die Vernichtung der christlichen Assyrer in der Türkei (Göttingen, 1989); on the Greeks, see nn. 30–1 below.
of agitation for Armenian leaders who had welcomed the Russian armies and had then seen their own demands for effective reform undermined by the Treaty of Berlin of 1878. The Armenian nationalist political parties — most importantly the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF: Dashnakzutiun) and the Hunchaks — were formed in the 1880s in the light of the failure to secure enforceable reforms, and led the movement to recapture the attention of the Great Powers, sometimes by ostentatious, terrorist methods.¹⁴

As Ottoman control over the European provinces was eroded, Turkish nationalists looked eastwards to see Anatolia as an indivisible whole, the seedbed for Turkic-Muslim national renewal. Though no ethnie comprised an absolute majority of the inhabitants of eastern Anatolia, Armenians formed a plurality, alongside Kurds. These Armenians would come to be seen as an internal obstacle to ethnoreligious homogeneity, and, the other side of the coin, with their development of a greater national consciousness during the nineteenth century, as a potentially disloyal or separatist Christian community in these ‘imagined’ heartlands.

The ordinary course of Armenian existence in the eastern provinces deteriorated with the arrival of the Balkan and Caucasian refugees. These muhacirler brought into Anatolia both competition for space and resources and a considerable residue of bitterness about the treatment they had received at the hands of Christian regimes — bitterness that they often took out on the indigenous Christians.¹⁵ The Circassians had notably been subjected in the 1860s to a programme of forced expulsion, deportation and massacre at the hands of the Russian government that was arguably genocidal, with a minimum of tens of thousands of deaths.¹⁶ The muhacirler would be heavily represented among the gendarmerie and irregular forces that later took such an active part in murdering Armenians on the deportation convoys. Further to this, many of the CUP leaders who later seized power originated in

¹⁴ Anahide Ter Minassian, Nationalism and Socialism in the Armenian Revolutionary Movement (1887–1912) (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), 4–5, 15, 18. This study also suggests that, whatever the doctrinal differences between the political parties, nationalism was their most significant characteristic.

¹⁵ Vahakn N. Dadrian, Warrant for Genocide: Key Elements of Turko-Armenian Conflict (New Brunswick, 1999), ch. 3.

peripheral Ottoman lands, which particularly sensitized them to territorial depreciation and the sufferings of some provincial Muslims.

The late nineteenth century brought in an era of violent and often deadly repression of the Armenians. Between 1894 and 1896, 80,000–100,000 were killed in the eastern provinces in a series of sustained massacres during the regime of the ruthless and paranoid Abdülhamid II, and certainly with his quiescent knowledge. Though not a genocide, since the victims were generally adult males and the killings had a regional pattern, this was an attack on the Armenians as a whole, combining elements of pogrom against a minority and calculated use of force against a protonational group — a sort of ‘cull’. In 1909, the year following the coup that introduced the second Ottoman constitutional period, CUP forces were implicated in the massacre of around 20,000 Armenians in the Adana province in Cilicia, supposedly to repress increasingly forthright calls for Armenian separatism, during a crackdown on a reactionary counter-revolt.

The second constitutional period was one of political embattlement for the CUP. After the Balkan secessions and losses to Russia in the nineteenth century, the 1908 coup heralded only further concessions. Bosnia-Herzegovina was formally annexed by Austria-Hungary in that year. The next year saw the attempted counter-coup and its aftermaths. Revolts by the Druses south of Damascus followed in 1910, as did revolts in Albania and Yemen, in both 1910 and 1911. Then came the Tripolitanian war and ensuing losses to Italy, and the Balkan wars in 1912–13. Of these developments the most significant were the ceding of most of Rumeli, the former European heartlands of the empire, to Bulgaria, and the secession of the Muslim province of

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18 Jelle Verheij, 'Die armenischen Massaker von 1894–1896', in Hans-Lukas Kieser (ed.), Die armenische Frage und die Schweiz, 1896–1923 (Zurich, 1999). This detailed analysis supersedes the earlier study of Stephen Duguid, 'The Politics of Unity: Hamidian Politics in Eastern Anatolia', Middle Eastern Studies, ix (1973), in showing the sultan’s consenting awareness of the massacres, and even his ordering of specific examples of severe repression, even if he was not always truthfully informed about the causes or the extent of the killings, many of which were conducted (under the eyes of local authorities) by elements of the Muslim population and the Kurdish ‘Hamidiye’ irregular regiments. It is still unclear how much these killings can be attributed to a ‘plan’ as such.
Albania. The territorial losses and the failure to keep hold of an important Muslim constituency were the context for a consolidation of power under a more radical and explicitly Turkish-nationalist leadership in an internal coup by the previously discredited CUP. The new ruling triumvirate consisted of Talât, Minister of the Interior and subsequently Grand Vizier; Enver, Minister of War; and Cemal, Minister of the Marine and Governor of Syria, backed behind the scenes by the party’s central committee. The CUP leadership cadre consisted of ruthless activists as well as more ‘theorized’ ethnonationalists (in as far as we may speak simply of Turkish nationalism), informed by half-digested notions of social Darwinism. These would be the driving force behind the genocide and the other population policies enacted during the First World War.

Turkish–Armenian relations were strained almost to breaking point in the immediate pre-war period. Turkish sovereignty in eastern Anatolia was challenged by a revival of the ‘reform plan’, first brought up in 1877–8, to curb abuses against the Christians; the measure also followed the precedent of reforms in Macedonia in 1903. The plan had been suggested by Russia in 1913 with the encouragement of the pro-Russian Catholicos of all Armenians in Etchmiadzin in the Caucasus; it was a revival of the schemes suggested fatefully in 1878 and 1895, and was brought up again at a time of Turkish weakness just as the defeated empire was agreeing peace terms at the London conference. In the revised form in which it was finally foisted onto Turkey, the plan entailed the creation of two zones out of the six ‘Armenian provinces’ (Erzurum, Van, Bitlis, Harput/Mamuret-ul-Asis, Diyarbakır and Sivas) and Trebizond/Trabzon on the Black Sea coast, to be administered by neutral European inspectors approved by the Porte. While the Russians backed the reform plan to forward their own influence in eastern Anatolia, for most Ottoman Armenians it was not necessarily a step

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towards autonomy or union with Russian Armenians, but rather a means of ensuring greater social justice and security of life and property under a regime that was growing ever more discriminatory. Grievances included the depredations visited by muhacirler, including the appropriation of Armenian property abandoned during flight from the 1895–6 massacres.

The reform scheme was discarded on Turkey’s entry into the War in opposition to Russia and Britain, to whom Armenian leaders had looked for support. It did, however, raise the spectre of Armenian allegiance with Turkey’s ‘national enemy’, and this in the light of Russian-sponsored agitation in the Balkans. Like Germany, the CUP viewed Russian sponsorship of the reform plan as preparation of the ground for subsequent direct intervention in, and annexation of, the six vilayets against a recent backdrop of increased Russian agitation against Armenians and Kurds, and increased control over the adjoining regions of Persia. Undoubtedly for some extremists the reform plan was the last straw. As the deportations moved into full swing the next year, Talât rebuked Armenian leaders for raising the issue at a dangerous time for Turkey; he stated his intention to make it a redundant concern for fifty years.

Ceteris paribus, taken to its logical conclusion, Turkish policy from the time of the reform plan would at some point have required the marginalization of the Armenian national community of eastern Anatolia at least, in order to tackle the ‘anomalous’ population itself, to remove the excuse for European encroachments, and to secure the land for Muslims. This did not necessarily mean killing, but it certainly would have entailed policies of cultural and linguistic ‘Turkification’ such as those initiated from 1910, and probably furthermore of the sort of dilution-by-muhacir-settlement which had already occurred in the region. Nevertheless, whatever thoughts of ethnic ‘homogenization’ were present in 1914 did not translate smoothly into action. Despite

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22 Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Vienna (hereafter HHSA), PA XL 270, Konstantinopel, 27 Mar. 1914.
the threats, increasing abuses of the Armenians in eastern Anatolia (including sporadic boycotts), and the deterioration of Ittihadist–Armenian relations from 1909, there is no evidence that a policy of physical destruction of the community was forged prior to 1914, not least because the deportations only began after seven months of war.

The construction of a potential apparatus of destruction throughout 1914 is not a ‘smoking gun’, as has been suggested by one influential scholar. The *Teshkilatı Mahsusa*, or Special Organization, an irregular military force first used during the Balkan wars, was mobilized again for the world war. At its height between 1914 and 1918 it consisted of 30,000–34,000 men, drawn from the ranks of the Turkish gendarmerie and Muslim bands, including *muhacirler* and criminals specially released from prison. It was staffed by young army officers, but civilians from the CUP were integrally involved at the highest level. However ruthlessly it behaved prior to the spring of 1915, as in the pre-war harassing of Greek communities, the development of the Special Organization in 1914 is not a reliable indication of genocidal intent. It originated as a means of forwarding the ethnic war outside Turkish boundaries by irredentist agitation, guerrilla warfare and assassination, including of prominent Armenians. (Former refugees from Russian rule in the Caucasus were thought particularly useful in encouraging insurrection in the lands of their kin.) The precise time of its change to a dedicated instrument of indiscriminate mass murder is unclear.

International factors, the interaction between Russia and Armenian nationalists in particular, continued to be important until well into the War in radicalizing CUP policy. Continuities in this interaction were evident from the pre-war period, but

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there were also factors specific to the War, and to the new long- and short-term strategic goals of the combatant forces in and around Ottoman territory. The existence of an evolving, three-way dynamic contradicts both the determinist ‘Armenian’ historiography and the Turkish apologist literature. Indeed, it is entirely consistent to suggest a symbiotic relationship between Armenian nationalist activism, the actions of external powers, and CUP policy. Turkish nationalism had, after all, developed in reaction to the nationalisms growing amongst the Ottoman subject peoples, to great power influence in Ottoman affairs, and to the loss of territory.

Expulsions of ethnic Greeks to Greece from the Aegean islands, Thrace and then the western Anatolian coast in 1913–14 illustrate these interconnections perfectly. CUP rhetoric, particularly that of the one-time guerrilla fighter, one-time anti-insurgency operative Enver, escalated from early 1914 to talk of cleansing Anatolia of its Christian elements and replacing them with more ‘reliable’ Muslims who could also take over the Greek economic role.30 The contexts of these stated goals and of the Greek expulsions — over and above the migration of Muslims from Greek territory, the loss of land to Bulgaria and the mutual ‘ethnic cleansing’ and refugee movements that had taken place between Bulgaria and Turkey — were uncertainty over sovereignty of the Aegean islands and the escalating prospect of war with Greece,31 not to mention the imposition of the Armenian reform plan.

Turkey’s war from 1914–18 was fought in the interests of ethnic-national independence, what Talât later recalled had been the CUP’s goal in 1913: ‘the renovation and reorganization of our vital resources ... to consolidate the existence of the empire’.32 On one level this meant simply regaining control of fiscal policy from Britain and France and escaping from semi-colonial subservience. On another it meant the abrogation of the reform plan33

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30 Akçam, Armenien und der Völkermord, 43–4.
32 Cited in US National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland (hereafter NARA), Record Group (RG) 59, 867.00/791, Elkus to Lansing, 14 Oct. 1916.
and the capitulations — that system of extra-territorial privileges enjoyed in Turkey by representatives of the Great Powers and their local Christian clients. On a third it meant supplanting the important commercial function of the Christian minorities with the forced creation of a Turkish bourgeoisie. How such notions of national restructuring came to be expressed explicitly murderously and in the short term, however, may be understood only when we consider another intrinsic aspect of the drive for homogeneity and independence.

Preserving territorial integrity was the precondition for any national renewal. War meant an opportunity to expand in order to incorporate ethnically ‘reliable’ Muslim territories in the east, the doctrine of pan-Turkism envisioning the coalescence of the remaining empire with the Turkic Muslims of the Caucasus and then, perhaps, of central Asia, while creating a buffer territory between Anatolia and Russia. (In this new order, the future of Armenians would indeed have been a bleak one.) But war also presented the threat of further, perhaps fatal, diminution of Ottoman territories. The nationalist feminist Halidé Edib recalled that from the beginning of the War there was ‘general belief [about] a secret recognition by England and France of Russia’s claims on Constantinople and the eastern provinces’. In March 1915, even the Manchester Guardian could claim, before it was formally true, that Russia had been assigned the territory of Armenia in an Entente carve-up, with Syria going to France and the Baghdad railway to Britain.

For ordinary Ottoman Armenians, war — particularly against Russia, with its large Caucasian Armenian population — was a matter of anxiety. For some rash nationalists, it was an opportunity to snatch the territory of ‘historic Armenia’ from the moribund Ottoman state with Entente help. Extant notions of reordering society crystallized as the CUP saw their wartime plans fall apart and felt their territory to be under threat both from outside and within, as the stereotype of Armenians as proxies of the Great Powers in peacetime was extended into a stereotype of military collaboration during warfare. The sheer brutality of the

34 Johannes Lepsius, Der Todesgang des armenischen Volkes: Bericht über das Schicksal des armenischen Volkes in der Türkei während des Weltkrieges (Potsdam, 1919), 225.
36 Halidé Edib [Adivar], Turkey Faces West (New Haven, 1930), 133.
37 Manchester Guardian, 5 Mar. 1915.
method used to combat this putative threat was conditioned by generations of discrimination against the Armenians. It began with a series of localized massacres at sensitive points in border areas — effectively a policy of collective ‘ethnic reprisal’ for any perceived treachery.

II

ETHNIC AGITATION AND ETHNIC ‘REPRISAL’ IN THE EASTERN BORDER REGIONS

There is one point in 1915 by which consensus suggests that a policy of general killing had definitely been reached. ‘The Van uprising’, which took place in the second half of April, writes Vahakn N. Dadrian, ‘was a desperate and last-ditch effort to thwart the Turkish design to proceed with their matured plan of genocide by launching the massacre of that province’s Armenian population as an initial step’. That famous act, which ended in May with the establishment of Armenian rule in a major eastern Anatolian city, was by this consensus the pretext the CUP wanted to begin their predetermined, empire-wide anti-Armenian programme. The first measure in this plan, so the argument goes, was the decapitation of the Armenian nation with the mass arrests of 24 April.

The pretext theory is intuitively appealing. One can then retrospectively identify as preparations for genocide previous discriminatory measures, such as the disarming of Armenian soldiers in the Turkish armies — in February 1915 — and their assignment to labour battalions. It changes the interpretation of the whole destruction process, however, if the 24 April arrests are seen as a reaction to the anticipated Anglo-French landings at Gallipoli on 25 April and the news of the Van rising from 20 April, just as arrests occurred on 19 April in Trebizond.

38 Aspects of this section have been examined in greater detail in an earlier case study: see Donald Bloxham, ‘The Beginning of the Armenian Catastrophe: Comparative and Contextual Considerations’, in Hans-Lukas Kieser and Dominik Schaller (eds.), Der Völkermord an den Armeniern und die Shoah (Zurich, 2002).


province immediately before Russian destroyers attacked the port of Kerasond/Giresun on 20 April. As for the disarmament process, it was undoubtedly motivated by distrust of Armenians, but fed into a tradition of discrimination against all non-Turkish soldiers in the allocation of military functions, through which Greeks also suffered. (Murderous though they became, the battalions were initially formed by Enver to exploit the manpower made available by military mobilization in order to improve the transport infrastructure of the empire.)

The CUP probably did regard arrests and arms searches as ‘preventative’ measures, designed to forestall predicted Armenian support for the Entente forces, given that the CUP were well aware which side of the conflict most Armenians hoped would prevail. The ARF had indeed procured weapons in Constantinople during the early months of the War, though the ownership of weapons does not prove conspiratorial intent — Muslim civilians were allowed to retain their arms, and the CUP’s record was not one to inspire trust amongst Armenians. Yet blanket arrests, with no attempt to investigate genuine guilt, were not unusual in CUP policy at the time.

As for the empire, even with the first successes in defeating the Entente landing troops at Gallipoli, the external threat remained, though it was not as immediate. While Russia had been weakened by events on the European front, it still loomed in the Caucasus, and the CUP anticipated a huge offensive in the spring of 1915; meanwhile the British were still advancing up the Tigris and the Euphrates. Yet this was the time, in the period from April to June 1915, when the policy of oppression broadened

45 HHSA, PL 245, Constantinople, 29 Apr. 1915.
47 NARA, RG 59, 867.4016/92, Jackson to Morgenthau, 28 June 1915, on the reluctance of Urfa Armenians to surrender weapons since in 1895 surrender was followed by massacre.
48 Maurice Larcher, La Guerre turque dans la guerre mondiale (Paris, 1925), 393.
across the empire and increased to genocidal proportions; in other words, it happened in a period of national retrenchment, if not emergency. This interpretation first requires the substantiation of a detailed study of the War up to 24 April, which will illustrate the many facets to the pre-history of the Van rising.

Measures against Armenians developed initially in tandem with a general anti-Christian chauvinism, encouraged by a declaration of cihad (holy war) in November 1914, and illustrating the lengths to which the government was prepared to go to protect its territory. Christians and Entente nationals were cast as collective targets when Talât and Cemal threatened reprisals against them respectively for any Muslims that died in bombardments of coastal settlements; there was of course no mention of reprisals for Ottoman Christian deaths. The laws of war were further abrogated when Enver and Cemal pushed for the use of human shields composed of Entente nationals — including the whole French and British population of Constantinople — at the most exposed points to deter attacks on the Gallipoli peninsula and the Syrian coast respectively. As the first, smaller Armenian deportations were taking place from Cilicia early in April, the 2,000 inhabitants of the Greek village Arnavutköy on the Bosphorus were given twenty-four hours to leave their homes on suspicion that they would support Russian landings. At the evacuation of the Gallipoli peninsula on 10 April the Christian population of some 22,000 was given two hours’ notice, and scattered in small groups amongst the predominantly Turkish populations of western Anatolia. After the attempted Dardanelles landing this measure was to be extended to all the Christian — predominantly Greek — settlements on the coast of the Sea of Marmara since some Greeks were suspected of supplying enemy submarines with provisions and fuel. In excess of 40,000 were thus deported to the interior.

49 Henry Morgenthau, Ambassador Morgenthau’s Story, ed. Ara Sarafian (Princeton, 2000), 96, 125; HHSA, PA I 942, Damascus, 10 Nov. 1914 and 12 Nov. 1914.
50 HHSA, PA I 944, Pallavicini to Burian, 6 May 1915; PA I 942, Damascus, 10 Nov. 1914.
51 HHSA, PA I 944, Constantinople, 3 Apr. 1915.
52 NARA, RG 59, 867.4016/123, Morgenthau to Secretary of State, 10 Aug. 1915.
53 HHSA, PA I 944, Chief of Austrian General Staff, 14 May 1915, with report of 6 May; Library of Congress, Henry Morgenthau Papers, box 7, Morgenthau to Secretary of State, 18 May and 13 July 1915.
The *cihad* was announced with German encouragement to smooth the path for invasions of the Caucasus and Persian Azerbaijan, and to appeal to Muslim subjects of Britain and Russia.\(^{54}\) It was one of a broader set of strategies used by both sides in the conflict to undermine the other by stimulating anti-imperial insurgency on ethnic and/or national grounds, conceptually comparable to the British sponsorship of the Arab revolt or German appeals to Ukrainian nationalists. In August 1914, before the outbreak of war, a CUP emissary tried unsuccessfully to encourage the Turkish section of the ARF to sponsor anti-Russian insurrection among the Caucasus Armenians in the event of war.\(^{55}\) Infuriated at the rebuff, the emissary condemned the ‘treacherous’\(^{56}\) Armenians and ordered the assassination of ARF leaders in the first movements of the Special Organization’s participation in mass murder.\(^{57}\) At the same time, the Russian authorities were pursuing parallel schemes. The foreign minister Sazonov thought it ‘desirable to maintain the closest relations with the Armenians as with the Kurds in order to . . . exploit them at any given moment’, if war descended. Weapons were to be distributed over the Turkish border ‘if the rupture occurs or becomes unavoidable’.\(^{58}\)

Russian policy was less offensive than defensive. Since its war strategy was predicated upon defeating Germany in the west, it foresaw only ‘active defence’\(^{59}\) in the conflict with Turkey, and to this end it was important to keep Russian commitments to a minimum and to utilize any means available at the discretion of the military commander and viceroy of the Caucasus Vorontsov-Dashkov.\(^{60}\) After the Stolypin reaction, the viceroy

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\(^{54}\) YUL, Ernst Jäckh Papers, file 51, ‘Auszug aus den Vortrage des Dr Johannes Lepsius von 5.10.15’.


\(^{57}\) Dadrian, ‘Role of the Special Organisation in the Armenian Genocide’, 66.

\(^{58}\) *Die internationalen Beziehungen im Zeitalter des Imperialismus: Dokumente aus den Archiven der zarischen und der provisorischen Regierung*, ed. M. Pokrovski (Berlin, 1931–6), 2nd ser., vi, pt 1, Sazonov to Goremykin, 30 August 1914.


had established close relations with the Armenian political and ecclesiastical authorities in the Caucasus. He exploited these connections after an approach from the Armenian Catholicos early in August 1914 seeking Russian-guaranteed post-war autonomy for ‘Turkish Armenia’.\(^{61}\) In September the Tsar announced that the eve of liberation from Turkey was nigh. In November he encouraged the Catholicos with the deliberately vague assertion that ‘a brilliant future awaited the Armenians’, and that at the end of the War ‘the Armenian question will be resolved in accordance with Armenian expectations’.\(^{62}\) Vorontsov-Dashkov declared that Russia remained in favour of enforcing the earlier reform scheme, and he called for Armenians in Russia and ‘across the borders’ to prepare to implement Russian instructions in the event of war.\(^{63}\) These half-promises amounted to a deliberate deception. An autonomous Armenia in the six vilayets was anathema given the proximity of Russia’s own Armenian community and the fear of irredentism.\(^{64}\) Russia did not wish to gain another ‘nationalist problem’.

Vorontsov-Dashkov’s opportunistic ‘plan for revolt among the Turkish Armenians’ was described in September 1914. It foresaw the creation of armed Armenian bands under military command in the Caucasus at Olty, Sarikamish, Kagysman and Igdyr, and in Persia, a traditional base for activities in Ottoman territory by the Armenian political parties, under the authority of the military and the Choi consulate at Choi and Dilman.\(^{65}\) (Units in Urmia further south were also formed from the large Nestorian population and ‘other people loyal to us’ for more conventional defensive purposes.)\(^{66}\) In that month four volunteer battalions were formed — two were added later — with the

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\(^{64}\) Bodger, ‘Russia and the End of the Ottoman Empire’, 99.

\(^{65}\) Die internationalen Beziehungen im Zeitalter des Imperialismus, ed. Pokrovski, 1st ser., vi, pt 1, Klemm to Giers, 23 Sept. 1914, and n. 1. On Persia as an established base for ARF activity, see Manuel Sarkisyanz, A Modern History of Transcaucasian Armenia: Social, Cultural and Political (Nagpur, 1975), 134.

\(^{66}\) Die internationalen Beziehungen im Zeitalter des Imperialismus, ed. Pokrovski, 1st ser., vi, pt 1, Vorontsov-Dashkov to Sazonov, 19 Oct. 1914. See also ibid., 1st ser., vi, pt 1, Klemm to Giers, 23 Sept. 1914, esp. n. 3.
support of the ARF-dominated Armenian National Bureau in Tiflis to fight alongside the Russian army. The units were composed of men hailing from the Transcaucasian territories taken by Russia in 1878, or who had fled to the Caucasus more recently from Turkish rule. Some were also volunteers from the international diaspora. Most prominent among the indeterminate number of Ottoman Armenian participants was one of the unit leaders, the ARF deputy for Erzurum in the Turkish Parliament, Garegin Pasdermadjian.

The policy served both Russian domestic as well as war strategy. The majority of Armenian volunteer soldiers were deployed on the eastern front, for the Tsarist government had no intention of allowing large numbers of them to press political aspirations in Anatolia. The smaller irregular volunteer battalions could act as a palliative to the Russian Armenian population, and at the same time could provide useful advice on the terrain and, given their motivations in fighting Turkey, could be of genuine military assistance. Crucially, however, and as has been ignored in the literature, these volunteers were also supposed to provide a stimulus to Ottoman Armenians to take up arms. Boghos Nubar, leader of the Armenian National Delegation (AND) established in 1912 by the Catholicos to forward the cause of reforms on the international scene, and an integral character in the wartime negotiations to establish an Armenia under international protection à la belge, recalled that they were to provide an example for their Ottoman ‘compatriots . . . in a common action to acquire the rights of autonomy’.

From November 1914 the volunteer units assisted Anatolian Armenian communities in preparing for ‘self defence’, a

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67 G. Korganoff, La Participation des Arméniens à la guerre mondiale sur le front du Caucase (Paris, 1927), 20–1; Hratch Dashnabedian, History of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation Dashnaksutun (Milan, 1989), 117.
69 Auswirtiges Amt-Politisches Archiv, Bonn (hereafter AAPA), Abt. 1A — Weltkrieg, WK 11d geheim, vol. 4, Pera, 26 Mar. 1915.
70 Korganoff, La Participation des Arméniens à la guerre mondiale, 9–10.
72 G. Pasdermadjian, Why Armenia Should Be Free: Armenia’s Role in the Present War (Boston, 1918), 9.
long-standing strategy to help Armenians protect themselves in the adverse conditions prevailing in Anatolia. The purpose of the volunteers at the outset of the War was not dissimilar to that of the Ottoman irregular formations (though the individuals joining the volunteer battalions cannot be compared to the criminal elements of the Special Organization), since they too tried to incite insurgency. Rough comparison may also be made between the Armenian self-defence organizations and similar groups organized among the Caucasian Muslims and exploited by Turkey and the central powers during the War.73

Nubar and the French consul en retraite in Constantinople both cited pro-Entente incidents in the early war months involving native Armenians in Erzurum and Van provinces.74 Yet such eruptions as there were in the interior — for example assaults on the gendarmerie or the cutting of telegraph cables in Van from late 1914, localized clashes between Armenian groups and Turkish forces in Bitlis in February 1915 — were small in scale, suggesting a lack of enthusiasm among the Armenian population as a whole, and marked by a lack of discernible organization.75 Parenthetically, the cihad was also largely unsuccessful, though the (false) religious imperative probably encouraged some Muslims to participate in the coming Armenian genocide.76 For all sides in the conflict, external sponsors of insurgency were more enthusiastic than their ethnic brethren, the prospective cannon fodder on the ground in ‘enemy’ territory.

Ottoman and German agitation bore a little fruit in Azerbaijan77 and in the Caucasus, where advancing Turkish forces were joined by several thousand Muslims.78 The brutal Russian response included expelling suspect Muslim communities

73 On the Muslim ‘self-defence’ units, see AAPA, Abt. 1A, Aktenzeichen, 135/1, geheim, vol. 10, Pera, 8 Feb. 1915.
74 Les Grandes Puissances, ed. Beylerian, Constantinople, 1 May 1915; Boghos Nubar’s Papers, ed. Ghazarian, docs. 1, 3.
75 AAPA, Türkei 183/36, Pera, 9 Mar. 1915. On Van, see below.
77 Yonan, Ein vergessener Holocaust, 111–12; Sarkisyanz, Modern History of Transcaucasian Armenia, 192; Dadrian, ‘Role of the Special Organisation in the Armenian Genocide’.
78 Gotthard Jäschke, Der Turanismus der Jungtürken (Leipzig, 1941), 14, suggests 60,000 defections.
over the Turkish border, and doubtless also massacre. For their part, the great weight and viciousness of Turkish responses to incidents sparked off internally or by the approach of the Armenian volunteer units can be inferred from veiled official references to the dispatch of ‘militia and tribal forces’ or ‘punishment units’. These overtly murderous measures demonstrate that Armenians were already fair game to military and irregular operatives in eastern Anatolia. Obviously, Turkish forces had no compunction about rationalizing the severest methods to ‘completely crush’ any incidents lest they assume more than ‘merely regional proportions’.

Ottoman intelligence was aware of Russian plans from the beginning. Russian promises were trumpeted by Russian ARF leaders, Armenian solidarity was invoked in the Russian press, and rumours were abroad of future Russian-sponsored Armenian autonomy in return for an uprising. The Third Army command reported from the border on 24 September 1914: ‘the Russians have provoked Armenians living in our country through Armenians in the Caucasus . . . forming armed bands, and storing arms and ammunition in many places to be distributed to Armenians’. The Turkish embassy in Teheran had already notified the government that arms had been issued to Armenians in Persia and the Caucasus, while in late October military intelligence observed the gathering in Kagysman of 8,000 men, later revised downwards to 6,000, ‘mostly . . . Ottoman Armenians and army deserters [forming] . . . organized

79 Euphemistically on Russian ferocity, see John Buchan, A History of the Great War, i, From the Outbreak to the Battle of Neuve Chapelle (London, 1921), 173–4; on expulsion, see Larcher, La Guerre turque dans la guerre mondiale, 393; on atrocities against Muslims in Kars and Ardahan, see Osmanlı Belçelerinde Ermeniler (1915–1920), ed. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti, Baskı Baskı ve Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü [Armenians in Ottoman Documents (1915–1920), ed. Prime Ministry, General Directorate of the State Archives of the Turkish Republic] (Ankara, 1995), 21, no. 3.
81 Documents on Ottoman Armenians, iii, Hasankale, 27 Feb. 1915; i, Hasankale, 24 Mar. 1915, pt 4, on preventing ‘incidents’ turning into a ‘general revolt’.
84 AAPA, Abt. 1A — Weltkrieg, WK 1d geheim, vol. 4, Pera, 26 Mar. 1915.
85 Documents on Ottoman Armenians, ii, no. 1894; see also n. 84 above.
86 Documents on Ottoman Armenians, i, 7 Sept. 1914.
guerrilla bands'. The civil authorities in Bayazid in eastern Erzurum reported the flight of army deserters to Russia and many Armenians from the villages of the region, with the help of some Kurds, to join the bands formed... in Igdyr', bands which were later estimated to be 6,000 strong. The predominantly Christian settlements of Artvin and Ardanus were also mentioned as bases.

Turkish accusations of widespread desertion and of Armenian soldiers and civilians passing to Russian territory are corroborated by German, Austrian and American sources and, again, by Nubar. The difference in CUP eyes between their desertion and that of Muslims, which was also on a large scale, was its perceived purpose. Talât later claimed the plan was as follows: 'if war is declared Armenian soldiers will take shelter on the enemy side with their arms. If the Ottoman army advances [they will] remain inactive, if the Ottoman army retreats, [they will] form armed bands and hinder transport and communications'.

Russian arming of Christians and disarming of Muslims in Persia — reversing the prevailing practice in Turkey — also built upon tensions between Kurds and Nestorians and Armenians from the nineteenth century. Further, in response to a pre-war thrust towards Urmia at the beginning of October 1914, Russian authorities expelled the Muslim inhabitants of the local villages

87 Ibid., i, no. 8; ii, no. 1903.
88 Ibid., ii, 31 Oct. 1914; ii, no. 1903.
89 Ibid., i, 8 Oct. 1914.
90 For example, AAPA, Türkei 183/36, Pera, 15 Apr. 1915; AAPA, Abt. 1A — Weltkrieg, WK 11 d geheim, vol. 4, Pera, 26 Mar. 1915; Deutschland und Armenien, 1914–1918: Sammlung diplomatischer Aktenstücke, ed. Johannes Lepsius (Potsdam, 1919), Erzurum, 15 May. See also Rafael de Nogales, Four Years beneath the Crescent, trans. Muna Lee (New York, 1926), 27–8.
91 HHSA, PA XL 272, Constantinople, 23 Feb. 1915.
94 Documents on Ottoman Armenians, ii, 18 Sept. 1914. See also nos. 1894, 1903 and, the following year, interview of Talât, Berliner Tageblatt, 4 May 1916. For concurrence in German sources, see AAPA, Abt. 1A — Weltkrieg, WK 11 d geheim, vol. 4, Pera, 26 Mar. 1915.
and installed Christians in their place; the Armenians in the adjoining parts of the Van region in Turkey were evicted in a tit-for-tat process. The full-scale Ottoman invasion of Persian Azerbaijan at the beginning of 1915 was accompanied by killings of both Armenians and Nestorians, with the assistance of Kurds and Azerbaijanis. It is unclear how extensive the killing was in each Armenian settlement, though males were the main target. Only with hindsight, however, can the murders be regarded as 'a preparatory stage of the impending genocide', since they clearly fed off these pre-existing enmities in the region.

Invasions of Persia and the Caucasus saw the plunder of 4,000-5,000 Armenian villages and the murder of some 27,000 Armenians in and beyond Turkish territory between November 1914 and April 1915. The litany of expanding atrocities corresponded to a significant degree at first to the geographical locus of Armenian bases and action. The most famous example is the failed grand offensive of the Turkish Third Army in its drive into Russian territory at the turn of 1914–15 to regain the Transcaucasian territories lost in 1878, and to raise the banner of insurrection among the local Muslim populations. The ensuing, crushing Russian victory at the battle of Sarikamish wiped out almost the entire Ottoman Third Army and was greatly aided by the delaying actions of a volunteer battalion. It led to much CUP propagandizing about the treachery of the Armenians as a whole, and, alongside the earlier desertions, forms a backdrop for the disarming of Armenian soldiers in February 1915 and the massacres perpetrated by the retreating Turkish forces.

Immediately upon the outbreak of war in November the volunteer unit led by the famous partisan Andranik assisted the Russian column crossing the Turkish border from Persian Choi in the conquest of Saray in the east of Van province. Simultaneously, another force to the north occupied Bayazid with the assistance of a second battalion of Armenian volunteers.

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97 Dadrian, 'Role of the Special Organisation in the Armenian Genocide', 62.
Together, these expeditions were to move on the city of Van. A third preliminary strike from Erivan via the Alashkert region towards the fortress-city of Erzurum was halted near the border after the taking of Karakilisse.100

When Russian and volunteer forces withdrew from Bayazid and Karakilisse on 12 December, the Special Organization wrought destruction on some eighteen villages, murdering the males of 270 families.101 The pattern was repeated in the Caucasus: alongside Ardahan, where Turkish forces had initially been defeated with the use of Armenian volunteers, Artvin, Ardanus and Oltý were targeted as the Turks advanced into Russian territory in late November and December.102 With the withdrawal from Saray amid the general Russian retreat from Persia at the end of December, Saray and the surrounding districts also became sites of extensive massacres on accusations of collaboration.103 This was pursuant to a practice conceived before the outbreak of war which, in Ittihadist euphemism, involved ‘punishment for villages which shelter and protect the gangs and the dispersing of such villages’.104 If it was an ‘ethnic reprisal’ policy, doubtless many of the ‘reprisals’ were for imaginary transgressions, though there is evidence from the Turkish side of atrocities, including murder, committed in some Russian-occupied parts of eastern Anatolia.105 (While it would be controversial and speculative to estimate scale, it is safe to say that the Russian use of irregular troops invited fracture of the laws of war.106 The Armenians, however, formed only a portion of the irregular troops operating in Russian service, alongside Cossacks, for instance, who are also identified in some of the Muslim testimonies as perpetrators, as are Russian soldiers.)107 The most intense killings inspired by the Turkish policy occurred

101 Lepsius, Der Todesgang des armenische Volkes, 77–82, 186–8.
103 Kieser, Der verpasste Friede, 446–7.
104 Documents on Ottoman Armenians, i, no. 7, 1 Oct. 1914.
106 On the tendency of irregulars to atrocity, see Reid, ‘Total War, the Annihilation Ethic, and the Armenian Genocide’.
107 Rustem, La Guerre mondiale et la question turco-arménienne, 192–3, 200.
in eastern Van province, where perhaps 10,000 Armenians were murdered in the region between Saray and Bashkale before the Van rising. Why there?

Van was of great significance as a strategic point either for a Russian push from Persia into Mesopotamia and the interior of eastern Anatolia, or for a Turkish strike in the reverse direction. Since the Sarikamish defeat, and the closing of that military option, its importance was even magnified as a launching point for the other half of Enver’s pan-Turkish offensive through Persia. The city was given added significance by a prominent ARF presence and a dense Armenian population, one with established pre-war connections with the Russian consulate. The ARF had also secretly imported and distributed quantities of arms in the course of 1914. With the appearance of Andranik’s volunteers at Saray in November the Turkish authorities demanded of the city’s ARF leaders the immediate return of Armenian deserters. As Anahide Ter Minassian describes, beginning in November, in the ‘district of Van and the high valleys and towns with a large Armenian population . . . and in isolated Armenian villages . . . the extortions, search for deserters, and slashing of telephone lines degenerated into clashes between soldiers, gendarmes and chete [Muslim brigand] bands, on the one side, and Armenian self-defense groups, on the other’.

At the end of November a Turkish division commander at Saray explicitly raised the possibility of rebellion in Van, and shortly thereafter noted that ‘the enemy is seizing weapons from local people’ and ‘using these weapons to arm Armenians and form units. There are some Persian tribes among enemy units’. This illustrates the success of the volunteer policy in destabilizing intercommunal relations, but it is unlikely that Van’s own leaders were planning anything at that stage, as they

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113 Documents on Ottoman Armenians, i, nos. 9–10.
were trying to appease the authorities. This attitude persisted when Van’s governor returned to the city at the end of March from campaigning in Persia, accompanied by several thousand soldiers and Kurdish and Circassian irregulars.\textsuperscript{114}

At the beginning of March the governor Cevdet had met defeat in the Choi region as Russia reasserted its authority in Persia in preparation for a limited assault on Van to strengthen the Russian position.\textsuperscript{115} He responded to a minor occurrence in the Shatakh district in mid April by demanding that all the Armenian men aged from eighteen to forty-five years (a number put at 4,000, and certainly including numerous deserters) enlist as military labourers on pain of death and the deportation of their families. The ARF proffered 500.\textsuperscript{116} On 17 April Cevdet dispatched his self-styled ‘butcher battalions’ to annihilate Shatakh. The ill-disciplined irregular forces opted instead to attack closer Armenian settlements,\textsuperscript{117} and the ensuing chain of massacres drove the Armenians of Van and those of Shatakh to their well-known resistance.\textsuperscript{118} It would have been foolish for them to open hostilities unprovoked in this climate, particularly after the arms confiscations. Yet, based doubtless on his Persian experiences,\textsuperscript{119} Cevdet was ‘persuaded that the Armenians of Van were in collusion with the Armenian volunteer detachments’. He was attempting to isolate the city from the outlying districts of the province,\textsuperscript{120} and crush any sign of trouble with extreme, indiscriminate, vengeful violence. To ascribe the hatching of a plan to either side is wrong: in a terrible circularity, the Van Armenians, trying to maintain an escape route towards Persia, were driven to action by the very ‘ethnic reprisal’ measures Cevdet used to crush the Armenian ‘threat’. He was not acting on a general policy of murder, since events in his vilayet were atypical at the time. To add to the regional flavour of events, the

\textsuperscript{114} Kieser, \textit{Der verpasste Friede}, 446.
\textsuperscript{115} Allen and Muratoff, \textit{Caucasian Battlefields}, 298.
\textsuperscript{117} Kieser, \textit{Der verpasste Friede}, 449.
\textsuperscript{119} A point Ter Minassian does not emphasize, but which was vital in the cumulative radicalization process.
\textsuperscript{120} Ter Minassian, ‘Van’, 223.
Nestorians of Bashkale also rose up after the earlier treatment of their kin.  

III

RADICALIZATION AT THE CENTRE, AND THE FIRST DEPORTATIONS FROM CILICIA

Between Sarikamish and the Van rising, Russian forces were insufficient to sustain a major thrust into Anatolia. In the interim the major threat to Anatolia affected the region’s north-western extremity: it was the beginning of the Anglo-French assault on the Dardanelles, designed to relieve pressure on the Russian Caucasus flank. The first major stage of the attack on the outer forts was from 5 to 17 March. In Constantinople, preparations were made for a previously planned movement of the capital and its population to the interior of western Anatolia, by force if necessary. Parliament was suspended as part of the process, which removed an important check on government actions. Consistent with the established fear that Armenians would join with advancing Entente forces, the intention was to deport all the Armenians from the area between Constantinople and the projected provisional government base, Eskishehir.

Mid March also saw a series of meetings of the CUP’s central committee. Behaeddin Shakir, director of the Special Organization, member of the central committee of the CUP, and the emissary who had approached the ARF in August 1914, was recalled from Special Organization operational HQ at Erzurum to attend, and presented evidence of the activities of the Armenian bands in eastern Anatolia. He argued that the CUP should fear the ‘inner enemy’ just as much as the ‘outer enemy’, and was delegated extended authority and independence to combat the former. The end of March and the beginning of April saw an ominous build-up of the irregular units for

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121 AAPA, Türkei 183/36, Pera, 10 May 1915. On the simultaneous Kurdish uprising, see ibid., Pera, 27 Apr. 1915.
122 On Talat’s preparedness to use the police in the resettlements, see HHSA, PA I 947, folder 21c, Pera, 21 Dec. 1914; ibid., folder 21d, Constantinople, 11 Mar. 1915.
123 Akçam, Armenien und der Völkermord, 64; Vahakn N. Dadrian, The History of the Armenian Genocide (Providence, 1995), 236.
124 Berliner Tageblatt, 4 May 1916.
125 Akçam, Armenien und der Völkermord, 59.
126 Ibid, 59, 64–5.
‘border’ activities, the departure for eastern Anatolia of others in the Special Organization hierarchy who attempted to organize a general massacre in Erzurum, and the dispatch to other provinces of radical Ittihadist emissaries, including the notorious Dr Reshid, sent to bring his iron rule to Diyarbakır, where he conducted a particularly vicious round of searches, incarcerations and torture, and went on to become perhaps the most enthusiastic murderer.

Akçam argues that the meetings ‘led ultimately to the passing of the deportation law’. The unleashing of the Ittihadist and Special Organization emissaries, and their impact, certainly indicate the reservoir of ruthless anti-Armenianism waiting to be tapped among CUP leaders and operatives on the approval of far-reaching measures. Cevdet in Van, for instance, clearly benefited from a more-or-less free hand in dealing with the situation. Yet the fact that the projected deportations from Constantinople and its hinterlands did not occur, owing to the Entente failure to break through to the capital, suggests that Armenian policy was still contingent upon the course of the War, and was not fully proactive or general across the empire. From the end of March, deportations of Armenians also began from Cilicia, but they too were regionalized measures, attributable to a combination of the history of Turkish–Armenian relations in the area and to the course of the War in the adjacent Mediterranean.

A recurrent wartime fear was that Russia would attack through eastern Anatolia and drive on to the port city of Alexandretta/Iskenderun — the shortest route to bisect the Ottoman empire and gain a Mediterranean outlet. This still appears in ‘justifications’ for Turkish wartime measures, but

127 HHSA, PA I 942, Pera, 24 and 28 Mar. 1915; Constantinople, 15 and 22 Apr. 1915; Liman von Sanders, Fünf Jahre Türkei (Berlin, 1920), 137.
128 On the governor of Constantinople offering to lead ‘volunteers at the border’, see HHSA, PA I 942, Pera, 24 Mar. 1915. It is unclear if the source, the German consul at Trebizond, referred to Cemal Bey, military commandant of Constantinople, or Cevad Bey, military governor of Constantinople. The former seems to have been the one identified in Erzurum: Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, ed. Sarafian, docs. 56–7.
130 Akçam, Armenien und der Völkermord, 59.
131 Muratoff and Allen, Caucasian Battlefields, 231–2. On earlier Russian designs, see Somakian, Empires in Conflict, 47–8.
132 For example, Kavkaslar’da ve Anadolu’da Ermeni Mezâlîmî, ed. State Archives of the Turkish Republic, i, p. xxxvii; Documents on Ottoman Armenians, i, p. xv.
was not simply paranoia or pretext: the fear was also expressed within the diplomatic circles of the central powers, since Russian representatives had threatened it before the War.\footnote{HHSA, Konsulatsarchiv, Konsulat Aleppo, Karton 2, Aleppo, 18 Jan. 1914.} Further, since the British takeover of Cyprus in 1878, Alexandretta, along with the whole Syrian coast, was particularly vulnerable to maritime attack. The Porte had been awakened to the possibilities of a landing as part of the international pressure for reform during the 1895 massacres;\footnote{Roy Douglas, ‘Britain and the Armenian Question, 1894–7’, \textit{Hist. Jl}, xix (1976), 122–3.} a British warship was dispatched to Alexandretta to encourage compliance.\footnote{PRO, FO 424/184, 872/1 (enclosure), Langley to Culme-Seymour, 10 Dec. 1895.} Meanwhile, in spring 1913, a Greek ship had attempted to land some 200 Armenians there to try to provoke an uprising among the native Armenians in the Adana province in order to stake a territorial claim at the close of the Balkan wars.\footnote{PRO, FO 371/1773, 16941, 25 Mar. 1913, 10 Apr. 1914; 16736, 5 Apr. 1913; FO 371/1775, 17825, 15 Apr. 1913.} During the First World War the (small) fourth Turkish army was assigned to protect the coastal regions from external invasion and to maintain internal security, particularly regarding the Armenians and the French-influenced Syrian population.\footnote{Wolfskeel to Sofie-Henriette Wolfskeel, 28 Feb. 1915; Wolfskeel to Karl Wolfskeel, 30 Mar. 1915, both in Eberhard Count Wolfskeel Von Reichenberg, ed. Hilmar Kaiser (Princeton, 2001).} At the beginning of March 1915 the Turkish authorities searched the small, quiet Armenian population of Alexandretta for any evidence of communication with the English,\footnote{Deutschland und Armenien, ed. Lepsius, Alexandretta, 7 Mar. 1915.} and later claimed that plans had been discovered for an Entente-sponsored uprising in Cilicia, a notion dismissed as propaganda in the historiography.\footnote{Journal de Genève, Supplement, 4–5 July 1915; Djemal, \textit{Memories of a Turkish Statesman}, 299. Cf. \textit{Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire}, ed. Sarafian, 628; Lepsius, \textit{Der Todesgang des armenische Völkes}, 204–5.} In fact, in November 1914, as the Armenian volunteers were setting to work in the Caucasus, Boghos Nubar was trying to establish a similar arrangement with the British military command in Egypt.\footnote{ADNA, Correspondence Arménie 1915, vol. I, Nubar to Aivazian, 22 Aug.; also Aivazian to Nubar, 15 July.} This was a part of a broader Armenian nationalist war strategy which also encompassed the Armenian volunteer battalions in the Caucasus.
from Bulgaria, Egypt, France, Greece, Romania and the USA also sought to enter the fray under the auspices of various national Armenian committees or committees for ‘Armenian National Defence’, just as émigré Bulgarians fomented the 1876 uprising, and the Polish legion of brief fame during the War was comprised of expatriates.

Cilicia was targeted alongside the eastern provinces as an integral part of an autonomous Armenia, not only because of its history but for geopolitical reasons similar to Russian interests: it would provide a Mediterranean outlet and a fertile plain to sustain the mountainous plateau of eastern Anatolia. Thus Nubar’s AND and the multinational Armenian committees undertook a two-pronged diplomatic offensive, trying to persuade the western Entente governments of the benefits for the imperial balance of power of an internationally administered, neutral Armenian Cilicia, while promoting the use of volunteer units from the diaspora. The units were envisaged to help form an Entente bridgehead and precipitate a general rising led by militants within key Cilician communities. The ARF theoretician and delegate of the Armenian committee in Sofia, Mikayel Varandian, had requested that, while the future of the eastern Anatolian Armenians seemed secured by Russia, the Armenians of the Cilician coast should also be given ‘the opportunity to take part in the war against Turkey’.

For a short time in British military thinking the assault on the Dardanelles was to be accompanied by ‘serious feints’ against Alexandretta, with a view to occupying it and cutting Turkish rail communications. Had this been followed through, it is indeed possible that the British would have armed Cilician Armenians in accordance with Nubar’s approach. During the Dardanelles build-up, in February 1915 Armenian representatives

141 Die internationalen Beziehungen im Zeitalter des Imperialismus, ed. Pokrovski, 2nd ser., vii, no. 765, Zavriev, May 1915; Boghos Nubar’s Papers, ed. Ghazarian, docs. 9, 16, 26 and 35 (8, 12, 22 and 27 May 1915 respectively); Les Grandes Puissances, ed. Beylerian, Tchobanian to Gout, 3, 5 June 1915.


144 PRO, FO 371/2484, 25073, War Office, 4 Mar. 1915.
from the mountain town of Zeytun contacted the Russian Caucasus army HQ to say that if supplied with arms and ammunition via Alexandretta they could provide a 15,000-strong interior uprising at that place which would benefit a simultaneous assault both on Cilicia and on the line of communications to Erzurum.145

Zeytun was a key revolutionary centre with a long tradition of resisting Ottoman repression and massacre. Most notably, in 1895, alongside the neighbouring city of Marash, it had escaped the mass killings by successfully fighting off the Ottoman armies. The Zeytunlis had fought to maintain their semi-autonomous status within the empire, and alone among the Ottoman Armenians before 1908 had the right to bear arms. During the First World War many had militated against conscription since its introduction.146 In their inaccessible mountain retreat they presented an obstacle to the central control and uniformity of administration that the CUP required as part of their modernizing agenda, just as did large parts of the mountainous plateau of eastern Anatolia.147

The potential leaders of the proposed insurgency in 1915 had led the 1895 self-defence operation, and some if not all belonged to the Hunchak party148 which had established a wartime alliance with Nubar’s Ramgavar (‘Democrat’) party. Their proposal was based on the capacity of Hunchak committees in several Cilician locations — Zeytun, Adana, Dörtyol, Hacin, Sis, Furnus, Marash and Aleppo — to stir their communities to revolt.149 It matched the plans outlined from the diaspora,150 and in the 1913 landing ‘plan’. Just as the revolutionaries had expressed the willingness to revolt without any Entente landing, as the possibility of landing receded,151 Nubar and the diaspora

147 On the openness of the whole frontier of the Armenian provinces, see NARA, RG 59, 867.00/465, Rockhill to Bryan, 21 Jan. 1913.
149 Ibid.
150 PRO, FO 371/2485, 41444, Armenian National Defence Cttee. of America to Grey, 23 Mar. 1915.
committees continued to press for participation in an attack on Cilicia into the late summer.\textsuperscript{152} Though these plans gained greater urgency with the increasing destruction of the Ottoman Armenian community, they were not in the first instance inspired by them, as the timing of the above correspondence shows. National liberation, unrealistic as it may now seem, was the aim of the revolutionaries from within and without.\textsuperscript{153} As for the Zeytunlis, they were not supplied with the weapons they requested, so it is impossible to assess whether the claim of 15,000 Cilician participants would have been substantiated, though such a high figure was in any case almost certainly a revolutionary’s fantasy. Yet the plan corresponded to Turkish suspicions, clearly reached the ears of the Ottoman authorities, and was thus a contributory factor in the forthcoming deportations.\textsuperscript{154}

Incremental deportations, which soon became a flood, began early in April from Zeytun after a small number of Armenian deserters attacked Turkish troops and then barricaded themselves inside a monastery in mid March. This reflected the small-scale and rather chaotic nature of such insurgencies emerging from within the Ottoman Armenian community itself, though an American missionary could report that Zeytun had been ‘provisioned’ for some sort of rebellion,\textsuperscript{155} and the Entente presence in the Mediterranean may have influenced a few ‘hotheads’\textsuperscript{156} who had certainly tried to incite the Zeytun population to general action, and in February had even planned abortively to seize the local arsenal.\textsuperscript{157} More importantly, reflecting as in Van the dialectical relationship between Turkish repression and Armenian resistance, the latter increased as the deportations were extended.\textsuperscript{158} This was partly caused by the enforcement of revolt by ruthless

\textsuperscript{152} PRO, FO 371/2485, 115866, Sykes to Maxwell, 3 Aug. 1915; 106769, 4 Aug. 1915.
\textsuperscript{153} Boghos Nubar’s Papers, ed. Ghazarian, docs. 1, 3. On ‘liberation’, see PRO, FO 371/2485, 41444, 23 Mar. 1915.
\textsuperscript{154} See n. 139 above.
\textsuperscript{155} NARA, RG 59, 867.4016/80, Aintab, 14 June 1915; YUL, Ernst Jäckh Papers, file 50, Bericht von Beatrice Rohner, 9 Sept. 1915 (the German missionary claimed that other villages were ‘innocent’, but Zeytun was ‘guilty’ — ‘schuldig’).
\textsuperscript{156} To borrow Lepsius’s term: see his Der Todesgang des armenische Völkes, 5.
\textsuperscript{157} According to the Armenian patriarch of Cilicia: Deutschland und Armenien, ed. Lepsius, 21 Apr. 1915.
\textsuperscript{158} NARA, RG 59, 867.4016/80, Aintab, 14 June 1915; YUL, Ernst Jäckh Papers, file 50, Bericht von Beatrice Rohner, 9 Sept. 1915.
activists; eyewitnesses reported that only two villages near Zeytun gave willing assistance to the ‘outlaws’, while most of the population, if unwilling to surrender the rebels, did not wish to excite passions. Amongst the leading opponents of the deserters’ actions were the majority of local Armenian civic notables who, with their families, became the first deportees. The events of the War combined with the strategic location, history and topography of Zeytun, and resulted in the CUP ending up once and for all with a ‘problem’ population irrespective of individual responsibility. The Armenians were replaced by a more compliant, ethnically compatible population of muhacirler, and the town was renamed Suleymanli.

On the Cilician coast itself during March, a number of inhabitants of the village of Dörtyol were publicly hanged on charges of contacting Entente ships in the Gulf of Alexandretta, and the male population was rounded up and put to road-building. Here, again, the local and wartime history of the region was important in determining the course of events. Like Zeytun, Dörtyol had successfully held out during the 1909 massacres. It was also the projected disembarking point for the landing of the revolutionaries in 1913. Dörtyol became an object of suspicion in the War as ‘almost all’ of its inhabitants of arms-bearing age had deserted the army (hence the roadbuilding as an extension of the simultaneous military policy of putting Armenian soldiers in labour battalions), and was further jeopardized by the behaviour of a few of its inhabitants. Alongside the periodic bombardment of Alexandretta and the communication roads and railways thereabouts, from the end of 1914 the British and French had also disrupted the functions of the port by periodically landing troops in and around it, cutting telegraph wires and destroying or stealing military stores. On 18 December 1914 a British landing party

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159 See n. 158 above.
160 Deutschland und Armenien, ed. Lepsius, 21 Apr. 1915.
161 Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeniler, ed. State Archives of the Turkish Republic, 23, Interior Ministry to Fourth Army, 20 Apr. 1915.
162 Lepsius, Der Todesgang des armenische Völkes, 11; Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, ed. Sarafian, doc. 123. The first deportation order: Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeniler, ed. State Archives of the Turkish Republic, 20, Interior Ministry to Adana, 2 Mar. 1915.
163 Lepsius, Der Todesgang des armenische Völkes, 11.
164 According to an Armenian connected with the local German consulate: see Deutschland und Armenien, ed. Lepsius, Adana, 12 Mar. 1915.
succeeded in blowing up the strategically important Dördytol railway bridge. We know that at least one of the executed Dördytol Armenians, and a number of others, had been in contact with the Entente ships, and though there is no evidence that there was any common plan unfolding, this was certainly the suspicion which led to the evacuation of the settlement since, on each landing, the Entente troops were gleefully greeted.

These episodes ramified in turn on other deportations and actions against Armenian communities from Adana and the Marash, for instance in the vicious arms-searches and incarcerations that occurred in Marash city, or in the deportations from Hassan Beyli. Likewise, the soon-to-be-deported inhabitants of the village of Furnus, north of Zeytun, with its Hunchak committee, were called upon to swear loyalty to the government at the beginning of the Zeytun troubles. The general military-strategic significance of the region spelled danger for every Armenian village in this atmosphere, as villages along military supply lines were forcibly evacuated in a radical expansion of measures that had been employed during the Balkan wars for small ‘suspect’ groups living near communications routes.

It almost goes without saying that government actions were grossly disproportionate. In April they were not yet standard throughout the empire or, therefore, genocidal, but they were potentially deadly, brutally carried out in accordance with what the Austrian ambassador called a ‘harsh morality of war’. Unlike the deportations from May, which were all directed towards the desert regions in the south, the first Zeytun deportees were sent to a variety of destinations, including the heavily

166 Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, ed. Sarafian, doc. 123; Deutschland und Armenien, ed. Lepsius, Alexandretta, 7 Mar. 1915, Adana, 12 Mar. 1915.
170 Fikret Adanir, ‘Non-Muslims in the Ottoman Army during the Balkan War of 1912/13’, unpubd MS.
171 HHSA, PA I 943, Constantinople, 3 Apr. 1915.
Turkish Konia in western Anatolia. Their treatment at, and on the way to, their destinations varied because in some places they were fed initially or allowed to be fed, in others not. At this stage the measures were similar to the simultaneous deportation of the Christians from Gallipoli and the Sea of Marmora, and the American ambassador Henry Morgenthau was broadly correct in surmising a policy of ‘breaking up a compact Armenian community . . . and by wholesale deportation which must deprive them of their ordinary means of livelihood locating them among purely Turkish villages where those who survive their ill-treatment need no longer be feared by the Government’. The move to general deportation, and alongside it the active murder of the deportees, required a further trigger. This was duly supplied in the further unfolding of wartime events in eastern Anatolia.

IV
FROM REGIONAL MEASURES TO GENERAL POLICY
If general deportation was not itself a long-planned move, that does not mean there was no pressure from different Turkish quarters for extreme measures and a final reckoning. Talât freely admitted to Morgenthau that the decision arose out of great deliberation in the CUP central committee, but this is less indicative of a plan than of the ongoing search for a ‘solution’ of the correct nature and magnitude. Radical Ittihadists both in the central committee and the provinces, particularly those stationed in more sensitive areas, pressed correspondingly earlier and harder. The border province of Erzurum had heard strong rumblings against the Armenian community since Sarikamish.

During the course of April regional committees for the ‘solution of the Armenian question’ were formed. Ittihadist ‘clubs’, the regional agents of the party centre, had been agitating for massacres since at least the time of the central committee meetings

172 Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeniler, ed. State Archives of the Turkish Republic, 24, Interior Ministry to Fourth Army, 24 Apr. 1915, ending deportations to Konia and redirecting further deportations from Cilicia southwards.
173 NARA, RG 59, 867.4016/97, Beirut to Secretary of State, 6 July 1915.
175 As Akg˘am implies in his Armenien und der Völkermord, 60.
176 Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, ed. Sarafian, doc. 55.
in the middle of March. On 18 April, just before the Van episode, a meeting was called in Erzurum to address growing tensions. At the gathering, prominent Ittihadists, including one of the overall leaders of the Special Organization who had come from Constantinople at the head of an influx of irregulars after the March meetings, agitated for an immediate massacre. They were instructed to hold off by the governor (a state rather than a party appointment) until instructions had been received from Constantinople.

The army was also at the forefront of pressure for draconian measures. On 2 May the military leadership requested of the Interior Ministry that Armenians in ‘rebellious’ regions in Van either be forced over the Russian border or dispersed in Anatolia. As well as addressing the problem of insurgency, it was argued, this would provide a form of revenge for the Russians’ treatment of Muslims during the War while vacating homes for those very refugees. A week later the Interior Ministry issued corresponding orders for Van and parts of Erzurum and Bitlis provinces in the face of the Russian advance, formalizing a policy which had already begun with the settlement, in the Mush district of Bitlis, of Muslim refugees from Alashkert.

In between, on 4 May, 200 Erzurum Armenians were arrested as the Russian left flank crossed the border in a two-pronged assault, one prong directed through the east of Erzurum province to the north-west of Lake Van, the other heading for the city of Van itself on the eastern side of the lake, both accompanied by Armenian volunteers. As one...

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178 Lepsius, Der Todesgang des armenische Völkes, 27–8, 35–7.
179 See nn. 127–8 above; HHSA, PA I 943, Constantinople, 15 Apr. 1915; for the passage of irregulars from Trebizond to the zones of combat, see ibid., Constantinople, 22 Apr. 1915.
180 Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, ed. Sarafian, doc. 56.
182 Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeniler, ed. State Archives of the Turkish Republic, 28–9, Interior Ministry to Van and Bitlis, 9 May 1915. For earlier Muslim resettlements, AAPA, Türkî 183/36, Pera, 15 Apr. 1915.
183 AAPA, Türkî 183/36, Pera, 6 May 1915.
force approached Van, and Cevdet’s forces began to retreat with many of the Muslim women and children of the city. The Armenians were evicted from the rural border region (the Passin district and the wider plane of Erzurum), whereupon their villages were indeed resettled with Muslims. The Armenians were initially moved westwards, with many gathering around the city itself. Thereafter events proceeded at a bewildering pace.

The arrival at Van on 18 May of Russian forces with Armenian volunteers as the advance guard seemed to confirm every Turkish suspicion. Certainly the Van Armenians looked to Russia for aid at this dire moment, and contacted Choi and the Caucasus to try to secure it, beknown to the central powers. The Russian army did come, slowly, while thousands of Armenians were dying in Van — but as an ad hoc measure, not because of a preconceived plan. Nevertheless, by disrupting the rear and occupying Turkish troops, the rising was instrumental in the failure of the Persian part of Enver’s pan-Turkish campaign, as were the Armenian volunteers fighting in Persia by their delaying actions at the battle of Dilman at the end of April. Equally important, both before and after ‘liberation’, an indeterminate number of Muslims were massacred. This added fuel to the ethnic fire, though the death toll was nowhere near the scale of 150,000 claimed as one justification for the subsequent deportation programme.

185 Walker, Armenia, 208. Many defenceless Muslims did, however, remain in the city: see Kieser, Der verpasste Friede, 451.
186 Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeniler, ed. State Archives of the Turkish Republic, 54, Interior Ministry to Erzurum, 27 June 1915.
187 Deutschland und Armenien, ed. Lepsius, Erzurum, 15, 16, 18 and 22 May, 5 and 23 Aug. 1915; Pera 30 May. Lepsius, Der Todesgang des armenische Völkes, 42–3. On ‘inappropriate’ deportations to the west, see Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeniler, ed. State Archives of the Turkish Republic, 32–3, Interior Ministry to Erzurum, 18 May 1915.
188 Les Grandes Puissances, ed. Beylerian, Paris, 8 May 1915; Allen and Murato, Caucasian Battlefields, 299. For German knowledge of Armenians escaping from Van ‘to unite with the Russians’, see Deutschland und Armenien, ed. Lepsius, Pera, 8 May 1915.
190 Pomiankowski, Der Zusammenbruch des ottomanischen Reiches, 147; Dadrian, Warrant for Genocide, 115.
192 Deutschland und Armenien, ed. Lepsius, p. lxxiv.
rival, an estimated 80,000 Muslim refugees fled to Bitlis on the other side of Lake Van.\textsuperscript{193}

During the conclusive days of the Van conflict (16–18 May), and as the inhabitants of Khnyss on the Van–Erzurum border were massacred in the retreat from the other prong of the Russian invasion, the Interior Ministry instructed the governor of Erzurum to deport those Armenians thus far evicted southwards from their homes to the areas of southern Mosul, Der-el-Zor and Urfa.\textsuperscript{194} On 23 May, as the Russians and some of the volunteers pushed on from Van towards Bitlis, this decision was extended throughout the provinces in closest proximity to Russian forces: Erzurum, Van and Bitlis.\textsuperscript{195} (For his part, Cevdet moved southwards and westwards into Bitlis in the face of the Russian advance, massacring as he went.\textsuperscript{196} He was joined at the beginning of June by Enver’s uncle Halil, the vanquished commander at Dilman. Between them they succeeded in repelling the Russians, and notwithstanding the deportation orders for the province’s Armenians, continued with massive, indiscriminate murder on the spot among the Armenian and Nestorian population, though they were temporarily held up by knock-on Armenian resistance at Mush and Sasun.)\textsuperscript{197}

A plausible explanation for the absence of comprehensive anti-Armenian measures up to this point is Talât’s own claim that he feared the international condemnation general deportation would bring.\textsuperscript{198} His account is tellingly free of moral scruple, and finds indirect substantiation in the post-war testimony of the German chief of staff of the Ottoman high command.\textsuperscript{199} It is further reinforced by chronology. On 24 May, at Russian instigation, the Entente issued a declaration promising to hold Ottoman leaders and officials accountable for atrocities against

\textsuperscript{193} AAPA, Türkei 183/6, Wangenheim to Foreign Office, 18 May 1915.
\textsuperscript{194} Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeni, ed. State Archives of the Turkish Republic, 32–3, Interior Ministry to Erzurum, 18 May 1915. On Khnyss, see Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, ed. Sarafian, nos. 53, 57.
\textsuperscript{195} Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeni, ed. State Archives of the Turkish Republic, 33–4, Interior Ministry to Erzurum, Van and Bitlis, 23 May 1915.
\textsuperscript{196} On the Russian advance, see n. 184 above; see also Deutschland und Armenien, ed. Lepsius, Mosul, 10 June 1915.
\textsuperscript{197} Walker, Armenia, 211–12, 222. Mush and Sasun had been specified for the earlier, targeted deportations conceived early in May: see n. 182 above.
\textsuperscript{198} Kasim, Talât Pasa’nın Aamları, 82, cited in Göçek, ‘Reading Genocide’.
\textsuperscript{199} Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, 24 July 1921, where it is suggested that the CUP knew deportations would be used as propaganda. And the German embassy had long counselled the CUP leaders that this would be the case.
Christians.200 From the very next day, eyewitnesses suggest that the atrocities intensified still further.201 On 26 May, the Supreme Military Command contacted the Interior Ministry, referring to an oral decision for the deportation of Armenians from the eastern vilayets, Zeytun, and other areas of high Armenian concentration, to the region south of the Diyarbakır vilayet, the Euphrates valley, Urfa and Süleymaniye.202 On the same day Talât sought the enactment of legislation authorizing deportations. Pursuant to these two communiqués, a ‘provisional law’ was promulgated on 27 May, permitting the military authorities to order deportations in the interests of ‘security’ and ‘military necessity’.203

The circumstances surrounding these developments were truly poisonous. New elements of vengeance for the events of the War, the fall of Van and attacks on Muslims had been amalgamated with established suspicions of Russian–Armenian collaboration, and with a sense of the CUP having nothing left to lose since criminal culpability had already been invoked on the international stage in this the latest chapter of great power intervention in Ottoman affairs. There was nothing now — not even a practical rationale — to restrain the most vicious anti-Armenian tendencies as a ‘clean sweep’ began.

The very nature of the deportations is sufficient evidence of genocidal intent. Where the first anti-Armenian measures did not distinguish innocent individuals from ‘guilty’, the new ones did not differentiate between communities with revolutionary traditions or the great majority without, nor between border regions and the interior. Unlike the first Zeytun deportees, the Armenians were not to be sent to places where settlement was possible, if difficult; they were sent, defenceless and without provision or the means of subsistence, to desert regions where natural attrition could take its deadly toll. This was not all. In the orgies of murder, rape, mutilation, kidnap and theft that accompanied the Erzurum deportations from the beginning of June, the desire of the radicals for massacre was also fulfilled as

201 ADNA, Correspondence Armenie 1915, vol. I, Aivazian to Nubar 8/15 July; also Nubar to Moutafoff, 4 Aug. 1915.
202 For the text of the Military Command’s communiqué, see Gürün, *Armenian File*, 206.
203 *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeniler*, ed. State Archives of the Turkish Republic, 30–2, 30 May 1915; Dadrian, *History of the Armenian Genocide*, 221.
irregulars and Kurdish and other Muslim tribesmen, alongside some units of the army, descended on the deportees at strategic points. Barely 20 per cent of the deportees from this phase of the deportation programme would reach their desert destinations. The twin track of measures — deportation and accompanying massive killing — was repeated throughout the expulsions from eastern Anatolia, though not in the western provinces, where the deportees passed relatively unmolested to their desert fates.

By late May, after a series of stages of radicalization in Turkish policy, the move to a decision for general deportation was probably not a question of the shedding of any vestige of moral restraint. It was more a matter of logistics, of concern for Turkey’s image, and even perhaps of imagination, in terms of finally seizing the moment to ‘solve the Armenian question’. At the same time we should not, conversely, imagine that as soon as Talât and Enver opted for general measures they decided that each and every Armenian should die. There are two reasons for this. First, the death of every single Armenian was not crucial for the fulfilment of the aim of destroying the Armenian national presence in Anatolia and Cilicia. Given the small pockets of Armenians remaining across the empire after the War, and given the practice of allowing some converted Armenians to remain in situ, there was clearly space in the policy to allow for a few isolated and therefore irrelevant survivors. There was even space for tokenistic orders to protect some convoys of deportees en route, safe in the knowledge that even in the unlikely event that the orders were observed, the deported communities in question would still be permanently dislocated and their members would, in all probability, die anyway from the conditions of their deportation and destination.

Secondly, it is unlikely that the CUP leaders instantly developed a precise template of how their inherently murderous scheme would unfold across the empire. A discrete decision for total murder, as endlessly debated in the historiography of the Nazi

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204 Deutschland und Armenien, ed. Lepsius, Erzurum, 18 June and 23 August 1915, report by the German Lt. Col. Stange, who had led Special Organization detachments at the beginning of the war.
205 Kévorkian, ‘Le Sort des déportés arméniens ottomans’, 11–12, 16; Kaiser, At the Crossroads of Der Zor, 10.
206 Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeniler, ed. State Archives of the Turkish Republic, 44, Interior Ministry to Diyarbakır, Mamuret-ul-Asis and Bitlis, 14 June 1915.
'final solution',\(^{207}\) is a product of the *ex post facto* ruminations of genocide scholars. Logistical decisions still remained to be made in the following months concerning the pattern and schedule of the deportations after 26 May. Indeed, the provisional nature of the establishment of the desert concentration camps in the south for those Armenians that survived the deportations suggests the ongoing, rather improvised nature of the whole destruction process.\(^{208}\) The scope of deportations was continually expanded within Anatolia until the end of the summer, and into Thrace in the autumn.

If we are, nevertheless, to seek a point by which it is possible to speak of an accepted practice of general destruction — of which outright murder on a massive scale was an integral part — that was maintained and extended until over a million Armenians were dead, we might consider the prisoners incarcerated in Constantinople (24–26 April) and deported to Ankara. With very few exceptions they were murdered, but only from mid June.\(^{209}\) By that time, Cevdet was turning Bitlis into a charnel house and the slaughter of the Erzurum Armenians was fully underway.\(^{210}\) The latter was given euphemistic sanction on 14 June by Talât’s authorization of the killing of resistors and escapees in the deportation columns,\(^{211}\) and was pursuant to the logic he outlined three days later to a member of the German embassy staff. On 17 June Talât averred the Porte’s intention to use the cover of war to finish for good with its ‘inner enemies’, thereby avoiding the problems of external diplomatic interference.\(^{212}\) Shortly before, on 9 June, Talât’s Ministry of the Interior had directed the governor of Erzurum to auction off the property of the deported Armenians of the province:\(^{213}\) they were clearly not expected to return.

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\(^{207}\) See below.

\(^{208}\) Kévorkian, ‘Le Sort des déportés arméniens ottomans’; Kaiser, *At the Crossroads of Der Zor*.


\(^{210}\) *Deutschland und Armenien*, ed. Lepsius, Erzurum, 18 June 1915.

\(^{211}\) *Osmanli Belgelerinde Ermeniler*, ed. State Archives of the Turkish Republic, 43, Interior Ministry to Erzurum, 14 June 1915.

\(^{212}\) AAPA, Türkei 183/37, Pera, 17 June 1915.

\(^{213}\) Sinasi Orel and Sâreyya Yuca, *The Talât Pasha ‘Telegrams’: Historical Fact or Armenian Fiction?* (Nicosia, 1986), 119, Interior Ministry to Erzurum (Tahsin Bey), 9 June 1915.
Yet if general deportation was an exceptional initiative, it was also a radicalized continuation of earlier traditions of deportation and banishment, and it is unlikely that the CUP leaders perceived quite so sharply the dividing line that has been drawn in recent genocide scholarship between the first deportations from Cilicia and those from Anatolia. In the latter deportations, traditions of population engineering and punitive dispersal were fused with another existing practice: that of collective ‘reprisal’ massacre, as perfected in the border regions. A continuum of another sort can be superimposed on Armenian actions in 1914–15.

V

ASSESSING THE ARMENIAN NATIONALISTS

The distinction between acts of self-defence and acts of revolt was and remains blurred: who was to decide when and why to take up arms against the state, and how was the state to perceive the intentions of unlicensed arms-bearers in its midst? While to many Armenian nationalists and historians, the Van uprising was of the same desperate, heroic part as the famous ‘forty days of Musa Dagh’ in the autumn of 1915 (on the Mediterranean coast south of Alexandretta, where a community fled impending deportation to the hills and held off their assailants until their rescue by a French warship), and to the Turks they were simply two similar examples of treachery, the external observer might view them as different points on a scale with pure voluntarism at one end and choiceless desperation at the other. The pure self-defence of Musa Dagh would be at the latter extreme, the Van rising slightly less so. The planned Zeytun rising would be perhaps around the midpoint of the scale, while the behaviour of Pasdermadjian from the outset of the War might be regarded as much closer to voluntarism.

If not all forms of resistance were at the time responses to genocide, all were based on experience, including of discrimination and massacre, and on aspirations for the future. Nowhere is this clearer than in the involvement in the Cilician uprising plan of the resisters of 1895 and 1909 or in the participation in

215 Immortalized in Franz Werfel’s fact-based novel of the same name (1933).
the volunteer units of earlier refugees from Hamidian and Young Turk rule. That at the outset of the First World War some Ottoman Armenians were prepared to throw their lot in with Russia is not surprising, given the dashing of their hopes for a more secure, egalitarian society with the false dawn of the Young Turk revolution and the reform plan, and the fears revived by the fate of the western Anatolian Greeks.216

The very large majority of Ottoman Armenians, however, remained terrified of what any ‘provocation’ might bring. The Zeytun case and Turkish documents on eastern Anatolia show that some Armenians were coerced into action, and also that Armenian communities condemned the reckless behaviour of some of their number;217 and particularly that of their co-religionists in the Caucasus and Persia,218 who provided the driving force for action as they had traditionally done.219 Assuredly this was the established attitude of most ordinary eastern Anatolian peasants who feared reprisals out of long experience,220 and who went on, fully uninvolved, to form the bulk of the genocide’s victims. Leaders of every Armenian political party are culpable for not heeding the early voices of caution from within their communities, subordinating the interests of the Ottoman Armenian masses, ignoring their fears, and by default inveigling them in a nationalist scheme with which many did not identify.221 So we are not talking of a movement of national consensus, let alone participation; this was certainly not a civil war situation, as apologists for the CUP have contested. Unfortunately for the passive Armenian majority, the actions of the few contributed to radicalizations of CUP policy.

The Armenian political leaderships were not simply dupes, fooled into collaboration by Russian lies about future autonomy, though the Russian role in fostering an explosive situation does need to be highlighted.222 Not all were ready to believe French and British assurances about Cilicia: realizing the regional

216 On fears engendered by the earlier treatment of Anatolian Greeks, see Die internationalen Beziehungen im Zeitalter des Imperialismus, ed. Pokrovski, 1st ser., iii, Vorontsov-Dashkov to Nicholas II, 7 June 1914.
217 Documents on Ottoman Armenians, ii, no. 1903, pp. 49, 52.
218 Van Tosp, 9 Jan. 1915.
219 Sarkisyanz, Modern History of Transcaucasian Armenia, 119.
221 Opinion of Varandian, quoted in Pavlovitch, ‘La Russie et les Arméniens’, 479.
222 Boghos Nubar’s Papers, ed. Ghazarian, docs. 1, 82; Katchaznouni, Armenian Revolutionary Federation, 6–7.
interests of the two powers, the Russian ARF spokesman Zavriev knew blind collaboration was useless — Armenian claims had to be diplomatically ‘defended’ against both.  

But Armenian representatives had precious few cards to play, and the biographer of the volunteer leader Andranik identifies the resulting dilemma: could the Armenians expect territorial favours in a peace settlement if they did not make some sacrifices? 

Nubar had also reflected in April 1915 that ‘every oppressed people needs to comply with certain duties in order to be worthy of liberation’. His prescription: ‘a unified rebellion of the Armenians against Turkish authorities wherever possible’.

The promise of internal assistance to the Entente derived from the perceived need for Armenian leaders to contribute to overthrowing Turkey, in order to maximize the weight of their claims to territory. In short, they tried to prove to the Entente by the provision of force that they were worthy nationalists in the Darwinian international system that the ‘Great Powers’ had done so much to create. The volunteer battalions were integral to the bid. Their significance also guaranteed internecine strife, as there was to be later at the peace conferences, over which party legitimately represented the Armenian nation — thus the ARF sought to retain exclusive control over the Caucasus volunteers, while Nubar tried to help form a Russian Hunchak battalion.

Tellingly, Nubar came to understand the real significance of the volunteers. After the Russian–Armenian retreat from Van in July 1915 in the face of the Turkish advance, he recalled that previously the illusion had been maintained that the volunteers had at least fought courageously and saved lives. This illusion vanished in the light of [the retreat]. I had predicted from the beginning that the volunteers were a danger in pushing the Turks to revenge, though at the same time I

223 Die internationalen Beziehungen im Zeitalter des Imperialismus, ed. Pokrovski, 2nd ser., vii, pt 1, no. 765.
224 Chalabian, General Andranik and the Armenian Revolutionary Movement, 218–19.
225 ADNA, Correspondence Arménie 1915, vol. I, Nubar to Sahag, 30 Apr.
226 On the politics of this Darwinian international system, and the longer-term impact of the agendas of the European powers on intercommunal relations in the Ottoman empire, see Donald Bloxham, ‘Three Imperialisms and a Turkish Nationalism: International Stresses, Imperial Disintegration and the Armenian Genocide’, Patterns of Prejudice, xxxvi, 4 (2002).
could never have imagined that that revenge would reach such a degree of cruelty and savagery . . . If later, in the light of events, I rallied to the unanimous opinion of our compatriots of all parties, I much regret today not having resisted to the end. The Turks have cruelly made us repent of this mistake . . . This opinion is not mine alone; it is a general belief today.228

If the dangerous logic of nationalist calculation was not fully apparent beforehand, it soon became so, to the horror of most, like Nubar. Some observers, though, remained brutally pragmatic. Thus in May 1915, Arshag Tchobanian, the poet and secretary of the Armenian committee of Paris, pointed out: ‘Our compatriots are facing a great crisis which may be the last. The Turks and the Kurds can kill individuals only; they will never succeed in killing the Armenian nation. I have total confidence in the future of our people’.229 This notwithstanding, however, no matter how callous Tchobanian and others like him, and whatever the scope of their actions, nowhere else during the First World War was revolutionary nationalism answered with total murder. That is the crux of the issue.

VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Armenian genocide has been dubbed the first modern genocide. To borrow Zygmunt Bauman’s metaphor of destruction, the ‘garden culture’, it was an attempt to reorder a community in the self-image of the perpetrator by the forcible removal of the ‘problematic’, non-conforming elements — the social ‘weeds’.230 It was also a completely successful genocide in its own nationalist terms, for the Armenians who remained231 could not form a significant separate national group and many were forcibly assimilated into Muslim Turkish society. After the ‘cleansing’ of Armenians from Anatolia and most of the rest of Turkey, and the removal of the Arab provinces in the post-war settlements, it would be left to the CUP’s successor regimes to carry Bauman’s logic to its conclusion with only a little less brutality

228 ADNA, Correspondence Arménie 1915, vol. I, Nubar to Arakélian, 21 Dec., replying to the former, 9 Nov.; also Nubar to Kouchakian, 26 Oct.
229 Boghos Nubar’s Papers, ed. Ghazarian, no. 9.
231 For survivor numbers and locations, see the figures cited on the second page of this article.
by removing the remainder of the Armenian population of Cilicia, the Ottoman Greeks,²³² and then retargeting the Kurds.

The CUP had moved towards an extreme ethnonationalist position. Had their policy not developed into one of murder, it would still have boded ill for the Armenians, given that context. The CUP had, with the willing assistance of imperial Germany, attempted to sponsor uprisings amongst other ethnoreligious groupings in the territories controlled by the Entente. That they should imagine the Armenians as a group subject to the same pressures in reverse by France, Britain and particularly Russia is not surprising. The whole of the War in the near east and the Balkans was drawn along ethnic-national lines, and every imperial power was seeking advantage in their opponents' territory by offering incentives to nascent ethnic/religious/nationalist movements therein. The fact that such links did exist, though they were not quite of the nature the CUP imagined, was all the evidence that a paranoid and chauvinist regime required to confirm their suspicions of Armenian ethnic enmity.

In reality, the Armenians actually received least in the way of help from the Entente when they most needed it. From the internationalization of the Armenian question in 1878, and particularly in the immediate pre-war years, the Entente nations had involved themselves sufficiently with internal Turkish affairs for the appearance of their interest in Armenia per se to be great. The fact was that the territory on which the Armenians lived was important (particularly to Russia and Germany), as was the opportunity that suffering Christianity presented for influence in Ottoman affairs (particularly to Russia and Britain). The actual fate of the people was insufficient on the whole to stimulate any form of assistance or preventive measure. During the War, for both practical and realpolitik reasons (as with Britain and particularly with Russia), the Entente did not come good on their intimations of support. Arms and agitation did flow in from beyond Ottoman borders, and contacts between the Entente authorities and Armenian representatives endured, thus giving the latter unjustified faith in the longer-term intentions of the former, while sharply sensitizing the CUP.

The element of state 'security' should not, though, be singled out above all others in the Turkish move towards killing

Armenians. Had a definition of national security, however
paranoid, been the only reason for acting against the Armenians,
the result might have been more like, for example, the Tsarist
deportations of ethnic Germans, Jews, Poles, Latvians or
Lithuanians from areas near the eastern front during 1915.
‘Security’ only assumed its significance because of the linkage
in CUP thought with the drive for ethnic homogeneity and
national territorial integrity in the ‘heartlands’ of the Ottoman
empire, and political and economic independence for Turks as
an ethnic-national group. Armenians in Cilicia and eastern
Anatolia were already seen as obstacles to each of these ends.
And with Entente military advances and the very real Turkish
fears of their implications for the empire, the presence of an
internal ‘alien’ element was no longer just an obstacle, it
seemed an immediate threat. The involvement of some Ottoman
Armenians and the Armenian Caucasus and diaspora community
with the war effort gave sustenance to the notion of a common
plot against Turkey from within and without.

Once the strategic city of Van had been ‘liberated’, the dis-
tinction between innocent and ‘guilty’ Armenians was rendered
meaningless both ideologically and practically in CUP eyes.
Now, even if not all, or only a small minority of, Armenians were
active enemies, all would benefit from the situation which some
of their number had brought about. That, and the feared prospect
of Armenians joining with Entente forces, could be forestalled
if the Armenian population was once and for all physically
removed. This would leave Muslims in sole occupation of the
land — and, as important, of Armenian property — and would
also render redundant any Russian claim to a protectorate. And
even if (as some officials could discern) the Van Armenians had
only risen in self-defence, they still represented an obstacle to
the prosecution of the War in the short term, and an ethnically
defined challenge to Turkish authority in Anatolia in the long
term. Talât’s shameless propagandizing about the ‘Armenian
threat’ therefore made perfect sense in his terms, as did his
claim that the deportations ‘were determined by national and
historical necessity’.233 The First World War brought everything
to a head.

233 Berliner Tageblatt, 4 May 1916 (my emphasis).
This interpretation in itself is not partisan; the question is to what use it is put. It is not to excuse Hitler that his delusions about the Jewish world conspiracy were real enough to him, or that the association of Jewry with Bolshevism was taken as self-evident. For the CUP the Van rising was a realization of a prophecy of Armenian treachery, but because of the repressive and often murderous nature of CUP policy up to that time, the prophecy became self-fulfilling. And any claim that the murder of the Armenians when it unfolded was not a genocide, simply because there might not be unequivocal evidence of genocidal intent prior to May 1915, is as absurd as the suggestion that the Nazi ‘final solution’ was not a genocide because it was not inscribed before the invasion of Poland or the USSR that every Jew was to be murdered. Since the historiography of the Shoah today is more mature and less politicized than that of the Armenian genocide, the question does not now really obtain, but it would be equally controversial for a scholar of the former as for one of the latter to pinpoint exactly when that genocide began. Indeed, for many years the scholarship of the ‘final solution’ was divided about the existence of a single specific order for the annihilation of the Jews.

Part of the interpretative problem is that ‘genocide’ is more a legal term than a historical one, designed for the ex post facto judgements of the courtroom rather than the historian’s attempt to understand events as they develop — that is, out of non-genocidal or latently murderous situations. In this sense, ‘genocide’ is a classic example of the past examined teleologically: a retrospective projection. As the epithet ‘genocide perpetrator’ has become the major stigma under international law, the politico-legal battle between, crudely speaking, representatives of Turks and Armenians, has raged around the applicability of the term, and specifically the key notion of intent. It may be said categorically that the killing did constitute a genocide — every aspect of the United Nations’ definition of the crime is applicable — but recognizing that fact should be a by-product of the historian’s work, not its ultimate aim or underpinning.

‘Deciding’ upon genocide is not like one man resolving to kill another, packing a gun and then locating and shooting his victim, where ‘intent’ is clearly illustrated by the prior wielding of the firearm. It is eminently possible to prove state intent to kill individuals, but genocide involves mass, sustained and
indiscriminate killing, and often a period of the expansion of murder from individuals, even in large numbers, to whole groups. Pinpointing the precise time within that period of radicalization at which a state framework that is demonstrably permissive of murder and atrocity becomes explicitly genocidal is extremely difficult and unlikely ever to be achieved definitively.

One scholar of a new wave to have debunked the idea of a unilinear progression from idea to act via a ‘Führer order’ in the Jewish genocide is Peter Longerich. To borrow from his analysis of the development of the ‘final solution’, if we think more along the lines of a ‘policy of annihilation’ we get the idea of a general consensus of destruction of the Armenian national community, a consensus which developed and was augmented over time around broad principles of discrimination and xenophobia, progressing from notions of removal by dilution and/or assimilation to physical removal by deportation and/or murder. Thus phases of acceleration and radicalization become more appropriate terms of reference than discernible, discrete shifts in intent.

In the historiography of the Armenian genocide the writing of reconstructive history has too often been subordinated to ahistorical ends. Interpretations have been artificially dichotomized into pre- and post-‘decision’ periods. The confrontation at Van is a prime example of the confusion to which such an approach can lead. Put plainly, representatives of the official Turkish nationalist viewpoint have tried to use those events to illustrate Armenian treachery and thus to ‘legitimate’ subsequent CUP policy. On the other ‘side’, while proving that Van was a result of Turkish provocation, scholars have argued that it must, therefore, have been a response to a preconceived policy of genocide, or at the very least that it gave the perpetrators the excuse they were looking for. Or conversely, like Dyer (“Turkish “Falsifiers” and Armenian “Deceivers””), they have depicted Van as bringing a shift to deportation in Ittihadist policy out of a clear blue sky.

235 Or conversely, like Dyer (“Turkish “Falsifiers” and Armenian “Deceivers””), they have depicted Van as bringing a shift to deportation in Ittihadist policy out of a clear blue sky.
existing CUP policy and the unleashing of its most extreme tendencies. This is probably insufficient for scholars who have been involved in a long quasi-political battle to prove outright prior genocidal intent. Yet Van is precisely illustrative of a process of cumulative radicalization towards a policy of genocide.

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