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Delicate Questions

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TURKEY

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Dear Peter,

A couple of months prior to my departure for Istanbul from the United States, it was my privilege to have lunch at the Institute for Advanced Studies with Bernard Lewis, author of The Emergence of Modern Turkey and perhaps the ablest historian of the Middle East now alive. At one point in the conversation, I took the opportunity to ask him whether there was any one topic that was so delicate that I should refrain from raising it with Turks until I knew them reasonably well. He replied without any sign of hesitation that there were, in fact, two such topics--Marxism, and the national minorities.

On both counts, as I soon found out, Professor Lewis was correct. Marxism was an important force in Turkish intellectual life in the 1970s, and it had a considerable and growing influence in the universities, in the press, in the labor unions, and in the Republican People's Party lead by the democratic socialist Bülent Ecevit. The military officers who seized power in 1980 blamed the anarchy of the preceding period in part on the hosts of young Marxists turned out by the universities; and, at the time of the coup, they moved swiftly to purge those universities of leftists and to arrest and imprison Marxist scholars, journalists, labor union officials, and politicians whose activities they thought a danger to the maintenance of public order. Many of these individuals remain in the army's custody today, and that fact has much to do with the half-hidden fears so evident among the young scholars I encounter at cocktail parties and on the university campuses. All of them have friends and acquaintances who are still in jail awaiting trial or release; many fear that their own past associations will soon return to haunt

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them.

In one regard, the problems with the minorities are similar. In eastern Turkey, along its borders with Iran, Iraq, and Syria, there is a sizeable Kurdish population. Unlike the Greeks and the Armenians, the Kurds have never been given official recognition as a protected minority. Under Ottoman rule, because the Kurds were Moslems, their status was no different from that of their Turkish-speaking neighbors; they were not then, in any meaningful sense, a minority at all. In the 1920s, all of this changed. Atatürk's foundation of Turkey as a secular republic resulted in the abolition of the Caliphate, the disestablishment of Islam, and the reconstruction of the political community on a national (as opposed to religious) foundation. In practice, this made of the Kurds a minority. But the leaders of the new regime were acutely aware that the bulk of the Kurdish population was concentrated in a particular region, and they were rightly fearful that official recognition of the Kurds as a minority would be the first step in a process leading to the establishment of an independent Kurdistan; so, Atatürk and his ministers chose to treat the Kurds as if they were in fact Turkish. Indeed, to this day, the Kurds are called--in official parlance--"the mountain Turks."

Not so long ago, scholars enjoying the government's favor were spilling a great deal of ink in attempting to demonstrate that the Indo-European language spoken by the Kurds is, in reality, a dialect of Turkish (which is, of course, related to Finnish, Hungarian, Mongolian, Korean, and Japanese--and is not Indo-European at all). Little is said on that subject now, but the Kurds of Turkey are still not allowed to publish anything in their own language; and the language of education--even at the elementary level--is always Turkish, never Kurdish. In a haphazard and ineffectual fashion, the government is intent on making them Turks. From time to time, for one reason or another, the more warlike among the Kurds of Turkey follow the example set by many of their fellow Kurds in Iran and Iraq and rise up in rebellion. During the period of the anarchy, there was considerable violence in the areas inhabited by the Kurds--and the troubles have not ceased. In such matters, the press here is allowed to report only what the military allows it to report--but, occasionally, one learns of Turkish soldiers being killed by bandits or guerrillas in the eastern provinces.

The Armenians are another matter. There is at least one Armenian village surviving in Anatolia, and there may be more. But, like the Greeks, the Armenians remaining in Turkey are nearly all concentrated in Istanbul; they do not pose a threat to the territorial integrity of the state. Thus, if the situation of the Armenians remains a delicate topic here, it is because of the activities of those within the Armenian diaspora abroad. Those activities are, in turn, linked with events that took place seventy years ago and more.

I

Nearly a decade has passed since the historian Gwynne Dyer set out to review the evidence available regarding the massacres suffered in the 1890s and again in 1915 by the Armenian population of eastern Anatolia. She began her review of the secondary literature with the following observation.

Any historian who has to deal with the last years of the Ottoman Empire will sooner or later find himself wishing desperately that the air could be cleared on the subject of the Ottoman Armenians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and especially the deportations and massacres of 1915. Armenians, the victims of a national trauma comparable in this century only to that of the European Jews, cannot stop remembering, and their conviction that the destruction of the Ottoman Armenians was the unprovoked result of cold-blooded calculation by the Turkish Government is largely accepted in Europe. The almost unanimous Turkish reaction has been to try to forget the whole episode, and when that becomes impossible to seek complete justification for the holocaust in allegations of wholesale disloyalty, treason and revolt by the Ottoman Armenians in the gravest crisis in the history of the Turkish nation--allegations wholly true as far as Armenian sentiment went, only partly true in terms of overt acts, and totally insufficient as a justification for what was done.

She goes on to mention two partial exceptions to the rule (one Turk, and one Armenian), but then adds that "the great majority of Turkish and Armenian historians remain frozen on this issue in the attitudes their predecessors had already adopted by 1916. The succeeding years have provided much diversion to attract public attention elsewhere, but still the barrage of accusations and counter-accusations rolls on, no longer in the foreground of public debate but conducted with undiminished vigour in terms entirely unchanged over half a century."¹

Gwynne Dyer's description of the character of the bulk of the scholarship dealing with the Armenian question is impeccable. What is perhaps most astonishing about it is the manner in which even able and balanced scholarly presentations are sometimes quite unexpectedly interrupted by the assertion of bizarre conclusions in no way justified by any of the evidence presented. Let me take one example. Twenty-two years ago, Louise Nabalanian published a book on the rise of Armenian nationalism in the 19th century and on the revolutionary movements it spawned. It is a perfectly competent, if somewhat dull scholarly monograph. At one point, she describes the capture by Ottoman

1. Gwynne Dyer, "Turkish 'Falsifiers' and Armenian 'Deceivers': Historiography and the Armenian Massacres," Middle Eastern Studies 12 (1976) 99-107.

soldiers of some Armenian revolutionaries associated with the Armenakan Party. The event took place in 1889. These Armenians had attended a conspiratorial gathering just across the border in Persia; and now, disguised in Kurdish garb, they were making their way back, bringing guns and ammunition to their comrades in eastern Anatolia. When stopped by the Sultan's soldiers, they refused to surrender their weapons, and there was an exchange of fire. One of the Armenians was killed; one was captured and later tortured to death--while the third managed to escape. Unfortunately, he left a diary behind that revealed (and perhaps exaggerated) the size and seriousness of the Armenian revolutionary movement then in existence. In response, Sultan Abdül Hamid II took steps to head off any Armenian uprising that might come about. In particular, he ordered the creation of irregular Kurdish cavalry units modelled on the Cossacks used so effectively by the Russian army. These Hamidiye were subsequently given relatively free rein in the eastern provinces, and in the 1890s they preyed on the various Armenian villages of the region. On a number of occasions, they committed massacres within those villages--and did so with impunity.

Louise Nabaldanian lays out the evidence linking the capture of the three members of the Amerakan Party with the policy adopted by the Sultan and then adds a startling conclusion--which she does nothing to prove.

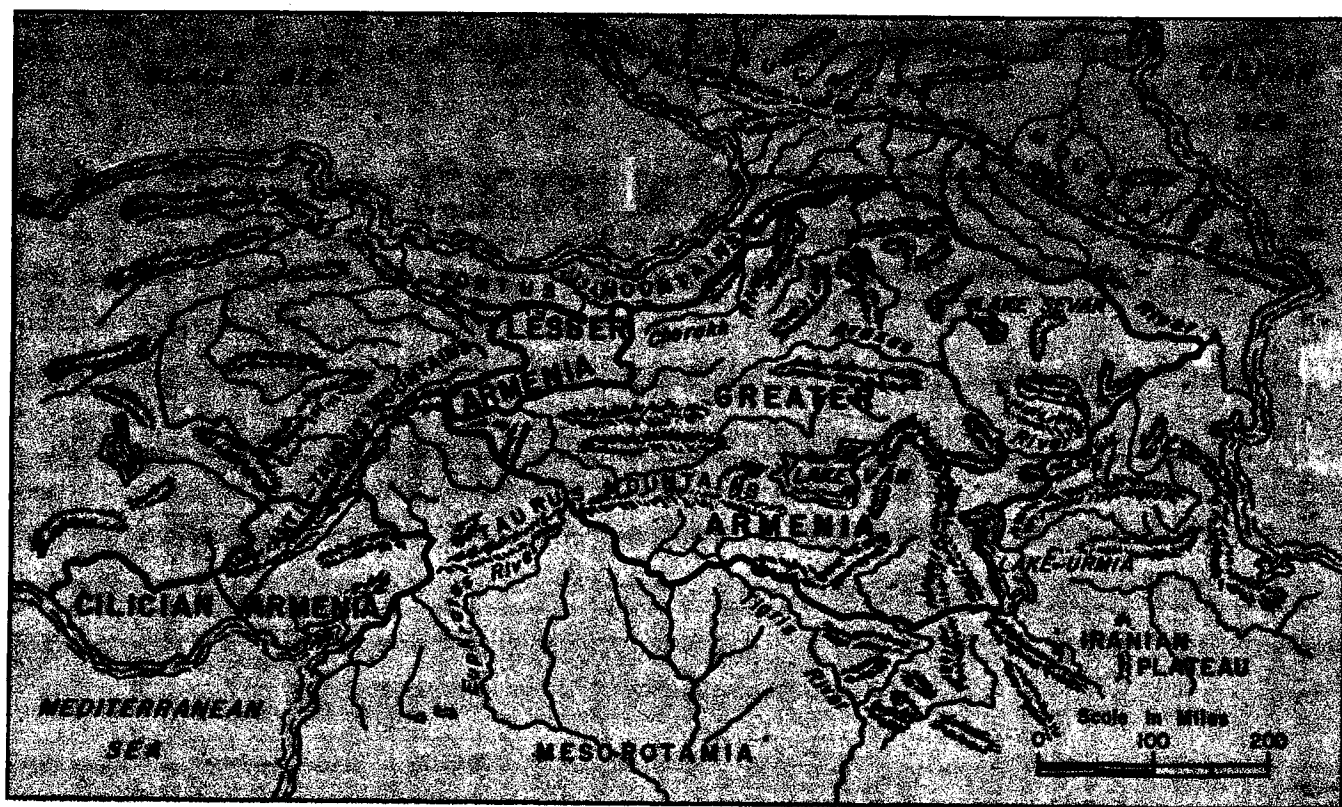
The repressive measures of the government were part of a program that went beyond the stamping-out of revolutionaries. It became apparent that the Porte, as part of its plan for Islamic revival, had intentions of placing all Armenians--men, women, and children, both guilty and innocent--into a single category marked for extinction. The Porte aimed at the destruction of the whole Christian nation. In pursuit of this cruel policy, a series of organized massacres commenced in 1894 and continued through 1895 and 1896. Thousands of unarmed Armenians were the helpless victims of these brutal crimes. The exact number of dead cannot be accurately determined, but the numbers vary from conservative figures of about 50,000 to as high as 300,000 persons.²

That there were massacres there can be no doubt. It is possible that as many as 50,000 were killed in all; there may even have been more deaths than that--though not anything like 300,000. But there is not a shred of evidence to indicate that the Sultan, the Grand Vizier, or any of the other leading officials of the Ottoman regime had decided to place "all Armenians--men, women, and children, both guilty and innocent--into a single category marked for extinction." Nor do the events of the 1890s justify this supposition. They do suggest, however, that the Sultan and his advisors were willing to employ indiscriminate terror in order to retain control over an increasingly restive Christian population within their domain.

2. Louise Nabaldanian, The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties through the Nineteenth Century (Berkeley 1963) 102.

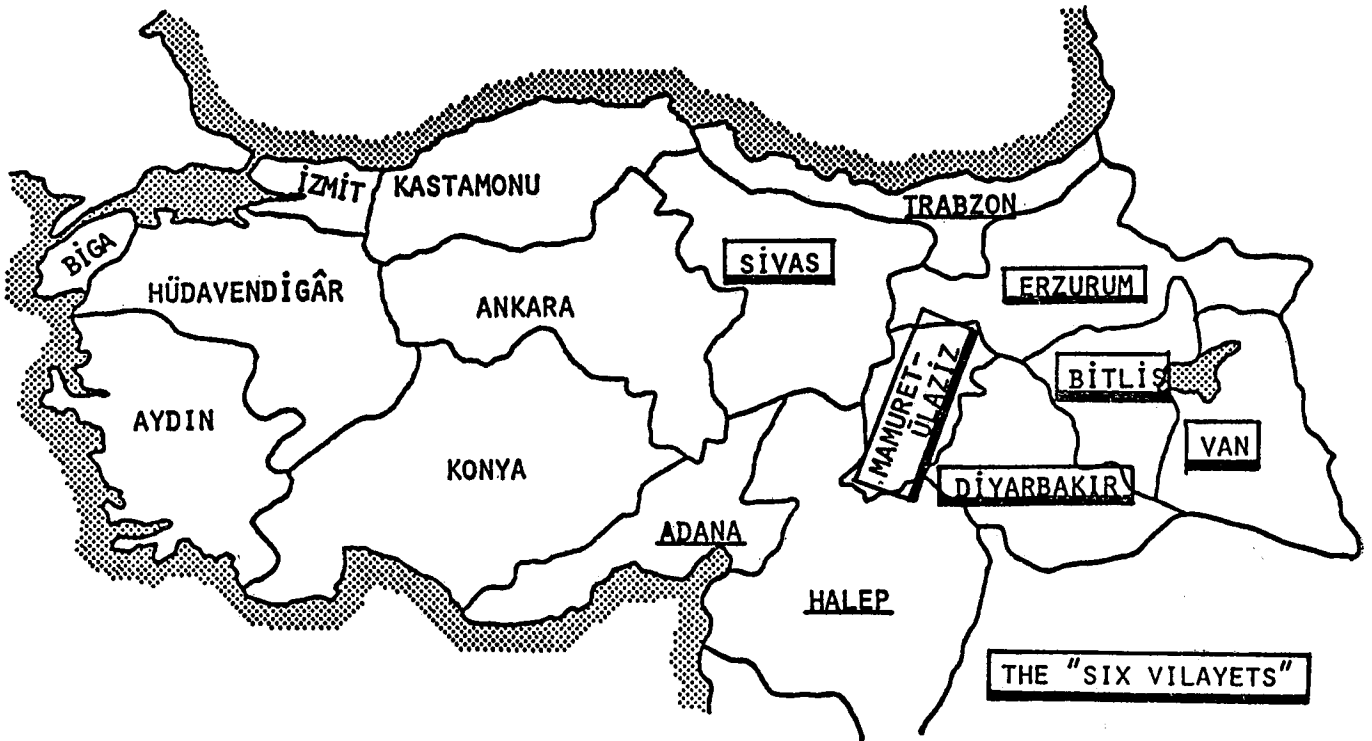
II

That population was spread over a vast area. Even before the Ottoman conquest of the Armenian plateau, a great number of Armenians had moved out of their ancestral homeland. Some settled in Constantinople; others shifted to Cilicia on the Mediterranean coast. There was also a substantial Armenian presence to the West of the Armenian plateau in the area to the south of Trebizond. At one point, this region--like the Armenian plateau and Cilicia--had been ruled by Armenian princes. It was for this reason sometimes called Lesser Armenia.

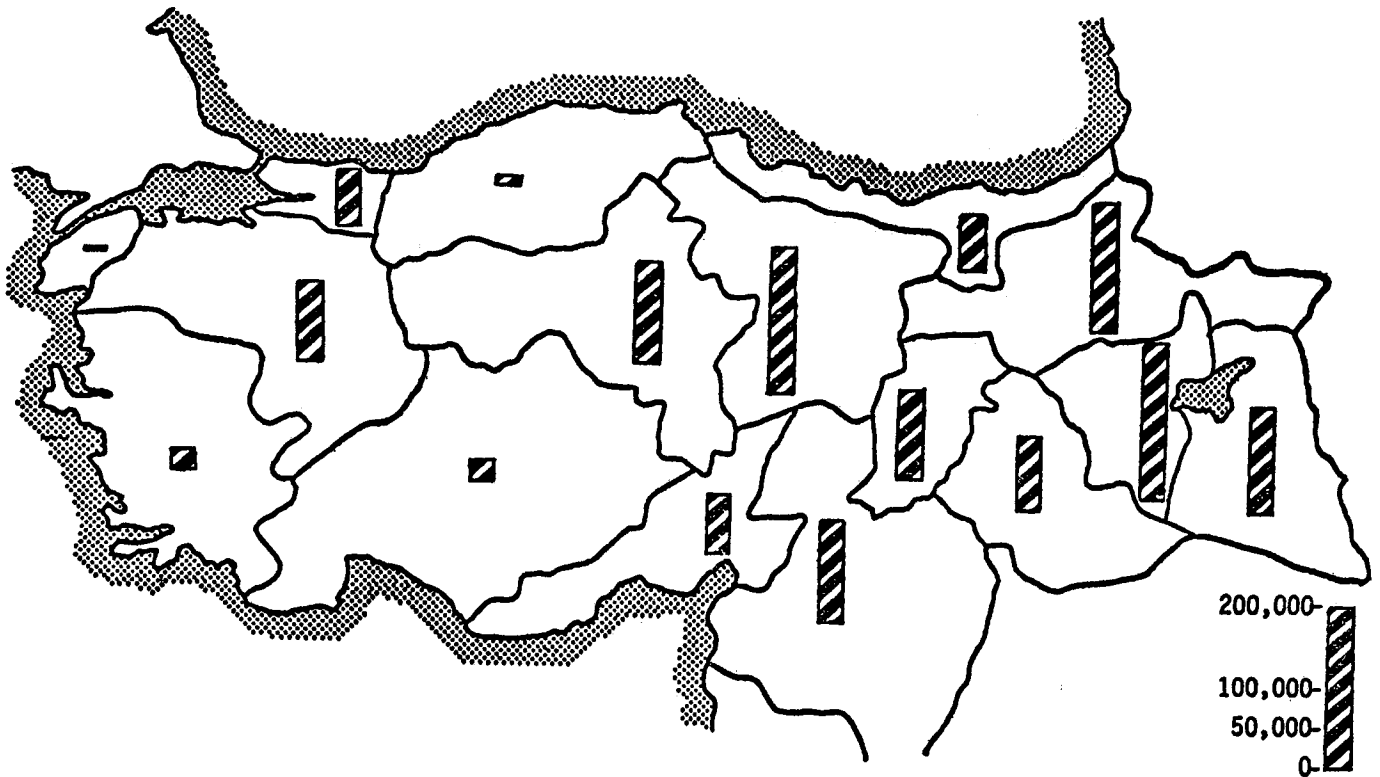


Historic Armenia

After the Ottoman conquest, the Armenian diaspora grew--as many of these monophysite Christians, like their counterparts among the Greek Orthodox and the Jews, took advantage of the Moslem disinclination for banking, commerce, and the industrial arts and adopted these professions themselves. In time, these Armenians bankers, traders, and artisans came to be a prop almost indispensable to the Ottoman regime. They were dubbed by the Ottoman ruling



Ottoman Anatolia



Anatolian Provinces. Armenian Population in 1912.

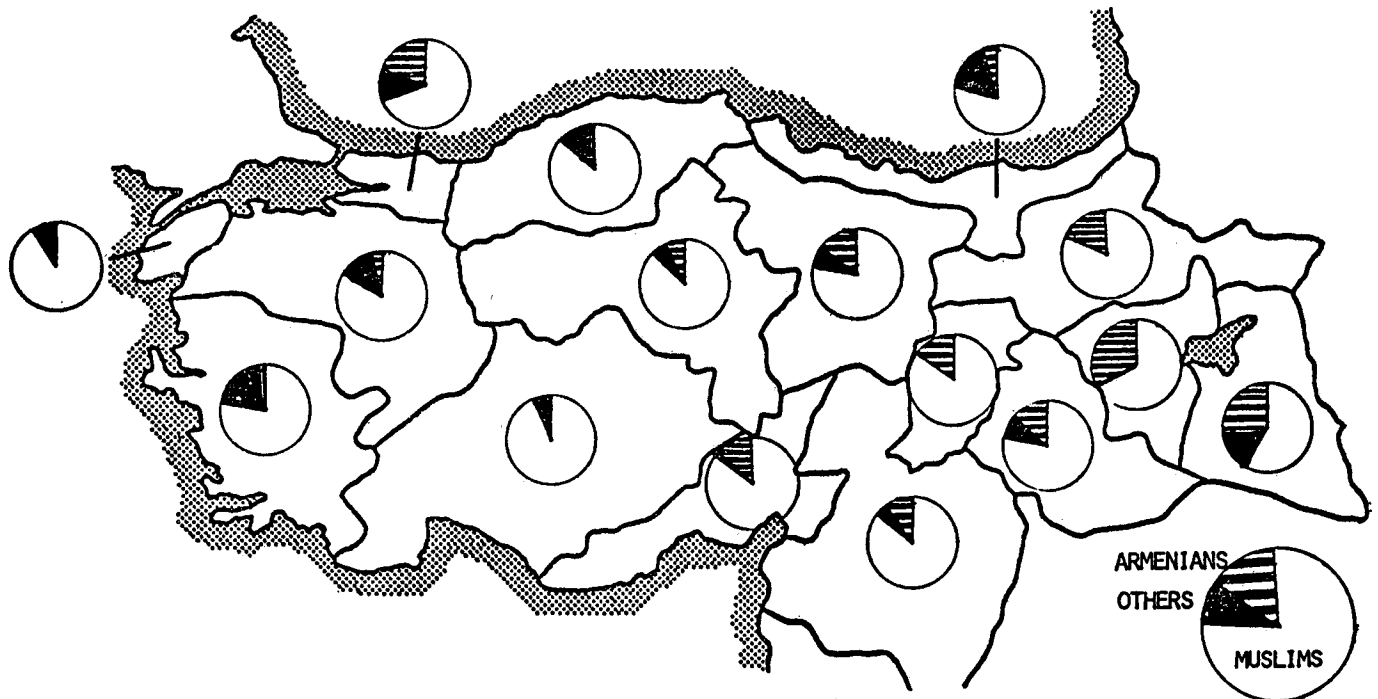
elite the millet-i sadıka--"the loyal nation"--and they became even more prominent after the 1830s, when the emergence of a Christian kingdom in Greece caused the Sultan and his advisers to treat with increasing distrust the Greeks who still lived within the Ottoman Empire. By the late 19th century, every third Ottoman official is thought to have been an Armenian; and members of the millet-i sadıka could be found in virtually every corner of Asia Minor. In fact, the Armenian population was thicker on the ground in the Ottoman province (vilâyet) of İzmit in Asia Minor opposite Istanbul than in the vilâyet of Sivas, Mamuretülaziz, Erzurum, Diyarbakır, and Van. Of the Ottoman provinces encompassing the ancient centers of Armenian settlement, there was only one--Bitlis--with an Armenian population density even remotely approaching that of İzmit in the far West.



Anatolian Provinces, Armenians Per Square Kilometer in 1912.

The Armenians were not alone in being geographically mobile. Over the centuries, great numbers of Kurds and Turks had come to live among them; and, in the nineteenth century, two sets of events added to the number of Moslems residing in eastern Anatolia. As the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans gradually gave way, Moslems fled from the newly established Christian realms of the region to Asia Minor--where the Ottoman government aided them in finding land. At the same time, the Russians gradually conquered the Transcaucasus, causing thousands of Turkish-speaking Moslems from the area to seek refuge in the Ottoman realm. Not a few Armenians crossed that same border in the

opposite direction when they found that many of their fellow Armenians were now under Christian rule. No one knows just how important these particular shifts in population were, but one fact is clear. By the latter part of the 19th century, the Armenians were a minority in each and every one of the Ottoman provinces. On the eve of the First World War, they were outnumbered in the six vilâyets that made up their ancestral homeland--and not by a small margin. The Moslems were in the majority by a ratio of 4.5 to 1.



Anatolian Provinces, Relative Numbers of Armenians, Muslims, and Others in 1912.

Indeed, Justin McCarthy's careful study of the census records from the last and most dependable Ottoman census--that of 1912--indicates that, if all of the Armenians in Anatolia had moved into the six vilâyets, they would still have been outnumbered by a ratio of 2.5 to 1. "If all the Armenians in the world had moved to the Six Vilayets," he concludes, "Muslims would still have been a majority. There were simply too few Armenians for a viable state."

3. See Justin McCarthy, "The Anatolian Armenians, 1912-1922," in Armenians in the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey (1912-1926) (Istanbul 1984) 17-25. All but the first of the various maps to be found on the preceding pages are drawn from this article. For a more detailed analysis of the population statistics, see Justin McCarthy, Muslims and Minorities (New York 1983). For reasons that are given below, I am inclined to follow McCarthy both in discounting the

To this conclusion, Professor McCarthy might have added yet another observation. Any serious attempt to establish an independent Armenian state would have required the expulsion or extermination of much, if not all of the Moslem population of eastern Anatolia.

III

In the 19th century, no one had precise and accurate statistics to go on, and those intent on creating an independent Armenia were not prepared to acknowledge in public that they were a minority in their ancestral homeland. Some of the Armenian revolutionaries seem, nonetheless, to have recognized the problem. I can think of nothing else that would explain why so many of them advocated autonomy within the Ottoman Empire rather than secession from it. They knew that their countrymen, comfortably ensconced in Adrianople, Constantinople, Brusa, and Trebizond, were not about to immigrate to the Armenian Plateau and subject themselves to relative poverty and deprivation in an extremely harsh climate. When these revolutionaries decided to aim at autonomy, they even had a model in mind. In Lebanon, the Maronites had managed to achieve something of the sort not long after the middle of the century--and they had done so with foreign help.

The strategy of the revolutionary groups was foreshadowed by that adopted by Patriarch Nerses Varzhadbedian and Archbishop Khirimian Hairig at the time of the Russian defeat of Turkey in 1877-1878. The Patriarch actually visited the victorious Russian general at San Stefano outside Constantinople and sought Russian protection for the Armenians. As a consequence, the treaty dictated to the Turks at San Stefano in March, 1878 provided that the Russian troops occupying the Armenian plateau would not withdraw until the Ottoman regime had carried out administrative reforms designed to protect the Christian population of the region; and it gave the Russians the right to intervene again in the future to protect that population from abuse. For all intents and purposes, Armenia was to be a Russian protectorate--a part of the Ottoman Empire in name only.

Unfortunately for the Armenians, this treaty was soon a dead letter. Its imposition rendered them suspect; its abrogation denied them protection. At the Congress of Berlin, held in July, 1878, Russia was stripped of her power to intervene unilaterally on behalf of the Armenians; instead, the Turks promised administrative reforms--and the Concert of Europe accepted responsibility for seeing that these promises were actually fulfilled. In

so-called "Patriarchate Statistics" presented at the Versailles Conference by the Armenian nationalists and in supposing that the Ottoman census statistics--when corrected for the undercounting of women and children--are reasonably reliable.

practice, this turn of events left the Armenians twisting slowly, slowly in the wind. As the Duke of Argyll would later comment, "What was everybody's business was nobody's business."

When Archbishop Khirimian, Patriarch Varzhadbedian's representative at the Congress of Berlin, returned to Constantinople, he preached a sermon at the Patriarchal Church in the Kum Kapı district. The Bulgarians had been given a proper hearing in Berlin, he told his flock. They were invited to the banquet table because they had brought iron spoons. But the Armenians had been excluded because they had brought along nothing other than paper. The moral of "The Sermon of the Iron Spoons" was clear to the Archbishop's listeners. If the Armenians were to gain their freedom, they would have to do something themselves to secure it. They might even have to imitate the Bulgarian komitadjis and the other guerrilla bands that had been so successful in struggling against the Turks in the Balkans. Archbishop Khirimian's sermon marked the beginning of what became known as "The Fatherland Movement." From that time onward, the Armenians of Constantinople began to show a growing interest in the welfare and education of their fellow Armenians in the backward regions of eastern Anatolia. The next time that opportunity knocked, the Armenians would have iron spoons themselves.

In the last years of the 19th century, there were two principal Armenian revolutionary groups--the Hunchaks based in Geneva, and the Dashnaks operating out of Russian Armenia. The first group bore the name of its journal: Hunchak, "The Bell." It was ostensibly Marxist, and it aimed at the establishment of an independent Armenia. The second group was an umbrella organization--a federation (Dashnaktsuthiun) of various local nationalist groups that had grown up within the Armenian communities of the Transcaucasus. It was only vaguely socialist in its rhetoric, and it sought merely to force the Turkish government to install a Christian administration in the Armenian heartland. Both groups were powerfully influenced by the rhetoric and tactics of the Russian populists--the Narodnaya Volya. Neither tried to foment a war of national liberation on a grand scale; both recognized that the Armenians could not achieve independence or even autonomy without considerable outside support.

To rally their fellow Armenians both at home and abroad and to secure effective patronage from the European powers, the Hunchaks and Dashnaks endeavored to advertise their cause far and wide. To achieve this end, they employed the entire panoply of devices that movements like the Palestine Liberation Organization have made so familiar in our own time. In Istanbul, they organized public demonstrations and conspired to assassinate the Sultan; at one point, Armenian terrorists seized the Ottoman Bank and took as hostages all those found inside. By this act, they were able to humiliate the Sublime Porte, to secure publication of their manifesto, and to arrange for their own safe passage to the outside world. In Anatolia, the revolutionaries encouraged the peasants and townsmen to rise up against their rulers. All of these acts were designed to create the impression in Europe that the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire were being driven by Turkish oppression to acts of

desperation; they were intended as well to provoke the Sultan and his advisers into reacting in a barbarous and unspeakable fashion. In this way, the revolutionaries would make it impossible for the more comfortably situated among their fellow Armenians to accommodate themselves to continued Ottoman rule; in this way, they hoped also to induce the Christians of Europe to pressure their governments into intervening in support of the Armenian cause.⁴

Within this scheme, the Armenians of the diaspora were assigned an important role. A great many Armenians had settled in the various cities of Europe in the course of the 19th century as their countrymen replaced the Greeks of Fener in Istanbul as the principal traders of the Ottoman Empire with the outside world. Many of these expatriates were wealthy and well-connected; and, even before the Hunchaks and Dashnaks launched their various terrorist campaigns, the Armenians abroad had acted to focus the attention of the literate elite of Europe on the plight of their beleaguered fellow Christians living under Ottoman rule. One statistic gives an indication of the effectiveness of these efforts. In 1886, The Times of London published fourteen articles dealing with the Armenian question; in 1887, it printed sixty-one articles of this kind; and, in 1890, one hundred twenty-two of these articles appeared. This increase in interest preceded the formation of the irregular Kurdish cavalry called the Hamidiye, and it foreshadowed the dramatic coverage that the European press accorded the massacres committed by the Hamidiye in the 1890s.⁵

In some respects, the Hunchaks, the Dashnaks, and the other Armenian revolutionaries were relatively successful. They did manage to gain the sympathy of a good many of their countrymen both within the Ottoman Empire and abroad, and they likewise contrived to make the Christians of Europe aware of the plight of the Christians suffering under Turkish rule in eastern Anatolia. Needless to say, these revolutionaries and their sympathizers within the Armenian communities of the diaspora did not hesitate to invent massacres and exaggerate the extent of those that did occur. The anti-Armenian riots that actually took place in Istanbul and the massacres actually committed by the Hamidiye lent credibility to virtually all of the charges made.

As a consequence, the European powers did intervene eventually to force the Ottoman government to meet at least some of the revolutionaries' demands. In 1912, the Gregorian Katholikos Gevorg V, who was resident in Russian Armenia, petitioned the Russian government on behalf of the Armenians--and his

4. See Nabaldanian, The Armenian Revolutionary Movement passim (esp. 110-111, 119, 168-171). See also the relevant discussion in William L. Langer, Diplomacy of Imperialism² (New York 1956).

5. See Robert F. Zeidner, "Britain and the Launching of the Armenian Question," International Journal of Middle East Studies 7 (1976) 463-483.

petition fell on fertile ground. At about the same time, he asked Boghos Nubar, the son of an Armenian who had served as Prime Minister in Egypt, to employ his connections in Europe to encourage the great powers to cooperate in the Russian endeavor. In the meantime, the leaders of the Armenian community in Istanbul did what they could to support this maneuver. Using the records of the Gregorian Patriarchate, they prepared statistics on the size and geographical distribution of the Armenian population within the Ottoman Empire--statistics designed to justify the plan being devised by their Russian patrons. That plan, when presented, called for the unification of the six Armenian vilayets into a single province to be governed by an Ottoman Christian or a European. There was to be an assembly representing Moslems and Christians alike and a gendarmerie similarly composed and organized under European officers. The Hamidiye were to be disbanded; decrees were to be published in Turkish, Kurdish, and Armenian; each community was to have its own schools; and, in the future, Moslem refugees from abroad were barred from settling in the region. A similar scheme was to be developed for Cilicia.

Tension between the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente prevented acceptance of the Russian proposal as outlined above, but a watered-down version was eventually adopted in February, 1914. By October, this, too, had become a dead letter. In that month, the Young Turk rulers of the Ottoman Empire entered the First World War on the side of Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire; two months later, they launched an attack on the Russian dominion in the Transcaucasus.⁶ In the process, they dashed Armenian hopes and prepared the way for a bloodbath that would engulf the entire population of Asia Minor.

IV

Initially, the Ottoman invasion of the Transcaucasus made some headway. But Enver Paşa, who was responsible for the campaign, had done little logistically to prepare for the winter to come. The result was a catastrophe: an army undefeated in the field succumbed to the weather and disintegrated almost entirely. As a consequence, the way was open for the Russians to invade the Armenian Plateau.

When the war broke out, the Gregorian Patriarch instructed the bishops and priests under his direction to hold religious services on behalf of the Ottoman homeland. The Dashnak press printed editorials supporting the Ottoman effort. These attempts to reduce the suspicions which the Young Turks directed against their Armenian subjects were fruitless. The Ottoman

6. See Richard G. Hovannisian, Armenia on the Road to Independence: 1918 (Berkeley 1969) passim (esp. 24-39).

government had long employed spies to keep an eye on the various groups of Armenian nationalists, and the leaders of that government knew perfectly well that the bulk of the Armenian population sympathized with the Triple Entente. They knew also that a number of prominent Armenians had crossed the border to cooperate with the Russian enemy, and they were acutely aware that the Russians were organizing Armenian legions intent on liberating the ancestral homeland from Moslem rule.

The prospect of a Russian invasion was not the only problem which the Young Turks faced at this time. In February, 1915, the British launched an abortive naval assault on the Dardanelles; not long thereafter, it became evident that this assault would eventually be followed by an invasion by land. Both in the East and in the West, the Ottoman Empire seemed to be on the verge of collapse. It was in this situation that the Young Turk leaders--under the guidance of Talat Pasha--decided to shift at least temporarily the Armenian population of Anatolia away from the regions likely to be subject to Russian invasion. They had every reason to suppose that the Armenians in these areas would welcome the invaders with open arms.

Just what happened to the Armenians of Anatolia as a consequence of this and related decisions remains and will for a long time remain a subject of debate. No one seriously doubts that many of the Armenians deported in 1915 were massacred en route. Armenian writers claim that 1.5 million of their countrymen were murdered and they almost all see this as the fruit of a long-contemplated, satanic plot to annihilate the entire nation. Turkish apologists reply that the numbers are wildly exaggerated and tend to blame local Kurds and convicts released from prison (because of a shortage of soldiers) to escort the convoys of Armenians. They also claim that, in the localities where the Armenians were numerous, they were responsible for the massacre of a good many Turks. Neither case is entirely plausible.

The Ottoman government may have condoned or even encouraged the massacres which did take place, but there is no reason to suppose that it, in fact, contemplated genocide. If the fear that the Armenians would rise up in support of a Russian invasion was just an excuse for the Young Turks to accomplish what their predecessors had been plotting for decades, they would have included the Armenians resident in Constantinople and in the other Ottoman communities of Europe--which they did not do.

Nor is there any justification for the claim that 1.5 million Armenians were murdered. The Ottoman census--unlike the statistics which the Armenian nationalists claimed to have compiled from the records of the Gregorian Patriarchate--was not devised to prove a point; it was intended to give the government the information it needed if it was to levy taxes and to draft the requisite number of soldiers from each locality. Women and children were

7. See Hovannisian, Armenia on the Road to Independence 40-68.

undercounted, to be sure. But, when due compensation is made for this fact, it is possible to present a reasonably accurate account of the Ottoman population--and that account indicates that there were a good many fewer than 1.5 million Armenians in Anatolia at the start of the war. When these population statistics are compared with the number of survivors known to have immigrated to the United States and to various European countries during or after the First World War, they indicate that the number of Armenians who died--including those who fled to Russian Armenia and subsequently fought in the Armenian legions against the House of Osman--should be numbered in the hundreds of thousands, not in the millions.⁸ In the same period, 2.8 million Anatolian Moslems lost their lives. This figure includes 60% of the Moslems living in the province of Van; 40% of those living in the province of Bitlis; and 30% of those living in the province of Erzurum. During the First World War, there was a general bloodbath on the Armenian Plateau.⁹ Many of the Armenians who were massacred or who died from disease or famine while en route to Syria or Iraq would have lost their lives if they had remained at home.

On the question of the massacres, something more should be said. The most important of the documents presented at the time of the Versailles Conference by Boghos Nubar and other Armenian spokesmen in support of the notion that the massacres were planned and orchestrated by the Sublime Porte appear to be forgeries. Indeed, if one recent discussion of the matter by a distinguished historian can be credited, there is no shortage in the archives of the Sublime Porte of documents recording orders specifying that everything possible be done to protect those being deported.¹⁰ If Talat Pasa and his colleagues plotted the massacres which did take place, they probably never put their orders in writing.

This does not mean that the Young Turk leaders cannot be held responsible for many of the deaths which did occur. Had they really been as concerned for the preservation of Armenian lives and property as the Ottoman documents suggest, they would never have ordered that hundreds of thousands of Armenians be deported to the deserts of Iraq and Syria. No one familiar with conditions in eastern Anatolia, Syria, and Iraq at this time could have seriously

8. See Kemal H. Karpat, "Ottoman Population Records and the Census of 1881/82-1893," International Journal of Middle East Studies 9 (1978) 237-274; Stanford J. Shaw, "The Ottoman Census System and Population, 1831-1914," ibid. 9 (1978) 325-338; and McCarthy, Muslims and Minorities.

9. See Justin McCarthy, "Foundations of the Turkish Republic: Social and Economic Change," Middle Eastern Studies 19 (1983) 139-151.

10. See Stanford J. and Ezel Kural Shaw, History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey (Cambridge 1976-1977) II Reform, Revolution, and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808-1975 315-317, and then read the exchange between the Shaws and Richard K. Hovannisian: "Forum: The Armenian Question," International Journal of Middle East Studies 9 (1978) 379-400.

supposed that very many of those deported would survive the ordeal ahead of them. Even if the Young Turks had been intent on making adequate provisions to feed, house, and provide medical care for a population they considered guilty of treason, the Ottoman Empire did not, in 1915, possess the requisite resources to accomplish this task. For the Armenians of Anatolia, the deportation orders issued in the Spring of 1915 were tantamount to a sentence of death.

V

As a consequence of the Young Turk decision to enter the First World War on the German side, the Ottoman Empire was dismembered and the Turks very nearly lost control of large tracts of Anatolia to the Greeks and the Armenians they had once ruled. Indeed, for a brief moment, after a bitter struggle and extraordinary suffering, the monophysite Christians of eastern Anatolia and the Transcaucasus possessed a state of their own. The Turkish nationalist revival lead by Atatürk--in cooperation with the Bolshevik regime which had emerged in Russia in the course of the war--was ultimately able to crush the newborn Armenian regime,¹¹ but the aspirations of the Armenian people to possess a homeland of their own live on.

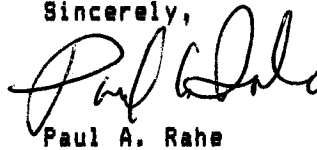
The Armenian revolutionaries of the late 19th and early 20th centuries sought to provoke the Ottoman authorities into committing acts so barbarous and so unspeakable that the European powers would intervene on their behalf; in this endeavor, they succeeded only too well. When I contemplate the situation of the Armenian population of Istanbul, I sometimes wonder whether the terrorists active in the Armenian diaspora today are not attempting to achieve the same end by the same means. In the last decade, these terrorists have assassinated thirty-two Turkish diplomats and international civil servants. As best I can tell from this vantage point, the Turkish government has behaved impeccably in reaction to these events; as far as I can see, it has done nothing to retaliate against the Armenian population resident here.

Whether this will remain the case in the future, one must sometimes wonder. When the popular press in Turkey treats the Armenian question, it generally does so in an hysterical fashion. The Armenian Christians of Istanbul are citizens of the secular republic of Turkey, but no one would think of calling them Turks. When they serve in the army--as all citizens of the republic do--they are never assigned politically or militarily sensitive tasks. The Turks, in general, view them as foreigners in their midst. If the

11. See Richard G. Hovannisian, "Armenia and the Caucasus in the Genesis of the Soviet-Turkish Entente," International Journal of Middle East Studies 5 (1974) 77-92.

anarchy of the late 1970s were to return, life could become extremely difficult for this particular minority; the same could be the case if an administration far more demagogic than the government of Turgut  zal were to take office in Ankara. There are, in fact, only two countries in the world that could hope to gain a great deal should there be a pogrom in Istanbul sufficiently barbarous to cause a serious breach between the United States and the states of western Europe on the one hand and Turkey on the other. It is not fortuitous that many Turks attribute the resurgence of Armenian terrorism in the last decade to Soviet support--and to the anger caused in Greece by the Turkish invasion and partition of Cyprus in 1974.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Paul A. Rahe".

Paul A. Rahe

Received in Hanover 3/5/85