

Armenian Terrorism: History as Poison and Antidote

By Justin McCarthy

Historians do not usually contribute to discussions of present-day terrorism. Middle East historians have especially avoided comment on Armenian terrorism, preferring topics more remote and less likely to shoot back. However, in considering Armenian violence, history cannot be ignored, for history is both the cause of Armenian terrorism and its only cure. Armenian terrorism is rooted in a false view of history and only by correcting that view will Armenian terrorism be defeated. I therefore wish to suggest a method not usually used to combat terrorism -the study of history.

There are many reasons that someone becomes a terrorist; perhaps few of them have to do with the cause in which the terrorist believes. Many here know the real psychological and economic motivations of terrorists better than I.

Nevertheless, each terrorist needs a *raison d'etre* philosophy and a cause for which he can kill and die. History usually plays a part in this, both because terrorists often look back to an idyllic past in which all was well with their people and because terrorists harbor historical grudges and hatreds. Whether they be the Viet Minh, the Mau Mau, the I.R.A. or others, terrorists who attack imperial powers usually remember real or imagined historical injuries and vow vengeance. But with most terrorists history is the smaller part of their justification. The greater part is their desire to free their people from bondage, so that their people can rule themselves and their land. Today's Armenian terrorists are unique in that history is their only real justification. There are no people to liberate. The aim of Armenian terrorists is vengeance for what they believe are past wrongs.

There cannot be said to be a practical justification for Armenian terrorism. Some who provide assistance to Armenian terror, such as the Soviet Union, wish to disrupt Turkey and NATO and they gain from Armenian violence, but the Armenians themselves do not, and can not gain. They can never reasonably claim the area that once was their homeland. Today, less than three million Armenians live outside the Soviet Union, and of these only a small percentage would ever migrate to a newly-created Armenia . More than eleven million Muslims, Turkish citizens, now live in the same area. Armenians could at best hope to be 10% of the population. Short of a major war that would kill the eleven million Muslims, an Armenian state in Anatolia is impossible.

Armenian terrorists also cannot be said to be fighting for a better life or freedom from oppression for their people or even to free their brothers from an oppressive political yoke. No one seriously believes that the Armenians in Turkey are politically persecuted and, in any case, the terrorists write of the Armenian citizens of Turkey as "not real Armenians," because they are willingly part of the Turkish Republic. If Armenian terrorists really wished to free their brothers from political bondage, they would be directing their attacks toward Russia, not Turkey .

Thus it is obvious that Armenian terrorism does not have a realizable political goal. Stripped of abstract political rhetoric and ingenious clamorings for a "return" to Erzurum or Harput, Armenian terrorism is purely a product of the desire for revenge.

The crimes for which the Armenians blame the Turks are numerous and varied, including all the villainies attributable to man, but two claims are of paramount importance Turkish refusal to accept an Armenian state in Eastern Anatolia and the supposed Turkish genocide of 1.5 million or more Armenians during and after World War 1.

These are historical claims. They are unquestioningly accepted as true not only by Armenians, but by the majority of citizens of Western Europe and America. They are also the reason that Armenian terrorism, including the murder of absolutely innocent diplomats and others, has caused so little moral outrage among non-Armenians. Because of these historical claims, Armenian terrorism is viewed as justifiable vengeance, not murder.

Treating Armenian terrorism by hunting down terrorists and checking for bombs at embassy doors is necessary, but it is also treating the symptoms while the disease remains. As long as children are taught to hate their ancestors' enemies, the seeds of terrorism will live on. The foundation of Armenian terrorism is bad history. In the end, only good history will cure the disease.

There is no time here to consider in detail the history of the Ottoman Armenians. Much of the history of the Armenians is, in any case, not known. One of the tragedies of scholarship on the Middle East is that independent historians have long avoided the Armenian Question. Studying the Armenians potentially brought with it little praise and much loss. I must admit that my own intention was not to study Armenians. As a demographer I was fascinated by the fact that histories of the Ottoman Empire had been written for 300 years, but no one had an accurate idea of who actually had lived in the Empire. I began studying the population of Ottoman Anatolia to find how many Anatolians were in each of the millets and what had actually happened to the Anatolians in the course of the wars that ended the Ottoman Empire. I first discovered that something was wrong with the accepted wisdom on the Armenians when I found that many more Anatolian Muslims had died than Armenians. That did not seem to be genocide.

My researches have since demonstrated a number of facts that disprove the usual contentions concerning Turks and Armenians. The facts were drawn from statistics on Armenian population which were compiled by the Ottomans as part of their population registration program. They were demographically consistent, accurate data, collected by a government that needed to know Armenian numbers for its own Intelligence. In no way were they politically or propagandistically motivated, and when they were collected, before the war, the Ottoman government did not expect that they would ever be used in arguments over an Armenian problem. They were, in short, the type of population statistics gathered by every government in the world. However, although the statistics have been available for 70 years, they have remained unused. Politicians, terrorists, and Armenian scholars have preferred their own guesses to accurate figures. Their guesses, of course, have supported their contentions

that millions of Armenians had been killed or driven from Armenia. Real statistics show a far different picture.

First, despite the presence of "Armenia" on nineteenth century maps and the assertions of European politicians who had no way to know the truth, there was no Armenia in the Ottoman Empire.

The area claimed as "Turkish Armenia" was commonly known as the Six Vilayets Van, Bitlis, Mamuretulaziz, Diyarbakir, Sivas , and Erzurum . In 1912, there were only 870,000 Armenians in the Six Vilayets. Armenians were less than one-fifth of the population of the Six Vilayets as a whole. In some provinces of the Six Vilayets, Muslims outnumbered Armenians six to one. Moreover, Armenians were settled all over the Ottoman Empire, not simply in the East. As many Armenians lived in the rest of the Ottoman Empire as in the Six Vilayets. However, even if all the Armenians of the Empire had come together to live in Eastern Anatolia, the Muslims would still have outnumbered them by more than two to one. The impossibility of building a modern state with such numbers is obvious.

Second, the alleged Genocide of the Armenians: Barring the latter-day discovery of a personal diary, no one will ever be able to prove what Talaat Pasa really intended for the Ottoman Armenians. We now know that, like the infamous Hitler quote, the so-called extermination orders of Talaat Pasa were forgeries. The only relevant Ottoman documents that have come to light indicate a generally solicitous attitude toward deported Armenians. Yet Muslims surely did kill Armenians during World War 1, and Armenians surely died during the deportations. No matter how many Ottoman documents surface showing benign Ottoman intentions toward Armenians, it is doubtful if Armenian apologists will ever accept such documents as accurate. Numbers present more indisputable evidence. They allow one to view the situation in Eastern Anatolia during World War I without the blinders of ethnic identity. Statistics have no millet.

The history of the events in Eastern Anatolia is no one-sided tale of massacre and deportation. In April of 1915, the last act of the long Ottoman-Russian wars began. Armenian leaders in the Ottoman Empire adopted two stances toward the war: The Armenian "establishment" businessmen, churchmen, and educators professed their neutrality, although they accepted conscription and other unavoidable duties as citizens. Armenian revolutionary groups stepped up their anti-Ottoman activities, including the stock-piling of arms in Eastern Anatolian cities. On the other side, far from professing neutrality, Armenians in the Russian Empire supported the Czar and Armenians joined Russian forces with the intention of taking Ottoman Armenia and uniting with their brothers.

Both the Ottomans and the Russians cleared border areas of part of their population in preparation for war. The Ottoman government, remembering Armenian support for Russia in past wars, decided to remove Armenians from potential war zones and communications centers. Whether or not hindsight and modern morality tell us that the deportations were a mistake, no one can seriously doubt that the Ottoman government had reason to distrust many of the Armenians of Anatolia. Because of the assistance given by the Armenians to invading Russian armies in 1828, 1854, and 1877, the Ottomans decided they could not trust the Armenians, much as the United States, with much less justification, decided they could not

trust Americans of Japanese ancestry in World War 1. A forced deportation of Armenians was begun. In areas in which Ottoman authority was weak and in war zones, Armenians suffered terribly. They were set upon by the Kurdish bandits and even by some Ottoman government officials. Interestingly, the latter were often Muslims who themselves had been exiled from the Russian Empire, their places taken by Armenians in the Caucasus. In areas to the south where Ottoman authority was strong, such incidents were few and the refugees arrived in Syria in relative safety (as attested by the Armenians themselves).

Before the deportations had begun, the first Ottoman thrust into Russian territory had failed and the Russians had begun a strong counter-attack. At the back of the Ottoman army, Armenian revolutionaries seized and held the city of Van, displacing thousands of Muslims, who became refugees. These were soon joined by 800,000 fellow Muslims, refugees from areas taken by the Russian army. By the time warfare ceased more than 400,000 Turks evicted from the Caucasus had been added to the refugee numbers. The Muslim refugees were persecuted by the same Kurdish bandits who attacked the Armenian refugees, and they were killed by Armenian revolutionaries and Armenian volunteers from the Caucasus. The fate of the Muslim and Armenian refugees was remarkably similar. War, bandits, starvation, and disease killed Turks and Armenians indiscriminately.

By the end of the Eastern Anatolian wars, 1.2 million Muslims from Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus had become refugees. More than one million of the Muslims of Eastern Anatolia had died, as had at least 130,000 Caucasian refugee Muslims. 870,000 of the Armenians of the Six Vilayets had become refugees or had died. In Anatolia as a whole, 600,000 Armenians and 2.5 million Muslims had died. If this was genocide, it was a strange genocide indeed, one in which many more killers than victims perished.

If the case against a genocide of Armenians needed any further proof, one would only have to look to Istanbul, the capital of the Empire and the area most under government control. In Istanbul, to the shame and guilt of the Ottoman government, perhaps 200 Armenian politicians were executed without trial. But all the rest of the Istanbul Armenians, who presented no threat to the Ottomans, lived through the wars. Their sons and daughters live in Istanbul today. Considering actual genocide in its worst manifestation, Nazi Germany, can one imagine Hitler sparing the lives of all the Jews in Berlin?

Any comparison between the Ottomans and the Nazis is ludicrous, as is the use of the word genocide to describe the actions of the Turks. What passed between the Armenians and the Turks was not genocide; it was war.

The war that engulfed the Turks and Armenians in 1915 was the last in the series of nineteenth century Turco-Russian Wars. It was those wars that destroyed the place of the Armenians in Anatolia- In the 1700s, the Russians began their conquest of the lands of the Crimean Tatars, expanding their conquests in the 1800s to include the Caucasus. The overwhelming majority of the population of both areas was Muslim. As part of their colonial policy, the Russians set out to change the demographic makeup of the area.

The Russian policy had two facets the deportation of Muslims and the importation of Christians. Deportation was advanced vigorously during both peace and wartimes. Between 1828 and 1920, more than two million Muslims were forcibly evacuated and an unknown number killed. Those who fled found refuge in the Ottoman Empire. In the process, whole nations the Crimean Tatars, the Abkhazians, the Circassians ceased to exist in their ancestral homes.

The other mainstay of the Russian colonial policy was the importation of Christians to the Crimea, the Steppes, and the Caucasus. Slavic Christians were brought to the Crimea and North Caucasus. Armenians were welcomed to the South Caucasus. Beginning with the war of 1828-29, the Russians promised privileges and autonomy (a promise still undelivered) to the Armenians, in return of Armenian support against the Turks. Twice, in 1828 and 1854, the Russians invaded Eastern Anatolia, each time favoring local Armenians, and twice they left, taking 100,000 Armenian sympathizers with them to the Caucasus, where the Armenians took the place of emigrant and deceased Turks. (The province of Erivan, the present-day Soviet Republic of Armenia, was 80% Muslim before 1828). In the 1877-78 war, the Russians took and held the Kars-Ardahan region, driving out Muslims and providing a home for 70,000 Armenians in the region, many of whom came from other areas of Anatolia. Perhaps 60,000 Armenians went to the Russian Caucasus in the troubles of 1895-6. Finally, the migrations of the World War I era resulted in an almost even exchange of 400,000 Armenians from Eastern Anatolia for 400,000 Muslims from the Caucasus.

Figures on refugee numbers are somewhat imprecise and are the subject of on-going research. However, we know that from the 1820s to the 1920s almost 600,000 Armenians went from the Ottoman Empire to Russia. Two million Muslims came from Russia to Turkey. Once again, the suffering was far from one-sided.

The historical truth is that Russian Imperial expansion upset the traditional balance of the peoples of the Caucasus and Eastern Anatolia. All the peoples suffered. In terms of number, dead and deportations, those who suffered most were the Crimean and Caucasian Muslims. If any people were the victims of genocide, it was the Crimean Tatars, victims in their own homeland of a planned extermination begun by Catherine the Great and ended by Joseph Stalin. Yet those who are all too willing to consider Muslims as the agents of genocide seem strangely unwilling to consider Muslims as its victims.

What I have related is, I submit, the truth, albeit in an abbreviated form. It is a story of human suffering that, like most such stories, has no hero and no villain, only victims human victims, whether Turkish or Armenian. But that is not the way the story has been told. Instead of the truth of a human disaster, a great myth has arisen, the myth of the Evil Turk and the Good Armenian. The myth has been perpetuated by stories of the sufferings of the Armenians. The stories are often true, but they never mention the equal or greater sufferings of the Turks. The myth has been generally believed by non-Armenians because it fits well into a larger, centuries old myth the Terrible Turk. To Europeans, who had feared Turks for more than five centuries, the myth of the Armenian genocide seemed just one more example of what they had been taught was the savagery of the Turk. It spoke to a prejudice that had been nurtured by textbooks, sermons, folk tales, and ancestral fears of the horsemen riding out of the East.

The false image of the Turks was too strong to be affected by facts. When Turks protested that their side should be heard and that their dead should be mourned just as Armenian dead were mourned, they found no sympathy and no understanding. No matter the evidence they presented, nothing they said was believed, and soon the Turks ceased their protests against the injustice. Under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, they busied themselves with the creation of a new Republic, assuming that their success as a modern nation would be the best weapon against the image of the Terrible Turk.

To a great degree, the Turks have succeeded. Politicians and statesmen in Europe and America have welcomed the Turks as friends and allies. However, Turkish silence has done nothing to kill the myth of the Armenian genocide. A vocal, well-educated, and media-conscious group of Armenians, believing in their cause and anxious that their children learn to believe as they do, have kept alive the false picture of the genocide. They have succeeded in perpetuating the myth and strengthening its grip. The false picture of Armenian genocide has become the only picture seen.

While I was writing this paper a book appeared in my mailbox. As they do to all professors, publishers send me copies of textbooks in the hope that I will adopt them for my classes. The book, *The Modern Middle East and North Africa*, by Lois Aroian and Richard Mitchell, is published by Macmillan, one of the largest publishers in the United States. It is obviously being marketed extensively with, I expect, a free copy being sent to every professor who teaches Middle Eastern history. Thousands of American college students will probably read the book.

The Modern Middle East and North Africa contains a section titled "The Armenian Demise." I will quote only a few sentences from it:

Armenians throughout Anatolia began marching southward or eastward into the Syrian desert wastes. Turkish and Kurdish forces denied them rest, food, and water. Thousands died on the way. Those who did not were often killed when they reached Dayr al-Zor on the Euphrates. Most Armenians caught in the east were killed outright.

The book goes on to state "Historians have not determined how many Armenians died" (a statement that particularly bothered me, since I thought I had done so). The lack of information on the Armenian dead is explained by the assertion that "the Ottoman government imprisoned and later killed most of the Armenian educated elite writers, teachers, businessmen, and prominent clergy who might have written about the event." In the end, despite the avowed lack of evidence, the authors found a number after all "Including perhaps 200,000 executed by the government, historians generally accept that as many as 1.5 million Armenians may have died." Some of what is written on the Armenians in the book is half true. Some is completely false. None of it is completely true.

Of course, one of the great benefits in writing a textbook is that you do not have to prove your assertions. An occasional reference such as "historians generally accept" is considered to be proof enough. Reading the text, one could be pardoned for thinking that only Armenians suffered, since only one part of the one sentence is devoted to all of the Muslim dead of the

time- "Greek, Kurdish, and Turkish noncombatants in Anatolia died during the war of hunger and disease, but they were not singled out for death in an organized campaign." No mention is made of Armenian or Greek attacks on Muslims, both of which were organized campaigns. Only two paragraphs are given to the entire Turkish War of Independence.

Unlike many books written by Armenian and other scholars, this book is not intended to be an Armenian polemic against Turks. It is a textbook, well- written and attractive. It will appeal to many professors and their students. Thus the myth lives on.

The examples of this type of historical distortion of the history of the Armenians and the Turks are many. The Armenian Question is seldom mentioned in print without half-truths and falsifications. In fact, in the United States and Western Europe we have seen a new wave of false history. Armenian apologists have succeeded in tying themselves to those who wish never to forget the suffering of the Jewish Holocaust, and the Armenian experience has been portrayed as a "proto-Holocaust." Television shows and newspaper articles have repeated and reinforced the old myth, accepted because Europeans and Americans have never been told the truth. A new generation of Armenians is learning the stories that will produce future terrorists.

The lesson is obvious-silence does not work. Historical lies, unless they are countered, will perpetuate themselves. As long as Armenian children believe that their great-grandfathers were murdered by Turks, some Armenian children will kill in what they believe is revenge. And as long as the world believes in Turkish guilt, little will be done to stop the killers.

The solution is a difficult one the truth must be fearlessly proclaimed. I say fearlessly, because one American professor, Stanford Shaw, and his family have already been physically attacked for his statements on the fate of the Armenians. Given the intensity of belief in the myth of the Terrible Turk, it may be that the truth will not be heard. Nevertheless, the truth must be spoken. Scholars, especially European and American scholars, must call for the independent and unbiased study of history. As they have begun to do, Turks must continue to open all archives and records so that this study can be made, demanding that Russians and Armenians do the same. There will be no quick solution and many years will pass before young Armenians realize that their cause is not just. But I believe that, had the true history of the Ottoman Armenians been widely known thirty years ago, there would be no Armenian terrorism today. As historians, it is our duty to insure that thirty years from now the same statement cannot be made.

I began by saying that the best weapon against Armenian terrorism is the study of history. It might be better said that the best weapon is truth.

Source: Justin McCarthy "Armenian Terrorism: History as Poison and Antidote," International Terrorism and the Drug Connection, Ankara, (Ankara University Press), 1984, pp.85-94.