

THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

The Young Turks
Before the Judgment
of History

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The Young Turks Before the Military Tribunal

In recent years a mass of archival material from many different countries has clarified some obscure aspects of international relations at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. But as we have noted before, Turkish archives remain closed to this day. Nevertheless, existing documents permit historians to reveal the realities of the Turkish political situation during World War I.

During the war, Young Turk propaganda strove to convince public opinion that Russian troops had abused the Muslim population of the Caucasian front assisted by Greeks and Armenians. A document to this effect was produced by the political department of the Foreign Ministry of the Ottoman Empire and sent from Constantinople to the Turkish embassy in Washington (394, 10/21/1915). During the war Hakki Bey, the Turkish ambassador to Berlin, in meetings and interviews also tried to put responsibility for these crimes on the shoulders of the Armenians. He repeatedly drew attention to Armenian cooperation with Russia. Mehmed Talaat (Pasha), tried to present the Armenian massacres as the sad outcome of racial antagonism between the Armenians and the Kurds.

The Ittihad conference convened on September 28, 1916 in Constantinople discussed, among other things, the question of the Armenians' deportation and its consequences. The Young Turk leaders attempted to justify their actions by pointing to the Armenian revolts and Armenian cooperation with the Russian army. Nevertheless, the conference did state that the Armenian population of Turkey had been treated atrociously. The conference decided to send a commission to the

places where the massacres had taken place to investigate the circumstances of the crimes (224, p. 246; 116, pp. 203–204).

But the Young Turk high officials would not let well enough alone. A fake document issued at Talaat's instructions misinterpreted the cause of the atrocities, blaming the Armenians for desertion and other anti-Turkish acts (193).

However, at the final conference of the Ittihad in late November 1918, Talaat admitted that outrages had taken place, but attempted to introduce extenuating circumstances. He said: "Measures taken against non-Turkish elements during the war were not strictly necessary"; "Naturally not all our compatriots, the Greeks and Armenians, were responsible for this." The great assassin tried to save his skin by putting the blame on other Young Turk leaders. Moreover, he succeeded in expelling Ismail Enver Pasha from the party, but by then Enver had fled Constantinople.

Ismet Pasha, and later Fethi Pasha, who came to power after the Young Turks, did everything to quiet international outrage. However, being traditional supporters of the course maintained by the leaders of the Ottoman government, they could not be expected to change policy in this regard. Still, along with problems of "peace" and "armistice," government publications and the press in general discussed the condition of the Armenians, Greeks, and other refugees. The Turkish magazine *Aksam* wrote: "For the past two days the government has tried to find documents referring to the Armenian massacres, and has not succeeded. Apparently Talaat Pasha and his accomplices hid them before their resignation and departure from Constantinople" (52, 11/7/1918).

In November 1918 during a session of the Turkish Parliament, Fethi Pasha, although trying to defend the pashas who had fled the country, had to admit that during the war "the Greek, Arab, and Armenian elements were crushed," that the government must "ameliorate the injustice that had been perpetrated by returning the deported to their places of residence." He tried to settle the conflict by smoothing over awkward issues: "Talaat Pasha is a member of the Parliament, how can we arrest him?" (52, 11/5/1918).

In the early part of September 1918, the Turkish press discussed the problem of the Parliament's future. Although there was a great variety of opinion, the general feeling was that the Majlis was discredited. The newspaper *Inkilab*, demanded that the Majlis be at once dissolved: "It is impossible to appear before humanity and civilization hand in hand with those who had worked with the organizers of the Armenian massacres . . . [The] Majlis must be dissolved, otherwise the nation's ruin is inevitable" (52, 11/6/1918).

The newspaper *Sabah* admitted frankly:

There is no way to renounce the reality we face today, a reality of endless misery and

wretchedness. The government of Said Halim and Talaat nursed in their accursed hearts a horrible plan: using the excuse of war to deport the Christians, and especially the Armenians, from one province into another, to the Arabian desert, and in the course of deportation with unspeakable, cannibalistic methods not even known in the middle ages or in the centuries that followed, murder not only grown-up men or boys of tender years, but also infants, women, old men—to finally destroy and extinguish the Armenian race . . . Talaat Bey, Minister of the Interior, gives orders and instructions from the Center, organizes gangs and sends them to the provinces. The Ittihad Center sends its members like Dr. Nazim and Shakir to Erzerum, Trebizond and other places as extraordinary plenipotentiaries to confer with Hasan Tahsim and Jemal Azmi. As a result—outrages, methodically planned atrocities and massacres conducted with the assistance of lawless elements and criminals specially released from jail for the purpose [20, 11/28/1918].

The inhuman action devised against the Armenian people was condemned by many decent Turks. *Sabah* inserted a petition signed by a group of Konya residents—Nuri Efendizade, Tewfik Rüştu, Lüfti Neçin, and others—who were asked to consider the following during the hearing of Muammer Bey's case by the governor of Sivas:

Muammer Bey's activity has been disastrous for the Armenians. Almost the entire Armenian population of this province was put to the sword by him. . . . When he came to the province of Konya the first thing he did was to destroy the Armenian church and commit lawless acts. Muammer Bey is an ignorant official who can't even spell [52, 11/8/1918]. [The authors of the petition asked that he be brought to justice.]

After the fall of the Young Turk government in early 1919, member of the party *Hürriyet ve Ittilaf* (see Notes) Damad Ferid Pasha, the new Grand Vizier, "unveiled the secret labyrinth of the policy of extermination conceived and brought about against the Armenians by the Ittihad party." He declared that everything referring to the Armenians' treachery in the official *Red Book* issued by the Young Turk government was a contradiction of the facts.

On January 28, 1919, Ali Kemal Bey (who in 1920 became Turkey's Foreign Minister) wrote in *Sabah* that the annihilation of the Armenians had been planned on the instructions of the Ittihad Center. He described the massacres as "a heinous crime unprecedented in history" (12, p. 249).

The *New York Times* reported in its issue of December 7, 1918 a conversation between Mehmed VI, Turkey's new Sultan, and a British correspondent in Constantinople. Mehmed VI condemned the Young Turks' policy toward the Armenians and expressed his genuine regret for the crime. He said that had he been the Sultan then, nothing of the kind could have happened.

Such misdeeds and the mutual slaughter of sons of the same fatherland have broken my heart. I ordered an inquiry as soon as I came to the throne so that the fomentors

might be severely punished, but various factors prevented my orders from being promptly carried out. The matter is now being thoroughly investigated. Justice will soon be done and we will never have a repetition of these ugly events.

The Sultan asked the interviewer to publish the following statement: "The great majority of the nation [i.e., the Turks] is entirely innocent of the misdeeds attributed to it. Only a limited number of persons are responsible."

Thus, by November–December 1919 the Constantinople periodicals were full of testimony that helped to lay bare the truth. The newspapers published copies of anti-Armenian documents and circulars issued by Talaat, Behaeddin Shakir, and Nazim Bey.

Krieger's *Documentary History of the Armenocide in Yozgat* was published in 1980 in New York (34). In this book the author has made use of a large number of authentic and extremely important documents and testimony both in Turkish and Armenian, taken from Turkish official sources and periodicals during the period 1918 to 1919. In 1918 by the Sultan's order the Turkish government had organized a commission of inquiry that was to collect all official documentation on the Armenian massacres. The commission was headed by Mazhar Bey, former governor of Ankara, who in 1915 was dismissed from his post for disobeying Talaat's orders on the deportation of the Armenians. By the use of special questionnaires sent to various cities in Turkey, Mazhar Bey obtained a large amount of official and private testimony.

Halide Edib Hanim (see Notes), the Turkish poet and an active social and political figure, declared in the newspaper *Vakit*:

When we were powerful we tried, operating with medieval methods, to exterminate the Christians, particularly the Armenians. . . . Today we live through the saddest and darkest days of our national life. In the eyes of America and Britain we are a state that has done away with its innocent citizens and sons. The present government announces that the Armenians must be returned to their homeland. . .

Halide Edib Hanim, having little confidence in the successful completion of this task and in the resources of the local authorities, demanded formation of a mixed commission that would include conscientious Turks, Armenians, and Americans (332, 22/2/1918).

After the Mudros armistice (1918) the Armenian massacres became the primary topic of discussion in the Ottoman Parliament. Records of the speeches on this question given in the Parliament were printed in the official gazette of the military department *Takvim-i Vakayi* and other papers.

Hafiz Mehmed Bey, the deputy for Trebizond, on the basis of irrefutable facts, demonstrated a parliamentary session that the Armenian massacres had been meticulously planned by the Young Turk

government and carried out with the assistance of gangs of the Teshkilat-i Mahsoosé (Special Organization) (51, 12/13/1918).

A resolution was voted on in the Parliament that along with the organizers of the massacres the actual executioners should also be tried. "These criminals must be tried by a simple court," read the resolution. The question was also raised of condemning all crimes committed by the mob with the encouragement and participation of the authorities (332, 12/10/1918).

After the fall of the Young Turk government of Talaat Pasha on October 7, 1918, it was Tevfik Pasha, former ambassador to London, who was asked to form a new government, but he failed in doing this. On October 9 Minister of the Military Ahmed Izzet Pasha formed a government comprising, among others, several Young Turks.

The Ottoman Parliament was dissolved in December 1918, and the Minister of the Interior issued a declaration on the formation of the Supreme Military Tribunal (*New York Times*, 12/27/1918). Several days later (12/30/1918) the same paper published a protest by Mihran Svasli, President of the Armenian National Assembly in the United States, in which he expressed his doubt about the impartiality of the Turkish court and demanded that inquiries be conducted in the presence of Entente representatives.

Beginning in October 1918, after the resignation of Talaat's government, criticism of the Young Turks became the chief theme in the Turkish press. The deportations and massacres of the Western Armenians were discussed everywhere. Jelal Bey, formerly governor of Aleppo and then of Konya, in his article in *Vakit* revealed extremely important details of the Armenian deportation and his attitude toward it. He wrote, in part:

If all our enemies all over the world were brought together and against us to cause us as much harm, they could not succeed. . . . Almost one-fourth of the public wealth was in the hands of the Armenians . . . as was also half of the country's commerce and industry. . . . Their extermination is tantamount to the Empire's ruin; a loss that will be hard to recover from for centuries [332, 12/13/1918].

"Court and police officials searched the Ittihad Center to find documents referring to the deportations and massacres" (22, 12/11/1918). A number of such documents were found in the house of Ahmed Ramiz Bey, the brother-in-law of Behaeddin Shakir (22, 12/14/1918) (see Notes). Two documents signed by Behaeddin Shakir and Nazim Bey and addressed to the governors of provinces were to this effect: "Obey our orders to exterminate the Armenians." *Sabah* reported that two commissions of inquiry were organized to investigate the circumstances of the Armenian massacres and deportation. It wrote further: "These telegrams assert who were the real organizers of the

Armenian deportation and massacres. The Turkish nation is not implicated in the crimes organized by this party" (20, 12/12/1918). During the trial and interrogation Midhat Shukri announced that the author of the massacres and deportation was not the Ittihad but Teshkilat-i Mahsoose. *Sabah* did not agree with this, stating that cipher telegrams of Teshkilat-i Mahsoose were found at the Ittihad center, consequently Midhat Shukri's arguments were unacceptable (20, 12/13/1918).

The following cipher telegram sent by Dr. Nazim to Behaeddin Shakir read: "The Armenians must be deported and the dangerous elements destroyed. Will this be so, my brother?" This telegram was delivered to Dr. Shakir through Sabit Bey, governor of Kharput. The latter, in order to free himself of all responsibility, divulged it during the interrogation (20, 12/13/1918). Talaat's cipher telegram, dated November 10, 1915, was first published by the newspaper *Istanbul* in the January 1919.

In the sessions of the extraordinary military tribunal decreed by the Sultan in December 1918 for the trial of the perpetrators of the Armenian massacres, all arguments were based on documentation from the Young Turk government, including both official and private testimony. In addition to *Takvim-i Vakayi* and other periodicals, materials of the sessions were published at large in the French newspaper *La Renaissance* issued in Constantinople.

Toward the end of 1918, a member of the opposition party Hürriyet ve Ittilaf, Mustafa Arif Bey, Turkey's Minister of the Interior, condemned the government of both Mehmed Said Halim (Pasha; see Notes) and Talaat and stated: "It is most deplorable that former Turkish rulers possessed by lawless ideas carried out the deportation with methods that even the most impudent and bloodthirsty criminals could not have devised. . . . What aim could have been pursued by the government?" (332, 12/14/1918).

When Parliament discussed the crimes perpetrated by the Young Turk leaders, Mustafa Arif Bey testified: "The atrocious barbarities inflicted upon the Armenians now come to light . . . barbarities that filled the entire human race with disgust. We inherited a country turned into a huge slaughterhouse" (332, 12/22/1918).

Toward the end of 1918 and the beginning of 1919 Ali Kemal and Yunus Nadi, editors of the Constantinople newspapers *Sabah* and *Yeni Gün*, discussed the revelations regarding the perpetrators of the Armenian massacres and evidence of their guilt. Ali Kemal made the following declaration: "The world knows, and it is the truth, that the Armenian massacres were organized and ordered by the Central Committee [i.e., the Ittihad leaders]. To establish the truth—does it not mean to serve the Turkish nation and her cause? Do you want us to give up our efforts and take the responsibility upon ourselves?" (332, 12/15/

1918). In its turn, newspaper *Alemdar* wrote about Talaat and his adherents: "[They] hanged, murdered, deported, massacred and made others massacre, deport, and slaughter the Armenians. They are twice assassins, because they gave orders to murder and themselves murdered" (332, 4/30/1919). *Istiklal* admitted that "World War I awakened in us bestiality and immorality. To renounce the bitter truth is to renounce the sunlight" (332, 6/22/1919).

Ahmed Riza, Chairman of the Parliament, made a declaration on December 2, 1918, at the opening of the trial of the Young Turk criminals. It read: "For all the crimes and misdeeds committed by the government, for the outrages, public crimes . . . confiscation of estates and buildings . . . oppression . . . perpetrated from the day we entered the war (October 30, 1914) and until the fall of Talaat Pasha's government (October 7, 1918) . . . I demand the criminals be revealed as quickly as possible and brought to justice." Ali Bey, Minister of Justice, replied to this that "those who organized the massacres during the deportation or took part in it, whether they are governors or soldiers, must be tried as ordinary citizens and by an ordinary court" (51, 7/25/1918).

In early 1919 the Turkish government published a paper in English under the title *The Turco-Armenian Question. The Turkish Point of View*. It denounced the Young Turk leaders' brutal methods, describing their actions as "ruthless" and "cruel" and admitting that, the government did not have to resort to such a policy to defend its interests. "The guilt of the Unionist organization which conceived and deliberately carried out this infernal policy of extermination and robbery is patent. Its leaders rank among the greatest criminals of humanity," read the document (396, p. 83). The authors of this paper expressed their readiness to indemnify those Armenians who were victims of the Young Turks' policy. It stated further that "most of the officials who acted as agents of the Unionist organization in its campaign of extermination and spoliation against the Armenians have been arrested and are under judgment." "In one word justice is in full operation"; "The deported population is being restored to its homes, the acts of spoliation and robbery to which it was subjected repaired or compensated for and considerable funds allotted to relieve its distress" (396, pp. 83-84). The authorities of Constantinople wrote that "the Turkish people bows its head. It does so in grief for the Armenian people and in shame for itself" (396, p. 116).

In January 1919 in Constantinople an investigation began under the control of the occupation army of the Entente powers, principally Great Britain, of the crimes perpetrated by the leaders of Ittihad ve Terakki.

Numerous books were published after the end of the war; not only were the Young Turks condemned as criminals but there were also

demands that action be taken against them with the participation of the representatives of the Entente and the United States. But even then there was concern that the Turkish authorities would not carry out their responsibilities in this respect.

On January 31, 1919 *Sabah* published a list of Young Turk leaders who were under arrest: Mehmed Javid (former Minister of Finance, vice chairman of the Parliament); Midhat Shukri (chief secretary of the Ittihad Central Committee); Karasso (deputy representing Constantinople; see Notes); Zia Gökalp (member of the Ittihad Central Committee) and many others.

The military tribunal started work on February 12, 1919. Opening the trial the chief prosecutor declared that it was urgent that the authors of the genocide be punished. However, Rifat Pasha, the Turkish ambassador in Berlin, failed to organize the arrest of Talaat, Behaeddin Shakir, Dr. Nazim, and others.

The original materials of the trial can be found in the Turkish official gazette *Takvim-i Vakayi* and its supplements.¹

The court was in session for several months. The Young Turk leaders were charged with two crimes: drawing Turkey into the war, and the extermination of the Armenian nation.

It is all the more surprising that even today Turkish propaganda and "historiography" spare no effort to distort historical evidence and to withhold information on the unparalleled crimes perpetrated by the Young Turks, passing over in silence the fact that in early 1919 the Turkish state itself actually put the Young Turks on trial.

According to some French and Armenian sources, Mustafa Kemal was also invited to the military tribunal. In the complicated period between late 1918 and early 1919, adversaries of Enver and his followers took an active part in Turkey's political life. In his testimony Mustafa Kemal disclosed facts condemning the Young Turk rulers and accusing the Ittihad leaders.

Here is an excerpt from Mustafa Kemal's speech given before the tribunal on January 27, 1919, published in a book by Paul du Vèou:

The Pasha [and his followers] who committed inconceivable and unheard-of crimes, thus bringing the country to its present state, are again instigating discord for the sake of their selfish interests. They gave rise to every kind of tyranny, organized deportations and outrages, burnt to death infants, raped women and girls, confiscated their personal and real property, sent the women to Mosul after subjecting them to tortures. Thousands were thrown into the sea from ships. Public criers announced that non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire must renounce their religion and accept Islam. They forced apostasy; made hungry old men cover miles

¹ See *Takvim-i Vakayi* nos: 3540 (5/5/1919), pp. 1–14; 3571 (6/10/1919), pp. 127–140; 3604 (7/22/1919), pp. 217–220; 3616 (8/6/1919), p. 103; 3617 (8/7/1919), pp. 1–2; 3771 (2/9/1920), pp. 1–2; 3772 (2/10/1920), pp. 3–6.

and do hard work. They sent women to brothels. . . . An unprecedented fact in the history of any other nation [366, p. 54; 367, pp. 121-122].

Some years later, in 1926, when the Young Turks' plot against Mustafa Kemal was disclosed, the latter in an interview given to the *Los Angeles Examiner*, threatened to hang and shoot all those officials, big or small, who had participated in the plot. He declared that we must "*murder and do away with every member of the Ittihad. This was the very party which through its infernal policy exterminated and deported one million Christians*" (Alik, newspaper [Teheran], N 59, 1926).

In New York, through the courtesy of Vahan Ghazarian, former editor of the progressive American newspaper *Lraber*, English language copies of materials published in *Takvim-i Vaki* regarding the trial were translated from Turkish and French and placed at the author's disposal. They include material from the Constantinople newspapers of the period from 1919 to 1920. We do not have the space to discuss all the documents here, but will refer to some of the most significant ones.

Most important documents on the genocide were read out wholly or in part in the presence of persons who had signed them or had some relationship to the events described in the documents. Then, after being certified, the documents were recorded in the minutes.

The Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Communications, and the military tribunal officially demanded documents referring to the process against the Young Turks from the local Turkish authorities. Civil and military authorities, as also the press and the telegraph office of the Empire sent documents directly to the military tribunal. The documents may be divided into two groups: those which refer to the genocide, original documents, and copies certified by authorized bodies and individuals; and those taken from the records of the military department. Documents dispatched from the provinces were officially remitted to the military tribunal by the Ministry of the Interior.

In this way, for example, on December 17, 1918 governor-general of Mardin, Barsam Bey transmitted by telegraph information on the slaughter organized and carried out by Zeki Bey, the müteşsarif (see Notes) of Deir ez-Zor. On February 9, 1919 Jemal Azmi Bey, governor-general of Ankara, in response to a telegram from the chairman of the military tribunal (February 2, 1919) informed him that "the certified copies of the documents are being transmitted by mail." There were officially certified copies of forty-two telegrams. On December 13, 1918 the first secretary of the province of Sivas dispatched sixteen officially certified copies of telegrams, exchanged between Talaat Pasha and governor-general of Sivas Muammer Bey, and other high ranking officials of Erzindjan, Karakilisa, and others. The governor of Yozgad in his answer to a telegram (N 2851, February 2, 1919) from the chairman of the military tribunal informed him that as ordered by the Young Turks

the local authorities had armed sixty-five criminals and released them from jail and, after training them in the town of Khorom in the province of Ankara, enlisted them in the special organization Teshkilat-i Mahsoosé to murder the deported Armenians on the roads. Enclosed was a list of the sixty-five criminals.

Sami Bey, the Attorney General issued an indictment on April 12, 1919 which included numerous official documents testifying that the Young Turks government had thoroughly planned the Armenians' mass genocide. It read, in part:

July 1914 . . . immediately after the military movements Talaat, Enver and Jemal put their secret plans into operation. They formed Teshkilat-i Mahsoosé composed of criminals released from jail who constituted the "core of the gang acting on special orders and instructions." Prior to the mobilization it was rumored that the gangs were to participate in the war. . . . However, there is incontrovertible evidence that they were formed to massacre the Armenians [*Takvim-i Vakayi*, April 2, 1919, N 3604].

The Union and Progress established, both in the major towns and cities and in the interior, the special organization Teshkilat-i Mahsoosé whose members murdered and marauded, looted villages, raped and killed women (from the sentence of the military tribunal, dated May 26, 1919; in *Takvim-i Vakayi*, N 3571).

Kemal Bey's lawyer, Sadeddin Bey, governor of Yozgad, declared in the first session of the military tribunal on February 5, 1919: "I recommend the accused for mercy, for they merely obeyed orders. It is the ministers, high ranking officials of the government and their accomplices who are to be punished in the first place, and only then, after a corresponding investigation, their subordinates" (332, N 58, 2/6/1919). The lawyer observed then that "the order to dislodge the Armenians was supported by the Council of Ministers and was legalized by an imperial *irade* of the Sultan" (51, 2/6/1919).

Attorney general Sami Bey made the following declaration in his indictment: "It is true that everyone must obey the orders of superiors, but first he must understand if they are at variance with law and justice, should they be followed or no. Some of the authorities, realizing this, disobeyed the orders and protested against them." This was the attitude of Mazhar Bey, the vali of Ankara who, on receiving orders from Atif Bey, replied: "No, Atif Bey, I am a governor, not a criminal. I give you my post, execute it yourself" (80, 3/28/1919).

Many of the accused complied with orders from above because they feared punishment. Here is what officer Ahmed Bey told the court:

At night I was woken up by some armed men. They handed me a closed envelope that contained the order for the Armenians' deportation. A civil official was attached to me to follow my orders. I was given a free hand to kill him in case he disobeyed me.

And they could do the same with me. The order was final, and I obeyed it as a soldier [332, N 144, 4/13/1919].

The military tribunal concluded that civil officials, making use of ciphered codes as military officials did, transmitted secret telegrams, orders, and instructions on the Armenians' extermination.

In April 1919 *Takvim-i Vakayi* made the following report on the trial of the leaders of Ittihad ve Terakki:

At last, after long deliberation, yesterday afternoon the trial of the party members began. The small room assigned to the military tribunal, was crowded. Turkish women and high ranking officials attended the trial which the Turkish press has called historic. It will certainly be "historic," but in what sense is yet unknown. In the dock were Said Halim Pasha, former Grand Vizier; Khalil, Zia Gokalp, Ahmed Shukri, Midhat Shukri, Javid, Kemal, Ibrahim, Jusuf Ridja, and Atif. They looked bewildered. The Chairman asked them to identify themselves, and then read out the indictment. After this the Attorney General took the floor. He besought the Court to try the accused on the basis of the official indictment adding that such was also the Sultan's will: to punish the assassins without religious or race discrimination and thus ensure [good] relations between various elements of the Empire.

Indictment:

We have acquainted ourselves with the Attorney General's indictment, as also with the enclosed minutes and conclusions referring to the investigation of the case of Said Halim Pasha, Chairman of the [Committee of] Union and Progress (the Committee has announced its dissolution). We have also examined the minutes referring to the following members of the Chief Council: Mehmed Talaat, Ahmed Jemal, Ibrahim Shukri, Kout Khalil, Ismail Enver, Ahmed Nesimi; chief secretary Midhat Shukri and members of the National headquarters Kemal (representative of Constantinople), Zia Gokalp, Dr Nusuhi, Küçük Talaat; appointed members of the Teshkilat-i Mahsoosé special organization Dr. Behaeddin Shakir, Dr. Selanikli Nazim, Atif, Jusuf Ridja; subordinate members of the Central Board, former director of the Criminal Investigation Department Aziz and former commander Javid.

These documents testify that the Committee of Union and Progress functioned also as a secret organization operating through oral instructions alongside its official activities. There was also evidence that the corporate organization of the Committee participated in a series of slaughters, robberies, and bribe taking. The above-mentioned influential leaders of the Committee were found guilty.

In July 1914, having announced mobilization after the Committee's conference, its influential members Enver and Jemal (both of them dismissed from military service at the time of the trial) and also Talaat, taking advantage of the world war tried to solve by force problems that should have been reasonably and peacefully settled by a court, and thereby subjected the nation to great suffering.

Although they appeared as advocates of national interests, they actually tried to suppress the nation's voice in the cause of the nightmares of the war. Exploiting the situation, they took to despotism and amassed personal riches.

They set up Teshkilat-i Mahsoosé composed of criminals released from jail who formed their own organization with its special instructions and laws. The leaders of this special organization were: Aziz Bey, director of the Criminal Investigation Department; Atif and Dr. Nazim, while military governor of Constantinople Javid Bey put their instructions into practice. Huge sums were given to agents and other persons attached to their "service" who were sent to various regions of the country.

Dr. Behaeddin Shakir gave the leaders of the gangs the key to the ciphers, put at

their disposal a great many cars, a great deal of money, and arms and explosives. In this manner, in conformity with a secret agreement, he complied with the Ittihad orders.

Some of the party members sent by the Committee to the provinces, in accordance with the instructions of their leaders, organized slaughter, pillage, and arson. The local population endured unspeakable tortures, but the Armenians suffered most of all, although there were also Turkish victims.

The most important conclusion arrived at as a result of the investigation was that the crimes inflicted upon the Armenians in various places and at various times, were not isolated events. The central force made up of the above-mentioned figures, had devised everything beforehand and then brought it about through secret orders or oral instructions. Behaeddin Shakir was sent to Erzerum to lead the armed forces of the Eastern vilayets; Riza Bey was sent to the Trebizond district; Aziz, Atif, and Nazim operated in Constantinople; Javid Bey was instructed to execute the decisions.

Report N. 50 signed by Khalil, Nazim, Atif, and Aziz and sent to Midhat Shukri Bey testifies that Enver's uncle Khalil was also a member of Teshkilat-i Mahsoosé. Hence it can be concluded that this organization was connected with the Committee of Union and Progress. Khalil Bey's telegram (N 67) sent to the governor of Izmit testifies that they had hired a gang of criminals released from jail. Document N 68 sent by Khalil Bey on November 16, 1914 to the War Minister noted that Teshkilat-i Mahsoosé had received arms and munitions. Documents of such content are found also in other minutes of this organization. Still, in the course of the investigation it became obvious that most important material on the activity of the organization and all the documents of the Central Committee had been stolen. From the articles of the *tezkere* (series 31) of the Ministry of the Interior and also from authentic evidence it is presumed that the files with the most important documents and letters had been taken by the director of the Criminal Investigation Department, Aziz Bey, shortly before Talaat's resignation. After his own dismissal Aziz Bey did not return the files.

"As reported by the governor of the vilayet of Kharput, the roads are piled up with corpses of women and children; there is no way to dispose of them." This telegram is from the file referring to Talaat.

A telegram sent by Behaeddin Shakir, Chairman of the Erzerum branch of Teshkilat-i Mahsoosé, to Sabit Bey, governor-general of the vilayet of Kharput asks: "Are the Armenians shipped from there exterminated? And are the dangerous persons about whose deportation you have informed me indeed been destroyed or simply deported? My brother, give me accurate information."

That the massacres were implemented on the instructions and through the consent of Talaat Bey, Jemal Bey, and Enver Bey, is further proved by the cipher telegram which on July 11, 1915 Talaat dispatched

to the vali and mutessarifs of Diarbekir, Kharput, and Urfa. The telegram was to the effect that the corpses on the roads should be buried and not thrown into pits, rivers, or lakes, and that the victims' personal belongings scattered over the roads should be burned.

The governor of Kharput sent out the following cipher telegram to the kaimakam of Malatia:

We are informed that in spite of repeated orders numerous corpses are still left exposed on the roads. The inconvenience resulting from such neglect is in no way justified and the Minister of the Interior informs [us] that those who oppose this order will be severely punished. Send out to such places sufficient number of [people] to ensure the burial of the corpses in your district.

A cipher telegram dated September 15, 1915, signed by Mahmud Kemal, Second Army Commander, and addressed to the Minister of the Interior said that the number of Armenians deported from Diarbekir amounted to 120,000: "every Muslim who tries to protect Armenians will be hanged in front of his house, and his house will be burned."

A cipher telegram addressed to Munir Bey, governor of Erzerum, dated December 14, 1918, said: "Despite the will of Tahsin Bey, the former governor, the caravan of rich Armenians deported from Erzerum to Kighi has been destroyed and looted by the inhabitants of Dersim and groups formed by Union and Progress member Behaeddin Shakir Bey."

One of the documents referring to Suleiman Nazim Bey said that when he left Baghdad and reached the outskirts of Diarbekir, he had to hold his nose because of the stench of putrescent corpses.

In a cipher telegram dispatched from Erzerum to the governor of Adalia, Behaeddin Shakir told him what he was busy with now that all the Armenians of Erzerum, Van, Bitlis, Diarbekir, Sivas, and Trebizond had been deported to Mosul and Zor. Sabur Bey, former governor of Adalia, reported that he had sent a copy of this telegram to Talaat Bey but received no answer. The deciphered answer to Behaeddin Shakir's telegram was found in the files of Teshkilat-i Mahsoosé with the following inscription: "As there is nothing more to be done here, leave without delay for Trebizond to do something more important."

The following account by an eyewitness was presented to the military tribunal in Constantinople: a man called Rifaat from Yozgad informed the Minister of the Interior on December 1, 1918 about the brutalities of the former chief of gendarmery Tewfik Bey, how he raped women and girls and participated in acts of outright plunder, and how he put to the sword captive Armenians, women and children. The letter also described cruelties committed by gangs. The author demanded that the Ministry of the Interior take all measures to punish the criminal.

In December 1918, the commission of inquiry sent to Yozgad, which consisted of six persons, headed by Osman Nuri, reported to Mazhar Bey, Chairman of the Committee of Inquiry on Armenian atrocities,

that chief of gendarmery Khulusi Effendi personally conducted mass plunder of the Armenian population, appropriating all their goods; personally organized bands of criminals and deserters to plunder and massacre the Armenians. And after all that he was imprisoned for only two months!

On February 10, 1919 the mutessarif of Yozgad in his response to the inquiry of the military tribunal (February 2, 1919; N 2851) reported the following: On May 15, 1915 by the order of former governor Muhaeddin Pasha a new organization, Teshkilat-i Çediday, was formed composed of sixty-five criminals—robbers, bandits, and murderers—released from jail. Their center was at Chorum. The executive secretary of the Ittihad in Ankara, Nedjati Bey had twice visited Yozgad, once prior to the deportation and once during it. From Yozgad he had gone to Chorum in secrecy and returned at night. All of this was confirmed by police reports. Telegraph agency archives confirm that Nedjati Bey telegraphed Gani Bey, executive secretary of Sivas to inform him of the time the deported Armenians would pass and the route their caravan would take. The documents confirmed also that mutessarif Jemal Bey, by his own avowal, was dismissed from his post because he had refused to take part in Nadjati Bey's illegal and unofficial activities. The latter had tried to convince Jemal Bey that the Armenians' deportation was a patriotic task and that it was the duty of every patriot to carry out the orders of the Minister of the Interior.

Mahir Bey, a known criminal, and 123 other criminals were released from jail in Sivas on the pretext of being sent to the front. In reality they were admitted into the Teshkilat-i Mahsoosé to slaughter Armenian women and children. On June 26, 1912, Mahir Bey was imprisoned for fifteen years on a charge of murder, but he was actually released after two years and nine months. One of his first victims was Mkirtitch Sahak Odabashian, the priest of Erzindjan, who with other deportees was passing through Sivas and was murdered on December 18, 1915.

A caravan of five hundred rich Armenian families from Erzerum was looted in Malatia. Hut barracks had previously been emptied by the orders of mütesarrif Reshid Bey, local regiment commander, and chief of gendarmery Abdullah Effendi. The men were locked in the barracks, the women and children in the school and in stores. All of them were then searched, their money, gold, and other valuables taken from them. The episode attracted attention because previous caravans had passed through Malatia undisturbed. The mob, excited and inspired by the example of the officials, attacked the women robbing them of everything. An eyewitness testified that the mütesarrif and other officials present calmly watched the plunder.

We will now quote from one of the sessions of the military tribunal that took place on March 8, 1919:

Chief Justice Mustafa Nazim Pasha.

Members: Brigadier-general Zeki Pasha; Brigadier-general Mustafa Pasha; Brigadier-general Nazim Pasha; Colonel Radjeb Ferdi Bey; recording secretary

Accused: Musa Kiazim Effendi (former Sheikh-ul-Islam); Esad Effendi (former Chairman of the Senate); Husein Hashem Bey (former Minister of Post, Telegraph and Telephone)

Accused in absentia: Talaat Pasha (former Grand Vizier); Enver Effendi (former Minister of War); Jemal Effendi (former Minister for Marine); Dr. Nazim Bey (former Minister of Public Education); Javid Bey (former Minister of Finance); Voskan Effendi (former Minister of Post, Telegraph and Telephone); Suleiman el-Bustani Effendi (former Minister of Trade and Agriculture); Mustafa Sherif Bey (former Minister of Trade and Agriculture)

Court Statement

The Court studied and discussed all material and documents referring to the accused. As the accused and their lawyers rejected all the accusations and pleaded not guilty, and as the Attorney by means of his accusation (May 2, 20 and 22, 1919; June 8-10, and 25, 1919) proved the Committee for Union and Progress (at present dissolved) to be guilty of multiple crimes, and its leaders as the authors of those crimes, thus they should face punishment.

The court charged the Young Turks with lawless acts and unwarranted decisions hurting the interests of the nation and the country.

The court stated that of all non-Muslim nations the Armenians were the most outraged, and realizing how wrong they had been to believe in promised justice, had returned to their former wish for independence. Thus, the Ittihad was to blame for the wrong done to the integrity of the Ottoman Empire.

The court summarized the charges as follows:

The atrocities at Trebizond, Yozgad, and Boghazlian were planned beforehand and brought about by the leaders of the Committee for Union and Progress.

As confirmed by written evidence, former Grand Vizier Said Pasha tried to convince the Young Turk leaders that participation in the war would prove dangerous for Turkey, and that neutrality was expedient. But his view was not considered seriously and Turkey was plunged into war. Riza Bey, the Young Turk deputy, admitted at the trial that even before the declaration of war, he flooded Russian territory with armed gangs sending them through Trebizond.

Sheikh-ul-Islam [see Notes] Musa Kiazim Effendi was charged with handing over the country's "justice" to the Ittihad. He confessed he had lost his authority and had said: "Do not ask my opinion. The party wishes it so, and so it must be."

In conformity with Article 45 of Paragraph 55 on the charge of violating the Constitution the court found guilty and sentenced to death in absentia Talaat, Enver, Jemal, Dr. Nazim, and several other leaders of Union and Progress.

Three years later, on June 2 and 3, 1921, the district court of Berlin tried Soghomon Tehlirian, Talaat's assassin. In a speech to the court

Tehlirian said that Talaat was sentenced to death in absentia by the court martial in Constantinople. Johannes Verdauer, Tehlirian's advocate, announced with regard to this: "You have learned in this court that Talaat was sentenced to death. Sentences are either recognized, or not. If we do not recognize sentences pronounced by other courts, then we cannot demand that they recognize our sentences" (116, p. 176).

As reported by *Takvim-i Vakayi* (1920, N 3771), on the basis of numerous oral testimony, the court concluded that Behaeddin Shakir had been sent to Trebizond and Erzerum to organize criminal gangs to loot and slaughter caravans of deported Armenians. The secret instructions and letters through which he ordered the plunder and bloodshed were compared. It was he who had organized the attack on the Armenian caravan traveling from Erzerum on the road to Kighi. At the trial evidence to support this was brought to light, mostly in the form of receipt stubs for telegrams dispatched by Behaeddin Shakir.

General Vehib Pasha testified that: The massacre and annihilation of the Armenians, appropriation of their property in the territory under the command of the Third army, were devised by Union and Progress. The territory embraced Erzerum, Van, Trebizond, Bitlis, Mamuret-ul-Asis, Diarbekir, and Sivas. . . . Mahmud Kiamil Pasha, former Commander of the Third army, sent from Tortum a circular telegram to all military commanders ordering them to exterminate the Armenian people.

The court stated that all the facts were confirmed by testimony. The court found that Dr. Behaeddin Shakir was the chief perpetrator of the crimes.

The court stated also that among the accused Nazim Bey of Resni had most actively cooperated with Behaeddin Shakir. The former had received Shakir's cipher telegram on April 21, 1915 ordering him to exterminate the Armenians. Nazim Bey cooperated also with the governor-general of Mamuret-ul-Asis, Sabit Bey, and chief secretary of the Ittihad Central Committee, Midhat Shukri. Both Dr. Behaeddin Shakir and Nazim Bey, on learning the punishment that awaited them, fled the court. Behaeddin Shakir was sentenced to death under Articles 181 and 171 of the Civil Code; Nazim Bey was sentenced to fifteen years of hard labor (*Takvim-i Vakayi*, N 3617, 1919).

On April 14, 1919 the *New York Times* reported that governor Kemal Bey was hanged publicly in Baghdad Square in Constantinople. As confirmed by the court he was the chief perpetrator of the deportation and massacre of the Armenians in the Yozgad district.

The newspaper *Alemdar* wrote with regard to this: "The only thing that would help us is to cry all over the civilized world that we will really and actually exercise justice over the guilty. If Baghdad Square will not witness the gallows of the criminals, then Paris [i.e., the Peace Conference] will become the place of judgement of our state and nation"

(332, N 116, 4/16/1919). "We Turks, are accused of a crime and suffer an incurable disease that is worse than the plague. . . . For this reason we started an extraordinary military tribunal to punish all the criminals in the name of justice" (332, N 128, 5/1/1919).

Among the atrocities committed by the Turks against the Armenian nation, special consideration should be given to medical experiments performed by Turkish "doctors" on Armenian orphans. This, indeed, was a prototype for the Fascist crimes of World War II. Testimony confirming this is to be found in Armenian state archival material (246, fund 200, list 1, file 273, p. 2), and in Turkish and Armenian periodicals published in Constantinople. For example, between 1914 and 1915, Ali Saib, health services inspector, tested new medicines on Armenian orphans and the sick as a result of which they were poisoned and died.

In December 1915 in Erzerum by order of Tewfik Salim, medical officer, the unsterilized blood of typhoid patients was injected into Armenian soldiers, almost all of whom later died as a result. A detailed account of this is found in a letter sent to the newspaper *Türkçe İstanbul* (12/16/1918) by physician Haidar Jemal. The same was confirmed by physician Salaheddin in his letters to *Türkçe İstanbul* (12/24/1918) and *Alemdar* (1/8/1919).

The following lines from *Türkçe İstanbul* written in 1919 might well be addressed to the modern Turkish authorities and authors who ignore the facts: "Our argument that it was the Armenians who first attacked us in Van and that we then revenged ourselves on them in Anatolia, will satisfy only those who are guided by 'sentiments' and not by scientific and legal reasons. Such an attitude cannot [be used to] defend our cause before European and American public opinion" (332, N 77, 3/1/1919).

We will only stress that after the fall of the Young Turk government Turkish state authorities acknowledged that genocide was committed against the Armenians, and themselves tried and condemned the Young Turks' barbaric deeds. And although the trial was not complete, and the Young Turks did not receive the maximum punishment, still it should be emphasized that Turkish state publications themselves condemned the Young Turks, or perhaps were forced to.

Since the Turkish military tribunal tried only the high officials of the Ittihad, most of the Young Turks went unpunished. This is why Armenians in Constantinople, although welcoming the tribunal, drew attention to its restricted nature and urged that measures be taken to reveal and punish all the criminals responsible.

The Armenian press, displeased with the authorities' inconsistency toward the Young Turks, called the military tribunal proceedings "a judicial farce," as "to this day thousands of assassins not only enjoy freedom, but remain at their posts. . . . Did the government prove its [sense of] justice by hanging only one hangman, Kemal Bey, whose body

was then wrapt in the Ottoman banner and adorned with flowers?" asked one newspaper (53, 4/26/1919).

While the trial of the Young Turk leaders was in progress, with the support of Damad Ferid Pasha and the British, the League of Islam Renaissance, the League of Caucasian Muslims, and other reactionary organizations were established.

The above-mentioned Tewfik Pasha proclaimed Armenia a "Muslim" territory in February 1919. In his memorandum presented to the Allies, this adherent of Sultan Hamid expressed his readiness to accept "both the American and the French mandates" (231, p. 15).

On June 17, 1919 Damad Ferid Pasha, President of the Turkish delegation, gave a speech at the Paris Peace Conference. Claiming himself the representative of 300 million Muslims, he put the blame for the failure of Turkish diplomacy for the past five years on the Young Turk leaders. Emphasizing that they were condemned and tried he pleaded with the European powers to be merciful to Turkey.

In 1919 in Constantinople a collection of fake documents circulated published in French and entitled *Documents Relating to the Armenian Atrocities Committed Against the Muslim Population* (294, p. 73). The authors of the collection tried to present the anti-Sultan and Armenian national liberation struggle as a front against the Turkish people. Indeed, the title of the third chapter of this collection is "Armenian Atrocities in the Caucasus."

Turkish official publications take the view that only the leading Young Turks were criminals. The above-mentioned publication says in this connection: "In the Turko-Armenian discord the share of the Turkish nation was not as large as was ascribed to it. Its deeds against the Armenian nation were not blows out of the blue, but an instinctive reaction of self-preservation heightened as a result of 30-year-long systematic attacks despite numerous efforts to establish peace" (294, pp. 3-4).

In essence, the same attitude was maintained also by the leaders of the Turkish nationalist movement. Mustafa Kemal, for instance, at the congress held in Sivas in early September 1919, oblivious to the sentences passed by the military tribunal, put the blame on the Armenians. He sought to convince the audience that the Armenians hurt the "dignity of the Turkish nation." To him, the eastern borderline provinces were in "mourning" not because of the Armenian deportations and massacres, but because the Muslims "underwent all sorts of cruelties and miseries during the war," the more so in view of the Armenian zulum and barbarity (67, 11/14/1919).

Some of the Turkish official periodicals and telegrams only survived because at that period Aleppo was occupied by the British, and the Young Turks did not succeed in destroying the Armenian archive of the Committee of Deportation (286, July, 1921).

Soon there appeared, although rarely, books and articles by people who tried to throw light on the actual state of affairs, to give an unbiased account of the Ittihad crimes. We have already mentioned one of them, Naim Bey, whose memoirs were published in London in 1920 (261).

Naim Bey was the chief secretary of the committee for Armenian deportation at Aleppo. He was sent there to exterminate the Armenians deported to Meskene. However, as Aram Andonian (see Notes) maintains, Naim Bey was a decent man who even helped Armenian families. Mr. Andonian had received from Naim Bey copies of numerous orders and official papers which he was to destroy as instructed by the Ittihad Central Committee (261, pp. x-xii).

The principal authors of the genocide tried to escape punishment. Jemal Pasha declared in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* that he "is not responsible for the Armenian atrocities." He was positive that Talaat and Enver would also succeed in proving that they had nothing to do with the Armenian massacre (67, 11/27/1919). Declarations of this kind were peculiar to the Young Turk leaders.

Talaat settled in Germany in mid-November 1918, and lived in constant fear of his life, under the assumed name Ali Sami Bey. This was the period of the German revolution and the great assassin dared not appear in the streets, although social democrat Friedrich Ebert had supplied him with a special pass. As we have already mentioned, in January 1919 when the military tribunal was in session in Constantinople, the Turkish ambassador to Berlin Rifat Pasha received instructions from his government to arrest Talaat and send him to Turkey. At this period the Turkish club in Berlin was the meeting place of Turkish students with revolutionary inclinations, and Hamdullah Subhi Bey was the president. The latter sympathized with the German revolution and supported the antiwar feelings of Turkish soldiers. An organization was founded which compiled a list of Turkish war criminals and demanded that the German government arrest them and hand them over to the Turkish government. Officials of the Turkish embassy in Berlin also took part in meetings at the club when demands were made for Talaat and others to be arrested. As a result, Talaat was forced to change his lodging and go underground.

In May and June 1922, in a series of articles, the Constantinople newspaper *Verchin Loor* reprinted material by Talaat's friend Arif Jemil, "The Escape of the Ittihad Leaders and Their Life Abroad" which shed light on some details of Talaat's life and activity in Berlin. The material was issued as a serial under various titles: "The Life of Talaat in Berlin and His Memoirs"; "Talaat and the Armenian Question"; "Talaat's Appeal to Lloyd George is to no Purpose"; "The Mission of Mustafa Kemal"; "The Adventurous Visit of Behaeddin Shakir and Enver Pasha to Moscow," and so on.

Following Theodor Wolff's series of articles in the *Berliner*

Tageblatte—an impartial elucidation of the history of the Armenian question and massacres—a secret meeting was organized between him and Talaat. The latter, who had found refuge in a Potsdam sanitarium and rarely appeared in Berlin, begged Wolff not to reveal his whereabouts. “I had the impression,” wrote Wolff about Talaat, “that he had been to the theater only once or twice during his more than two years stay in Berlin. His only pleasure is to play bridge with his friends after dinner. . . . The 15-20 marks, won or lost, is the only theme of his conversation.”

Arif Jemil, who was an eyewitness of the events, commented: “When the military tribunal in Constantinople began the trial of the Ittihad leaders . . . Talaat Pasha used to say that he must write his memoirs to enlighten public opinion.” Talaat started with a short introduction intending to publish it in Turkish, French, German, and English. But soon he was disappointed with the unflattering response to his appeals, or “explanations,” sent to European public figures (Lloyd George and others).

Soon after this Talaat rented a two-room apartment in Berlin which became the meeting place of his cabinet and Ittihad leaders. They prepared a special reference book and sent it out to various addresses. It was decided to issue a newspaper in French, *Reveil d'Orient*, to be edited by Ahmed Riza Bey, but his sudden death frustrated their plans.

In 1919 and 1920 Talaat visited Switzerland, Italy, Denmark, Sweden, and Holland, trying to unite his fellow thinkers scattered in those countries.

Talaat's memoirs, with an introduction by Husein Jahid Yalçın, were published in 1946 in Istanbul. Enver Bolpir, the publisher, praised the great assassin as a “great Turk” and “patriot,” a “clever” and “just” premier minister (44, p. 5). In his memoirs Talaat tried to justify the atrocities of the Committee of Union and Progress, maintaining that everything was done for the sake of the “interests of the state” (44, pp. 36-37). Playing innocent, he described at length the measures taken by him for the punishment of the guilty, attributing everything to careless and “cruel” individuals, “a number of officials” (44, pp. 78-79, 129-130).

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