

## U.S. Foreign Policy and the Armenian Genocide: The Clash between Idealism and Pragmatism

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**Abstract:** The article focuses on the conduct of American foreign policy on the subject of the Armenian genocide. This conduct serves as an excellent study of a major theme in the history of the formulation of American foreign policy—the clash between moral values and pragmatic economic and strategic interests and constraints and between the declared policy of President Wilson and the real policy of his and subsequent American administration on the Armenian genocide issue. A special emphasis was placed on “denial” as the final stage of a genocide.

**Keywords:** Armenian genocide, U.S. foreign policy, Denial of Genocide, Woodrow Wilson, diplomacy, Turkey, Armenia

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The conduct of American foreign policy on the subject of the Armenian Genocide serves as an excellent case study of the perpetual challenges in formulating policies that balance between moral values and economic and strategic interests. It is a tale of the collision between moral responsibilities and humanitarian values and their abdication in favor of immediate tangible earthly gains. American inaction, contrasted by President Wilson’s and America’s warm vocal support of the Armenian cause, reflected a disparity between its declared and actual policies, contributing to the genocide.

The systematic genocide of the Armenian people that lived in the Ottoman Empire was planned and executed by the Ottoman authorities. The genocide began in the 1880s and lasted until 1923. During the World War I years alone, 1.5 million Armenians, one million Greeks and 750,000 Assyrians <sup>1</sup> (indigenous Christian people in the Ottoman Empire) were exterminated.<sup>2</sup> These events received much attention and space in the American newspapers and were the subject of extensive interest and debates in the American political, intellectual, business and religious communities. Influential political, business and industrial leaders such as future U.S. president Herbert Hoover<sup>3</sup> that observed that during World War I “the name Armenia was in the

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1 The extermination of 750,000 ethnic Assyrians in the former Christian-majority regions of Van, Bitlis, and Diyarbakir vilayets, known as the *Sayfo* (meaning sword or extermination in Modern Aramaic), under Ottoman rule and guidance, is generally studied as a separate event and will not be dealt with in this article.

2 Samantha Power, *‘A Problem from Hell’: America and the Age of Genocide*. New York: Perennial, 2003, 1-14.

3 During World War I Hoover was responsible for the humanitarian aid that helped in returning more than 100,000 Americans to the U.S. providing them with food, clothing, money and travel funds to make it possible for them to return to the U.S. from Europe. After Germany occupied Belgium, Hoover organized and headed the organization that provided relief, especially food to the Belgians. After the U.S. declared war against Germany, President Wilson appointed him to head the Federal Food Administration. See George H. Nash, *he Life of Herbert Hoover* (vol. 2) *Days*

front of the American Mind[.]”<sup>4</sup> American missionaries were numerous and heavily invested and very much involved in educational and medical enterprises in the regions where the deportations and massacres took place throughout the Ottoman Empire and especially in Armenia. The need to finance the missionary and relief efforts that caused the establishment of the Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief (later known as Near East Relief) that raised vast amount of funds and was an important lobby on behalf of U.S. support for Armenia and Armenians.<sup>5</sup> According to Peter Balakian, the Armenian-American historian, poet and professor of literature, “The U.S. response to the Armenian crisis, which began in the 1890s and continued to the 1920s, was the first international human rights movement in American history and helped to define the nation’s emerging global identity.”<sup>6</sup> Balakian emphasized the role played by American cultural and intellectual leaders in support of the Armenians and viewed it as a “prologue to twentieth-century American engagement in the formulation and the execution of American foreign policy It highlighted the constant clash and simultaneously operations of humanitarian-idealism and pragmatic self-interests in the conduct of American foreign policy.”<sup>7</sup> From the earliest days of the colonial settlement, the leaders of the colonists in British North America believed that the colonies had a special mission to serve as the “City upon the Hill,” “The New [Israel] Jerusalem,” “The Light to All Nations.” Their mission was to establish “God’s Kingdom in America”—“Mankind’s Last and Best Hope.”<sup>8</sup> In the nineteenth century, after the Declaration of Independence, the adoption of the Constitution and the drive to settle the frontier, Americans believed in their “Manifest Destiny”—believing that the Creator directed them to conquer the continent from sea to sea. After the conquest of the West with its

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*of Armageddon, 1917 -1921*. New York: Norton, 1988; George H. Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover* (vol.3) *Master of Emergencies 1917 – 1918*. New York: Norton, 1996.

- 4 Herbert Hoover, *Hoover Memoires: Years of Adventure*. New York: Macmillan, 1951, 385.
- 5 Recep Boztemur, “Religion and Politics in the Making of Near East Policy,” *Religion and Ideologies*. Vol. 11, Summer 2005, 45-59; Leila Tarazi Fawaz, *The Land of Aching Hearts: The Middle East in the Great War*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014; Bruno Cabenas, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism, 1918-1924*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014; Joseph L. Gabrill, *Protestant Diplomacy and the Near East: Missionary Influence on American Foreign Policy 1810-1929*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1973; John DeNovo, *American Interests and Policies in the Middle East 1900-1939*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1963.
- 6 Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America’s Response*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003, xviii.
- 7 The classical study of this theme is Robert E. Osgood, *Ideals and Self Interest in American Foreign Relations*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953; See also Walter LaFeber, *The American Age: U.S. Foreign Policy at Home and Abroad*. Vols. I and II. New York: Norton, 1994.
- 8 Perry Miller, *Errand to the Wilderness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956; Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939; Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953; Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978; Sacvan Bercovitch, *Puritan Origins of the American Self*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976; Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World*. New York: Knoff, 2002.

vast natural resources, their mission became to bring the blessings of democracy and Christianity to the entire world. Americans believed that the Creator awarded them “God’s Elect,” “heaven on earth.”<sup>9</sup> Americans also believed that Providence provided them with the blessing of two oceans that kept them far from European entanglements and permitted a policy of “Isolation,” but at the same time the U.S., as a commercial trading nation adopted the foreign policy of the “flag follows the dollar” that meant wherever there was an American economic interest there would also be American political and/or military intervention.<sup>10</sup> Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the U.S. became a world power, its flag was present in the seven seas and the U.S. became a major actor in global politics. Isolationism did not disappear and was supported by a great number of Americans. Thus, ideals and pragmatism continued to play a role in the formulation of American foreign policies. Ideals had a great impact in the foreign policies of Presidents such as Wilson. Cynics claimed that God had ten points whereas Wilson needed fourteen.<sup>11</sup> Presidents Jimmy Carter and Barack Obama could also be described as being in the Wilsonian tradition permitting ideals to heavily influence their foreign and domestic agenda and policies. Franklin D. Roosevelt emphasized in his speeches, to the American people during World War II that the U.S. was fighting for the “Four Freedoms”<sup>12</sup> and President Ronald Reagan led the moral battle against the USSR—“The Evil Empire.”<sup>13</sup>

There was great interest and much support of the Armenians in the United States. This stemmed from the extensive involvement of American Protestant missionaries in the educational and medical systems in the Ottoman Empire and especially in Armenia.<sup>14</sup> After the end of World War I the main American interest in the Middle East became economic-strategic: oil, investments, markets and the strategic importance of the Turkish ally.<sup>15</sup> Those interests overshadowed ideals and humanitarian considerations and led to what became known as “the great betrayal.”

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- 9 The classical and most important study of this topic is Albert Katz Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny: A Study of Nationalist Expansion in American History*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1935; See also Ray Allen Billington and Martin Ridge, *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, 2001; Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History*. New York: Knoff, 1963.
  - 10 Julius W. Pratt, *Expansionists of 1898*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1925; Ernest R. May, *Imperial Democracy: The Emergence of the United States as a World Power*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1961; Howard K. Beale, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of America to World Power*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956.
  - 11 Thomas Bailey, *Woodrow Wilson and the Great Betrayal*. Chicago: Quadrangle, 1961; Ernest R. May, *World War I and American Isolation 1914–1917*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Historical Studies, 1959; Arthur S. Link, *Wilson the Diplomatist*. Chicago: Quadrangle, 1961; Howard K. Beale, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of America to World Power*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956.
  - 12 Robert Dallek, *Franklin Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy 1932 – 1945*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, 317-528.
  - 13 Alexander M. Haig Jr. *Caveat: Realism, Reagan and Foreign Policy*. New York: Macmillan, 1989.
  - 14 See supra note 5.
  - 15 John DeNovo, *American Interests and Policies in the Middle East 1900 -1939*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963.



Numerous Americans, during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the initial decades of the twentieth century felt, that the United States failed to act in an appropriate manner in regard to the Armenian debacle and protested against President Wilson that declared his support for Armenian independence and abhorred and protested the Ottoman-Turkish policies designed to exterminate the Armenians. His promises and statements on behalf of the Armenians were not accompanied by meaningful actions and caused harsh protests and criticism by many in the U.S. against him. Wilson, whose father was a minister, viewed “human rights” as a central subject in his agenda but there was a great contention and clash between his declared policy and his real policy. Wilson refused to declare war on Turkey and claimed that the cause of his inaction rested with his conviction he would lose an important lever of pressure that might result in American inability to assist the numerous American missionaries in the Ottoman empire. Theodore Roosevelt, that preceded Wilson as President, attacked Wilson and called him “an abject coward,” “the worst president since Buchanan” because of his refusal to undertake effective measures on behalf of the Armenians.<sup>16</sup> Roosevelt called the massacre of the Armenians as “the greatest crime of the War” and viewed the American failure to take effective steps against the Ottomans as an act of “condoning Turkish crimes.” Roosevelt emphasized that Wilson’s talks about ensuring world peace was a “mischievous nonsense” and that his refusal to go to war against Turkey demonstrated that all his declarations about “making the world safe for democracy” were simply “insincere claptrap.”<sup>17</sup>

The date that symbolized the start of the methodical annihilation process was April 24, 1915. This date was chosen to serve as the annual remembrance date for the Armenian Genocide. It commemorated the crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Ottoman and Turkish regimes in order to exterminate the Armenian people. On that date in 1915, the Ottoman authorities arrested and murdered 250 Armenian leaders and intellectuals in Constantinople [present day Istanbul].<sup>18</sup> Large scale massacres of Armenians occurred in Anatolia between 1894–1896. 250,000 Armenians were slaughtered and a similar number became refugees.<sup>19</sup>

In the years prior to World War I murder of Armenian males and children and death marches of women, elderly sick and children that were forced to cross deserts without food or water to concentration camps became routine. Confiscations of property, sales unto slavery and rapes were part of a systematic process of humiliation and extermination. After murdering males that reached military service age came the turn of political, religious and intellectual leaders to be slaughtered. The remaining Armenians were forced to leave their homes. The deportations were officially started in July 1915, after a law that authorized deportations of “suspected citizens” was enacted. All these activities occurred simultaneously in all the territories that were

16 Theodore Roosevelt to Samuel Dutton, November 15, 1915 in Theodore Roosevelt, *Fear and Take Your Own Part*. New York: T.R. Doran Co., 1916, 377-383.

17 Roosevelt to Dodge, May 11, 1918, *Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*. Vol. 8. *Days of Armageddon*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952, 1316-1318.

18 Ibid., 211–215.

19 Vakahn N. Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide*. Providence: Bergham Books, 1995, 155-156.



under Ottoman rule. The goal of the Ottoman authorities was to concentrate all the Armenians in the Aleppo area in northwest Syria and then to transfer the survivors to the Deir ez-Zor area in northwest Syria.<sup>20</sup> The central Ottoman authorities claimed that the “forced transfers” took place because of an “wartime emergency necessities” and that its purpose was to protect the populace. Women, children and the elderly were forced to participate in the death marches. Their property was declared “abandoned property” and was confiscated by the Ottoman authorities. It was estimated that in the period before 1915 over 1,500,000 Armenians perished.<sup>21</sup>

The Holocaust of European and North African Jewry during World War II, revived the interest and the responsibility of the international community to act on behalf of the victims and the persecuted people. A need was felt to provide for a new moral world order that would guarantee respect for human life and it became an integral part of numerous agreements that were codified by the United Nations. It raised Armenians’ hopes that their predicament would receive worldwide attention. The United Nation’s Assembly in 1948 adopted the “Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.” This convention defined Genocide as: “any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction, in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”<sup>22</sup>

The new term “Genocide” entered the legal and political lexicon after World War II relating to premeditated mass murders. It was Raphael Lemkin, a Polish-Jewish Holocaust survivor and a legal expert, who invented the term after researching the Armenian Holocaust that had a great similarity to the Jewish Genocide during World War II.<sup>23</sup> Turkey that was established after the demise of the Ottoman Empire continued the policy of denial of Ottoman-Turkish responsibility to the Armenian Genocide. The only nation supporting this stance is Azerbaijan. Numerous nations, forty-three states in the U.S., the United Nations, the European Parliament, The World Council of Churches, The Turkish Human Rights Association, The International Association of Researchers of Genocide, many in the academic world and the legal realm recognized the Ottoman-Turkish responsibility for the Armenian Genocide.<sup>24</sup> On April 22, 1965, Uruguay was the first nation to officially recognize the Armenian Genocide and decreed that annually, on April 24 it will celebrate “A Day of Remembrance for the Armenian Martyrs.” Recognition of the Armenian Genocide found expression in the many declarations of heads of states and in the resolutions passed by numerous parliaments.<sup>25</sup>

20 Peter Balakian, *Burning Tigris*. 175–180.

21 Ibid., 53-62.

22 “UN: When to refer to a situation as ‘Genocide.’” <http://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/publications-and-resources/GuidanceNote-when%20to%20refer%20%20situation%20as%20genocide.pdf>.

23 On Lemkin’s story and his contributions see Samantha Power, ‘*A Problem from Hell*’. 17 -73; Jay Winter, “Citation, The Genesis of Genocide.” *The Quarterly Journal of Military History*. Vol. 29, No. 3, 2017, 19.

24 The Armenian Genocide Museum Institute. *Recognition*. <http://genocide-museum.am>

25 Ibid.

**Testimonies of American Diplomats  
in the Ottoman Empire as Relayed to the Henry Morgenthau,  
the American Ambassador in Constantinople**

During the Armenian Genocide the U.S. had no territorial ambitions or meaningful strategic interests in the Middle East. American policies did not constitute any threat to the sovereignty or the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>26</sup> Its neutral posture till April 1917 permitted the U.S. to maintain diplomatic relations and an embassy in Constantinople and a wide network of consulates throughout the Ottoman Empire. American diplomats conveyed eyewitness reports to the embassy in Constantinople and thus to the State Department in Washington, D.C. about the Armenian Genocide. Those reports were the basis for the information on this topic. Moreover, many of the American diplomats risked their lives in order to save Armenian survivors and refugees. Henry Morgenthau served as the American ambassador in Constantinople between 1913 and May 23, 1916. After April 1915 the Ottoman authorities prevented him from relaying to or to receive coded messages from the American consulates in the Ottoman Empire. Most of the documents that he sent or received underwent censorship by the Ottoman authorities. The Ambassador realized that the Ottoman authorities attempted to conceal information.<sup>27</sup> In the following months he continued to receive numerous reports from the consulates that described in the deportations and murders of the Armenians. On July 10, 1915, he sent the following message to his superiors in Washington: "Persecution of the Armenians assuming unprecedented proportions. Reports from widely scattered districts indicate systematic attempt to uproot peaceful Armenian population and through arbitrary arrests, terrible torture, wholesale expulsions and deportations from one end of the Empire to the other, accompanied by frequent instances of rape, pillage, and murder turning into massacre, to bring destruction and destitution to them."<sup>28</sup> In another cable, on July 16, 1915, Morgenthau wrote "a campaign of race extermination is in progress under the pretext of reprisal against rebellion."<sup>29</sup>

On September 3, 1915, Morgenthau issued an urgent call for humanitarian assistance for the Armenians. This call resulted in the establishment, on September 16, 1915, of the American Committee for Armenian-Syrian Relief, an organization that in 1919 assumed the name of Near Eastern Relief. In 1916 the U.S. Congress adopted a resolution on the "Serious and immoral Evil Plight" of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. The purpose of the resolution was to facilitate the raising of funds from the American public in order to assist the victims. The resolution was supported

26 Rouben Paul Adalian, "American Diplomatic Correspondence in the Age of Mass Murder: The Armenian Genocide in US Archives." In Jay Winter (ed.). *America and the Armenian Genocide*. 146–184.

27 Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1918, 327.

28 Ibid.

29 Morgenthau to Secretary of State. July 16, 1915, Cable 858, in *Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States, 1915*.

by President Wilson.<sup>30</sup> Ambassador Morgenthau became the main spokesperson of this new organization and the remaining short time of his tenure in Constantinople he saw to it that the needy victims would receive food, medicine, clothing and other equipment that they required. He succeeded in convincing President Wilson to send an American naval vessel that delivered emergency aid to the Armenians. Between 1915 and 1929 the organization raised \$120,000,000 and goods worth a similar amount in order to help the suffering Armenians and assisted in rescuing many Armenians.<sup>31</sup> Ambassador Morgenthau demonstrated great courage and confronted with leadership of the Ottoman administrations on the Armenian question. In one of the exchanges he had with Talaat Pasha, the Ottoman Interior Minister, Talaat Pasha admitted that the acts described by Morgenthau did indeed occur but blamed the Armenians for getting rich at the expense of the Turks, for wanting to create an independent Armenian state, and encouraging the enemies of the Ottoman Empire as the reasons for their treatment.<sup>32</sup> During two different meetings Talaat Pasha demanded that the Ottoman Treasury would receive the insurance funds of those hundreds of Armenians that purchased policies in American life insurance companies since they and their heirs were no longer alive. In addition, Talaat ordered to confiscate funds that were transferred by cables to Armenians from the U.S. and demanded their transfer to the Ottoman treasury. The Ambassador was flabbergasted and deeply shocked by these demands.<sup>33</sup> Both Enver Pasha, the Ottoman War Minister and Talaat Pasha admitted their responsibility to the deportations and the massacres and added that these actions were planned in advance.<sup>34</sup> Morgenthau attempted, but failed, to convince the German Embassy to intervene and pressure their Ottoman allies to stop the massacres. The Germans refused to intervene.

The Ottoman authorities informed Morgenthau that “the manner that the Turkish authorities deal with Turkish citizens is a pure internal affair, unless it has a direct effect on the lives and interests of Americans. Therefore, it is not an American governmental concern.” Morgenthau rejected this approach.<sup>35</sup> Morgenthau continued to appraise the State Department about the Armenians’ fate and also continued to implore President Wilson, the State Department and Congress to put pressure on the Turks to stop the annihilation of the Armenians. He demanded also from the American authorities to put pressure on Germany to pressure the Turks to stop the mass murders and deportations and to assist those Americans that wished to provide humanitarian assistance to the Armenians. It was then that Morgenthau coined the term “race

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30 *Congressional Record*. 64<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 1916, 2335-2336; Donald A. Ritchie, “Congress Confronts the Armenian Genocide.” In Jay Winter (ed.). *America and the Armenian Genocide of 1915*. 280-281.

31 Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*. 280.

32 Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story*. 290, 334-339.

33 *Ibid.*, 337-339; Peter Balakian, *Burning Tigris*. 260-261, 290.

34 Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story*. 337-338, 351-352. See also Tanner Akcam, *Killing Orders: Talat Pasha's Telegrams and the Armenian Genocide*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Studies in the History of Genocide, 2018, [Documents], p. 175-233.

35 Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*. 277.



extermination.”<sup>36</sup> Despite his repeated appeals, Morgenthau was disappointed and frustrated by his failure to prompt the American administration to undertake effective actions to halt the debacle. When he ended his tenure as ambassador he wrote: “My failure to stop the destruction of the Armenians had Turkey for me a—place of horror, and I found intolerable my further daily association with men who, however gracious and accommodating they might have been to the American Ambassador, were still reeking with blood of nearly a million human beings.”<sup>37</sup> In 1918 he published his memoir of his service in Constantinople focusing on the Armenian Genocide in a book entitled *Ambassador Morgenthau’s Story*. Abram Elkus replaced Morgenthau as ambassador and served until April 1917, when the U.S. declared war on Germany. On this occasion Turkey severed relations with the U.S. Elkus’ role during his short stay was limited to attempts to assist Armenians, but the aid, in most cases, were confiscated by the Turkish authorities.

### **Leslie A. Davis, American Consul in Harput**

Leslie A. Davis, a New York lawyer, was the American Consul in Harput in the Elazig Province. He was stationed there from May 14, 1914 to May 16, 1917. Davis witnessed the demonization of and the horrendous actions perpetrated on the Armenian population and the closing and destruction of the missionary institutions during his tenure there.<sup>38</sup> Davis also relayed numerous reports about transgressions in the neighboring provinces, such as Diyarbakir, from American missionaries that were stationed there and from survivors that he hid in the Consulate. He sent numerous cables and reports to Ambassador Morgenthau and to the State Department hoping that the State Department would intensify its efforts to assist the Armenians. On June 30, 1915 he filed the following report and sent it to Ambassador Morgenthau: “one of the severest measures ever undertaken by the government and one of the greatest tragedies in all history.... Another method has been found to destroy the Armenian race. This is no less than the deportation of the entire Armenian population.... A massacre would be humane in comparison with it. In a massacre many escape, but in a wholesale deportation of this kind in this country means a lingering and more dreadful death for nearly every one. I do not believe it possible for one in a hundred to survive, perhaps one in a thousand.”<sup>39</sup>

Davis hoped that his reports would result in effective protests or to actions that would result in the cessation of the murder. Many of his cables and reports and

36 Morgenthau to Secretary of State, August 11, 1915, in *Papers Related to the Foreign Relations of the United States 1915. Supplement, The World War*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1928, 986.

37 Hans Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau’s Story*. 385.

38 United States National Archives, Record Group 59, Records of the Department of State, 867 Series, Internal Affairs of Turkey 1910-1929, File 867.4016, Race Problems. Leslie A. Davis, “Report of Leslie A. Davis, American Consul, Formerly of Harput, Turkey on the Work of the American Consulate at Harput since the Beginning of the Present War” (prepared for Mr. Wilbur Carr, Director of the Consular Service), U.S. State Department, RG 59, 867, 4016/392.5.

39 Leslie A. Davis, *The Slaughter House Province: An American Diplomat’s Report on the Armenian Genocide 1915-1917*. New Rochelle, NY: Artise D. Caratzas, 1989, 143-144.

cables were intercepted by the Ottoman authorities.<sup>40</sup> On one occasion, when he approached the Governor of the Province and asked to stop the deportations, he was asked to present his request in writing and include a statement that all the Armenians that were deported were “punished because they were found guilty of crimes against the Ottoman authorities and therefore deserved their fate.” Davis was emphatic in his refusal to comply.<sup>41</sup> According to Davis, by September 1915, the quarters of the Armenians that resided, in what he called “the Slaughter House Province” were deported.<sup>42</sup> Davis witnessed the pillage of the Armenian properties and consequently he hid and provided food for Armenians that he hid in the Consulate building. He attempted to save Armenian-Americans that resided in the Province and made great efforts to ascertain the fate of Armenians as per requests that he received from their relatives that resided in the U.S.<sup>43</sup> Many of the deportees left their money, valuables and documents in the Consulate, that included gold worth \$200,000.<sup>44</sup>

During the Spring of 1915, Davis traveled to thirty-six abandoned Armenian villages in the vicinity of Harput. Most of them, before the deportations, had 300 Armenian households. The homes in those villages were totally destroyed. In many of the villages the churches were destroyed and Davis found in them heaps of decaying corpses. The stench was unbearable.<sup>45</sup> He also discovered remnants of concentration camps of Armenian refugees and found there passports of Armenians that were expelled from the distant city of Erzurum, a city in eastern Anatolia.<sup>46</sup> His most shocking report described his two trips to Lake Goelzuk, there he found dismembered bodies, hands, legs, heads and dead babies most in temporary graves. Part of the bodies were devoured by dogs. He also saw hundreds of bodies floating in the lake. The victims were thrown to the lake from cliffs near the lake. In gorges and crevices near the Lake he saw piles of bodies in various stages of decay, their clothing was removed and afterward the bodies were stabbed and bayoneted: “We estimated in the course of our ride around the lake, and actually within the space of twenty-four hours, we had seen the remains of not less than ten thousand Armenians, mostly innocent and helpless women and children, were butchered on its shores and barbarously mutilated.”<sup>47</sup>

Until the end of his service as Consul in 1917, Davis continued to travel and discovered heaps of dead Armenians in every location that he traveled to. Upon his return to the U.S. he was asked by the State Department to describe his experience his reports were published by the Department of State under the title of “An American Diplomat’s Report of the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1917.”<sup>48</sup>

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40 Peter Balakian, *Burning Tigris*. 238.

41 Henry H. Riggs, *Days of Tragedy in Armenia: Personal Experiences in Harput 1915-1917*. Ann Arbor: Gomidas Institute, 1997, 52-55.

42 Ibid., 53-55; Merrill D. Peterson, *Starving Armenians*. 38.

43 Ibid., 40; Peter Balakian, *Burning Tigris*. 238.

44 Leslie Davis, « Report.” Supra Note 40, 31 -38.

45 Ibid., 63-69.

46 Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*. 247.

47 Leslie A. Davis, *Slaughter House Province*. 84-87.

48 Leslie A. Davis, “Report.” See Supra note 40.

### Jesse B. Jackson, American Consul in Aleppo, and Other American Consuls

The reports of Jesse B. Jackson, the Consul that served in Aleppo between 1908-1917, provided further first hand reports for Ambassador Morgenthau and for the State Department. Jackson witnessed caravans of hundreds of thousands Armenians that were expelled from all parts of the Ottoman empires and were forced to cross the Deir ez-Zor desert where most died of starvation, torture and disease in a massacre that occurred during the summer of 1915.<sup>49</sup> Jackson described the deportees as naked, injured, dirty and fatigued. Most were dying of dysentery and typhoid fever. In his August 1915 report Jackson summarized: "It is a gigantic plundering scheme as well as a final blow to extinguish the [Armenian] race."<sup>50</sup> Jackson also received reports from F.H. Leslie, a minister that served as his representative in Urfa, on the deportations and massacres. Leslie, for his aid to Armenians was arrested, tortured and committed suicide in jail. Jackson was involved in saving a great number of Armenians by supplying Armenians in the city, and in the neighboring towns and villages, in the camps and in the orphanages, food and financial help. His activities were contrary to stern, explicit instructions *that* he had received from the Ottoman authorities that prohibited him from engaging in such activities.<sup>51</sup>

Other American consuls that were stationed in different parts of the Ottoman Empire filed similar reports in the cables and reports that they had sent the Embassy and to Washington. The consuls Oscar Heizer in Trabzon and W. Peter in Samsun, Charles A. Allen in Adrien [Adrianople], Edward A. Nathan in Adana and Mersin, George Horton in Izmir all reported on the atrocities perpetrated on the Armenians and the Greeks.<sup>52</sup> The State Department also received reports from the consulates in Jerusalem, Haifa, Bagdad, Beirut, Cairo, Salonika, Odessa, Tbilisi, St. Petersburg and Alexandretta Those reports were used by Morgenthau in his efforts to supply a complete picture of the atrocities and for his attempts to raise help for the survivors.<sup>53</sup> Consul Oscar Heizer described the deportations of the entire Armenian population from Trebizond, the forced drowning of many of them in the Black Sea and the plundering of their property.<sup>54</sup> Consul W. Peter described the forced conversion of Armenians to Islam and the transfer of their homes to local Turks and to Islamic refugees from the Balkans.<sup>55</sup> All the reports corroborated each other and provided evidence to systematic, initiated and directed persecutions by the authorities. In a report written by Talaat Pasha on November 18, 1915, he confirmed that he had full knowledge of the reports that the consuls sent to Ambassador Morgenthau.<sup>56</sup>

49 Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*. 253-260.

50 *United State Official Documents on the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1917*. As quoted in Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*. 256

51 *Ibid.*, 260-261.

52 For Horton's reports see Gordon Horton, *The Blight of Asia*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1926.

53 Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*. 265.

54 *Ibid.*

55 Oscar Heizer to Henry Morgenthau July 28, 1915. U.S. National Archives, RG 59,867, 4016/128, 1.

56 Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*. 346-347.



## American Diplomacy and the International Response

During and immediately after the end of World War I the horrific crimes perpetrated upon the Armenians that resided in the Ottoman Empire became well known, all over the world, through the extensive coverage in the press internationally. In 1915 alone the *New York Times* published 145 articles that dealt with the massacre of the Armenian people. The conclusions from the reports were unequivocal: the massacres were “planned,” “systematic,” “organized,” “supported and executed by the Ottoman authorities.” It was “a project of annihilation and of systematic race murder.”<sup>57</sup> The sources of most of the reports were missionaries and diplomats, many of them Americans, that were stationed in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>58</sup> These reports caused the allies, Russia, France and England to issue a joint statement in London on May 24, 1915, on the subject of the mass murder that warned the Ottoman authorities of the grave consequences of the crimes: “For about a month the Kurd and Turkish populations of Armenia have been massacring Armenians with the connivance and often assistance of Ottoman authorities. Such massacres have taken place from mid-April at Erzurum, Terdjian, Eghine, Bitlis, Moush, Sasoun, Zeytoun, and in all Celicia. The inhabitants of approximately a hundred villages in the vicinity of Van besieged by Kurds. At the same time, the Ottoman government has acted ruthlessly against the defenceless Armenian population of Constantinople. In View of this new crime of Turkey against humanity and civilization, the Allied governments make known publically to the Sublime Porte that they will hold all members of the Turkish government as well as those officials who have participated in these massacres, personally responsible.”<sup>59</sup>

This was the first use of the term “crime against humanity” in an official document in an international context.<sup>60</sup> This was also the first time that courts were established to deal not only with “War Crimes” but also with “Crimes against Humanity.” This occurred before the Nurnberg Trials that were convened after World War II.<sup>61</sup> The Turkish government, after World War I, in 1919, put on trial a few government officials that belonged to the “Young Turks” and charged them with crimes related to the massacres, plunders and the deportations. Nationalist Turkish scholars criticized these trials as “show trials” or “Kangaroo Courts” designed to placate and appease the victorious allies.<sup>62</sup>

57 Ibid., xix.

58 In 1900, for example, there were 300 American missionaries in 162 missions and in 21 centers throughout the Ottoman Empire. In most they ran and activated schools and hospitals. See Merrill Peterson, *Starving Armenia*. 19.

59 Telegram sent from American Embassy, Constantinople to Department of State, Washington, May 29, 1915. “French Foreign Office requests following notice be given Turkish Government. Quote May 24th.” [France, Great Britain, Russia Joint Declaration]. United States National Archives, RG 59, 867, 4016/67.

60 Woodrow Wilson, *Self Determination and the Rights of Small Nations*. Dublin, IR: Candle Press, 1918, 18-19.

61 Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*. 331-333.

62 An example to the approach of a Turkish scholar to the Armenian Genocide and to the official Turkish historic narrative on the subject could be found in the book by Dr. Sukru Server Aya, *The Genocide of Truth Continues... But Facts Tell the Real Story*. Istanbul: Der'in yayiniari, 2010.

In April 1917, the U.S. declared war on Germany and in December on Austro-Hungary but not on Turkey that severed diplomatic relations with the U.S. when the U.S. declared war on Germany. The U.S. assumed a neutral stance *vis-à-vis* Turkey that continued to be a loyal German ally. The numerous American missionaries in the Ottoman Empire staunchly opposed an American declaration of war against Turkey because they feared that would cause their expulsion and thus they would lose the great investment in educational network and in the hospitals and infirmaries they had established throughout the Ottoman Empire during the previous 100 years. The value of the properties owned by the American churches was estimated at \$123,000,000 [1900 value]. The American missionaries were cognizant that if they were expelled there would not remain a single body that could provide humanitarian assistance to the remaining Armenians and that would result in their complete annihilation.<sup>63</sup>

Former President Theodore Roosevelt bitterly attacked this position of the missionaries and the unwillingness of the Wilson administration to declare war on Turkey: "I feel that we are guilty of a peculiarly odious form of hypocrisy when we profess friendship for Armenia and the downtrodden races in Turkey, but don't go to war with Turkey. To allow the Turks to massacre the [Armenians] and then solicit permission to help the survivors, and then to allege the fact that we are helping the survivors as a reason why we should not follow the only policy that will permanently put a stop to such massacres is both foolish and odious[.]"<sup>64</sup>

It seemed that President Wilson attempted to protect the interests of the American missionaries and at the same time maintain a lever of pressure on the Ottoman authorities in order to assure the continuation of the missionaries' work.<sup>65</sup> Wilson also suspected that the allies had plans to annex parts of the Ottoman Empire into their spheres of influence and rule and wished to limit their imperial appetites.<sup>66</sup> Wilson erred in his policy decision. It did not result in any Ottoman change in the genocide policies and also numerous Americans were already among the victims of the Ottoman policy.<sup>67</sup> The consequence and significance of Wilson's refusal to declare war on Turkey resulted, after the cease fire, in the U.S. possessing lesser, limited influence during the negotiations with Turkey after the end of the war.<sup>68</sup>

63 Ibid., 305-307.

64 Theodore Roosevelt to Cleveland Dodge, May 11, 1918. *Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*. Vol. 8, New York: Cooper Square Press, 1923, 1316-1318.

65 Suzanne E. Moranian, "A Legacy of Paradox: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Armenian Genocide," in Jay Winter (ed.). *America and the Armenian Genocide of 1915*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 310-314; Lloyd B. Ambrosius, "Wilsonian Diplomacy and Armenia: The Limits of Power and Ideology," in Jay Winter (ed.). *America and the Armenian Genocide of 1915*. 116.

66 John Milton Cooper, "A Friend in Power? Woodrow Wilson and Armenia," in *ibid.*, 105, 110.

67 Jay Winter, "Introduction: Witness to Genocide." In *America and the Armenian Genocide of 1915*. 3-4.

68 Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*. 296, 308, 331.

### **The Sevres Conferences and the Debates in the American Policy Decisions Network**

During October 1915, President Wilson received information about the massacres of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire and was under pressure to protest to the Ottoman authorities on the subject.<sup>69</sup> After the end of the war Morgenthau continued to lobby on behalf of the Armenians and urged the American Government to send troops to Armenia to defend the young democratic republic that was just established.<sup>70</sup> This did not happen. Despite this, in response to a request by Pope Benedict XV Wilson stated that: “one of my most cherished desires [is] to play any part that I can in securing for that wronged and distressed people the protection of right and the complete deliverance from unjust subjection.”<sup>71</sup> Support of the Armenians was bi-partisan and was supported by both parties in Congress but the President had to contend with a small number of opponents from his own Democratic Party.<sup>72</sup>

In January 1919, Vice Admiral Mark Bristol was appointed to the post of American High Commissioner in Turkey. During his service there that lasted to 1927 he represented a different attitude towards the Armenian question and focused on what he called a “wider point of view” whose purpose was to get rid of the Armenian “lemon.”<sup>73</sup> His prejudice against Armenians and his poisonous hate towards them were evident in the numerous reports that he sent to his superiors in Washington. Bristol opposed any reparation for Armenians, opposed the establishment of an Armenian state and described Armenians as a people that caused problems and strife. In many of his reports he dismissed reports that described massacres of Armenians and defined them as misleading lying propaganda.<sup>74</sup> In addition, he asked the State Department to pressure American newspapers to be less supportive towards the Armenians. Bristol was a senior U.S. Navy officer and had great respect and admiration for the brutal power of the Turks. He placed commercial interests before humanitarian considerations and human lives. He did not possess a modicum of sympathy for the Armenian suffering. He refused to investigate and report on murders and deportations of Armenians that were ordered by Mustafa Kemal’s government that occurred in the 1920s. Three American destroyers that docked in Izmir harbor were ordered by the naval high command not to interfere.<sup>75</sup> This caused the American missionaries in Turkey to demand Bristol’s removal because of his clear preference for the Turks

69 Colonel House to Wilson, October 1, 1915, In *Wilson Papers*. Vol. XXXV, 3; John Milton Cooper, “A Friend in Power?” 104.

70 *New York Times*. November 6, 1918.

71 “Wilson to Pope Benedict XV, December 24, 1918.” In Arthur Link (ed.). *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966, 489.

72 Lloyd B. Ambrosius, “Wilsonian Diplomacy,” 113-114; John Milton Cooper, “A Friend in Power?” 107.

73 Library of Congress, Division of Manuscript, The Papers of Mark L. Bristol, Box 65, Armenia File, Bristol to American mission, August 21, 1919; Bristol to Harbord, Box 31, August 20, 1919.

74 Mark L. Bristol Diary in Mark L. Bristol Papers, Library of Congress, June 7, July 20, September 7 and November 9, 1919

75 Marjorie Housepian Dobkin, *Smyrna 1922: The Destruction of a City*. London: Faber and Faber, 1972, chs. XVII-XX.



they viewed him as unfit for his position.<sup>76</sup> Their protest elicited no response from the American authorities.

### **President Wilson at the Versailles Peace Conference**

Early in 1919, the Versailles Conference convened in Paris. President Wilson presented his vision—the “Fourteen Points,” the principles that should be the base and guide the conduct of nations after World War I. Point number Twelve of his plan called for “A New World Order” that would ensure security for the lives and an opportunity for the autonomous development of Greeks, Assyrians, Arabs and Armenians that had lived under Turkish rule.<sup>77</sup> In the Armenian case, Wilson suggested, that Armenia should be placed under the protection of the League of Nations that would recommend and choose a nation that would run Armenian affairs until Armenia would decide to declare its independence.<sup>78</sup> Two Armenian delegations were present at the Versailles Conference but both did not receive official recognition. Both delegation hoped and begged for American protection and leadership that would result in the U.S. would be awarded the mandate of Armenia. Most European nations urged the U.S. to agree to accept the Armenian mandate until Armenia would decide to declare independence.<sup>79</sup> President Wilson refused to decide and did not wish to commit himself “until the American people and its representatives in Congress would express their opinion on the subject.” Thus Wilson postponed and delayed the signing of the Versailles Treaty, the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding with the Turkish government, and the details of the aid package to Armenia.<sup>80</sup> This was politics of shrieking and avoiding responsibility.<sup>81</sup> In May 1917, Lloyd George, The British Prime Minister, urged President Wilson to send American troops to Turkish Armenia and to Constantinople.<sup>82</sup> Wilson refused because he did not wish to have the U.S. mixed in the “territorial debates of the Old World.”<sup>83</sup> Thus he highlighted the limits of his powers and of his worldview. In closed meetings Wilson told some of his Democratic Party supporters that he thought it was the duty of the U.S. to agree to accept the Armenia mandate because of the extensive American influence there that stemmed from the large numbers of American missionaries that served there and had a great influence on the educational institutions there. He added that such a step would be purely altruistic and would not result in financial gains. Wilson attempted to pursue a policy that would be balanced between

76 Merrill D. Peterson, *Starving Armenians*. 125-126.

77 “Address of the President of the United States, delivered at a joint session of the two houses of Congress, January 8, 1918.” Hose Doc. 765, 65<sup>th</sup> Cong. 2d Sess. 1918.

78 Richard G. Hovanissian, “The Armenian Genocide,” 259; Lloyd B. Ambrossius, “Wilsonian Diplomacy,” 126.

79 Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*. 300.

80 Robert Underwood Johnson, *Remembered Yesterday*. Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1923, 528-530.

81 Davis to Wilson, January 15 and January 21, 1920, *Papers of Woodrow Wilson*. Vol. LXVII, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, 63-67, 79.

82 “Meeting of the Council of Four,” May 5, 1919, *Papers of Woodrow Wilson*. Vol. LVIII, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987, 436-438.

83 Memorandum, *Papers of Woodrow Wilson*. December 30, 1918, Vol. LIII, 561-562.

American public opinion, national interest and moral duty.<sup>84</sup> This was not a simple task in the post-World War I American environment. Americans were deeply disappointed with the results of the World War. Wilson decided to send Henry Churchill King, the President of Oberlin University in Ohio and Charles Crane, a prominent Chicago businessman on a fact finding mission to the Middle East to ascertain the wishes of the people of Syria and Palestine as to the future of the territories that they lived in. Most Arabs wanted an independent Syria and not a French mandate and seventy-two percent opposed the Zionist plans to settle Palestine.<sup>85</sup> The King-Crane Commission also investigated the conditions under which the residents of the area would support mandates.<sup>86</sup> The future of Armenia was also discussed in their report that was supportive and sympathetic to the Armenians. It described the crimes inflicted on the Armenians “as black as anything in human history” and demanded that the wrongs inflicted on them be rectified. Their report stressed that in any political solution in the region had to take the Armenian interest into account. Because of the great decline in the Armenian population that was caused by the massacres and deportations, the Commission recommended that the Russian Erivan region and the Ottoman provinces of Trabzon, Erzurum and Bitlis along with an outlet to the Black Sea would be included in the new independent Armenia when it would be established. This was intended to assure that within five years the Armenians would constitute a demographic majority in Armenia.<sup>87</sup> The establishment of an independent Armenia was, according to the report, essential because: “the demonstrated unfitness of the Turks to rule over others, or even themselves; because of the adoption of repeated massacres as a deliberate policy of state; because of an almost complete lack of penitence for massacres, or repudiation of the crime—they rather seek... to excuse them... because the most elementary justice suggests there must be at least some region in Turkey where Armenians can go and not have to live under Turkish rule; because nothing less than that could give the Armenians any adequate guarantee of safety; because consequently, nothing less will satisfy the conscience of the world... the Armenians have surely earned the right, by their sufferings, their endurance, their loyalty to principles, their unbroken spirit and ambition, and the demonstrated industry, ability and self-reliance to look forward to a national life of their own; because such a separate state would probably make more certain decent treatment of Armenians in other parts of Turkey; and because there is no adequate substitute for such a state. In the interests of the Armenians, of the Turks, and of peace of the world alike, the formation of a separate Armenian state is to be urged.”<sup>88</sup>

The report emphasized neither the Turkish authorities nor the Turkish people recognized their responsibility for the Armenian massacres.<sup>89</sup> The authors of the Report

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84 Merrill D. Peterson, *Starving Armenians*. 72.

85 Andrew Patrick, *America's Forgotten Middle East Initiative*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2015, 160-161.

86 Richard G. Hovannissian, “The Armenian Genocide,” 261.

87 Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*. 351; Merrill D. Peterson, *Starving Armenians*. 83.

88 *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States: The Paris Peace Conference, 1919*. vol. 12 (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1947, 814.

89 *Ibid.*, 810-813.

recommended that the Turks express their remorse for their crimes by transferring territories to Armenia and agree to “just repatriation” that would help the victim to rebuild the regions that the Turks destroyed.<sup>90</sup> The authors of the Report added: “It was better to spend millions to preserve the peace than billions to wage another war.”<sup>91</sup> On August 28, 1919, The Report was presented to the Paris Peace Conference but it was not published or circulated until 1922.

Robert Lansing, Wilson’s Secretary of State, was an extreme opponent of Wilson’s policy on Armenia. Lansing, a radical nationalist, entire worldview was based on economic and military considerations only and mostly on what would the U.S. profit from its policies. He opposed the sovereignty of small, weak nations and held international justice codes in contempt. He declared “that almost any form of atrocity is permissible provided a nation’s safety is involved.”<sup>92</sup> Lansing had no desire or need to investigate “crimes against humanity” and succeeded in removing those words from the final draft of the Paris Peace Treaty. He believed, supported and gave priority to international trade, commerce and economic ties that would ensure that the U.S. would be the leading and most important leader of the capitalist world.<sup>93</sup> Many believed that both Lansing and Wilson preferred to place the responsibility for the future of Armenia on America’s allies and blame the U.S. Congress in America’s inaction on Armenia’s behalf. The President used the wide support the Armenian cause had in the U.S. to promote his political agenda. Humanitarian considerations, on this matter, were not really important to the American political leadership.<sup>94</sup>

### **The Armenia Mandate**

In July 1919, after returning to the U.S. from the Paris Peace Conference, Wilson embarked on a journey across the U.S. in an attempt to convince Americans to approve the Versailles Agreements and to join the League of Nations. Later that month the American envoy to the New Armenian republic called on the Allies that met in Paris to provide military protection to Armenia against the Turkish attempt to annex Armenian territories. He said that this had to be done in order to prevent “a disaster... more terrible than the massacre of 1915.”<sup>95</sup> Wilson wrote that he directed the State Department to support an initiative in Congress that would authorize him to send a military mission to Armenia. In September 1919, a military mission headed by General James Harbord left for Armenia. Its mission was to ascertain the interests and the constraints on American involvement necessary to protect American interests in Armenia.<sup>96</sup> The Mission’s report confirmed that the massacres and deportations of 1915 were planned and executed by the Turkish authorities and added that Turkey must

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 814.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 819-828, 841-847.

<sup>92</sup> Christopher Simpson, *The Splendid Blonde Beast*. New York: Grove Press, 1993, 23-34.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Desk Diary of Robert Lansing, August 21, 1919. *Papers of Woodrow Wilson*. Vol. LXII, 453-454.

<sup>95</sup> James Gidney, *A Mandate for Armenia*. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1967, 170.

<sup>96</sup> United States National Archives. RG 1256, 184.21/142 and RG 256184.021/106/113;



never, in the future, rule any part of Armenia. The Mission concluded that the Turks would never cease to try to annihilate the Armenians. Only if a third powerful entity would intervene on behalf of the Armenians could they be saved. In its final report that was presented on October 23, 1919, it was stated that if the U.S. would not assume responsibility over the Armenian territory all assistance efforts to save the Armenian would be like “pouring water through a strainer.”<sup>97</sup> The Mission’s Report stated that it felt that the U.S. had a “moral duty” to assume the “burdens and the responsibilities” of the mandate of Armenia. The Mission’s Report summarized the occurrences and the impact of the Armenian Genocide: “Mutilation, violations, torture, and death have left their haunting memories in hundred beautiful Armenian valleys and traveler in that region is seldom free from the evidence of this most colossal crime of all ages.... Conditions shriek of misery, ruin, starvation, and all the melancholy aftermath, not only of honorable warfare, but of bestial brutality unrestrained by God or man.”<sup>98</sup> The American authorities never related to the King–Crane Commission or to the Harbord Reports.<sup>99</sup>

During this time period, President Wilson suffered near fatal, severe strokes that caused brain damage that hindered his ability to function.<sup>100</sup> For a month a Senate sub-committee deliberated Wilson’s proposal and conducted hearings on the question whether to station American army and naval personnel in Armenia in order to ensure the very existence of the Armenian state. Finally, the subcommittee report was defined as “wholly advisory.” It was drafted by Wilson’s Republican adversary, future President Warren G. Harding. It did not reach consideration on the Senate floor until May 1920.<sup>101</sup> When it reached the Senate floor the proposal did not include the sending of American military personnel to Armenia. It empowered the President to dispatch a naval destroyer and a unit of U.S. Marines to protect the lives and property of American citizens that resided in the port city of Batumi.<sup>102</sup> The President countered by requesting the Senate to grant him the authority to assume the mandate over Armenia. On June 1, 1920, this request was denied by the Senate.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, the U.S. did not grant diplomatic recognition to the Armenian Republic, this contrary to its European allies. This despite the efforts of the pro-Armenian Lobby in the U.S. Because of America’s refusal to undertake the Armenian mandate and because of the fact that the U.S. did not sever diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire, the U.S. was not invited to be an official participant in the 1920 San Remo Conference and therefore was not permitted to participate in the deliberations concerning the future of Armenia. Armenia, during that time, was threatened by Turkey’s Mustafa Kemal and

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97 United States National Archives. RG 256, 1284.021/329 enclosures; RG 59, 860J.02/25; RG 256, 867B.00/296.

98 United States National Archives, RG 256, 184.02105/5.

99 Richard B. Hovanissian, “The Armenian Genocide.” 257.

100 Merrill D. Peterson, “Starving Armenians.” 85.

101 John Milton Cooper Jr. “A Friend in Power?” 109.

102 U.S. Senate, Subcommittee on Foreign Relations, Hearings: *Maintenance of Peace in Armenia*. Congressional Record, 66<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess. Washington, DC: 1919.

103 Wilson message to Congress, May 24, 1920 in *Wilson Papers*, vol. LXV, 320-323; *Congressional Record*. 2nd Sess., 8073 June 1, 1920.

by the Russian Bolshevik regime. In the San Remo Conference, the Allies presented the U.S. an official request to assume the mandate over Armenia. The U.S. refused this request when it realized that the Allies divided the oil fields in the Ottoman Empire amongst themselves leaving the U.S. out of the of the act.<sup>104</sup>

### **“The Great Betrayal”**

The American public, meanwhile, lost interest in the Armenian topic because of the deep disappointment from the outcome of the World War that resulted in the rejection of Wilson’s idealism and the unwillingness to assume the costly burdens of international commitments.<sup>105</sup> The State Department, headed by Bainbridge Colby, the new Secretary of State, assumed a much more favorable stance on the Armenian question. and on April 23, 1920, accorded de-facto recognition to the Armenian Republic.<sup>106</sup>

A month later, Wilson’s request to accept the mandate over Armenia was deliberated in both houses of Congress and was rejected. Numerous Congressmen wondered why the American people must finance the defense and the rebuilding of a poor devastated nation, especially since there did not exist the slightest chance for any material profit from assuming the mandate. Most members of Congress had an the image of Armenia as a poorhouse populated by wretched beings that could not deliver any meaningful economic or strategic contribution to the U.S.<sup>107</sup> At that time the American business community rapidly took advantage of attractive economic opportunities in the Middle East, especially in the oil business. Those opportunities did not exist in Armenia. The attempts of President Wilson to include a statement supporting an independent Armenia that focused on Christian and humanitarian values and duties into the Democratic Party’s National Platform failed.<sup>108</sup> Instead, the following paragraph appeared in the Party Platform: “We express our deep and earnest sympathy for the unfortunate people of Armenia, and we believe that our government, consistent with Constitution and our principles, should render every possible and proper aid to them in their efforts to establish and maintain a government of their own.”<sup>109</sup>

When it signed the Treaty of Sevres on August 10, 1920, the Turkish government undertook to arrest and try those who were responsible for the massacres. The international community had no doubt about the veracity of the reports of the massacres. The Treaty also recognized and supported Armenian independence and called upon the President of the United States to determine Armenia’s borders and

<sup>104</sup> Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*. 366.

<sup>105</sup> Mark Malakasian, “The Disintegration of the Armenian Cause in the United States, 1918-1927,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. Vol. 16, No. 3, August 1984, 349-365; Walter LaFeber, *The American Age: U.S. foreign Policy at Home and Abroad*. vol. II, New York: Norton, 1994, 328-330; Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, 227-270.

<sup>106</sup> Merrill D. Peterson, *Starving Armenians*. 98.

<sup>107</sup> Richard Hovanissian, *Between Crescent and Sickle, Partition and Sovietization*. Vol 4, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, 15-24; James B. Gidney, *A Mandate for Armenia*. ch. 10.

<sup>108</sup> Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*. 362.

<sup>109</sup> “1920 Democratic Party Platform.” <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/1920-democratic-party-platform>.

ensure that Armenia would have a Black Sea outlet. The treaty also demanded from Turkey to relinquish all claims on Armenian territories.<sup>110</sup> The delay by President Wilson to determine Armenia's borders hindered the process.<sup>111</sup> In December 1920, Armenia became part of the Soviet Union after it was forced to relinquish territories in its western regions to Turkey. It was ironic, since President Wilson had the authority to send American forces to Armenia without the need to wait for Congressional approval on the mandate issue but he chose not to act.<sup>112</sup>

### **The Change in America's Policy on Armenia and Its Complicity in the Denial of the Armenian Genocide**

In contrast to Wilson's and the Democratic Party's professed idealism, President Warren G. Harding and his Republican Party promoted American policies of isolation and the limitation of American involvement overseas. The Republican Party that opposed Wilson's "irresponsible" attempt to receive the mandate over Armenia did not change its position on the issue. During the Harding Administration public opinion was divided between calls for aid and justice for Armenia and the limits sets by the Republican Administration on this issue. Instead of emphasis on the past, the injustice and the massacres the Harding Administration preferred to focus on the present and future and face the new emerging realities.<sup>113</sup> This was manifested when Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes refused to act in behalf the Armenians and Greeks in the 1922 Izmir calamitous riots.<sup>114</sup> Hughes declare that the time had come for the U.S. to alter its policy towards Turkey because of the changes in the political climate.<sup>115</sup> Europe that just began to distant itself from the horrors of World War I and in the U.S. "Splendid isolation" foreign policy and a desire "to return to normalcy" reigned. It found expression in unwillingness to be involved in European affairs in particular and world affairs in general. A great, unreasonable fear of Bolshevik revolutionary designs gripped the nation after end of the War in the period that became known as the "Res Scare" and was characterized by mass hysteria and persecution of alleged Communists and traitors and total disregard of basic Constitutional rights.<sup>116</sup> One of the

110 Fred Israel (ed.). *Major Peace Treaties of Modern History, 1648-1967*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1967, 2048-2088.

111 Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*. 359-360.

112 James W. Gerard to Wilson, May 24, and May 18, 1920. *Papers of Woodrow Wilson*. vol. LXV, 287-288.

113 William W. Peet to James L. Barton, memorandum, 1923, in American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, Western Turkey Mission sup. 1920-1924, vol. 1. Documents. No. 37 Houghton Library, Harvard University; James L. Barton, "Report on the Lausanne Conference" in *ibid.*, No. 328.

114 Allen Dulles to Mark Bristol April 21m, 1922, U.S. National Archives. RG 45, Washington, DC. In Christopher Simpson, *The Blond Beast*. 34.

115 *The Treaty with Turkey: Statements Resolutions and Reports in Favor of Ratification of the Treaty of Lausanne*. New York: General Committee in Favor of Ratification of the Treaty with Turkey. 1926, 11-17.

116 Geoffrey R. Stone, *Perilous Times: Free Speech in Wartime*. New York: Norton, 2004, 135-233; Robert J. Goldstein, *Political Repression in Modern America from 1870 to 1976*. Urbana:

results of these currents was the tragic reality that the surviving Armenians witnessed that American and European policy makers preferred to overlook and disregard their predicaments and chose to forget their past and their suffering. At the same time, the rapid winning rise of Kemalism occurred in Turkey and the Sevres Treaty was ignored since Mustafa Kemal succeeded to pressure the European allies to agree to a new and much more lenient and comfortable treaty—the Lausanne Treaty of July 24, 1923. The U.S., again, was just an observer. The American position was that the rights of minorities had to be protected and also called for the establishment of a homeland for the Armenians. This point caused vigorous protests from the Turkish Delegation that clarified, before the convening of the Lausanne Conference that raising the Armenian question would result in the cessation of the deliberations.<sup>117</sup> Later, the Turks promised to return oil fields, railway building rights and other resources in Turkey's eastern provinces that had been cancelled, to American corporations.<sup>118</sup> The Turks used this economic bait and the U.S., that at the time, was concerned about its low oil reserves enthusiastically swallowed the bait.<sup>119</sup> In the Lausanne Treaty, Turkey was cleared from all responsibility for the policies and deeds of the Ottoman Empire. It was the economic and commercial preferences and interests of the Allied Powers that were the reasons for the betrayal, the denial and the abandonment of the Armenians. The word "Armenia" did not appear in the final draft of the Lausanne Treaty.<sup>120</sup> The U.S. Senate, in 1927, did not confirm the Lausanne Treaty and the Treaty was denounced by the Democratic Party in its 1924 Presidential Elections Platform. In 1927, the U.S. renewed diplomatic relations with Turkey and both nations opened embassies. In the respective capitals.<sup>121</sup> Immediately after the Lausanne Conference the Turkish and American delegations met to formulate a Friendship and Commerce Treaty. This treaty was planned by the State Department and received its approval. The main points of this treaty were: Free passage to American ships in the Dardanelles, an "Open Door" policy towards American business concerns and protection of the Christians living in Turkey.<sup>122</sup> This treaty was described by Oscar Straus, a former U.S. Ambassador to Turkey, as "diabolically one-sided" but it was, in 1929, approved by the Senate.<sup>123</sup> This treaty in addition to the American economic rivalry with the European nations, especially in the oil fields concessions, resulted in the abandonment of the Armenian

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University of Illinois Press, 2001; Robert K. Murray, *Red Scare: A Study of National Hysteria*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955; Arnon Gutfeld, *Montana's Agony: Years of War and Hysteria 1917-1921*. Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1979.

117 Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*. 369-370.

118 Luther L. Fowler to Ernest W. Riggs, June 10, 1923. *ABC Papers*. [Supra Note 116] Central Turkey Mission 1920-1924, Documents, vol. 1, No. 46; George Sweet Gibbs and Evelyn H. Knowlton, *History of the Standard Oil Company: The 4c Resurgent Years 1911-1927*. New York: Harper & Bros. 1956, ch.11.

119 Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*. 365-366.

120 Treaty of Lausanne, July 24, 1923. [https://www.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Treaty\\_of\\_Lausanne](https://www.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Treaty_of_Lausanne); *New York Times*, Editorial, July 24, 1923.

121 Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*. 372.

122 Gregory Aftaldinian, *Armenia, Visions of a Republic: The Independence Lobby in America*. Boston: Charles River Books, 1981, 58.

123 Ibid.



cause: “The Department of State became a concession hunting agency for the Standard Oil Company.”<sup>124</sup> As a result, Turkey took advantage of the opportunity and adopted a policy of denial and oppression of any public debate or official mention of the horrible treatment of the Armenians in the West. This policy reached the Hollywood film industry: in 1935, when Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer acquired the right to produce a film based on Franz Werfel’s novel *The Forty Days of Moussa Dag*, the story based on the Armenian genocide in order to produce an important blockbuster film. The State Department intervened in order to cancel the production of the film by MGM because of threats and protests by the Turkish government.<sup>125</sup> The economic and commercial interests of the American business community had much greater importance than Turkey’s treatment of minorities or the right to free expression.<sup>126</sup>

### **The American Refusal to Recognize Turkey’s Responsibility for the Armenian Genocide**

During the deliberations in the United Nations in 1948 on the U.N. Convention on Genocide, The Armenians realized that they had been victims of a crime that till then had no name or definition. In order to honor the memory of the victims, Armenians in all the nations of their diaspora began efforts to receive national and international recognition of their debacle through adoption of decisions that recognize the historical veracity of their holocaust. On the fiftieth anniversary of the Armenian Genocide the governors of Massachusetts and Maine delivered speeches and published memorials about the genocide. Commemorative speeches were also delivered in the U.S. Senate. Future President Gerald Ford, then a Republican member of the House of Representatives from Michigan, declared in Congress that he recognized the “Turkish Genocide of the Armenian people.” In 1975, both houses of Congress attempted to adopt a resolution that called for a “National Day of Remembrance of Man’s Inhumanity to Man” on April 24. Because of State Department’s demands and pressure every mention of Turkey was removed from the Declaration. The resolution read: “The President of the United States is Authorized and requested to issue a proclamation calling upon the people of the United States to observe such day as a day of remembrance for all the victims of genocide, especially those of Armenian ancestry who succumbed to the genocide perpetrated in 1915, and in whose memory this date is commemorated by all Armenians and their friends throughout the world.”<sup>127</sup> This resolution did not pass in the Judiciary Committee of the Senate because of the opposition of the State Department that feared that adoption of this resolution would insult Turkey, an American ally in NATO that her friendship was very important to the national security of the U.S. and to

124 Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*. 366-370.

125 Merrill D. Peterson, *Starving Armenians*. 156-158.

126 George A. Plimpton, “The New Turkey,” in *The Treaty with Turkey: Statements, Resolutions and Reports in Favor of Ratification of the Treaty of Lausanne*. New York: General Committee in Favor of Ratification of the Treaty with Turkey, 1926, 10.

127 U.S. Congress, House, “National Day of Remembrance of Man’s Inhumanity to Man,” H.J. Res. 148, 94<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, *Congressional Record*. April 8, 1975, vol. 121, pt. 8, 9244.

its European allies.<sup>128</sup> In 1985, 1990 and in 2000 the government of Turkey succeeded to block Congressional resolutions for memorial days for the Armenia Genocide.<sup>129</sup> In 1996, the House of Representatives succeeded to pass legislation that ordered cutting aid to Turkey because of Turkey's refusal to recognize its responsibility for the Armenian Genocide.<sup>130</sup> Presidents and numerous members of Congress, since the mid-1970s sent official condolences to the Armenian people on April 24, the memorial day for the victims. The Presidents of the U.S., from Jimmy Carter to Donald Trump, purposely avoided the use of the word Genocide in their descriptions of the calamity and failed to identify the guilty. Turkey continues to employ its political clout, as a member of NATO, and threatens to shut American military bases in Turkey and cancel contracts of acquisitions of weapons from American companies in order to pressure the American Government not to recognize the Armenian Genocide.<sup>131</sup> The Turkish government assumed an extreme stance on the subject by declaring that it would not be able to protect the lives of Americans in Turkey if the U.S. would mention or refer to the Turkish responsibility for the Armenian Genocide.<sup>132</sup> The efforts of the Armenian Diaspora contributed to the greater emphasis of the media on the subject and contributed to the general public's greater awareness of this topic. Numerous Armenians believe that the continuous denial of the Turks of the Genocide created a situation that necessitated a situation that called for greater international necessity to study and be aware of the historical facts till the time that recognition of the Armenian Genocide would become unequivocal and universal.

### Denial

The Turkish government refuses to acknowledge Turkey's responsibility for the Armenian Genocide. Recently, Turkey demanded that the "historical truth" about the 1915 events should be studied based on documents in the Turkish State Archives. The official Turkish version mentions only "deportations" and "resettlements" that were performed by the Ottoman military in "self-defense" against hostile forces during battles for the very survival of the Empire. According to the Turkish official version the Armenians died during the resettlement process as a result of epidemics, hunger and fatigue. The official Turkish version also claims both sides were responsible for unsavory incidents that occurred during what the Turks describe as a civil war. The Turks also claim that the number of dead Armenians was "only" 300,000.

In February 1996, the following petition signed by more than a hundred Holocaust scholars and literary figures, among them Yehuda Bauer, Israel Charny, Raul Hilberg, Helen Fein, Steven Katz, Robert Jay Lipton, Deborah Lipstadt, Robert Melson, Allen Ginsberg, Norman Mailer, Arthur Miller, Harold Pinter, Susan Sontag, John Updike and Kurt Vonnegut appeared in the *Journal of Higher Education*: "Where scholars deny genocide, their message is: murders did not really matter; victims were

128 Merrill D. Peterson, *Starving Armenians*. 380.

129 Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*. 385.

130 Ibid., 390.

131 Ibid., 385-387.

132 Ibid., 389.

not really killed; mass murder requires no confrontation, but should be ignored. Scholars who deny genocide lend their considerable authority to acceptance of this ultimate human crime. The Denial is the final step in Genocide: it murders the dignity of the survivors and destroys the remembrance of the crime. The denial of genocide is the final stage of genocide: it murders the dignity of the survivors and destroys the remembrance of the crime. Denial of genocide strives to reshape history in order to rehabilitate the perpetrators and demonize the victims. The Turkish government's denial of the Armenian Genocide encourages—by its very nature—the current programs they deny the Jewish Holocaust and the Cambodian genocide; it encourages genocidal episodes that are currently occurring in Africa, the Balkans, and elsewhere. The Turkish government's tactics pave the way for state-sponsored Holocaust and genocide denials in the future.”<sup>133</sup> In the fall of 2000, the House Subcommittee on International Relations and Human Rights passed by a large majority a Armenian Genocide Resolution despite intense Turkish opposition. Several distinguished genocide scholars, among them Elie Wiesel, wrote to the House Subcommittee urging the members not to succumb to Turkish pressure.<sup>134</sup> Deborah Lipstadt wrote the Congressional Committee: “Denial of genocide strives to reshape history in order to demonize the victims and rehabilitate the perpetrators[.]”<sup>135</sup> Richard Hovannisian characterized the process of denial as “Falsification, deception and half-truths reduce what was to what may have been or perhaps what was not at all.... By altering or erasing the past, a present is produced and a future is projected without concern for historical integrity. The process of annihilation is thus advanced and completed by denial.”<sup>136</sup> In the Armenian case, denial under the guise of an historiographical debate had been institutionalized by the Turkish authorities and by its powerful economic and military allies. Nations, such as the United States succumbed to Turkish pressures and supported the Turkish policy of denial. Other nations joined the U.S. in this conduct because they shared economic and strategic interests with Turkey. Those nations preferred to placate Turkey thus cynically abandoning their humanitarian principles. Economic and security considerations triumphed over universal humanitarian values.

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On April 22, 2021, on the Armenian Remembrance Day—a date on which many around the world reflect on the genocide of the Armenian people, President Joe Biden of the United States officially labeled the mass killing of the of the Armenians, prior to and during World War I, as a genocide perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire.

133 *Chronicle of Higher Education*. February 2, 1996, A30; Richard G. Hovannisian, “Denial of the Armenian Genocide in Comparison with Holocaust Denial,” in Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1999, 201-236.

134 Elie Wiesel to Hon. Chris Smith, Chair, House International Operations Subcommittee, September 12, 2000. Correspondence to U.S. House International Relations Committee Concerning HR 398, the United States Training and Commemoration of the Armenian Genocide, 106<sup>th</sup> Congress 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, September 14, 2000.

135 Deborah Lipstadt, letter to Chris Smith, September 2, 2000, *ibid*.

136 Richard Hovannisian, *Remembrance and Denial*, 229-230.

Biden, during the Presidential elections campaign promised to recognize Ottoman responsibility for the massacre. Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's growing hostility toward the United States in the past four years; Turkey's recent decision to withdraw from the European Convention on Women's Rights and Domestic Abuse was declared "deeply disappointing" by the U.S. The Biden administration also issued a severe condemnation of Turkey in its report of human rights abuses around the world. Biden labeled Erdogan an "autocrat" and promised to oppose "new moment of advancing authoritarianism." Anthony Blinken, the American Secretary of State, a son of Holocaust survivors, in his confirmation hearing, because of Turkey's drift towards Russia in the past four years, called Turkey "a strategic—so-called strategic,—partner of ours." These moves along with the calling, of the Biden administration of the killing of the Uyghur Muslims by China a genocide all pointed to a concentrated effort by President Biden to reestablish the United States as the world's leading moral leader. Biden stated that the U.S. confirmed this historical event not in order to assign blame but in order to ensure that that what occurred would never again be repeated.<sup>137</sup>

Only by acknowledging the responsibility for the horrendous injuries and pain perpetrated on the Armenian people and an official apology by the Republic of Turkey, the successor state to the Ottoman Empire, would initiate a healing process that would allow a future peace between those two peoples. The chances of this happening soon, to use an understatement, are not promising.

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137 *Washington Post*. April 22, 2021.