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The Sassoun Massacre: A Hundred Year Perspective

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Modern Armenian historical scholarship is an historiography engagé, involved by its very existence in several struggles — a struggle to be heard, to be taken seriously, and ultimately to free itself from struggle. The very first sentence of one of the papers of this volume draws the suggestive parallel between the “mountain refuge” of Sassoun one hundred years ago and the embattled fortress of Karabakh (Artsakh) today. Those who take up the reconstruction of the Armenian past, particularly in the modern period, can hardly be neutral, for like a swimmer in a raging torrent there is no standing still but fighting against or going with the current. The best of professional historians of Armenia attempt against all difficulties to be fair to the issues, scrupulously honest in their use of sources, and balanced in their judgments, but all the time in a maelstrom of prejudice and accusation, some coming from falsifying enemies of the Armenians, others from nationalists among Armenians who have their own preferred version of the “truth.” While someday the nuances and complexities of competing historiographies will occupy these historians, at this point much of their energy must go simply to rectifying what is being distorted and rescuing from oblivion obscured and misunderstood aspects of the past. Sadly, modern history for Armenians has been in part reduced to establishing “facts,” even numbers, that others have worked hard at having us forget. As fast as some write, others erase; as steadily as histories are presented, they are dismantled.

The events in Sassoun in 1894 are the stuff of legend and song but not of much reliable historical knowledge. Within months of the massacres Ottoman officials and the Sultan himself were presenting an explanation of the events that blamed the victims for their own de-

struction. Even the most basic facts of demography are in dispute. As Raymond Kévorkian of the Bibliothèque Nubar in Paris shows in his paper, the official Ottoman population figures do not correspond to other figures, like those from the Armenian Patriarchate. As near as he can estimate, there were about 40,000 Armenians in Sassoun in 1894, but only about 24,000 twenty years later, an almost 50 percent decline. Fourteen villages disappeared totally between 1894 and 1914, part of a dedicated policy of making life impossible for Armenians in the region. Some 5,500 to 6,000 people were killed outright in the massacres of 1894, but others perished in subsequent massacres or simply migrated from the region.

The eminent historian of the genocide, Vahakn Dadrian, reveals in his paper how the Armenians responded to Turkish and Kurdish exploitation and violence with armed resistance. Emulating earlier instances of successful resistance, like Zeitun in 1862, the Armenians of several villages in Sassoun decided not to pay both Turkish and Kurdish taxes. When the Armenians successfully resisted Kurdish incursions, the Ottoman government sent regular Turkish army troops against the villagers. Dadrian argues that the attacks that led to indiscriminate massacres were ordered by Sultan Abdul Hamid II himself. The European Powers protested the Sassoun events, but so weakly that the Ottoman authorities felt that they could act with impunity in the future. Dadrian sees the Sassoun massacres as the first in a series of violent acts of repression and murder that link 1894 with Adana in 1909 and the genocidal deportations and killings of 1915.

In her fascinating paper, Rebecca Morris, a graduate student in Armenian and Ottoman history at the University of Michigan, critically examines the materials from the official Ottoman Commission that was set up to investigate the Sassoun events. Morris shows that these sources, only infrequently used by scholars and then with contradictory results, indicate that the Commission aimed to prove that the Sassoun events were an unjustified rebellion by Armenians. Yet the European delegates who sat in on the Commission's proceedings concluded on their own that no rebellion had taken place, and ample evidence in the record shows that the initial resistance of the Armenians was to the onerous *hafir* sheep tax levied by the local Kurds. Armenians were doubly taxed, by the Turkish state and by the Kurdish lords in the region, but by the early 1890s some of them were no longer willing to pay off the Kurds. The agitational work of several Hunchak party members over several years had encouraged this kind of tax resistance. But instead of dealing with the grievances of their subjects, the Turkish state, in alliance with the Kurds, came down on the Armenians with ferocious force.

Morris's work is beautifully amplified by the research of Professor Maurizio Russo of the University of Nancy, who uses Italian diplomatic documents to tell the story of the formation of the Hamidiye, the irregular Kurdish cavalry, created and financed by Abdul Hamid II. The Ottoman state, weak as it was in the Balkans and much of the Middle East, was particularly feeble in Eastern Anatolia. Istanbul saw the formation of a loyal Kurdish force as a means to hold on to this strategic region occupied by Kurds and Armenians as well as Turks, contested by the Russian Empire, and already an object of Western European imperialist appetites. The central government extended its authority eastward, not through concessions or protection of its Armenian subjects, but by arming and legitimizing the violence of the Kurdish tribes. A Muslim alliance that placed the Armenians at extreme risk replaced the earlier Ottomanist impulses to make all the Sultan's subjects equal under the empire's laws.

And finally, George Shirinian's article provides not only a wonderful bibliography of the publication record of the Sassoun massacres, but also an insightful analysis of the publication record itself. Shirinian, of the City of York Public Library, has gathered 677 entries in Armenian, Bulgarian, English, French, German, Italian, Polish, Russian, Spanish, and Turkish, all relating to the Sassoun events. Undoubtedly, this publication record will be highly useful as a guide to scholars trying to gather materials on this subject and will hopefully spur more research and better understanding of this key event in Armenian history.

The idea for a one-day seminar on the occasion of the one-hundredth anniversary of the Sassoun massacres came from two graduate students at the University of Michigan, Ara Sarafian and Vincent Lima, who did most of the work of organizing the meeting. Sarafian's research is primarily in the nineteenth and early twentieth century Armenian communities of the Ottoman Empire. Having worked extensively in archives in the United States, Great Britain, and Turkey, he has edited a series of volumes of documents on the genocide from the American National Archives, and with Lima has published memoirs and other accounts of twentieth-century Armenian history. Lima concentrates on Caucasian Armenia in his research and has been assistant editor of the *Armenian Review*, and, along with Sarafian, runs the Gomidas Institute and edits *Armenian Forum*.

Sponsored by the Armenian Studies Program of the University of Michigan and the *Armenian Review*, and funded by the Alex and Marie Manoogian Foundation, the papers were first presented in the Marie Manoogian History Seminar at the University of Michigan. We bring them to you now in revised and expanded versions. If history teaches anything it is that it can never be completely silenced. Our hope is not

that these essays will silence debate about past tragedies but that that debate might be raised to the level of serious historiographical discussion and leave behind the myth-making and falsification that began over one hundred years ago with the Ottoman Commission. Like the eyewitnesses to the Sassoun massacres, our historians bear witness and try to restore memory that has been distorted.

The 1894 Sassoun Massacre: A Juncture in the Escalation of the Turko-Armenian Conflict

Vahakn N. Dadrian

In several respects, the Sassoun massacre episode (August 12-24 to September 4-16, 1894) represents a turning point in the history of Ottoman Armenians as well as of Ottoman Turkey. Trapped in the clutches of a theocratic state organization in which Islam and its canon laws reigned supreme, the Armenians shared with a host of other non-Muslim nationalists the unending problems with which this Ottoman system was beset. The series of conflicts which evolved in the course of the developing history of the Ottoman Empire often resulted in repression through intermittent massacres against these nationalities. By way of counteracting these massacres, the Great Powers eventually inaugurated the principle of "humanitarian intervention." The 19th century history of the nationality conflicts is therefore intimately connected with the adoption and practice of this principle of "humanitarian intervention."

The pressures generated through this intervention eventually impelled Turkey to institute a series of Reform Acts in 1839 and 1856 (otherwise called *Tanzimat*), and a Constitution in December 1876. By these promulgations, Turkey was mainly trying to placate the Powers (i.e. Great Britain, Russia, France, Germany, Austria and Italy) which, for a variety of reasons, insisted on the preservation of the integrity of the empire. Indeed, many of these Great Powers in 1856 had rescued Turkey from disintegration in a war against Russia (the 1853-56 Crimean War) at great sacrifice of resources and of men.

Nevertheless, this external Turkish accommodation was not attended by a parallel accommodation internally as the nationality conflicts continued to brew. In fact, the resistance to *Tanzimat* reforms within Turkey was pervasive and wide-ranging. The radical wing of

the Turkish intelligentsia, the elites, palace officials, and the upper and lower strata of religious leaders set out to denounce and, whenever possible, to sabotage the measures of implementation regarding the reforms. At issue were a host of fundamental civil rights, including equality before the law and security of life, property and honor, which were specifically embedded in the 1876 Constitution. These rights clashed, however, with the tenets and precepts of Islam, as arbitrarily defined and upheld by a vast majority of Ottoman Turks who remained imbued with the martial traditions of the empire, traditions which continued to consecrate the rights of conquest and domination.

The idea of equality, to be granted to the non-Muslim subjects, was anathema in this scheme of things as it threatened to undermine the very fabric of the Ottoman social system. The prospect of giving up the prerogatives, attached to the status (and the corollary self-image) of the "dominant nation" (*milleti hakime*), was both unsettling and from the point of view of these opponents, full of perils for the future development of Turkey. The stakes were particularly high for a specific vested interest group, the vast array of religious leaders, many of whom acted as social control agents in the provinces. The system of exorbitant taxation imposed upon non-Muslims was a source of prodigious revenue benefitting not only the Treasury but also a wide assortment of people involved in the functioning of that system. Equality threatened the very foundations of that system.

The anti-Ottoman insurrections in 1876 in the Balkans and the attendant massacres of clusters of civilian populations by regular and irregular Turkish troops were the by-products of the nationality conflicts which continued to escalate as a result of Turkish resistance to effective reforms. The December 1876 to January 1877 Constantinople Conference could not resolve these conflicts. The Turks adamantly resisted the proposal of the Powers to introduce a set of new reforms under their supervision. They could not be persuaded that the only way to achieve an abiding solution was to attack the root causes of the conflict, not treat its symptoms. The 1877-78 Russo-Turkish war was the direct result of this impasse. Abandoned to her fate by the six Powers, Turkey suffered a devastating military defeat at her western front in the Balkans as well as at the eastern front that bestrode the territories of ancient Armenia and the Russian Caucasus. The March 1878 Preliminary Peace of San Stefano and the correlative July 1878 Peace Treaty of Berlin which followed, secured for some nationalities complete deliverance from Ottoman bondage. For others, it brought partial deliverance.

The military defeat in the Russo-Turkish war and the ensuing Berlin Peace Treaty were developments signalling the decline of the Ottoman Empire while at the same time highlighting the role of the

debilitating nationality conflicts in the incidence of that decline. The impotence of the empire is seen here entwined with the ineptness of the rulers of that empire to judiciously govern a multi-ethnic state system. Instead, these rulers managed to become hostage to the afflictions of the empire they themselves engendered by exacerbating rather than alleviating the unending nationality conflicts. It seems that more often than not, external weakness serves to produce a sense of urgency to try to be strong internally. In modern times, it has been typical of some multi-ethnic empires to attempt to deal with setbacks caused by external weakness by resorting to repression internally. Vulnerable minorities are often targets for such compensatory assaults, especially when they are identified in some way with certain external troubles.

The Treaty of Berlin had two specific minority-related clauses whose insertion had further injured the Turks' already deflated ego and self-image. The two clauses stipulated the implementation of a number of reforms for which Turkey was to be held accountable to the six Powers. Article 23 referred to reforms in Macedonia in the Balkans while Article 61 referred to the Armenians in Asiatic Turkey. These treaty engagements, and the military setbacks preceding them, coincided with the advent of the regime of Abdul Hamid, who ascended the throne in September 1876. His first act of oppression in February 1878 was proroguing the newly established Ottoman Parliament. His action was legal technically (Article 7 of the Constitution), but was lawless in its thrust and subsequent abuses as it ushered in the Abdul Hamid era of sanguinary despotism. That despotism was largely afforded by Abdul Hamid's next act: the order to let the infant Constitution lapse. It was a despotism which bore the imprint of a monarch morbidly obsessed with fears about the safety of his person and throne. These fears impinged upon his overall frame of mind, his approach to government and, in particular, his approach to reforms.

Abdul Hamid's attitude towards the Armenians as a subject nationality, irrespective of everything else, underwent a dramatic change in connection with the introduction of the issue of so-called Armenian reforms. Encouraged by the promises of the Midhat Constitution and emboldened by the thrust of the stipulations of Article 61 of the Berlin Peace Treaty, the Ottoman Armenians gradually abandoned their traditional attitude of submissiveness and began to assert themselves in terms of certain legal entitlements. The necessity to be as compliant as possible with the abuses of tax collectors, marauding Kurdish tribes, and tyrannical local officials in the provinces, for example, was no longer taken for granted but rather decried as abomination. The rationale of the symbiosis that in one form or another existed between multitudes of docile Armenians and dominant Turks, and which for so long had proven functional in the social system, began to erode gradu-

ally in anticipation of a new order based on egalitarianism and liberalism. But it was not to be. The series of pleas, petitions and peaceful protests seeking relief and redress from the central authorities were treated in the Ottoman capital either with indifference or were denounced as impudent acts by a servile minority daring to challenge the Ottoman state's sacrosanct authority. The identification of the Armenians with Europe's Christian Powers as their indirect patrons or benefactors particularly irked the Turks who were fully aware that in the display of their new attitudes of relative assertiveness, the Armenians were relying on these Powers. In this sense, many Turks viewed the quasi-legal instrument of humanitarian intervention as an abiding source of aggravation, capable of unraveling the Ottoman Empire's structure.

The Armenians were handicapped geographically and demographically. They were without protection from any special power through tutelage, a tutelage which benefited practically all the Balkan nationalities involved. As a result, humanitarian intervention for the Armenians proved disastrous. That condition largely arose because Abdul Hamid had succeeded in concentrating all executive power in his hands. The Sublime Porte (the seat of the nominal Ottoman government) was virtually reduced to a non-entity and the Palace, with its entrenched and insidious camarilla personnel, emerged as the single source of near-omnipotent power and authority. All the misfortunes befalling the Armenians in the Abdul Hamid era were instigated by the Palace, often in defiance of the counsels provided by the Porte.

The Sassoun outbreak was the first major link in the chain of such disasters. It dramatically exposed the vulnerability of a totally isolated minority, which while capable of inordinate feats of heroism, was nonetheless too limited in terms of numbers, resources and outside help to escape from the bondage of centuries-old Ottoman rule. The episode illustrates the intimate connection between economic hardships and political conflict. Its significance in terms of its portents is evident in its sequela. Indeed, the accretion of a record of incremental Turkish massacres may be compressed in a single word: impunity. By escaping punishment in and out of Turkey, the perpetrators were vindicated in default. They were in fact negatively rewarded and they viewed the Armenians consequently as fair game.

Sassoun is significant not only as a topic for careful study, but is also important for the sake of accuracy of the historical record. That record continues to be tampered with by a coterie of historians relying on Ottoman archives which they extol as an invaluable repository of "primary sources." It is, therefore, imperative to expose the gamut of fallacies and falsehoods emanating from this repository and making

inroads into the output of many authors who, for one reason or another, are willing to embrace them.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE ARMENIAN QUESTION PRIOR TO THE SASSOUN OUTBREAK

Though the legal and social disabilities imposed upon the nationalities were a common feature of the Ottoman system, the Armenian response to the resulting subjugation was uncommon. For example, unlike the Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs, and Macedonians, the Armenians for a long time avoided actual confrontation and militancy. Instead, they limited themselves to the framing of appeals and pleas for redress, which were always suffused with pledges of loyalty and dedication to the Ottoman regime and its rulers. In 1840-41, in the wake of the first Reform Act, the 1839 Tanzimat Gulhane Edict, the Armenians submitted petitions to Sultan Mejid pleading relief from their "intolerable" condition. Sultan Mejid himself acknowledged the inutility of that Act. A new Imperial Rescript, promulgated by the Sultan in 1844, ordered the authorities to end the persecution of the Christians.¹

However, the depredations, especially those in Turkey's interior, persisted up to and after 1856 when the Sultan proclaimed his second Reform Act, the Hümayun Edict. When British Foreign Minister Lord Derby pointed out to Prime Minister Salisbury in 1877 that "during the last twenty years many of the measures actually decreed ... as regards internal reforms ... had practically remained dead letters,"² the plight of the Armenian peasantry in the provinces had reached a critical stage. In accounting for Hamid's recalcitrance, Prince Sabaheddin of the Imperial Family (his father had married Hamid's sister) publicly declared that the Armenians, unlike the other Christian nationalities, only wanted administrative reforms. Believing that such reform portended the end of the regime, the government set out to avert such a danger by all measures available to it.³

The British Blue Books of 1860-1876 contain multitudes of consular and ambassadorial reports describing the litany of abuses in this regard. One of the most extensive and detailed accounts is by Erzerum Consul J.G. Taylor based on personal investigations conducted during the summer and autumn of 1869 in the eastern provinces of Turkey which contained large concentrations of Armenians. Taylor describes "barefaced corruption" and "well authenticated atrocities." He writes, "The slightest complaint to Government [by the Armenians] is followed by night attacks or open assaults in the day upon them ... because they have the temerity to complain." "The heavy losses the Christians suffer by such continuous depredations are increased by the

irregular manner with which the Government agents levy tithes." "Murder, robbery, and brigandage are every-day crimes, and when practiced against the Christians, receive the sanction of the so-called holy men, styled Sheiks, who infest that country..." "[T]he Christians, in addition to deprivation of property, daily jeopardize their lives, and what is more terrible, the honor of their female, in daily struggles for existence; trials from which the Moslems are exempt." "I found the Armenians bitter in their complaints against the Turkish Government ..."⁴

At the insistence of then-officiating Armenian Patriarch Khrimian, a Commission on Depredations was formed in the Armenian General Assembly, the elected body sanctioned by the Turkish authorities for the administration of Armenian community affairs. On January 4, 1871, the Commission sent a circular to the provinces requesting information from local Armenian organizations on their problems and suggestions for remedies. The Patriarch's key instructions were to "leave out anything and everything which is false or inaccurate. You are to report to us only those facts the certainty and authenticity of which you personally examined and have verified."⁵ The responses were compiled and added to the 528 grievances the Patriarchate had already filed with the Ottoman government from 1849 to 1869. At the suggestion of the national government, the Assembly debated the issues and prepared a summary report submitted to the Grand Vizier on April 11, 1872. However, despite promises made, no response was forthcoming. The Patriarch made inquiries only to be rebuffed and told not to exceed the boundaries of his competence.⁶

It was during the main debate (October 22, 1871) that some representatives of the Armenian Assembly for the first time expressed bitterness and frustration in a manner bordering on defiance of the regime. Summoning national pride, they insisted on pressing for the right to serve in the Ottoman army and bear arms to defend themselves against oppressors in the provinces. Responding to conservatives' arguments that nothing should be proposed which could cause bloodshed, one deputy retorted, "Are we not already bleeding enough? If this is inevitable, why not shed blood by fighting for our honor and dignity?" The conservatives insisted on substituting the phrase "religious prejudice" for "Muslim fanatics" in the report. Another deputy, Krikor Odian, who later became one of the co-drafters of the 1878 Ottoman Constitution,⁷ stated, "We ought to tell the world that we too are men, and are capable of intrepidity."⁸ Patriarch Khrimian resigned, shattered by his failed efforts and the further aggravation of the plight of peasant masses in Turkey's interior. On September 20, 1876, N. Varjabedian, Patriarch Khrimian's successor, whose apparently pro-Turkish, servile,

attitude annoyed many segments of the Armenian community, submitted a second report to the Porte on provincial depredations.

Less than three months later, on December 1, 1876, a formidable fire gutted Van's Armenian commercial district. The military and the police assisted the arsonists. In six hours, the fire destroyed more than 600 shops containing vast quantities of merchandise and promissory notes, while the Turks, coming from "near and far [were] all busy sacking and pillaging, and spreading the conflagration by throwing burning brands." According to consular reports, the purpose of the massive arson was pillage, because flames consumed only one third of the goods. The military (cavalry and reserves) and the gendarmes plundered the remaining merchandise.⁹ Throughout this period the Armenians remained largely obedient and loyal subjects. But the Armenian practice of filing grievances with the central government was superseded by a new development that marks the crystallization of the Armenian Question as a product of State policy. Within months after Sultan Hamid inaugurated a Constitution (December 23, 1876) and a Parliament (March 19, 1877), Armenian deputies, supported by Greek colleagues, began to raise for debate the matter of provincial depredations.

These debates reached their climax on June 6, 1877. In a long speech, Greek Deputy Soulides underscored the fact that Greeks, Bulgarians, and Macedonians obtained relief because of their ability to focus European attention to their plight. The Armenians, Soulides noted, "the State's most docile and loyal subjects, deprived of such European support, have been tormented and oppressed for so long. Is this justice?" Erzerum's Armenian Deputy H. Ballarian followed Soulides on the rostrum. First, Ballarian catalogued the litany of crimes perpetrated against the Armenians, "often with the active support of the provincial and district governors." Then, Ballarian castigated the complicity of the government, whose provincial governors had, in conversation with him, invoked the principle of "high politics" or "state reason" (*hikmeti hükümet*) to justify the oppression of the Armenians. With the concurrence of Muslim deputies, the Chamber approved Greek Deputy Vasilaki's motion to urge the government to initiate effective counter-measures.¹⁰ In response, the Sultan suspended the Parliament on June 30, 1877.

Upon his installation as Grand Vizier on December 19, 1876, Midhat effected a major change in the status of the Armenian Patriarchate. The diplomatic standing of the Patriarch was annulled. The Patriarch was ordered henceforth to submit his memoranda to the Minister of Justice and Religion and thus in effect be subject to the dictates of Islamic Sacred Law. Up until that time, the Patriarch had addressed these communications to the Ottoman Sublime Porte.

Before the Armenian Question could escalate from the national to the international level, segments of Turkey's Armenian community launched some isolated instances of public demonstrations, armed resistance, and insurgency. In 1862, for example, two such events occurred. The first event was on August 1, 1862, when a large crowd gathered in front of the Armenian Patriarchate and demanded that the Porte ratify the Armenian Constitution without further delay. That Constitution, granting certain administrative rights for running communal affairs, was ratified seven months later on March 17, 1863. In connection with the ratification, the following editorial appeared in the Armenian periodical *Dzaghig*: "No, no. Our patience is exhausted. We must wrest through daring and intrepidity that which is being denied to us through stalling and ill will."¹¹ The second event was the 1862 insurrection at Zeitoun (Suleymaniye), a mountainous enclave situated some 40 miles northwest of Maraş in historic Cilicia. Refusing to pay taxes in arrears, some 5,000 Armenian highlanders defied the Ottoman army, estimated to number more than 40,000 men, which surrounded the insurgents on three sides. The crucial battle, lasting four hours, was fought from August 14 to 26, 1862. Taking advantage of their position, ideally suited for defense, the mountaineers prevailed, inflicting heavy casualties. As a French historian concluded, "The Turkish hordes, including thousands of irregulars who were brought up from nearby Maraş, were routed after suffering a humiliating defeat."¹² Later, in 1876, some 2,000 Armenians demonstrated in front of the Porte, before Grand Vizier Mehmet Rüştü Paşa could agree to receive a deputation and assure the members in the presence of Midhat Paşa, who was slated to succeed him, that the depredations against the Armenians in the provinces had decreased by 80 percent compared to the depredations of 1846.¹³

The clamor for Armenian reforms coincides with the emergence and internationalization of the Armenian question. To understand the conditions under which Sultan Abdul Hamid scuttled this reform movement while exacting heavy tolls from the Armenian population at large, the key diplomatic phases in the evolution of the Armenian question may be briefly outlined as follows:

1. The insertion of Article 16 in the San Stefano Treaty of March 3, 1878.
2. The insertion of Article 61 in the Berlin Treaty of July 13, 1878.
3. The June 11, 1880, Identical Note the European Powers delivered to the Sultan.
4. The September 7, 1880, Collective Note the European Powers delivered to the Sultan.

And after the Sassoun outbreak,

5. The May 11, 1895, European Reform Project transmitted to the Sultan.
6. The October 17-20, 1895, Hamidian ratification of that Project (with some modifications.)

As can be seen, the intervention of the Powers, undertaken specifically, if not exclusively, on behalf of the Armenians, was a major component in this new reform movement impinging upon the Ottoman policies which were evolving vis a vis the Armenians.

The ultimate futility of these efforts, however, resulted in Armenian revolutionary cells emerging in and out of the Empire, set to confront local and central authorities. It is significant that in a report to Paris entitled, *Exposé Historique de la Question Arménienne*, the veteran French Ambassador Paul Cambon traced the genesis of the "Armenian question" to this period. Cambon wrote.

A high ranking Turkish official told me, "the Armenian question does not exist but we shall create it." Up until 1881 the idea of Armenian independence was non-existent. The masses simply yearned for reforms, dreaming only of a normal administration under Ottoman rule ... The inaction of the Porte served to vitiate the good will of the Armenians. The reforms have not been carried out. The exactions of the officials remained scandalous and justice was not improved ... from one end of the empire to the other, there is rampant corruption of officials, denial of justice and insecurity of life. The Armenian diaspora began denouncing the administrative misdeeds, and in the process managed to transform the condition of simple administrative ineptness into one of racial persecution. It called to the attention of Europe the violation by the Turks of the Treaty of Berlin and thereby summoned up the image of Armenian autonomy in the minds of the Armenian population. France did not respond to the Armenian overtures but the England of Gladstone did: The Armenian revolutionary movement took off from England ... as if it were not enough to provoke Armenian discontent, the Turks were glad to amplify it by the manner in which they handled it. In maintaining that the Armenians were conspiring, the Armenians ended up engaging in conspiracy; in maintaining that there was no Armenia, the Armenians ended up conjuring the reality of her existence ... The harsh punishment of conspirators, the maintenance in Armenia of a veritable regime of terror, arrests, murders, rapes, all this shows that Turkey is taking pleasure in precipitating the events [in relation to] an inoffensive population. In reality the Armenian Question is nothing but an expression of the antagonism between England and Russia....Where does Armenia begin, and where does it end?¹⁴

Later in his report, Cambon prophetically questioned the sanity of the scheme of transporting the Armenians to Mesopotamia, a solution the Ottoman government was reportedly contemplating. Mesopotamia would later serve as the valley of the Armenian genocide.

These developments, animated by stirrings of nationalist fervor and highlighting the Armenian revolutionary movement's beginnings,¹⁵ gained momentum through the conditional support of the two Armenian Patriarchs, Khrimian and Varjabedian, who despaired of the hopelessness of the provincial Armenians' tribulations. The transformation of segments of the Ottoman Armenian population, from loyal state servants to militant state opponents, underscores the futility of making entreaties and pleas to two regimes thriving on oppression and tyranny. In a meeting with British Ambassador Sir Henry Elliot on December 6, 1878, Patriarch Varjabedian expressed the hope that the impending Constantinople Conference would not urge the Porte to accord certain privileges to the rebel provinces (involving the Serbs, Bulgars, Montenegrins) and deny the same to the loyal ones (involving the Armenians). The Ambassador demurred, saying that the Conference's purpose was not to scrutinize Turkey's entire administration, but to secure peace and tranquility in those provinces where revolts threatened the general peace. In response, the Patriarch retorted, saying that if rebellion was a prerequisite for enlisting the support of European Powers, it would not be difficult to organize a movement of that nature.¹⁶

By the time Khrimian became Catholicos, the Supreme Patriarch of all Armenians, on September 26, 1893, he had already abandoned all hope of securing reforms peacefully in the Turkish Armenian provinces. On September 20, 1896, Khrimian issued an encyclical at the Holy See in Etchmiadzin, with the following exhortation:

I know, I know people of Armenia, thy soul is tormented, thy heart lacerated. But take notice and awake. If you fail to brandish your own sword against those swords threatening you and to grit your teeth defying those of the foe, you will be doomed to extinction. Come on, come on people of Armenia, join the ranks of the new Armenian knighthood, aid and abet the revolutionary movement, for along with the handle of the plough and the cross, the sword of the knight is equally liberating.¹⁷

The revolutionary movement Khrimian called for never gained a foothold among the peasant masses, which comprised nearly 80 percent of Turkey's Armenian population. Erzerum's British Consul Hampson's observation in 1892 explains why:

Armenians in this district are a most peaceable people ... They have neither arms nor leaders, and the idea of a general rising is laughed at by all who know the real state of the country ... In my opinion, the Armenians would be a perfectly contented, hard-working and profitable part of the subjects of the Sultan, provided that they were protected ... given a fair share in the local administration of those districts where they would follow as a natural consequence, treated as civilly and personally on an equal footing with their Mohammedan neighbors.¹⁸

But that was not to be. Small bands of Armenian "freedom fighters" sprang up in scattered regions of the interior to deter the authors of atrocities and oppression with armed resistance and occasional punitive forays. It may be contended that these revolutionary sallies precipitated Turkey's violent response, thereby transforming the internal Turko-Armenian conflict into an Armenian Question. The 1894-96 empire-wide massacres were the result. Attempting to provide an "explanation of the Armenian massacres," a British author offered an analytical framework:

In Armenia, as elsewhere in the Sultan's dominions, when the Christians became so numerous, and prosperous, and educated, that they excite fear and cupidity of their oppressors, a decree goes forth to "diminish the population." The local authorities then do their best to goad the Christians into such a frenzy of despair as to induce a few hot-headed men to combine at last to resist, with such arms as they can secretly secure, one of the usual raiding attacks of the Kurds. This is immediately magnified into a dangerous rebellion, and is offered to deluded Europe as the sufficient justification of an indiscriminate massacre.... [T]he Armenians would not only be justified, it would be their sacred duty to rise and overthrow, if they had any prospect of success, the internal Government which dooms them to a slavery the most degrading and cruel and hopeless recorded in the annals of human misery.... Such is the rule of the Porte. It is, in literal fact, an organized brigandage, and the head brigand is the Sultan.¹⁹

The agitation for urgent reforms inside and outside Turkey on behalf of the Armenians assumed crisis proportions for the Sultan and his regime. It was in this atmosphere of peril that the monarch unleashed the lethal fury of a combined force of mobs, religious fanatics, and regular and irregular armies against large, unarmed Armenian masses.

The Sassoun episode ushered in this period of incremental massacres which sustained their tempo and rhythm in the Young Turk Ittihadist period and culminated in the World War I genocide.

THE OUTBREAK OF THE SASSOUN MASSACRE
(AUGUST 12/24 - SEPTEMBER 4/16, 1894)

Located in Bitlis province, southwest of Moush, this district, embracing a large cluster of Armenian villages, was traditionally subjected to double taxes: one imposed by Kurdish tribal chiefs playing the role of protector and the other by government tax collectors. Unable and unwilling to submit any longer to these exactions, two of the villages took the initiative to challenge the extortionists. They were helped and prodded in this undertaking by two Armenian revolutionary leaders who came from the outside to organize the resistance. The government first tried to subdue and repress the villages with Kurdish irregulars and mobs. However, this tactic failed dismally after repeated attempts and the Kurdish irregulars refused to continue their assaults without effective assistance from the regular army.

Immediately, local authorities magnified the incident deliberately, characterizing it as a large-scale Armenian rebellion. When central authorities broadcast the news, they portrayed the Armenians as savage murderers whose atrocities avowedly claimed multitudes of innocent Muslim victims. With the army's active intervention, mainly contingents of the Fourth Army Corps stationed at Erzincan, the episode ended with the summary destruction of 25-30 Armenian villages and the merciless slaughter of many villagers. Unfortunately, historical accounts drawn from Ottoman sources and other reports distort and misportray this central truth. The revisionism that resulted is generally based either on selective use of accounts of the events, or on an uncritical acceptance of the report of a fraudulent Ottoman government inquiry into the events.

*1. The Revisionist Account of the Outbreak and the Refutations
Supplied by European Delegate-Investigators*

As described by Stanford Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, Hunchak revolutionaries "organized a major coup" in this remote mountain enclave. Accordingly, they ambushed armed tax collectors and ravaged area Muslim villages as they fled from the arriving army units sent there "to enforce order." In the process, the Shaws say, "the entire population [of these Muslim villages] had been wiped out."²⁰ A group of like-minded Turkish scholars recently published a massive volume full of documents obtained from Ottoman state archives. These documents purport to authenticate the Shaws' claim that an Armenian rebellion erupted at Sassoun in 1894 and the authorities merely tried to restore order.²¹ This portrayal must, however, be contrasted with that of the European delegates (French, Russian, British) who were attached to the Turkish Commission of Inquiry - also known as the Anatolian

Investigation Commission - which was formed and sent to Sassoun to investigate the atrocities much to Abdul Hamid's great reluctance and temporizing. British Foreign Affairs Minister Kimberley had insisted on this co-investigation, claiming authority under the Treaty of Berlin's Article 61. In their 60-page report, the European delegates concluded that the "refusal of seven or eight wards, consisting of seventy or eighty houses," of a village "to pay taxes to the Government ... affords no proof of revolutionary spirit among the inhabitants who paid tribute to the Kurds." Likewise, "some isolated acts of brigandage" by an Armenian band, or some Armenian "resistance to troops" did not constitute "an open revolt," as the authorities claimed. Nor did these isolated provocations justify burning and killing "without distinction of age or sex ... of old people, the sick and the children" who could not flee.²²

Moreover, the Ottoman-Turkish contention of the Armenians' "major coup" of "ravaging Muslim villages" and wiping out the entire population must be contrasted with the delegates' findings. British Delegate Shipley, in a separate memorandum, dismissed the Ottoman government's charges with the derisives "pseudo-revolt, or the pretended outrages" of the Armenians, concluding, "It is not too much to say that the Armenians were absolutely hunted like wild beasts, being killed wherever they were met." On May 16, 1895, British Ambassador Philip Currie sent Shipley's May 3rd report to London, again refuting official Ottoman accounts:

From the evidence now before the Commission it is becoming evident that the magnitude of the Sassoun affair was not in the least exaggerated in the early reports received at Constantinople and elsewhere ... no semblance of evidence being brought forward on the other side to show that they are merely Armenian inventions devised for the purpose of discrediting the Turkish government and that the Turkish Commissioners appear to be endeavoring to substantiate the theory of Armenian rebellion and atrocities as set forth in the official statement which appeared in the Levant Herald and other Constantinople newspapers on the 23rd of November, 1894, but this theory was not borne out by the facts which have come before them.²³

Shipley's conclusion must be juxtaposed with the Shaws' statement that: "[d]etailed investigations made by a mixed Ottoman and foreign commission demonstrated the exaggerated nature of the claim..."²⁴ Noted historian G.P. Gooch dismissed this Turkish initiative of investigation as a "sham inquiry."²⁵ Another British author observed that "the [Turkish] Inquiry was a farce from the beginning to end, while the Italian Government was so impressed by its evidently

fraudulent character, that they would not submit to the indignity of taking even a nominal part in connection with it."²⁶

Disregarding these facts, the Shaws inject the word "mixed" when describing the Inquiry Commission's composition, presumably to enhance the credibility of the work of that Commission's Ottoman members, work which the European delegates summarily denounced as farcical and fraudulent. This Commission consisted of (1) Şefik Bey, its president and head of the Court of Cassation's Bureau of Petitions, (2) Celaleddin Bey, Chief of the Court of Appeals' Department of Correction, (3) Ömer Bey, Director of the Savings Bank, (4) Mecid Efendi, Chief of the Interior Ministry's Bureau of Correspondence and (5) Hafız Tevfik Paşa, brigadier general at the General Staff and Aide de Camp of the Sultan.

2. *The Specific Charges of Fraudulent Investigation*

The Blue Book cited in this connection contains a whole range of complaints by the European delegates about obstruction, intimidation, bias in the conduct of the hearings, and bribery by the authorities. The Ottoman government is seen here attempting to subvert the ends of what was intended to be an impartial investigation. Some examples are in order.

1. First twelve sittings of the Commission. Mr. Shipley reports a bias against the Armenians on whose side only one witness had been heard (Doc. No. 150).
2. Delegates find that inquiry is not being conducted in good faith (Doc. No. 166).
3. Time wasted over immaterial evidence (Doc. No. 189).
4. Witnesses pressured by threats and bribes to give false evidence (Doc. No. 197).
5. The Commission declines to hear the Armenian Vicar Bishop of Genc, the muleteers who accompanied the troops, or the woman Anna whose evidence is important (Doc. No. 208).
6. Violation by the police of the Delegates' domicile at Moush (Doc. No. 214).

The Joint Report of July 20, 1895, signed by the French, British and Russian representatives, is even more descriptive of the Ottoman obstruction, including the selection of Armenian witnesses by local Turkish police who were at police disposal during their stay. Incensed at these subversive tactics, the European delegates tried in vain to correct the situation, as described in the following passage:

On several occasions the Undersigned drew the attention of the Commission, access to which was always difficult, to the impor-

tance, in order to discover the truth, of putting themselves in direct touch with the people, and of thus not allowing any intermediary or any influence to come between themselves and witnesses whose evidence the Commission had to take. But the Undersigned must place it on record that their efforts in this sense were always fruitless, though they were justified in making them.²⁷

French sources were no less dubious about Ottoman accounts of the Sassoun episode. For example, M. Vilbert, the French delegate to the mixed Commission, complained that "the Ottoman Commissioners are trying to discard the real witnesses of the occurrences at Sassoun, insisting on their right to rely only on official documents and on testimony emanating from officials, or persons with connections to authorities. From the very start we felt constrained through a variety of reasons to accept with reservations the depositions of people who were either bent on exculpating the Turks, or were coopted by way of promises or threats."²⁸

In his "Special Report," Russian delegate M. Prjewalski expressed almost identical misgivings. He described the investigative work as being "under administrative pressure exercised by local authorities," with the police screening the eyewitnesses, preventing from appearing those whose testimony may help document the design of massacre and destruction. "They are almost forbidden to leave their villages and are carefully watched. Those who somehow manage to reach Moush [the site of the investigation] are arrested." In one case, those arrested were denied appearance before the Commission of Inquiry despite the European delegates' demand. The mutasarrif's explanation was that they were "brigands who had been captured ... Private information entirely contradicts these statements ... Witnesses for the Commission are selected mainly, if not entirely, by the local police."

Witnesses can be divided into two categories: those who "repeat one and the same story, which they have learned by heart, although they belong to different villages" and those who are so intimidated that upon appearance they "mostly refuse to answer the question addressed to them, excusing themselves on the ground of their entire ignorance ..." In one such case, a woman, "on returning to her village ... said to her son, 'What is the use of telling the truth; they will kill us for it, as they killed your father.'" Still others supplied testimony which upon investigation proved to be entirely untrue, such as when the witnesses involved had left the area a year before the outbreak. A more subtle form of generating probative evidence which may serve the needs of the Ottoman archival "primary sources" is described by the Russian delegate as follows: "Depositions favourable to the Turks are not interrupted by the President, and are carefully written down by the Secretary. But witnesses who speak against the authorities and the

troops merely answer the questions put to them, and the interrogatory is conducted in the most confusing fashion in order to entrap them in contradictions."²⁹

The Commission sat from January 24 to July 21 at Moush, some 20 to 30 miles from the mountain villages which were destroyed in the course of the massacre of the inhabitants. The Inquiry Commission's work involved one hundred and eight sittings.

In light of the repudiations of Ottoman methods of "official investigation," and the associated compilations of "official records" described above, it is fair to pose the question: How would or could any scholar have any inkling of the true nature of the Sassoun episode, or the substantial complicity of the authorities, both local and central, by just relying on "primary sources" available in the depositories of the Ottoman state archives? One need only consult the ensemble of Ottoman documents embodied in the volume, referenced in Note 21 of this study, to know that one would not and could not. The degree to which Sultan Abdul Hamid attached importance to giving these documents an appearance of validity is evident in how he intervened personally to secure the cooperation of the European delegates who were reluctant to co-sign the Inquiry Commission's final report. In a memorandum intended to serve as a guideline for the Commission's Turkish members, Sultan Abdul Hamid explicitly admits his purpose for allowing the Europeans to join the Commission: to (1) "give the lie to and reject certain accusations levelled against the Ottoman Empire in some newspapers, (2) certify that the investigation was conducted impartially and justly and, (3) [in the event the European delegates should refuse to certify,] induce the Ambassadors to order their Delegates to certify and sign the Ottoman report."³⁰

THE COMPLICITY OF THE AUTHORITIES

One of the Sassoun massacre's undisputed facts is the direct complicity of Sultan Abdul Hamid, whose peremptory orders unleashed the fury and ferocity of the massacring killer bands. In two "very confidential" reports to Foreign Minister Hanotaux in Paris dated December 19 and 26, 1894, French Ambassador Paul Cambon confirmed this fact, adding that one reason why the Sultan was resisting the idea of an inquiry adamantly was his terrible fear that his cipher telegrams to the Fourth Army Corps Commander and the Governor of Bitlis would be discovered and his complicity revealed ("*il redoute leurs révélations*").³¹

The massacre's careful preparation under the supervision of provincial officials, and the attendant motives of robbery and plunder through extortion and other means, call for examination. British Ambassador Currie informed his Foreign Minister Earl of Kimberley as

follows: "His Excellency Hasan Tahsin Paşa, governor of Bitlis [with jurisdiction over Sassoun], being notorious for his skill in exploiting 'the Armenian Question...' [there is] scarcely a single well-to-do Armenian in Bitlis or Moush who has not been either imprisoned or threatened with imprisonment on charge of sedition with a view to the extortion of money." Turning to the question of the governor's preparation for massacre, Currie added: "He caused Kurdish Sheikh Mehmet Bey to come to Moush from Diyarbakir and instructed him to collect large numbers of tribal Kurds who assembled in July [a month before the outbreak] in enormous numbers in the Tailori district" [where the outbreak began].³²

The following facts highlight the central authorities' complicity. In French Ambassador Cambon's December 19, 1894 "very confidential" report to Hanotaux, he wrote: "From a definite source I know that during the Sassoun incidents the Sultan sent, without the knowledge of the Porte ("*a l'insu de la Porte*"), the most rash telegrams to the Commander of the Army Corps and to the governor-general of Bitlis. The disturbed state of his mind is rendering him incapable of any reasonableness despite my generous counsels."³³ Whether these orders were indeed "rash" may be judged against two facts.

First, in a December 26, 1894 report to London, British Ambassador Currie invokes the words of Zeki Paşa, the Commander-in-Chief of the Fourth Army Corps. It appears that the Commander had a stormy interview in Erzincan (where his Headquarters was located) with an emissary. The Commander is reported saying with regard to the massacres, "I did not approve of these proceedings, but don't let them press me or make me speak out, for I still have the Sultan's orders by me..." Further, Currie states in his report, "Mr. Hallward's [England's Consul at Van] dispatch confirms this statement when he speaks of the Sultan's Firman being read out; and there seems no reasonable doubt ... that the orders emanated from Yildiz [Palace] ... It is not to be wondered at that in these circumstances that the Sultan does not want a full inquiry."³⁴

Second, Sultan Abdul Hamid through the use of *Saadet*, and other newspapers in Istanbul, let the world know that he conferred upon Zeki Paşa the insignia of the *Order of Imtiyaz* (a certificate of honor) "for his faithful and laudable services, and excellence, and able efforts." After the Sassoun operations were completed and he had returned from Moush, General Zeki was decorated with the *Order of Liyakat*, a golden medallion bearing the Imperial monogram and the inscription for "loyalty and valor."³⁵ Hamid also sent a number of silk banners to the Hamidiye Cavalry Regiments involved, conveyed by general Vehbi Paşa, Sultan's envoy in Erzincan.

The correspondent of the *Times of London* supplied some revealing details about the Ottoman government's designs of massacre and their camouflage as Kurdish excesses. He wrote: "the Kurds had oral or written instructions -- something more than mere promises -- to pillage, burn, and kill -- The fact is, the government hoped to finish the business by means of the Kurds ... When that failed it was determined in 1894 to clean out the whole region by bringing in hordes of Kurds. When these did not succeed in making proper headway -- The Sheikh of Zelon declared, out of his 14-15,000 men, 1200 had been killed -- it was thought the thing might safely be done by troops while Europe had its eyes fixed on China and Japan ... Hamid honored also Governor Tahsin with a high decoration for having restored order. Such is I believe the true explanation of the massacres." Even more significant is the disclosure that "150 soldiers [of the regular army] were killed while fighting in disguise in company with Kurds."³⁶

British Foreign Minister Kimberley was even more specific when he told new Prime Minister Lord Rosebery, who replaced the retiring Gladstone, "The Sultan himself is the author of the merciless measures against the Armenians, and ... the signal honours conferred upon Zeki Pasha are deliberate affront to us and the other Powers. I did not think this at first but recent information leaves I fear no doubt of this." Hamid's authorship of the massacres was disclosed by Grand Vizier Said who, upon his flight to the British Embassy, told Rosebery that Hamid ordered the Sassoun massacres.³⁷ In fact, upon discharge, a Turkish sergeant who participated in the Sassoun massacre disclosed in an interview with British journalist Frank Scudamore that a Turkish officer had read Abdul Hamid's written order (*Firman*) to the Fourth Army Corps' commander, whereupon the soldiers had a field day with the Armenians who had become fair game. The sergeant also revealed that his unit was commanded by Colonel Ismail who directed the assault on Şenik, one of the villages involved.³⁸

THE MOBILIZATION OF MILITARY UNITS AS INSTRUMENTS OF MASSACRE

German general von der Goltz had strong affinities for Turkey and a long career as a Turkish army reformer and instructor. Responding to the Turkish ploy of implicating the Kurds as the sole villains and blaming them for the crime of atrocities ("*zur Last gelegt worden sind*") against Armenians, General von der Goltz published an article where for the first time he identified the Fourth Army Corps units employed against the Armenians. Goltz noted that the information was supplied to him by Divisional General Abdullah Paşa, Aide de Camp to His Imperial Majesty the Sultan. The general had been designated to

be a Turkish Commission of Inquiry member, but because Goltz's sense of probity was a major concern to the Sultan the general was replaced. Goltz revealed that among the units used against the Armenians were the 4th Battalion of 32nd Infantry regiment, two companies of the same regiment coming from Bitlis, 3rd Battalion of the 29th Regiment from Erzerum, one squadron of the 23rd Line Cavalry Regiment, fifty mounted gendarmes, 1,200 rifles, 120-130 swords, three mountain cannons from Harput, with Colonel Tevfik having overall command. Excluded from these formations are the more numerous and deadlier irregular units.

In a commentary of the relatively heavy losses sustained by the regular and irregular forces, Goltz pointed out that unlike their compatriots elsewhere, who are "peaceable and in no way warlike," the Sassoun Armenians were "a rough and hardened mountainfolk" ("*ein rauhes und abgehärtetes Bergvolk*").³⁹ On the other hand, a French historian describes the Turkish army forces employed against the Sassoun Armenians as consisting of 12 infantry battalions, four Hamidiye cavalry regiments, and several batteries of artillery.⁴⁰

Some Ottoman sources are no less explicit about the ploy of employing Kurds to shift the blame for the massacres. In his second volume, historian Osman Nuri calls attention to "the enormous dimensions of the massacre" and admits that the Kurds engaged by "the civilian and military authorities" failed to destroy the Sassoun Armenians. Regular army units were sent in after the Armenians successfully repulsed the Kurds; these units "torched villages, killing many people."⁴¹ More importantly, in his memoirs, four-time Grand Vizier Kâmil Paşa reveals that orders were issued by civilian and military authorities that resulted in "the burning and killing" of the Sassoun Armenians.⁴² Turkish historian Doğan Avcioğlu explained the main rationale for this undertaking. "Abdul Hamid deliberately incited the Kurds against the Armenians as a means of resolving the Armenian Question."⁴³

It is important to note here the issue of Armenian reprisals against Kurdish atrocities prior to the engagement of regular Ottoman army units. In his study of the Sassoun outbreak, historian Roy Douglas refers to the incidence of "a heavy and wanton attack by 3,000 or 4,000 Kurds on Armenians living at Talori, in the Sassoun district of Bitlis vilayet." The Turkish contention cited at the start of this chapter — that the entire population of Muslim villages "had been wiped out" as a result of these alleged Armenian reprisal acts — is dealt with by Douglas. "Counteratrocities alleged to have been committed by Armenians ... were reduced, on investigation, to half a dozen authenticated cases." Douglas concludes that " ... beyond all question the

suffering of the Armenians bore no relation to any reasonable complaint which the Turkish authorities may have had against them."⁴⁴

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EXTORTIONIST TAXATION AND "REBELLION"

The problem of suffering ruthless and often uncontrolled levies assumed epidemic proportions in many parts of Turkey's interior, especially in connection with and in the wake of wars or military incursions. There was practically no mechanism for redress, in particular, for the vast segments of non-Muslim peasantry. The problem was compounded for many clusters of Armenian agricultural populations by the intrusion of Kurdish tribal chiefs imposing their own system of levy upon Armenian peasants. These peasants were unprotected by the government's law enforcement agents and, therefore, remained in a state of quasi-bondage vis a vis these chiefs. Unable to bear these burdens any longer, many of the Sassoun district's Armenian villages found themselves in arrears in taxes owed to the government.

In the summer of 1894, some villages, mainly Tailori and Shenik, decided to launch a protest against the entire system by demonstratively refusing to pay these taxes. They were prodded by two Hunchak revolutionary leaders in particular, Mourad (Hampartzoum Boyadjian) and Mihran Damadian, who had infiltrated the region and secretly were organizing resistance. Such resistance was more or less affordable because the region's mountainous geography and topography favored defensive resistance.

The following observations by European experts regarding the conditions of the conflict's escalation explain the violent and ferocious nature of Turkey's response. Commenting on the Ottoman-Turkish propensity to refuse to countenance grievances lodged by the Armenians, "a subject race," and to define such a recourse as an act of rebellion, a longtime observer of Turkish methods of handling conflicts with nationalities, offered some insights. After asserting that "the idea of revolution" is not entertained "by the peasants," Britain's Erzurum Consul Clifford Lloyd wrote: "Discontent, or any description of protest, is regarded by the Turkish Local Government as seditious."⁴⁵ Describing the Armenians as "an eminently agricultural people," a German economist viewed the Turko-Armenian conflict as process evolving mainly from a growing resistance against depredations, especially excessive taxes levied against them by both the government and semi-feudal Kurds. The consequences were devastating for the population which the author keyed with the following remark: "without exaggeration one can assert that "85-90% of that population is engaged in agriculture and horticulture,"⁴⁶ as were the highlanders of Sassoun.

A French fiscal expert of Turkish finances, on the other hand, went so far as to claim that the Armenian "uprising" of Sassoun, producing the first link in the chain of Abdul Hamid-era massacres, was due to the oppressive tithe (*aşar*), the farm product tax.⁴⁷

In his latest work on the Ottoman Empire, British historian Lord Kinross expounds a similar view: "In the region of Sasun, south of Moush, the exactions of the Kurdish chieftains had evolved into an organized system of tribute by blackmail, paid for their protection by the Armenian population. On top of this the Turkish authorities now chose to demand payment of arrears of government tax - which in the circumstances had for some years been tacitly remitted. When the Armenians refused to submit to this double exaction, Turkish troops were called into the area, in close concert with the Kurdish tribesmen. Soon they were indiscriminately slaughtering the helpless Armenians." Kinross' ultimate judgment is that Armenians' insubordination "served as a pretext in 1894, for an atrocious campaign of massacres launched by the Sultan's orders."⁴⁸ Likewise, Roy Douglas maintains that the Armenian resistance to double taxation catalyzed the Turks to attack the Armenians.⁴⁹ John Marriot, another British historian, noted, "The Kurds were encouraged to extort more and more taxes from the Armenian highlanders ... Supported by Turkish regulars, the Kurds were then bidden to stamp out the insurrection in blood."⁵⁰

Victor Berard, the French chronicler of the Abdul Hamid era massacres, gives the same explanation for the Sassoun outbreak. As early as 1892, the mutasarrif of Moush tried to exact taxes from three Sassoun villages: Şenik, Geligüzan and Semal. The Armenians demurred, saying that they "couldn't serve two masters at the same time" even though they "certainly would prefer serving the Turks" but that they "already were paying the Kurds heavy taxes. If the government desired to collect taxes from [them], in return it should provide effective protection and deliver [them] from the *hala* and *hafir* levies." This daring response was exploited by the Turkish authorities and the religious chiefs of the Kurds; it set the stage for the subsequent anti-Armenian agitation among the Kurds, culminating in the events of the summer of 1894.⁵¹ In a rare display of candor, a Turkish author conceded that the Armenians were not necessarily rebelling but were refusing to serve two masters via taxation.⁵²

SASSOUN AND THE ROLE PLAYING OF EUROPEAN DIPLOMATS

Of the six Powers involved, only Great Britain came close to threatening the Sultan with effective intervention. The main reason for this was British public opinion, stirred up as a result of the British press' intense and prolonged publicity on the carnage at Sassoun. Despite

their participation in the investigation of the massacre and their attendant decrials, the other Powers remained aloof. When Abdul Hamid tried to preempt the execution of an impartial investigation by defining the investigative commission's agenda as an inquiry into the criminal acts of the Armenians, the Powers, led by the British, objected to this act of presumption of guilt prior to the inquiry which in fact was a transparent effort to deflect attention from the crime of massacre and distract the European delegates. In a confrontation with Rustem Paşa, the Turkish ambassador in London, British Foreign Minister Lord Kimberley tersely informed the ambassador that he would have no choice but to expose through publication the consular reports detailing Turkish misrule and the latest atrocities. At the same time, Kimberley pointed out that England had the option to intervene based on treaty rights. As if to undermine his veiled threats, however, Kimberley hinted that he was reluctant to expose and embarrass Turkey. Nevertheless, when Rustem tried to explain the Turkish point of view, Kimberley again changed the tone and refused to hear Rustem, saying that it would be a sheer waste of time.⁵³ Likewise, in a report to Kimberley, British ambassador to Turkey Philip Currie suggested that England "might find it necessary to claim a right under Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin" to send a colonel to ascertain the facts.⁵⁴ In a report to the German Chancellor Prince von Hohenlohe in Berlin, Prince Radolin, the German ambassador to Turkey, indicated that England might seriously try to reopen the Armenian question by invoking the Cyprus Convention's Article 1, which entitled England to raise the issue of Armenian reforms.⁵⁵ But Abdul Hamid let the German government know that he would not grant the reforms the Armenians were seeking under any circumstances. To emphasize his stated resolve, Abdul Hamid exclaimed: "Over my dead body."⁵⁶

The French stance was in part in tune with that of Russia, reflecting the spirit of concordance issuing from the freshly concluded Franco-Russian alliance and, in part, of French Foreign Minister Gabriel Hanotaux's personalized French policy on Turkey. Hanotaux's sympathies to the Sultan dated back to his youth when he was cultural attaché at the French Embassy in Constantinople. On November 27, 1894, Hanotaux advised his ambassador Cambon that France's "direct" interests on the Armenian issue were not "parallel" to those of the Berlin Treaty's other signatories. "Therefore, limit our intervention in the delicate problems which may arise out of the recent events [in Sassoun]..."⁵⁷ When British Ambassador Currie asked his French colleague Cambon to exert pressure on the Sultan, Cambon, in faithful execution of Hanotaux's instruction, declined, stating that "our interests being minimal in the Armenian matter, France can not take any initiative and that our attitude undoubtedly will conform to that of

Russia."⁵⁸ As the reverberations of the news of the Sassoun massacre continued to plague the public fora and the world of diplomacy, Hanotaux displayed a distinct aptitude for diplomatic evasiveness and equivocation. In a conversation with Ziya Paşa, who asked his opinion about the Armenian question, Hanotaux allowed that he was reserved on that question and that he wanted only to maintain "a benevolent impartiality and attentive neutrality" ("*impartialité bienveillante et neutralité attentive*").⁵⁹

The German stance was not much different from that of France. The Emperor was ambivalent about his partnership in the European Concert of the Six Powers which had signed the Berlin Treaty. While occasionally admonishing Turkey to get serious with the badly needed reforms, the Emperor never wavered in his "friendly sentiments for the person of the Sultan." Like France, Germany never ceased in its efforts to ingratiate itself with the Sultan, eagerly reminding him that it never took the initiative in the matter of the Armenian question and that "Germany's reservations in that matter were dictated by a genuine concern for the welfare of Turkey." Upon reading in the German Foreign Office dispatch files the German ambassador's description of Germany's friendly Turkey policy, the Emperor wholeheartedly approved it, appending the marginalia "good" at the spot bearing that description.⁶⁰

The Russian position was perhaps the most negative as far as the need for active and forceful intervention on behalf of the Armenians was concerned. This was in part due to the legacy of Foreign Minister Giers and the autocratic, repressive reign of Tsar Alexander III whose policy of campaigning against national minorities and russifying the border provinces were anathema to the idea of reforms. Tsar Nicholas II, Alexander's successor in 1894, generally sustained this stance. Nicholas identified with Sultan Abdul Hamid in terms of the threat that reform movements portended for established autocratic monarchs. In a sense, he shared the fear which enveloped the Sultan in this respect. According to Ottoman historian Osman Nuri, Abdul Hamid's "promises of reform were deceitful. The mere mention of the word 'reform' irritated him, inciting his criminal instincts."⁶¹ Armenian reforms in Turkey had a potential not only to bolster Turkey's Armenian population but also to impact Russian Armenia by way of contagion. Supported by Giers (and subsequently Lobanof), Nicholas II adamantly refused to consent to any act of coercion against the Sultan, thereby paralyzing the Concert of Europe's designs of intervention. In a December 15, 1894 report to Paris, French Ambassador to Russia M. de Montebello described Russia as being "aloof and negative in the matter of Armenian reforms which were capable of impinging upon developments in Caucasian Armenia."⁶²

This allusion to a projective fear of the formation of "a second Bulgaria" on Russia's borders involving the Armenians in the Transcaucasus, brought Russia and Turkey under a single wing of partnership counterposed to any schemes to improve the lot of Ottoman Armenians. The Bulgarian example had come about earlier, when after helping emancipate Bulgaria from Ottoman dominion, the Russians had met with resentment from the Bulgarians due to perceived Russian domineering. Thereafter, Russia had been treating Bulgaria as an "ungrateful" nation, a liability rather than an asset for Russian national interests. Sultan Abdul Hamid conveyed his apprehension explicitly with regard to his anticipated consequences of Armenian reforms in the immediate aftermath of the Sassoun massacre. During an audience with German ambassador Radolin, the Sultan declared that the Armenians were trying to emulate the Bulgarians in their quest for autonomy by provoking massacres and then agitating the rest of the world with stories akin to those of "so called Bulgarian horrors." The Sultan then pointed out that the Armenians would not succeed because nowhere did Armenians constitute a dense and concentrated population to warrant autonomy.⁶³

Thus, one is again faced with the reappearance of the provocation thesis expounded by the monarch himself and without a sense of irony. That thesis has, however, been adequately dealt with elsewhere (see Robert Melson⁶⁴).

The diagnosis regarding the root causes of the Sassoun outbreak which most stands out in terms of cogency, candor and provenance, belongs to Turkish diplomat Said Paşa, the Foreign Minister of Turkey at the time of the outbreak. He "confidentially" told German Ambassador Radolin that Turkish misrule in the provinces had caused the troubles "in Armenia."⁶⁵ Central to this misrule was the Ottoman system of taxation as applied to Armenian peasantry in the distant corners of Anatolia. As disdained *raias*, servile subjects of a decrepit empire, the impotent Armenians resorted to rebellion only after enduring for a very long time the abuses of an illicit arrangement of double taxation. History is replete with instances of conflicts due to abusive tax systems, the American Revolution being perhaps the most epochal of these.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SASSOUN MASSACRE

Insofar as the evolution of the Turko-Armenian conflict is concerned, the Sassoun episode proved a turning point in several respects. Unlike past and isolated incidents, the Sassoun bloodbath was sanctioned by the central authorities, was organized upon the latter's instance by the provincial authorities, and was mainly executed by regular army units, including the Moush and Bitlis garrisons. The operation

was supervised and directed by the High Command of the Fourth Army Corps, the mainstay of the Ottoman Army stationed in eastern Turkey. The army was thus reduced to an instrument of mass murder against a domestic minority, resisting a system of exorbitant and debilitating taxation. In other words, there was no external war, the exigencies of which might have provided the expedient pretext of eliminating an internal antagonist as a wartime tactical or strategic necessity.

To justify the organization of the bloodbath, the authorities resorted to a device which is part of the privileged repertoire of excuses of imperial and subjugative powers. The authorities chose to define the conduct of the Armenian peasants as "rebellion." Furthermore, to somehow justify the level and scale of the ferocity of the atrocities, the same authorities blamed the victims, attributing to them the commission of wholesale massacres against Muslim villages.

A noteworthy innovation for the purpose of deflection was the use of men in Kurdish garb and attire. Large numbers of regular soldiers fought in the ranks of the irregulars disguised as Kurds. This arrangement was consistent with the Ottoman practice of using and misusing contingents of irregulars, serving as regular appendages of the standing army. They were to demonstrate their functional efficiency as shock troops through resort to what came most natural to them: indiscriminate pillage, arson, rape, and massacre. More significant, the mere use of disguise, with regular soldiers ordered to participate in the expedition as Kurds, unmistakably attests to the authorities' complicity. Even more importantly, it demonstrates the same authorities' propensity to conceal that complicity. These are the fundamental elements of the conspiracy of a government attempting to conceal a major state crime. In the process, the blame is not only shifted to another minority which is portrayed as savage, but also the episode itself is made to appear as a case of inter-ethnic hostility. In this scenario, the government is intended to appear as a social control agent, desperately trying to restore order.

It is important as well to detail some of the main features of the organized massacre, including the methods of killing the victims, because of their recurrence in more expanded forms in the greater cataclysms launched in the decades to follow against the Ottoman Empire's Armenians. The compilation below of that massacre's details is a succinct description of the major particulars of the 1894 Sassoun mass murder. The description is culled from the summary report of England's Vice Consul at Van, Cecil M. Hallward, who spent several weeks in the massacre's general area. First, however, a comment made by R.W. Graves, England's Consul at Erzerum, to whom Hallward and the other British diplomats of the area reported, is offered to stress the caution

and circumspection with which these British representatives sifted and scrutinized their information before reporting it to their superiors as reliable or factual:

Reports of the horrible barbarities committed by the Turkish troops and their Kurdish auxiliaries in Sassoun have reached me from time to time from various private sources, but I was loath to believe them, and refrained from reporting them officially, while Mr. Hallward was engaged in inquiries upon the spot. Now that his inquiries are finished, it is my duty to inform your Excellency that the above reports from quite independent sources agree in almost all respects with the main lines of Mr. Hallward's narrative. I know also that my foreign colleagues here are in possession of information tending to confirm the truth of his reports ... And these persistent and circumstantial stories of massacre and atrocity have now reached the general public, and become matters of notoriety throughout the country, so that I venture to say that no intelligent person in these provinces, not being a Turkish official, would think of doubting that they were indeed committed by Turkish troops in Sassoun.⁶⁶

In his lengthy report Hallward indicates that the Armenians of Sassoun were indeed subjected to some political agitation by a Hunchak leader from Constantinople as early as 1892. However:

I do not believe that the agitation amounted to much, or had much effect on the villagers ... shortly after his [Damadian's] capture the fate of Sassoun Armenians was sealed. Tribal Kurds began to assemble in large numbers in the neighbourhood of Talori in such a way as to alarm the villagers, who began to make preparations in anticipation of an attack, which, in fact, shortly took place. The Armenians, being in a stronger position than the Kurds, repulsed them with considerable loss, their own loss being small. At the same time, they broke down a bridge over a deep gorge across which other Kurds were coming to join in the attack. The Kurds then retired, finding themselves worsted ... The Armenians were in a strong position, and the troops did not attack them, but waited in the hope of reducing them by famine. This attempt, however, failed, and at the beginning of winter they returned to Bitlis.

Then followed the events related in my former despatch: The Vali's summons to the principal villagers, and their refusal to appear, the dispatch of a detachment of troops to the district in the early summer, the assembling of the tribal Kurds, and the affray between the latter and the Armenians on account of stolen cattle, and the arrival of reinforcements of troops in August.

The troops sent from Bitlis took eight tins of petroleum with them, and also four mountain guns.

At first the troops did not show themselves in the villages, but the Kurds were urged to attack the latter. The Armenians, thinking they had only to deal with Kurds, made a vigorous resistance and repulsed them. The latter refused to return to the attack unless helped by the soldiers, some of whom then assumed Kurdish costume, and joined in an attack which was more successful.

The troops now began to show themselves in some of the villages, saying that they had come down to protect them; they lodged the night in them, and during the night rose and slaughtered all the inhabitants, men, women, and children. The Ferik (General) ... who came from Erzingian, read an Imperial Firman, authorizing the punishment of the villages, and exhorted the soldiers not to fail in their task, but their officers urged them on with threats, and the work of destruction and butchery was carried through without mercy or distinction of age or sex.

A large number of the leading men, headed by a priest, went out to meet the Commanding Officer with their tax receipts in their hands, by way of providing their loyalty to the Government, and begging for mercy. They were surrounded and killed to a man.

At Gheli Guzan a number of young men were bound hand and foot, laid out in a row, had brushwood piled on them, and were burned alive.

At another village a priest and several leading men were captured and promised release if they would tell where others had fled to; they did so, but were killed. The priest had a chain put round his neck and pulled in opposite directions, so that he was nearly throttled; finally, bayonets were placed upright in the ground, and he was tossed in the air so that he fell on them.

The men in another village fled with their women and children to a grotto, where they remained for several days, till the weaker ones died of hunger; the remainder were at last discovered by the soldiers and put to the bayonet, which was the weapon principally employed throughout.

Some sixty young women and girls were driven into church, where the soldiers were ordered to do as they liked with them and afterwards kill them, which order was carried out.

A large number of the most attractive women were set aside and invited to accept Islam and marry Turks; they refused, and were accordingly killed.

The petroleum brought from Bitlis was utilized for burning the houses, together with the inhabitants inside them. A soldier related in Bitlis how he had seen on one occasion a little boy run out from the flames, and pushed back into them with a bayonet by another soldier. It was also used to burn the corpses.

Many other disgusting barbarities are said to have been committed, such as ripping open pregnant women, tearing children to pieces by main force, & c.; but the above will serve as examples of the way in which this campaign of extermination was carried out.

I must modify the statement I made in my former dispatch, that the Kurds did not take any large share in the massacre. At the instigation of the soldiers they certainly did take part in it, though the worst excesses seem to have been committed by the former. A large number of the villagers fled to a peak near Talori, and determined to sell their lives as dearly as possible. The Kurds were sent to attack them several days in succession, but did not produce much effect; finally, when their ammunition and food gave out, the soldiers reached the summit with little loss, and killed nearly every one of them.

The final scene was enacted in the Valley of Talvoreeg, where a large number of men, women, and children had collected; they were surrounded by Kurds and soldiers, and first thinned out by rifle-shots and then the rest dispatched with sword and bayonet.⁶⁷

Two aspects of the Hallward report require further discussion. First, Hallward's identification of his sources should be noted: "The details given above were principally collected from soldiers who took part in the massacre, and I have heard the main facts substantiated from various different quarters, among others by a Turkish zaptieh, who was there and saw the whole affair."⁶⁸ Second, reference may be made to Hallward's conclusion:

There was no insurrection, as was reported in Constantinople; the villagers simply took up arms to defend themselves against the Kurds. The statement made to me by an official here of their having killed soldiers and zaptiehs, I found after careful inquiry to be false. Before arriving in Moush, I naturally supposed that something of the sort must have occurred to call for such a display of military force, but neither the Mutessarif nor the Military Commander with whom I spoke on the subject hinted at anything of the sort, nor did I learn elsewhere that the Armenians had been guilty of any act of rebellion against the Government.⁶⁹

The details of this account in their entirety highlight the extraordinary significance of a major phenomenon in the annals of Ottoman history involving the resort to lethal violence to handle domestic conflicts. A pattern of mass murder emerges, with a tendency to crystallize itself as a standard method of dealing with Armenians anxious to end inequality and secure reforms stipulated by treaty and guaranteed constitutionally. The Sassoun episode set the stage for a sequence of aggravating developments. There emerged an Ottoman-Turkish proneness to respond to the escalating phases of the Turko-Armenian con-

flict with incremental massacres for which opportunities either presented themselves or were created deliberately at propitious moments. The use of rationalization, the associated subterfuges, and the methods of deflection and cover-up, are seen as practices, repeating themselves throughout with ritualistic monotony. Above all, the tested and proven *modus operandi* in the enactment of the Sassoun massacre comes to prevail in new episodes of this kind. Abduction, rape, pillage, forcible conversion under threat of imminent death, burning alive, these methods stand out as the integral components of that massacre.

The sterility of the Sassoun Inquiry Commission's investigation reinforced Ottoman perceptions regarding the margins of impunity relative to the state organized crime of mass murder. Moreover, the authorities were now firmly persuaded about the utmost vulnerability of the victims, the Armenians. Encouraged largely by these perceptions, the Sultan unleashed a new wave of massacres. Not content with the scale of ruin already wrought in Sassoun, the authorities broadened their sweep of destruction to maximize its scale and to finish off the victims. One year after the Sassoun outbreak, and on the threshold of a new chain of massacres, British Ambassador Philip Currie relayed to London the report of R.W. Graves, his Erzerum Consul, stating that "by administrative pressure of every kind and under the disguise of superintending their relief, the Turkish authorities are still endeavoring to consummate the ruin of the Christians of Sassoun and Talori."⁷⁰

The Sassoun massacre, with all its essential characteristics, indeed established a precedent whereby these characteristics eventually evolved into common denominators relative to launching, directing and justifying subsequent massacres. It may therefore be viewed as a watershed event. Its most signal aspect is not only the impunity of the entire array of perpetrators involved, but also the ferocious symbolism through which the arch-perpetrators were publicly and defiantly rewarded by the Sultan himself.

The totality of these facts cast serious doubt upon the veracity and reliability of Abdul Hamid's occasional exculpatory pleas made in times of crisis. In his memoirs, former Grand Vizier Kâmil Paşa cites such a plea made in connection with the crisis resulting from the Sassoun massacre. Upon the monarch's urgent request, Kâmil was rushed to his side in the middle of the night for an emergency consultation. The Sultan began the session with the following statement:

For three nights I have been unable to sleep. Having been apprised of the savage assaults of the Armenians of Sasun, I ordered the apprehension of the rebels and the repression of the uprising. It develops, however, that the chief secretary (Sürreya Paşa, who subsequently, and rather mysteriously, died, and was replaced by Tahsin Paşa) had sent a telegram urging the use of severe methods (*şiddet*,

which can also mean terror)... When I said "strike," I did not mean "massacre them" (*Ben "vurulsun" dedi isem, "katliam edilsin" demedim*).⁷¹

If so, one might expect not only an official and formal denunciation of the atrocities in the aftermath of the massacre, but also the institution of trials to punish the guilty. Not only did none of these happen, but as the record indicates, Abdul Hamid brazenly rewarded the entire cast of perpetrators on the scene.

One of the highly cherished top rewards went to the Commander in Chief of the Fourth Army Corps under whose supervision and control the massacre was implemented. One can hardly underestimate the significance of the Sultan's public gesture. Enlisting and rewarding the services of the military as an efficient instrument of massacre by a government, is a reflection of an entire social system which permits such a development. It not only involves a proclivity to subvert and criminalize the legitimate functions of a profession, but also, by rewarding such services, the social system becomes infused with the elements of a culture favoring resort to indiscriminate lethal violence as a profitable method of settling a domestic conflict. The reward system of a society should never be underestimated when analyzing the sanguinary track record of that society. The system also includes broad latitudes for self-enrichment for the members of the perpetrator group appropriating the accumulated riches and possessions of the victim population.

The anomie afflicting the Ottoman Empire in its decades of corrosion and steady decline was largely the result of economic retardation and rampant poverty among the Muslim masses. This included the military and its officialdom, which often waited for months to receive their salaries and suffered the indignities of poverty created by an incompetent administration. The Sassoun episode epitomizes the economic aspects of a political conflict culminating in massacre. The ensuing 1895-96 series of empire-wide massacres was largely driven by acquisitiveness and greed as far as the active participants in the massacres were concerned. For the authorities, the massacres were an expedient device to redistribute wealth by way of mass murder. This pattern was sustained in 1909 in Adana, but above all, it was demonstrated in the World War I genocide which in many ways was foreshadowed in the Sassoun episode of massacre.

Analyzing the web of factors which configured in that wartime cataclysm, a prominent historian observed that the Ittihadists, like Abdul Hamid, needed to deal effectively with the discontent of the masses and placate them with attractive incentives for generating support for the regime and its endeavors:

They wanted to popularize the unpopular war by directing greed and fanaticism to the spoilation of the largest and richest non-Moslem element ... Such were the motives of the Porte in ... inciting [the Turks] to hatred and atrocities.⁷²

NOTES

1. *La Verité sur les massacres d'Arménie*. Documents nouveaux et peu connus. (Paris: P.V. Stock 1896), Doc. No. 17, p. 83.
2. *Das Staatsarchiv. Sammlung der Officiellen Actenstücke*. vol. 32, Kremer-Aunrode and Hirsch, eds. (Leipzig, 1877), Doc. No. 6360, pp. 156-57.
3. *London Times*, August 12, 1906. The occasion for this article was British Foreign Minister Sir Edward Grey's declaration that the policies pursued by the Islamic Union were a threat to civilization. Y.H. Bayur, *Türk İnkilâbı Tarihi* (The History of the Turkish Revolution), vol. II: 4, (Ankara: Turkish Historical Society, 1952), p. 94.
4. *British Foreign Office Archives*, Blue Books, Turkey No. 16 [1877], Report No. 13, Enclosure, March 19, 1869, pp. 17, 18, 19, 24, 31, 35.
5. A. Arpiarian, "Dzakoum Haigagan Hartzee" (The Origins of the Armenian Question) 3 (11) *Nor Giank* (June 1, 1900): 164-65. The five-part series of articles were published in installments. (1) vol. 3, No. 10 (May 15, 1900) 148-152; (2) vol. 3, No. 11 (June 1, 1900) 164-169; (3) vol. 3, No. 12 (June 15, 1900) 180-183; (4) vol. 3, No. 14 (July 15, 1900) 215-19; (5) vol. 3, No. 16 (Aug. 15, 1900).
6. K. Kapigian, *Haigagan Hartzu* (The Armenian Question) (Beirut: n.p., 1962), pp. 88-89.
7. According to the personally recorded Notes, left behind by Abdul Hamid, Midhat Paşa, who is identified as the author of the 1876 Constitution, "understood very little about European constitutions. [He relied upon Otdian] who acted as his guide (rehberi)," İsmail Hami Danişmend, *Izahlı Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi* vol. 4 (Istanbul: Türkiye Yayınevi, 1961), p. 293.
8. M. Varantian, *Haigagan Sharjman Nakhbadmoutiun* (The History of the Rudiments of the Armenian Movement), vol. 2, (Geneva: A.R.F. press, 1913), pp. 64-65.
9. A. Gallenga, *Two Years of the Eastern Question*. vol. II (London: S. Tinsley, 1877), pp. 367-370; see also *Blue Book*, Turkey No. 15 (1877), p. 8.
10. *Massis*, 19 June 1877, issue no. 1985.
11. Varantian, *Haigagan* [n. 8], p. 33.
12. V. Langlois, "Les Arméniens de la Turquie et les massacres du Taurus", *Revue des Deux Mondes* II (February 15, 1863), pp. 28-30.
13. A. Saroukhan, *Haigagan Khunteern U Azkayin Sahmanatroutiun* (The Armenian Problem and the National Constitution) (Tiflis: Epocha Press, 1913), p. 119.
14. *Documents Diplomatiques Français* 1871-1900. vol. 11, Doc. No. 50 (February 20, 1894) pp. 71-74 (1947); see also *Livre Jaune*. Affaires Arméniennes. Projets de réformes dans l'Empire Ottoman 1893-1897. Doc. No. 6, pp. 10-13 (1897).
15. Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963), pp. 67-89.
16. FO424/46, No. 336, Elliot's Dec. 7, 1876 communication to British Foreign Minister Lord Derby. See also *Blue Book*, Turkey No. 2 (1877), p. 34.
17. A variant translation of this excerpt from the encyclical is in V. Nalbandian (misprinted as V. Cardashian) "The Armenian Revolutionary Movement" 2 (4-8) *Armenian Review* 2: 4-8 (Winter 1949-1950), 65-66. Khrimian, unlike any other Armenian Church leader, came to be adored and venerated by the masses which affectionately nicknamed him Hayrig, or, papa. He embraced the cause of the disaffected and neglected masses in the provinces in the heartland of which, in the region of Van, he was born, raised and officiated as a prince of the Church. He repeatedly argued that

unless the Armenian peasantry was rescued from the scourges afflicting it, there was no future, nor any justification for the survival of the nation. Throughout his career, Khrimian was an advocate of Ottoman citizenship; he espoused neither political autonomy, nor secession, nor Russian sovereignty. His chief concern was the introduction of administrative, internal reforms in order to improve the Ottoman system, and to relieve his charges from the tribulations of unrelenting misrule, plunder and enslavement. Disappointed and broken, he resigned after four years (1873), only to espouse, reluctantly, the cause of revolution.

18. *Blue Book*, Turkey No. 1 (1892), p. 57.
19. Malcolm MacColl, *England's Responsibility Towards Armenia*, 2nd ed. (London, New York: Longman's Green, 1895), p. 29. For two fully referenced articles on the origins of the Armenian Question and the Armenian national movement see A. Beylerian, "Les Origines de la Question Arménienne du Traité de San Stefano au Congrès de Berlin" 1-2 *Revue d'Histoire Diplomatique* (Jan.- June 1973), 139-171; same author, "L'Imperialisme et le mouvement national arménien (1885-1890)" *Relations Internationales* 3 (1975), 19-54.
20. Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*. vol. 2. Reform, Revolution and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey 1808-1975 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 203-204.
21. *Ottoman Archives*. Yildiz Collection. The Armenian Question 1 Talori Incidents (Istanbul: The Historical Research Foundation. Istanbul Research Center, 1989), 371 pp. The volume contains 85 documents in modern Turkish, accompanied with English translations.
22. *Blue Book*, Turkey No. 1 (1895) Part I, pp.133-193, Report No. 252, written on July 20, and submitted on August 15, 1895; the quotations are from pp. 170, 171, 173. The French text is in *Documents Diplomatiques*. Affaires Arméniennes. Projets de Réformes dans l'Empire Ottoman 1893-1897. (*Livre Jaune*) (Paris, 1897) (French Foreign Ministry Archives) No. 86 (August 16, 1895) of which Annex No. 1 is the Joint Report, pp. 96-111, and Annex No. 2 is the supplement to No. 1, pp. 111-136.
23. British delegate Shipley's Memorandum is in *Blue Book* [n. 22] October 12, 1895, Enclosure No. 267, pp. 203-8; the quotations are from pp. 206-7. Ambassador Currie's communication to the British Foreign Office is in *Ibid.*, No. 206, p. 112.
24. Shaw, *History* [n. 20], p. 204.
25. G.P. Gooch, *History of Modern Europe 1878-1919* (New York: H. Holt & Co., 1923), p. 234.
26. Duke of Argyll (George D. Campbell), *Our Responsibilities for Turkey* (London: John Murray, 1896), p. 92.
27. *Blue Book* [n. 22], p. 174 of the Joint Report; the French original is in *Documents* [n. 22], p. 110.
28. *Documents* [n. 22], No. 41, p. 41, Cambon to Foreign Minister Hanotaux, April 4, 1895.
29. English translation is in FO881/6645, pp. 28-9, enclosure in No. 4 in Ambassador Currie's April 20, 1895 report to London. The date of Prjewalski's secret report is March 20, 1895.
30. Mehmet Hocaoglu, *Abdulhamit Han'ın Muhturaları*. Belgeler (Abdul Hamid's Memoranda. Documents) (Istanbul: Anda, 1989), pp. 239-240.
31. *Documents Diplomatiques* [n. 14], Doc Nos. 318 and 322, pp. 484 ff.
32. *Blue Book*, Turkey No. 1, (1895) Part I, No. 28 report of October 30, 1894, pp. 14-15; for a detailed account of the background and sequences of the massacres see *Ibid.*, Enclosure 2 in No. 60, Hallward's November 6, 1894 report, pp. 36-38. For more candid reports on the circumstances of the Sassoun massacre, composed without the

- diplomatic restraints which, as a rule are observed by most representatives of the European Powers, especially the British, see the collection of Van Vice Consul Cecil M. Hallward's private letters sent to his mother while on duty in Turkey. *Extracts from Letters of C.M.H.* It was published and circulated privately among the friends of the author's family, probably sometime after February 1895. It contains 16 letters, with dates starting on July 13, 1894 and ending on February 11, 1895.
33. *Documents Diplomatiques*, [n. 14], No. 318, p. 493.
34. FO881/6645, Enclosure No. 3, in Report of A. Block from the British Embassy who for weeks negotiated with Turkish authorities the dispatching to Sassoun of the Commission of Investigation, p. 27.
35. *Blue Book*, Turkey No. 1 (1895) part I, No. 49, p. 27; No. 68, p. 42 and No. 82, p. 45. For the Liyakat decoration see *Documents* [n. 22], No. 13, p. 19 Erzerum French Consul Bergeron's November 24, 1895, report.
36. *London Times*, March 30, 1895. C.M. Hallward, British Vice Consul at Van, in a November 6, 1894 report confirms that Turkish troops "assumed Kurdish custom and joined in an attack which was more successful" after the Kurds were repulsed by the Armenians and "refused to return to the attack unless they were helped by the [Turkish] soldiers." FO881/6645, enclosure 2 in No. 1 Erzurum Consul R.W. Graves' November 15, 1894 report, both of which Ambassador Philip Currie forwarded to London on November 26, 1894 under "Confidential" No. 754, registry No. 539.
37. Roy Douglas, "Britain and the Armenian Question, 1894-7" *The Historical Journal* 19, 1 (1976), 118; Grand Vizier Said's disclosure about Hamid having ordered the Sassoun massacre is on p. 125.
38. *Documents* [n. 22], Cambon to Hanotaux, April 4, 1895, p. 42.
39. *Kölnische Zeitung*, February 24, 1895.
40. Le Vte. de la Jonquiére, *Histoire de l'Empire Ottoman depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours*. vol. II, new, enlarged edition (Paris: Hachette, 1914), p. 134.
41. Osman Nuri, *Abdülhamit Sani ve Devri Saltanatı. Hayatı Hususiye ve Siyasiyesi*. (AbdülHamid the Second and His Period of Rule. His Private and Political Life). Ottoman script. vol. 2 (Istanbul, 1328 [1912]), p. 372.
42. Kâmil Paşa, *Hatıratı Sadrı Esbak Kâmil Paşa* (The Memoirs of late Grand Vizier Kâmil Paşa) Ottoman Script, (Istanbul, [1913]), pp. 180-181, 187.
43. Doğan Avcıoğlu, *Milli Kurtuluş Tarihi 1838 den 1995e* (History of the National Liberation from 1838 to 1995) vol. 3 (Istanbul: Istanbul Publishers, 1974), 1088-89.
44. Douglas, "Britain" [n. 37], p. 116.
45. October 2, 1890 report in *Blue Books*, Turkey No. 1 (1890), pp. 80-82. Ten years earlier when *Levant Herald* (a newspaper run by the British) and two Armenian papers, in their publications had raised the issue of the quest for "justice, protection, and better government in the provinces," the Censor of the Press suppressed all three publications for being "seditious." FO424/106, folio 360A, Layard to Salisbury, April 26, 1880.
46. La Barbe, "Die Steuern im Türkischen Armenien und die Ursachen der Armenischen Bewegung" (The Taxes in Turkish Armenia and the Causes of the Armenian Movement) *Neue Zeit*, 16 (1897), 41, 46.
47. Du Velay, *Essai sur l'histoire financière de la Turquie*, (Paris: Rousseau, 1903), p. 668.
48. Lord Kinross, *The Ottoman Centuries. The Rise and Fall of the Turkish Empire* (New York: Morrow Quill Paperback, 1977), pp. 557-558.
49. Douglas, "Britain" [n. 37], 116.

50. Sir John A.R. Marriott, *The Eastern Question. An Historical Study in European Diplomacy*. 4th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), p. 399.
51. Victor Berard, "La Politique du Sultan" installment No. 1, *La Revue de Paris*, 39 (December 15, 1896) 883 ff.
52. M. Sertoğlu, *Belgelerle Türk Tarih Dergisi*, 2 (November 1967), 48.
53. *German Foreign Ministry Archives 1871-1914* (Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871-1914) vol. 9, *Der Nahe und der ferne Osten*, J. Lepsius, A.M. Bartholdy and F. Thimme eds. (Berlin, 1927). Doc. No. 2186, registry No. 160, November 28, 1894, p. 206.
54. FO ZHCI/5810, Doc. No. 66, November 26, 1894.
55. *German Foreign Ministry* [n. 53], Doc. No. 2184, registry no. 157, November 16, 1894, p. 203.
56. *Ibid.*
57. *Documents Diplomatiques* [n. 14], Doc. No. 292, p. 439.
58. *Ibid.*, Doc. No. 308, December 8, 1894.
59. *Ibid.*, Doc. No. 365, February 7, 1895, p. 568.
60. *German Foreign Ministry* [n. 53], p. 207.
61. Nuri, *Abdulhamit Sani* [n. 41], vol. 1, p. 838.
62. *Documents Diplomatiques* [n. 14], Doc. No. 314, p. 484.
63. *German Foreign Ministry* [n. 53], Doc. No. 2184, November 16, 1894, p. 202.
64. Robert Melson, "A Theoretical Inquiry into the Armenian Massacres of 1894-1896" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 24, 3 (1982): 481-509; *idem.*, *Revolution and Genocide. On the Origins of the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 5-6, 10, 12, 42, 142, 151-59.
65. *German Foreign Ministry* [n. 53], Doc. No. 2186, November 28, 1894, registry No. 160, pp. 206-07.
66. *British Foreign Office Archives* [n. 54], Consul Grave's November 15, 1894 report, Enclosure 1 in Ambassador Currie's November 26, 1894, No. 60 report, p. 35 of the file. See also Note 36 where the source is listed as FO881/6645.
67. *Ibid.*, Vice Consul Hallward's November 6, 1894 report from Van, Enclosure 2 in Ambassador Currie's November 26, 1894, No. 60 report, pp. 36, 37 of the file.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
70. *Blue Book*, Turkey, No. 1 (1895) part I, p. 194, Report No. 261, August 29, 1895, enclosure No. 260, R.W. Graves' August 12, 1895 report.
71. Kâmil Paşa'nın Anıları. *Belgelerle Misir, Ermeni, Kürt, Doğu Rumeli Meseleleri* (the memoirs of Kâmil Paşa: The problems of Egypt, Armenians, Kurds, Eastern Rumelia, with documents) ed. Gül Çağalı-Güven (Istanbul, 1991), pp. 188-89.
72. W.W. Gottlieb, *Studies in Secret Diplomacy during First World War* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1957), p. 110.

A Critical Examination of the Sassoun Commission of Inquiry Report

Rebecca Morris

In the wake of the Sassoun massacre of 1894, in the face of considerable pressure from the British government, the Ottoman Porte conducted an official investigation into the proceedings at Sassoun. The investigation was organized in the form of a commission of inquiry composed of five representatives of the Ottoman government. Attached to the Commission was a team of three European observers, appointed by the embassies of the British, French and Russian governments.¹ While the European Delegates were not themselves members of the Commission of Inquiry, they were empowered by the Porte to observe and comment on the proceedings of the Commission, and to offer suggestions as to the course that the inquiry might take. However, the final authority for determining the direction of the investigation, the selection of witnesses, and the lines of questioning rested solely with the Ottoman Commission.²

The report on the proceedings of the Commission of Inquiry constitutes an important source of information regarding both the Sassoun events themselves and the subsequent investigation.³ It contains detailed daily summaries of the depositions of over 200 witnesses — including a number of verbatim transcriptions — rendering it the only readily available primary source in which the statements of a large number of participants in and eyewitnesses to the events are presented.⁴ In addition, it contains information regarding other aspects of the investigation, including official documents pertaining to the Sassoun events, discussions of petitions presented to the Commission, and extensive reports on communications between the European Delegates and the Ottoman Commissioners during the time that the Commission was in session. And although it was eventually published by the

British government, the report may be considered to be first and foremost an Ottoman document, and only secondarily a British, Russian and French document. The Report itself was prepared by an Ottoman official, under the jurisdiction of the President of the Commission.⁵ The fact that the Commission of Inquiry Report was prepared by a representative of the Porte, rather than by officials from any of the three European countries who sent delegates to observe the Commission sets it apart from other, purely European sources which can be classified as "external" sources, and thus might be considered to be of less value than "internal" Ottoman sources.

To date, the Commission of Inquiry Report has largely been overlooked by historians. In view of the fact that much attention has been devoted to the "Armenian Question" by historians such as Davison, Shaw, Uras, Salt, Duguid, and others, it is remarkable that a published source which is as readily available and as laden with information as the Commission of Inquiry Report has been so underutilized. While passing references to it can be found in several historiographical accounts of the Armenian Question in general and the Sassoun affair in particular, as of yet no systematic analysis of its contents has been undertaken. Because the Report has not been carefully and thoroughly scrutinized and evaluated, historians have been able to make selective use of it in order to support a variety of positions vis-a-vis the massacres. Indeed, when utilized in an uncritical manner, the report can offer accounts to back up the claims of even the most diametrically opposed chroniclers of the Sassoun events.⁶ On first appraisal, it would seem that the Report is in fact of negligible value, as it is filled with a formidable range of wildly contradictory accounts, rendering extremely daunting the task of using it to obtain reliable information. However, when the Report is thoroughly and critically analyzed, it becomes apparent that indeed it can be of significant value as a source of information about the events at Sassoun. The fact that — as will be demonstrated below — the Commission of Inquiry was deliberately constructed in such a manner as to conceal evidence of the massacre and to impart an image of a powerful and seditious Armenian revolutionary movement in the Sassoun area, need not necessarily warrant the conclusion that the entire Report on the Commission of Inquiry must be discarded. On the contrary, I contend that it is precisely the investigation's obvious fraudulence which lends credence to that information contained in the Report which is consistently reiterated and is corroborated by a variety of sources. If, despite concerted efforts on the part of the Commission members to cover evidence of massacres, such evidence still continued to surface, produced by numerous witnesses from a variety of localities and with a remarkable degree of consistency, then this evidence merits serious attention.

In the following paper I shall present the findings of a detailed and systematic quantitative analysis of the report on the Commission of Inquiry.⁷ The Report was examined with two objectives:

1. To analyze the organization and proceedings of the Commission of Inquiry itself, and
2. To obtain as much information about the Sassoun events as the Report might yield.

In part one, the organization of the Commission of Inquiry will be discussed. In this section I will argue that the Commission was deliberately constructed in such a way as to conceal evidence of a massacre of the local Armenian population and of official complicity in this massacre. Using such tactics as suppression of evidence and pressuring of witnesses, the Commissioners strove to shift the inquiry away from the massacre of the Armenians and to erect a frightening image of a powerful and dangerous Armenian revolutionary movement bent on terrorizing the local Kurdish population and bringing the corruption and downfall of the local Armenian population.

The fact that the Commission of Inquiry can be shown to have been farcical in many respects does not, however, mean that the Commission of Inquiry Report must necessarily be discarded as a worthless source for study of the Sassoun events. Despite its shortcomings, the Report, when used responsibly and when analyzed thoroughly instead of quoted selectively, can prove to be a rich source of information regarding the Sassoun events. In the second part of the paper, I will present a discussion of the Sassoun events themselves. In this section, I hope to demonstrate that a careful and thorough examination of the Report can yield much data about the sequence of events, the perpetrators of the massacre, and the victims. The story which this data tells stands in stark contrast to the standard historiographical discussion of the Sassoun events. Because a thorough analysis of the Commission of Inquiry Report suggests a narrative of the Sassoun events which is strikingly at variance with many of the already-existing historiographic accounts, it will be necessary to examine some of these other accounts and to compare them with the account and analysis of the events suggested by the Commission of Inquiry Report. In the process, I shall argue that the evidence contained in the Commission Report warrants a dramatic revision of the standard interpretation of the Sassoun events which can be found in the works of these historians.

METHODOLOGY

In an examination of a source such as the Commission of Inquiry Report, which consists mainly of depositions of more than two hun-

dred people, the historian is inevitably faced with the problem of whose testimony to believe. While a few of the depositions contained in the Report are so outlandish that they might safely be determined to be false, such a method of approaching the sources presents obvious pitfalls. Thus, in my examination of the document, I have refrained from trying to ascertain which of the witnesses were telling the truth and which were lying simply on the basis of the plausibility of their statements. Instead, I have chosen to approach the document more conservatively, accepting statements at face value rather than picking and choosing my data from the statements which seemed the most credible or which otherwise appealed to me. Witnesses' depositions were examined methodically; whenever possible, efforts were made to quantify the data gathered from their statements, and to check for corroboration and consistency of detail when the same version of the events was offered by a plurality of witnesses. Thus, in the compilation of data for this paper, the Report was systematically broken down, classified and analyzed. Each of the witnesses who appeared before the Commission was assigned a number.⁸ Witnesses were then charted according to ethnicity, place of residence (before the massacre), and occupation. Information as to whether the accounts offered were first-hand, eyewitness accounts or whether they were accounts based on hearsay was also charted.⁹ Finally, witnesses were classified according to whether their appearance before the Commission of Inquiry was called for by the Commission itself, by the European Delegates, or by the personal initiative of the witness. After the initial scoring of the witnesses had been completed, it then became possible to analyze and organize the data from a number of different angles and to look for patterns and recurring themes. Finally, the reports were systematically read and compared with one another. While all of the reports were carefully examined, special attention was allotted to eyewitness accounts, accounts which were especially rich in detail, and accounts which were corroborated by multiple witnesses. Tables 1, 2 and 3 provide some basic demographic information on the sources used in the Report, as well as on the villages involved.

This conservative approach to the document did not enable me to draw more than modest, and, in some cases, tentative conclusions about the Sassoun events. Even so, the analysis generated by this examination of the Commission of Inquiry Report is startlingly different from many of the existing accounts and analyses, suggesting at the very least that it is necessary to thoroughly re-examine the existing historiography on the Sassoun affair and to question the methodology employed by the historians who have produced these accounts.

TABLE 1. BREAKDOWN OF WITNESSES ACCORDING TO GENDER

Gender	Summoned by Commission	Summoned by Delegates	Appeared of own accord	Other	Total
Male	161	18	13	2	194
Female	3	6	8	0	17

TABLE 2. BREAKDOWN OF WITNESSES ACCORDING TO ETHNICITY

Ethnicity	Summoned by Commission	Summoned by Delegates	Appeared of own accord	Other	Total
Armenian	78	18	17	2	115
Kurdish	59	3	4	0	66
Unknown (Kurdish or Turkish)	27	3	0	1	31
Total	164	24	21	3	212

CONSTRUCTION OF THE COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

It was the official position of the Ottoman Government that no massacre had ever occurred at Sassoun. Instead, what had transpired was a massive Armenian rebellion, for the suppression of which it had been necessary to call troops into the area. Since there had been no massacre, there could likewise be no investigation of such a massacre. The Commission of Inquiry must therefore concern itself not with an investigation of massacre, but rather with an investigation of Armenian insurgency.¹⁰ An analysis of the Commission of Inquiry Report reveals that indeed the investigation was carefully constructed in such a way as to uphold the official position of the Ottoman government. In the face of overwhelming evidence of the massacre, and under pressure from the European observers to the Commission, who continually insisted that the massacre itself be thoroughly investigated, the

TABLE 3. VILLAGES AND TOWNS IN DISTRICTS REPRESENTED DURING THE COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

	Ghendj	Unknown
Kavar	Ardushin	Artik
Ghelieguzan	Ghendj	Avran
Semal	Reshki	Avzakhpur
Shenik		Bellan
		Bozikan
Khian	Kulp	Djerdjar/Jerjas
Akhung	Gheliemansur	Ghedornik
Ardegonk	Kerghervank	Havadorik
Arze-Kiegh	Kuh Islam	Hosvank
Baks	Kulp	Innekan
Khian	Passur	Jemikan
Malamelki	Rabat	Kefifhan
Senda	Nedran	Keguarvan
	Tiakho	Kelbastik
		Kekan
Dzovassar	Talori	Keran
Agpi	Hartk	Kerili
Darsikom	Eki	Keshish
	Merg	Kizil-Aghadj
Moush	Hakmank	Koshekan
Alvarindj	Mesre	Lachki
Moush	Halorik	Mehemet Khan
	Davolie	Melek
		Migrakom
Adana	Hazo	Omer Khian, Silivan
Hachin	Metink	Panah
		Papor
		Pertak
		Rayaaushtam
		Sorda
		Ziaret

Commissioners were compelled to rely on a number of methods in order to control the information disseminated during the Inquiry. These methods included, but were not limited to, the following:

1. Reliance on hearsay testimony

Although the villages surrounding the city of Moush, the site of the investigation, were filled with survivors of the massacre, the Com-

mission chose to make extensive use of witnesses who could provide only secondary information. As Table 4 demonstrates, well over half of the witnesses whose presence was occasioned by the Commission itself did not represent themselves as direct eyewitnesses to any of the events (referred to as "Secondary accounts" in the Table). Although it was well-known to the Commission that a great number of people from the affected areas were located in the city of Moush, where the Inquiry was being held, as well as in the surrounding villages, the Commission nevertheless elected not to make extensive use of eyewitness testimony in its investigation. The predominance of hearsay testimony in the depositions of the group of witnesses summoned by the Commission suggests that there was a concerted effort on the part of the Commission to control the dissemination of information through the careful selection of witnesses.

TABLE 4. NATURE OF THE REPORTS AND SUMMONED WITNESSES

	Eyewitness reports	Secondary accounts	Unclear	Total
Witnesses summoned by Commission	61	87	16	164
Witnesses summoned by Delegates	18	7	—	25
Witnesses appearing of own accord	16	5	—	21
Other	1	2	—	3
Total	96	101	16	213

2. Directing the Inquiry away from the massacre itself

The Commission summoned a large number of witnesses whose depositions concerned events other than the massacre. Most of these people spoke of Armenian acts of brigandage which allegedly occurred prior to the July 1894 Kurdish attack on Shenik. Others spoke (in very general terms) of Armenian revolutionary activity in the area dating back to 1891. While the task of the Commission was defined in somewhat broad terms, it was clearly stated in the instructions to the Commissioners that the purpose of the Inquiry was to investigate the Sassoun

incident itself, and that "the inquiry [was] to be confined to the events of Sassoun."¹¹ Yet despite their instructions to limit their investigation to the Sassoun affair itself, the Commission repeatedly strayed from their assigned task. Although this problem was often brought to the attention of the Commission by the Delegates, the practice of moving the investigation away from an inquiry into the Sassoun events themselves continued throughout the course of the investigation.

3. *Unequal treatment of witnesses*

Many of the Armenian witnesses were introduced to the Commission as "suspect" (*maznun*), rather than the customary "witness" (*shahed*). When the Delegates questioned the Commission as to the reason for this practice, they were told that "as the inhabitants of Shenik, Semal and Ghelieguzan took part in the rebellion, all the inhabitants must be considered as *maznun*, as well as the inhabitants of Talori and those of the surrounding villages who associated themselves with the rebellion." Thus, the great majority of the witnesses from the villages in which the violence had actually occurred were presented as "suspect," while those who were not eyewitnesses to the events, or who did not themselves endure the massacre, were considered by the commission to be "witnesses."¹²

4. *Unwillingness to hear witnesses*

On numerous occasions, the Delegates requested the appearance of specific people who were said to have been eyewitnesses or participants, and whose depositions might therefore provide reliable information on the Sassoun events. Sometimes these requests were fulfilled only after considerable resistance on the part of the Commission. Other times, the requests were flatly refused. Of these, the most significant is the refusal of the Commission, after several exchanges with the Delegates, to hear the deposition of six eyewitnesses, four of whom had been muleteers attached to the military encampment at Ghelieguzan. After the Commission refused to summon these witnesses, the Delegates decided to hear them anyway. Their depositions, several of which were recorded verbatim, furnish useful information regarding the massacres.¹³

5. *Unwillingness to travel to sites which could have illuminated the investigation*

On several occasions, the Delegates suggested that the Commission travel to the nearby village of Haskeui, where a large number of refugees from Shenik were said to have been lodged, in order to gather as much eyewitness information as possible. This suggestion was opposed by the Commission, and the visit to Haskeui never took place.¹⁴

Additionally, the Delegates repeatedly requested that the Commission visit the village of Ghelieguzan, at which place were said to be located several trenches into which the bodies of a large number of victims had been dumped. Finally, after considerable pressure from the Delegates, the Commission agreed to visit the site, but protested that "it is very probable that the trenches mentioned during the inquiry, if they exist in the above-mentioned village, have been filled by the Armenians themselves with bones picked up here and there, the existence of such trenches and bones eight months after the events cannot be considered as conclusive evidence." The Commission then declared that they would not allow an immediate visit to the site, but would only permit it after a week's time. They offered no reason for the delay.¹⁵

6. *Obstruction of free access to the Commission*

Although the Commission members maintained that all who wished to come before the Commission were afforded free access, in fact on numerous occasions it was only with great difficulty, and after much insistence from the Delegates, that the Commission agreed to accept petitions which had been brought before them. The contents of several of these petitions were never even revealed to the Delegates. In addition, two witnesses alleged that roadblocks had been erected which prevented travel to the Commission site. One of these witnesses, Mairam of Ghelieguzan, had burst into the Commission room with a petition. It was only after the Delegates insisted that she be allowed to speak that the Commission agreed to hear her. In her deposition, Mairam stated that refugees from the area of the massacre had been driven away from Moush by Ottoman soldiers, making it impossible for them to come testify before the Commission. She also claimed that "she herself [had] wished to go before the Commission, but was not allowed, a mounted soldier having caught her as she was on her way from Shenik, and taken her back as far as Alvarindj."¹⁶

7. *Coaching of witnesses*

A number of witnesses reported that prior to their appearance before the Commission, they had been instructed as to precisely what they were to say when summoned to give depositions. Witnesses reported the use of bribes, threats, and intimidation. On one occasion, a witness recognized the clerk attached to the Commission itself as one of the people who had threatened him.¹⁷

All of these methods were employed by the Commission in an effort to construct an image of a powerful, organized and brutal Armenian revolutionary movement, bent on terrorizing the local Kurdish population and eventually seceding and forming an independent Armenia. It was this movement, led single-handedly by a seditious agitator named Murad,¹⁸ which necessitated the intervention of troops; only with considerable difficulty was this dangerous rebellion quashed.

When the information contained in the Commission of Inquiry Report is systematically broken down, ordered and analyzed, the image of a seditious, rebellious Armenian population can conclusively be revealed to be an artificial construction, and can subsequently be deconstructed. It then becomes possible, through the comparison of eyewitness accounts and attention to consistency of detail, to begin to sketch an alternative picture of the Sassoun events which is sharply at variance from the one which the Commissioners strove to create. The remainder of this paper will consist of the presentation of some of the findings of a close analysis of the data contained in the Report, with a view toward presenting a more accurate representation of the Sassoun events than that which was propounded by the Ottoman government and which was subsequently adopted in historiographical accounts of the events. While the Report does not lend itself well to the production of a full-fledged, detailed narrative of the sequence of events in chronological order, it does furnish enough material to allow for the presentation of a number of general points of analysis, of which five are offered below. All of these points of analysis were generated from an examination of the entire body of depositions taken during the Inquiry. Each of the five points derives its authority from the large number of eyewitness reports supporting it.

ANALYSIS OF THE SASSOUN EVENTS

1. Profile of victims

The Report indicates that 14 soldiers were killed during the Sassoun events.¹⁹ It also indicates that a number of Kurds were killed.²⁰ Overwhelmingly, however, the victims of the massacre were Armenian. While this point may seem self-evident, in fact it contrasts sharply with the accounts offered by Shaw, Duguid, and Salt, all of which allege that the Sassoun events included large-scale massacres of Muslims by Armenian revolutionaries. Since none of the above-mentioned historians have furnished citations of primary or secondary sources which have led them to derive this account of the events, it can only be concluded, on the basis of overwhelming evidence to the contrary

in the Commission of Inquiry Report, that these allegations are simply false.²¹

No effort was made during the Inquiry to count the number of Armenian casualties, and thus a discussion of numbers does not appear in the Report. Still, although no conclusions can be drawn regarding the number of victims, the Report does allow for the assertion of several basic points:

1. All segments of the local Armenian population were victimized. The Report offers substantial evidence that men, women, children, and the elderly were killed during the events. In many cases, victims were tortured and mutilated as well (See Table 5).

TABLE 5. REPORTS OF ARMENIAN CASUALTIES²²

Type of report	Heard of incident	Saw body	Witnessed incident	Total number of reports
Killing of men	25	21	12	58
Killing of women	6	7	17	30
Rape of women	7	—	3 (survivors)	10
Killing of children	7	6	10	23
Total	45	34	42	121

2. Victims were killed while in flight. In contrast to historiographical accounts which depict the Sassoun events as little more than the suppression of a rebellion (as well as those accounts to this effect presented during Commission of Inquiry),²³ the Report indicates that an overwhelming majority of the deaths occurred while the victims were fleeing from oncoming soldiers.
3. A number of the victims were killed while seeking protection from the soldiers. In one of the most brutal incidents, (and one of the most well-documented), a large group — probably between 100 and 250 people — the majority of whom were from the village of Semal, were collected by Semal's priest, Ohannes. The priest advised them that if they went to the military encampment and surrendered themselves, demonstrating that indeed they were not armed and that they had no desire to fight, they would not be harmed. Led by Ohannes, the group of villagers went together to Ghelieguzan, where the soldiers were camping. Upon their arrival at Ghelieguzan, the men were

immediately separated from the women; the men were slaughtered and their bodies dumped into a ravine on the night of their surrender to the military. While their husbands were being killed, the women of the group were taken to a church and raped.²⁴

2. Profile of perpetrators

The massacre was carried out by a mixed group of soldiers (consisting of regular forces and Kurdish Hamidiye forces) and local nomadic Kurds. It began with an attack by the Badikanli Kurds on the village of Shenik on approximately July 30 or 31. Within one or two days, the local Kurds were joined by soldiers from Merghemuzan, where a military encampment had been located for several months prior to the massacre. After the arrival of military forces, Kurds and soldiers appear to have been thoroughly mingled, and attacks were conducted by mixed groups. Two weeks into the massacre, large numbers of military and nomadic Kurdish reinforcements arrived, bringing the total number of forces operating in the area to several thousand.

While the Report indicates that both soldiers and Kurds were involved in the destruction of property (see discussion below), the eyewitness accounts of violence against women and children — acts which could not under any circumstances be construed as necessary for the suppression of a rebellion — overwhelmingly implicate the soldiers. Numerous reports furnish evidence that Kurds killed members of the adult male population who were resisting the attacks. As Table 6 demonstrates, however, there is almost no evidence that Kurds had any involvement in the slaughter of women, children and the elderly.

TABLE 6. EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS OF VIOLENCE (RAPE AND MURDER) AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Perpetrators were soldiers	23
Perpetrators were Kurds	2
Perpetrators could not be determined ²⁵	2
Other ²⁶	1
Total	28

The soldiers who carried out the massacre made extensive use of tactics of humiliation and dehumanization. Much of the violence which

they perpetrated was charged with symbolism. Examples of such incidents included the raping of women (including mass rape inside a church), the brutal dismemberment of families (including such acts as placing children on their mothers' breasts before decapitating them), the torture and mutilation of a priest in front of his parishioners, the destruction of churches, and the detaining of captured prisoners inside a church, forcing them to defile it.

3. Destruction of villages

The massacres were accompanied by the wholesale destruction of Armenian villages in the area — in most cases by burning. The Report contains references to thirty-five villages which were allegedly burned (See Table 7).²⁷ The destruction of villages encompassed the entire districts of Kavar and Talori. It also affected many other villages in the surrounding areas. Since the Report contains depositions from eighty-three Muslims, it can safely be concluded that, had any Muslim villages been burned or otherwise molested, references to such occurrences would be found in the Commission of Inquiry Report. The allegations made by Professor Shaw and others that Armenians on a rampage "ravished the Muslim villages as they went," remain in fact, entirely unsubstantiated.²⁸

TABLE 7. VILLAGES IN DISTRICTS REPORTED BURNED

Kavar	Talori	District Unknown
Gheliéguzan	Akchesser (4 or 5 houses)	Spagank
Semal	Ergart	Henzan
Shenik	Talori	Keurtevank
	Halorink	Alian
Khian	Devalik	Kharipshan
Ish Khanzor	Purh	Mekhitar
Sevit	Herdamank	Khedan
	Kholovit	Gheliéresh
Dzovassar	Mezre	Tarik
Agpi	Hosnud	Norhank
Gheliéresh	Tsorir	Ardegonk
Hetink	Hakmank	Harmakom
	Eki	Herink
		Inguznak

No disagreement appears in the Report regarding the fact that many villages were burned, and that the affected villages were Armenian. When the Commission of Inquiry report is compared with the account of the Sassoun affair offered by Stanford Shaw, it is striking to note that there is not a single mention anywhere in the Report of the destruction of Muslim villages. Professor Shaw, on the other hand, asserts that the violence against the Armenians occurred only after Armenian rebels had "ravaged Muslim villages in the area." The dispute at the time actually centered around the identity of the perpetrators of the destruction, which became one of the focal points of the Commission of Inquiry. As the Inquiry progressed, and information about the burning of villages became impossible to refute, the Commissioners produced an increasing number of witnesses who declared that the villages were destroyed by the Armenians themselves. However, when these accounts are examined as to whether or not they are eyewitness or secondary accounts, it becomes apparent that there is little basis to the charge that the Armenians burned their own villages (see Table 8). Of those who blamed the burning of the villages on the Armenians, the vast majority were unable to cite any specific source from which their information had been obtained.

TABLE 8. RESPONSIBILITY IN ACCOUNTS OF BURNING OF VILLAGES

Responsible for burning villages	Eyewitness accounts	Secondary accounts	Total
Armenians	3	34	37
Kurds	8	12	20
Soldiers	15	6	21
Soldiers and Kurds	3	—	3

The report also suggests that the soldiers alone may have been responsible for the burning of villages in the early stages of the massacre. Ten witnesses from the villages of Shenik, Semal and Ghelieguzan (the localities attacked during the first part of the massacre) indicated that their villages had been burned by soldiers, while only two people from these villages reported that the fires had been set by Kurds. In the later stages of the massacre, however, the Kurds appear to have played at least as great a role in the burning of villages as did the soldiers.

In the affected areas, the destruction of the villages was complete. Not only were houses burned, sheepfolds and fields were trampled and burned as well. Numerous witnesses also cited widespread pillaging. The damage was so thorough as to render the entire Armenian population of the affected region destitute. Their crops destroyed, their cattle stolen, and their homes reduced to ashes, the villagers were forced to leave the area and seek refuge elsewhere. At the time of the Commission of Inquiry, most of the survivors of the affected regions were dispersed throughout the plain of Moush. Several reported that, deprived of all means of earning a livelihood, they now engaged in begging in order to maintain themselves and their families.

4. *Complicity between Kurds and soldiers*

The Report offers considerable evidence that the massacres involved some form of complicity between local Kurdish population and the military. The great majority of the eyewitnesses stated that they saw Kurds and soldiers mingled together during the massacres. Furthermore, one witness provided detailed information as to the simultaneous advancement toward the Talori region of large numbers of Kurds and soldiers, suggesting that movements of Kurds and soldiers were coordinated. The witness, a man called Erko, of the village of Shenik, reported that on the twelfth day after the initial Kurdish attack, he personally observed (from his hiding place at the top of Mount Antok) large numbers of Kurds and soldiers simultaneously proceeding toward the area. According to his testimony, one group of Kurds, led by Mehmet, the Sheikh of Zeilan, came from the direction of Diarbekir; another group, led by Sheikh Omer, came from the direction of Kulp. Erko stated that at the same time that this was occurring, he saw troops arriving from Moush, Erzurum, Erzincan, and Diarbekir. The witness's statements regarding the direction from which troops were seen to be arriving, as well as the date at which he claimed to have seen these troops, are consistent with the official Ottoman records regarding troop movements. While Erko's statement was the most detailed, the Commission also heard many other witness accounts which placed Kurds and soldiers together; these accounts were provided by witnesses from all of the affected areas, suggesting that the movement of troops from one locality to the next was coordinated with that of the Kurds.²⁹

The Report also suggests that the local Kurdish population may have known in advance of the impending attack on the Armenians. Two people reported that they had been forewarned by local Kurds far in advance of the military attack; they were told by the Kurds that "an order had come down to massacre the Armenians." Moreover, five witnesses alleged that they had overheard talk in which it was said that one or another aspect of the massacre was carried out by orders

from above. In addition, Erko of Shenik, who had recently been imprisoned, reported that he had had as his prison companion a man named Hishman Agha, of the Sassounli Kurds. Erko testified that Hishman Agha told him of an order which he had been given to join the other Kurds in the massacre of the Armenians. Hishman Agha had refused, and it was for this reason that he was jailed. Although Erko was the only person who claimed to have heard this from Hishman Agha, several of the Armenian witnesses mentioned that the Armenians were on friendly terms with the Sassounli Kurds, and the Sassounlis had not joined in the massacre.³⁰ While the Report does not contain enough information as to warrant the conclusion that the massacre was ordered by the Porte, it does suggest the possibility that the massacre was pre-planned, and that information of it was disseminated to the local Kurdish population, meriting further investigation of this possibility in the relevant local, regional and central government documents.

5. Resistance

The Report indicates that the Armenians did not accept the attack at Sassoun passively. Many witnesses indicated that a number of fights took place. During the early stages of the attack, a number of armed Armenians attempted to ward off the oncoming soldiers and Kurds. These fights, some of which lasted as long as two days, occurred at Shenik, Semal, Ghelieresan and the area around Ghelieguzan. The combined strength of the Kurds and the military forces was much too great for the Armenians, who were quickly overcome. The Report indicates that no fights took place after the second week of the attack. The fighting which did occur was confined to the Kavar region and the area around Antok Dagh, the mountain to which the Armenians had fled after the initial attacks. There was no resistance at Talori.³¹ Nevertheless, all of the villages of the Talori district, as well as many villages from the districts surrounding Talori, were destroyed.

A number of historiographical accounts of the Sassoun events describe the affair as a large-scale, organized rebellion, led by the revolutionary leader Murad. Professor Salt, citing "Ottoman and other sources," offers the following account of the events:

Instigated by Murad and fed wild tales about imminent European support, Armenians of the region had gathered in bands and attacked Kurdish tribes before retreating to the heights of Mount Anduk. There they fought pitched battles with Ottoman troops and *hamidiye* cavalry, thousands being involved on both sides, before the Armenians finally broke.³²

While there is clear evidence of an Armenian resistance effort, there is no firm indication in the Report that this resistance was part of an organized rebellion. The Commissioners went to great lengths to construct an image of a powerful revolutionary movement led by Murad. However, when the depositions are closely examined, it can be seen that of the eighty-three people who in some way linked Murad to the incidents, only thirteen claimed to ever have even seen him. Thus the Commission of Inquiry Report is neither sufficient to link Murad directly with the events at Sassoun, nor does it provide evidence to substantiate the charges of an Armenian rebellion.³³

CONCLUSION

In the historiography of the late Ottoman Empire, the discourse on the "Armenian Question" has all too often assumed a highly polemical tone. Discussions of "Armenian terrorists" and revolutionaries bent on bringing destruction on an otherwise peaceful Anatolian countryside abound, even in the works of otherwise serious scholars.³⁴ For all the vigor with which these representations of the Armenians are created, however, there is remarkably little utilization of primary sources in these discussions. The lack of attention to primary sources may be attributed in part to the relative inaccessibility of many of the sources, due to the difficulty of the languages in which they were written. Two of the historians whose work has been cited in this article have made no use of Ottoman sources in their discussion of the "Armenian Question" in general and of the Sassoun affair in particular.³⁵ None has used Armenian sources. The lack of proficiency in the Ottoman and Armenian languages necessarily puts limits on the nature and scope of the sources which some of these historians have at their disposal. Yet the fact that so much of the primary source material pertaining to the "Armenian Question" in general and the Sassoun events in particular is relatively inaccessible to many historians makes it all the more puzzling that a source as readily available and easy to use as the Commission of Inquiry Report has been so widely neglected. As has been demonstrated above, this document can be an extremely useful source of information about the Sassoun events. Certainly, the Report has limitations. Because of the circumstances under which the Commission of Inquiry was conducted, it cannot be used to determine the precise sequence of events at Sassoun. Further, it yields no information regarding the number of casualties. And finally, it can provide no insight into either the causes of the massacre or its impact on Ottoman and Armenian history in subsequent decades. These questions must be addressed through examinations of other types of primary sources. However, even when taken by itself, if approached with

care and a critical perspective, the Report can be a useful tool in the effort to reconstruct the specific circumstances of the Sassoun massacre. Through this reconstruction, the Commission of Inquiry Report helps suggest an interpretation of the "Armenian Question" in general and the Sassoun events in particular which is quite different from the interpretations found in much of the existing historiography. Such a re-interpretation is long overdue.

APPENDIX

List of witnesses whose depositions appear in the Commission of Inquiry Report

Witness No. & Name	Report No.	Place of Residence	Ethnicity	Occupation	Notes
1. Iskender Agha	4	Moush	—	Yuzbashi of zaptichs, Moush garrison	N ² C ³
2. Saad-Ullah (alias Said Agha)	4	Moush	—	Chaush (sergeant) of zaptiehs, Moush garrison	NC
3. Mejid Agha	4	Moush	—	Onbashi (corporal) of zaptiehs, Moush garrison	NC
4. Faris Agha	5	Moush	—	Mulazim (lieutenant) of zaptichs, Moush garrison	NC
5. Gurjo, son of Kurki	7	Shenik	Armenian	Peasant	ND ⁴
6. Erko, son of Kurki	7; 65	Shenik	Armenian	Peasant	Y'D
7. Fevzi Effendi	9	—	—	Tabur Aghasi (commander of battalion,) superior of witnesses no. 1, 2, 3	NC
8. Hadji Mustapha Effendi	9, 80	—	—	Kol-Aghassi (captain) of infantry, commanded two companics sent to Merghemuzan	NC
9. Serkis	10	Shenik	Armenian	Peasant	NC
10. Parsegh	11, 21	Moush	Armenian	Priest, Apostolic Church	NC
11. Taleb Effendi	12	—	—	Former government employee	NC
12. Nadir Agha	13	—	—	"Business"	NC
13. Garabet	13	—	Armenian	Priest, monastery of Tchanlikillise/Surp Garabed	NC
14. Isaias	13	—	Armenian	Priest, monastery of Tchanlikillise/Surp Garabed	NC

The Formation of the Kurdish *Hamidiye* Regiments as Reflected in Italian Diplomatic Documents

Maurizio Russo

Even though the Italian state had only recently been unified, its diplomatic corps was quite active in Turkey during the second half of the nineteenth century. Italian diplomats had shown an interest in the Armenian Question since the Congress of Berlin, and as the century drew to a close they followed the evolution of the *Fatti d'Armenia* or the "Armenian Events"¹ with ever increasing attention. Their first-hand observations are a valuable source of information on the Anatolian situation that has generally been overlooked by historians.

The first important indication of Italian interest in the Armenian Question was the Anglo-Italian collaboration on the Wilson-Trotter memorandum of 1882 (Memorandum on the Reforms to be Inaugurated in the Countries Inhabited by the Armenians).² Italian interest culminated in 1895 with a determined effort to be represented on the commission of inquiry formed after the Sassoun massacre.³

Italian interest in the evolution of the Armenian Question produced a considerable number of diplomatic documents which promise to be very informative, particularly if used in conjunction with other diplomatic sources such as the English, the French and the German.

The presence of Italians in Erzurum since the early nineteenth century was reason enough to establish a Royal Consular Agency (*Regia Agenzia Consolare*) there in 1862. As a branch of the Royal Consulate (*Regio Consolato*) in Trebizond, the Consular Agency was Italy's most advanced outpost in Armenia.

The reports from this Consular Agency are preserved as attachments to those of the Trebizond Consulate in the Political Affairs series of the Historic Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs in Rome, so that we have a trove of information on the *Fatti d'Armenia* during the period from 1890 to 1894 in the reports of the Royal Consul (*Regio Console*) in Trebizond as well as those of the Royal Consular Agent (*Regio Agente Consolare*) in Erzurum.⁴

It was clear to these diplomats that Ottoman policy on the Armenians was undergoing a significant change toward repression during this period, and June 20, 1890, the date of the riots at Erzurum, was cited as the beginning of that change. In this connection, the Italian Consul wrote from Trebizond,

Una conseguenza deplorabilissima di tutto ciò fu il risvegliarsi tra i musulmani del sentimento di odio verso i cristiani. Mentre da vari anni regnava tra essi una reciproca tolleranza, ora il motto dispregiativo di ghivur, che è detto dei cristiani, è tornato in voga.

[One extremely deplorable consequence of all this has been the reawakening of a feeling of hatred among the Muslims toward the Christians. Mutual tolerance had been the rule for some years, but now the scornful term *gavur*, used to refer to Christians, is back in style.]⁵

We have identified the following themes in these diplomatic documents:

- a. A tremendous increase in jailings, which the Italians considered a form of repression.
- b. The gradual intensification of an anti-Armenian propaganda campaign suggesting the Armenians were conspiring against the Sultan's government.
- c. The use of extortion as another significant form of repression.
- d. The use of the Kurds in anti-Armenian policy and the formation of the Hamidiye.

The Italian diplomats paid close attention to the development of special Kurdish cavalry regiments, the so-called Hamidiye, during this period. From 1891 to 1893, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs received a remarkable number of reports on the subject from the two diplomatic posts in Trebizond and Erzurum, and they testify to the growing importance of the Hamidiye during those years.

The care and determination with which the Ottoman government pursued its objective, the involvement of civic and military officials at various levels of the operation, and the prominent coverage it was given in the Ottoman press all make it clear that the creation of the Hamidiye was a key element in the political designs of Abdul Hamid II.

The formation of the Hamidiye regiments occurred in progressive phases. The project required tremendous sustained energy because its

goal was very ambitious: to recruit semi-nomadic warrior tribes who had always resisted authority and transform them into a strategic instrument at the service of Hamidian policy.

To what extent did Abdul Hamid achieve the goal he envisioned? That is difficult to determine, but his policy certainly had far-reaching consequences.

We have identified four consecutive phases of Operation Hamidiye as reflected in the Italian documents:

Phase 1: Alliance (January/February to July 1891)

Phase 2: Recruitment (July to September/October 1891)

Phase 3: Formation (September/October 1891 through 1892)

Phase 4: Organization and Training (throughout 1893)

The formation of the Hamidiye presupposed an alliance with a tribal people who had no well-defined center of power. It is quite evident from the Italian diplomatic documents that the *beys* or tribal chieftains had an essential role to play in Hamidian policy. This was especially clear during the initial phase of the operation when an official alliance was cultivated between the Sultan and the *beys*.

PHASE 1: THE JOURNEY AND THE ALLIANCE

The first step in organizing the Hamidiye called for the *beys* to journey to Constantinople to meet the Sultan. The Italian diplomatic documents describe the route they traveled as they made their way to the capital. Their journey was treated as an important event whose official character was underscored by ceremonial pomp and circumstance.

The earliest reference to this journey occurs in early 1891, in a report by Augusto Laviny, the consular agent at Erzurum, which was the first major stage in the Kurds' journey to Constantinople. Here they stayed for several days while they had gold-embroidered suits made by local Armenian tailors so they could parade themselves in the capital. Writing to the Consul in Trebizond on February 28, 1891, Laviny described the transit of the first contingents of Kurdish chiefs through Erzurum:

I Curdi passano a frotte ogni giorno da questa città per recarsi in Erzinghian, e al loro passaggio i Capi si fanno qui confezionare degli abiti ricamati d'oro, secondo il loro costume per poterne far pompa colà ed in Costantinopoli.

Uno di questi capi trovavasi qualche giorno fa nella casa di un notevole turco, nella quale eravi un Armeno, e siccome questo lo compiangeva per le tante spese cui aveva dovuto sobbarcarsi, egli

rispose che sarebbero state pagate dagli Armeni, però non avrebbe detto questo, se avesse potuto sapere che quello che lo aveva compianto era un Cristiano. Le garantisco l'esattezza di questo fatterello che ci prova sempre più che i Curdi arrivati a Costantinopoli, per essere ligi al sistema di corruzione esistente nella Capitale dovranno fare dei regali a una quantità di persone, cominciando dalle più alto locate sino alle più infime, e saranno sempre i poveri Cristiani che no soffriranno le conseguenze. Io non prevedo dunque nulla di buono per la state prossima, e Dio voglia che io sia un cattivo profeta.

[Groups of Kurds come through town every day on their way to Erzinjan, and while they're here they order their customary suits embroidered in gold, so they can make a big impression in Constantinople.

[A few days ago one of these chieftains happened to be at the home of a Turkish dignitary. An Armenian was also present, and when he sympathized with the chieftain over all the expenses he must have had to incur, the chieftain replied that these would be paid for by the Armenians, but he would never have said such a thing had he known the man who addressed him was a Christian. I swear this story is true, and it only goes to prove, as ever, that once they get to the capital, in order to show their loyalty to the corrupt system that exists there, the Kurds will be obliged to make gifts to many people, from the highest to the lowest, and it will always be the poor Christians who suffer the consequences. I predict nothing good for this coming summer, and may God grant that I am a poor prophet.]⁶

The procession of these Kurdish groups through Erzurum was the most important event in town at the time, and it turned life upside down for the local Armenian population. As Laviny reported on March 7, 1891, the Armenians were extremely distressed:

Frattanto gli Armeni sono tutti invasi da un timore panico per la venuta di tutti questi Bey Curdi che vanno a Erzinghian, e di là proseguono per Costantinopoli. Essi paventano che al loro ritorno commetteranno ogni sorta di rapine e violenze e molti vorranno certamente emigrare, ma io sono persuaso che il Governo cercherà mille pretesti per impedire codesta emigrazione.

[Meanwhile the Armenians are in a state of sheer panic over the arrival of all these Kurdish Beys who are going to Erzinjan and from there will proceed to Constantinople. They fear the Kurds will commit all kinds of mayhem on their way back. Certainly many would like to emigrate, but I have no doubt the Government will come up with a thousand excuses to prevent this from happening.]⁷

After a brief stay in Erzurum, the *beys* moved on to Erzinjan and thence to Trebizond where they were received by the town's highest civic and military authorities. A welcoming ceremony lent their journey the proper official tone and served as a prelude to what they would encounter in the capital.

Francisci, the Italian consul in Trebizond, described the arrival of a number of these *beys* accompanied by a large entourage as was their custom. The reception accorded them testifies to the importance the Ottoman government attached to their journey. The Vali himself along with the highest civic and military authorities of Trebizond as well as a company of *nizam* (regular army forces) and a military brass band went several miles outside of town to meet them. They were put up in the homes of local notables while they awaited the arrival of a ship specially chartered by the government to take them to Constantinople. Two government representatives had come from the capital for the express purpose of accompanying the Kurdish *beys* on the last leg of their journey. As they prepared to leave Trebizond, the Vali and the local military commander went aboard the ship to salute them, while on the pier the inevitable military band played on.

Consul Francisci's report, written directly to the Italian embassy in Constantinople and copied to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome, provides an exemplary description of the official ceremonies that characterized the stopover in Trebizond which was repeated with the arrival of each new contingent of Kurdish *beys*:

Copia di rapporto di questo R.° Consolato in data 28 Marzo n° 204/22, diretto alla R.^a Ambascia in Costantinopoli.

L'altro ieri ebbi l'onore d'informare telegraficamente la S.V. Ill.^{ma} dell'arrivo in questa città di vari bey curdi con seguito, frattutto 150 persone circa, e che poi tempo permettendo si sarebbero imbarcati per questa volta [Costantinopoli].

Da quanto ho potuto sapere i detti Curdi appartengono a tre tribù dei vilayet di Musch e Bitlis e provenivano da Erzinghian. Fra essi vi sono 12 bey più o meno alto locati e gli altri sono del loro seguito. Eran tutti armati di yatagan, cangiar revolver, i capi avevano delle carabine Vinchester di cavalleria, in uso nell'esercito russo: due soli del seguito erano armati di lancia. Il Vali, le Autorità militari e il capo del Municipio si recarono loro incontro a qualche miglio di distanza con una compagnia di nizam e la banda militare. Appena giunti andarono al comando di piazza furono quindi alloggiati in casa dei principali notabili della città e ieri alle 4 pom. s'imbarcarono sul piroscifo "Diana" del Lloyd A. Espressamente noleggiato dal Governo. La loro presenza qui non dette luogo ad alcun disordine. Una compagnia di nizam con musica in testa rese loro gli onori alla partenza, a cui assistevano

anche il Generale Comandante di piazza e il Vali che se recò a salutarli a bordo. Per ricevere i bey erano giunti da Costantinopoli due ciambellani, uno del Sultano l'altro del Serraschierato.

[Copy of a report from this R[oyal] consulate dated March 28, n. 204/22, addressed to the R[oyal] Embassy at Constantinople.

[The day before yesterday, I had the honor of telegraphically informing Y[our] E[xcellency] of the arrival here of several Kurdish beys and their entourage, some 150 persons in all, who would be embarking [for Constantinople] as soon as the weather permits.

[From what I have been able to learn, said Kurds belong to three tribes from the vilayets of Moush and Bitlis and they came by way of Erzinjan. Twelve of them are beys of more or less high rank, and the rest constitute their following. All of them were armed with yatagans and kandjar revolvers, and the chiefs had Winchester cavalry rifles of the type used in the Russian army. Only two men in the whole party carried spears. The Vali, the military authorities and the mayor, along with a company of nizam and the military band, all went out a distance of several miles to greet them. No sooner had they met when they all came back to headquarters, the Kurds were lodged in the homes of the principal local dignitaries and yesterday at 4 pm they embarked on Lloyd's A[ustrian] liner "Diana." Expressly chartered by the Government. Their presence here occasioned no disorder. Upon their departure a company of nizam with musicians at the fore did the honors, also present were the local Commander General and the Vali who went on board to salute them. Two chamberlains, one from the Sultan and the other from the Serasker [Commander in Chief], had come out from Constantinople to accompany the beys.]⁸

Another official ceremony awaited them in the capital, where they would be introduced to the Sultan and then be given uniforms and decorations. Some two months later a government-chartered steamship would carry them back to Trebizond, where they would stop off again before returning home to recruit the men they had promised the Sultan.

Consul Francisci faithfully described their return from Constantinople:

Eccellenza,

Il 19 corrente tornarono qui da Costantinopoli i Curdi dei quali avevo annunziato a V.E. il passaggio col mio rapporto in data dei 29 Marzo u.s. N.°207/76, e il giorno dopo ripartirono per tornare ai loro paesi. Essi eran tutti in uniforme et i capi tutti quanti decorati. L'uniforme non è identica per tutti ma di 3 specie: alcuni hanno un'uniforme simile a quella dei circassi, altri a quella dei cosacchi, altri infine, invece del kalpak portato dai primi, portano la coffia

e rasomigliano a cavalieri arabi, e questi sono i più belli. Così equipaggiati essi non hanno più quel feroce aspetto che avevano dapprima nei loro bizzarri e barbari costumi: non è però a credere che col cambiar di vestito essi abbiano potuto mutar d'animo e di abitudini e rendersi a un tratto disciplinati: è perciò un errore quello di remindarli ai loro paesi e qui tutti pensano che una volta là giunti torneranno a fare su per giù la vita di prima.

[Excellency,

[The Kurds whose passage I had indicated to Y[our] E[xcellency] in my report dated last March 29, N. 207/76, returned here from Constantinople on the 19th instant, and the following day they left for home. They were all in uniform and the chieftains wore all kinds of decorations. Not all of them had the same uniform: there were three different types. Some wore a uniform similar to that of the Circassians, others like that of the Cossacks, and finally others, instead of the kalpak worn by the first group, were wearing the keffeyia like Arab horsemen, and they were the best looking. Fitted out like this, they no longer have the savage look they had before in their strange barbarian costumes; but there is no reason to think this change of costume signals a change of heart or ways or a new spirit of discipline. It is a mistake to send them back home and everyone here believes that once they get there they'll go back to their old ways.]⁹

This carefully planned operation was preceded by a press propaganda campaign casting the new regiments in the role of a border patrol for the northeastern frontier. While the Italian diplomats understood from the start that the Ottoman government wanted to create Kurdish cavalry regiments,¹⁰ they were not sure how the government intended to use them. Consul Francisci, writing to the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, reported several rumors then making the rounds in Trebizond concerning the reason for the Kurds' journey to Constantinople:

- a. The Sultan intends to subject the Kurds once and for all to military service.
- b. The Sultan intends to lay the groundwork for setting up Kurdish cavalry regiments to fight the Cossacks and the Circassians in the Caucasus.
- c. The Sultan intends to remove the Kurds from Armenia and so put an end to the constant and deplorable spoliation of the Armenians.

The Consul thought the most likely reason for the *beys'* journey was the formation of new cavalry regiments to send against the stronger Russian cavalry. But he also reported the conviction among certain Armenian circles in Trebizond that the Kurds' journeys was the

result of protests and pressures exerted by the Great Powers on behalf of the Armenians.¹¹

These journeys to Constantinople continued into the summer.¹² Consul Francisci reported on July 3, 1891, that fifty-four *beys* had returned to Trebizond from the capital, and this was the last reference to such travels in the Italian documents.¹³ The first phase of establishing an alliance had come to a close, and now began the second phase of recruiting the Kurdish troops.

PHASE 2: THE PROBLEMS OF RECRUITMENT AND ITALIAN SKEPTICISM

In his July 3rd report, Consul Francisci also noted that after spending two days in Trebizond the Kurds, accompanied by Colonel Zaccaria Effendi, had proceeded to Erzinjan, the headquarters of the Fourth Army Corps. This is worth noting, because the Fourth Army Corps had a significant role in organizing the Hamidiye, as we shall see.

In the same report the Consul provided another interesting detail: 7,000 cases containing uniforms and munitions for the new regiments had also landed at Trebizond.¹⁴ Materiel to equip the irregular Kurdish cavalry was now being stockpiled.

Despite the onset of this new phase, which would seem to represent real progress in the organization of the Hamidiye, despite the influx of materiel, and despite Turkish claims of inevitable success, the Italian diplomats still refused to believe the Hamidiye would ever materialize. Francisci thought the whole project would "vanish like a soap bubble,"¹⁵ and Italian diplomats at all levels remained skeptical regarding the future of these forces.

Their skepticism at this stage was understandable, given the obstacles that stood in the way of creating the Hamidiye. It was widely touted in the press that there were to be twenty-seven regiments, but the biggest problem facing the Turkish government was actually enlisting the Kurdish troops.

When the *beys* had traveled to Constantinople, they had promised the Sultan they would find the men needed to make up the Hamidiye regiments when they returned home. But they had failed to provide the promised contingents; at best, some of them had fulfilled a small portion of their quota.

Consul Francisci cited the example of a Kurdish tribe who fled across the border (to Russia) rather than furnish the men their *bey* had promised the Sultan.

Consular Agent Laviny reported from Erzurum on June 27, 1891, that General Ibrahim Pasha had been sent out to check on the progress of operations and found that the *beys* had thus far provided less than

one-fifth of the men promised. In Laviny's opinion, "codesta armata irregolare, che doveve essere organizzata alla foggia di quella dei Cosacchi, non lo sarà punto" (this irregular army, which was supposed to be organized along the lines of the Cossacks, will not be).¹⁶ In another report, he wrote that "il Governo non riuscirà a organizzare nemmeno 3 invece dei 27 Reggimenti di Curdi" (the Government will not succeed in mustering even 3 of the 27 Kurdish regiments).¹⁷

Based on such information, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs informed the Minister of War that "le promesse erano state molto esagerate e che la progettata formazione di 27 reggimenti di cavalleria irregolare, ad imitazione di quelli dei Cosacchi, è diventata assai problematica" (the promises were greatly exaggerated and the projected formation of 27 regiments of irregular cavalry, modeled on those of the Cossacks, has become somewhat problematic).¹⁸

But the Turkish authorities responded to these difficulties with a strong hand. According to Consul Francisci, writing from Trebizond on September 24, 1891, the "Muscir" (mushir, field marshal) of Erzurum was holding many Kurdish *beys* hostage in his own compound in order to force them to raise the troops they had promised, and had jailed some of their family members in order to increase the pressure even more.

Here again we note the central role of the *bey* as the figure on whom the Ottoman authorities brought their pressures to bear.

PHASE 3: THE FORMATION OF THE REGIMENTS AND THE FLAG PRESENTATION CEREMONY

Despite the many setbacks, the creation of the Hamidiye continued apace. Consular Agent Laviny reported as early as September 6, 1891, on the formation of the first eight battalions of 450 men in Bayazid, although he remained dubious.¹⁹

Five months later, Consul Francisci wrote that the formation of the Kurdish cavalry had apparently made considerable headway, with battalions for the most part consisting of 600 men each, yet he too was still quite skeptical of this information.²⁰ Despite his doubts, it seems clear that by the first months of 1892 the Hamidiye had made remarkable progress.

Thus on March 18, 1892, Francisci passed along a report from Laviny concerning the expectation that by the end of the month there would be forty Hamidiye regiments of 600 men each:

Circa la cavalleria irregolare Curda il R° Agente, a cui chiesi notizie in proposito, mi riferisce di aver attinto da fonte sicura che sembra proprio che nel mese in corso se ne dovrebbero organizzare 40 dei

54 reggimenti progettati; ogni reggimento secondo quanto mi fu detto anche qui, dovrebbe avere una forza minima di 600 cavalieri, e a ciascun reggimento verranno mandati un colonnello, 4 capitani ed un contabile (kiatib). Resta però a sapere, aggiunge il R^o Agente, se cotesto progetto verrà interamente e così presto tadotto in fatto, cosa di cui egli dubita fortemente.

[With regard to the irregular Kurdish cavalry, the R[oyal] Agent, whom I asked for news about them, informs me that according to a very reliable source, 40 of the 54 projected regiments will most likely be organized within the month; and according to what I have been told here, each regiment will have a minimum force of 600 cavalry, and one colonel, 4 captains and one accountant (katib) will be posted to each regiment. The R[oyal] Agent adds that it remains to be seen whether this project will be so completely and easily translated into fact, which he seriously doubts.]²¹

Clearly, the Turks had succeeded in overcoming the problems of recruitment by the first months of 1892, and had moved on to the formation of the Hamidiye regiments, even if the Italian diplomats still refused to believe it.

As of September 1891, we also find passing references in the Italian diplomatic documents to another important ceremony designed to lend an official tone to this third phase, that being the presentation of flags to the new regiments. Consul Francisci mentioned it for the first time in a September 12 report on the arrival at Trebizond of Vekbi Bey, the Sultan's chamberlain, whose mission it was to deliver fifty flags for the new cavalry regiments. With typical skepticism, he added:

Il suddetto funzionario fu ricevuto con gran pompa dal Vali: le bandiere trasportate chiuse in casse mi si dice siano in numero di 50, ma ben lontano da questo sarà il numero dei reggimenti ai quali le stesse potranno essere distribuite.

[The aforementioned official was received in great pomp and circumstance by the Vali: I am told that the flags, shipped in closed cases, are 50 in number, which is far more than the number of regiments to which they can be distributed.]²²

The flag presentation ceremony was a clear indication of the progress made in organizing the irregular Kurdish cavalry, because it consecrated the official birth of the Hamidiye regiment. But we should not underestimate the Turkish taste for ostentation.

The presentation of the flags in a solemn ceremonial atmosphere represented a very important event at the local level as well, with obvious propaganda value relative to the local population.

The mere arrival of the flags in Erzurum was treated as an official event, just as it had been in Trebizond. Indeed, the local authorities went out to meet them, as Laviny reported on March 21, 1892:

Ieri qui giunsero le bandiere hamidié per uso dell'armata Curda. Tutti gli impiegati superiori ed inferiori furono obbligati di andare incontro alle bandiere, malgrado un tempo pessimo.

[Yesterday saw the arrival of the Hamidiye flags to be used by the Kurdish army. The whole staff, superiors as well as subordinates, were obliged to go out and meet the flags in spite of very bad weather.]²³

Italian diplomatic doubts began to dissipate around April 1892, as it became increasingly evident that progress was being made even though there was little information on the substance of the Hamidiye. A new diplomatic appreciation is apparent in Consul Francisci's report dated April 5, 1892, noting that Vekbi Bey, the Sultan's chamberlain, had come from Constantinople again, this time to decorate Zekki Pasha, the man responsible for organizing the irregular Kurdish cavalry:

La scorsa settimana col piroscavo della Compagnia Ottomana "Mahsusse" giunse in questa città da Costantinopoli il Maggiore Vekbi bey Ciambellano del Sultano, latore del gran cordone del Migidiè con placca in brillanti recentemente conferito dal Sultano a Zekki Pascià e segno che il Sultano è soddisfatto dell'opera da lui spiegata nell'organizzazione dei reggimenti di Cavalleria Curda, e mostra che la medesima se non ancora completa, deve tuttavia essere abbastanza avanzata. Il suddetto Ciambellano è partito due giorni fa per Erzinghian recando con se oltre alla decorazione altre bandiere pei reggimenti curdi in formazione.

[Last week Major Vekbi Bey, the Sultan's Chamberlain, arrived here from Constantinople aboard the Ottoman Mahsussa Line steamship, bringing with him the grand Migidia cordon with a jeweled medal which the Sultan recently conferred on Zekki Pasha as a sign of his satisfaction with the work accomplished in organizing the Kurdish Cavalry regiments, and it shows that if the work is not yet complete, it must nevertheless be fairly far advanced. The above-mentioned Chamberlain left here for Erzinjan two days ago, and in addition to the medal, he also brought more flags for the Kurdish regiments now being formed.]²⁴

Consular Agent Laviny provided an eye-witness report on the status of some of these regiments in a report to the Trebizond consulate dated June 25, 1892. He had attended a flag presentation ceremony for fifteen Hamidiye regiments. The entire diplomatic corps in Erzurum was invited to a ceremony such as this.

Venerdì il Muscir invitò tutti i Consoli alla distribuzione delle bandiere, che venne fatta a 15 reggimenti (meglio squadroni) della cavalleria irregolare Curda detta Hamidié.

Per ragione di qualche mancamento le bandiere non vennero distribuite a 3 reggimenti, e pare che a uno di questi non venne data perchè si sospetta che sia in segreto accordo con la Russia.

A ciasquan reggimento pare che verranno dati quattro (4) capitani, 8 tenenti e 1 maggiore, più 1 professore per impianti di nuove scuole [...]

Da quanto mi venne riferito, in Van le bandiere vennero dal Muscir distribuite ad altri 12 reggimenti.

[On Friday, the Mushir invited all the Consuls to the distribution of the flags for 15 regiments (or squadrons) of the irregular Kurdish cavalry known as the Hamidiye.

Since there were not enough flags, three regiments were not given any, and it seems that one of them was left out because it is suspected of having secret ties to Russia.

It seems that each regiment will be given four (4) captains, 8 lieutenants and 1 major, plus one professor to set up new schools [...]

According to what I have been told, in Van the flags were distributed by the Mushir to 12 other regiments.]²⁵

Consul Francisci provided the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs with the first figures he deemed credible in a report dated July 7, 1892. He wrote that forty-seven Hamidiye regiments had already been created, and that each one was supposed to reach a prescribed strength of 500 men, but that not all of them had done so. He added that the government intended to increase the number of regiments to one-hundred.²⁶ He described his informant as reliable, the implication being that the Kurdish cavalry had reached a theoretical strength of 23,500 men.²⁷

Although the figure may have been incorrect, it does show that the Italian diplomats had completely revised their position. They now acknowledged the existence and the strength of the Hamidiye cavalry, and they followed its progress even more closely as they anticipated further developments. Evidently the Hamidiye project was much more successful than they had expected.

PHASE 4: ORGANIZATION AND TRAINING

While the creation of new regiments and the flag presentation ceremonies continued throughout 1892, the first months of 1893 saw the transition to a new and even more advanced phase in the development of the Hamidiye. On March 24, 1893, Consul Francisci reported

the arrival of thirty officers in Trebizond who had been sent by the Turkish Minister of War to train the new regiments.²⁸ This was the beginning of the organization and training phase.

Unfortunately, Italy was deprived of its privileged vantage point in Armenia by the closure of its consular agency in Erzurum in September 1892. The flow of information was further reduced when the Trebizond consulate lost its consul in May 1893. Yet the consulate continued to perform its normal functions; Guglielmi, the consulate's official interpreter, took over as temporary manager.

Despite the thinning out of the Italian diplomatic network in the region, it continued to provide some extremely interesting reports. The most significant of these is undoubtedly that of Guglielmi, dated June 17, 1893, in which he described how the Hamidiye were being organized, including the specific structure of their ranks.²⁹

Beginning in April, Guglielmi had observed a stream of Turkish army officers, passing through Trebizond in groups of twenty to thirty per week on their way to join the new cavalry units. These officers were called "i prescelti" (the select), and they all wore a copper medal with an image representing the Hamidiye. After a three-day stopover in Trebizond, they departed for Erzinjan, seat of the Fourth Army Corps.

Erzinjan played a very important role in the organization of the Hamidiye during this period: it served as their headquarters, while the Fourth Army Corps provided the logistical requirements for their training. Guglielmi also reported that Ferik Ibrahim Pasha was in Erzinjan, and that he was the designated chief of the Hamidiye.

The role of the "select" officers was to counterbalance the Kurdish officers in the new regiments. The planned structure of the officer corps was as follows:

- A division general from the Turkish cavalry (Ferik Ibrahim Pasha) to serve as commander in chief of the 33 Hamidiye regiments(30);
- 1 Kurdish brigadier general for every 4 regiments;
- 4 colonels per regiment (2 Kurds and 2 "prescelti" from the Turkish cavalry);
- 4 lieutenants (2 Kurds and 2 "prescelti" from the Turkish cavalry);
- 2 majors (1 Kurd and 1 "prescelto" from the Turkish cavalry);
- 2 adjutant-majors (1 Kurd and 1 "prescelto" from the Turkish cavalry);
- and so on for the lower ranks.

Guglielmi believed the motivation for this structure was the Turks' lack of confidence in the Kurds:

[I prescelti] sono destinati per sempre, tanto per istruire i nuovi reggimenti Curdi, ma ancor più, il Governo non avendo la piena fiducia in quella razza, la quale è molto selvaggia, e che in tempo di guerra fosse sorvegliata, onde non si rivoltasse e commettesse anche qualche tradimento a danno del loro Sovrano. Queste considerazioni hanno determinato e indotto il Ministero della Guerra e d'ordine del Sultano di prescegliere da tutti i Corpi d'Armata dell'Impero, un quantitativo sufficiente d'Ufficiali perchè fossero incorporati nei predetti nuovi reggimenti di Cavalleria Curda Hamidié.

[[The select officers) will not only train the new Kurdish regiments, but even more importantly, because the Government does not fully trust this race, which is quite savage, they will keep them under surveillance during wartime so they won't revolt or betray their Sovereign in any way. These considerations have caused the Ministry of War, by order of the Sultan, to select a sufficient number of Officers from the entire Army Corps throughout the Empire to be incorporated into the aforesaid new Hamidiye Kurdish Cavalry regiments.]³¹

In another report dated May 28, Guglielmi informed Rome that two officers of the German Army Corps of Engineers were passing through Trebizond en route to Erzurum and Erzinjan, that they had been seconded to the Sultan's military service, and that they might be going to Erzinjan to help organize the Hamidiye.³²

We cannot prove that this was in fact the case, but it is worth recalling the role played by German officers in organizing the Ottoman army beginning in 1882, above all in training the officer corps. The German presence had become even more significant when General Colmar von der Goltz arrived in Turkey in 1885.

The two officers in question may have been sent to reorganize the artillery in the region,³³ or to help organize the Hamidiye by providing training and advice to the officers, or perhaps they were merely there as observers. In any case, the presence of two German officers in the service of the Sultan at this crucial stage in the structuring of the Hamidiye is worth noting.

While there is a certain amount of information on the role played by the Hamidiye during the massacres of 1894-1896, little was known about the formation of these regiments. But they were being organized at a time when profound transformations were taking place in eastern Anatolia, and that is why the Italian diplomatic documents are so important, because they provide us with such a detailed description of the final phase in the formation of the Hamidiye.

These documents show the creation of the Kurdish regiments to have been a well structured operation that moved forward in progres-

sive phases with the result that by June 1893 they had attained a remarkable level of organization and were obviously destined to continue their progress.

The creation of the Hamidiye over a period of three years was undoubtedly an impressive achievement, and one that would have an enormous effect on the history of the region. In fact, it was during this period that a veritable ethnic revolution was beginning in eastern Anatolia. It would result in the complete destruction of the equilibrium that had governed relations between the various ethnic groups in eastern Anatolia for many years. The demographic consequences, while unfortunately very little studied thus far, were far-reaching.

During this period of 1890-1893, the Italian diplomats were keenly aware of the danger the Hamidiye posed for the Armenian population.³⁴ Indeed, their reports provide evidence of an increase in Kurdish harassment of Armenians. All this took place in an atmosphere of complicity between the Kurds, particularly the *beys*, and the local Turkish authorities.³⁵

It is clear from the Italian diplomats' accounts that the Hamidiye operation was important to the Turkish government. But why did Abdul Hamid put such a premium on the project? In order to answer this question, we must consider it in the dual context of international and regional politics:

1. At the international level, the context was provided by the Anglo-Russian antagonism. Given their respective international strategies, both the British and the Russian governments attached increasing importance to eastern Anatolia.³⁶
2. At the regional level, we must look at the local balance of power: the central government's control of the region was quite tenuous during this period, and its manipulation of the rivalry between the local notables and the Kurdish *beys* can only be called a policy of divide and rule.³⁷

The arrival of the Armenian revolutionary movements on the scene represented what Stephen Duguid has called "another power factor"³⁸ — a dangerously destabilizing element. And since the Ottoman Empire had lost nearly all of its European territories, eastern Anatolia had become a crucial stake over which the government had to gain more control. Hence the need for a new policy that would allow for a change in the traditional relationship between the central and the local powers, while also creating a useful tool of repression against the Armenian revolutionaries and their supporters, i.e., the Armenian population.

In this context, the Hamidiye project emerges as an important element in an overall strategy to gain control of this strategic region. Clearly, the project faced enormous obstacles, beginning with the need to create an alliance of sorts between traditional rivals (the local notables and the Kurdish *beys*) under the aegis of a central government whose authority was not accepted or even recognized in the region.

In order to achieve its purposes, the central government's first requirement was to make its presence felt and its authority accepted. While government representatives had been associated with the Hamidiye operation since its inception, the army was in fact the primary conduit of central government influence in eastern Anatolia. This institution had gone through a period of crisis and was in the midst of being reorganized. Its influence within the Ottoman state was again on the rise, and it would play a key role as the "face" of central authority in those geopolitically significant regions, such as the Armenian high plateau, that were considered "strategic" in terms of the Empire's new policy but were still too "peripheral" in relation to the center of power.

So it is significant that the formation of the Hamidiye, a political phenomenon that would overturn the local balance of power and upset relations between the various ethnic groups, occurred as part of the more general reorganization of the Ottoman army.

Clearly, the formation of the Kurdish regiments was a significant political phenomenon, and as such had its roots in a particular ideological substratum.

We can gain a better understanding of the broader ideological context in which the Hamidiye phenomenon must be situated if we consider the profound upheavals that shook the Ottoman Empire over the course of the nineteenth century.

The Empire was racked by crisis during the second half of the century, a multi-faceted crisis with financial, political, military and diplomatic aspects. It was emerging from that difficult period territorially fragmented and severely weakened politically. It had come close to disaster by playing on the antagonisms among the Great Powers and it was finally beginning to reorient its focus toward Asia Minor. The Muslim population increased from 68% to 78% of the total population within a few years and the Ottoman Empire became a state that was over three-fourths Muslim.

As Francois Georgeon put it, "all of these events engendered a serious moral crisis among the ruling class":

The war of "93" [1293 in the Mali calendar corresponds to 1877] would leave a deep impression in the Turks' collective memory. Never had the empire been so near to the end, never had the Rus-

sian armies come so close to Istanbul. And the danger threatened not only the European part of the empire, now it was everywhere, in Asia and in Africa. This was something new, and the crisis stimulated the feeling among Ottoman leaders that the empire was a fortress besieged on all sides and undermined from within.³⁹

In this situation, the foundations of central power required what Selim Deringil has termed an "additional ideological reinforcement."⁴⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, writing earlier about a similar phenomenon, had described it as a "new, or at least supplementary, national foundation."⁴¹ In the case at hand, the ideological reinforcement was, in Deringil's words, "a much more Islamic character."⁴²

We do not pretend, in this synthetic study, to have exhausted the subject of the Hamidiye, which is so complex and has been so little studied. Nor have we attempted to fully explore the ideological context of which the Hamidiye were a part. Rather, it was our intention to point out some aspects of the Hamidiye that shed light on this new ideological climate.

The organization of large scale press campaigns and the persistent use of ceremony to accentuate the official character of events⁴³ must be seen as appeals to national identification.⁴⁴ The connection between religion and nationalism,⁴⁵ which was so important in the formation of the Hamidiye, should be studied further. This theme was intimately involved in the generation of a new national consciousness for potential new subjects⁴⁶ who would be loyal to the Sultan and to the Hamidian ideal of Empire.

NOTES

1. This is how the Italian documents refer to the Armenian Question.
2. *Documenti Diplomatici Italiani (DDI)*, s. LXVI, *Armenia*, v. 1, d.n. 20: L'ambasciatore di sua maestà britannica a Roma Paget al Ministro degli Affari Esteri italiano, Roma 6.3.1882 [March 6, 1882].
3. See Francesco Crispi, "Le stragi d'Armenia e il concerto europeo," in *Questioni internazionali* (Milan, 1913), a collection of documents and accounts edited by F. Crispi and T. Palamenghi.
Although Italy's efforts were frustrated in 1895 by virulent Russian opposition, Italian diplomacy was more successful in 1896 in the case of Father Salvatore Lilli of Cappadocia, an Italian national who had been killed in the Marash region during the massacres of November 1895. Italian diplomatic protests resulted in the appointment of a commission of inquiry by the Sultan.
Father Salvatore was the head of the Franciscan Holy Land Order, whose works included several monasteries near Marash. He himself resided at the monastery in the village of Mujuk-Deressi, where he and eleven other Catholics were killed by Turkish soldiers who burned their bodies in a heap. Their remains were discovered several months later by members of the commission who traveled to the site.
See *Livre jaune, Documents diplomatiques, Affaires Arméniennes; Projets de réformes dans l'empire Ottoman 1893-1897* (Paris, 1897), pp. 196 and 212-214, *Supplement du Livre jaune*, the Report of Lieutenant-Colonel de Vialar, July 1896, n. 231; and *Documenti Diplomatici Italiani*, s. LXVI, *Armenia*, vol. 3-4.
4. Abbreviations used in this study include the following: ASDMAEI = Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero Affari Esteri Italiano; AP = Affari Politici (Political Affairs); DDI = Documenti Diplomatici Italiani (a collection of diplomatic documents published by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs); s. = serie (series); n. = numero (number); D. = documento (document); d. = dispaccio (dispatch); b. = busta (envelope); fasc. = fascicolo (file); r. = rapporto (report); an.r. = annesso al rapporto (annex to the report); R° = Regio (Royal).
Translation of the Italian passages quoted here was not an easy task, given the rather archaic character of the manuscripts and the often quite personal style of the writers. We have attempted to render a grammatically correct translation while remaining faithful to the sense of the original.
5. *DDI*, s. LXVI, *Armenia*, D.n. 1, rapporto da Trebisonda n. 36, dal R° Console Gioja al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, 1 luglio 1890 [July 1, 1890].
6. ASDMAEI, *AP*, *Armenia*, b. 325, fasc. 1891, an.r.n. 159/61: Il R. Console d'Italia Francisci al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Trebisonda, 6.3.1891 [March 6, 1891].
7. ASDMAEI, *AP*, *Armenia*, b. 325, fasc. 1891, an.r.n. 163/62: Il R. Console d'Italia Francisci al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Trebisonda, 10.3.1891 [March 10, 1891].
8. In the same report, Consul Francisci also noted the arrival of five or six Kurds from the vilayet of Van with an entourage of some one-hundred men en route to Constantinople. They were given the same official reception.
ASDMAEI, *AP*, *Armenia*, b. 325, fasc. 1891, an.r.n. 207/76: Il R. Console d'Italia Francisci al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Trebisonda, 29.3.1891 [March 29, 1891].
9. ASDMAEI, *AP*, *Armenia*, b. 325, fasc. 1891, r.n. 310/114: Il R. Console d'Italia Francisci al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Trebisonda, 22.5.1891 [May 22, 1891].

10. "Di parecchi Bey Curdi chiamati dal Governo nella capitale per accordarsi con essi intorno alla formazione di vari reggimenti di Cavalleria Curda..." [The many Kurdish *beys* summoned to the capital by the government to come to an agreement with them on the formation of a number of Kurdish cavalry regiments...]

ASDMAEI, *AP*, *Armenia*, b. 325, fasc. 1891, r.n. 207/76: Il R. Console d'Italia Francisci al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Trebisonda, 29.3.1891 [March 29, 1891].

11. *Circa il motivo della loro chiamata a Costantinopoli varie sono le voci che qui corrono. Chi dice che il Sultano li abbia chiamati per sottoporre una buona volta i Curdi al servizio militare, chi per stabilire le condizioni per la formazione di diversi Alai (reggimenti) di cavalleria curda da contrapporre ai cosacchi e circassi del Caucaso, chi per allontanarli dall'Armenia e porre così fine alle lamentele continue loro incursioni e depredazioni a danno dei pacifici Armeni. La più accreditata è la voce, da diverso tempo riportata dai giornali, della formazione di nuovi reggimenti di cavalleria, da contrapporre alla preponderante cavalleria russa, ma non è improbabile che anche gli altri motivi abbiano influito nella decisione presa dalla Sublime Porta. Dagli Armeni poi si crede che tale chiamata sia effetto delle rimostranze et delle pressioni esercitate dalle Grandi Potenze.*

[There are various rumors circulating concerning the reason for their summons to Constantinople. Some say the Sultan has sent for the Kurds in order to subject them once and for all to military service, others say to establish conditions for the formation of various Kurdish cavalry regiments (Alai) to send against the Cossacks and Circassians in the Caucasus, still others say to remove them from Armenia and thus put an end to the deplorable and constant incursions and depredations against the peaceful Armenians. The most credible story, reported a number of times in the press, concerns the formation of new cavalry regiments to send against the superior Russian cavalry, although it is not unlikely that other motives have also influenced the decision taken by the Sublime Porte. Among the Armenians it is believed that the summons is a result of certain remonstrations and pressures exerted by the Great Powers.]

ASDMAEI, *AP*, *Armenia*, b. 325, fasc. 1891, an.r.n. 207/76: Il R. Console d'Italia Francisci al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Trebisonda, 29.3.1891 [March 29, 1891].

12. ASDMAEI, *AP*, *Armenia*, b. 325, fasc. 1891, an.r.n. 319/119: Il R. Console d'Italia Francisci al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Trebisonda, 26.5.1891 [May 26, 1891], and an.r.n. 337/126, 3.6.1891 [June 3, 1891].
13. ASDMAEI, *AP*, *Armenia*, b. 325, fasc. 1891, r.n. 382/145: Il R. Console d'Italia Francisci al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Trebisonda, 3.7.1891 [July 3, 1891].
14. *Lunedì pp. ritornarono da Costpoli a bordo del vapore "Sacharia" della compagnia "Mahsussé" 54 Capi Curdi vestiti delle nuove uniformi [...], e due giorni dopo accompagnati dal Colonnello Zaccharia Effendi proseguirono per Erzinghian, sede del 4° Corpo d'armata. Collo stesso vapore arrivarono 7000 casse contenenti vestiario, fucili e munizioni destinate all'equipaggiamento e all'armamento dei Curdi.*
[Last Monday 54 Kurdish chieftains dressed in new uniforms returned from Constantinople aboard the Mahsussa Line steamship "Sacharia" (...), and two days later, accompanied by Colonel Zaccharia Effendi, they left for Erzinjan, seat of the Fourth Army Corps. The same ship delivered 7,000 cases containing rifles, ammunition and clothing slated to arm and outfit the Kurds.]
ASDMAEI, *AP*, *Armenia*, b. 325, fasc. 1891, r.n. 382/145: Il R. Console d'Italia Francisci al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Trebisonda, 3.7.1891 [July 3, 1891].
15. *Secondo ogni probabilità, codesta armata irregolare, che doveva essere un quid simile della cavalleria cosacca, svanirà come una bolla di sapone.*
[In all likelihood, this irregular army, which was supposed to be something like the Cossack cavalry, will vanish like a soap bubble.]

- ASDMAEI, *AP*, Armenia, b. 325, fasc. 1891, r.n. 382/145: Il R. Console d'Italia Francisci al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Trebisonda, 3.7.1891 [July 3, 1891].
16. ASDMAEI, *AP*, Armenia, b. 325, fasc. 1891, an.r.n. 382/145: Il R. Console d'Italia Francisci al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Trebisonda 3.7.1891 [July 3, 1891].
17. ASDMAEI, *AP*, Armenia, b. 325, fasc. 1891, an.r.n. 403/152: Il R. Console d'Italia Francisci al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Trebisonda 15.7.1891 [July 15, 1891].
18. ASDMAEI, *AP*, Armenia, b. 325, fasc. 1891, d.n. 26881/529: Il Ministro degli Affari Esteri al Ministro della Guerra, Roma 13.7.1891 [July 13, 1891].
19. *Qui si assicura che il Muscir ha già sul territorio di Bayazid otto battaglioni di soldati irregolari a cavallo. Ciascuno squadrone o battaglione avrà 450 cavalieri. Io però ne dubito seriamente.*
- [We have been assured here that the Mushir already has eight batallions of irregular mounted soldiers in the Bayazid region. Each squadron or battallion will have 450 cavalrymen. But I still have serious doubts.]
- ASDMAEI, *AP*, Armenia, b. 325, fasc. 1891, an.r.n. 455/167: Il Console d'Italia Francisci al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Trebisonda 12.9.1891 [September 12, 1891].
20. ASDMAEI, *AP*, Armenia, b. 325, fasc. 1892, an.r.n. 56/15: Il R. Console d'Italia Francisci al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Trebisonda 13.2.1892 [February 13, 1892].
21. ASDMAEI, *AP*, Armenia, b. 325, fasc. 1892, r.n. 94/27: Il R. Console d'Italia Francisci al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Trebisonda 18.3.1892 [March 18, 1892].
22. ASDMAEI, *AP*, Armenia, b. 325, fasc. 1891, r.n. 455/167: Il R. Console d'Italia Francisci al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Trebisonda 12.9.1891 [September 12, 1891].
23. ASDMAEI, *AP*, Armenia, b. 325, fasc. 1892, an.r.n. 179/52: Il R. Console d'Italia Francisci al Minsitro degli Affari Esteri, Trebisonda 26.3.1892 [March 26, 1892].
24. ASDMAEI, *AP*, Armenia, b. 325, fasc. 1892, r.n. 117/36: Il R. Console d'Italia Francisci al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Trebisonda 5.4.1892 [April 5, 1892].
25. ASDMAEI, *AP*, Armenia, b. 325, fasc. 1892, an.r.n. 217/62: Il R. Console d'Italia Francisci al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Trebisonda 28.6.1892 [June 28, 1892].
26. ASDMAEI, *AP*, Armenia, b. 325, fasc. 1892, r.n. 225/65: Il R. Console d'Italia Francisci al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Trebisonda 7.7.1892 [July 7, 1892].
27. In 1901, Léon Lamouche counted 266 Kurdish cavalry squadrons. *Les armées de la péninsule Balkanique* (Paris, 1901), p. 18.
28. ASDMAEI, *AP*, Armenia, b. 325, fasc. 1893, r.n. 95/35: Il R. Console d'Italia Francisci al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Trebisonda 24.3.1893 [March 24, 1893].
29. ASDMAEI, *AP*, Armenia, b. 325, fasc. 1893, r.n. 197/72: Guglielmi al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Trebisonda 17.6.1893 [June 17, 1893]. The complete document is reproduced in the Appendix herein. See also ASDMAEI, *AP*, Armenia, b. 325, fasc. 1893, d.n. 23733/360: Il Ministro degli Affari Esteri al Ministro della Guerra, Roma 27.6.1893 [June 27, 1893], and d.n. 4448/23733/300: Il Ministro della Guerra al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Roma 6.7.1893 [July 6, 1893].
30. Guglielmi offered two different figures for the number of Kurdish regiments. He believed there were 52, but his informant (a "select" lieutenant in the Turkish army) had told him that only 33 were adequately trained for the cavalry and that the rest would join the infantry. Apparently there were 33 operative Hamidiye regiments at the time, as for the other 19, it may be that the soldiers had been recruited and were on the point of being constituted as regiments.

ASDMAEI, *AP*, Armenia, b. 325, fasc. 1893, r.n. 197/72: Guglielmi al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Trebisonda 17.6.1893 [June 17, 1893].

31. ASDMAEI, *AP*, Armenia, b. 325, fasc. 1893, r.n. 197/72: Guglielmi al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Trebisonda 17.6.1893 [June 17, 1893].
32. ASDMAEI, *AP*, Armenia, b. 325, fasc. 1893, r.n. 177/63: Guglielmi al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Trebisonda 28.5.1893 [May 28, 1893]. See also d.n. 21524/322: Il Ministro degli Affari Esteri al Ministro della Guerra, Roma 12.6.1893 [June 12, 1893]; d.n. 3969/21524/322: Il Ministro della Guerra al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Roma 20.6.1893 [June 20, 1893]; and r.n. 286/97: Guglielmi al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Trebisonda 16.9.1893 [September 16, 1893].
33. The Turkish artillery were supplied with Krupp cannons.
34. ASDMAEI, *AP*, Armenia, b. 325, fasc. 1891, an.r.n. 159/61: Il R. Console d'Italia Francisci al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Trebisonda 6.3.1891 [March 6, 1891].
35. ASDMAEI, *AP*, Armenia, b. 325, fasc. 1892, r.n. 283/99: Il R. Console d'Italia Francisci al Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Trebisonda 3.9.1892 [September 3, 1892].
36. See Edouard Driault, *La Question d'Orient depuis ses origines jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris, 1912), pp. 295-329.
37. See Stephen Duguid, "The Politics of Unity: Hamidian Policy in Eastern Anatolia," *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 9, n. 2 (May 1973), pp. 139-155.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 145.
39. François Georgeon, "Le dernier sursaut (1878-1908)," in *Histoire de l'Empire Ottoman* (Paris, 1982), p. 525.
40. Selim Deringil, "The Invention of Tradition as Public Image in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1808 to 1908," in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 35, n. 1 (January 1993), p. 3.
41. Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 84.
42. See Deringil, *Ibid.*, p. 5.
43. The most important of these ceremonies marking the various stages in the formation of the Hamidiye was the distribution of the flags. Others include the reception of the Kurdish *beys* in Trebizond, the ceremony held at their departure, and the ceremony of their presentation to the Sultan.
44. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983), p. 82.
45. See Hobsbawm, *ibid.*, pp. 40-80.
46. See Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 266, and Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 100-110.
47. Ministry stamp with series number and date of receipt.
48. Date of redaction.
49. Subject: Incorporation of Officers into the new regiments of the "Hamidiye" Kurdish Cavalry.