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**BELL AND BANNER: ARMENIAN REVOLUTIONARIES
AT THE END OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE**

by

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December 2011

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AT THE END OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

This study begins by addressing the political, social, and economic conditions in the Ottoman Empire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in order to provide the historical context for the emergence of Armenian revolutionaries. It then details the attempts at reforming the empire by the Tanzimat and Hamidian regimes, the effect these reforms had on social and economic conditions for provincial Ottoman Armenians, and the steps those within the empire but especially among the Armenian diaspora took to adopt revolutionary tactics in attempting to alleviate conditions in the Armenian fatherland. Specific attention will be paid to the programs and activities of the major parties that have comprised the Armenian Revolutionary Movement: the Dashnaktsutiun, the Hunchaks, and the Armenakans. This study then reviews revolutionary activity amidst the rise of the Committee of Union and Progress, particularly the Dashnaktsutiun who were most active during this period, in an effort to complete a survey of Armenian revolutionary activity. Finally, it concludes with general observations regarding the process by which some Armenians, who had at one point been considered the Ottoman Empire's "loyal millet," decided to arm themselves first in self-defense in pursuit of autonomy and then to engage in terrorism as an acceptable tactic in carrying out their strategy.

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I. INTRODUCTION

This study will provide an historical study of the Armenian revolutionary movement in the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. Efforts by organizations within the movement to adopt a revolutionary path in pursuit of Armenian autonomy within the Ottoman state have included both non-violent participation in the political process as well as alternative measures that have included terrorism. As one of the first revolutionary movements in modern Middle Eastern history, it is essential to identify who the Armenians revolutionaries were, what strategies they adopted and why they adopted them, as well as the historical context in which these strategies were employed. This work, it is hoped, will provide conclusions derived from an historical survey of the basic conditions that fostered the adoption of violence by a revolutionary group in achieving their political objectives which attempted to address worsening conditions for provincial Ottoman Armenians.

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

In reviewing the emergence and development of Armenian revolutionaries, several questions demand attention: What challenges did the Ottoman Empire face during its decline? What was the effect of Ottoman reform (in response to these challenges) on the empire's religious minorities, particularly upon rural Armenians? What impact did changes in the Ottoman government at the beginning of the twentieth century have on the efforts of Armenian revolutionaries? In answering these questions, certain conclusions may be drawn regarding this study's central question: What were the social, economic, and political conditions within the Ottoman Empire that prompted revolutionary activity, specifically, the adoption of terrorism?

B. IMPORTANCE

There are many states today that maintain a contentious relationship with ethnic minorities within their borders. As violence and terror have been used by some of these groups in the past to varying degrees of success, it is important to understand what

conditions existed that brought them to adopt a revolutionary stance in general, and violence in particular, in achieving their political goals.

A review of the origins and evolution of the Armenian revolutionary parties, their political strategies and what these strategies attempted to accomplish under the rule of different Ottoman governments is pertinent to geopolitical circumstances today that involve states and their ethnic minorities. The importance of the relationships between the ethnic and religious minorities and the states by whom they are governed cannot be understated; it threatens the region's stability to this day.

One of the first revolutionary movements in the Middle East was the Armenian revolutionary movement. A review of the evolution of the Armenian revolutionary parties provides a telling narrative which may provide comparison to the region's revolutionary groups today. The circumstances under which this movement was formed provide a historical context for examining revolutionary emergence during the Ottoman Tanzimat era and the Armenian reaction to the dissolution of the millet system as well as the pivotal decrees issued by the sultan's government in 1839 and 1856. During this period, there occurred significant changes in the manner in which groups such as the Armenians were administered, as the government moved from an ideology based on religion to a more secular Ottomanism.

Armenian hopes for improved governance hinged on the implementation of a constitution after the failure of both the *Hatt-i Sherif* (the 1839 reforms) and the *Hatt-i Humayun* (the 1856 decree) to improve conditions in Ottoman Armenia. Conditions for Armenians continued to worsen under Ottoman prejudices against non-Muslims and fostered a policy of inequality toward Armenians in the region. This policy was manifest in such practices as forbidding Armenians the right to bear arms; maintaining taxation practices that were more burdensome for Armenians than for Muslims; failure to provide protection from hostile tribes that bordered Armenian areas; forbidding Armenians to serve in the military; and restricting Armenian involvement in legal proceedings.¹

¹ Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties through the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 25–26.

Armenian nationalist sentiments eventually took root in Ottoman Armenia due to frustration fed from a lack of reform and continued ambivalence,² as well as in response to encouragement of Armenian persecution at the behest of the Ottoman state.³ As nationalism continued to grow throughout the Armenian population, however, Sultan Abdulhamid II ignored the constitution and the western liberties it contained. For the Armenians, life under the Hamidian government was a struggle for survival under a constant fear of attack or displacement. The establishment of the Hamidiye, a Kurdish cavalry that constantly threatened Armenian areas with plunder and terror, was sponsored by the sultan and it was estimated this force grew to 30,000, operating in areas where there was little civil authority.⁴ The sultan's promotion of Pan-Islamism reconciled differences among Sunni Kurds, those constituting the majority, and brought them back into his favor.⁵ Further plaguing the social climate in Armenian areas was the arrival of *muhajirs* from the Caucuses and the sultan's policy of settling these people among the Armenians which led to "Armenian insecurity of life and property."⁶

Armenian hopes of any reform by the Ottoman government were further diminished under the Committee for Union and Progress (CUP). With an ideology that promoted the Turkification of the population of the Ottoman empire, and amid growing Muslim discontent with equality guaranteed to Ottoman Christians, the CUP would do little to improve life in Armenian areas. In fact, perhaps the most horrific slaughter and deportations of the modern age began in 1915 under its charge. But even before such genocide was undertaken, measures had been instituted to derail Armenian political activity in the form of a "law of associations" which "forbade the formation of political associations linked to non-Turkish ethnic or national goals."⁷ Despite efforts by the

² Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 50.

³ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 62.

Dashnaks to change the CUP platform to one significantly less prejudiced against minority groups such as the Armenians, plans for the great tragedy that was to befall the Armenians and effectively end their revolutionary activity against the Ottomans were already underway, though whether this was during the 1910 or 1911 congress is still disputed.⁸

The story of the Armenian revolutionaries is significant in that it provides an overview of one of the first revolutionary groups in the Middle East whose struggle for an improved life for the population they represented was met with contention from a state that was itself struggling for survival. In hindsight, the goals of the Armenians and those of the Ottoman state do not seem mutually exclusive; value remains in an examination of the courses taken by both.

C. PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESES

Armenian nationalism has a tendency to dominate the literature concerning the development of the Armenian revolutionary movement and conflates an already sensitive subject: the discussion of Armenian genocide. Armenian revolutionary political strategies were supported with the hopes that Armenian nationalism would appeal to the greater Armenian population from which it would garner support and an international audience from which an external partner would emerge to help the revolutionaries establish self-rule. But nationalism seems to have appealed more to an Armenian intelligentsia than to the masses it was meant to inspire. This is a problem that is further explained in the following literature review.

The “problem” posed by the genocide discussion stems from an insistence from the Turkish point of view that, at best, it was a means of the government to deal with insurrection within its borders, and, at worst, that it never occurred. Armenians, of course, adhere to a distinctly different belief in that it is one of the greatest human

⁸ Ibid.

tragedies of the modern era. Both sides are unbending in their beliefs and it is not likely to change in the near future. The challenge, then, is finding objective evidence on which to base conclusions.

From an historiographical point of view, the issue becomes finding sources which consider an integrated narrative of both Turks and Armenians: “The problem, simply phrased, is that historians and others who have tried to tell the story of Turkish/Armenian relations toward the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have been unable to imagine a common history, one that accounts for the complexities each found in its situation and the areas where common thought and action evolved.”⁹ This study will attempt to include those areas of commonality among Armenians and Turks.

D. LITERATURE REVIEW

Against a backdrop wrought with death on a truly awesome scale, this study will provide an historical survey of the Armenian revolutionary movement, with a focus on the means they adopted in advancing their political interests.¹⁰ A historical review of these organizations’ efforts of attaining an autonomous Armenian state have included both non-violent participation in the political process as well as alternative measures that have included violence and terrorism. This study will consolidate the history of Armenian revolutionaries that can be found in work on subjects such as the Armenian genocide, Armenian nationalism, Ottomanism, and Pan-Islamism, as well as those that deal exclusively with Armenian revolutionary groups during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is essential to review precisely what was intended by these early

⁹ For an excellent and recent work of the general nature of Armenian revolutionaries see Gerard J. Libaridian, “What Was Revolutionary about Armenian Revolutionary Parties in the Ottoman Empire?” in *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny, et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 86.

¹⁰ Several excellent works provide the historical context on which this study relies: Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); M. Sukru Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); and Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700–1922* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

revolutionaries in understanding their original tendencies toward violence and occasional focus on participation in legitimate political processes.

1. Revolutionary Origins

It is necessary to trace the origins of these revolutionaries within a greater, more general national conscience, to include the movement's origins and evolution, and the manner in which it chose to deal with the Ottoman state. Originally conceived in the summer of 1890, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation was a loose collaboration among several Armenian groups, principal among them the Dashnaktsutjun, but also the Hunchaks, and to a lesser extent, the Armenakans, in order to provide a somewhat united political entity that would represent Armenians within the Ottoman state.¹¹ Dissension within the party quickly brought about a split into what would become the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), known as the Dashnaktsutjun (or, simply the Dashnaks), and the Hunchak Revolutionary Party, or the Social Democratic Hunchakian Party (SDHP) (or simply, the Hunchaks).¹² This divide would have enduring effects on the Armenian revolutionary movement experiencing failure where a unified party might have succeeded. Indeed, a point of contention is the extent to which each of these parties was able to exert its influence over the Armenian population and the extent to which they constituted a threat to the Ottoman regime.¹³ From its inception, and as outlined in its program of the Dashnaks, there was an inclination toward violence by which the party would obtain its objective of "the political and economic freedom of Turkish Armenia..."¹⁴ Included in the Program was language that is not easily confused: "To stimulate fighting and to terrorize government officials, informers, traitors, usurers, and every kind of exploiter."¹⁵ Such sentiment was indicative of the revolutionary nature of both the Dashnak and Hunchak party, but the differences between the two are important

¹¹ Nalbandian, *Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 151.

¹² *Ibid.*, 164.

¹³ Robert Melson, "A Theoretical Inquiry into the Armenian Massacres of 1894–1896," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, July 1982. 24:3, 493.

¹⁴ Nalbandian, *Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 167.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

for a full understanding of the former, especially if the distinction is to be made between pursuit of political objectives by non-violent and violent means and the lengths to which violence was pursued. A comprehensive and widely referenced historical narrative concerning the origins of the Armenian Revolutionary Movement is included in the cornerstone of Armenian revolutionary literature in *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties Through the Nineteenth Century* by Louise Nalbandian.

2. Party Differences

The Dashnaks and the Hunchaks differed primarily in their political goals and their geographic interests. The central political goal of the Dashnaks was the establishment of an autonomous, distinctly Armenian territory within the Ottoman state.¹⁶ The implementation of imperial reforms was the immediate concern for the betterment of all Ottoman Armenians. Conversely, the Hunchaks advocated the institution of a separate, independent Armenian state.¹⁷ Ideologically, the Dashnaks and Hunchaks did not differ significantly in their adoption of socialism as a framework through which to change the nature of a society that constituted “the exploited and exploiter classes of society and...the need to do away with bourgeois capitalist-usurers.”¹⁸ Significant differences did result on how big the role of socialism should play in the program. Another principal difference was where such change would take place: the Dashnaks focused on Ottoman Armenia and the Hunchaks on Armenians in the Ottoman, Russian and Persian Empires.¹⁹ While these differences related the official divides between the two parties, much of the split was likely due to intraparty rivalry and resentment.²⁰

¹⁶ Nalbandian, *Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 169; Libaridian, “Armenian Revolutionary Parties,” 90.

¹⁷ Nalbandian, *Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 169.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 172.

3. Nationalism, Ottomanism, and Panturism

Where socialism was sufficient to launch the political aspirations of Armenian revolutionaries, it did little to mobilize support of the larger Armenian population. Instead, there occurred a shift to inspire the masses of Armenians along nationalist lines. Herein is found the true nature of a people disenchanted by the yoke of imperialism: “The point was to turn subjects into citizens.”²¹ It was at this point, then, that the imperial traditional practices, such as the use of *millets*, transformed peoples from those who were governed according to religious dictate to nations who were organized politically.²² This was accomplished primarily by a reconstitution of the Armenian identity: where once there had existed separate religious sects composed of Armenians, there now was a consolidated ethnic group that could foster political progress.²³ This, then, was the birth of Armenian nationalism which would become the impetus behind future Armenian revolutionary activity.²⁴ While such nationalist sentiments spread among Armenians, the target of such sentiment remained the inability of the Ottoman state to deliver basic political goods, especially security.²⁵

Nationalism served to unite Armenians against a regime that could not guarantee their security or prosperity. Indeed, the deteriorating security conditions in Armenian areas and the lack of an appropriate response by those in power at the time, the Tanzimat and then the Hamidian regime, promoted the conception of the Dashnaks as a revolutionary party.²⁶ The shift to nationalism from the religiously organized *millet* system is included among works dealing with Armenian revolutionaries in the context of

²¹ Libaridian, “Armenian Revolutionary Parties,” 98.

²² *Ibid.*, 86.

²³ *Ibid.*, 87.

²⁴ For an ideological overview that includes the emergence of Armenian nationalism in both the Ottoman and Russian states see Anaide Ter Minassian, *Nationalism and Socialism in the Armenian Revolutionary Movement (1887–1912)* (Cambridge: The Zoryan Institute, 1984). See also J. Michael Hagopian, “Hyphenated Nationalism: The Spirit of the Revolutionary Movement in Asia Minor and the Caucasus, 1896 – 1910,” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1942).

²⁵ See Dikran M. Kaligian, “A Prelude to Genocide: CUP Population Policies and Provincial Insecurity, 1908–1914,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 10:1 (2008).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Armenian nationalism.²⁷ The dissolution of a system in which church leaders governed their respective areas allowed for the emergence of Armenian revolutionary parties as the dominant political actors.

The focus of the literature that covers Armenian nationalism is varied. Indeed, as Reynolds correctly suggests, “the theme of nationalism and its development has been allowed to overshadow other processes, and its uncritical application has proven deleterious to our understanding of history.”²⁸ Armenian nationalism is important to our understanding of the development of revolutionary political strategy but it is not in and of itself a sufficient explanation for the adoption of violent or nonviolent means. Reynolds, among others,²⁹ considers nationalism in a broader context rather than as a simple Panturanic explanation for Ottoman persecution of Armenian revolutionaries.³⁰

4. Political Strategies

With growing discontent in Ottoman Armenian areas, and the unifying factor of Armenian nationalism, the challenge then became what methods to adopt to achieve the Dashnak goal of an autonomous Armenian region. The Dashnaks realized very early on that they would not have enough military strength or experience to defeat the Ottomans by themselves, a critical juncture that forced an appeal to international allies. They would thus look both within Ottoman borders and to the wider international community for support of their plight.

The Ottoman government, other ethnic and religious minorities, and wealthy Armenians served as targets of political strategies that involved political petition, multi-

²⁷ Donald Bloxham, “Terrorism and Imperial Decline: The Ottoman-Armenian Case,” *European Review of History* 14:3 (2007), 304; Ronald Grigor Suny, “Empire and Nation: Armenians, Turks, and the End of the Ottoman Empire,” *Armenian Forum* 12:2 (1998), 23. For an excellent and comprehensive work on most political, economic, and social aspects of minorities in the Ottoman Empire see *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, ed. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982).

²⁸ Michael A. Reynolds, “Buffers, Not Brethren: Young Turk Military Policy in the First World War and the Myth of Panturanism,” *Past and Present* 203 (2009), 137.

²⁹ See Bloxham, “Terrorism and Imperial Decline”; Kaligian, “A Prelude to Genocide”; Suny, “Empire and Nation.”

³⁰ See Reynolds, “Buffers, Not Brethren.”

ethnic alliances, and fraternal sponsorship, respectively, of a non-violent nature.³¹ In response to the security situation in Armenian regions, the Dashnaks tried time and again to petition the Ottoman government for improvement in their conditions, particularly security from exploitation by neighboring ethnic populations.³² A second tactic was an attempted alliance with such traditionally hostile populations as the Kurds in an effort to unite disenfranchised Ottomans in providing a united opposition.³³ Lastly, the Armenian revolutionaries appealed to their own wealthy members for patronage.³⁴ Similar peaceful appeals were projected abroad to European and even Russian powers in an attempt to appeal to the Universalist and enlightenment ideals that brought about the French Revolution.³⁵ But such attempts were largely in vain and the impatience of the Dashnaks fostered a tendency toward violence in search of immediate progress toward autonomy. The hope that fed Armenian revolutionary pursuit of international intervention is covered widely within the literature and remains important due to the fact that it helped in myriad ways to promote the Armenian revolutionary cause and to provide an easy explanation for an Ottoman campaign of persecution.³⁶

Political violence and terrorism were both used as means by which to intimidate a target audience in order to bring about an intended political result. But while many do not distinguish between political violence and terrorism, the difference between the two remains subtle.³⁷ For the sake of this study, terrorism will include political violence,

³¹ Later demands for funds from wealthy Armenians, however, would involve extortion and violence as conditions in the provinces became more desperate.

³² See Bloxham, "Terrorism and Imperial Decline," 304 for conditions prior to 1890; Kaligian, "A Prelude to Genocide," for a description of the Dashnak-led Congress of Ottoman Opposition Parties as well as a description of the deteriorating security conditions among the Armenian peoples from 1908–14; Suny, "Empire and Nation," 37–8 for elected Armenian nationalists in Ottoman Parliament.

³³ Libaridian, "Armenian Revolutionary Parties," 92.

³⁴ Khachig Tololyan, "Terrorism in Modern Armenian Political Culture," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 4:2 (1991), 11.

³⁵ Libaridian, "Armenian Revolutionary Parties," 88, 100.

³⁶ See Jeremy Salt, *Imperialism, Evangelism and the Ottoman Armenians 1878–1896* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1993); Bloxham, "Terrorism and Imperial Decline"; Tololyan, "Terrorism in Modern Armenian Political Culture"; Kaligian, "A Prelude to Genocide"; Suny, "Empire and Nation"; Libaridian, "Armenian Revolutionary Parties."

³⁷ See Tololyan, "Terrorism in Modern Armenian Political Culture," 10–11.

which some define as attempts at specific political targets designed to intimidate those with influence to act a certain way. Terrorism more generally includes the indiscriminate threat or direct use of violence targeting innocents in order to attain political goals.

Surveys of some of the violent methods and the justification for their use may be found within the literature about Armenian revolutionaries and offer some insight into specific incidents of terrorism and political violence, the distinction between the two,³⁸ and the association between the role of the Ottomans in the massacres of 1894-6, 1909, and 1915-6 and international intervention.³⁹

E. METHODS AND SOURCES

The analytical approach that will be undertaken is an historical study that will examine instances in which political strategies were employed by Armenian revolutionary parties and their predecessors from 1850 through the First World War. This evaluation will include a review of the goals that were promulgated, the strategies that were then used to achieve these goals; and historical accounts of the results of these efforts that reveal their effectiveness. This study will then provide general conclusions based on this method that will further the understanding of current ethnic and religious minority tensions that exist within states.

This study will also rely on several works by Armenians that examine the revolutionary programs of the Dashnaks and Hunchaks, as well as accounts of the activities of Armenian revolutionary groups.⁴⁰ These sources provide a greater understanding of who the Armenian revolutionaries were, their agenda, and the means by

³⁸ See Tololyan, "Terrorism in Modern Armenian Political Culture."

³⁹ See Bloxham, "Terrorism and Imperial Decline"; Melson, "A Theoretical Inquiry."

⁴⁰ See K.S. Papazian, *Patriotism Perverted: A Discussion of the Deeds and Misdeeds of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, the So-Called Dashnagtzoutune* (Boston: Baikar Press, 1934); Manuel Hassassian, *A.R.F. as a Revolutionary Party, 1890–1921* (Jerusalem: Hai Tad Publications, 1983); and Simon Vratzian, "The Armenian Revolution and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation," *The Armenian Review* 3 (1950).

which they hoped to accomplish their goals. They are available in English and constitute valuable historical material on which this study will rely.

II. THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE: CHALLENGES AND REFORM

The historical context from which Armenian revolutionaries emerged is one that spans approximately six hundred years and involves the rise and collapse of one of the greatest empires in world history. The intent of this chapter is to understand the preconditions for Armenian revolutionary activities. In order to understand the Armenian revolutionary movement, in particular its more violent manifestation, one must analyze and comprehend the challenges the Ottoman Empire faced during the 19th century. Furthermore, one must consider just as closely the reforms the Imperial government undertook as a means of responding to these challenges. Finally, deteriorating social conditions on the periphery of the empire must be reviewed as they were the result of state reformation failure and directly contributed to the emergence of Armenian revolutionaries.

A. CHALLENGES TO IMPERIAL AUTHORITY: 1700–1839

1. Decentralization

Understanding the challenges the Ottoman Empire faced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries requires a grasp of the manner in which the empire devolved from a state where power was effectively consolidated in a central authority to one in which influence gradually came to be held primarily at the local and provincial level. Two instruments that fostered this shift were tax farming and mercantilism in a European-dominated global economy.⁴¹

a. *Tax Farming*

Tax farming became the instrument of state revenue collection and eventually evolved into an institution that, once privatized and established on the periphery, could not be converted to a centralized, public system of direct taxation.⁴² The

⁴¹ Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 228.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 270.

reasons for this include the size of the territory that required reforming, the reliance of those tax farmers in the provinces on the system, and the lack of a means by which the state could control the provinces.⁴³ Before proceeding to how the system promoted decentralization within the Ottoman Empire, however, it is appropriate to first clarify what the term tax farming actually entailed.

Tax farming was the privatization of tax collection. The state sold the rights to collect taxes to individuals whose initial investment also required them to submit an amount of revenue to the state.⁴⁴ In order to meet the state's demands for remittances, the tax farmer raised taxes in the locality for which he was responsible. Thus, the rights to tax farm were in high demand; the tax farmer was able to keep the revenue he collected after he submitted the required allotment to the appropriate state official. This system (*iltizam*) was administered by such state officials whose fixed-term contract allowed them to hire tax farmers as intermediaries to collect state monies.⁴⁵ The nature of the system, then, promoted a tendency toward decentralization: the more taxes that had to be collected, the more contracts had to be issued, the more the state was required to loosen its grip on authority in such areas its control was marginal. Because various disputes and issues could and did arise in such a vast system, its oversight was proportional: "the Ottoman state regulated and assigned many different officials to supervise the workings of the system."⁴⁶ Except for a deprived peasantry, the system was profitable. The duration of the tax farming contracts changed significantly with the arrival of the *milikane*, which was a life-term tax farm awarded by the state to the highest bidder, though often sold to a collection of individuals who shared the expense and the spoils of a larger farm.⁴⁷

⁴³ Ibid., 273–4.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 229.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 231.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 232.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

The evolution of tax farming thus saw the creation of myriad relationships that allowed the dispersal of power farther away from Istanbul and into the provinces. New positions were created and a system of sub-letting contracts became common:

The Istanbul tax farmers engaged as agents, sub tax farmers, and local tax collectors – between 5,000 and 10,000 individuals based in the provinces – constituted an entirely new web of state-provincial relations. The result was a gradual centrifugal expansion of contracts. Especially when central elites showed little interest in leases in the far eastern provinces of Anatolia (e.g., Damascus, Aleppo, Diyarbakir, Mardin, Adana), provincial notables in these regions were awarded contracts instead.⁴⁸

In such a manner, the state profited, at least initially, from its tax farm system. It also enjoyed a reciprocal relationship with the military elite who were among the first to participate in tax farming: the state favored them with such privilege, hoping this would engender loyalty, and the military assumed the financial risk inherent in the system in order to keep the state solvent.⁴⁹ But as the system gained more and more participants at various intermediate levels between the state and its peasants, and interest in the provinces was maintained primarily by those who lived on the periphery, decentralization was inevitable: “Yet, the unintended by-product of such an extension of distributive privileges was that it allowed the provincials to develop their own new world.”⁵⁰ The Ottoman institution of tax farming eventually contributed to decentralization within the empire.

b. Mercantilism

European mercantilism also played a significant role in further decentralizing the Ottoman Empire. Trading networks included widespread production locations, markets, and ports. As these bases became more established centers of commerce, their economic power tended to subvert that of Istanbul.⁵¹ Traders of other

⁴⁸ Ibid., 234.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 236.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 227.

nations also provided a means of exposure to different cultures and policies that eventually resulted in reorganization,⁵² pulling Ottoman subjects away from the center of the empire.

The trading routes in the Indian Ocean were a source of wealth and luxury goods and, despite not being able to defeat the Portuguese, the loose Islamic network fostered by the Ottomans in this region proved profitable.⁵³ The gradual shift to a more sedentary state in the fifteenth century had also allowed for the construction of permanent places of trade that would become large centers of commerce.⁵⁴ The caravansary emerged as a place where people could bring goods from far away and sell them at profit. Trade, however, was well-regulated during the seventeenth century and one significant economic institution in the Ottoman empire was the practice of granting capitulations, or a grant in the ability to trade, to Europeans.⁵⁵ These capitulations would have a significant role later in the history of the empire, particularly in the erosion of Ottoman power and subjects to European powers and Russia, and will be covered later in this study in a political context. With the Ottoman Empire still wielding significant influence in the region, however, the Europeans were forced to compete among each other for them. The capitulations also affected the state's internal social composition wherein traders and providers became their own distinct groups within a greater Ottoman society.⁵⁶ The former provided a means of expanding trade and tapping into new routes; the latter thrived under the state's supervision and protection of this system of trade.⁵⁷ Most other Ottoman imperial economic institutions were ineffective in the seventeenth century and served to harass the lower class without significant increase in treasury levels.⁵⁸

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Colin H. Imber, *The Ottoman Empire 1300–1650* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 202), 57.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, 237.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 231.

Much of the restructuring of the empire and the associated decentralization was due to the reinforcement of allegiances based on the goods that were traded, power positions among traders, and the manner in which the state handled trade expansion in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Raw materials were extracted and, after processing, became tradable goods which then had to be transported to an export or market location.⁵⁹ At each of these steps in the production cycle, there was opportunity to interact and network with other entities engaged in similar activities.⁶⁰ Trade thus transcended the borders of the empire bringing the influence of many different peoples to bear on Ottoman subjects and often resulting in strong bonds between them. Further decentralizing Ottoman authority was the power wielded by intermediaries in trade.⁶¹

Those outside as well as within the empire relied on myriad people in positions of influence who facilitated trade at various ports and who themselves became a class of wealth and influence, but whose loyalty may not have centered on the state. Indeed, many in such positions represented the interests of not only themselves, but the various communities and entities they represented.⁶² The state, however, continued to exert its economic policy on the markets it tried to control. Such practices often resulted in corruption exacerbated at the local level which made trading more difficult.⁶³ In the mid-eighteenth century when the balance of trade began to shift in favor of European powers, so too did attitudes among traders, producers and intermediaries in a similar direction.⁶⁴ No longer was the Ottoman capital the only authority which had significant influence over economic actors within the empire: “As a result, the open, fluid, and far-reaching networks of commercial activity could not endure, and they reorganized along communal, protectionist lines.”⁶⁵ Power became decentralized in areas of trade such as

⁵⁹ For a description of this process as it pertains to the Ottoman cotton industry, see Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, 240.

⁶⁰ Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, 240.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 241.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 242.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

ports and markets, and wealth increasingly distributed among those doing the trading. States external to the Ottoman state also gained more and more influence as the Empire's status among the world powers continued to decline.

2. Loss of Economic Solvency

Though commercialization and tax farming both had negative effects on the Ottoman economy in the eighteenth and into the nineteenth centuries, other factors contributed to the empire's economic decline. From the disastrous siege of Vienna in 1683 to the arrival of Napoleon in Egypt in 1798,⁶⁶ the Ottoman empire both defended its territory and campaigned, most often unsuccessfully. These military actions, however, had to be funded and the empire did so at the expense of its people with increased taxes. Further straining Ottoman economic welfare was state control of land, poor fiscal policy, and inefficient industrial development.

In order to fight the empire's battles, materiel had to be bought; soldiers had to be paid, equipped, clothed, and fed; and transportation had to be purchased and maintained. In funding its martial necessities, the state adopted several dubious fiscal practices that served to place it farther into debt. It seized lands from its subjects, assumed substantial internal debt, and levied war taxes even in scarce periods of peace.⁶⁷ War further added to Ottoman debt with the additional, and ever frequent, burden of reparations to the victor. It is estimated that in 1775 the Ottoman state was forced to forfeit half its budget to Russia.⁶⁸

Other policies were implemented in an effort to keep the state solvent. Ottoman provisionism, driven by the need to pay for war, led to most local production being diverted to war efforts.⁶⁹ As a result, a great part of the production stayed within the

⁶⁶ Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 38. This context is derived from Quataert's in his section "The wars of contraction, c. 1683–1798" in which he presents a military history of Ottoman defeats within this time period.

⁶⁷ M. Sukru Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 22.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

country and created a paucity of exports.⁷⁰ With imports consisting mainly of scarce goods, an enormous trade deficit began to dominate the economy. A public purchasing policy allowed the government to set its own price for goods produced within the empire which was often well below market price and had disastrous results: “But this practice naturally led producers to cut supplies, lower quality, or even abandon the production of goods needed by the state.”⁷¹ These inefficiencies stood in stark contrast to manufacturing practices abroad that saw imports at competitive or even cheaper prices than domestically manufactured goods.⁷² Bankruptcy became rampant in the manufacturing sector.⁷³ The Ottoman government was forced to borrow abroad or face the same fate as its domestic manufacturers.

3. Great Power Political and Territorial Challenges

The encroachment of the Great Powers on Ottoman politics and territorial integrity further burdened an already embattled empire. Capitulations, the permeation of western influence, and Western influence on the Ottoman administration was both direct, in the form of diplomatic pressures in the capital, and indirect, in the form of external pressures channeled through the *millets*. Capitulations had been in use since the sixteenth century⁷⁴ and were a tool used by the Ottoman Empire to strengthen ties with countries and grant their merchants favorable trading conditions. The favor of the sultan inherent in the capitulations stipulated a protected status while conducting business in the empire, as they were subject only to the laws and taxes of their country of origin. In their original intent, these agreements were neither reciprocal nor were they as formal as a treaty: they

⁷⁰ Ibid., 19–20.

⁷¹ Ibid., 23.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 24.

⁷⁴ Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 11.

signified the favor with which the sultan held these foreign citizens, were granted at his whim, and could thus be rescinded just as quickly.⁷⁵

The name given by the Ottomans for these capitulations was *imtiyazat* or *ahidname* which carried the connotation of honor for an outsider.⁷⁶ The term took on an entirely different meaning when the Ottoman Empire began to decline in strength while Europe's influence and power increased. The Europeans recognized the situation for what it was – economic and political opportunity – and gradually abused the capitulations for their own ends, believing them to be their right, rather than a decree the sultan could rescind if “...the precondition of ‘friendship and sincerity had been broken.’”⁷⁷ But the one-sided nature of the capitulations disappeared when they began to be included in treaties in hopes that both sides would discontinue abusing the system.⁷⁸ In reality, however, the advantage these agreements provided shifted significantly to the Great Powers. An example of the manner in which the Great Powers were able to use the capitulations to their exclusive advantage was the Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca signed with Russia in 1774. Articles VI and XIV of the treaty allowed Russia to make “representations” of members of the Greek Orthodox population within the Ottoman Empire.⁷⁹ The effect of the treaty was devastating in its symbolism and implications. In essence, Catherine the Great subsumed all members of the Greek Orthodox community within the Ottoman Empire into Russian subjects. Ottoman dragomans working for Russian diplomats were given the same status which would eventually elevate them to intercessors between Ottoman bureaucrats and the Russian diplomatic mission.⁸⁰ Having

⁷⁵ Feroz Ahmad, “Ottoman Perceptions of the Capitulations 1800–1914,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 11:1 (2000): 1.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

assumed responsibility for the Ottoman Greek Orthodox population, article IX “provided Russia with opportunities and pretexts to interfere in the affairs of the Ottoman Empire whenever it saw fit.”⁸¹

The lessons of diplomacy in the case of the Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca were not lost on the Ottomans but their status as a declining power in relation to the Great Powers left them scrambling in subsequent treaties to protect their population from essentially becoming citizens of other countries. The reality of the situation surely must have been apparent to Ottoman administrators, but their fate at this time was effectively intertwined with European policy: “Moreover, treaties were only as good as the ability of the Porte to enforce them and that became more and more difficult as the Ottoman Empire’s political and diplomatic dependence on Europe increased.”⁸² The beginning of the end of the Ottoman Empire had already begun; western influence would effectively continue to subvert the empire from within.

Western influence had infiltrated the empire in myriad ways but of particular note is the manner in which the *millets*, including the Armenian *millet*, served as a conduit for western political and economic influence. Not only were European trading interests and diplomats challenging the Porte with western notions of change, the *millet* members with whom they were closely allied were critical in the delivery of western ideals as well, particularly through trade:

The many millet members engaged in the import and export trade with European merchants often were given diplomatic passports or protection by European powers, and increased in numbers after 1774. In addition to bringing Western goods into the empire, they must certainly have introduced some Western business concepts and practices, and were probably aligned with Europeans in pressing the Porte for secular, Westernized commercial law and commercial courts.⁸³

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 5.

⁸³ Roderic H. Davison, “The *Millets* as Agents of Change in the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Empire,” in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, ed. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982), 324.

The concept of individual property rights in the Ottoman Empire, especially in the provinces, was non-existent; land was consistently subject to irregular taxation and outright seizure.⁸⁴ Thus, a large portion of the populations in the *millets* were subject to unforeseen economic crises and displacement.

Protection under a Great Power changed life considerably and for the better. If a subject of the *millets* was fortunate enough to work in some capacity for a foreign government, interpreters are one example provided by Issawi, they could avoid such difficulties in being granted or sold a *berat* from that government.⁸⁵ This was but one element of a greater system, the “protégé system,” which allowed citizens of a foreign power to extend the rights of their homeland to Ottoman subjects, effectively circumventing stubborn Ottoman laws and conventions.⁸⁶ This practice had profound effects among the empire’s minorities in that this became a legitimate goal of many that resulted in a loss of hundreds of thousands of Ottoman subjects (and associated tax revenue): “Thus by the beginning of the nineteenth century Austria had two hundred thousand subjects in the Ottoman Empire.”⁸⁷ But this system of foreign protection gradually changed so that the leaders of the *millets*, content with the status quo and less respondent to petition from those in the provinces, were often not sought by *millet* subjects to handle grievances. That role was now one that extended to those foreign nationals within the Ottoman empire: “By the middle of the nineteenth century foreign protection of minorities had greatly widened. Not only holders of *berats* but all aggrieved members of *millets* within reach of a foreign consul looked to him for protection and

⁸⁴ Charles Issawi, “The Transformation of the Economic Position of the Millets in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, ed. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982), 273.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Kamel Abu Jaber, “The Millet System in the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Empire,” *The Muslim World: A Quarterly Review of History, Culture, Religions and the Christian Mission in Islamdom* 57 (1967), 217.

⁸⁷ Issawi, “Economic Position,” 273.

redress.”⁸⁸ The Great Powers were asserting a firmer hand in the affairs of the empire’s minorities, subverting the authority of the *millet* leadership in the center and, therefore, Ottoman control.

There was also the influence of foreign non-state actors, specifically, those minorities and missionaries in the various diasporas in western Europe and Russia. The Christian minorities in the *millets* readily identified with these groups of the same religious persuasion who were willing to help. The assistance of these groups can be seen in two areas: trade and education.⁸⁹ The advantages gained by the assistance of Christians outside the empire may seem obvious: business contacts fostered growth; new markets could be accessed; and different products could be brought to these markets. More substantial, however, was the development of educational opportunities for non-Muslims. Greater access to education for non-Muslims was often a direct result of the intervention of diasporas to build schools for those in the *millets*.⁹⁰ It is appropriate to review some statistics that provide an educational comparison between Muslims and non-Muslims in the empire. These numbers are provided by Charles Issawi:

In the Ottoman Empire in 1896 there were 31,000 pupils in Muslim middle (*rusdiye*) schools, compared with 76,000 in non-Muslim and 7,000 in foreign (the vast majority being non-Muslims), and 5,000 in secondary (*idadiye*) compared with 11,000 and 8,000. It is true that in elementary (*ibtidaiye*) schools Muslims far outnumbered the others, but the education received in them was of very little value. As early as the 1870s the Greeks in Istanbul alone had 105 schools with 15,000 pupils and the Armenians were not behind, frequenting in addition to their own schools those of the Catholic and Protestant missionaries. In Egypt the Greeks opened their first school in 1843 and soon had a wide network, Jewish schools, opened by immigrants from Europe, also date from the 1840s, and the Syrians and Armenians had theirs too.⁹¹

Such evidence provides insight into one probable factor that contributed to the attitudes of Muslims toward the empire’s non-Muslim subjects that most probably provided a basis

⁸⁸ Ibid., 274.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 277.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

for discrimination against them, particularly in areas in the provinces where the majority of landholders were Muslims, as was the case with many Armenians.

In addition to the statesmen who developed western diplomatic contacts, were educated in the west, and whose exposure to the west surely influenced them in carrying out their duties to the Ottoman state, it is important to distinguish the manner in which one considers the *millet* as a medium that delivered western influence to Ottoman Muslims. Though one might consider the role of individual *millet* members as instruments of influence, or the influence certain religious aspects of *millets* had on Muslim subjects of the empire, this study will consider the *millet* as a “structural entity”.⁹² Politically, the Armenian *millet* served as a touchstone for western influence in the ever-changing Ottoman state of the nineteenth century

4. The Rise of Nationalism(s) Within the Empire

Nationalist movements within the empire also challenged Ottoman sovereignty. The emphasis had begun to shift in the eighteenth century, and more so in the nineteenth century, from identifying with one’s religion to identifying more with the ethnicity with which one was associated.⁹³ Greeks, led by the Greek Orthodox Church in the Balkans, became, in essence, one of the first separatist challenges to the Ottoman state in the eighteenth century.⁹⁴ But while it encompassed many ethnicities, it too became, along with the Ottoman state, an entity from which several ethnicities attempted to distance themselves in the nineteenth century.⁹⁵ The nineteenth century then saw the emergence of several churches that represented separate, more distinct ethnicities, and would quickly give rise to nationalist tendencies. Such was the case with the Serbs in the 1830s; the Bulgarians in 1870; and Rumanians in 1885.⁹⁶

⁹² Davison, “Agents of Change,” 321.

⁹³ Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700–1922* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 186.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

Nationalism in the late Ottoman Empire, however, cannot be explained in its entirety with the emergence of ethnic churches. The Great Powers and a small number of ethnic separatists within their respective populations were in fact the forces behind nationalism. Indeed, rather than a grass roots movement spurred from the bottom up, the emergence of nationalism in the Balkan states was promoted by a small group of ethnic separatists whose political goals were impossible to implement within the Ottoman state.⁹⁷ With help from the Great Powers, who hoped to use these nascent Balkan states to their own ends, these small groups were able to establish their own nation states.⁹⁸

The emergence of nationalism among the empire's ethnic minorities and their successful attempts at establishing their own nation states proved disastrous for the Ottoman government. The very ideologies it had promoted as a means of consolidating its population and guarding the state against the erosion of territory, Ottomanism and then Pan-Islamism, had been unsuccessful.⁹⁹ The loss of territory had become such a fear that it remained in the forefront of the Ottoman conscience into the twentieth century. Consider the frustrations of the Young Turks: "Within months of the 1908 revolution that had promised an end of territorial dissolution, lands nominally still Ottoman became formally separate or independent: Bulgaria, Crete, and Bosnia-Herzegovina."¹⁰⁰ Ottoman reaction after this loss of territory was to protect what remained of the empire and to centralize the state while tightening its grip on those that remained.

B. REFORM

1. Early Attempts at Reform

At the end of the eighteenth century, Sultan Selim III recognized the need for administrative reform within the empire. In order to address the changes required to fortify the Ottoman state, the sultan sought to reconsolidate his sovereignty into a more

⁹⁷ Ibid., 187.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 188.

centralized state with better control of its outlying territories. A provincial system emerged as the preferred instrument of administrative reform.

New laws required the establishment of twenty eight provinces, each with its own provincial governor, or vizier.¹⁰¹ These governors would serve “at least three years and no more than five, in a given province under normal circumstances.”¹⁰² Despite a desire to centralize, however, the sultan did not have the army or funding to effectively control such a system: “Legislation represented only a neat paper solution to the enormous challenges posed by the fragmentation of the empire.”¹⁰³ The glaring example was the appointment of Mehmed Ali as governor of Egypt who had garnered enough local support to gain the sultan’s approval, despite not conforming to the Ottoman gubernatorial ideal: “His boldness underscored the fecklessness of Ottoman administrative reform and demonstrated just how far a provincial governor could go in challenging the imperial center.”¹⁰⁴ In attempting to bring the periphery under the central control of Istanbul, the sultan acquiesced to the whims of the very peoples and institutions he was trying to bring under tighter control. These concessions contributed to renewed efforts of implementing ineffective reform and did little to achieve their intended goals.

Militarily, the Ottoman Empire had developed an undesirable record of defeats, most notably at the hands of the Russians with whom the Ottomans were at war frequently throughout the eighteenth century. A complete restructuring of the army was required but adamantly resisted by the Janissaries, as was any suggestion to base a new army on a European model.¹⁰⁵ Selim III, therefore, was forced to continue a pattern of ineffective reformation begun by his predecessors that included the adoption of European

¹⁰¹ Hanioglu, *Brief History*, 50.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 50–1.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

strategy, tactics, training, and equipment.¹⁰⁶ Eventually, instead of an overhaul of the Janissary Corps, new troops were established, proven effective in battle, and stationed in Istanbul and the Anatolian provinces.¹⁰⁷

2. The Tanzimat

The *millet* system had been in place for almost four hundred years when the the *Hatt-i Sherif* was issued in 1839 and, perhaps, the imperial administration had underestimated the enduring nature of the *millets* in light of their predecessors' policies of religiously dividing and ruling their non-Muslim subjects. To expect such monumental social change in a relatively short period of time suggests that the Ottoman administrators had succumbed to significant internal and external influence that demanded the empire not be relegated to an anachronistic state in the international community. Such reform differed from previous Ottoman attempts at reform in that it embodied an entirely different character; rather than previous attempts that sought to preserve the 'old' ways and establishments of the empire, the Tanzimat reforms strived for modernization of the state and many were based on western ideals and models.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, much of the language of the decree itself, ushering in as it did a new era, was heavily influenced by similar documents in the west: "Though presented in the context of the Ottoman experience and expressing particular goals rather than abstract principles, the decree of Gulhane thus encompassed many of the ideals contained in the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen of 1789."¹⁰⁹

Despite blaming the shortcomings of the empire on a failure to follow the Qur'an and shari'a, this decree set forth several important changes in areas such as tax collection, capital punishment, conscription, and property rights. The message, it was hoped, would reach its audience abroad, specifically in Europe, which would then be more receptive to

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 45.

¹⁰⁸ Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, Volume II: Reform, Revolution, and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808–1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 55.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 61.

Ottoman inclusion among the European states: “In a sense, the document served as an assurance to the Great Powers that demanded domestic reforms in return for future recognition of the Ottoman Empire as a member of the concert of Europe.”¹¹⁰ Indeed, the man behind the document, Mustafa Resid Pasha, was a leading advocate of joining the ranks of the Europeans.¹¹¹ But what was most significant about the edict was the message to the subjects within the Ottoman Empire: it would apply to all subjects regardless of religion. In transcending the criteria by which it had previously considered its non-Muslim subjects, a new ideology of Ottomanism was adopted which dictated that all subjects of the Ottoman Empire were now first and foremost Ottomans, and secondarily considered Greek, Jew, or Armenian.¹¹² Response on behalf of the Ottoman subjects to the reforms of 1839 was, however, slow and because of this, an additional decree was issued. The *Hatt-i Humayun* of 1856 was decidedly less grounded in Islam and provided a more definitive basis for the secular Ottomanist ideology related in 1839 by announcing the equality of all subjects of the empire regardless of religious affiliation. This reinforcement of the idea that all subjects were equal was at once western in its character and radical in its attempt to undermine the basis of centuries of Ottoman rule. The Tanzimat, however, saw it as crucial in instituting the measures that would save the empire. The four officials instrumental in drafting and carrying out the reforms¹¹³ were themselves influenced by European political and cultural ideas and shared the same ideal of equality for all.

¹¹⁰ M. Sukru Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 73.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid., 74.

¹¹³ Roderic H. Davison, “Turkish Attitudes Concerning Christian-Muslim Equality in the Nineteenth Century,” *The American Historical Review* 59:4 (1954): 849. Specifically, Davison lists Mustafa Resid Pasa (1800–58); Mehmed Emin Ali Pasa (1815–71); Kececizade Mehmed Fuad Pasa (1815–69); and Ahmed Sefik Midhat Pasa (1822–84) as those who “...initiated and carried through most of the reform measures in this period...”

Western reaction to Ottoman reform in the nineteenth century was often suspicious.¹¹⁴ The timing of the issuance of mandates often followed a crisis¹¹⁵ and was suspected as being simply a means of appeasing European powers to join their ranks. The *Hatt-i Sherif* of 1839 was issued when a crisis in Egypt, led by Muhammad Ali, imperiled Ottoman borders and depended on Europe to back it up in order to resolve the crisis. The *Hatt-i Humayun* of 1856 was issued as a means of avoiding Great Power intervention in overseeing certain measures promised after the Crimean War. The constitution of 1876 was instituted when ministers from European nations were meeting in the Ottoman capital to discuss reforms for the empire. But Davison is quick to point out that while the timing may have been such that the issuances of these documents followed certain crises, their content was not that of a hasty response to threatening events.¹¹⁶ In fact, it may have been the timing of their issuance that persuaded the sultan and the Ottoman administration to approve them at all.¹¹⁷ The reaction among Muslims and the leadership in the *millet*s was one of hopelessness,¹¹⁸ as the former had technically been stripped of their status as privileged subjects and the latter had no legal grounds for their positions within their own *millet*s.

Tanzimat reform resulted in social and cultural consequences that were the opposite of what the Ottoman government had intended. In its emphasis on placing all of its subjects on an equal footing, the edicts issued in 1839 and 1856, rather than promote Ottomanism among the empire's subjects, served instead to emphasize the nascent nationalism that had replaced religion as the primary criterion on which *millet* identity was based. But it was not only the attitudes of the empire's minority populations that had changed; deep resentment among Ottoman Muslims toward Ottoman Christian, Jewish, and Armenian subjects was reinforced as those Ottoman Muslims who had previously been the dominant group within the empire saw their status as such in peril. Great Power

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Hanioglu, *Brief History*, 75. See notes 9 and 10 specifically.

capitulations, cries of independence from minorities in the periphery, and the constant threat of the erosion of the empire to Russia and Europe all served to promote and emphasize a discrimination among Muslims toward non-Muslims.

C. FAILURES OF REFORM

1. Muslim Reaction to Reforms

Since their conquest, Christians and Jews had been relegated to the role of *dhimmi*¹¹⁹ within the empire. As non-Muslims, they were automatically and should forever be considered inferior to Muslims. The basis for this projection of Muslim superiority is simply the tenet that Islam is the one true religion and others, while tolerated, could only be inferior. Coupled with Tanzimat advocacy of Ottomanism (*Osmanlilik*), this simply did not make sense to a majority of Ottoman Muslims: “And Osmanlilik, as a purely political concept of the allegiance of peoples of all creeds to a ruler who treated them equally, was unreal, because of the traditional concept of ‘Osmanli’ had always carried strong implications of Muslim orthodoxy as well as of loyalty to the Ottoman state.”¹²⁰ The subversion of the status of Muslims by non-Muslims as the latter gained greater protection from foreign powers and seemingly the Ottoman government, was realized by many of the empire’s Muslims as certain subjects among the Christian, Jewish and Armenian populations became wealthy, better educated and no longer inferior as a result of Great Power intrusive policies. Non-Muslims were enjoying the same or better privileges as “believers” and this did not sit well with many of the empire’s Muslims. Policies of discrimination toward non-Muslims would have drastic consequences for Armenians, particularly in those areas the Ottoman state was never able to adequately control: provinces on the periphery.

Social and economic conditions worsened in areas the state could not effectively police and in which it relied on Muslim populations to regulate. Though it continued to petition the Porte to address social injustices, the Armenian provincial population

¹¹⁹ The term here refers to non-Muslims whose mention in the Qur’an as “Peoples of the Book” allowed them to be tolerated among Muslims.

¹²⁰ Davison, “Turkish Attitudes,” 861.

remained a victim of inaction from the center in what the capital considered local circumstances. Problems were to be handled at the local level:

Beyond specific urban centres and regions, however, the Tanzimat did not bring the envisaged reforms in eastern Anatolia, bringing instead dislocation and no little chaos. This was due in large part to non-implementation or obstruction of reforms by Ottoman provincial officials reliant on the support of, or even under the control of, local Muslim notables with an interest in the status quo. Local power bases were an obvious problem for the state's wider reform agenda of centralization and control.¹²¹

Such delegation of authority, combined with the attempted implementation and eventual failure of Tanzimat reform, inevitably led to deplorable conditions for Armenians outside the capital.

Specific conditions deserve mention as, in the face of the failure of the Tanzimat, they were either a continuation of practices because Muslims in these areas chose to ignore the reform laws, or they were instituted in response to displeasure with such policies. Bloxham's description of these practices summarizes the expansiveness and harshness of life for Armenians in the provinces and deserves inclusion here for its comprehensive nature:

In the case of eastern Anatolia, the comparatively tolerant religious tradition of Bedr Khan was replaced by the rule of often militant sheikhs of sufi orders. Moreover, the imposition of centralized taxes and partial central control effectively meant that for many Armenians the pre-existing tax burden was doubled. Further, the practice of Kurdish 'wintering' in Armenian quarters persisted despite legislation to the contrary in 1842, for the nomads regarded it as a hereditary right, while the breakdown in the client-protector system meant that many Kurdish tribes simply began to pillage, kidnap and rape on a much greater scale than hitherto. From mid-century, the Armenian population also suffered as its lands were appropriated in little more than legalised theft by sedentarising nomads,

¹²¹ Donald Bloxham, "Terrorism and Imperial Decline: The Ottoman-Armenian Case," *European Review of History* 14:3 (2007): 302-3.

and also allocated to Muslim refugees fleeing Russian rule from the late 1850s and from the new Balkan states thereafter. These muhacir brought into Anatolia both competition for resources and a considerable residue of bitterness regarding the treatment they had received at the hands of Christian regimes, bitterness that they often took out on indigenous Christians.¹²²

The conditions among the majority of Armenians in the provinces were deplorable. In the opinion of Armenians largely in the European and Russian diasporas, political petition through the Armenian elite in Istanbul yielded little results. Alternate, more effective forms of political representation were required to improve the standard of living among rural Ottoman Armenians.

Another crucial aspect of the lives of the subjects of *millet*s was the fact that military service was most often the exception rather than the rule. A tax was remitted that provided for a pardon from the obligation that remained the duty of Muslim subjects: army service. Further clarification is needed on this point, however, as this was not a fee to avoid military service, but rather a financial burden extracted from all non-Muslims as they, until the Tanzimat, had previously not been allowed to serve in the army. Christians, however, were content to continue paying the tax¹²³ and avoiding service as they could benefit from the traditional military service of Muslims. Muslims, in turn, welcomed Christian army service, only in that they could supervise it; Christian officers would have been a difficult development in the army.¹²⁴ Though an opportunity of equality as a result of the Tanzimat, this policy, like the other reforms of this era went largely ignored in practice: “In theory the equal right to serve in the armed forces remained, but in fact the whole matter was quietly buried, and the old exemption tax reappeared under a different name.”¹²⁵ The lack of implementation of this policy of equal service and the observance of a tradition of Muslim service, however, would benefit those in the *millet*s more than the empire’s Muslims: “This, together, with the removal of

¹²² Ibid., 303.

¹²³ Davison, “Turkish Attitudes,” 859.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

restrictions on land purchase and other forms of discrimination and oppression which had impeded them, put *rayas* in a very advantageous position to compete with Muslims.”¹²⁶ But feelings among Muslims in both the center and the periphery of the empire were changing in response to what they saw as a minority threat to their power and prosperity.

2. Continued Western Interference

Led by European economic leverage, the West continued to meddle in the empire’s affairs and this interference would eventually result in western dominance of the Ottoman economy in a gradual whittling away of sovereignty. The Ottoman Empire, particularly on the periphery, was susceptible to western incursion. Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt in 1798 was simply one instance of many in what became in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a pattern of continued European intrusiveness in the empire. Russia and Austria had absorbed lands in the east and west respectively, but these were lands in which Muslims constituted a minority.¹²⁷ Much more telling were Napoleon’s invasion; the occupation of Perim by the French in 1738 and again by the British in 1799; and the French incursion into Algeria in 1830.¹²⁸ The powerlessness of the Ottoman state to counter such imposition on its territory did not go unnoticed. Nor did the Greek revolt in the early nineteenth century. This is perhaps one of the most important developments of the period. It was only after Greek insurgents received backing from abroad that the revolt was successful and this served as an example for future European intervention in the empire on behalf of the empire’s minorities.¹²⁹

The continued interference of Britain and France in the empire resulted in several developments in the nineteenth century that saw the erosion of Ottoman sovereignty. Support for this claim is inherent in two important historical developments of this era: the allowance of British land ownership as a result of the Anglo-Ottoman Convention of Baltalimani (1838) and the Ottoman Public Debt Administration by France and Britain.

¹²⁶ Issawi, “Economic Position,” 276.

¹²⁷ Hanioglu, *Brief History*, 69.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

In 1838, the Ottoman Empire formalized a treaty that gave Great Britain a distinct trading advantage. Ease of export restrictions, competitive tariffs, and unrestricted purchases of Ottoman goods were outlined in the treaty.¹³⁰ The Porte, since abolishing monopolies in several sectors, hoped this more open economic policy would recoup revenue foregone as a result of the elimination of the monopolies and the diminution of tariffs.¹³¹ Previously, the Ottoman state taxed products according to the country of origin of the buyer.¹³² The effect, however, was negative throughout the economy: British imports enjoyed a 3 percent tax while Ottoman exports were charged up to 60 percent.¹³³ These practices also prompted other countries with trading interests in the Ottoman Empire to petition for and receive similar policies.

Having become more involved in the world economy, the Ottoman Empire advocated the elimination of the capitulations in an effort to be treated as equals in the international community.¹³⁴ Due to the further advantages garnered to the Great Powers in the capitulations, they refused. In dire need of funds following the Crimean War, the Ottoman Empire had little choice but to turn to Europe for loans that would commence a trend of debt: the Ottomans borrowed from Britain and France at rather high rates and when there was no money in the treasury to pay their creditors, borrowed heavily again to meet the interest payments.¹³⁵ European control of the Ottoman economy was an inevitable result. When the Ottoman Empire defaulted on its loans in 1876, the Ottoman Public Debt Administration was formed in 1881 that completed European domination of the Ottoman economy. As the European powers acted in their own interests, Ottoman economic development stagnated;¹³⁶ Ottoman dominion over their own state was all but gone.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 70.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Bloxham, *Great Game*, 35.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 36.

3. Continued Failure on the Battlefield

A pattern of Ottoman military defeat separated the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from previous centuries that were characterized by the empire's military successes and expansion. Several factors contributed to military failure in the late empire. European states gained the advantage over Ottoman forces due to a combination of factors that included improved weapons technology, wealth from the New World, and improvements in defenses (where previously the Ottomans had an offensive advantage over weaker defenses).¹³⁷

In the eighteenth century, several conflicts deserve note. The Russians emerged in the late seventeenth century and would be a constant source of enmity and war in the centuries that followed. From 1677 to 1878, the Ottomans fought their Russian foes nine times, as well as opposing the Russians in the Crimean War and World War I.¹³⁸ In Zenta in 1697, after conflict with the Hapsburgs, the empire suffered its first defeat that resulted in the forfeiture of Ottoman territory (Hungary, Transylvania, and Dalmatia), when previously simply removing Ottoman troops were an adequate concession in defeat.¹³⁹ This pattern of territorial loss in military defeat continued: the Treaty of Passarowitz in 1718 (some Serbian lands and Wallachia); the Treaty of of Kucuk Kaynarca in 1774 (vast portions of the Black Sea shoreline); and the Treaty of Jassy in 1792 (Georgia).¹⁴⁰ The Ottoman – Russo War of 1877-8 was perhaps the most critical for Armenians with its resultant Treaty of San Stefano and subsequent Treaty of Berlin, and will be discussed later in this study in an Armenian historical context.

While there occurred some Ottoman victories in the early to mid-eighteenth century, the 1700s were most notable for the losses sustained by the Ottoman Empire that culminated in a serious threat to Ottoman sovereignty with the invasion of Egypt by

¹³⁷ Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 37.

¹³⁸ Robert Cowley and Geoffrey Parker, ed. *The Reader's Companion to Military History* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 408–9.

¹³⁹ Quataert, *Ottoman Empire*, 38.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

Napoleon in 1798. Territorial losses were also sustained on the periphery to state challengers from within. The losses sustained in the nineteenth century, however, belied internal dissent in the form of rebellion with the goal of secession, when previously such efforts were to simply change imperial policies.¹⁴¹ This change is illustrated by the Serbian rebellion in 1804¹⁴² and the Greek rebellion in 1821-30.¹⁴³ But perhaps the greatest challenge to the Ottoman state was how those outside the state came to view this pattern of defeat: “With truly fateful consequences, some inhabitants of both western Europe and the partitioned lands falsely concluded that military strength/weakness implied cultural, moral, and religious strength/weakness.”¹⁴⁴ Significant losses in territory, a record of military defeat, and perceptions of inferiority as a result, all contributed to the challenges the empire faced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

D. CONCLUSION

In describing life within the Armenian *millet* under Ottoman rule and the associated social rifts among the Armenians themselves, one begins to see the conditions that led to the establishment of Armenian political parties as well as those among the population that would fill their ranks. Such parties were founded in response to the need to address deplorable conditions among the majority of Armenians living in the provinces under persecution at the hands of Muslims whose entrenched local authority undermined Tanzimat reforms in the nineteenth century. Making a bad situation even worse for the Armenians was the status those among them in Istanbul enjoyed as a result of a *berat*, favorable practices under the capitulations, or wealth and skill on which the Porte could rely. Under Great Power protection, one could become an Englishman or Austrian and enjoy the status of citizenship under the laws of those countries. Improvement in the lives of Armenians due to Great Power policies within the empire brought the ire of Ottoman Muslims.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 57.

¹⁴² Ibid., 55.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 57.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 59.

Together with mandates that promulgated non-Muslims be treated equally, it may be said that the reforms attempted in the nineteenth century served to hurt those whom they were intended to help the most. The *millet* system eventually served the purposes of several religious minority communities within the Ottoman Empire by solidifying a sense of community along religious then ethnic divides providing a readily identifiable “nation” within the empire with whom the Great Powers could ally and use to their own end against the Ottomans.

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III. THE EMERGENCE OF ARMENIAN REVOLUTIONARIES IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

A. ARMENIANS IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE: THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY TO THE TANZIMAT

The purpose of this chapter is to review the manner in which Armenian revolutionaries emerged in response to social conditions that were a result of Ottoman reforms. Before proceeding to a description of these groups, their ideologies, and programs, it is first necessary to review what life was like in the Armenian *millet* with special attention paid to the conditions as they continued to depreciate among Ottoman Armenians as a result of Hamidian reforms. As state and social forces intensified and varied the methods by which they persecuted Armenians, the development of the Armenian revolutionary movement can then be understood in the context of a population under siege in their fatherland.

1. 1453 to 1839

There is, perhaps, no better description of the Ottoman Empire in the fifteenth century than that of Karen Barkey: “The empire that was built after 1453 became a robust, flexible, and adaptive political entity where a patrimonial center, a strong army, and a dependent and assimilated state elite interconnected with many diverse and multilingual populations ensconced in their ecological and territorial niches.”¹⁴⁵ Indeed, the challenge for the Ottoman Empire in acquiring new lands and peoples was that these new subjects had to be administered in a manner that asserted the authority of the central government, benefitted the empire in some way, and diminished the prospects of rebellion and secession. The Armenians were to be among these new and diverse conquered peoples that posed such challenges to the Ottoman government.

The Turkomans, specifically the Ak-Koyunli and Kara-Koyunli tribes after Tamerlane died in 1405, ruled the Armenians until they were replaced in 1514 by

¹⁴⁵ Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 67.

Ottoman Turks led by Sultan Selim I.¹⁴⁶ It was then that Armenia was absorbed into the Ottoman Empire. This early period under Ottoman rule saw Armenians caught in the midst of land grabs among raiding tribes, especially Turkomans, as well as conflict between empires, the Ottomans and Safavids in particular.¹⁴⁷ Transplantation also contributed to the dispersal of the Armenian population: Persians relocated significant numbers of Armenians from Ararat to Persia in the vicinity of Isfahan in 1605 during a period of Turkish-Persian fighting.¹⁴⁸ Thus, when a truce was called and borders redrawn, there remained a portion of the Armenian population within the borders of the Persian Empire:

The smaller area of Armenia, which included the Holy City of Etchmiadzin, went to the Shah and was known as Persian Armenia. Amid continuing invasions, large numbers of the population, especially among the aristocracy, left the country, and Armenian history flowed into two channels: the homeland and the Diaspora. The place of the original population was gradually filled by Turks, Kurds, and Turcoman tribesmen who abused and exploited the native Armenians.¹⁴⁹

Another portion of the Armenian population would later fall within Russian borders in the early nineteenth century with the Russian conquest of Transcaucasia. The treaty agreed upon by the two empires after the Russo-Persian War of 1826–1828 established that two Armenian provinces, Nakhichevan and Erivan, would be annexed by Russia.¹⁵⁰ By the early nineteenth century, the Armenian population consisted of the majority in Ottoman Armenia as well as a significant diaspora divided amongst the Persian and Russian Empires. In the Ottoman Empire, which still contained the majority of the Armenian population and was affectionately referred to as the fatherland, most

¹⁴⁶ Nalbandian, *Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 17.

¹⁴⁷ Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, "Introduction," in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, ed. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982), 21.

¹⁴⁸ Nalbandian, *Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 17.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

Armenians lived in one of six provinces that made up the region known as Ottoman Armenia: Van, Bitlis, Erzerum, Diarbekiar, Sivas and Kharput.¹⁵¹

One of the most important developments in the history of the Armenian people was the Armenian reawakening that occurred from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. This renaissance was the result of the arrival of standardized printing in the 1500s; missionary education in the 1600s; an Armenian literary revival in the 1700s; and the renovation of the Armenian language and evolution of an Armenian intelligentsia in the 1800s.¹⁵² Much of this renaissance originated beyond Ottoman borders and was spurred by the Mekhitarist Fathers, whose break with the Armenian church in favor of a more Catholic oriented order led to their exile.¹⁵³ Nonetheless, their contribution was instrumental: “The Mekhitarist Fathers revived the Armenian language, cultivated Armenian literature, spread Western ideas through translations, established scholarly and popular journals, instituted a network of schools, and laid the foundation of modern Armenian historiography.”¹⁵⁴ The influence of this movement on the development of revolutionaries among Armenians was instrumental.

The average Armenian within the Ottoman Empire, however, was not aware of such developments and instead was struggling to simply survive amidst war and insecurity. While they became the objects of the independence and, later, nationalist movements of those in the Armenian diaspora, they remained socially and economically separate and poor: “...the bulk of the Armenian population remained as they had been for centuries, peasants in Anatolia.”¹⁵⁵ And yet, the suffering of this people would continue. Indeed, it would intensify.

Several important factors may be gleaned from the Armenian history of this period. Firstly, wars geographically divided the Armenian population between the

¹⁵¹ Nalbandian, *Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 25.

¹⁵² Harry Jewell Sarkiss, “The Armenian Renaissance, 1500–1863,” *The Journal of Modern History* 9, no. 4 (1937): 433–34.

¹⁵³ Braude and Lewis, “Introduction,” 21.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Ottoman, Persian, and Russian Empires. Secondly, this division created a homeland within the Ottoman empire and a diaspora without. Thirdly, the Armenian reawakening that started in the sixteenth century directly influenced the revolutionaries of the nineteenth century. Fourth, and most importantly, the Armenian peasants that remained in the Ottoman Empire were the most innocent yet suffered the most at the hands of others. Many times, they were casualties on the fringe, caught in the crossfire in wars among states and between ethnic groups within the empire. This, unfortunately, would be a pattern that would repeat in modern Armenian history, culminating in genocide in 1915.

2. The End of the Millet System

The social history of Ottoman Armenians largely centers on the *millet* system. It is important to first understand how this system worked with the empire's religious minorities in general in order to grasp the meaning of its dissolution on the empire's Armenian population in the greater context of nineteenth century Ottoman reform. As the empire moved from a religious based system of rule to administration based on more secular ideologies, perceptions of and amongst its minorities changed in drastic and often unforeseen ways.

The Ottomans divided their non-Muslim subjects into *millets* according to religion. As the empire at the time of the conquest of Istanbul in 1453 may be considered a theocracy,¹⁵⁶ the manner in which the rulers regarded non-Muslims allowed for the continued use of the system they found among the 'flock' in the capital in the mid-fifteenth century.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, though commonly regarded as such, Abu Jaber¹⁵⁸ represents one side of a debate on early considerations of *millets*: the system was not in fact an Ottoman invention, but simply an effective system already established that the new rulers could continue to use as an efficient administrative structure.¹⁵⁹ The other extreme in this

¹⁵⁶ Abu Jaber, "The Millet System," 213. By "theocracy," it is meant that the Ottomans ruled as a Muslim religious majority and their rule of law was sharia. Few, if any, institutions were in existence at this time that might allow the term to be applied in its modern connotation.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 212.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

discussion is that presented by Benjamin Braude who insists on a more gradual introduction of such a system: “First, the Ottomans had no consistent policy toward non-Muslims in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and perhaps later as well. Second, as administrative policy slowly began to emerge over the centuries it was accompanied by mythmaking which created justifications for new policies by attributing them to the past.”¹⁶⁰ For the sake of this study, the term “*millet* system” will be used to describe the various policies and administrative practices the Ottoman Empire used to rule its non-Muslim religious minorities; they were regarded, and thus ruled, quite differently than Muslims.

Mehmet II and his Muslim warriors comprised the heart of the state and had little time to administer the periphery; religious leadership among each group was responsible for seeing to the religious and cultural needs of their people. Tolerance of its religious minorities was a policy that allowed their survival within the empire in their respective *millets*, and recognized unique skills and contacts on which the empire relied. It was realized by the Sultan that these minority peoples were necessary for the prosperity and growth of the empire despite being non-Muslim. While they conquered, they exploited “...the trading and other skills of the minority groups over which they ruled.”¹⁶¹ Furthermore, they were able to both gain new territory and subjects, as well as take advantage of the revenue extraction methods already in place within each community.¹⁶² Ottoman interests were in expansion and prosperity, not in the welfare of its non-Muslim subjects: “...the Ottomans in the early modern period were not engaged in any kind of nation-building project but in an imperial-state-building effort that sought at one and the same time to maintain the distinctions of hierarchy between rulers and ruled, Muslim and non-Muslim, without integrating a disparate society into a single, homogeneous

¹⁶⁰ Benjamin Braude, “Foundation Myths of the Millet System,” in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, ed. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982), 83.

¹⁶¹ Abu Jaber, “Millet System,” 213.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

whole.”¹⁶³ Thus, the non-Muslims of the empire were tolerated as “People of the Book,” but never considered equal and discrimination at the hands of Muslims was often the norm.¹⁶⁴ Indeed, several examples provide a bleak picture of life as a non-Muslim under Ottoman imperial rule: owning weapons was outlawed; only jobs Muslims considered beneath them were available to non-Muslims; and public prostration in the presence of Muslims was expected of non-Muslims.¹⁶⁵

The typical leadership in a *millet* consisted of a religious patriarch as the figurehead of the community under whom a council carried out the daily affairs of the subjects.¹⁶⁶ The leader of the *millet* was often an elected official and was the face of his community for the Sultan: “Throughout Ottoman history each *millet* organized itself separately and had to receive formal recognition from the Sublime Ports. The head of each *millet* was the representative of that *millet* at the Ottoman court as though representing a foreign power. The head of each separate *millet* administered to its affairs on behalf of the Sultan.”¹⁶⁷ The duties of the *millet* leader were many. Sharia could only be administered on behalf of an Ottoman Muslim subject and so the *millet* established its own laws for its own religious.¹⁶⁸ The collection of taxes and their remittance to the Sultan was another responsibility of the head of the *millet*, as was keeping his people in line and in order.¹⁶⁹ For Armenians, leadership was embodied in the patriarch of the Armenian Apostolic Church.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶³ Ronald Grigor Suny, “Empire and Nation: Armenians, Turks and the End of the Empire,” *Armenian Forum* 1:2 (1998): 25.

¹⁶⁴ Abu Jaber, “Millet System,” 213.

¹⁶⁵ Suny, “Empire and Nation,” 26.

¹⁶⁶ Abu Jaber, “Millet System,” 215

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 214.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 216.

¹⁷⁰ Gerard J. Libaridian, “What Was Revolutionary about Armenian Revolutionary Parties in the Ottoman Empire?” in *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny, et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 86.

Though he enjoyed the favor of the Porte and auspicious status by the court, his influence among Ottoman state leadership eventually diminished to strictly religious affairs. Of particular concern for Armenians in the second half of the nineteenth century, was the deplorable economic conditions within the provinces. In a telling historical example of the restrictions of the office of the patriarch, Archbishop Khrimian, in attempting to work with the court to address such conditions, resigned in frustration after “the Porte made it clear that such concerns were not within the mandate of the patriarchate or the structures in its control.”¹⁷¹ Such frustration was consistent with the aims of the state, however, as the *millet* system had only ever been intended to provide for the religious and cultural needs of its people, and not a sponsorship for participation in Ottoman politics.¹⁷² Though largely excluded from the Ottoman political process, there remained in the center of the empire those whose skill and wealth seemingly transcended religious cleavages and garnered an urban elite from various religious minorities that enjoyed the favor and influence of the Porte. It was thus along class lines that the internal divides of the Armenian *millet* were observed.

Armenians within the *millet* constituted two groups: an urban elite and a provincial peasantry. The *amira* were the affluent Armenians who enjoyed significant privilege with the Sultan and his court.¹⁷³ Members of this wealthy class served the state in many ways. Many *amira* were *sarrafs* who guaranteed the payments of those bidding on the right to collect taxes within the *iltizam* and in turn received a commission for this role.¹⁷⁴ Several positions within the imperial mint were held by *amira*, including the *darphane*,¹⁷⁵ and prominent bankers added to the *amira* ranks. Other official positions were dynastic in nature, as was the case with the Dadians and imperial ordnance

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid., 87.

¹⁷³ Hagop Barsoumian, “The Dual Role of the Armenian *Amira* Class within the Ottoman Government and the Armenian *Millet* (1750–1850),” in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, ed. Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982), 171.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 172.

¹⁷⁵ Superintendent of the mint. See Barsoumian, “Dual Role,” 173.

manufacturing, as well as the Balian and the position of “chief architect”.¹⁷⁶ Despite their favor with the sultan, the power this class had with the Porte was negligible.¹⁷⁷ Within their *millet*, however, they wielded immense power to include the real power behind the patriarchate.¹⁷⁸ In certain instances, the *amira* would work against the other Armenians within their own *millet*, maintaining passivity in the face of exploitive Ottoman policy as it served their efforts at self-preservation.¹⁷⁹ Active intervention with the Ottoman administrators often did not bode well for Armenians outside the *amira* class, “When social tensions between the rich and the not-so-rich tore at the fabric of the Armenian community and threatened the peace of the Ottoman capital, the sultan responded to the pleas of leading Armenians and reluctantly granted a ‘constitution’ to regulate the Armenian *millet*.”¹⁸⁰ There is little doubt which class of Armenians the terms of the document favored.

Differences within the Armenian *millet* were related to the manner in which the various groups responded to Ottoman policies. As described, the *amira* were considered by the Porte and many among the Ottoman elite in Istanbul to be the leaders of all Armenian Orthodox subjects. But, as they often acted on their own behalf with the near-sightedness of an urban elite, they often overlooked or simply ignored those Armenians on the periphery. Libaridian distinguishes between the two groups of Armenians within the *millet* in considering the origins of Armenian revolutionary politics: *azgasers*, Armenian urban elites concerned with the maintenance of the status quo, and *hayrenasers*, those Armenians outside the center who were concerned with the negative effects of Ottoman policies:

Until their [Armenian “revolutionary” parties] founding, the tensions within the Armenian millet of the Ottoman Empire had been articulated as a conflict between *azgaser* (nation or community lover) and *hayrenaser*

¹⁷⁶ Barsoumian, “Dual Role,” 173–4.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 176.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹⁸⁰ Suny, “Empire and Nation,” 30.

(fatherland lover or patriot), loosely corresponding to the Armenians of the urban centers who controlled the millet institutions and the poor Armenians in the provinces. *Azgasers* were content with the amenities provided by the millet system, and their identity was defined mainly by religion, on which the millet system itself was based...a *hayrenaser's* main concern was the worsening situation of Armenians in the provinces.”¹⁸¹

This political divide directly stems from the manner in which each group viewed the *millet* as a political vehicle. To put in terms of the modern political spectrum, the *azgasers* may be considered a conservative group and the *hayrenasers* subscribed to a more liberal political outlook.¹⁸² The former viewed any attempts by Armenians to petition the Porte as undermining not only their status but the *millet* system itself, while the latter group saw the same system as precisely the means by which to do this.¹⁸³ In recognizing and emphasizing these social differences, the roots of an Armenian ‘nationalist’ movement were born, and the shift from self-identification as a religious community was underway toward one of a more secular, nationalistic people.¹⁸⁴

As the *millets* became more secular in aspects of governance, the authority of the patriarch that was once unconditional was now shared among a body of democratically elected lay members.¹⁸⁵ These representatives made public the manner in which they would govern and let the patriarch know they would resign from the sultan-mandated governing body.¹⁸⁶ The days of absolute religious rule were over and a more democratic, secular means of governance was taking hold. The Armenian *millet* was able to implement its own constitution in 1863, “providing for lay control of an elected assembly as the keystone of its *millet* government.”¹⁸⁷ The other *millets* would follow suit, though

¹⁸¹ Libaridian, “Armenian Revolutionary Parties,” 94.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 94–5.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ Suny, “Empire and Nation,” 50.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 329.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 330.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

their documents were not as comprehensive in their reform.¹⁸⁸ Further influence is seen in Ottoman legislation: language such as that providing for the election of provincial representatives was similar to that in the 1864 Ottoman vilayet law, and even though it undoubtedly was influenced by other documents, the Ottoman constitution (1876) itself was influenced by that of the Armenian *millet*.¹⁸⁹ It is not a stretch to say that the Armenian *millet* was a significant influence on the Ottoman Empire:

When one considers the millet as a form of organization, a constitutional structure, one can find a continuous thread of influence in the nineteenth century from the Western example through millet organization to the Ottoman organization. The Western influences were Anglo-Saxon and French. The millet structure that best absorbed these was the Armenian.¹⁹⁰

It was the *millet* structure, particularly the Armenian *millet*, that brought much western influence to the Ottoman Empire and this influence can be seen as reaching into the highest levels of government.

B. BIRTH OF A REVOLUTION

The Armenian national movement sprung from revolutionary groups in Ottoman and Russian Armenia as a result of worsening conditions in the Ottoman Armenian provinces due to Hamidian policies and the hope that the Great Powers, especially in Europe, through the activities of these parties, would sympathize and intervene with the Ottoman government on the revolutionaries' behalf. Hamidian policies that served to decimate the Ottoman Armenian population were: the establishment and subsequent employment of the Hamidiye; the implementation of a Pan-Islamist ideology; and the resettlement of Muslim populations that amounted to the redistribution of land from Armenians to these immigrants.

The character of the parties themselves also reveals several challenges they faced in garnering support from within the Armenian diaspora. Geographic, social, and

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 329.

ideological divides among the numerous Armenian revolutionary groups led to a movement whose inability to ultimately unite left them politically impotent both among themselves and with the European patrons whose assistance they so desperately sought. Of the three strongest Armenian political parties at the end of the nineteenth century, only the Armenakans were formed in Ottoman Armenia; the Hunchaks and Dashnaks were established in Russian Armenia from members of the Russian bourgeoisie whose sympathy with the Ottoman Armenian cause prompted their activism. Socially, they were members of a relatively wealthy, urban middle class attempting to help a disenfranchised peasantry in the rural provinces of Ottoman Armenia. There further existed ideological divides that could not be reconciled, specifically concerning the role of socialism within the movement. Lastly, besides the Armenakans, Hunchaks, and Dashnaks, there were myriad other groups, some existing as secret societies and some posing as legitimate organizations, whose interests lay in Armenian autonomy within the Ottoman, Russian, and Persian states, but whose cooperation as part of a larger movement was precarious at best.

The majority of Armenian political activity was carried out by the Hunchaks and the Dashnaks and the groups employed different methods to achieve their goals that varied from public petition and peaceful demonstration to violence and terrorism. In relating the historical narrative of the origins and founding of these parties, the factors that led these groups to abandon nonviolent approaches and adopt those of seditious agitation against Ottoman authorities become clearer. As conditions became quite literally a question of life and death on a daily basis for many rural Armenians, some among the Armenian population became aware of the need for violence as a demonstrative tool that would bring attention to the cause; provide a means of enlisting support of stronger allies; and offer a means of countering policies instituted by the Hamidian administration under whose charge much Armenian suffering was occurring.

C. THE NEED FOR REVOLUTION

Conditions within the provinces in Ottoman Armenia were dire when Abdulhamid II took the throne, and they continued to worsen under his reign. The promotion of Pan-Islamism, the formation of the Hamidiye, eviction from an ancestral land, and the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877 all contributed to a quality of life that was lacking in virtually every aspect of human dignity for Ottoman Armenians. The question of using arms among those in the provinces began as one of self-defense; among those in the Russian diaspora, it was an issue of revolution toward Ottoman Armenian autonomy.

1. Hamidian Reform

In an ideological shift from the Ottomanism of the Tanzimat to Pan-Islamism, Sultan Abdulhamid II succeeded in altering the secular nature of the failed reforms of his predecessors, in effect subjecting Armenian Christians to a persecution worse than any under the *millet* system. His establishment of the Hamidiye as a means of policing the Armenian provinces (an endeavor from which they profited immensely) sponsored the exploitation and wonton destruction of one of the empire's oldest minority populations. Further contributing to the deterioration of conditions for Ottoman Armenians was the practice of resettling Muslims among Armenians, and on traditionally Armenian land. In describing these circumstances, one sees how very desperate the situation was for the Ottoman Armenians at the end of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century.

a. *Hamidian Pan-Islamism*

Dashing the hopes of all Armenians for equality under an Ottoman constitution, Abdulhamid II abrogated the Ottoman constitution a few months after ascending to the Sultanate in 1876. His rule was absolute and he succeeded in effectively rendering the Sublime Porte to a mere administrative function while surrounding himself with devoted officials whose incompetence was often overlooked in favor of their loyalty. His intent with the implementation of Pan-Islamism was two-fold: he wanted to reimage the Muslim population as the core of the Ottoman Empire and “a polyethnic

brotherhood of Muslims,” while simultaneously fostering resentment among the European powers as “protector” of their Muslim populations.¹⁹¹ With the Ottoman Empire significantly militarily inferior to the Europeans, his proclamation as the head of a transnational Sunni Islamic movement was an attempt to prey on the Islamist apprehensions of Europeans and, it was hoped, to check the influence of the Great Powers.¹⁹²

In doing this, however, Abdulhamid II effectively re-instituted a system wherein non-Muslims became once again oppressed minorities. By politicizing his Muslim subjects under the banner of Islamism, equality was effectively abandoned and the formal notions of Muslim superiority over subordinate religious minorities was re-established.¹⁹³ The tides were changing in the predominantly Armenian Anatolian provinces. Due to the concession of vast swaths of land as a result of the Russo-Turkish wars of 1877-8, the ethnic composition of the region had shifted in favor of Muslims.¹⁹⁴ The efforts of the Ottoman government in implementing its new ideology were thusly centered on Anatolia.¹⁹⁵ These efforts, however, were not without their own Muslim detractors, especially among non-Sunnis.

The question of what to do with non-Sunni Muslims was dealt with rather bluntly; forced conversions were common, sometimes aimed at entire groups. The Alevis, for instance, were targeted in this manner: “Groups such as the heterodox Alevis, many of whom were ethnically Kurdish, were subject to an orchestrated attempt to subsume them within the Sunni community.”¹⁹⁶ The new Pan-Islamism, it was hoped, would

¹⁹¹ Hanioglu, *Brief History*, 130.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ Bloxham, *Great Game*, 46.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

placate differences among the Kurds¹⁹⁷ and Abdulhamid II also provided opportunity for benefitting from the new ideology to Kurdish leaders. One such opportunity was inclusion in the Hamidiye.

b. Russo – Ottoman War (1877–8)

The Russo-Ottoman War that occurred in 1877–8 was the result of Ottoman conflict with Serbian and Montenegrin forces in Bulgaria in 1876 that resulted in Ottoman victory.¹⁹⁸ Russia declared war in 1877 and invaded the Ottoman Empire reaching as far as Edirne in the west and up to Erzurum in the east with unremarkable Ottoman resistance except for a stand at Plevna.¹⁹⁹ An agreement was reached in 1878 in the form of the Treaty of San Stefano which contained details that either granted Russia large swaths of Balkan lands or made them independent. The European Great Powers, however, saw this as an attempt by Russia to essentially control either directly or indirectly a large portion of the Ottoman Empire, which was precisely what it was.

In order to stave off Russian dominance in the Balkans, the European Great Powers, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire met and reached a revised agreement, the Treaty of Berlin (1878). The treaty split Bulgaria with half under Ottoman rule and half becoming an independent state. Ottoman Bulgaria, however, along with Bosnia and Herzegovina were Ottoman still but essentially autonomous. Russia gained important provinces from the Ottomans in the Caucasus. But of particular importance for Armenians was article 61 of the treaty which stated:

The Sublime Porte undertakes to carry out, without further delay, the improvements and reforms demanded by local requirements in the provinces inhabited by Armenian, and to guarantee their security against

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire 1300–1923* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 484.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 485.

the Circassians and Kurds. The Sublime Porte will, periodically, make known the steps taken to this effect to the Powers, who will superintend their application.²⁰⁰

Armenians immediately celebrated its ratification. But such improvements in security were not forthcoming and Abdulhamid II used his clever diplomatic skills to appease Great Power oversight while doing nothing to enhance Armenian quality of life.

c. Hamidiye

The Hamidiye, officially the Hamidiye Light Cavalry (*Hamidiye Hafif Suvari Alaylari*) was a Kurdish paramilitary unit established by Abdulhamid II in 1890. It is important for its ethnicity, Kurdish; its religious affiliation, Muslim; and the land in which it operated, the Ottoman Russian front. As previously mentioned, settling differences among Kurds and uniting them under the banner of Islam was a priority for the sultan. Another important reason for forming this regiment was to ensure they remained an asset loyal to the Ottoman Empire: “These aims were to be accomplished through the arming and pampering of select Kurdish tribes, particularly their chiefs, who would now find it in their advantage to turn down any offers to work for ‘the other side,’ which the central Ottoman government saw as a distinct threat.”²⁰¹ To control the population in these provinces, one had to control the local leaders whose authority mattered to the people living in the region.²⁰² In forming this cavalry of some 30,000 troops, the sultan would be able to exert Istanbul’s influence in an area that was “among the most difficult for the Ottomans to control.”²⁰³ Control was necessary due to the geostrategic implications of this land, then under the responsibility of the Ottoman 4th Army: “...this land was mostly important for strategic reasons as the buffer between its own dominions and the powerful empires to the east. It was the land that became the front line for many of the Ottomans’ wars with their eastern neighbors and the land over

²⁰⁰ As reprinted in Papazian, *Patriotism Perverted*, 74.

²⁰¹ Janet Klein, “Power in the Periphery: The Hamidiye Light Cavalry and the Struggle Over Ottoman Kurdistan, 1890–1914” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2002), 6.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

which many of the battles were fought.”²⁰⁴ With its lands constantly coveted by enemies both within and outside its borders, the Ottoman government could ill afford to lose this territory. The Hamidiye, the Sultan hoped, would help provide security for the state in this land, or so its official mission related.²⁰⁵

Other reasons for this cavalry included security from internal threats as well. The Kurds themselves, as previously mentioned, as well as the Armenians, were particular instigators of unrest in the eyes of the Ottoman government and this dissention could not be tolerated in a region of the empire considered crucial to its territorial integrity. The sultan was less concerned about the land itself, only that it remain in the hands of those loyal to the Ottoman state. As Kurdish tribal leaders began seizing land, especially Armenian land, for their own use the Ottoman government could serve its own purposes of keeping Armenians in check and garnering the favor of provincial Kurds by simply doing nothing:

Although the central government did not initiate the process whereby powerful local notables began to appropriate peasant holdings for themselves, the state could certainly turn this development to its advantage by offering impunity of action to its supporters, here Hamidiye chiefs, to usurp the land of Armenian (and also Kurdish) peasants – land on which they could settle and become settled, and land from which the Armenian element, which was increasingly viewed with suspicion, would eventually be dispossessed.²⁰⁶

The direct effect of this militia on an already oppressed Armenian population was devastating and forced many to migrate elsewhere or suffer the consequences of facing a better armed, better trained, and better supported enemy.

d. Muhajir Settlement

Land ownership and settlement was further complicated with the arrival in Anatolia of thousands of Caucasian *muhajir*, or migrants, of the 1877-8 Russo-Turkish

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 4.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 5.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 7.

War.²⁰⁷ The concept of *surgun*, or exiling dissident populations, had not been uncommon and had been used by the Ottomans in the past as a means of altering demographics to better suit the empire's needs.²⁰⁸ Such migration became an opportunity to strengthen its hold on this peripheral region: "In eastern Anatolia, though the land was actually already under the suzerainty of Istanbul, *muhajir* settlement and behavior served as a means of consolidating Ottoman control over lands whose future disposition had been threatened in 1877-8. This was a process of internal colonization."²⁰⁹ Such control, however, came at a price paid ultimately by the Armenians whose land was being, in essence, stolen from them.

In time, such migratory practice became policy and the government was able to enhance the numbers of its loyal Muslim population in the region while tightening its grip on the Armenian population. It is important to consider the intent in the context of the numbers of people who were affected by this practice-cum-policy as well as the very negative effect it had on their daily well-being:

The government offered incentives for many of these [muhajir] to settle along rail routes, and the policy of settling muhajirs in Armenian areas appears to have become systematic, putting more pressure on the land and increasing Armenian insecurity of life and property. Between 1870 and 1910 some 100,000 Armenians emigrated and between 1890 and 1920 at least 741,000 hectares of Armenian property were illegally taken or confiscated by representatives of the state.²¹⁰

Such numbers affected the political agenda of both Armenians and the Ottoman government.

Government sponsored *muhajir* settlement had a profound effect on demographic considerations within the empire. As the Muslim population grew in areas that had previously been inhabited by an Armenian majority, there now was the return of Armenians to a minority status. The argument that Armenian secession based on majority

²⁰⁷ Bloxham, *Great Game*, 87.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

population, for instance, was no longer relevant.²¹¹ As more migrants arrived in Anatolia, the Ottoman government was able to establish new boundaries for its provinces based on the changing demographics of the area “to further the goal of artificially reducing local Armenian majorities which the *muhajir* influx was achieving in reality, as well as reinforcing its central control.”²¹² Caught between an oppressive regime in the center whose support bolstered Muslim-led persecution locally, the Armenian population was forced to respond by fighting, moving, or dying.

2. The Hope for Great Power Intervention

Time and again Armenians attempted to gain the support of the Great Powers. The support Europe and Russia was willing to give, however, remained primarily of a moral nature; materiel and troops were not forthcoming, as the Armenian Question resulted in oral condemnation and diplomatic censure which the Great Powers could afford but not in concrete military assistance which their interests could not.

a. Abdulhamid II and the Great Powers

Abdulhamid II was a master at making promises to appease insistence by Europe and Russia that he institute reform for the welfare of his subjects while simultaneously breaking these pledges by doing nothing. In effect, he played the interests of one against the others:

Ottoman leverage over the other Great Powers lay in exploiting their common fear of a disruption of the balance of power in Europe as a result of any one power gaining control or influence over the Ottoman territories. Accordingly, the sultan sought to stave off the threats toward Ottoman territorial integrity and pressures for administrative reforms in favor of particular ethno-religious groups by playing off one Great Power against the other-without, however, committing the empire to an alliance with any one power or alignment of powers.”²¹³

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Hanioglu, *Brief History*, 129.

His ability to manipulate the Great Powers and hold them at bay with what they wanted to hear, allowed Abdulhamid II to implement horrors among Armenians in the name of Pan-Islamism.

b. Armenians and the Great Powers

In stark contrast to Ottoman foreign policy, Armenians, particularly those in the nascent political parties, hoped above all else for Great Power intervention with the sultan on their behalf. Some Armenian political support came from Europe: the Hunchaks, for instance, maintained central headquarters in Geneva.²¹⁴ In addition, both the Hunchaks and the Dashnaks received support from the Armenian diaspora and most of its leaders were Russian Armenians.²¹⁵ It is no wonder then, that their activity, sometimes terrorism, was directed at a European and Russian (later, simply European) audience whom they hoped to influence with their plight in order to bring about effective intervention on their behalf. This remained a cornerstone in the agenda of Hunchaks and Dashnaks throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries. Great Power support, however, never materialized. The role of Armenian revolutionaries in late Ottoman history still remains an important one and it is not insignificant that they were among the first revolutionaries in the Middle East to adopt terrorism as a tactic in attempting to create an autonomous Ottoman Armenia. In order to better understand the origins of the dynamics of political violence in this region, it is now appropriate to examine the origin and development of the Armenian Revolutionary Movement.

D. DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARMENIAN REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT

It had become clear to Armenians that the traditional leadership for Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, the Armenian Apostolic clergy, was not effective in dealing on their behalf with the Porte or wealthy Armenians in Istanbul (the *amira*). Social and economic conditions for provincial Armenians had, after all, worsened under the guidance of the

²¹⁴ Nalbandian, *Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 163.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*, 182.

church. Many Armenians, particularly those middle class and educated, living abroad in Russia and Europe, saw the need for something other than what stood for them in the capital and whose inability to effectively petition the Ottoman government on their behalf demanded a change in ideology, objectives, and tactics. More effective means of getting the attention not just of the Ottoman government, but of the Great Powers, was necessary and so their members believed secular revolutionary movements were required. The call to revolutionary methods was indicative of the political change of the day in Europe and Russia; secular ideologies were replacing religion in political expression and the impetus in thought behind the French Revolution, “liberte, egalite, fraternite,” had taken hold among populations within the Ottoman Empire.

It is thus necessary to examine specifically why Armenian revolutionaries were established, what they hoped to accomplish and by what means they hoped to accomplish it, and who comprised these groups. What follows is a brief survey of the most important political groups of the Armenian revolutionary movement. Included are the circumstances surrounding their establishment, their goals and the means by which they hoped to achieve them, and a review of their activity. Of specific importance here is the manner in which the strategic objective shifted from one of self-protection of a local population which would probably entail violence, to a broader aim of Armenian independence, to advocacy in some instances of outright terrorism. Having discussed most of the social conditions that promoted the rise of revolutionaries, it is now necessary to proceed to the cultural and political circumstances surrounding their formation.

1. Inspiration

Until the Ottoman government began imposing secularist ideologies in the mid-nineteenth century, the Armenian Apostolic Church, administered by the ordained and uninitiated alike, saw it as its responsibility to maintain the historical, cultural, and linguistic aspects of a long and rich Armenian legacy.²¹⁶ The Armenian people were provided with a cultural well, so to speak, from which to draw motivation: “From the

²¹⁶ Nalbandian, *Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 30–1.

church the people derived not only spiritual and moral strength but the inspiration for literary and artistic expression.”²¹⁷ This made sense under the *millet* system where the church remained the bastion of authority on most aspects of life for the Armenians.

It is important to note the different ways in which both the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Armenian Catholic Church influenced two groups: the Ottoman Armenian peasantry and the Armenian revolutionaries. Regarding the former, the Armenian Apostolic Church had historically incorporated lay and clergy alike in its direction.²¹⁸ It also served a critical function as the primary Armenian political organization until the nineteenth century and served as a unifying entity among the Armenian diaspora.²¹⁹ Finally, as evidenced by its central role in sparking an Armenian cultural “awakening” in the eighteenth century, the Armenian Catholic Church, specifically, its Mekhitharist offshoot, was largely responsible for shaping an early Armenian national conscience on which future revolutionaries would promote their goals.²²⁰

The revolutionaries, however, maintained an icy relationship with religious organizations, the Armenian Apostolic Church in particular, into the twentieth century.²²¹ This hostility culminated in what Papazian calls the “Open, Close” dispute in which the Dashnaks attempted on several occasions to use churches to conduct political meetings which church leaders fervently opposed.²²² Violence was not uncommon in these later (ca. 1906-1912) disputes until their resolution in 1912 with the Dashnaks ceding to the church’s wishes.²²³ But the revolutionaries derived inspiration, however indirectly, from those martyr-saints whose sacrifice was proliferated through church-sponsored education

²¹⁷ Ibid., 31.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 31.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid., 32–3.

²²¹ Papazian, *Patriotism Perverted*, 32.

²²² Ibid., 34–5.

²²³ Ibid., 36.

and served to inform the Armenian revolutionaries.²²⁴ The role of such sacrifice, argues Tololyan, “was not a minor aberration of political practice but rather part of a larger struggle for the right to lead the Armenian nation that developed in the nineteenth-century and has continued unabated since.”²²⁵ The church, however much revolutionaries might have denied it, contributed to the early Armenian political struggle by glorifying the sacrifice of its martyrs and thus indirectly legitimizing the use of terrorism.

When the church began to lose its authority during the Tanzimat, other sources of inspiration were sought. One area that provided such stimulus was the rapidly growing body of Armenian patriotic literature and its prolific authors. The earliest to write with revolutionary fervor was Khatchatur Abovian. Abovian drew his inspiration from his witness of war, his western education, and his political frustration. Having witnessed the decay of his Persian hometown as it was conquered by the Russians during the Russo-Persian War of 1826-1828, Abovian wrote about tyrannical abuse suffered by Armenians in the Erivan region.²²⁶ Having spent a significant amount of time studying in Eastern Europe, he returned to Tiflis where he met stiff resistance to the western concepts he attempted to spread.²²⁷ Frustrated to the point of depression, he disappeared under mysterious conditions having left a legacy that would serve to inspire those to revolutionary ways in his wake:

He inspired and influenced Russian Armenian writers, glorified the revolutionists, and tried to incite his downtrodden countrymen to act. His patriotic dedication set the groundwork and became the inspiration of the political parties of the nineteenth century. The new spirit of the age, as exemplified in Khatchatur Abovia in Russian Armenia, was to become evident in Turkish Armenia by the mid-century.²²⁸

²²⁴ Khachig Tololyan, “Martyrdom as Legitimacy: Terrorism, Religion and Symbolic Appropriation in the Armenian Diaspora,” in *Contemporary Research on Terrorism*, ed. by Paul Wilkinson and Alasdair M. Stewart (Great Britain: The Aberdeen University Press, 1987), 91.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 91–2.

²²⁶ Nalbandian, *Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 38.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

The others that followed Abovian were Mikael Nalbandian, Rafael Patkanian (“Kamar Katiba”) and Raffi (Hakob Melik-Hakobian). Nalbandian was a poet born in Russian Armenia and educated in Russia, but was able to develop his socialist and liberal ideals on trips to Ottoman Armenia and Europe.²²⁹ He advocated political liberation for all peoples²³⁰ and wrote of the Armenian struggle extensively, emphasizing a more radical approach: “In order that the Armenians might obtain political independence, he advocated that they take up arms against their oppressors rather than rely on nonviolent methods and a waiting policy.”²³¹ Patkanian was another poet educated in Russia, and who took to publishing extensively in various Armenian revolutionary journals, including *Hiusiss* which he founded in St. Petersburg.²³² His fiery works inspired nationalism in many Armenians: “This famous poet aroused in his readers a love of country and a deep desire to redeem their enslaved homeland.”²³³ Probably the most famous Armenian writer to influence the revolutionary movement was Raffi, whose writing “served as a guide for organized revolutionary action.”²³⁴ Born in Persia, he lived mostly in Russia and had not received extensive university education. He relied more on his travels to Ottoman Armenia and Persian Armenia as an informal education.²³⁵ Raffi advocated liberation through education, but more influential for future developments in the Armenian revolutionary movement was his prescient (if unheeded) outlook on the larger, international political landscape:

²²⁹ Ibid., 59.

²³⁰ Ibid., 60.

²³¹ Ibid., 61.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid., 62.

²³⁴ Ibid., 63.

²³⁵ Ibid., 63–4.

Raffi ... advocated unified, armed action against the regime in power. He also contended that the Armenians must rely on their own powers and that assistance from foreign countries could not be expected, since the latter had clearly proved that their actions were motivated solely by selfish interests.²³⁶

There are two important aspects of these authors and their works that deserve attention. The first is the fact that not only did they advocate revolutionary activity among Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, but that they advocated *armed* dissention.²³⁷ The second is that they were popular among their intended audiences and their influence was spread widely.

2. Self-Defense

Besides the Armenian literary movement of the nineteenth century, a great source of inspiration for the various groups that would later promote the use of arms as a means of self-defense against Kurdish aggression, were the uprisings in 1862-3 in Zeitun, Van, and Erzerum.

Within the Armenian provinces, the heart of the Ottoman Armenian resistance was Zeitun; Van and Erzerum were also places of substantial revolutionary activity.²³⁸ Zeitun had remained a place of revolutionary prominence in the hearts and minds of both Ottoman and Russian Armenians: "Since Zeitun still remained semi-independent, it was probably considered a suitable center for political agitation by the Armenian intellectuals of Istanbul and Russian Transcaucasia."²³⁹ It was in Zeitun, Van, and Erzerum that Armenians would clash in defense of their land and their lives.

a. Zeitun Rebellion, 1862

The Ottoman government realized the revolutionary potential of Zeitun and attempted to raise taxes and settle Muslim Tartars on Armenian lands in the

²³⁶ Ibid., 65.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid., 67.

²³⁹ Ibid., 69.

region.²⁴⁰ Ottoman fears, already heightened by years of Great Power intervention that chipped away at Ottoman sovereignty, boiled over into action against Zeitunlis because an attempt had been made by the Armenians to enlist Napoleon III and France to their cause against the Porte.²⁴¹ This led to the Zeitun rebellion of 1862 in which a smaller Armenian force held off a much larger Ottoman force that had been brought in by the Ottoman government on behalf of Ottoman locals who had skirmished with a nearby Armenian village.²⁴² The rebellion had been inspired by members of the Armenian middle class intelligentsia in Istanbul who belonged to the Benevolent Union, an organization dedicated to educational and agricultural improvements in the region of Cilicia and among the Armenian population.²⁴³ There is evidence in correspondence that the Benevolent Union had supplied Armenians in Zeitun with arms for the insurrection.²⁴⁴ The Zeitun rebellion of 1862 stands out as a significant development in the evolution of Armenian resistance at the time for two reasons. Firstly, it served to inspire other Armenians that challenging the Ottoman government under arms was a noble and necessary step toward autonomy. Secondly, it further demonstrated the effectiveness of cooperation among groups with similar, though not identical, revolutionary goals.

b. Van Uprising, 1862

The Van uprising of 1862 was significant, not only for its value in self-defense of the city's Armenian population, but also because of the fact that Armenians and Kurds formed an alliance of sorts that allowed them to fight together against Ottoman troops. Cooperation with Kurds was rare: "...Armenians were virtually 'the serfs of their ferocious neighbors.'"²⁴⁵ This rebellion actually occurred before the one at Zeitun, but "it

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 69–70.

²⁴² Ibid., 70.

²⁴³ Ibid., 71.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 72.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 79.

seems not to have had the same lasting impact on the discontented Armenian community.”²⁴⁶ Though it is significant for the fact that cooperation with Kurds was rare and that this cooperation existed at all meant that under certain conditions, exploitation at the hands of the Kurds was avoidable, especially in the context of a greater Ottoman evil.

The deeper meaning to be gleaned from this brief review of this uprising is despite significant enmity among minority groups such as the Armenians and Kurds, their resentment of repressive Ottoman policies could be considered even more important and lead to compromises. As already discussed, however, and what a later rebellion in Erzerum in 1863²⁴⁷ reveals, is that such compromise and cooperation were indeed rare. The series of uprisings in 1862 and 1863 in Zeitun, Van, and Erzerum, as well as the groups behind such resistance served to inspire nationalism among Armenians in Turkey. These uprisings further provided the case for future revolutionaries that their cause may be effective and that resistance to the Ottoman government was a worthy cause.

E. ARMENIAN REVOLUTIONARY GROUPS

1. Early Revolutionary Groups

a. Union of Salvation

Reform promised by the Ottoman government was never effectively observed in the provinces prompting the founding of the “first organized revolutionary society in Turkish Armenia”: the Union of Salvation founded in Van in 1872.²⁴⁸ In a significant contribution to the Armenian revolutionary movement and what was seen as subversion by the Ottoman government, this group later in 1872 contacted the Russian government in hopes of bringing a consul to Van.²⁴⁹ Such steps were deemed necessary, as repeated attempts after the uprisings in 1862 and 1863 to petition Ottoman officials were in vain. In Erzerum, for example, delegations had visited the Grand Vizier who told

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 78.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 80.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 81.

them they were welcome to emigrate as that's what they threatened if quality of life for Armenians in the province did not improve; in 1864, the Erzerum governor was petitioned for the same purpose with no success; in 1865, a delegation was sent to the Grand Vizier and was imprisoned before being told to return home; in 1867 complaints dismissed by the Grand Vizier who again suggested they leave the country if that was what they wanted.²⁵⁰ Such attempts at civilized petition of government officials was futile. The Union of Salvation was the precursor to what would be the first Armenian political party, the Armenakan party, founded in Van in 1885.²⁵¹

b. Secret Societies

It seems rather simple, but after seemingly endless petitions of the Porte that were ignored or indeed used against them, and with Great Power promises fading due to a lack of effective pressure on the Porte, “No recourse remained but to depend on their own resources and to resort to revolutionary activity.”²⁵² Given the very nature of revolutionary activity in an authoritarian state, Armenian revolutionary parties of the nineteenth century emerged as a result of secret societies whose purpose was largely to organize an Armenian self-defense posture.

Clearly, conditions within Ottoman Armenia were deteriorating as a result of Hamidian policies if populations in the cities and villages of the Armenian provinces felt they had to arm themselves en masse. It is even surmised that the formation of the Hamidiye was a direct result of Armenian revolutionary activity: “European observers agreed that the Hamidiye had been established in response to the development over the previous years of Armenian revolutionary and self-defence groups, and combating the parties and their actions would certainly form one of the areas of Hamidiye activity.”²⁵³ The skirmishes that occurred as a result of conflict between Armenians and government

²⁵⁰ For an in depth description of all attempts from 1863 to 1867 see *Ibid.*, 79.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 84.

²⁵³ Bloxham, *Great Game*, 47.

sponsored forces (including Kurds), however, would provide a means of motivation for the organization of later revolutionary groups.

Secret Armenian revolutionary societies, the Black Cross Society (*Sev Khatch Kazmakerputhiun*) for example, arose of a need to protect those Armenians who couldn't protect themselves in the context of a deteriorating security situation in which unarmed Armenians experienced significant "looting, violence, and extortion of tribute".²⁵⁴ Another secret revolutionary society, Protectors of the Fatherland (*Pashtpan Haireniats*), was formed in 1881 in Erzerum. "Its purpose was to arm the inhabitants for defense against any future attacks by Turks, Kurds, and Circassians."²⁵⁵ The constitution and bylaws of these organizations were memorized for added secrecy. The organization of these societies suited their need to remain clandestine and they remained decentralized and organized into small groups with a leader who was inducted, and who then became responsible for finding ten members; initiation remained such that much of the membership was kept secret but it is estimated membership reached into the hundreds²⁵⁶ and the Armenian Patriarch was eventually informed and approved of the Protectors.²⁵⁷ The means by which societies such as the Black Cross and the Protectors were forced to function reveals much about the authoritarian state in which they lived and government fears of insurrection.

Many in the Protectors were arrested following the discovery by Ottoman authorities of the revolutionary oath that had been printed with the intention of delivering it to potential donors in Russia.²⁵⁸ But the lingering effects of the group inspired pursuit of armed resistance: "It served to encourage the Armenians to an organized resistance against Ottoman oppression."²⁵⁹

²⁵⁴ Nalbandian, *Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 84.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 87.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 89.

However, there remained very deep divides among those Armenians who would take to the revolutionary cause. Indicative of the severe ideological, tactical, and personal differences that were to come, “A general Congress of Armenian groups in the Diaspora took place in June, 1886, but instead of bringing about cooperation among them, the meeting caused much dissention and a disruption of untied efforts.”²⁶⁰ Fragmentation would plague the Armenian revolutionary movement throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century.

2. The Armenakan Party

a. Founding Members

The Armenakan Party was founded by students of Mekertitch Portugalian and was greatly influenced by the revolutionary writings in his newspaper *Armenia* and his teachings at the Central Gymnasium in Van, which he had founded.²⁶¹ It was in the province of Van that they decided they would focus their activities and it was also in the city that their concerns about raids and injustice at the hands of Kurds led them to adopt arms (mostly smuggled from other parts of Turkey and Persia) as an appropriate means of protection.²⁶² Ter Minassian describes the group thusly: “The Armenakans were democratic and liberal patriots who had a clear perception of the economic and cultural underdevelopment of Asia Minor. But while they sought progress and ‘national freedom,’ they called for the use of violence and the arming of the Armenian peasantry for its own self-defense.”²⁶³

The Armenakans, then, were the only revolutionary group founded by Ottoman Armenians within the Ottoman Empire; later parties such as the Hunchaks and Dashnaks were the result of a “Caucasian intelligentsia”: “Like its homologue, the Russian intelligentsia, this social group was numerically very weak and it was defined in

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 95.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 94–6.

²⁶² Ibid., 100.

²⁶³ Ter Minassian, *Nationalism and Socialism*, 5.

relation to culture (Armenian, Russian, or Western) and revolutionary ideology.”²⁶⁴ Their significance lies in the fact that they took steps to arm Armenians for self-protection and that they were the first to do so.

b. Program

The *Program* of the party listed its intentions as Armenian autonomy by revolutionary means through uniting, directing, organizing, spreading ideas and examples, instilling military training and a spirit of self-preservation through arms; mobilizing and striking when the time was right.²⁶⁵ But there was some ambiguity regarding specific points within the program that would later have to be clarified. The first was the vague location of where exactly the revolutionary activity would be focused. The second was whether it was restricted to Ottoman Armenians, or if it also included Russian and Persian Armenians.²⁶⁶ Another concern was exactly when the revolution would take place. As there was extensive military, political, and cultural training to be carried out among the Armenian populations by the Armenakan party, the revolution would occur “some time in the future.”²⁶⁷

c. Revolutionary Activity

The revolutionary activity of the Armenakan party was limited. Nalbandian relates one incident in which some members of the party were traveling from Persia to the Ottoman Empire and skirmished with Ottoman border guards after refusing to disarm.²⁶⁸ Two Armenians were killed and revolutionary material found on their bodies served to heighten the Ottoman government’s fears of rebellion within its borders.²⁶⁹ Little else is recorded regarding Armenakan revolutionary activity, but what has been chronicled accounts some of the earliest acts of the Armenian revolutionaries:

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 6.

²⁶⁵ Nalbandian, *Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 97–8.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 99.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 101.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

Three of these acts of agitation are documented: (1) Avetisian with three other men made a surprise attack on a Kurdish gathering with the intention of killing the chieftain. They were unsuccessful in their objective, but the raid resulted in the killing of two other Kurds; (2) aggressive action – including assassinations – was taken against Turks and Kurds by the two Kurdish –speaking Armenakans, Tchato and Shero; and (3) the murder of Nouri Effendi, a police agent of Van, on October 16, 1892, is attributed to four Armenian revolutionaries, among whom were Armenakans.²⁷⁰

Though they did not have the clout or support to replace the church in speaking for Armenians,²⁷¹ the Armenakan party was still an important organization within the greater Armenian revolutionary struggle, if only as the first group willing to organize as a political party that would represent Armenians in the provinces through armed resistance.

3. Initial Ottoman Reaction to Armenian Revolutionaries

The reaction to revolutionaries within the Ottoman Empire was severe and when instances such as those described in the paragraph above occurred, the Ottoman government was very outspoken, direct, and all-inclusive in its retribution. By publicizing and condemning such acts, the Porte became more and more concerned and willing to take action against revolutionaries that soon extended to the greater Armenian population whom the Porte associated with these revolutionaries: “It became apparent that the Porte, as part of its plan for Islamic revival, had intentions of placing all Armenians – men, women, and children, both guilty and innocent – into a single category marked for extinction.”²⁷² It is estimated between 50,000 and 300,000 unarmed Armenians were the victims of state sponsored annihilation from 1894-1896.²⁷³

Action was taken, at least in one Armenian city - Van, to defend against impending massacre in June 1896. Groups of Armenian revolutionaries had organized a defense of the city as Ottoman troops advanced and shortly after their arrival, they

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Libaridian, “Armenian Revolutionary Parties,” 86.

²⁷² Nalbandian, *Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 102.

²⁷³ Ibid.

clashed with the Armenians. The revolutionaries, while saving much of the population from slaughter,²⁷⁴ were either killed or routed. The defense of Van and ensuing battles left the region with no revolutionaries; Ottoman forces, by attacking Van, had not only forced them out of hiding, but were able to fight a united revolutionary front.²⁷⁵

4. Hunchaks

a. *Who Were the Hunchaks?*

The Hunchaks were a socialist party founded by Marxists who were Russian Armenians and who never actually lived within the borders of the Ottoman Empire.²⁷⁶ Formed in Geneva Switzerland in 1887, “They were young persons, in their twenties, and were from well-to-do bourgeois families who were financially supporting them.”²⁷⁷

They also had been influenced by Portugalian and his journal *Armenia*²⁷⁸ as well as a European education, and their commitment to the grave situation in Ottoman Armenia and the need to do something about it was strong.²⁷⁹ When it became clear that Portugalian was not going to take immediate action, the students in Geneva saw the need to establish their own party separate from the Armenakans.²⁸⁰ They were thus instrumental in forming the Hunchakian Revolutionary Party. The organization of the party in Istanbul consisted of the Board of Directors which was responsible for the direction of all party activity in Ottoman territory.²⁸¹ While they had bases in the Ottoman Empire, they took their direction from general headquarters in Geneva.²⁸² The

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 103.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 102–3.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 104.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 105.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 106.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 107.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 123.

²⁸² Ibid.

Executive Committee carried out the direction of the Board but the two bodies never met; a Representative of the Two Committees acted as a conduit between them.²⁸³

There was significant Hunchak opposition among the Armenian population, specifically the Armenian bourgeoisie in Russia who contested the Hunchak program on anti-socialist grounds, as well as the Ottoman Armenian elite whose self-preservation was in opposition to the Hunchak program.²⁸⁴

The Hunchaks did gain the support of educated Armenians in Istanbul, however: “they were mainly persons who held positions in foreign consulates and maritime companies.”²⁸⁵ Opposition to Hunchak efforts was based on suspicions that Armenian blood was being traded for “a dubious political goal.”²⁸⁶ The party listed its goals in its program, which had been tailored to be much more specific than that of the Armenakan party.

b. The Hunchak Program

The near term goal was independence via revolutionary methods of the Ottoman Armenians; the long term goal was the establishment of a socialist state in its place.²⁸⁷ Hunchaks also listed injustices in the provinces that, as mentioned in chapter I, included unfair taxes, inequitable and insecure land rights, and a lack of effective political representation. A legislative body was to be popularly elected and no one would be prohibited from contesting an office. Further, it called for several other ‘modern’ rights: “Complete freedom of press, speech, conscience, assembly, organizations, and electoral agitation” as well as “The person and home of every individual was to be inviolable.”²⁸⁸

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 116–7.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 117.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 119.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 112.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 109.

The program was much more specific than that of the Armenakans. It specified the means by which the revolutions would be carried out: “Propaganda, Agitation, Terror, Organization, and Peasant and Worker Activities.”²⁸⁹ Propaganda would serve to educate revolutionaries; agitation and terror would instill confidence and fervor for the cause while eroding the Ottoman will; organization would be centralized; and the main revolutionary groups, the peasants and the workers, would not only provide most of the revolutionaries in the coming conflict, but also comprise the bulk of society and thus a responsible electorate.²⁹⁰ It further specified the time of the revolution stating it would occur “when Turkey was engaged in a war”.²⁹¹ It also advocated allying with Turks and Assyrians in a more effective anti-Ottoman campaign.²⁹² Lastly, it specified where their efforts were to be directed, Ottoman Armenia, due to the immediate concerns over conditions in the region.²⁹³

It was heavily, and understandably, influenced by recent Russian revolutionary efforts to include the means by which revolution would be carried out as well as the centralized character of the party.²⁹⁴ These aspects could probably have been expected as the founders were themselves of Russian origin.

The end state of the revolutionary movement, however, would be the source of great contention in the near future and would cause trouble for cooperation with other Armenian revolutionary groups as well as within the Hunchak party itself. Theirs was a nationalist movement aimed at the construction of a socialist state: “For the Hunchaks, nationalism and socialism were mutually compatible and could be harmoniously developed together.”²⁹⁵ But such a distinction was not as clear to others outside the party, specifically in the Ottoman government.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 110.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 110–1.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 111.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 113.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 114.

It is important to clarify what exactly the revolutionary parties adopted as their ideology. Though their origins were in the ideological leakage from Russia concerning populism and Marxism, both the Hunchaks and the Dashnaks related a socialist ideological basis in their programs. But as they further developed politically, nationalism became the dominant foundation for their activity.²⁹⁶ Bloxham points out that nationalism was not unique to the Armenians but that other ethnicities had similar aspirations and that nationalism, while addressing the injustices of a people, was not the *only* means available to address them.²⁹⁷ What basing revolutionary activity on nationalism did accomplish, as opposed to Russian revolutionaries who had based their movements on populism and Marxism, was to further heighten Ottoman fears that more of the state would be lost: “From the view of the palace, the significant characteristic of the parties was the agenda they shared with the previously successful Bulgarian revolutionaries, and the geographical location of the community it sought to ‘liberate’.”²⁹⁸ As distress of further territorial loss stiffened the resolve of the state, so too did the smaller revolutionary movement gain strength among Armenians.

c. The Demonstration of Kum Kapu

A demonstration was held in Istanbul in 1890 wherein the Hunchakian Revolutionary Party organized Armenians to raise the Porte’s awareness of Armenian mistreatment in the provinces.²⁹⁹ Ottoman forces, however, intercepted them and the result was a riot in which many of the protesters were killed, jailed or wounded.³⁰⁰ The Hunchaks thought their effort in this demonstration was garnering Great Power interest.³⁰¹ Great Power interest, it would be discovered, was one thing; effective intervention with the Ottomans, an entire other. This demonstration was significant in

²⁹⁶ Bloxham, *Great Game*, 49.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 49–50.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

²⁹⁹ Nalbandian, *Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 118.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 119.

two ways: it demonstrated a willingness on behalf of the Hunchak party to engage in peaceful protest and it revealed a willingness to sacrifice blood for Great Power intervention. The former would not last long due to growing frustration among Hunchak members and the latter was simply not forthcoming.

d. The Sassun Rebellion

Hunchaks were a major proponent in antagonizing the Kurds in and around Sassun in response to the practice among Armenians of paying *hafir*, a rent for Kurdish protection.³⁰² Kurdish attacks against the Armenian population when they eventually refused to pay and the corresponding Armenian armed response led to the decision by the Porte to send in Ottoman troops. The ensuing rebellion saw the Armenians hold Ottoman forces at bay for several weeks before finally succumbing to defeat and extensive Ottoman retaliation for Armenian insubordination. A Commission of Inquiry sponsored by Great Britain, France and Russia found that “the misery to which the Armenians were reduced could not be justified.”³⁰³ This resulted in the Great Powers urging Abdulhamid II to implement dire changes in the social conditions in the provinces. The Hunchaks considered the rebellion a blow to the legitimacy of an irresponsible Ottoman government.³⁰⁴ The Hamidian government, however, saw it as an opportunity to do nothing about the conditions of Armenians in the provinces.

e. The Demonstration of Bab Ali

In 1895, the Hunchaks informed the government and the foreign embassies in their capital of their intention to conduct a peaceful demonstration aimed at bringing attention to reform in the provinces.³⁰⁵ A petition was carried and was to be presented to the Sultan which

³⁰² Ibid., 121.

³⁰³ Ibid., 122.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 124.

Complained against (1) the systematic massacre of the Armenians by the Turkish government, (2) the unjust arrest and the cruel punishments of the prisoners, (3) the Kurdish injustices, (4) the corruption of tax collectors, and (5) the massacre at Sassun. It demanded: (1) equality before the law; freedom of the press; freedom of speech; and freedom of assembly; (2) that all persons under arrest be given the right of *habeus corpus*, and that the Armenians be granted permission to bear arms if the Kurds could not be disarmed; (3) a new political delineation of the six Armenian provinces; (4) a European governor for the six Armenian provinces; and (5) financial and land reforms.³⁰⁶

Immediately after arriving at the Gates of Bab Ali, violence erupted, again with many protesters killed and injured; many more were imprisoned. This brought about European pressure on the Porte to introduce reforms and shortly after the incident (October 17, 1895), Abdulhamid II signed the Armenian Reform Program.³⁰⁷ Though welcomed as a positive development by the Hunchaks, this too was doomed as soon as the Sultan's ink had dried.³⁰⁸ Instead, what occurred was the systematic killing of thousands of Armenians in retribution for agitation against the state in the name of Armenian nationalism.

f. Zeitun Rebellion (1895)

The Hunchaks staged another rebellion in Zeitun intending to put action to the rebellious sentiment in the town, that remained bitter since the events of 1862.³⁰⁹ As the promoters of this rebellion, the Hunchaks believed they could spread this rebellion throughout the greater region and incite other Armenians in Cilicia to a greater insurrection against the government.³¹⁰ These greater plans would never materialize as the Turks instigated the fighting before the revolt could spread.³¹¹

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 126.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Ibid.

In the interim, the European powers would again have to intervene on behalf of the Armenians, again because of an incident sponsored by the Hunchaks. Four months of violence in Zeitun between Armenians in and around the city and Ottoman forces ended only with European insistence on improved conditions for Armenians. Again, however, the promises made by the Porte to curb conditions under which Armenians in the area suffered were empty and were only made to temporarily appease the Great Powers. This was typical of Hunchak efforts throughout their revolutionary period. They attempted on several occasions to bring the support of Europe and Russia to bear on the Sultan, but as the Great Powers were not willing to provide troops to bear on the Armenian Question, their efforts were largely unsuccessful and angered Abdulhamid II to further persecute and murder Armenians in a series of massacres from 1894-6.³¹² With such slaughter came the end of the liveliest era in the history of the Hunchak party. The Hunchak party soon split in 1896 over the question of socialism and the role it had played in hindering European support.³¹³

5. The Dashnaksuthuin

a. The Members of the Dashnaksuthuin

Several Russian Armenian revolutionary groups were founded with the goals of assisting Ottoman Armenians in their plight for freedom from Ottoman rule. The principal areas for these revolutionaries were in Transcaucasia: Tiflis, Erivan, Karabagh, St. Petersburg and Moscow.³¹⁴ Student movements in St. Petersburg and Moscow in particular were dedicated to promoting recent Balkan independence as inspiration and an example of independence among Ottoman Armenians.³¹⁵ Armed revolution was the instrument to accomplish this goal: “They considered it necessary to use illegal means in reaching their objective since no legal processes were available to them: revolution, after

³¹² Ibid., 128.

³¹³ Ibid., 129.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 137–40.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 141.

the Balkan example, seemed to them to be the most expedient road to freedom.”³¹⁶ Such groups, however, were not united in their efforts and this was the principal characteristic that hampered efforts at helping Armenians in the fatherland.³¹⁷

The most important organization to come out of the Transcaucus was the Young Armenia Society founded in 1889. This group sent armed troops into the Ottoman Empire to attack Kurds in hopes such action would enlist Europe into effective intervention concerning the Armenian Question.³¹⁸ The Young Armenia Society went further than the rest of the Russian Armenian groups in smuggling arms to Ottoman Armenians and providing military training for Russian Transcaucasians for anticipated conflict in Ottoman territory.³¹⁹ The core of this group, known as the Droshak, would extend geographically to found divisions in Russia, Turkey, and Persia and would help form the Armenian Revolutionary Federation.³²⁰ The events of Kum Kapu in 1890 had energized Russian support for revolution in the Ottoman Empire for Armenian independence.³²¹ There was therefore the need to organize the various Russian revolutionary factions under a single organization. When the various groups, mostly in Russia, were consolidated into a single organization, they formed the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, commonly referred to as the Dashnaksuthiun (or more informally, the Dashnaks). This occurred in 1890.³²²

Their membership was ideologically diverse, but can be categorized into three groups. Firstly, there were those who did not prescribe to socialism and whose interest lay in the development of a crusade that would lead to an autonomous Ottoman Armenia, similar to the Armenakan Party.³²³ The socialists were divided among

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 145.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 146.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid., 147.

³²² Ibid., 151.

³²³ Ibid., 152.

themselves into those whose revolutionary goal was the toppling of the Russian government and those revolutionaries who were interested in a liberated Ottoman Armenia, among whom were the Hunchaks.³²⁴

The new party, however, faced many challenges not the least of which was basing the organization on a socialist ideology. This was strongly insisted upon by the Hunchaks.³²⁵ The various factions met in Tiflis in summer 1890 to address their fundamental and administrative differences. The federation of revolutionaries settled on a name, “Federation of Armenian Revolutionaries” (or simply “Federation”) and claimed Trebizond as their center.³²⁶ They also agreed to have two organs: The Hunchak (Bell) and the Droshak (Flag or Banner), with the former located in Geneva and the latter in Tiflis.³²⁷

b. The Dashnak Program

The new party’s manifesto advocated nothing less than the “political and economic freedom of Ottoman Armenia.”³²⁸ In doing so, however, many important details were left out or shrouded in ambiguity. For instance, how exactly Ottoman Armenians were to defend against other ethnic groups and Ottoman forces was unclear, as was whether the petition of Great Power support would be abandoned.³²⁹

c. The Googoonian Expedition

The first incident that affected this new federation was the Googoonian expedition. Sarkis Googoonian had long been preparing for an incursion into Ottoman Armenia with the objective to “cross into Turkish territory, divide into guerrilla units, and produce a state of chaos. He [Googoonian] believed that such agitation would forcibly

³²⁴ Ibid., 152–3.

³²⁵ Ibid., 153.

³²⁶ Ibid., 154.

³²⁷ Ibid., 155.

³²⁸ Ibid., 156.

³²⁹ Ibid., 157.

remind the European Powers of the promised reforms for Armenia.”³³⁰ He had overseen the training and arming of the men he would lead across the border and finally attempted this on September 23, 1890.³³¹ The mission, however, was a disaster. The group quickly became lost, encountered resistance from Russians and Kurds and was finally caught and imprisoned by Russian Cossacks.³³² Despite its failure, the Googoonian Expedition had three important effects: Europe was not persuaded to assist in any meaningful way; Kurdish tribes had been agitated; but Googoonian’s mission had also enhanced Armenian patriotism and “create[d] a stronger spirit of national unity among the Armenians in Turkey, Russia, and Persia.”³³³ Nalbandian equates the effect of the Googoonian Expedition on Armenians in the three countries, a “display of the romantic spirit of the age,” to that of the Armenian literary revival.³³⁴ But such soaring spirits on which the federation was founded were brought down to earth in the aftermath of this expedition and what followed was a period of inactivity in which hoped for European intervention never arrived to rectify Armenian misery.³³⁵ In fact, things got worse.

As the Hamidiye had begun operating under the auspices of the Ottoman government, they wreaked havoc among an Armenian population exhausted from oppression and attack:

The Sultan’s newly formed regiments were allowed to act without restraint in the provinces, where they deliberately raided Armenian villages, ruined crops, and massacred the inhabitants...These regiments were a formidable force in counteracting Armenian revolutionary activities, and of course these were regular soldiers operating in the provinces against mere partisan bands.³³⁶

³³⁰ Ibid., 156.

³³¹ Ibid., 158.

³³² Ibid., 158–9.

³³³ Ibid., 159.

³³⁴ Ibid., 160.

³³⁵ Ibid., 161.

³³⁶ Ibid.

The situation further served to isolate the Armenians in the provinces: Hamidian Pan-Islamism was part of the mission of the Hamidiye.³³⁷ Forced conversions became rampant, and the divide between Armenians and Kurdish Muslims was widened and Armenians could not rely on Kurdish support as was the case in Van in 1862. More importantly, the Hamidiye became the sultan's anti-revolutionary arm and retribution against suspected Armenian revolutionaries was most severe.

Lesser known but still important Dashnak revolutionary activities included the establishment of an arms plant in Tabriz by Tigran Stepanian.³³⁸ It was staffed by men who had experience in and were adept at the manufacture and assembly of arms and munitions in Russia and such material could be assembled and stored at the plant for future use by revolutionaries.³³⁹ The recruitment of other minorities also became an important pursuit of the Dashnaks. Alliances with the Kurds, especially, continued to be pursued by the Dashnaks³⁴⁰ despite recent clashes between the two groups.

d. The Ottoman Bank Incident (August 1896)

In an attempt to garner European intervention on behalf of the Armenian cause, members of the Dashnaks in August 1896 attacked a financial institution in which the European powers had a stake. Twenty six Dashnak members took control of the bank, blocking the exits and entrances and threatened to blow up the bank within two days if their demands were not met. Their demands were related to foreign dignitaries and ranged from the return of land seized by the Kurds to Armenians to direct involvement of European powers in administering the Armenian population within the provinces.³⁴¹ After several hours, the Russian dragoman told the Dashnaks their demands would be met and the surviving revolutionaries (four had been killed and five wounded in

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Ibid., 173.

³³⁹ Ibid., 173–4.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 175.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 177.

explosions aimed at keeping people from entering the bank) were escorted through an enraged horde and given passage from the capital to Marseilles.³⁴²

The effect of this act of terrorism by a small group of Armenians on the Armenian population in Istanbul was incredible. Retaliation was immediate and disturbing:

Government soldiers, *softas* (theological students), and police officers led Turkish mobs in the slaughter of the Armenians. Christians, regardless of guilt, were singled out and bludgeoned to death; women and children were ruthlessly cut down in the streets; and this reign of terror persisted in the capital for many days, resulting in terrible carnage and destruction. More than 6,000 persons perished in the massacre.³⁴³

It is clear by this description that the retaliation was aimed at an ethnic population rather than those specifically responsible. It does not seem proportionate or justifiable by any measure. In fact, Nalbandian argues that the Ottoman government knew of Dashnak plans before the attack and had prepared for the slaughter of Armenians beforehand, while allowing the attack to proceed.³⁴⁴ The lasting effects of this incident are inherent in a cycle of violence in which the terrorist inclination of the Dashnaks and their role as a political group in the now withering Ottoman Empire prompted state authorities to retaliate against innocent Armenians.

6. Irreconcilable Differences

In 1891, rifts within the party between socialists and non-socialists widened over ideology and party leadership until Geneva decided to divorce the Hunchaks from the Dashnaks and become an independent party once again.³⁴⁵ This disunity certainly contributed to the revolutionaries' lack of success: "The secession of the Hunchaks from

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Ibid., 178.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 177–8.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 164.

the Dashnaktsuthiun weakened the ranks of the latter and in the long run precipitated conflicts between the two parties which were extremely damaging to the success of the Armenian Revolutionary Movement.”³⁴⁶

A second general meeting of the Federation was called in 1892 and this First General Congress of Armenian Revolutionaries resulted in the change in the name of the organization (from the Federation of Armenian Revolutionaries to the Armenian Revolutionary Federation) to reflect the secession of the Hunchaks. It also resulted in a new program for the party which called for: free elections; “security of life and labor”; equality of all peoples; “Freedom of speech, press, and assembly”; land redistribution among poor; tax reform; an end to government-sponsored slavery; conscription; obligatory education; industrial development; and instilling traditional, rural “communal principles” in every Armenian.³⁴⁷ The new Dashnak program was, in essence, a critique of the Hunchak one.³⁴⁸ The methods by which this would be accomplished were also included and ranged from the proliferation of propaganda to outright terrorism.³⁴⁹ The organization of the party was also to be decentralized³⁵⁰ and this is only one, but a very important, manner in which the Dashnaks differed from the other parties.

The Armenakans, Hunchaks and Dashnaks all agreed on a revolutionary path to ameliorate Armenian provincial conditions.³⁵¹ The Dashnaks and Armenakans, however, advocated an autonomous Armenian land, whereas the Hunchak party sought a united, independent Armenia comprised of all Armenians in Turkey, Russia, and Persia.³⁵² The lack of an independent state as a Dashnak objective would endure into the nineteen twenties; the Dashnaks wanted reform and autonomy, not independence from Ottoman

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 168.

³⁴⁸ Libaridian, “Armenian Revolutionary Parties,” 90.

³⁴⁹ Nalbandian, *Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, 168.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 169.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Ibid.

rule.³⁵³ Other differences between the three parties was the fact that, unlike the two larger parties, the Armenakans never incorporated a socialist ideology into the party, either in rhetoric or practice.³⁵⁴

Dashnaks and, to a lesser degree, Hunchaks relied on terrorism to further their cause, while the Armenakans, as stated in their program, did not,³⁵⁵ at least not indiscriminately. Organizationally, the Hunchaks insisted on a centralized structure, while the Dashnaks after briefly adhering to the opposite, established a decentralized system.³⁵⁶ The Dashnaks and the Hunchaks both advocated allying with Ottoman Muslims they considered peaceful but the Armenakans stipulated no outside, extra-Armenian groups.³⁵⁷ But the cleavages in the movement were largely attributed to stubborn, human behavior: “The underlying cause of disagreement between them can be attributed more to petty jealousies and personal feuds than to differences of socialist ideology, administrative organization, or geographical boundaries for revolutionary activity.”³⁵⁸ This explanation seems too general, however. It is more likely that these personality differences were fostered by deeper ideological differences. Specific differences that involved the evolution of nationalism as the foundation of Armenian revolution, and the role of socialism both undermined a united Armenian revolutionary movement.³⁵⁹

F. CONCLUSION

Several events triggered the organization of Armenian revolutionary groups. Internal to the empire, the ascension of Sultan Abdulhamid II and the implementation of policies such as control through forces such as the Hamidiye and mass migrations within

³⁵³ Ibid., 170.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 171.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 172.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Ronald Grigor Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 64.

the empire (part of the sultan's demographic restructuring plans) contributed to the deterioration of social conditions among Armenian peasants in the provinces of Ottoman Armenia. External politics also played a role in the destitution of the Ottoman Armenian population. War, of course, contributed to the transmigration of peoples into Ottoman lands and promoted the struggle over land possession. Most significant, however, was the role of the Armenian diaspora as it contributed significantly to the organization, arming, and funding of activities within the empire.

The Dashnaks, the premier Armenian political party at the end of the nineteenth century, would continue their pursuit of agitating the Ottoman government, stressing that this was the only way: "Reforms, it still argued, and as it would again during the First World War, were only 'granted a people up in arms, in protest.'"³⁶⁰ The importance of Great Power intervention on their behalf was also emphasized at its 1898 congress.³⁶¹ This was, above all, the immediate goal of the party and it was believed that the Ottoman capital, as an international metropolis, would remain the target of its activity for the exposure and attention dissension within the city limits would bring.³⁶²

Revolutionary activity is most closely associated with the use of force by a faction within a population to address grievances they would otherwise be unable to address. Indeed, the Armenian revolutionary movement grew of a need to defend their people, their homes, and their land in predominantly Armenian (but less so as the 1890s progressed) provinces. The decision to use terror, however, is an important development not only in the evolution of Armenian revolutionaries, but also has implications for modern terrorism. The following pages will review Dashnak activity amidst the rise of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), as well as attempt to identify the reasons not just for the adoption of revolutionary methods by parties such as the Armenakans, Hunchaks, and Dashnaks, as covered in this chapter, but specifically those conditions under which some justified the use of terrorism specifically.

³⁶⁰ Bloxham, *Great Game*, 57.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 57.

IV. 1896 TO THE FIRST WORLD WAR

A. ARMENIAN REVOLUTIONARIES AT THE TURN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Having reviewed the desperate social conditions among Ottoman Armenians as a result of attempts by the Ottoman government to stave off its destruction by implementing reform and the emergence of Armenian revolutionaries as a result, it is now appropriate to examine what exactly became of their efforts and what effect their efforts at attracting Great Power intervention had on the population they were trying to save. The intent of this chapter is to answer the question, “What was the impact of a change in government on Armenian revolutionaries, particularly the Dashnaks?” In answering this question, it is necessary to review the activities of these groups within the historical context of the close of the nineteenth century and the rise of the Committee of Union and Progress.

1. Legacy of the 1894-1896 Massacres

An important development that emerged as a result of the 1894-1896 massacres was that *muhajirs* and common Kurds became the instrument of death rather than Ottoman forces or the Hamidiye.³⁶³ This is important because it means anti-Armenian sentiment had grown deeper roots in the provinces; the revolutionaries were now fighting for survival rather than freedom. Also, Hamidian policies had the momentum to carry over to action of ordinary Muslim subjects; even when his orders were not formally directed at them, Muslims on the periphery were carrying them out.³⁶⁴ Furthermore, under his ideology of Ottomanism and its implied intention of unifying provincial Muslims, he was powerless to stop such action against Armenians, but it is improbable he would have wanted to.³⁶⁵

³⁶³ Bloxham, *Great Game*, 55.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

Killing Armenians was also a means of strengthening the broader sense of Muslim community in the region.³⁶⁶ This could be seen, then, as loyal subjects rising to the state's defense of their own volition, against those who had "rejected Ottoman rule and therefore broken their contract with the state."³⁶⁷ Local government officials were of a general mindset that the Armenians had done something provocative to incite such violence and the Muslim response was appropriate and justified.³⁶⁸

The massacres occurred against the backdrop of the emergence of new Armenian political parties that provided convenient justification for the Hamidian regime: dubious confessions of atrocities by suspected Armenian revolutionaries and Armenian revolutionary propaganda provided an opportunity to publicize the Armenian threat.³⁶⁹ More important, however, was the insistence by the sultan on projecting the actions of a few armed revolutionaries onto the greater, unarmed Armenian population.³⁷⁰ After the massacres, the ARF returned to its primary goal of organizing and leading the defense of the Armenian people within Ottoman Armenia.

2. Seizure of Church Estates (1903)

Amidst political conditions in the Caucasus that saw an intensified Russification directed at the smaller ethnic populations, Armenians were again the subject of persecution this time at the hands of Tsarist authorities.³⁷¹ Specific policies aimed at making Armenians more "Russian" included disestablishing Armenian educational centers and forcing Armenians from government positions.³⁷² Armenians, of course, did not take kindly to this approach and, when hints of rebellions made their way to Russian authorities, Tsarist adherents "suspected the Armenians of the Caucasus to be 'rebels'

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 56.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Hassassian, *A.R.F. as a Revolutionary Party*, 15.

³⁷² Ibid.

who ‘aspired’ to independence.”³⁷³ At the forefront of such oppression was the Tsar’s representative in the Caucasus, Grigorii Golitsyn, who held the Armenian Church as the principal culprit in provoking unrest. Sporadic violence soon broke out in the region between Dashnak-backed Armenian revolutionaries and Russian officials and troops. Golitsyn held the church responsible and successfully petitioned the Tsar to take action which resulted in state control in 1903 of all Armenian Church properties in the region.³⁷⁴

The situation quickly escalated. Armenian revolutionaries organized demonstrations involving Church officials as well as working class Armenians and the state responded with “police and Cossack terror.”³⁷⁵ The Armenian response was “a reign of terror which lasted two years, during which time many Russian officials were killed by the bullets and bombs of Armenians.”³⁷⁶ Dashnak reaction to such action would, in effect, open a second front in their terrorist campaign, the first having been established on Ottoman soil: “The new policy [an outcome of the General Congress of 1904] was to defend and secure Armenian basic rights and freedoms, whether in the realm of the Sultan in Turkey or the Tzar in Russia.”³⁷⁷ Their efforts, however, delivered success: the edict was eventually repealed by the tsar who softened his approach to Russian Armenians,³⁷⁸ at least in his rhetoric if not his policies.

3. Sasun Insurrection (1904)

Though hopes were high that a new insurrection in 1904 would succeed where the previous Sasun rebellion had failed in 1894, the outcome would be similar. More effort, however, had been put into organizing the 1904 uprising³⁷⁹ which may indicate improvement in the manner in which the revolutionaries were preparing for combat and

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 16.

³⁷⁵ Ibid. Quote attributed to Baron von Haxthausen, see note 86.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Papazian, *Patriotism Perverted*, 23.

could allude to greater support (in the form of those willing to fight with the revolutionaries) for their cause. This rebellion was also better funded and better equipped.³⁸⁰ It differed further from the 1894 rebellion in that it was led by Antranik,³⁸¹ one of the most famous and revered of the early revolutionaries.

There was, it seems, cause to be hopeful for victory. The revolutionaries hoped to make “a strong stand against the government designed at a time when the Porte was expected to be involved in complications in Europe.”³⁸² The Dashnaks in Sasun were more numerous, better funded, and better armed than the Hunchaks had been in the same area in 1895.³⁸³ But the odds were clearly not in the favor of the revolutionaries for this action: it is estimated that the rebels had approximately 600 fighters with which to fight an Ottoman force of tens of thousands.³⁸⁴ The results were devastating despite better preparedness: “After a series of long drawn-out fights, during which the peasants and their leaders from outside displayed great bravery and inflicted heavy losses on the Turkish troops, the rebellion was finally crushed, many mountain villages were destroyed and the revolutionists had to retreat to the districts of Moush and Bitlis.”³⁸⁵ Other than mention in European news sources and minor grumblings of European diplomatic discontent,³⁸⁶ not much came of skirmishes such as the second Sasun Rebellion; European intermediation certainly never materialized. Indeed, but for a change in tactics that favored terrorism rather than organized resistance in the name of self-defense, the most effective resistance for the region may have reached its peak in 1895: “It will hardly

³⁸⁰ Hagopian, “Hyphenated Nationalism,” 227.

³⁸¹ Papazian, *Patriotism Perverted*, 23.

³⁸² Hagopian, “Hyphenated Nationalism,” 227.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 231–2.

³⁸⁵ Papazian, *Patriotism Perverted*, 23.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

be an exaggeration to say, that all the revolutionary activities of the A.R. Federation put together, did not equal, either in magnitude or in actual results, the rebellion of the town of Zeitoun in 1895.”³⁸⁷

4. A Plan to Kill the Sultan (1905)

There are many who did not see the need for a plan as audacious as assassinating the sultan and who were dubious as to the effects it might produce: “This was another of the spectacular but futile acts of the Dashnagzoutune. Its success would not have helped the Armenian cause; its failure probably saved our people from greater misfortunes.”³⁸⁸

The plans to assassinate Sultan Abdulhamid II had been years in the making. The leader in this effort, Cristoper Michaelian, had disguised himself and a female accomplice in order to travel to the Ottoman Empire to make preparations for the attack.³⁸⁹ Though he died in an explosion in Bulgaria on a device being evaluated for the assassination, his female companion continued preparations and eventually was involved in carrying out the attack which occurred in Solanika at a mosque the Sultan was known to frequent.³⁹⁰ Despite killing two hundred in the vicinity of the mosque, the explosive laden carriage failed to kill the sultan who had delayed momentarily to shake hands with the imam.³⁹¹

The significance to be gleaned from this instance, however, is the daring nature of the Dashnaks and the lengths to which they would go to achieve their goals. By striking at the sultan, the attempt on his life was an endeavor that favored a spectacular act on a stage where it could not be ignored but whose chance of success was entirely minimal.

5. Armeno-Tartar Conflict (1905-7)

Despite the favorable resolution regarding the disposition of the estates of the Armenian Church in the Caucasus, there remained significant anti-Armenian sentiments

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 24.

³⁸⁹ Hagopian, *Hyphenated Nationalism*, 250.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 251.

³⁹¹ Ibid.

among Russian officials. Russians were thus able to successfully enlist Azeri support in harassing Armenians in the region.³⁹² This alliance was achieved due in large part to long standing ethnic and religious cleavages between Armenians and Azeris.³⁹³ Other factors contributing to the enmity between the two groups were, by now, common sentiments among Muslims in both Turkey and the Russian Caucasus: feelings of Muslim superiority toward non-Muslims and envy wrought by Armenian financial success.³⁹⁴

The tensions between the Azerbaijani Turks and Armenians came to a head in Baku in 1905 as a result of the encouragement of the governor, Prince Nakashidze, a Golitsyn protégé.³⁹⁵ Nakashidze indirectly fostered the violence between the two groups mainly by doing nothing, especially when the incident that sparked the violence, an Azeri man shot while resisting arrest, could easily have been resolved with the intervention of Russian authorities.³⁹⁶ Two groups stood to gain from this conflict: the Russian officials in the Caucasus and the Dashnaks. In the case of the former, violence between Azeris and Armenians kept these groups occupied where idleness during this period may have let their attention drift to the revolutionary movement in Russia, and the implications of minorities deriving inspiration therefrom did not sit well with the Tsar.³⁹⁷ Regarding the latter, these battles provided the means of championing the Armenian cause once again as well as another opportunity to spread their reputation and strengthen their following not only in Russia but fortify its efforts in the Ottoman Empire.³⁹⁸ The revolutionaries would have their due, however, as these years of conflict came to an end with a Dashnak act of terror, the assassination of Nakashidze.³⁹⁹

³⁹² Hassassian, *A.R.F. as a Revolutionary Party*, 17.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

The conflict that characterized these years is also significant because it transcended class differences within the Armenian community. Not only were Armenians themselves threatened but their land and property was as well. As most assets of this nature were held by the Armenian bourgeoisie, it is significant that the Armenian revolutionaries would defend such assets as this implies at best a degree of unity within the Armenian community and at least a sense of cooperation. On previous occasions, the Dashnak press had been disapproving of the lack of financial support from the bourgeoisie and their generally apathetic attitude toward the revolutionary plight.⁴⁰⁰ As there were no civil security or government military forces to protect their interests, the bourgeoisie had no choice but to rely on the Dashnaks.⁴⁰¹

6. ARF and CUP: Initial Cooperation

The early years of the twentieth century were marked by two significant developments in the opposition movement to Abdulhamid II's government. The Young Turks and the empire's various minorities attempted on a few occasions to find common ground with which they might unite and more effectively oppose the sultan. The first was the First Congress of Ottoman Liberals in 1902 and the second was the Congress of Opposition Parties in 1907.

a. First Congress of Ottoman Liberals (1902)

The First Congress of Ottoman Liberals, which was held by the Young Turks in Paris in 1902, was an attempt to gain the support of the various factions "opposed to the Sultan regardless of their ethnic, national, and religious origin."⁴⁰² The Young Turks sought the Dashnaks for their past radical activity and their increasing notoriety and influence among the Armenian population.⁴⁰³ The Young Turks' views

⁴⁰⁰ Gerard J. Libaridian, *Modern Armenia: People, Nation, State* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 107.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁴⁰² Hassassian, *A.R.F. as a Revolutionary Party*, 19.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*

toward minorities was one of inclusion in the empire and equality, but were inconsistent with what revolutionaries such as the Dashnaks sought:

Their solution to the problem of minorities was not based upon the idea of self-rule or concessions to their just demands. Rather, they advocated equal rights for all through a common citizenship and the establishment of a constitutional government with guarantees and safeguards for citizens regardless of their minority status. They saw reform as a means to an end, the latter being the creation of a viable imperial system.⁴⁰⁴

Though the Young Turks did not advocate self-rule for the empire's minorities, the Dashnaks attended the First Congress of Ottoman Liberals in order to participate in a greater opposition movement, but also with the intent of influencing the Young Turks to alter their views concerning autonomy for the empire's minorities.⁴⁰⁵

The Young Turks were split among themselves as to the question of minority autonomy. The more moderate group, led by one of the Sultan's exiled nephews, advocated a degree of autonomy for minorities, while the nationalist group, led by Ahmed Reza, promoted the stance that autonomy by its very nature was seditious and treasonous.⁴⁰⁶ As the nationalists gained increasing influence within the Young Turk movement, the Dashnaks were forced, for the first time, to consider constitutionalism in replacing European intervention as its goal.

b. Congress of Opposition Parties (1907)

Despite small Armenian revolutionary victories and their fleeting mention in the European press and diplomatic circles, at last the realization was settling into the Armenian revolutionary conscience that no European power could be counted on and that Russian support was now, after its role in inciting the recent Armeno-Tartar conflict, out of the question. Great Britain's attitude was indicative of general European sentiments: "The reasoning of the cabinet was that Britain refused to have her hand forced by revolutionary committees, that she did not intend to enlist in a crusade in which she had

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 20.

no interest, and that she must abstain from encouraging the revolutionary leaders by the use of severe language to the Turkish government.”⁴⁰⁷ The Armenian revolutionaries were thusly forced to alter their primary strategy and seek allies within the empire. They continued to seek such support in the general Hamidian opposition movement led by the Young Turks.

The Dashnaks, in doing their part in the Hamidian opposition movement, called for a Congress of Opposition Parties to be held in Paris in 1907. The Committee of Union and Progress had agreed to attend, but their involvement was entirely self-serving: “...the Young Turk Committee of Union and Progress decided to cooperate in order not to permit the movement within Turkey to get out of its hands.”⁴⁰⁸ It is significant that the Hunchaks decided not to attend (though they had attended the First Congress of Ottoman Liberals in 1902), having “no confidence in the Young Turks.”⁴⁰⁹ The Dashnaks were on their own as representatives of Armenians in the greater Hamidian opposition movement.

Two very notable developments resulted from the meeting. The first was the official declaration that future attempts would be abandoned in persuading the sultan to implement article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin or the European powers to petition the Ottoman government to this end.⁴¹⁰ Instead of working toward Armenian goals of autonomy, the Dashnaks agreed to work toward constitutionalism in Turkey and “become citizens, with equal rights, of the Ottoman empire.”⁴¹¹ The second was the emergence of the Dashnaks as the principal Armenian political party. This party, in their formal declarations as a result of this congress, had placed the future of all Armenians in the hands of the Young Turks and the broader opposition movement.

⁴⁰⁷ Hagopian, “Hyphenated Nationalism,” 247.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., 263.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 263–4.

⁴¹⁰ Papazian, *Patriotism Perverted*, 31.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

B. THE RISE OF THE COMMITTEE OF UNION AND PROGRESS

1. The Young Turk Revolution

In 1908, the Young Turks came to power in a relatively bloodless revolution on a platform that promised imperial constitutionalism; a return to a merit-based government administration; a cameral democratic system; political competition based in parties; less European meddling within its borders; Ottomanism; and an increase in civil liberties.⁴¹² As Hanioglu points out, however, these promises were largely empty.⁴¹³ The promises of solidarity made to the minority groups that comprised the Hamidian opposition, especially in the case of the Armenian revolutionaries, followed a similar path of decline. Pro-Hamidian forces attempted a counter coup in 1909 which forced the deposition of Abdulhamid II by the CUP as a result of its failure. The empire continued to erode, however: Austria-Hungary absorbed Bosnia-Herzegovina; Bulgaria seceded; and Crete became incorporated into Greece. The CUP began to realize that retaining their power and preserving what remained of the empire would be more difficult than originally anticipated.

2. The Massacres in Cilicia (1909)

The counter coup in the spring of 1909 briefly promoted a sense of Muslim superiority in Cilicia which led, in part, to the massacre of tens of thousands of Armenians, as well as hundreds of other Christians.⁴¹⁴ Another contributing factor to the Muslim ire in the region, was the return of Armenians to the region under the assumption that the 1908 Constitutional Revolution meant freedom from previous horrors at the hands of Muslims: “The promise of equal status as Ottoman citizens was interpreted by Armenians to mean protection of their lives and property and that past injustices would be remedied in the form of stolen lands being restored to their rightful owners. Thus

⁴¹² Hanioglu, *Brief History*, 150.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁴ Bloxham, *Great Game*, 60. See also Kaligian, “A Prelude to Genocide,” 77. Both Bloxham and Dikran list the number of Armenians killed at 20,000.

many of those who had fled the countryside to the cities or abroad now returned.”⁴¹⁵ The CUP, however, was largely unable to meet these Armenian expectations outside the capital. In fact, the fledgling government had difficulty maintaining control of its forces.

While the CUP central leadership was located in Istanbul and did in fact employ loyal forces to defeat the counter coup, they were not inculpable. Party leaders in the capital as well as local leaders were consumed with trying to restore the peace rather than protecting victims of violence.⁴¹⁶ CUP officials in the region had been recruited from the ranks of local notables and thus had a history of violence against Armenians.⁴¹⁷ Most importantly, however, was the fact that after the violence had subsided, none among the perpetrators were held responsible.⁴¹⁸

Despite the massacres in Cilicia, the CUP and the Dashnaks reaffirmed their unity in an agreement which re-stated their cooperative relationship; debunked any Armenian claim to autonomy; and emphasized the expansion of “privileges” for Armenians in the provinces.⁴¹⁹ Despite the fact that “the A.R.F. [Dashnaks] emerged as the most powerful group representing the Armenian people” their success and popularity had fostered dissention among the bourgeoisie and church notables in Istanbul.⁴²⁰ There was also the perception among some Armenians that the Dashnaks had promoted unity at the expense of the Armenian people: “The A.R.F. expressed so great a faith in the revolution and in the unity of the Ottoman Empire that some Armenians accused it of betraying the fatherland.”⁴²¹ The partnership the CUP and Dashnaks had enjoyed at the beginning of their relationship had, however, begun to crumble due largely to disunity within the CUP.

⁴¹⁵ Kaligian, “Prelude to Genocide,” 77.

⁴¹⁶ Bloxham, *Great Game*, 61.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁹ Kaligian, “Prelude to Genocide,” 78.

⁴²⁰ Hassassian, *A.R.F. as a Revolutionary Party*, 23.

⁴²¹ Hagopian, “Hyphenated Nationalism,” 373–4.

C. A PEOPLE FORESAKEN: THE BEGINNING OF THE END

1. The CUP Changes Direction

Liberal advocates within the CUP had been marginalized by the rise of nationalists at the center of the party in 1910. Of specific note was a new ideology proposed by Zia Gokalp in which was hidden a Turkish ethnocentricity that excluded minorities: “According to Zia, the ‘Turkish nation’ consists exclusively of Muslim Turks, while Greeks, Armenians and Jews may be treated as Turks in citizenship but not in nationality.”⁴²² As Zia’s influence grew, so too did the anxiety among Armenians that the alliance with the CUP they had so adamantly promoted may involve disastrous consequences for Armenians they had not foreseen: “By October, 1910, many Armenians came to believe that the C.U.P. had already made plans at a secret meeting in Salonika, for the extermination of the Armenian people.”⁴²³ But whether the decision was made at this congress or the one held in 1911, or later in January 1914 during several clandestine meetings⁴²⁴ is a matter of debate. What is known is that by 1912 the Dashnaks had come to the realization that the domination of the CUP by its conservative elements and the new ideology that was promulgated in 1910 effectively meant the conclusion of any thought by the party concerning “inter-religious inclusivity.”⁴²⁵ In May 1912, the Dashnaks officially seceded from their alliance with the CUP.⁴²⁶

The split from the CUP meant the Dashnaks could pursue other allies and they picked up where they had left off before the CUP alliance in seeking Great Power support, which it found in Russia.⁴²⁷ Russia, along with the Armenian Catholicos (in Russia) proposed a plan that would partition the Armenian provinces into two regions “to be administered by neutral European inspectors approved by the Porte.”⁴²⁸ For most, this

⁴²² Hassassian, *A.R.F. as a Revolutionary Party*, 23.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴²⁴ Bloxham, *Great Game*, 63.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

plan represented a means of addressing the inequality and persecution that was again becoming prevalent in the provinces at the behest of the CUP.⁴²⁹ Germany had joined Russia in sponsoring the plan as well in order to check Russian hegemonic pursuits should the plan be implemented.⁴³⁰ The CUP, however, stilted the progress of any such plan.

As a result of the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, vast imperial lands were lost: almost all of the empire's European lands were taken and mass migrations resulted.⁴³¹ Social conditions continued to worsen as a result of persecution by Muslims, and such mistreatment brought Armenian desperation: "...in Bitlis province alone in mid-1913 Armenians were being murdered at the rate of twenty-seven per month."⁴³² The efforts of Armenian revolutionaries would not alleviate the massacre that would occur in 1915-1916, however, and this was due in large part to a state whose paranoia became a pretext for violence based on fears of enemies both outside and inside its borders.

2. The Arrival of the Great War

With the arrival of World War I, the Armenians were again caught between competing international powers. As the Dashnaks had a history (however short) of cooperation with the young Turks, they were petitioned by the CUP to live up to an agreement they had made with them in 1907. This agreement stipulated that the Dashnaks, as loyal Ottoman citizens, would incite rebellion against the Russian government in the Caucasus.⁴³³ The Dashnaks informed the CUP that they would not do this specifically, but would fight against Russia with the Ottomans.⁴³⁴ This promise, which would not be fulfilled by the Ottoman Armenians, was correctly interpreted by the Ottoman authorities to be false and served to heighten the suspicions of Armenian

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Ibid., 62-3. Bloxham estimates an additional 400,000 *muhajirs* emigrated to Anatolia during this time.

⁴³² Ibid., 65.

⁴³³ Papazian, "Patriotism Perverted," 37.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

intentions by the CUP.⁴³⁵ In fact, the opposite would eventually occur with the Dashnaks in the Caucasus inciting thousands of Armenians from abroad to fight against the Ottoman Empire on the Eastern Front.⁴³⁶ The CUP, however, also heard this call to arms and exacted retribution on those Dashnaks whose fate they could decide: those within reach of the empire. They would call this an act of insurrection and use it to help justify the later genocide they would exact on the Armenian population.

One important development among the Dashnaks in the context of World War I was the disingenuous manner in which they called these thousands to fight the Ottomans. It was put forth by the Dashnak leadership that Russia had pledged support in the form of independence for all Armenians in return for their assistance in the war, a claim that was entirely false.⁴³⁷ But the realization that this was not something the Russians had promised and was instead the fabrication of prominent Dashnaks, was learned after the fact.⁴³⁸ Another significant development during this time must be considered the manner in which Caucasian Armenians took action without endorsement or even knowledge of these acts by those who would pay the price: “The fact remains that the real representatives of the Armenians in Turkey, the Patriarchate and its organs, were never consulted by the Caucasian leaders of the Dashnagtzoutune in adopting their policies with regard to the Armenian people; yet, the disastrous consequences of these policies were suffered by the Armenians in Turkey.”⁴³⁹ Such disconnected intentions among the Armenians continued to result in Armenian bloodshed, particularly in the Ottoman Empire.

Probably most important among the developments that concerned the Armenians in World War I was the paranoia rampant among the Ottomans and the patterns of reaction that emerged. Firstly, there was the tendency to consider all Armenians as

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 38.

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ Ibid., 39.

insurrectionists (which was not the case) and to hold them all equally responsible for rebellious transgressions. Indeed, the violence exacted against Armenians during the First World War was often simple, but widespread, typecasting of all Armenians as dissidents.⁴⁴⁰ Secondly, and as the insincere recruitment practices described above reveal, reprisals by the Ottoman government that resulted in the tremendous loss of life among ordinary Armenians were often the result of the actions of a few. This was especially the case among special, irregular pro-Russian formations (notorious for their atrocities that mirrored many committed by the Ottomans, though on a much smaller scale) of which Armenians were significantly few.⁴⁴¹ This deadly pattern of thinking by the Ottoman government was rooted in ethnic stereotypes and carried out amidst the backdrop of slaughter that would characterize the war itself. It was in this context that opportunity was realized by the Ottomans, led by the CUP, to finally resolve the “Armenian Question.”

D. CONCLUSION

The Dashnaks, in their alliance with the CUP, initially felt they could finally cooperate with a major government force with whom their political goals might be realized. Previous attempts had been mixed but what had worked in Russia, at least in the case of the repeal of the order to seize church lands, was terrorism. It must be noted, however, that though terrorism had worked in this case, it was still not a proven tactic in producing European state intervention on behalf of Ottoman Armenians. It certainly drew their sympathy but did little in terms of productive action against the Ottoman government.

The faith the Dashnaks had in the CUP as they rose to power soon evaporated amidst a coup within the CUP and the insistence on a discriminatory ideology among the conservatives who became the party’s leaders. Part of the original alliance had been the forfeiture of a pursuit of Great Power intervention. The Dashnaks, however, had to resort

⁴⁴⁰ Bloxham, *Great Game*, 76.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*

to this strategy once again with the dissolution of their association with the CUP; there was simply nowhere else to turn. But much to the detriment of Ottoman Armenians, World War I would provide both an empire that was hypersensitive to challenges to any more territorial loss within its borders, as well as an international community concerned with their own troops in combat in the Great War.

V. CONCLUSION: TURNING TO TERROR

It is clear from the preceding review of the Armenian revolutionary movement that two very general, but very important observations may be made concerning the doctrine which governed Armenian revolutionary activity. The first is that there was a widespread disagreement among many groups within the movement that working toward autonomy within the Ottoman Empire, rather than complete secession from it, should be the main political goal. The second is that the means to accomplish this goal would center around demonstrations and attacks aimed at attracting Great Power attention in hopes they would intervene on behalf of the Armenians to improve conditions for the ordinary provincial Armenian within the Ottoman Empire. Among the most spectacular displays of discontent were the terrorist attacks sponsored and carried out by the Dashnaks. This is an important part of the answer to the question: Why did Armenian revolutionaries adopt terrorism? But it is only part of the answer and there are underlying themes in their history that underscore where this tendency originated.

The inspiration for the use of violence and self-sacrifice that accompanied the choice to use terrorism lie partly in the Armenian cultural revival and the martyrs of the Armenian Apostolic Church and its offshoots. The cultural revival of the early nineteenth century was promoted by literature that glorified Armenian historical figures. Written in the recently revived Armenian language exclusively for (and widely read by) educated Armenians, it prompted deep patriotic feelings that were given a purpose by the plight of persecuted Ottoman Armenians. The history of martyrdom in the church also promoted this nationalist urge and gave no limit to the lengths to which one might go in the service of the cause.

Inspiration was also derived from past revolutionary activity that had resulted in success, specifically, the Zeitun rebellion of 1862 and the Bulgarian revolt. In the context of the influence of the latter, however, the Armenians did not constitute a majority in the

regions in which they lived.⁴⁴² Further complications of basing an Armenian revolution on the previous Bulgarian one was the fact that, while the Great Powers had intervened in the latter, they likely would not in the event of the former, as the region itself had lost much of its geostrategic importance.⁴⁴³ Nonetheless, motivation was derived from the Bulgarian revolt, however general in nature, due to the success of a minority group against the Ottoman Empire.

Terrorism was also adapted as a result of necessity. Armenian revolutionaries, even if they could unite, did not possess the numbers or materiel to challenge the Ottoman regime outright.⁴⁴⁴ Terrorism was a likely choice in advancing Armenian political interests. In light of these considerations it is now necessary to examine the major differences among various Armenian groups.

It seems logical that most prominent Armenians and church officials did not advocate terrorism against the Ottoman state. After all, their survival and prestige relied upon their continued role in providing both valued services to the state, which often involved ensuring order was kept among Armenians, and leadership for the Armenian people, which often involved representing the population in the Ottoman government. As their livelihood depended on working within the mechanisms of the Ottoman state, sponsorship of terrorist activities aimed at subverting it was inconsistent with their self-preservation as the Armenian elite.⁴⁴⁵

The leap to terrorism may seem a logical next step in Ottoman provinces where armed self-defense was necessary to protect Armenian people, homes, and lands from raiding Muslims and state troops. In considering this point, however, a critical distinction must be made between those who did not use terrorism and those that did. The Armenakans, for example, remained a local group whose goal was protecting their

⁴⁴² Ter Minassian, *Nationalism and Socialism*, 18.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Michael M. Gunter, *Transnational Armenian Activism* (London: Research Institute for the Study of Conflict and Terrorism, 1990), 3.

⁴⁴⁵ One may find some exceptions, Archbishop Khrimian, for example.

population against any aggression. It is precisely this manner of thought (simply protecting a homeland) on which this party was based. Without significant influence from the Caucasian intelligentsia and its Russian populist influence, which included exposure to insidious tactics,⁴⁴⁶ there occurred a stagnation in strategic thought which did not occur in the case of Dashnak leadership.⁴⁴⁷ The adoption of political violence in the case of the Armenakans was very discriminate and limited to assassination as a means of retribution; theirs was a local fight. Those who were influenced by and drew membership from the Caucasian intelligentsia, however, saw the role of Armenian revolutionaries as fighters for a greater, nationalist cause that was not contained locally but involved all Armenians as a nation.⁴⁴⁸ The Armenakans relied on limited, local terrorism; on the opposite end of the political violence spectrum were the Dashnaks and their acts of sensational terrorism.

As these organizations grew, so too did the diversity of their membership. The organization of this membership, however, was critical in the choice of tactics. The decentralized nature and disunity that characterized the organization of the Dashnaks, led to the adoption of terrorism as a tactic that was "...carried out by regional committees interpreting a local consensus..."⁴⁴⁹ Influence from abroad, particularly Russia, as well as the tendency to delegate carrying out activity to the local level, produced conditions from which terrorism was a readily adaptable tactic, particularly among the Dashnaks.

Growth of Armenian revolutionary groups also brought new requirements which accommodated the use of terrorism. Those groups who did advocate terrorism needed to fund their parties' activities which frequently involved extorting funds from prominent, wealthy Armenians.⁴⁵⁰ Those who did not give to the cause were often the targets of assassination. There was also the prestige factor that drove the need to maintain and

⁴⁴⁶ Libaridian, *Modern Armenia*, 105.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁹ Toloyan, "Terrorism in Modern Armenian Political Culture," 10.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

incite the supporters of the party.⁴⁵¹ This was accomplished by assassinating important statesmen or political figures perceived as particularly ruthless by the Armenian population.⁴⁵² These assassinations were very popular among party supporters and increased the political stature of a party. Other instances occurred within the party itself. When rivals could not come to an agreement, the dispute was often settled with terrorism in the form of assassination.⁴⁵³ Having used it against other Armenians and even other party members, it was not such a stretch that revolutionaries would use terrorism as a tactic against state officials.

This cycle of violence was perpetuated and kept in constant motion by all three players in the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century: the Great Powers, the Armenian Revolutionaries, and Ottoman government officials. The Great Powers used the practice of censure and public condemnation of the sultan's activity and often further insisted he implement the conditions outlined in article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin. This frequently served to raise the hopes time and again of the revolutionaries. The Armenian revolutionaries themselves were spurred by such hopes as the reason they continued to resist, demonstrate, and eventually turn to terrorism. The Ottoman sultans and officials in Istanbul did their part by continuously doing just enough to appease the great powers but continued to commit Armenians to death.

What deserves considerable attention is the effect of revolutionary activity on those it intended to help. These were the destitute Armenians in the provinces who cared little of politics or ideologies but mainly in eking out an existence as much removed from a Hobbesian one as they could manage. They became unwitting victims in a war in which both imperial forces and Armenian revolutionaries rose to fight while those about whom they were fighting suffered and died. This is another paradoxical characteristic of the Armenian revolutionary story: should Armenians have simply allowed their persecution, removal, and deaths without at least fighting for a better life, and in most cases, their own lives? Certainly not. At the same time, should campaigns of terror be considered an

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 17.

allowable course of action? In the context of the Ottoman Armenians presented herein, the response to that question is less clear. The answer, of course, lies elusively in an ambiguous middle ground muddied by distinct historical circumstances and a modern debate of significant sensitivity.

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