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FRIEND OR FOE?: THE AMERICAN RESPONSE TO THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE,  
1890-1920

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HST 203: History of the United States  
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FRIEND OR FOE?: THE AMERICAN RESPONSE TO THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE,<sup>1</sup>  
1890-1920

From June to July of 1878, representatives from Great Britain, Russia, Austria-Hungary, France, Italy, Germany, Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, Romania, and the Ottoman Empire convened for the Congress of Berlin. As part of the Ottoman Empire's delegation, a group of Armenian representatives spearheaded by Catholic leader and educator Mkrtych Khrimian was also present.<sup>2</sup> This group advocated for protection from the European powers to guarantee

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<sup>1</sup>For the purposes of this paper, I will refer to these events as a genocide. Much of the world has reached the consensus that what the Ottoman Empire inflicted onto Armenians was a genocide, defined by the systematic destruction of Armenians through deportations and mass killings. However, many Turkish historians argue that this interpretation is a mischaracterization of the history. It is still heavily debated among Armenian and Turkish historians whether the Armenian ethnic minority group was purposely targeted in these years. The most common arguments against the "genocide narrative" include the contention that Armenians were not blameless victims and that Armenian casualty figures were greatly exaggerated. For an overview of this counterargument, see Justin McCarthy, "Death and Exile: the Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821-1922" (Princeton, New Jersey: Darwin Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup>This group's participation in the Congress was prompted by the Ottoman Empire's occupation of Zeitun, the largest majority-Armenian region. In the first half of the 19th century, the Ottoman Government tried to dilute Zeitun by incentivizing Muslims to move there. This attempt at controlling the Armenians had little effect, as the disdain between the two groups was so much that Muslims and Christian Armenians could not coexist in a majority Armenian city. This civil conflict was only implicitly consequential until the summer of 1862, when Sultan Abdul Hamid sent 12,000 troops to Zeitun to strengthen the Empire's holding in the area. The

Armenia's safety from the oppressive Ottoman Empire. But as the Armenians made their case to top officials from around the world, there was one notable absence: the United States. This marked the beginning of a dangerous pattern throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries in which the U.S.'s relations and isolationist foreign policy with Ottoman Turkey superseded any meaningful attempt to ameliorate the plight of the Armenian people.

The Armenians were a Christian minority in the Muslim Ottoman Empire, and their religion was at the root of the conflict. Sultan Abdul Hamid was not tolerant of non-Islamic religious practices, and neither were Muslims in the Empire. Furthermore, Armenians were generally wealthier than Ottomans. Armenians were viewed as second-class citizens because they were not shaped into the traditional Ottoman mold. Their unique culture and lifestyle branded them as outsiders even though their homes neighbored ethnic Ottomans'.<sup>3</sup> When there grew a minority population undesirable to the Ottomans, Abdul Hamid's thought process followed the standard authoritarian philosophy: the simplest, least painful way to ensure long-term stability was to remove Armenians from Ottoman land.<sup>4</sup>

The Armenian group's advocacy at the Congress of Berlin resulted in the Treaty of Berlin, a set of reforms for the Sultan to follow to improve the condition of Armenians. But

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Armenians of Zeitun held off the Sultan's forces until the Ottomans received aid from the French to settle the conflict. While this was a victory for the Sultan, he was displeased with how many resources he had to expend to control the Armenians. This is when Abdul Hamid realized that he needed to address the Armenian Question before it became too massive to answer.

<sup>3</sup>Margaret J. Wyszomirsky, "Communal Violence: The Armenians and the Copts as Case Studies," *World Politics*, 27:3 (April 1975), 438-440.

<sup>4</sup>This approach was similar to how the Jackson Administration handled the Cherokee Question in the early 19th century. See, for example, Ronald N. Satz, *American Indian Policy in the Jacksonian Era* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002) and Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson & his Indian wars* (New York: Viking, 2001).

without any enforcement from the European nations, the Sultan completely disregarded the set of reforms.<sup>5</sup> No country wanted to sour its relations with the Sublime Porte, least of all the U.S. The U.S. had distanced itself from the Congress of Berlin entirely because Washington was not interested in involving America with external affairs that would cause conflict with its most important trade partner in the Near East. So, in one of the first announcements of the Ottoman Empire's anti-humanitarian treatment of Armenians, the U.S. effectively conceded internally that its hands were tied, and ignored the pleas of the Armenians.<sup>6</sup>

Following the disappointment of the 1878 Congress of Berlin, the Armenians decided that their only option was to take initiative themselves. The first attempt at protest with tangible results came with the 1894 Sasun Rebellion. After physical altercations and a quick Armenian loss, news spread of the event and foreign powers sided with the Armenians. This position signified a change of face for the European powers who had, merely two decades before, ignored Armenians. What had changed between 1878 and 1894 was that the Ottoman Empire was growing weaker. It became evident that the Sultan was not able to control all of the nationless states living within his borders. The conflict involved not only the Armenians, but also the Greeks and other minorities in the Balkans.

Despite Europe's growing agitation, the U.S. government and public were still largely unconcerned with the Near East. The U.S. press did little to cover the events, primarily because

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<sup>5</sup>Robert Hichens, "Skirting the Balkan Peninsula: From Triest to Constantinople," *Century Magazine* 86 (July 1913), 377–379; Lord Kinross, *The Ottoman Centuries: The Rise and Fall of the Turkish Empire* (New York: Murrow Quill, 1977), 528–34, 554–63.

<sup>6</sup>Donald A. Ritchie, "Congress Confronts the Armenian Genocide," in *America and the Armenian Genocide of 1915*, ed. Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 279.

it questioned the credibility of the accounts coming from Europe. Following Europe's heightened attention towards the Armenian Question in 1994, the *New York Times* wrote: "Our contention is that in case of incendiarism and revolution, no Government, least of all our own, can afford, even in appearance, to indorse such movements as those of the Armenian revolutionists. What are the facts in this case?"<sup>7</sup> Without the American public's attention, publications like the *New York Times* saw no reason to investigate "the facts" of the case. In a letter to the editor from Ottoman Turkey concerning the Sasun Rebellion, a concerned Turk wrote:

The Turkish Government has never denied that serious disturbances have taken place at the district of Sassoun. What it has denied is the accusation that there was a premeditated massacre, and yet this is the absurd basis upon which is built the whole Armenian agitation, both in America and Europe. The mere idea that the Sultan would order a massacre of his Christian subjects, Armenians or no Armenians, is ridiculous in itself, and denotes a credulous belief in the falsehoods and calumnies propagated by the Armenian revolutionary committees.<sup>8</sup>

At this point, the American public sided more with the Ottoman Government than with the Armenians.<sup>9</sup> The writer of the letter appealed to the doubts of Americans, as indeed it seemed "absurd" that the Sultan would systematically kill his subjects because of their religion. This concept was unfounded to Americans, who refused to comprehend such extreme religious intolerance. Support for Armenians was scattered throughout the country and skepticism hushed

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<sup>7</sup>"The Armenian Question," *New York Times* (February 15, 1894), 4; available from <https://proxy.multcolib.org:2069/docview/95238620?accountid=37296>; Internet.

<sup>8</sup>"The Other Side of the Armenian Question," *New York Times* (August 1, 1895), 5; available from <https://proxy.multcolib.org:2069/docview/95221605?accountid=37296>; Internet.

<sup>9</sup>Haroutune M. Dadourian, "The Armenians: Turkish Government Has Part In Massacres In Adana," *New York Times* (April 30, 1909), 8; available from <https://proxy.multcolib.org:2069/docview/96905246?accountid=37296>; Internet.

any meaningful negative reaction to the Sublime Porte's treatment of Christian minorities. The preference of inaction to action permeated through U.S. news coverage of the Armenian Question in the 1890's.

One of the biggest developments for the Armenian cause during the Cleveland Administration was when Congress finally began deliberating the Armenian Question in 1894. By then, the American public had heard reports of what had happened in Sasun, and momentum for the public's sympathy began to build. Protests were organized in New York, Chicago, and Massachusetts. At the time, Massachusetts had the highest concentration of Armenian-Americans in the country, and the state's delegation in Congress was particularly vocal about the Armenian Question. Republican Representative Henry Cabot Lodge served as the voice of Armenian-Americans in the government. Petitions from Massachusetts made their way before Congress, and groups such as the American Board of Commissioners and various missionaries who had been to the region spoke before Congress.<sup>10</sup> The heightened public reaction -- especially from Massachusetts and its delegation -- prompted Congress's attention to the matter. After quietly avoiding the signing of the 1878 Treaty of Berlin and subsequently dismissing the prospect of investigating the Sublime Porte, members of Congress began to address the issue. This momentum was short lived, however, as the Spanish-American War of 1898 shifted Congress's attention from Armenia and onto Cuba.<sup>11</sup> Had these efforts not fallen to the wayside, Congress may have passed a resolution condemning the Ottoman Empire's treatment of Armenians. But with focus shifting off of Armenia, Washington conveniently

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<sup>10</sup>Ritchie, 278-279.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

avoided followup as to not jeopardize relations with the Ottoman Empire. There would be no substantial progress on the Senate floor until 1915 when mass deportations of Armenians began, concurrent with the start of World War I. Isolationism with regards to the Ottoman Empire became the U.S. standard, and this stance was further solidified by inaction from the Commander-in-Chief.

As the Ottoman Empire grew weaker, the European powers saw an opportunity to belittle the once hegemonic Ottoman Empire; they demanded that the Sultan implement the reforms detailed in the 1878 Treaty of Berlin.<sup>12</sup> British Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone denounced the Sultan's continued discrimination, calling him "the Great Criminal" and "the Red Sultan."<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, France, Britain and Russia organized a committee of representatives to study the treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. Abdul Hamid was upset by the increased pressure on him, and he responded by doubling down on his actions. It was around this time that the Sultan declared: "The only way to get rid of the Armenian question is to get rid of the Armenians."<sup>14</sup> In 1895, the Sultan prompted the killing of Armenians, which became

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<sup>12</sup>Jeremy Salt, "The Narrative Gap in Ottoman Armenian History," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 39:1 (January 2003), 25.

<sup>13</sup>Mihran Kurdoghlian, *Hayots Badmoutioun, Volume III* (Athens, Greece: Hradaragoutioun Azkayin Ousoumnagan Khorhourti, 1966), 42–44 (in Armenian). Throughout his political career, the British Prime Minister paid great attention to German and Ottoman nationalism, and feared its growth. He feared that nationalism would lead to genocides, but was not intent on British military intervention.

<sup>14</sup>*New Britain Herald, Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress (February 12, 1918); available from <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014519/1918-02-12/ed-1/seq-6/>; Internet.



known as the Hamidian Massacres.<sup>15</sup>

Headlines around the world covered the Massacres, vilifying the Sultan, and European powers vowed to protect the Armenians. King Leopold II of Belgium wrote to British Prime Minister Robert Arthur Talbot Gascoyne-Cecil that he was ready to send the Congolese Force Publique to "invade and occupy" Armenia.<sup>16</sup> But similarly to the international response to the 1894 Sasun Rebellion, there was no actionable help for the Armenians. The hypocrisy of nations that preached self-determination but ignored the maltreatment of the Armenians angered the group. Especially in the United States, President Grover Cleveland's stance of neutrality in the 1880's and 90's shut the door for proper federal U.S. aid to Armenians. Cleveland was tepid regarding issues of foreign policy, and his refusal to take action when the global community first learned of the Ottoman government's atrocities during his term as president cemented the standard of inaction. Cleveland based his position on the country's centuries-long Monroe Doctrine, which established that the United States prioritize affairs in the Americas over other global affairs (this was one of the reasons the Spanish-American War became the center of foreign policy attention at the start of William McKinley's presidency in 1898).

President Cleveland maintained his isolationist strategy to preserve a friendly relationship

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<sup>15</sup>The Hamidian Massacres were the largest systematic killings of Armenians up to that time. While they initially targeted Armenians, the massacres soon enveloped all anti-Muslims in the region. Reports show that 25,000 Assyrians were also killed in the massacres. Total casualties ranged from 80,000 to 300,000 during the Massacres. For more on the Hamidian Massacres, see Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), 40-44.

<sup>16</sup>Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston, MA: Mariner Books, 1999), 167-68.

with the Sublime Porte.<sup>17</sup> Not only was there a substantial geopolitical advantage in being friendly with the region's hegemon, but there was also a key economic factor: oil. The Near East housed massive supplies of easily accessible oil. Additionally, Ottoman Turkey's demand for U.S. manufactured goods -- mainly firearms and machinery -- grew as the Empire's economy and military power suffered.<sup>18</sup> U.S.-Turkish trade was prospering, with the volume of trade between the two parties in 1899 totalling over \$6 million, and preserving these economic relations was Washington's primary goal leading into the 20th century.<sup>19</sup> This repeated cycle of protest, massacre, and global inaction epitomized the status of Armenians in the late 19th century.

In 1908, the Young Turks, a revolutionary movement in the Empire, overthrew the Sultan and established a constitutional monarchy. The movement consisted of liberals and nationalists. The nationalists were not fond of Armenians, but the liberals convinced them to extend rights to them and other minorities. This shift in power seemed to be the start of a new era where Armenians and federal officials could cooperate. However, stability was not maintained. In April 1909, a counter-coup was attempted but failed. Though the rebellion was instigated by Islamist Dervish Vahdeti, nationalist sentiment flourished, expanding pogroms against Armenians. This reaction became known as the Adana Massacres, and it resulted in as many as 30,000 Armenian deaths. At this time, William Howard Taft was president of the United States.

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<sup>17</sup>Simon Palaysian, *United States Policy Toward the Armenian Question and the Armenian Genocide*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 6.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>19</sup>Leland J. Gordon, *American Relations with Turkey, 1830–1930: An Economic Interpretation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1932), 13, 48, 50, 60, 65.

Like U.S. presidents before him, Taft sought to remain non-confrontational with the Young Turks. While tens-of-thousands Armenians were being massacred, U.S. ships "were stationed just miles off the coast and did not intervene."<sup>20</sup> This proves that had it wanted to, the U.S. could have easily deterred the Massacres from happening. Instead, Taft opted to weigh American interests over humanitarian injustices. Oil was essential to continue domestic industrialization and economic development -- aiding Armenians was not.

In 1912, the First Balkan War resulted in the loss of 85% of Ottoman Turkey's European land.<sup>21</sup> Hundreds of thousands of Turks were kicked out of the Balkans, and forced to live with Armenians. The Armenians, who were well off and not affected by the war, were disliked by the Turks who had lost everything. These conditions rejuvenated anti-Armenian sentiment in Ottoman Turkey.

Tensions climaxed at the dawn of World War I, when the Empire grew restless and officials blamed their problems on Armenians. Enver Pasha, a prominent military figure in the 1908 Young Turks Revolution, declared Jihad (holy war) against Christians. Enver Pasha's influence was far-reaching, so his declaration invigorated the masses to fight the Armenians. In 1915, deportations began. U.S. records showed that 800,000 Armenians died, with over 1,000,000 deported.<sup>22</sup> Forced eviction of Armenians led them to the Syrian Desert, where the government barred access to essentials for survival. Over the span of eight years, Armenians

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<sup>20</sup>Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003), 157.

<sup>21</sup>Süleyman Uslu, "Balkan Savaşları ve Balkan Savaşlarında Bulgaristan," (December 2008), 5.

<sup>22</sup> *Congressional Record*, 66th Cong., 2nd Sess., 7883 as found in Ritchie, 288.

were systematically killed. Concentration camps were set up to rid the nation of the Armenians who had survived the trek into the Syrian Desert.

This was also around the time when the American press first began widely covering the genocide. The consensus in the press, which manifested in the public, became more sympathetic towards the Armenians than it was 20 years prior because of skyrocketing tensions from the War and the Sultan's more frequent mistreatment of minority groups. Most Americans believed that Armenians were being systematically exterminated during the War mostly because the reports were continually substantiated and because the War antagonized Ottoman Turkey.<sup>23</sup> In a *New York Times* opinion piece written before the first reports of genocide in 1915, the Turk was referred to as "sensous, lustful, indolent, deceitful, and incorrigible."<sup>24</sup> Following the publishing of the killings later that year, the public perception was centered around "the intolerable Turk." This narrative, while consistent with many foreign sources, was an embellishment likely made to be more attractive to readers. For two decades prior, the *New York Times* and the American public was highly skeptical of Armenian and European reports of systematic killings and deportations. But the start of the War further cemented the Ottomans as "the enemy."

To Americans, systematic killings and deportations were at first unimaginable, but the possibility of a genocide became more reasonable alongside the chaos of the War and the Ottoman Empire's role in it. Americans grew more sympathetic to the Armenian cause because

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<sup>23</sup>Thomas C. Leonard, "When News Is Not Enough: American Media and Armenian Deaths," in Winter, 299.

<sup>24</sup>"How Turkish Empire Should Be Made Over After the War," *New York Times* (January 24, 1915), sec. VIII, 1; available from <https://proxy.multcolib.org:2069/docview/97720801?accountid=37296>; Internet.

the Sultan's hostility became even more apparent to the rest of the world with his actions in the War. The narrative that the Sublime Porte was systematically killing religious minority groups became more palatable as the country gradually became more aggressive towards the Allies. Media thrives off of controversy, and the more extreme news organizations like the *New York Times* reported on the situation in the Near East, the more sales increased. With this focused resentment came increased sympathy and willingness to help. The image of Ottoman Turkey in the American public's eye flipped with the media's changed reporting of the Sublime Porte.

With the situation in the region worsening, America devoted a renewed interest towards confronting Ottoman Turkey's genocide. Congress did not put much consideration into military intervention because of the isolationist precedent with regards to the Near East and America not yet being active in the War, but efforts were made for financial aid. Members of the House and Senate realized that with reports of hundreds of thousands of Armenians being driven out of their homes and into the desert to starve and die, assistance in some form was necessary.<sup>25</sup>

In 1916, (newly-elected) Senator Lodge wrote a resolution to raise funds for Armenian relief, similarly to past resolutions on Poles and Jews.<sup>26</sup> Democratic Senator William Stone of Missouri praised Lodge, convincing the other Senate Democrats that the resolution was "a very proper appeal to the generosity, the sympathy, and the liberality of the American people in the hope of affording some measure of succor to a large number of men, women, and children who are suffering from the sad effects of the war."<sup>27</sup> Both sides of the aisle supported the resolution,

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<sup>25</sup>Ritchie, 280.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Congressional Record*, 64th Cong., 1st Sess., 2335–6 as found in Ritchie, 281.

and it was adopted in the Senate without debate. But the resolution did not pass in the House until the Foreign Affairs Committee heard testimonies describing first-hand accounts from Americans who had been in Armenia. After passing both houses, President Woodrow Wilson signed the resolution. These hearings marked the first time personal accounts of the atrocities committed in Ottoman Turkey were officially recorded in a publication of the U.S. government.<sup>28</sup>

Armenian activists saw this snowballing public sympathy and federal attention as momentum to raise money for the deported Armenians. Henry Morgenthau, American ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, established the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief (ACASR) -- later known as the Near East Relief (NER) -- following news of the mass deportations. Donations, especially during the War, were received in astounding numbers: in 1916, ACASR raised \$2,404,000, and this total doubled for every year up to 1920.<sup>29</sup> Philanthropic donations from people of higher status also became normalized. By the end of 1917, the Rockefeller Foundation alone had donated \$610,000 towards Armenian relief.<sup>30</sup> In a way, it became trendy for Americans to support the Armenian cause. With the support being rooted in patriotism as a product of the War, donations positively correlated with Americanism, and wealthy philanthropists boosted their image by writing these checks. Public sympathy was so high that even during the costly War, Americans invested heavily in the cause. While these

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<sup>28</sup>House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Hearings on Relief of Armenians*, 64th Cong., 1st Sess. (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1916), 4-6.

<sup>29</sup>James L. Barton, *Story of Near East Relief (1915–1930): An Interpretation* (Astoria, New York.: J. C. & A. L. Fawcett, Inc., 1991), 410.

<sup>30</sup>Balakian, 251.

donations helped, their sometimes performative nature shifted the focus off of Armenian relief and onto American exceptionalism.

By 1929, the organization donated over \$116,000,000 to supply food, water, and shelter to Armenians. This financial aid helped 2,000,000 refugees, most of whom were women and children. Over 132,000 refugee orphans graduated from the NER orphanage schools. The organization built incredible amounts of infrastructure in a region where there previously was little to none: the NER constructed buildings and hundreds of miles of roads and streets, implemented irrigation systems to recover thousands of acres of arable land, established new industries, imported diverse livestock, and planted better crops.<sup>31</sup> This was the most impactful form of U.S. aid, but it did not fix the crisis. It only prolonged the suffering of an estimated 2,000,000 Armenians.

Even the Wilson Administration's campaign to unite the world's democratic powers and detest human rights violations passed over the suffering Armenians. In his January 8, 1918 *Fourteen Points* speech, Wilson presented a response to the Armenian Question in point 12:

The Turkish portion of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development, and the Dardanelles should be permanently opened as a free passage to the ships and commerce of all nations under international guarantees.<sup>32</sup>

The "other nationalities" to which Wilson referred to undoubtedly included the Armenians, yet

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<sup>31</sup>Suzanne E. Moranian, "The Armenian Genocide and American Missionary Relief Efforts," in Winter, 195.

<sup>32</sup>Woodrow Wilson, "Fourteen Points" speech (January 8, 1918); available from [https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/President\\_Wilson%27s\\_Fourteen\\_Points](https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/President_Wilson%27s_Fourteen_Points); Internet.

the U.S.'s foreign policy remained unchanged. Again, Washington erected a sympathetic, heroic facade with its promise of an "absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development" while continuing to neglect the millions of suffering Armenians. Wilson's ideal post-war world, as outlined in his speech, was predicated on the League of Nations. The League of Nations required the support of Western nations, and to appeal to them took no more than empty promises. Wilson's objective was to gain the approval of the winners of World War I -- France, the United Kingdom, Italy and Japan -- none of whom had a personal stake in what became of the Armenians.

Immediately following the end of the War, the President viewed Armenia only in a secondary way -- as one piece in a pile of bargaining chips to unify the Allies into the League of Nations.<sup>33</sup> On July 10, 1919, the same day he announced the details of the Treaty of Versailles in the Senate, Wilson held a press conference. He was asked: "Do you expect to ask that the United States act as mandatory for Armenia?" The President answered: "Let us not go too fast. Let's get the treaty first."<sup>34</sup> There was no acting "too fast" in the face of continual human rights atrocities in Armenia, but Wilson believed that finishing business left from the War was a prerequisite to helping the region. Wilson was not mainly concerned with the conditions of the Armenians, but with his country's global standing following the First World War. And if he was concerned with the conditions of the Armenians, his only way to address them was to build a League powerful enough to stand against the Ottoman Empire.<sup>35</sup> Promising autonomy was not synonymous with

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<sup>33</sup>John M. Cooper, "A Friend in Power? Woodrow Wilson and Armenia," in Winter, 109.

<sup>34</sup>Report of a Press Conference in *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. LXI (July 10, 1919), 424.

<sup>35</sup>Lloyd E. Ambrosius, "Wilsonian Diplomacy and Armenia," in Winter, 132.



liberating Armenia; it was a euphemism for establishing a global power structure that protected Western interests. Ultimately, Wilson's reaction to the Armenian Genocide paralleled Roosevelt's response to the Holocaust a generation later.<sup>36</sup>

Meanwhile, the American press was still promoting the Armenian cause. The *New York Times* was reporting on the Near East more than ever before. A *Times* headline from 1919 reads "Christians in Dire Need."<sup>37</sup> This appeal to religion contributed greatly to why the Armenians attracted as massive a response as they did. America is rooted in the Christian faith, so Christian righteousness illustrated the Christian Armenians to be meaningfully connected to the Americans. This energy generated momentum from the American public, but it did not affect U.S. policy after the War. Spreading awareness and raising funds for relief was done out of sympathy for fellow Christians more than for sympathy towards fellow humans.

The entire Western World was aware of the atrocities committed by the Ottoman Empire, but nobody prevented the killings of hundreds of thousands of innocent Armenians. Public scrutiny of the Sublime Porte was fervent -- the media covered the systematic human rights atrocities with empathy and calls to action. The *New York Times* and other news organizations

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<sup>36</sup>As President during World War II, Franklin Delano Roosevelt did little to help the genocide on Jews in Germany. Other interests trumped intervention to stop the humanitarian tragedy. See, for example, Henry L. Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1970).

<sup>37</sup>"TURKISH ARMY MOVES TO DESTROY THE ARMENIANS: OTTOMANS, AIDED BY TARTARS, ADVANCING ON THREE SIDES IN WAR OF EXTERMINATION," *New York Times* (July 31, 1919), 1; available from <https://proxy.multcolib.org:2069/docview/100414350?accountid=37296>; Internet.

covered the atrocities daily, and children in the U.S. were even told by their parents to clean their plates and remember the “starving Armenians,” but international civilian sympathy could not save the race from systematic destruction.

Missionaries in Ottoman Empire from the United States were tasked with providing aid to the Armenian people. They ensured that the Armenian Genocide received substantial coverage not only to help those in need, but also to prove their worth in a country where their value was dying. The media latched on to the narrative that the “intolerable Turk” was destroying the “Bible Lands,” which was profitable. The *New York Times*, for example, extensively covered the Armenian Question after 1915, while the genocide in Congo went unreported.<sup>38</sup> These missions hoped to galvanize attention in the form of money because their purpose was largely lost in the 20th century. The Armenian Question was treated as an opportunity to regain importance, not to fight injustice. This is another reason why the U.S. was ineffective in improving the conditions of the Armenians.

The U.S.’s policy reactions did not align with the public’s reaction. The United States had not entered the war until 1917 when Wilson declared war on the Central Powers, and even then he had not declared war on Ottoman Turkey. Without going to war with the nation, there was no hope of U.S. military intervention to assist the Armenians. After the Allies’s failure at Gallipoli, none of the Allied Powers were keen on going to war in that region.<sup>39</sup> This was a

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<sup>38</sup>Leonard, 305.

<sup>39</sup>On April 25, 1915, Allied troops -- mainly from the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) -- landed on the Gallipoli Peninsula at the Northeastern tip of the Aegean Sea. The Peninsula became the site of the first major battles of the War. The Campaign proved to be a massive failure; over the course of nine months, casualties for the Allies amassed over 200,000. This was a decisive victory for the Central Powers.

militarily sound decision, but it ignored the genocide. Wilson's objective upon entering the war was to win first, and focus on humanitarian repair after. Sadly, the humanitarian crisis in Ottoman Turkey required immediate military attention, which the Commander-in-Chief did not think the U.S. could afford.<sup>40</sup> America's response was founded on sensational sympathy rather than intentional liberation, which is why the U.S. fundamentally failed to protect the Armenians.

After the War, there was sharp discourse in Congress about how to address the Armenian Question. Because the public's reaction to the treatment of Armenians was so strong, both parties sought to display meaningful sympathy towards them. For the anti-Wilsonian, isolationist Republican majority, however, this stance was a bluff. Armenia became partisan political ammunition for the debate between Wilson and his ideological opposition. Senator Warren Harding of Ohio was running for the Republican party presidential nomination in 1920, and was therefore trying to appeal to the public's concerns regarding Armenia. On May 15, the Senator put forth a resolution expressing sympathy for the Armenians' "deplorable conditions of insecurity, starvation, and misery." Furthermore, the resolution advocated for Armenian independence and called to dispatch the Navy to ensure the safety of the Armenians.<sup>41</sup> But when Wilson endorsed his political rival's resolution, Harding equivocated and withdrew his support for the legislation. Two weeks after Harding introduced the resolution, the Senate rejected it by a vote of 52 to 23. The 52 votes came from 13 Democrats in addition to every Senate

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<sup>40</sup>Milton, 110.

<sup>41</sup> *Congressional Record*, 66th Congress, 2nd Sess. (May 13, 1920), 6978–9 as found in Ritchie, 287.

Republican.<sup>42</sup> Even Senator Lodge of Massachusetts, the man who first brought petitions for U.S. involvement in Armenia and introduced a resolution for relief, voted against the resolution. His stance on the U.S. response to the Armenian Question took a drastic turn from being a strong advocate for aid to refusing to endorse U.S. presence in the region. In an effort to explain his diametrically changed position, Lodge said in April, 1920:

The fact is, the protracted debate on the League both inside and outside the Senate has wrought a great change in public opinion and the feeling is growing constantly stronger against the United States involving itself in the quarrels of Europe at all. For this reason it will be impossible to get a mandate accepted by the United States and I doubt very much if we could secure a loan from the Government for any political or military purpose.<sup>43</sup>

It is reasonable to assume that the Massachusetts Senator became a pessimist (or a realist) due to Washington's unimpressive record of attempts to improve the conditions of the Armenians. This sentiment was shared among most Congressmen. The U.S.'s involvement in the War was a turn-off for politicians, who wanted to avoid further entanglement in foreign affairs. After championing their cause for three decades, Lodge and other isolationists backed down.

The unmistakable irony is that once Wilson showed promise of ending the atrocities of Ottoman Turkey, Congress lost its patience and was unwilling to play into Wilsonian-internationalist politics any further. In the end, Wilson acknowledged his administration's failure. Condemning his peers in Washington, Wilson said at a speech in front of 15,000 Americans in Kansas City: "When I think of words piled upon words, of debate

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<sup>42</sup>Wilson message to Congress, in *The Woodrow Wilson Papers*, Library of Congress, vol. LXV (May 24, 1920), 320–3; *Congressional Record*, 66th Cong., 2nd Sess. (June 1, 1920), 8073 as found in Milton, 110.

<sup>43</sup>Lodge to Bryce, in *Henry Cabot Lodge Papers*, Massachusetts Historical Society (April 20, 1920).

following debate, when these unspeakable things are happening in these pitiful parts of the world, I wonder that men do not wake up to the moral responsibility of what they are doing.”<sup>44</sup>

While the greater tragedy was that Wilson himself did not “wake up” until far too late, his words here have merit: since the U.S. turned a blind eye to the plight of the Armenians at the Congress of Berlin, Washington’s foreign policy with regards to helping Armenia had always been inwardly focused, with actual help based in “moral responsibility” being secondary to preserving relations or boosting America’s global standing. While Wilsonianism promised a new global order, its benefits did not extend to Armenia.<sup>45</sup> Throughout the late 19th century and early 20th century, marginal steps were taken to alleviate the pains of Armenians, but no action was consequential enough to stop the plight of the Armenians. Wilson, one of the only politicians in Washington who expressed a genuine interest in intervention after World War I, failed in his efforts to bring Ottoman Turkey to justice, ultimately costing the deaths and deportations of millions.

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<sup>44</sup>Address in Kansas City, September 6, 1919, *The Woodrow Wilson Papers*, 63:71.

<sup>45</sup>Ambrosius, 138.

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