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### The Armenian Genocide

When it comes to the notion of genocide, the majority of people will immediately think of the Holocaust. However, the truth is that there were other instances of massive human rights violations that involved displacing and eradicating millions of people based on either religious or ethnic factors. In this case, one should speak about the Armenian Genocide—the event that took place a century ago and often gains almost no attention from modern historians. Understanding this phenomenon allows making significant insights about something that played a vital role in the formation of Armenian national identity. It also illustrates a case of an enormous human rights violation. An exploration of the causes of the Armenian Genocide, atrocities associated with the event, and the consequences of the phenomenon, demonstrate an instance of a massive human rights violation—a page in the history of humanity that should not be forgotten.

It makes sense to begin the comprehension of the Armenian Genocide by reviewing its background. According to the United Human Rights Council, the event is regarded as the first genocide of the twentieth century. Even though it lasted three years, from 1915-1918, there is enough evidence to indicate that more than two million lives were lost as the result of the Armenian Genocide (United Human Rights Council). Speaking about the event from the

perspective of the western response and the idea of nations like Great Britain and the United States being international arbiters of human rights protection around the globe, it is crucial to refer to the article titled “Crimes against Humanity”: Human Rights, the British Empire, and the Origins of the Response to the Armenian Genocide.” The author suggests that at the time when the Armenian Genocide took place, it was Britain that portrayed itself as a nation with an imperial responsibility to enforce a universal standard of human rights. However, when an actual massive human rights violation happened, Great Britain failed to bring the responsible side to justice, thus failing its status as a humanitarian empire (Tusan 77). In such regard, the importance of an exploration of the Armenian genocide as an instance of an enormous human rights violation becomes more apparent.

Speaking about the causes of the event, one cannot avoid mentioning the role of the Ottoman Empire and the rising nationalism in the region where the Armenian Genocide took place. Considering the historical perspective, Turks were an ethnic group that ruled the majority of West Asia, North Africa, and Southeast Europe before World War I (Armenian National Institute). Importantly, Islam was the official religion in the Ottoman Empire, thus putting Christians and representatives of other religions into a minority population. In such regard, while many non-Muslims living in the region ruled by Turks experienced oppression, it was Armenians who suffered the most significant blow. Specifically, while being Christians and an ethnic minority, Armenians were often perceived as second-class citizens while being subjects to specific legal restrictions that denied their fundamental human rights. However, with the reduction of influence the Ottoman Empire had over the region, the oppression toward ethnic and religious minorities progressively increased (Armenian National Institute). The breaking point

occurred when a new political, nationalistic group called the Young Turks seized power by time of the revolution in 1908 (Armenian National Institute). Therefore, when World War I broke out, fueled hatred toward Armenians within the empire skyrocketed—something that was primarily driven by cultural and religious differences between Armenians and Turks (United Human Rights Council). As a result, the initiative that started as a movement toward nationalism among Turks soon grew into a full-blown oppression of religious and ethnic minorities. Therefore, the causes of the Armenian Genocide can be succinctly illustrated in terms of the Ottoman Empire losing its imperial power, nationalistic ideas growing among Turks, and Armenians as an ethnic and religious minority being targeted for the group's difference from Turks.

Understanding the event of the Armenian Genocide requires dissecting the phenomenon in particular aspects, allowing to witness how it began. When the Young Turks came to power, they established the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP)—the governmental institution bound to propagate nationalistic ideas to the public (Armenian National Institute). When the CUP came up with the plan of eradicating ethnic and religious minorities from Turkey, Armenians were the ones targeted first. As a part of a new strategy toward the creation of a Pan-Turanian empire, in 1915 the Armenian population was instructed to be deported (Armenian National Institute). As a result, thousands of soldiers of Turkey's army were sent to transport thousands of Armenian women, men, and children toward the Syrian desert (Armenian National Institute). Horrifically, it is estimated that 75 percent of the people who participated in marches toward the desert perished, with children and elderly constituting the most casualties (United Human Rights Council). There were so many Armenians killed that various sources describe unimaginable scenes—ones where an entire countryside was littered with corpses. While being

disguised as a resettlement program, in reality, deportations were death marches. Turkish forces methodically removed Armenians from the rest of Turkish society. Historical accounts indicate a malicious logic standing behind the deportations and the physical elimination of the minorities. Specifically, historical reports and documents show that the principal motive for sending Armenians on death marches was about killing people while preserving their property (Armenian National Institute). While anticipating resistance on the part of Armenians, before the genocide started, Armenian soldiers in the Ottoman forces were disarmed and sent to labor camps—ones where people often were left to die in harsh conditions (Armenian National Institute). Investigating the evidence, one should say that the Ottoman forces and authorities knew exactly what they were doing. Armenians were methodically eliminated as well as any possible means of resistance negated. It was ethnic cleansing—a brutal act that claimed the lives of several millions of people.

Since the Armenian Genocide was an atrocity of a massive magnitude with a broad range of long-term impacts, along with hundreds of thousands people killed and displaced, the entire Armenian population of Anatolia was wiped off—thus forcing the rest of the people to live in exile (Armenian National Institute). While the western world was aware of the atrocities taking place in the Ottoman Empire, there was little made to prevent the event. Once, an ambassador of the United States to Turkey reported to Washington: “When the Turkish authorities gave the orders for these deportations, they were merely giving the death warrant to a whole race” (United Human Rights Council). The lack of proper international response showed that there are no viable means of preserving human rights across the globe. Woodrow Wilson, the President of the United States, was the only authoritative figure who assisted Armenians. Namely, he signed the

Treaty of Sevres in 1920—a document recognizing an independent Armenian state and offering it an American protectorate (United Human Rights Council). However, while the only positive connotation of the entire case is the fact that the Republic of Armenia was established, the lesson of the Armenian Genocide was something that later was used by another dictator and mass murder Adolph Hitler. In one of his speeches, before World War II started, he indicated that because nobody remembers the genocide of Armenians, the same can be done to the people of the East (the Soviet Union) (United Human Rights Council). In such regard, it is apparent that the lack of historical and international recognition of the Armenian Genocide was something that showed Hitler the possibility to avoid punishment for atrocities one can inflict on entire populations.

All in all, while exploring the Armenian Genocide as an event, resulting in enormous human rights violations as well as the deaths of thousands of people, the key lesson is about recognizing and remembering the event to avoid similar things from happening again. In such a context, investigating the incident, one can make particular conclusions concerning the potential adverse effects of nationalistic ideas as well as the division of people based on ethnic and religious principles. Perhaps it is crucial to seek unity and collaboration, using foundational human rights as a cornerstone and any other characteristics as secondary—something that makes people unique and helps establish their sense of identity.

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