

Young Turk Decision Making 1914-16

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Research on the history of the late Ottoman Empire and the Armenian genocide has advanced rapidly in the last ten years. But many key questions remain, notably about the degree of intentionality of the Young Turk government and the role of German officials, civilian and military. Moreover, as much as the historiography has developed, the Armenian genocide is often studied in isolation from the ethnic politics involving other groups within the Ottoman Empire and in neighboring regions and states.

From a combination of Ottoman and German sources, we plan to reconstruct virtually on a day-to-day basis the process of decision making in Istanbul and Berlin in regard to a) the Armenian deportations and massacres during the critical months from late 1914 through 1916, and b) the policies toward other ethnicities in this same period. Such a reconstruction has never been done. (Even in relation to the Holocaust, a much more deeply researched event, this kind of reconstruction has only been accomplished in the past few years.) It is possible now because of the dramatic expansion of research on the topic in the past fifteen years and the greater accessibility, just recently, of the Ottoman archives in Istanbul.

This careful, detailed reconstruction will enable us to answer three critical questions: 1) To what degree were Young Turk policies toward the Armenians *intentionally designed* to lead to mass killings, 2) to what extent were German civilian officials and military officers *complicit* in the process, and 3) what was the relationship between policies toward Armenians and those toward other ethnic groups. While we now know a great deal about what happened in 1915-16, we still need to know a lot more about a) *why* the Young Turks initiated the process, b) *who* was involved aside from the triumvirs, Enver Pasha, Talaat Pasha, and Djemal Pasha, c) *how* orders were conveyed to party and state officials around Anatolia, and d) *what* precisely was the German role. Intentionality is the key component of the definition of genocide contained in the United Nations Convention on the Crime and Prevention of Genocide. Scholarly and political conflicts about the events of 1914-15 largely revolve around this issue. Our detailed reconstruction will enable us to address the issue of intentionality more precisely than has yet been possible. In regard to the German role, our working hypothesis is far more nuanced than most current historical evaluations. Motivated by racial ideology, including a shared antipathy toward Armenians as a “troublesome population;” a general notion that states should be dominated by one ethnicity; and immediate military and political interests during wartime, most German officials had no objections to the radical policies initiated by the Young Turks. At the same time, the Young Turks very deliberately leveraged their influence as Germany’s ally in war to secure the tacit support of the German government for their campaign of annihilation.

These issues can be addressed on a serious level only through primary research in the Ottoman and German archives. The Foreign, Interior, and War Ministry archives of the Ottoman Cabinets and Ministries are housed in the State Archives of the Turkish Republic, Istanbul Prime Minister Archive, and contain much of the relevant information. On the German side, the Political Archive of the Foreign Office (PAAA) in Berlin and the Military Archive in Freiburg contain the critical record groups and documents. Other scholars have worked in these archives and explored these issues, but the team approach

in this project entails a unique combination of expertise in both Turkish (Ottoman and Republican) and German history, the necessary linguistic and other substantive research skills, and knowledge about the larger theoretical and empirical questions concerning genocides and ethnic cleansings in the modern world.