



Genocide and Attempted Genocide

Taner Akçam's History of the Armenian Genocide

Six years ago, Taner Akçam reminds us in his book on *The Young Turks' Crime Against Humanity*, a Turkish court sentenced two journalists to a year to jail for using the term, "genocide," to describe "events of 1915." It passed a suspended sentence on Sarkis Se-ropanyan and Arat Dink, son of the 2007 slain journalist Hrant Dink (to whom this book is also dedicated). The court found that talk of genocide adversely affects national security, that this claim supports some plans aiming to change Turkey's geographic and political boundaries and is part of a campaign to destroy its physical and legal structure. Accepting the term, "genocide," the judge opined, may lead to questioning of the sovereign rights of the Republic which is under siege by genocide resolutions. The assertion that genocide happened is not protected speech. According to Turkish law, such freedoms can be limited in order to protect the security of the nation.

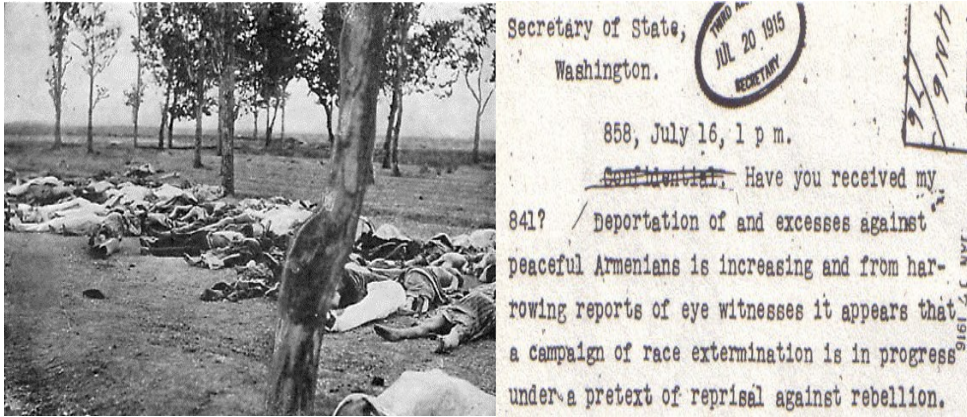


Photo: [Wiki](#)

Armenian Carpet Weavers in Van of Anatolia, 1907

It is alarming that by this logic Taner Akçam's name appeared on a 2009 "hit list" with "traitors to national security" (p. xii). This list also included Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk whom a court likewise fined in 2011. However, in 2008, paragraph 301 of the Turkish penal code was softened. Insult to "Turkishness" was redefined as insult to the "Turkish nation." But even this must be nullified; all the more because Ankara wants to join the European Union. On March 9, 2011, the *European Parliament* marked this *paragraph* as detrimental to freedom of speech. Yet, Turkish courts prosecute persons who have exercised this right. Others like Akçam, who live in America, received death threats, while Turkish officials maintained a black out on this past. So what happened in 1915 that justifies a formal state denial and threats against independent thinkers?

Akçam offers answers. I shall explore them and give an overview of their strengths and weaknesses, the missing parts of the mosaic, and describe an ideological gap. In his previous book, *A Shameful Act*¹, this chair of Armenian Studies at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, identified the perpetrators of the genocide against Armenians. Now he focuses on 1913 to 1918. He opined that this history reveals two sides of a coin: the same events, but different views. Akçam unified them in one account (p. xiii), but there are multiple narratives, including a German one (350). Based on six hundred Ottoman documents which had not been previously available, the author claims that his book as a “first” on the genocide of the Armenians.



Photo, Text Clipping: [Wiki](#)

Armenians murdered in 1915: photo from the 1918 book by U.S. Ambassador Henry I. Morgenthau, and a clipping from his cable of July 16, 1915: A campaign of *race extermination* is in progress under a pretext of “reprisal against rebellion.” [Berlin](#) propagated the same wrong formula of “crushing a revolt.”

Parts of this book appeared in Istanbul. This English version (p. xxxii) differs from the Turkish text as it has revised and new chapters. The reader might miss definitions of Turks, Ottomans, Young Turks and Ottomanism.² Akçam uses the term, *Young Turks*, for those who rebelled in 1908. In 1913 they set up a triumvirate of “Three Pashas,” Cemal, Enver and Talat. But the members of the Committee of Unity and Progress, CUP, or Unionists, were as multi-ethnic as the Empire. Turks, the majority, held key positions, although Arabs, Jews, Kurds and Druses made their contribution. There were a pro-German grand vezir, Halim Said, Tekin Alp, an ideologue of Jewish descent, Emmanuel Carrasso, a Unionist, and Kurds in killer gangs. So, “Young Turks” needed to be defined better by showing how the multi-ethnic mixture changed with men from the Balkans and the Caucasus. What *joint ideology* drove them ahead? Taner Akçam did not answer this key question.

In the first three chapters Akçam exposed the purge of Ottoman sources from the very start and immediately after the genocide, the plan to *cleanse Anatolia*, and the drive against the Greeks of Thrace and the Aegean 1913 to 1914. In the next three chapters he dealt with the turn of Ottoman policies against the Greeks, an initial phase of the anti-Armenian policy and its final steps in decision-making. Chapters seven to ten offer documentary archival proof of the intent to annihilate, the “demographic policy” against the

Armenians, and assimilation by forced conversion to Islam and marriage. The last three chapters contain information with regard to Armenian property, the official denial and Ottoman counter-sources, and his conclusions.

The reader gets an overview of Ottoman sources (pp. 453-457). Incriminating records have been destroyed “right after reading.” After the war, the same took place in Istanbul Court-Martials about War Crimes 1918 to 1922. Also, papers were removed by such leading men as the Unionist Nazim Bey and Hans von Seeckt, acting chief of staff of the Ottoman High Command. At the same time, the author also cited Ahmed Esat (later known as Esat Uras) who disclosed that an *order to kill deportees* was sent via courier to governors. After reading it, the message was to be returned to the couriers, who were often secretaries of the CUP party. This was corroborated in the trial of March 5, 1919. Akçam reprinted Talat’s cable of June 22, 1915 to governors concerning *forced conversion to Islam* with the note to remove it from the telegraph office and destroy it (pp. 13-15). From the start, the perpetrators worked with a notion of guilt and endeavored to hide their crimes.

Genocidal Attempts Against all “Infidels”

Until 1913, the Balkan Wars led to a Muslim migration into the Ottoman realm. In the fall of that year and in 1914 the Ottomans exchanged populations by agreements with Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece. For a short period, they provided for the bilateral exchange of minorities to each of their respective ethno-religious majority lands. According to Akçam, there was a Unionist plan of further *ethno-religious homogenization* in Anatolia with two parts: *cleansing* of Anatolia’s non-Muslim population and the assimilation or *Turkification* of Anatolia’s non-Turkish people (p. xiv). As it turned out, all “infidels” were included.

Akçam discovered cables dealing with the expulsion of 500 Russian Jews from Jaffa on February 6, 1915. He came to the conclusion that deportations of which the government was unaware took place in a great number within the area controlled by Cemal Pasha’s Fourth Army. Here Akçam argued that Cemal ordered a number of expulsions that he considered necessary on the basis of political and/or military necessity. On August, 23, an “irritated Talat” (p. 61) asked Cemal about the identity of “1,700 Jews to be expelled” and “the reasons of their expulsion.”

Was Talat really “unaware” or “irritated” about expulsions for “political and/or military necessities?” Was it one or the other? In many cases a *dual track-system* was at work, which Akçam uncovered for Armenians (p. 380). The Ottomans had sent “protective cables” in favor of a “fair treatment” of the deportees (also to pacify their German partners). But the Unionists sent contradictory “genocidal cables.” The latter were often dispatched on the same official or private telegraph lines or via courier (p. 13). With regard to Jewish affairs in Palestine there were no “war necessities” for the deportations, as may be seen in Jewish and German records.³ As illustration follow four pages with clippings from the 1921 *Palestine Report* on the Ottoman rule which illuminate the *attempted genocide* against the Jews.

Zionist Organization, ed.: *Palestine during the War*. Record of the Preservation of the Jewish Settlements in Palestine. From the Report to the 12th Zionist Congress at Carlsbad, September 1921, London 1921 [Italics added, names adapted], clippings pp. 18-42: III. PALESTINE UNDER TURKISH MILITARY RULE

(1) *Turkey's Declaration of War* (p. 18): On October 31st [1914], the seriousness of the situation in Palestine was accentuated by Turkey's entry into the war. Although this step had been anticipated for some time, yet when actually taken it was felt as a terrible aggravation of the existing difficulties, notably through the fear to which it gave rise that now communication with the outer world would cease entirely. Immensely overrating their own strength, the Turks... believed that the day had come when they could *sweep all foreigners out of the Ottoman State*. In respect of the Jews, this purpose first revealed itself in a series of persecutions and oppressive acts. The Zionist agency in Istanbul and the Actions Committee in *Berlin* endeavored immediately to counteract the oppressive measures. Both bodies followed events in Palestine with the closest attention.

(2) *Cemal Pasha and his Subordinates*: Cemal Pasha, who as Commander-in-Chief of the Fourth Army and Minister of Marine, exercised supreme authority over the whole of Syria and Arabia, came to the country with the idea of fully *Ottomanising* all Turkish provinces, even those in which, with the exception of some officials, there were no Turks. The object which he set before himself was *to root out all foreign subjects and replace them* with persons more to the taste of the Turkish Government. He was, however, of an incalculable temper, always acting on the spur of the moment. His commands were self-contradictory. In the most important and critical affairs he decided without consulting experts...

He had a certain appreciation for the educational work of the Jews, but he was inflexibly opposed to the idea of an extension of the Jewish Yishuv. On [p. 18] this account, he issued a stringent *prohibition of all sale of land and all transfer of land* through Ottomans to non-Ottoman Jews. Cemal Pasha made a special point of *persecuting the Zionists*. He sought to represent them as a *revolutionary element*, and tried to institute legal actions against them in the same way as against the Arabs. With this object he appointed a special official to conduct investigations.

One of the first acts of Cemal Pasha was to summon a number of Jewish notables to appear before him in Jerusalem. He there announced to them that the next day they would be sent with their families into the *interior of Asia Minor*. Only through the intervention of Albert Antebi, the representative of the *Aliyah* and the Alliance in Jerusalem was Cemal induced to change his mind, so that instead of thirty people going to Bursa, thirteen finally went to Tiberias... Cemal's period of office was marked by a whole series of *Jewish trials*. Cases occurred of people being suddenly taken from their houses, and then being shut up for weeks or months in prison, without even being informed of the charge made against them. Many of them were, after weeks or months of detention, sent into the interior of the country.

Baha ad-Din: A true disciple of Cemal Pasha was Baha ad-Din, who at the beginning of the war occupied the post of Qaimaqam in Jaffa. This man had been trained for a position in Armenia, and he came to Jaffa armed with definite instructions, and with the object of *instituting there a reign of terror like that in Armenia*. Immediately after his arrival he declared to the Hakham Bashi in the hearing of a number of persons in his office that he was a determined opponent of those Palestine Jews who called themselves Zionists. He had, he said, devoted particular attention to this question while he was yet in Istanbul. He knew the Jews, whose prayer book was full of "Zion, Zion." They came now in order to acquire the land, and founded "colonies" like the Romans, i.e., settlements [start p. 19] which were to form a State within a State. But he would deal rigorously with them. His first order was that Hebrew sign-boards should be prohibited (Hebrew was only allowed to take the third place along - with Turkish and Arabic, and then only in small letters); that the street name-plates in Tel Aviv should be removed; and) that Jewish guards of the *Jewish quarter* should be forbidden. He further resolved not to allow the Jewish subjects of foreign countries to land... He brought his own career to an end by the *great domiciliary search* which he instituted in Tel Aviv on November 5th, 1914. On December 17th, he projected a *mass expulsion of Jews* from Jaffa, which caused a universal commotion. In consequence of the great indignation roused by this action abroad, Cemal Pasha found himself obliged to remove Baha ad-Din from his post as Qaimaqam, though he simply transferred him to the information service's head in the staff of the 4th Army [[Amin al-Husaini](#) served in the "4th" too].

Hasan Bey: The harshest and cruelest of all the Turkish officials was the Commandant of the Jaffa district, Hasan Bey, who for a time was also Deputy Qaimaqam in Jaffa. He was the very type of an Oriental satrap. It would suddenly come into his head to summon respectable householders to him after midnight, and hours after they would return to their expectant families with an order to bring him some object from their homes which had caught his fancy or of which he had heard — an electric clock, a carpet, etc. Groundless arrests, insults, tortures, bastinadoes — these were things every house-holder had to fear. Like Cemal, he also had an ambition to beautify the towns. For this purpose he suddenly had whole rows of *houses pulled down* without offering any reason, and forced the owners to sign legal documents stating that they gave up all claim to their property. Both they and the other inhabitants were compelled to provide building materials and money. He forced the laborers under threat of the lash to give work without payment...

Hasan Bey continually demanded from the Jewish institutions *money* for and active participation in the execution of public works (building of a mosque in Jaffa, erection of the Muslim schools founded by him, etc.). The Jewish [start p. 20] *communal committees* particularly excited his wrath. He openly called the members of the Colony Committees "Komitadjes." Every Jewish institution and building was suspect in his eyes. When Hasan Bey presented a demand to a colony, he usually reinforced it with a threat to attack the colony with his soldiers and wipe it out if his request was not fulfilled. At the end of 1916 Hasan Bey was removed to al-Mausil. Then there was a *domiciliary visit*. One morning the residents of Tel Aviv woke up to find the whole quarter surrounded by a cordon of soldiers, while policemen pressed into the houses and began their search. Prominent individuals were arrested and sent to Jerusalem. The search lasted about a week... On November 5th, 1914, a *second domiciliary visit* was carried out. Baha ad-Din had Tel Aviv encircled on all sides, posted guards at the crossroads, and began a minute search in the houses. He looked for money, securities, and checks on the bank. Some people were imprisoned for a time. [start p. 21]...

The First Exodus from Jaffa [start p. 22]: Baha ad-Din's great coup was the *expulsion* of Jews from Jaffa on December 17th, 1914. On that date at mid-day he suddenly issued an order that *all Jews* who were subjects of foreign Governments and had not yet become Ottoman subjects *must leave the country* by the boat which was to come to Jaffa at four o'clock. Policemen and soldiers posted themselves in the streets, beat and arrested men and women, old persons and children, and dragged them to the police buildings. They were not allowed to take with them their things, not even a change of clothing. Those arrested in the streets received no permission to inform their families of their arrest and to secure provisions for the journey. Without pity they were all dragged to the Customs House, and from there transferred in the most unfeeling manner on to the ship in boats.

The barbarity of the officials who carried out this expulsion passed all bounds. Before their eyes the boatmen dragged the exiles in the darkness of the evening out to sea. They threatened with knives and struck the people who refused to give them what they demanded. The ship could not take in all the victims, and a large part returned to the shore. Many families were separated; either the children remained in the boat while the parents had already been put on board, or the children had to depart while the parents remained behind. This expulsion was all the more unexpected, as a decision was being awaited from Istanbul regarding the *naturalization*. Cemal Pasha, as Commander-in-Chief, had simply given the *order for expulsion* without the Central Government knowing anything about it... The continuance of the *expulsion* was stopped by *telegraphic order* from Istanbul. The fact of the expulsion and the manner in which it was carried out were so strongly commented on in *foreign countries* that the Turkish Government saw itself sorry compelled to remove Baha ad-Din from his post, though, as already mentioned, it was only to transfer him to a higher one.

Trials: Nothing contributed so much to depress and mortify the Jews under the Turkish rule as the *chain of trials of leading Zionists* which extended over the whole period. These trials gave a shock to the whole Jewish community, and kept not only the accused but all the representatives of the Zionist Organization in continuous agitation and unrest. In every case it was necessary to give the accused legal, political, and financial assistance, and the Palestine Office in particular was kept in a constant ferment. The whole of the trials had no other object than to reduce to inaction persons who were known as representatives of Zionism... [start p. 23]

END OF THE TURKISH RULE, *Evacuation of Jaffa*: From the beginning of the war Cemal Pasha had been resolved to *make Palestine Turkish*. His intention was to send a large portion of the inhabitants of the country into distant Turkish provinces, and to settle Turks in their place in Palestine. With this end in view he was always expelling Arabic and Jewish families. This was only a preliminary to the *mass expulsion* which he intended to order at the propitious moment. For the *expulsion of the Jews*, he chose the moment when in March, 1917, the British were preparing their first serious invasion of Palestine. On March 29th, the order was issued that all Ottoman inhabitants not of the Moslem religion, and all Jews without distinction of nationality, must leave their abodes in Jaffa and the colonies of the Jaffa Kaza. This order was generally interpreted as the *prelude to a repetition of the Armenian massacres*.

The *Consuls of the neutral States and the German and Austrian Consuls* immediately lodged a protest. This caused Cemal Pasha to alter the form of the order in such a way as to reveal his real intention. According to the revised text of the order all inhabitants of Jaffa without distinction of religion and nationality had to leave the town and only the agriculturists in the villages and colonies were allowed to remain in their abodes till after the harvest. In regard to the main point, Cemal Pasha still remained inflexible. Every attempt to baulk his intentions only made him more obstinate. All *telegrams*, even those of friendly consuls to their Governments, were held back by him for some days.

Although the military situation in Palestine underwent such an alteration during these days that there was no longer any strategical ground for the evacuation of Jaffa, yet the *expulsion order still remained in force*. Some days were allowed to the Jews of Jaffa to make their preparations, after which they would have to leave their houses and businesses and go into exile. On the *evening before Passover* the last train left the town. The inhabitants had to carry out their removal from the town at their own expense. Only very few railway carriages were provided for conveying the fugitives, so that hundreds of men, women, and children had to sit about on the station without protection from the weather and without food, and to depend on the kindness of the station officials for any small comforts.

Help from Galilee: One trembles to think what the fate of the exiles would have been, had not the settlers of Galilee come to their aid. The Committee which had been formed for the purpose of helping those who had been evacuated in Galilee placed dozens of railway coaches at the disposal of the Evacuation Committees in Jaffa and Petah Tikvah. These travelled day and night without interruption [start p. 37], and brought the persons evacuated *from Jaffa to Galilee*. They met with a particularly hospitable reception in the new farms. Yet in spite of the fraternal welcome which was accorded them in the Galilean colonies... their situation became desperate... epidemics broke out which... caused a serious mortality among them.

The Last Persecutions in Judea, Trials, for Espionage: In September, 1917, a young man from Rishon le Zion was arrested on the Egyptian border as he was about to cross into Egypt. It was disclosed in the examination, which lasted some months that besides him a number of people, including Turkish officials and Jewish and Christian inhabitants, had made the attempt to transmit information from Palestine to the British Army, which the inhabitants of the country regarded as their deliverer. [start p. 38]

This discovery gave Cemal Pasha and his subordinates a good opportunity to proceed against the whole Yishuv. For several weeks the colonies Zichron, Jacob, Rishon le Zion, and Petah Tikvah, the colonies of Lower Galilee and the Jewish inhabitants, of Haifa and Tiberias were subjected to bitter persecution. Several persons were arrested, including the heads of the colonies, the members of the various committees...

Proceedings against those evading Military Service: Along with these arrests and examinations of persons suspected of espionage, Cemal Pasha began to proceed with greater *harshness against Jews liable to military service*. Repugnance to service in the Turkish Army was equally strong among all sections of the population of Syria and Palestine — Muslims, Christians, and Jews. In the third year of the war the number of *deserters* in Syria and Palestine is said to have reached 100,000. Every Arab village harbored a large number of deserters. Most of those called to the colors escaped back to their villages in a short time. Equally great was the number of deserters in the towns.

The officials who were charged with the search for deserters turned this activity into a new source of income for themselves. The Government knew all that was going on, but could not do anything to prevent it. Only against the Jews were energetic steps taken. In the last few weeks before the arrival of the English, when Cemal's irritability and his fury against the Jews were at their height, these *persecutions became particularly severe*. Under the pretext of looking for shirkers, attacks were made on the colonies, and the people there arrested in crowds. Those arrested were tied to one another or to a horse and beaten mercilessly. Jerusalem was filled with crowds of prisoners from the colonies, who came from all ends and comers of Judea. The streets were empty. Everyone hid in holes and cellars, in wells and garrets. For weeks together people did not venture to show themselves in the street.

Persecutions in Samaria: In Samaria the search for spies was placed under the charge of the Qaimaqam, who had also learnt his trade in Armenia. One day about midnight, he attacked Zichron Jacob with a company of soldiers. The *Aaronsohn family* was tortured in mediaeval fashion. The daughter, Sarah Aaronsohn, was mercilessly beaten before the eyes of her aged father, and after three days of the most terrible agony, found an opportunity of escaping from her tormentors by committing suicide.

In Lower Galilee the military doctor, Hasan Bey, was put in charge of the search for firearms. He also conducted it to the accompaniment of cruel tortures of old men and women. Hundreds of young men were sent to Nazareth, and from there to *Damascus* for a continuance of their examination. *Only the liberation of Judea and the capture of Jerusalem put an end to these persecutions*. But before it could take effect some hundreds of young people were sent to Damascus. They had to pass many days in closed railway carriages without [start p. 39] food and water... In Damascus a special cemetery, with sixty graves, bears witness to the effects of this *expulsion*.

Several prominent *Jews were sent away along with the heads of the Christian communities*. Another long list had been drawn up of persons to be sent away, but owing to the conquest of the country it was left in abeyance. By Hanukkah, 1917, this chapter of sorrows for the Yishuv in Judea was closed by the British occupation, whereas Samaria and Galilee remained under the Turkish yoke about a year longer.

RELIEF WORK IN DAMASCUS AND ISTANBUL, *Damascus as Centre for Palestine* [p. 40]: With the removal of the chief command of the Syrian army to Damascus, this place became more and more important for the administration of Palestine, and so for the fate of the Jews of that country. Again and again the representatives of the Evacuation Committee, Meir Dizengoff and Chaim M. Kalvarisky, had to wait on Cemal Pasha in order to induce him to countermand severities which had been threatened by the officials, or to obtain concessions and facilities for the Evacuation Committee.

As time went on a group was formed in *Damascus* of prominent public workers who had been expelled from Palestine and lived in exile in Damascus, along with others who occupied posts there in the military or civil administration. They found much to do in Damascus. A number of Jews involved in the *espionage trials* had been dragged to Damascus, as also a large number of young people charged with evading military service. Numbers of Palestine Jews who were supposed to be going to Istanbul passed through Damascus. All these had to be looked after. Special thanks are due to the *German Consul, Friedrich-Werner Graf von der Schulenburg*, who defended the interests of the Jews with great energy. Until the final conquest of Galilee through the decisive victory of Edmund Allenby in September 1918, Damascus remained an important administrative center of the Palestine Office, with branches in Galilee and Haifa, and the *expelled Jews* found there a protecting hand. [p. 42]

The Position in Judea: The persecution to which the Jewish population of Palestine had been exposed during the closing period of the Turkish regime made them all the more thankful for the *liberation of the country by the British troops*. The capture of Jerusalem on the first day of Hanukkah was hailed with particular delight, and was celebrated by all the Jews in the liberated area as a national holiday. The rejoicings were greatly heightened by the news of the *Balfour Declaration* of November 1917, which reached Palestine while the advance of the English was taking place.

Was there an *ideology* that favored the *liquidation of non-Muslim minorities*? The talk that Russian Jews belonged to an enemy state does not apply, for the persecutions began in 1913. Cemal tried twice, in 1915 and 1917, to drive all Jews from Palestine regardless of their citizenship. This also affected the German Jews there. There are eyewitness reports that lead to one conclusion: as the Armenian genocide progressed, the Unionists also tried to carry out the same policy against *Palestinian Jews*. They were unable to achieve this goal because of the Kaiser's pro-Zionist line, Zionist counter steps and diplomatic protests. One tenth of Palestinian Jews perished in this *attempted genocide*. Akçam cannot explain this ideology, which is a weak point in a great study.

Greek villagers of western Anatolia were forced out and replaced by Muslim immigrants (pp. 69-70). Special Organization Units, *teshkilat-i makhsusa*, did the intimidation, terror and killings. They cleared out villages, pushed males into conscription for labor brigades and redistributed Greek-owned businesses to Muslims. In 1914 Celal Bayar was involved as a civilian. Later, he became President of the Republic. In late 1916, Baha ad-Din Şakir fully turned against the Greeks of the Samsun area (p. 100, 112). Akçam viewed this development as a *trial run* of the deportation of Armenians (p. 94). He also pointed to the ties between Berlin and Istanbul. There was a key figure, the German marine attaché Hans Humann. A boyhood friend of war minister Enver, he tried to slow down the force against "coastal Greeks." Nonetheless, the Ottomans expelled them. Akçam stressed that the "evacuations" 1916 to 1918 were enforced with brutality, but for what purpose?

Akçam focused on Armenians though he neglected cables which contained the *incitement to jihad and Islamism*. He wrote that "about 150 families have been converted to Islamism" (p. 292, 301). But they converted to Islam, the religion, not to the *ideology of Islamism*. This is true for the sultan-caliph's *jihad appeal* of November 14, 1914. Also the "Ottoman population or settlement policy" (p. 271) took place in a *multiethnic empire* and was not an isolated initiative against the Armenians. What about non-Armenian Christians who were murdered, such as Assyrians and other "infidels?" It is hard not to stumble over so many cables where Ottoman soldiers explained that their killings followed the *sultan's jihad* or "German wishes" to do it *à la franca*, that means "the European or German way."⁴

Since a coherent perspective is missing, the author cannot sufficiently illuminate the ideological nexus which motivated the previous Armenian massacres, which had taken place since 1894, the parallel attempts against the Jews since 1915, the fading war threat in Gallipoli – after March 1915 – and the full *jihadization of Islam* by the German-Ottoman axis. Akçam missed or ignored this literature.⁵ So Akçam cannot explain the fact that Armenians *and* other minorities were subjected to a genocide which was rooted in a strain of *Islamism*. In fact, on February 1, 1916, minister of war Enver Pasha told the German politician Gustav Stresemann that the Ottomans had killed up to a million and a half Armenians.⁶

Key Contradictions

On the one hand the author claimed that the context of such mass murder was the division of the empire into nation-states (449). In fact, the Armenian genocide was a part of a comprehensive operation intended to save the empire, — or a Turkish nation state. Akçam states that it is incorrect to interpret the Armenian genocide along the lines of a clash between the Muslim groups as Turks, Kurds or Circassians versus its Christian groups like Armenians, Greeks and Assyrians. Rather this genocide must be seen as an issue between the Ottoman state and its subjects and part of specific policies of the regime. The rulers viewed not only one group, due its religious and ethnic makeup as a threat. Thus they intended to expel those groups from Anatolia, and failing that, to kill them. If this was the case, how can he explain the same policy against the other groups, including the Jews of Palestine?

On the other hand, Akçam by citing many records proved that the major fault line of genocide was the one he called “incorrect” for interpretation (p. 449). This was between the Turkish *Muslim majority* and the *non-Muslim minorities*. That basic difference was in the mind of the people involved as the Empire’s fundamental classification due to religion in every Ottoman census: *Muslims and non-Muslims* (p. 32). Only this deep distinction permits a correct understanding for other eras from the Ottoman-Russian War of 1878 up to the Armenian massacres 1894-1896, 1914 to 1918 and, briefly after the war, in the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of the Republic of Turkey. The author did not clarify what was the major ideology, the *driving force* in the minds of the Ottomans that was *additionally* instigated by the *German-Ottoman jihad*. Also missing from the index are the terms, *jihad* and *Islamism*.

Akçam did not discuss at all the appeal to jihad by the Ottoman sultan-caliph (and counter declarations by Agha Khan III) for example. But there are many cables with reports by Turkish and Kurdish witnesses who explained that they perpetrated massacres in the name of jihad. Sometimes common soldiers and officers explained that the Sultan declared jihad or even that these were German orders by the Kaiser. The author acknowledges that the policy of “*Ottoman Islamist supremacy against infidels*” played a role, and the Unionists saw the Christians as second class citizens (335). Only one minority was protected by a sovereign state, the Greeks. Therefore, the Ottomans took special care not to draw Athens into the war. Two groups were unprotected by a state, the Armenians and the Jews. *Islamism* was the main ideology behind the Armenian genocide and the attempted genocide against the *Jews of Palestine*. It received impetus as a result of an organized incitement campaign of German–Ottoman *jihadization of Islam* which openly took place since 1914 and is here the *missing part* of the story.⁷

To sum up, Akçam has unearthed new skeletons in the form of documents from Turkish archives but he overlooked the “genocidal brain and soul.” We know better now what steered the limbs but less about the ideology in their minds. The author mentioned Muslim fanaticism (p. 289, 307), but this is not enough. It is only part of the story. We can compare his results with other records. His use of the term, “population policy,” is weak. It works for official Ottoman views. If *two thirds of a minority* were destroyed, can we

accept it as policy? (p. 450) “Population policy” was a code and cover, as was the term, “relocation to designated areas.” The soldiers and bands in the killing fields were not driven by such a “policy” but rather by *jihad and Islamism*. Some twenty-five years later, Hitler and his accomplices such as the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, al-Hajj Amin al-Husaini, and Iraq’s ex-prime minister, Rashid Ali al-Kailani, again used this very genocidal strain of that ideology.

After the Second World War, the fate of the Ottoman’s Armenian population was high on the list of crimes against humanity. One film included a clip from a 1949 CBS interview with Raphael Lemkin, the law professor who in 1943 coined the term “genocide” which corresponds with the German word, “Völkermord,” (which contains a plural, the murder of *peoples*). “I became interested in genocide,” he said, “because it happened so many times,” Lemkin tells commentator Quincy Howe: “First to the Armenians, then after the Armenians, Hitler took action.”⁸ Hitler and al-Husaini, who was the chief Islamist of the time, were allied observers of the Armenian genocide and the *attempted genocide against Jews in World War One*. They used their understanding of these earlier events as a precedent and blue print for genocides against Jews, Slavs and others during World War Two.



Photo: [Wiki](#)

Day of Remembrance, April 24, 2009: Armenians in the Syrian town of Dair az-Zur

Taner Akçam’s study represents a giant step forward. He produced a most important book, all the more so because the *ideology of Islamism* has endured,⁹ and most recently some of its outstanding proponents have seized power in the Middle East.

[Wolfgang G. Schwanitz](#)

Dr. Wolfgang G. Schwanitz is a historian of the Middle East and German Middle East policy. He is the author of five volumes and the editor of ten books, including *Germany and the Middle East, 1871-1945* (Wiener, [2004](#)). His upcoming book is *German Middle Eastern Studies After 9/11* (Weist, Berlin, [2013](#)).

Taner Akçam, *The Young Turks’ Crime Against Humanity. The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press [2012](#), 483 p.

This book review has been made available to the *Faculty Forum* courtesy of the *Jewish Political Studies Review*. The author wishes to express his gratitude to Dr. Joel Fishman of the Jerusalem [Center](#) for Public Affairs.

¹ Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006).

² For related terms see also M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, [2008](#)), 138–177.

³ Wolfgang G. Schwanitz, *Islam in Europa, Revolten in Mittelost*. Islamismus und Genozid von Wilhelm II. und Enver Pascha über Hitler und al-Husaini bis Arafat, Usama Bin Ladin und Ahmadinejad sowie Gespräche mit Bernard Lewis (Berlin: Weist, [2013](#)), 103-116 [German].

⁴ Wardges Mikaeljan, ed., *Die Armenier-Frage und der Genozid an den Armeniern in der Türkei* [1913–1919] (Jerewan: Akademie, [2004](#)), German Cables about Max von Oppenheim 88, Annihilation 225, the System of Terror 181, Targeted Extermination 145, The Concentration Camp Qatma 224, Christians 239, Deportations 256, Shükri Bey's Role 268, Islamization 297, Jihad 466, and the Turkish Race 375 [German].

⁵ Here some recent titles: *Germany and the Middle East 1871–1945*, ed. Wolfgang G. Schwanitz (Princeton: Wiener, [2004](#)); Tilman Lüdke, *Jihad made in Germany*. Ottoman and German Propaganda and Intelligence Operations in the First World War (Münster: Lit: 2005); *Kaiser Wilhelm II. als Oberster Kriegsherr im Ersten Weltkrieg*. Quellen aus der militärischen Umgebung des Kaisers 1914–1918, ed. Holger Afflerbach (Munich: Oldenburg, 2005) [German]; Efraim Karsh, *Islamic Imperialism*. A history (New Haven: Yale University Press, [2006](#)); Salvador Oberhaus, „Zum wilden Aufstande entflammen“. Die deutsche Propagandastrategie für den Orient im Ersten Weltkrieg am Beispiel Ägyptens (Saarbrücken: Müller, [2007](#)) [German]; Donald McKale, *War By Revolution. Germany And Great Britain In The Middle East In The Era Of World War I* (Ohio: The Kent State University Press, [2008](#)); Alexander Will: *Kein Griff nach der Weltmacht*. Geheime Dienste und Propaganda im deutschösterreichisch-türkischen Bündnis 1914-1918 (Cologne: Böhlau, [2012](#) [German]; Stefan M. Kreuzer, *Dschihad für den deutschen Kaiser*. Max von Oppenheim und die Neuordnung des Orients (1914–1918), (Graz: Ares, [2012](#)) [German]; after Akçam's book appeared this relevant book by Lionel Gossman, *The Passion of Max von Oppenheim*. Archaeology and Intrigue in the Middle East from Wilhelm II to Hitler (Cambridge: [Open Book](#), [2013](#)).

⁶ Wolfgang G. Schwanitz, „Immer guter Laune: Gutmann und die Deutsche Orientbank,“ in *Herbert M. Gutmann*, ed. Vivian J. Reinheimer (Leipzig: Koehler-Amerlang, [2007](#)), 61–77.

⁷ For details see Schwanitz, *Islam in Europa, Revolten in Mittelost*, [2013](#), 77-121.

⁸ Alessandra Stanley, “A PBS Documentary Makes Its Case for the Armenian Genocide, With or Without a Debate” *The New York Times*, 04/19/2006.

⁹ See also the upcoming by Barry Rubin, Wolfgang G. Schwanitz, *Nazis, Islamists and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New Haven: Yale University Press, [2014](#)).