Stumbling blocks

Geopolitics, the Armenian Genocide, and the American Jewish community

Jason Harris

Master’s Thesis, April 2008
Brandeis University, Hornstein Class of 2008
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I was cold and said, “We are doing nothing to you that you have not been doing to us,” and he said, “And we have done nothing to you that you have not been doing to us.”

Then I pulled out the bayonet suddenly, and he staggered forward a couple of paces and fell to his knees, clutching his stomach, and it looked as if he were about to pray, and before he fell on to his face he looked up at me and said, “As for me, I never harmed anyone in my life.”

-- Louis de Bernières, Birds Without Wings
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Jan. 2007
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Feb. 2007
Turkish officials meet with American Jewish leaders

Summer/Fall 2007
H.Res. 106 voted on by San Francisco JCRC, House of Representatives
On January 19, 2007, a teenage Turkish nationalist murdered Hrant Dink on the streets of Istanbul in broad daylight. The Armenian-Turkish journalist and activist had earned the enmity of Turkey’s ultranationalists for his vociferous and very public criticisms of Turkey’s present and past human rights policies, particularly the state’s refusal to acknowledge the 1915 Armenian Genocide. Finally, it seemed, at least one of the many death threats he had received proved real enough. The mass protests that erupted at his funeral exposed a rift in Turkish society that hinges in part on the question of the Armenian genocide, between those who see its acknowledgment as a necessary component of the kind of modernism exemplified by democracy and civil rights, and those who see nothing more than lies used by the international community to insult Turkey and its glorious recent past. A battle of wills erupted to the surface between the Turkish state, which seeks to deny that any such genocide ever occurred, and others who believe that only through toleration and minority rights will Turkey make the ascension to a more modern, prosperous life. Dink’s murder resonated around the world, enveloping multiple countries, politicians, religious and ethnic groups in an at-times bewildering realpolitik struggle over a terrible atrocity that took place more than 90 years ago.

6,699 miles from Istanbul, the San Francisco Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) sits in the heart of the city’s Financial District, two blocks from
Market Street and the famed Ferry Building. Poised on the edge of the Embarcadero, facing the waters of San Francisco Bay just below its office windows, the JCRC looks out at the steel-gray Bay Bridge, Treasure Island, and the Port of Oakland. Tremendous cargo ships, tankers, commuter ferries, and the occasional Navy guided-missile ship float by underneath buzzing Coast Guard helicopters and regional jets out of Oakland and San Francisco international airports. Slapped to the side of the building, a massive three-story billboard of a pouty girl advertising a green-and-white Gap summer dress looks down on cars, buses, taxis, trolleys and tourists flying by, an entire world away from the roil of Turkey’s nationalist and ethnic struggles. Indeed, here in San Francisco, in the park across the street from the JCRC, whites, blacks, Asians, Latinos, Russians, women, men, gays, and the occasional transgendered all mingle, as do the homeless: the crazy, the vets, the down-on-their-luck, the shoe-shiners, the pot smokers, the drunks. Not infrequently a sea lion swipes at low-flying seagulls off the pedestrian-only Pier 14. True to its geographical extremity on the western edge of the United States, San Francisco serves as the focal point for the Bay
Area’s leftist politics and diverse humanity. From wineries to barrios, million-dollar homes to urban ghettos, the Bay Area is busy and vibrant, exciting and infuriating. In this milieu, JCRC Executive Director Rabbi Doug Kahn is fond of saying, “I never have a dull day at the office.”

This is the world in which the JCRC operates, and into this environment one political issue stood out in 2007: whether the JCRC ought to support congressional legislation – House Resolution 106 – calling on the President of the United States to memorialize the Armenian experience during World War One as “genocide.” I was drawn into this effort while fulfilling my graduate school fieldwork assignment at the JCRC and was asked to research the historical background of the Armenian genocide and Turkish-Israel relations. I quickly came to realize that this issue touched on a variety of aspects of Jewish communal life: professional and lay Board relations, consensus building, Jewish community and external group relations, global politics and Israel advocacy, the role of Israel in the American Jewish community’s decision-making process, even domestic politics, for Nancy Pelosi, San Francisco’s congressional representative and the Speaker of the House, supported the resolution. I was drawn to three major questions: how did global political complexities intrude on such a seemingly simple request for support from the American Armenian community? What is the past history between the Armenian people and the American Jewish community? And how does this issue exemplify or raise larger questions of Jewish political advocacy?
The ideal setting for this paper would have been one year ago in the office of the San Francisco JCRC – and any other American Jewish organization asked to deal with the question of the Armenian genocide. In other words, this paper seeks to be something of a “primer” or case study for Jewish community leaders who find themselves embroiled in a controversy that has both deep roots in the past and important implications for contemporary geopolitics.

It is tempting to write a complete history of the Jews vis-à-vis the Armenian Genocide. There is almost no end to what could be studied: Jewish history in both Armenia and the Ottoman Empire; the huge bulk of scholarship comparing the Armenian experience and the Holocaust; the linkages between early Zionism, the Ottoman Empire, and the Armenians; a complete accounting of the experiences of Jews in the Ottoman Empire and Europe during the time of the Armenian Genocide, etc. Instead this paper addresses the above three questions with a narrow focus on those historic elements that shed light on American Jewry’s controversial engagement with House Resolution 106.

This paper has three major sections. The first part will survey Armenian ancient and medieval histories, noting in particular where the Armenian story abuts the Jewish one. Armenians and Jews have a similar historical narrative that is helpful to know, if for no other reason than for Jewish leaders to understand that our respective ties go beyond our having both been the victims of terrible atrocities in the twentieth century. This section will also survey the era of the 1890s Hamidian massacres and American Jewry’s efforts to recognize and relieve the plight of the Armenians.
The second section will examine the Armenian Genocide, which began in 1915. A survey of this history will include discussion of the rise of the Young Turk movement and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire during World War One, the Genocide itself, the role of the American Ambassador, Henry Morgenthau, a Jew who has become perhaps the single most heroic figure of this terrible era, and additional efforts of America’s Jewish community to respond to the atrocities. This section will delve into (though, regrettably due to constraints on time and space, only scratch the surface of) comparisons between the Genocide and Holocaust, including the role of the Polish Jew Raphael Lemkin, and Turkish denial of the Genocide. Turkey’s denial, its relationship with the West, and its relations with Israel all play a major role in the controversy over American recognition of the Genocide, as does the Armenian diaspora, many of whom reside here in the United States.

There is a question of how to refer to the events of 1915 and after. There is some debate in the scholarly community about whether the atrocities committed against the Armenian people really constituted a state-sponsored “genocide,” or whether, as the Turkish government and others insist, the Armenian experience was just the terrible byproduct of a terrible war. Additionally, “genocide” is somewhat anachronistic given that the word would not be invented until almost 30 years after these events. I am sensitive to these considerations but will anyway adhere to the moniker “Armenian Genocide” or also just “Genocide”. In the same way that we popularly speak about “World War One” or the “Holocaust” despite the anachronism, the “Armenian Genocide” is
the most common and known phrase associated with the events of 1915, and therefore I avoid some of the confusion and irritation that the reader would have upon my dancing around the phrase. And while reams of books have been written arguing one way or the other, this paper does not seek to be yet another examination of whether it was or was not a genocide; although I will make a valiant effort towards objectivity, and will discuss, as mentioned, the other side of the “genocide” debate, I also realize that the reader will probably not be too hard pressed to ascertain my personal feelings on this matter. But my main interest in this topic lies with the three questions stated in this Introduction.

Finally, this paper will examine the contentious congressional resolution in the context of the domestic lobbying effort to get it passed, a brief survey of Israel’s engagement with this issue, the lobbying campaign from Turkey, and the American Jewish community’s debate about whether or not to support the resolution. I use the San Francisco JCRC as a synecdoche, realizing of course that different organizations in different places had different approaches – and drew different conclusions. Nevertheless, the JCRC seems a good example of how what seemed like a straightforward situation – lending Jewish communal support to a fellow ethnic minority who suffered a genocide – in fact became a much deeper question of realpolitik, loyalty to Israeli and U.S. interests, the quest for historical justice, and the role of the American Jewish community in adjudicating questions of history not our own.
Part One

History

Ancient and medieval Armenian history

The Hamidian massacres

The American Jewish community and Armenian relief
Sometime during the 6th century BCE, much of which the Jews spent exiled in Babylon after the destruction of the First Temple, the Armenians emerged as a distinctive cultural group from a variety of tribes that lived in a region encompassing today’s eastern Turkey and parts of the Caucasus. Armenia’s historical development, and, more importantly, the narrative Armenians tell of their history, has a great deal of resonance with the history and traditions Jews tell of their own past: biblical origins, national formation, feelings of victimhood and fatalism, an historic sense of being natives to a specific homeland. It is therefore worth delving into some of this history.

Jewish community leaders ought to be aware that Armenian and Jewish ties do not exist only around genocide, but in fact there is a deeper overlap of historical mentality that may shed some light on the sensitivities over the congressional resolution controversy.

Explanations of Armenian historical origins “bring together myth, religion, history and scientific research . . . to prove that the Armenian nation has been on its land since the ‘beginning of time,’ and that the actual territory is much larger than the current republic. . . . Arguments . . . all come down to the same basic theme: Armenians are at the very least the natives of their land.”

Armenians relate a number of legends as to their ethnic origins, citing various Greek myths;

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some scholars trace their lineage to tribes from the Balkans region. In the centuries prior to their 6th century emergence there existed the Urartu dynasty, an Indo-European civilization located in the region around Mount Ararat and who managed to coalesce what was mostly a tribal expanse into a coherent kingdom. Armenians date the founding of the present capital of Armenia, Yerevan, to the eighth century BCE, making Yerevan several decades older than Rome. Though constant rivals with the neighboring Assyrians, the Urartu's were never actually defeated in battle, instead likely disappearing through assimilation with the dominant Armenian tribe by the 6th century BCE. \(^2\) The most important lesson from this history is that Armenians trace their lineage to the various peoples who inhabited the region around Mount Ararat for at least one or two millennia before the Common Era.

If Jewish tradition looks to the Holy Land as the essential symbol of its history, culture, and traditions, Mt. Ararat is similarly sacred for the Armenian people. Ararat is mentioned four times in the Hebrew Bible, most famously in Genesis 8:4 as the place where Noah's Ark made landfall after the Flood. \(^3\) Though this actual location has of course never been positively identified, most traditions hold the present Ararat – an almost-17,000 foot mountain on the far eastern edge of Turkey – as the "biblical" one. The Armenian historian Razmik Panossian writes extensively about Armenia’s foundational myths, in particular the story of Haik and Bel, from whom the Armenians trace their lineage to Noah.

\(^2\) Ibid. pg. 34
\(^3\) Berlin, Adele and Brettler, Marc Zvi [eds]. *The Jewish Study Bible*. Jewish Publication Society, Oxford University Press (2004). The other three mentions (Jeremiah 51:27, Isaiah 37:38 and 2 Kings 19:37) are largely incidental, though some scholars trace these references directly to the Urartu people.
Jews will undoubtedly recognize the symbolic lessons Panossian argues that Armenians take away from this story.

Movses Khorenatsi (Moses of Khoren), the accepted “father” of Armenian history, wrote down the Haik and Bel legend most likely in the 8th century CE. In his works he mixed as much legend as fact but nevertheless recorded a complete history of the Armenian people, “giving Armenians a sense of belonging that stretches back over two millennium or more.”4 In this legend, Haik, the father of Armenians, comes from the lineage of Japheth, the son of Noah. Haik rebelled against the cruel leader of Babylon, Bel, and then settled in the land around Mt. Ararat. Bel pursued Haik and there was a great battle, in which Bel was killed. Haik stayed in the region, establishing himself and all his descendents as natives of the Ararat region. Panossian writes that Armenians take away five essential attitudes from this narrative that together make up the essence of their historical narrative and cultural identity. 1) Armenia is the cradle of civilization, since Noah’s ark landed on Mount Ararat, 2) Armenians are directly connected with the biblical narrative, 3) righteous rebellion against tyranny and oppression, 4) freedom, independence and justice are the central themes of the Armenians’ origins, and 5) Mount Ararat is the symbol of all Armenians, and the territory around it the Armenian homeland from time immemorial.5

It is not too difficult to imagine replacing “Armenian” with “Jew” in this story to understand the similarities in historical narrative and identity between the two

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5 Ibid. pgs. 49-52
peoples. Jews similarly give themselves a biblical origin in which they are indigenous to the land where much of the Biblical action takes place – simply replace “Ararat” with “the Promised Land.” Jewish biblical and ancient history, too, is as rife with “righteous rebellion against tyranny and oppression,” as it is filled with the notions of “freedom, independence, and justice,” whether it is in the stories of Moses and the Exodus or the Maccabees. The two peoples seem to have a very similar outlook on their respective origins.

Also similar was the geopolitical situation. Like Judea, Armenia was strategically located at a political, military and economic crossroads. “The independence of . . . Armenia was conditional on the balance of power between the two major empires in the region: the Romans in the west, and the Parthians in the south-east.” When the two powers fought it out, Armenia, stuck in the middle, suffered, and usually became a protectorate of whichever power won the tug-of-war; but when the empires saw Armenia as an effective buffer best left alone against the other, the region prospered. The independent Armenian kingdom reached its peak in the first half of the second century BCE, when King Tigran II, known as “The Great”, expanded his kingdom from the Caspian to the Mediterranean Sea, including the ancient city of Damascus (see map next page). At one point, during the reign of the Hasmonean queen Alexandra (76-67 BCE), Tigran even attempted to conquer Judea, penetrating as far as Acco, where the queen sent her envoys to establish relations. But Tigran’s reign – and thus the threat to Judea – was short lived. Armenian had become “large and powerful

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6 Ibid. pg. 37
7 Ben-Sasson, H.H. A History of the Jewish People, Dvir Publishing House (Tel Aviv, 1969), pg. 222
enough for Caesar to send his generals Pompey and Lucullus to conquer it in 63 B.C.” They killed Tigran the Great and executed the rest of his family.⁸ (This was the same campaign in which Pompey captured Judea, ransacked the Second Temple, and brought captives back to Rome, laying the foundation for the beginnings of the Italian Jewish community.) By the early first century CE the dynasty had come to an end. The next few centuries saw a return to Armenia’s position between two competing empires, though with closer ties to the Parthian

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Empire (Persia).

The fourth and fifth centuries, commonly known as the Golden Age, saw the adoption of Christianity and the development of a distinct alphabet, two pivotal events that defined the next 1,600 years of Armenian history. Armenians date their adoption of Christianity to 301 CE, before even Constantine Christianized his empire, making the Armenians the first nation to officially become Christian. Some scholars, though, acknowledging an ambiguous chronology, instead date the adoption to 314 – a mere 13 years later, but after Constantine – and so likely inspired by the developing Roman tendencies toward Christianity. Nevertheless, that the Armenians continue to assert this unique aspect of their past speaks to the way they view their own history. “In a period when religion was a central element of identity, such a conscious decision to convert en masse to a new faith so different from that of their neighbors already indicates a sense of distinctiveness that Armenians sought to maintain.”

Two centuries later, the Armenian Apostolic Church became independent of the Byzantine authority in Constantinople as a way of maintaining a separate identity from both the east and west; the thrust of their efforts were not in proselytizing to outside groups but rather “on maintaining cultural boundaries that would assure their uniqueness.” This, too, sounds quite similar to Jewish notions of separateness and uniqueness as a solution to maintaining distinctiveness as a religious minority. In fact, it seems as though parallels with the Jewish

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11 Ibid. pg. 44
experience did not go unnoticed by the Armenians themselves. “Being the first nation to officially accept Christianity as the state religion also gave Armenians – and especially later nationalists – a powerful claim to be a ‘chosen people’. . . . Such claims were further augmented by [eighth century dynastic rulers] Bagraduni presumptions that they were related to the Jews – i.e. the original chosen people.” This idea of being the chosen people “is no longer widely believed by contemporary Armenians,” but it remains part of their historic identity and outlook.\footnote{Ibid. pg. 44.}

The Bagradunis, it seems, were especially fond of their supposed Jewish origins, promulgating a “false genealogy” that they were direct descendents of King David – and thus Jesus Christ.\footnote{Redgate, Anne Elizabeth. The Armenians, Blackwell Publishers Ltd (Oxford, 1998), pg. 184}

The adoption of Christianity and the effort to spread it among the Armenian peoples led to the development in the fifth century of an alphabet. This became another core piece of their ethnic and national identity. Not only did this enable a more effective transmission of Christianity but it also had the effect of creating a literary tradition unique to Armenian culture, and it was within this literature that much of Armenian history was recorded and distributed. “In a crucial respect they were ‘creating’ Armenians.”\footnote{Panossian, Razmik. The Armenians: From Kings and Priests to Merchants and Commissars, Columbia University Press (New York, 2006), pg. 45} The new religion and new alphabet effected this “Golden Age” of intellectual and cultural prosperity, which was also heightened by a decisive battle against the Persian Sassanids, who attempted to convert the Armenians to Zoroastrianism. The two peoples fought at a place called Avarayr in 451 CE. Despite an overwhelming loss, the battle
was still seen as a moral victory because it – and continued Armenian resistance efforts – eventually forced the Persians to acquiescence to Armenian demands for the freedom to practice Christianity. May 26, the day of the battle, remains today an important national holiday. The Battle of Avarayr and its historical context made an indelible impression on the Armenian national consciousness. “In addition to inserting martyrdom at the heart of Armenian history, Avarayr is also interpreted – specially in the last few decades – as national resistance against oppression . . .”15 As with Armenia’s ancient traditions, it is not difficult to see Jewish parallels, in this instance with the Jewish tradition of the Maccabees fighting against tyranny for freedom of worship in Judea, as encapsulated in a national holiday, Chanukah. The Armenians made this connection, too. The 5th century writer Eghishe wrote about the leaders of the mid-century anti-Sassanid revolt in his book The History of Vardan and the Armenian War. Richard Hovannisian writes about this historical connection.

“ . . . Eghishe more than any other Armenian historian makes the theme of the Maccabees, who fought and died for religious freedom, applicable to the Armenians. The Persians take the place of the Seleucids, Shah Yazdagerd is depicted in the same terms as King Antiochus, while the idea of death for ancestral traditions is modeled, at least verbally, on a basic theme of the books of Maccabees. This parallel between the history of the Armenians and the Jews is made by other Armenian historians. Some of them tried to find physical links between the two peoples by means of fictitious genealogies. In fact, the Armenian nobles had no Jewish

15 Ibid. pg. 48
blood in their veins. But Armenian writers were able to draw on powerful symbols of constancy to an ideal both religious and national that struck a responsive chords in their readers’ hearts.”

Throughout the Middle Ages Armenia struggled to maintain its independence against invasions, external pressures and the spread of Islam. Armenia was briefly conquered by the Arabs in the 7th century but regained independence in the 9th under the above-mentioned Bagraduni rulers, under whom Armenia achieved its greatest political, economic and social development. Yet Armenia continued to find itself amidst competing powers in the region, its power and independence weakening. In the 11th century the Seljuk Turk invasion drove much of the Armenian leadership into what became known as Lesser (or Cilicia) Armenia, today south-central Turkey. “An important geopolitical zone in the European quest to recover the Holy Land, it quickly became ‘a symbol of Christian hope’. The Armenian kings . . . made strong alliances with the Crusaders and the Crusader states in the Levant.”

Lesser Armenia became intimately connected with the West politically, religiously, and economically. But by the end of the 14th century the Armenia kingdom collapsed and was divided between the Turks and the Persians. This development was no small event. The subjugation of Armenia by the Muslims “. . . became an emblem of the failure of European Christianity to save its ‘Eastern brothers.’

Philippe de Mezieres, the fourteenth-century French diplomat and writer,

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described the fall of Armenia as 'a great disgrace to all of Christianity.' It was a statement that would foreshadow the European and American concern for Armenia in the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{18} Armenia never lost the luster it enjoyed for being the earliest Christian kingdom, and in particular for its importance to the West as the sole Christian realm in the midst of the Muslim powers of the eastern Mediterranean.

For the Armenian people, the loss of their kingdom meant that they soon found themselves subject people of the Muslim Ottoman Empire. Despite living in a "multinational and multireligious realm," the minority Armenian Christians "had to endure official discrimination and second-class citizenship" that included massive inequality, as well as a range of restrictive laws on all aspects of life.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{map.png}
\caption{Map obtained from www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/ottoman1481a.html}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid. pg. 31.
from taxes to legal testimony to prohibitions on bearing arms.  

Periodic bouts of violence also affected Armenian communities, particularly those in the more rural areas of the empire. Yet some Armenians enjoyed a level of prosperity as merchants, traders and other professions engaged in international trade and commerce. “Nonetheless, most of the Armenian population remained in its historic homeland, becoming, in large part, tenant farmers or sharecroppers under the dominant Muslim feudal-military elite.”

While there are major differences between the Jewish and Armenian experiences under the Ottomans, Jews recognize this situation for they had a similar social position as a non-Muslim minority. Today, however, while Jews tend to look back with a certain fondness for the Ottomans – as protectors of Jews fleeing Christian persecution in Europe – Armenians see an entirely bloody and contemptuous history between themselves and their Muslim rulers.

Razmik Panossian notes that by the 4th century CE four traits dominated Armenian political and cultural identity, which persisted throughout the rest of Armenia’s history. The first is that the position of Armenia between major competing powers meant that Armenians had to “play a delicate game of balancing . . . to maintain independence," a trick too often unsuccessful, leaving Armenians frequently under the thumb of foreign powers. The second trend is the difficulty in achieving political unity, a theme reflected in the oft-heard slogan

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20 Ibid.
(even today) that “if we can only unite!” Armenians can resume mastery of their fate. The third trait is rebellion against too much foreign imposition, which, in the modern era, has been infused with a nationalist sense such that the earlier resisters are seen as “protectors of Armenian identity and culture. . . .” Finally there is the notion of Armenia as a victim of forces beyond its control, thanks to its geopolitical strategic value. “This mentality of always being a victim,” writes Panossian, “has affected the Armenian popular psyche. . . . In a long history of defeats and persecution, Tigran the Great’s brief empire of 2,000 years ago is still a source of pride for Armenian nationalists.”

As with so many other aspects of Armenian history, narrative, and cultural identity, Panossian’s four trends also seem relevant to the Jews. We often view ourselves in a similar vein, imbuing our own ancient past with a fondness and wistful optimism that disappeared in what we often perceive (rightly or wrongly) as a particularly violent medieval experience, in which the fate of our community was at the whim of the surrounding Christian and Muslim majorities, in Europe and the Mediterranean, respectively. Jews express the same frustration of being trapped in a historical paradigm not of their own making and of the difficulty in uniting disparate diaspora communities, whether hundreds of years ago or even today. It seems, then, that Armenians and Jews share a history that goes way beyond the experience of great suffering in the 20th century; that the mentality between the two peoples in the way they examine their own history and traditions and the conclusions they each draw about themselves, is in many respects quite comparable.
By the end of the seventeenth century Armenia and its people were scattered, political impotent and impoverished. Caught again between two great powers, the Ottoman Turks and the Persian Safavids, Armenia became a battleground, constantly changing hands and displacing hundreds of thousands of Armenians. “It was no longer just a divided state but a divided territory that had become a demographically mixed provincial borderland with a ruined economy. It no longer had an indigenous secular leadership to speak of . . ., and Armenia itself ceased to be a political, economic, intellectual or cultural centre of any significance.”

Important changes had taken place in Armenian society that contributed to later nationalist developments and identity construction. A city-based merchant class replaced the land-based feudal rulers. The centers of the community shifted from Armenia proper to diaspora communities in the major cities and capitals of the two empires, and the church became the voice of leadership for Armenians.

By the nineteenth century the ominous-sounding “Armenian Question” would become a focal point for the Ottoman rulers and even the wider Western world, as the position of Armenians in the Empire became ever more tenuous, resulting in a massive explosion of violence that began in the late 19th century and persisted through the post-World War One era.

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22 Ibid. pg. 67
23 Ibid. pgs. 71-72
The history of atrocities experienced by the Armenians under Ottoman rule – and the American Jewish community’s efforts on behalf of the beleaguered people – did not begin with the 1915 Genocide but rather some two decades earlier, during the 1890s. Indeed, the experiences of the Armenians in the decades prior to the Genocide seem to belie the Turkish contention that the 1915 Genocide was not specifically targeted against the Armenians as a people but was rather a natural – though terrible – consequence of a war in which many people suffered horrible fates. While all groups certainly experienced great hardship and death during World War One, the Armenians already had had a long history of persecution and massacre under the Ottomans; the Genocide, far from being a coincidental or outlier event, was actually the culmination of decades of Ottoman government efforts against the Armenian people. The so-called Hamidian massacres during the mid-1890s spurned a novel movement in the United States: international human rights. Urged on by an active press and an increasingly globally-aware public, numerous American relief efforts were organized to come to the aid of the Armenians. Many prominent Jews of the time were involved, such as Rabbi Stephen Wise and the financier Jacob Schiff, though in national – not specifically “Jewish” – organizational efforts, primarily the National Armenian Relief Committee. This section will relate some of the history during the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, as well as discuss American Jewry’s
efforts on behalf of the Armenians. Regrettably there is simply not the space in this study to devote extensive attention to the rise of the modern-day human rights movement as an outgrowth of this era, nor an explication of all American relief efforts, particularly the role of Christian missionaries, Clara Barton’s Red Cross, or other notable efforts to rescue Armenians and to report on their plight.

It is important to address the status of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire in order to better understand the bitterness with which Armenians remember their lives under Turkish rule. Whereas today Jews tend to examine our Ottoman experience with a sense of gratitude for the comparably less-violent and more-prosperous existence we enjoyed under the Sultan as opposed to Christian Europe, Armenians had a different experience. The Armenians were considered dhimmi – non-Muslims living under the protection of Muslim rule, as were the Jews. In the Ottoman Empire these minority communities became known as millets. By the nineteenth century there were three major millets: Greek Orthodox (the largest), Armenian, and Jewish (divided into three main congregations: indigenous Jews, Karaites, and descendents of the 1490s Iberian exiles). Both Jews and Christians were considered infidels, and were thus subject to the same rules and responsibilities under Islamic law. Both Christians and Jews lacked real legal rights prior to the mid-nineteenth century reform movement known as the Tanzimat. “[A]n Armenian had no recourse in the Islamic court system . . . . The amount of theft and extortion, as well as rape and abduction of Armenian women, that was allowed under this Ottoman legal

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system placed the Armenians in perpetual jeopardy.”  

Armenians suffered under a range of burdensome policies: they could not bear arms, were exempt from military service (and thus incapable of joining the warrior class), yet ironically young boys were in danger of being kidnapped and converted to Islam in order to be conscripted, an exploitative system of taxation, winter-quartering obligation, and various institutionalized codes of behavior (showing deference to Muslims in public, identifiable dress, etc).  

After the Treaty of Adrianople in 1829 Armenia was divided among Russia, Turkey, and Persia, with the greatest concentration of Armenians – around three million – located in six vilayets (provinces) that comprised Turkish Armenia (see map below).  


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26 Ibid.
Patriarch at Constantinople, did enjoy limited self-government in certain areas, though always under the watchful eyes of the Ottoman Muslims.

Efforts were made to reform Ottoman institutions, and to extend greater rights to non-Muslims, during the Tanzimat (Reorganization) era in the mid-nineteenth century (1839-1878). “Unlike the previous reforms . . . these were endeavors to modernize and Westernize the regime and the society of the Ottoman state . . . culminat[ing] in the creation of an Ottoman constitution in 1876.” Yet the Tanzimat had limited reach, impacting only a few major cities, leaving the rural provinces, where most Armenians lived as simple peasants, mostly untouched. Still the Armenians had high hopes for the Tanzimat and were encouraged throughout the era by various actual reforms and, even more so, by promises for wholesale relief of their grievances. Unfortunately, four interrelated factors cut short the Tanzimat and gave rise to the so-called Armenian Question, which spelled doom for Turkish Armenia: the declining fortunes of the Ottoman Empire, the autocratic Sultan Hamid II, the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, and an Armenian cultural and intellectual revival that spawned notions of independence and revolutionary activity, including, in a few instances, armed resistance to their Ottoman overlords.

By the mid-nineteenth century the Ottoman Empire had earned the infamous moniker “sick man of Europe,” thanks to government instability and a

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29 Ibid. pg. 199.
rise in ethnic nationalism that threatened its territorial integrity, as well as a series of wars with Russia that drained its military and financial resources. This was a problem for the Armenians. "Despite their second-class status, most Armenians lived in relative peace so long as the Ottoman Empire was strong and expanding. But as the empire's administrative, financial, and military structure crumbled under the weight of internal corruption and external challenges in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, intolerance and exploitation increased."30 The Tanzimat was an effort to prop up the troubled Empire, but its failure became evident when in 1876 Sultan Abdul Hamid II tossed out the newly-formed constitution and assumed absolute power. "Abdul Hamid plunged his empire deeper into crisis. Under Hamid's reign the debt grew worse, mismanagement and political corruption became further institutionalized, and the condition of his subject peoples, particularly the Christians, grew disastrous."31 As dictators are wont to do in the modern era, rather than committing himself to greater liberalization or a relaxing of the government's theocratic rule, the sultan responded by clamping his fist ever tighter, responding with increasing harshness against any challenge that he perceived threatened his rule.

Russia and Turkey developed a lasting enmity in the 19th century, fighting four wars between 1806 and 1878. “While the wars were bound up in national struggles for control and domination of strategic areas in the Balkans, along the Black Sea, and in the Caucasus, the plight of the Christians under Ottoman rule also figured into Russia’s concern for its coreligionists across the border.”32 In 1877 Russia invaded the Balkans, sparking the fourth war, where fighting also occurred in the Ottoman Empire’s eastern Armenian-dominated provinces. The Armenian community was split; its leadership, including the patriarchate, feared Russian autocracy even more than the sultan’s, and actively rooted for an Ottoman victory. Yet Armenians in the east looked to Russia to protect them from Ottoman persecution. The Russian Army, which included Russian Armenians, rapidly achieved victories in the east. This gave rise to the Ottoman conviction that its Armenian population was acting against the sultan, suspicions that would later play a role in the 1915 Genocide. “The Turks believed that the Turkish Armenians had afforded valuable assistance to the advancing Russian forces; and these suspicions led the Turks to seek vengeance on the Armenians. When the Russian troops were driven back, the Turks found it opportune to allow hordes of Kurds and Circassians to pillage Armenian villages.”33 This ethnic strife between various eastern groups would continue to play a role in the atrocities committed against the Armenians, and lead to permanent bad blood between the groups that persists to this day.

32 Ibid, pg. 37.
33 Nalbandian, Louise. *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*, University of California Press (Berkeley, 1963), pg. 27.
By the end of the war in early 1878 Russia found itself in control of the eastern Armenian provinces. However, two treaties would dash the Armenians’ hopes for a betterment of the situation, as the Russians and Europeans left the Armenians at the mercy of an angry and vengeful Sultan Hamid II. While the Armenians had previously been reluctant to make overt appeals to outside forces for protection, at the end of the war they “put aside their customary caution and conservatism and appealed to the victorious Russian commander-in-chief to include provisions for the protection of the Armenians in the forthcoming peace treaty.”  

This did not happen, as the March 1878 San Stefano treaty left out provisions providing for protection of the Armenians. But Article 16 of the treaty did make Russian withdrawal from Ottoman territory conditional on the sultan’s government reforming its policies, imbuing the Armenians with the hope that years of persecution were finally coming to an end. But the Ottoman Empire and the European powers renegotiated terms in the Treaty of Berlin in July of that same year (notable, among other reasons, for turning Bosnia and Herzegovina over to Austrian rule, which led to the Serbian nationalist movement that culminated in the murder of Archduke Ferdinand in 1914, sparking World War One). In Berlin, Article 16 of San Stefano was superseded by Article 61 in the new treaty, which required the Russians to return some Armenian territories with only the sultan’s promise to reform his policies towards Christian minorities. “[This] put the very sultan who had been abusing the Armenians in charge of protecting them from himself – a classic case of having the fox guard the

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henhouse."\textsuperscript{35} Why did Christian Europe abandon its Christian brethren in the Muslim Ottoman Empire? Geopolitics. Anatolia was both a conduit of trade between, especially, Great Britain and Persia, and also served as a useful buffer against Russia’s increasing territorial gains that made the Europeans nervous. Europe therefore agreed to renegotiate the terms of San Stefano in order to ensure a more favorable outcome for the strategically-important Empire.

The Treaty of Berlin, then, had two important outcomes. It left the Armenians once again completely at the mercy of the Ottoman Empire, an even more dangerous prospect now that the sultan believed that the Turkish Armenians had aided his Russian enemy. The second outcome of the Treaty was that it made the plight of the Armenians an international issue, beginning a decades-long global interest in the empire’s Christian minority and forcing the Western powers to consider the Armenians’ situation in future conflicts with the Ottoman Empire. Yet this too proved more a curse than a blessing for the Armenians. “The Treaty of Berlin in 1878 had internationalized the Armenian question but had also cast fears in the sultan’s heart of foreign intervention and Armenian secession from the empire. As a result, in the early 1880s repression in the provinces had increased, obliging Armenians to form secret political societies and parties in order to defend themselves and to fight back. This only escalated the repression, resulting in increased misery and bloodshed.”\textsuperscript{36}

Throughout the previous few decades, the Armenians, like other Ottoman subject


groups, had been experiencing a cultural and intellectual revival that clashed with their continued persecution.

Inspired by European intellectual currents, particularly the French Revolution, various groups under Ottoman rule began to agitate for change in the nineteenth century, from simple reforms to outright autonomy, particularly in the Empire’s western Balkan provinces. This coincided with the Empire’s decline, and sparked the sultan’s fury. The Armenians, scattered throughout the Empire (though concentrated in the east), were far more reluctant earlier in the century to demand separation or independence, instead proclaiming their loyalty to the sultan and appealing for greater protection.37 But as the century wore on and their persecution continued, they began to take stock of their worsening position in the Empire; they had only to look to their fellow Russian Armenians to see how life could be. “There, Russian troops and officials provided secure borders, internal stability, and protection for middle-class Armenians . . . from exploitation . . . They enjoyed an increasing prosperity, education revival and dynamic publications.”38 A culture of rebellion emerged in some places, most notably in the city of Zeitun in 1862. The Zeitun Rebellion, which was inspired as much by discontent as nationalistic zeal stirred up by various intellectuals, was aimed at achieving independence for Turkish Armenians.39 Zeitun was a semi-autonomous city surrounded by some smaller villages, which were destroyed by

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Turkish forces advancing on Zeitun, ostensibly for the failure to pay taxes. Although the Armenians were victorious against a larger Turkish force, a blockade forced them to appeal to help from the French. The blockade was lifted but on the condition that Turkish military forces remain garrisoned in Zeitun. The victory, then, was Pyrrhic, and the Armenians found the sultan’s grip even tighter. But again, France’s involvement led to increased visibility for the Armenians in Europe's halls of power.

Various Armenian secret political parties arose to explore more intensive protests against their condition; those groups that formed amongst the Russian Armenians, with the goal of bettering the lives of their coreligionists in the Ottoman lands, took a harder line, in some instances advocating violent action and armed rebellion. The two most prominent and controversial of these Russian-led parties were the Hunchakian Revolutionary Party and the Dashnak Party. But Armenians were not united in these efforts. Many segments of society were “desirous of reform, but did not wish to be committed to illegal methods,” and the various main Armenian religious groups also refused to take sides. “In sum, a considerable number of Armenians stood in the way of the revolutionists because of special motives and attitudes – from disapproval of the methods of the parties (as more destructive and dangerous than salutary), from a desire to preserve the status quo, or from a mere lack of concern.”

Nevertheless, as the 1878 Treaty of Berlin failed to achieve the Armenian’s hopes for protection, and the sultan’s anger and repression grew, Turkish Armenians found themselves in dire straits.

40 Ibid. pgs. 183-184.
In sum, the declining Ottoman Empire, the failure of the Tanzimat movement to provide greater equality for non-Muslims, the Sultan’s autocratic rule and fear of foreign intervention, the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, and the rise of ethnic nationalism amongst Ottoman subject peoples, including the Armenians, gave rise to the so-called Armenian Question. The problem, from the Ottoman government’s perspective, was how to address the increasingly restless and agitation-prone Armenians.

By the 1890s the situation in the Ottoman Empire had gone from bad to worse. The next decade would prove to be a horrific one for the Armenians, a harbinger of the genocide to come in 1915. But it also led to increased Western awareness of the Armenians’ plight, particularly in the United States and amongst some leaders of the American Jewish community.

Frustrated, fearful of foreign intervention, angry, and increasingly paranoid, Sultan Hamid II clamped down on any acts he deemed seditious. As Hamid began to fear even the Ottoman military he created the Hamidiye, a kind of special military outfit comprised of armed Kurds who acted at the sultan’s behest, primarily against the Armenians. It was a way of pitting one ethnicity against the other, “the old scheme of divide and conquer.”41 The two groups resented each other, and the armed Kurds exacted a toll of violence against the mostly-defenseless Armenian peasantry, pillaging villages and murdering and raping as they went.

Sick of feudal exploitation by the Muslim majority, Kurds and Ottoman officials alike, and urged on by the secret political parties, the Armenians began to fight back, in some cases with armed resistance, most notably in the Sasun region. In 1894 local fighting broke out in response to Kurdish raids and demands for payment; the Armenians managed to fend off the Turkish forces which came to the assistance of the Kurds, and several government officials were killed in the course of the fighting. The Armenians eventually gave up the fight and disarmed. Despite a promise of amnesty, several thousand men, women, and children were massacred. But rather than putting down Armenian resistance the massacre at Sasun not only awakened Armenians throughout the empire but also captured the attentions of Europeans and Americans. Realizing that Western public opinion was turning against him, the Sultan established an investigatory commission to cover up the crimes, blaming the Armenians and the Kurds, but absolving the Ottoman government of any responsibility. This did not fool European investigators, who concluded that “the Armenians of Sasun had been forced to take arms for their own protection and that the gratuitous acts of cruelty by the sultan’s regular and irregular troops and irresponsibility of the Ottoman officials and commanders were reprehensible. There had been no rebellion, and even if the facts had proved otherwise, the unbridled, indiscriminate brutality could in no measure be justified.” In other words, the Armenian’s armed response was a matter of self-defense, not an attempt at

42 Ibid. pg. 56.
secessionism. The Europeans urged Sultan Hamid to initiate the reforms he promised in the San Stefano and Berlin treaties, but the sultan held fast to his policies.

In 1895 the Hunchakian Revolutionary Party decided to hold a peaceful protest rally in Constantinople in order to deliver a petition – a “Protest-Demand” – which condemned the Sasun massacre and the status of Armenians throughout the empire. This petition further protested against persecution and political violence and demanded civil-rights related reforms. It was an unprecedented document thus far in Armenian-Ottoman relations. But during the rally an altercation broke out between the protestors and the police, with the result of several dozen protestors killed. From there the violence spread throughout the city, as soldiers, police and Islamic students murdered Armenians in a pogrom that lasted for days. “The working-class Armenians of the city, mostly porters and day laborers, were the hardest hit. Not only were they the most visible but they were the most vulnerable, as they were despised by their Muslim counterparts because they occupied so many of the city’s service jobs.”

By the end of the first week of October, thousands had been murdered, and a year-long program of violence was initiated against Armenians throughout the empire.

“In the autumn of 1895 the map of Armenia in Turkey went up in flames.”

Tens of thousands were murdered, whole towns destroyed while other villages were forcibly converted to Islam, churches were either ruined or turned into ruins.

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mosques, and hundreds of thousands of Armenians were left homeless and impoverished, setting off an exodus from the Empire.\textsuperscript{46} The various massacres followed a common pattern. “What clearly seemed to be a staged skirmish would break out between a Turkish gendarme, a soldier, and some unidentified assailants, who were suspected of being Armenian activists . . .; this would become a pretext for the killing of Armenians.”\textsuperscript{47} The violence was so complete that it inspired the \textit{New York Times} to use the word “holocaust” to describe the situation. In “Another Armenian Holocaust” the \textit{Times} described a “band of brigands attacked a company of Turkish gendarmes” and “the Turkish authorities, without making any inquiry, decided that the assailants were Armenian revolutionaries . . . .” The paper reported that 1,000 Turkish troops pillaged five villages, destroying four monasteries, torturing men, women, and children, and leaving five thousand people homeless (see Appendix).\textsuperscript{48}

By 1896 the Armenian population in the Ottoman Empire was devastated, scattered, and desperate. Although there were efforts to fight back, notably in Zeitun and Van, they were small and temporary victories in an otherwise helpless situation. By the late 1890s, over two hundred thousand Armenians had died, half murdered outright, the rest succumbing to disease and starvation. Peter Balakian summarized the effects of the massacre:

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{46} Hovannisian, Richard G. “The Armenian Question in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1914.” In Hovannisian, Richard G. [ed.], \textit{The Armenian People From Ancient to Modern Times, Volume II}, St. Martin’s Press (New York, 1997), pg. 224.
\item \textsuperscript{47} Balakian, Peter. \textit{The Burning Tigris: the Armenian Genocide and America’s Response}, HarperCollins Publishers (New York, 2003), pg. 61.
\item \textsuperscript{48} \textit{The New York Times}. “Another Armenian Holocaust,” September 10, 1895.
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“The massacres of the 1890s fully inaugurated the modern fate of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. … The Hamidian massacres also initiated the idea that massacre could be committed with impunity. … [T]here was no forceful intervention to halt the massacres, nor was there any punishment in the aftermath. There was, to be sure, worldwide coverage of the events and attendant outrage, and there was an outpouring of humanitarian relief and philanthropy for the surviving victims. … Yet in the face of such world opinion, Abdul Hamid remained unrepentant, continuing to deny his actions and blame the victims. … By the end of the 1890s, the lack of political recourse or punishment let the sultan off the hook, and left Turkish society engaged in a culture of massacre that permanently dehumanized Armenians in an evolutionary process that would culminate in genocide in 1915.”49

Although the mid-1890s were the worst of the massacres until the 1915 Genocide, Armenians continued to suffer a steady, though smaller-scale, stream of violence. Despite a 1909 coup by the Young Turk movement that deposed the sultan (discussed in Part Two), Armenians continued to bear the brunt of Islamic- and nationalist-directed political violence. Where they could, Armenians fought back. This era also marked a change in the international perception of what was happening in the struggling Empire. In America, the public, the media, politicians, and famous citizens alike were all beginning to take notice, as was the American Jewish community.

The American and Jewish response

The international response was animated, especially in America, where thousands of ordinary citizens and prominent leaders rallied to aid the Armenians. Indeed, the Armenians’ plight captured the attention of the public just as the United States was emerging onto the world stage at the turn of the century, and the idea of the small, minority ancient Christian Armenians being persecuted by the majority Muslim society galvanized American missionary efforts, the press, and the public back home. Prominent American Jews and organizations also played a role in the philanthropic and relief efforts, including Jacob Schiff, Rabbi Stephen Wise, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, and Jewish women’s groups.

American Protestant missionaries, in the Ottoman Empire on the premise of converting Muslims, were instrumental in reporting on the massacres being committed against the Armenians and, given their proximity to the events, played a huge role in bringing rescue and relief. In numerous reports and letters sent back home to America, missionaries pleaded with their respective communities to raise funds and send all manner of goods, from blankets to tents to food. What partly captured the attention of Americans was the almost mythic view of the Armenians’ place in history. “[T]he Armenians were a Christian people who had survived on the battleground of empires for centuries and were known for their endurance. As the first Christian nation and the easternmost indigenous Christian culture in the world . . . Armenia was an inspiring reminder of the
continuity and typology of the Judeo-Christian tradition . . .”50 Missionaries by the hundreds flooded the Ottoman Empire in what was one of the earliest “humanitarian relief” efforts in U.S. history.

Following the Hamidian massacres of the mid-1890s, a national umbrella organization, the National Armenian Relief Committee, was formed in 1895 “for the purpose of collecting money and of providing means to mitigate the sufferings of the unfortunate in Turkey.”51 The movement brought together “Democrats and Republicans, conservatives and liberals, Christians and Jews” and included such luminaries as businessman Spencer Trask, John D. Rockefeller, Supreme Court Justice David Brewer, and the Jewish banker Jacob Schiff.52 The Committee began the task of raising both public awareness and funds in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, and soon embarked on an effort to send Clara Barton and her relatively-new Red Cross organization to the Ottoman east to oversee the relief efforts. She became a publicity spectacle – of international feminism, of American commitment to human rights, and of American interest in foreign affairs – and was shipped off to the Ottoman Empire as the woman in charge of saving the Armenians from their desperate plight. Her involvement ensured that the Armenians remained front-page news in America, and that the donations kept coming in.

America’s politicians were also taking an active interest in the plight of the Armenians. The Republican Party platform of 1896 listed three international issues worthy of America support: annexing Hawaii, the Cuban struggle for independence, and the Armenian massacres, citing the potential harm to American people, property, and interests, as well as the desire to end the atrocities.\textsuperscript{53} Congress, too, was acting. A major debate took place in the Senate on January 26, 1896 over how best to respond to the atrocities, with some senators expressing doubt about the United States’ ability to affect change in the Ottoman Empire. Others insisted that the United States had the right to intervene in Turkish affairs for humanitarian reasons. The Senate eventually adopted a compromise resolution by Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Senator Shelby Cullom. The Cullom resolution promised neutrality in Turkish affairs but offered support should President Grover Cleveland pressure the European powers to uphold their treaty obligations, which obliged them to insist that the Ottoman government protect the Armenian people. Within the resolution was language condemning the massacres and expressing the Congress’ sense of American humanitarian responsibility in the face of such catastrophe. It was “the first international human rights resolution in American history” and set the precedent for later human rights-related legislation.\textsuperscript{54} But even in 1896 was the pattern emerging that would characterize congressional efforts even through 2007 and House Resolution 106: “Confronting the unwillingness of the incumbent administration to intervene, those members of Congress who supported the

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid. pg. 73.
Armenians could do little more than express their outrage.” President Cleveland, bowing to Turkish threats to refuse the Red Cross’ entry into the sultan’s territory if Cleveland should take action on behalf of the Armenians, chose to ignore the Congress’ efforts. “It was the beginning of . . . White House and State Department acquiescence to Turkish human rights violations and, in particular, to Turkey’s coercive tactics with the United States government . . . .”

American Jews were behaving much as their neighbors, actively participating in the philanthropic and awareness efforts. Prominent community leaders such as Jacob Schiff and Rabbi Stephen Wise used their influence to raise money and enable other relief efforts; both would remain active on Armenian relief issues through the Genocide years. Schiff, as noted, was one of the original members of the National Armenian Relief Committee.

Jewish organizations were also taking up the cause. In several of its annual Yearbooks around the turn of the century, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) records a surprising amount of activity for a rabbinic assembly, both from individual rabbis as well as resolutions from the organization, demonstrating the reaching power of the Armenians’ cause. In an 1897 eulogy for 28 year-old Rabbi Israel Joseph of Montgomery, Alabama, Rabbi Samuel Hirshberg, then of Congregation Ohavei Shalom in Boston, noted that “it was but shortly before his death that we read of him in a public meeting, delivering the principal speech of the evening in denunciation of the Turkish

atrocities in Armenia. And this would illustrate his ever constant readiness to make common cause with every movement making for the betterment of his fellows, whoever they might be, to whatever rank or race or clime they might belong.”57 On July 4, 1907, the CCAR passed a Resolution of Sympathy in response to a Detroit News article the previous day about attacks on Armenians, the rabbis writing that they “wish to record our utter abhorrence of persecution in any form of any people and consider it our patriotic duty to extend our warmest sympathy with the Armenian victims of this most recent epidemic of cruelty and fanaticism.”58

The CCAR unanimously passed a lengthier resolution with tougher language two years later that demonstrates the extent to which the CCAR was aware of matters of European foreign affairs and the violence being committed by the Ottoman government. It is worth quoting in full here:

“Bearing in mind the arrangements made between both Turkey and Roumania, and the Powers by the Berlin Treaty of 1878, whereby Turkey agreed to introduce reforms in the government for the protection of Christians, the steps taken to be superintended by the Powers, and Roumania agreed to grant and protect the equal rights of Jews as citizens, and

“Whereas, these agreements have not been kept, but many thousands of Armenia Christians have been barbarously murdered, and with little but expressions of sympathy resulting from the Powers, and the Jews in Roumania have been persecuted, robbed of their rights, and deprived of citizenship, without any protest from the Powers, and

“Whereas, these conditions have long been a disgrace before the civilized world,

“We, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, now put ourselves on record as urging the governments of the civilized world, particularly the Signatory Powers of the Berlin Treaty, to take vigorous and persevering action for the protection of Armenian Christians in Turkey, and for the protection of and granting of rights of citizenship to Jews in Roumania.”

This resolution highlights the link between Armenian and Jewish relief efforts in the Ottoman Empire. Jews were in part drawn to the Armenian cause because of their work on behalf of the region’s Jews. The Treaty of Berlin held promise not only for the Armenians but for the Jews as well, who expected the reforms to relieve their own hardships. The discussion of the Jews of Roumania (Romania) refers to the situation of non-Christians in that country, who, under the constitution, could not attain citizenship. Romanian Jews experienced a rise in anti-Semitism and its attendant vices, such as sporadic violence and anti-Jewish political parties. Romania allied with the Turks in the Russo-Turkish War of

1877-78 and the subsequent Treaty of Berlin stipulated that Romania bestow citizenship on its non-Christian subjects. As with the sultan, the European Powers looked the other way as Romania failed to adhere to the treaty’s provisions. A full 13 years after the Hamidian massacres, the CCAR’s resolution demonstrates both the continued suffering of the Armenians as well as American Jewry’s continued attention to their plight. As part of their specific concern for the plight of the Jews in Eastern Europe and the Ottoman Empire, this resolution demonstrates that American Jewry was concerned about the larger issue of the protection of national minority rights.

The National Council of Jewish Women considered and passed similar resolutions of sympathy. At their first annual convention, held in New York City in 1896, the Council’s President, Hannah Solomon proclaimed, "our hearts go out to our fellow-beings in Armenia. Would we know the details of it all, let us read our own history, where torture, famine, and cold track with dead bodies our pilgrimages through the centuries."60 Interesting, the convention contained a hint of the debate that would occupy some members of the Jewish community over House Resolution 106 in 2007: whether the Jewish community ought to be engaged in determining questions of history for other peoples and countries. Maud Nathan, a social reformer and political activist on a variety of issues, including women’s suffrage (and cousin to both Supreme Court Justice Benjamin Cardozo and the poet Emma Lazarus), reflects this concern.61 In response to a

resolution of sympathy for the Armenians, Nathan, according to *The New York Times*, was “on her feet, indignant. ‘There is a great difference of opinion’ she said, ‘as to whether the Armenians are persecuted or not. A great many people believe that the Armenians brought their trouble on themselves. There is a feeling that political intrigues have a great deal to do with their misfortunes. In any event I do not think it is in the province of this convention to fix the blame.’”

Nathan’s perceptions, situated during the actual era of anti-Armenian atrocities, shows that there was awareness even then of the complex nature of Ottoman politics, and that there existed the notion that the Armenians’ rebellious activities (Nathan’s “political intrigues”) were the catalyst – not the reaction – for their plight. This line of argument is one that the Turkish government continues to push today, and Nathan’s wariness about the Jewish community’s role in this matter also reflects the thinking of some contemporary Jewish leaders. The history of anti-Armenian atrocity, even almost twenty years before the Genocide, is no recent debate. The conventioneers debated the resolution and, in yet another foretelling of Jewish concerns in 2007, decided to table the resolution on the grounds that “it would be unwise for the Jewish women of America to publicly sympathize with the Armenians lest the Turks turn their attention in retaliation on the Jews in Armenia.”

This section looked at the fate of Turkish Armenians in the latter years of the nineteenth century and first decade of the twentieth. Persecuted as non-

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63 Ibid.
Muslims, the proposed Tanzimat reforms of the mid-19th century failed to bring promised relief to the Armenians, who in response to their plight formed resistance organizations, some of which preached armed violence as a mechanism for self-defense. The advent of the Armenian Question led Sultan Hamid II to initiate violent attacks on Armenian communities throughout the Ottoman Empire, which led to wholesale massacres, the worst being in 1895-96, but continuing sporadically until the onset of World War One and the Genocide. The Hamidian massacres provoked a huge response in the West, especially in America, where human rights and interventionism became political movements, and relief efforts were sent abroad. The American Jewish community was equally involved in these efforts, as demonstrated by the various documents of both the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the National Council of Jewish Women. American Jewry would continue to play an active role in what was going to be the denouement of Armenian life in Turkey: the 1915 Genocide.
Part Two

The Armenian Genocide

Historical overview: the Young Turks, World War One, the Genocide, American and Jewish relief efforts

The Genocide and the Holocaust

Turkish denial
If there is one consistent element to the Armenian experience in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it must surely be disappointment. Time and time again the Armenians were assured of imminent reforms that would bestow civil rights, toleration, and self-determination upon the Ottoman Empire. And time and time again their naïve hopes came crashing down, usually accompanied by massacre and banishment. It is not difficult to understand, then, why as the nineteenth century turned into twentieth, and despite the fall of the Sultan in favor of the Young Turk movement, the Armenians increasingly looked to outside help to realize their longed-for promises. But a perfect storm was brewing. The typhoons of nationalism, war, and ethnic strife would hasten the destruction of more than one-third of the Armenian population in the 1915 Genocide, a period so brief but so brutal that eyewitness to the violence swore that no such atrocity had ever taken place in the history of mankind. This section will delve into that Genocide: the rise of the Young Turks, the onset of World War I, the aftermath of the war, the efforts of American diplomats – Ambassador Henry Morgenthau in particular – to alert the world to the atrocities, and the response of the American Jewish community. We will also look briefly at comparisons between the Holocaust the Armenian Genocide, for such a study is relevant to Jewish leaders attempting to understand the dynamic between the two peoples. And, finally, we will examine Turkish denial, perhaps the most
difficult section of this paper to write. We will see that it is quite different from Holocaust denial, and has both an academic and political element that is not always completely pernicious; and yet, despite the existence of legitimate historical questions that are still debated by scholars, Turkish denial leaves a very bad taste, for it seeks to dismiss and belittle what so many millions have attested to: genocide.

**The Young Turk movement**

At the turn of the century Sultan Abdul Hamid’s reign was teetering on the edge. His corrupt and paranoid regime was unable to deal with external European pressures, the challenges of modernization, and Ottoman minorities’ demands for self-determination in various parts of the Empire. The Sultan’s repression and utter mismanagement of the flailing Ottoman Empire inspired a group of liberal intellectuals, political figures, and others to form what became known as the Young Turk movement. Seeking to reform government and reinstate the 1876 constitution, the Young Turks soon secured an indispensable ally: the military, which was angry with the Sultan for his abuse and neglect. Forming a political party, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), the Young Turks set about agitating for change amidst great unrest in the empire. By 1908 the CUP convinced the Sultan to restore constitutional government, a

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victory “welcomed by Muslims, Christians, and Jews.”\textsuperscript{65} His position untenable amidst rousing public anger, Sultan Hamid abdicated the throne on July 24, 1908, and the CUP installed a puppet-figure sultan in his place. The Empire seemed to be at the beginning of an era of liberalism, toleration, and equality.

The Armenians seized on these events with the same degree of hope and anticipation with which they had welcomed earlier promises of reform and progress. Seeking to demonstrate their fidelity to the regime, in one instance the Dashnak Party and other groups explained to the Young Turks that “Armenian political action ‘is directed against the present regime and not against the unity and organic existence of Turkey,’ and that their objective was simply to implement the reform mandate in article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin. . . .”\textsuperscript{66} The Armenians, now granted constitutional rights, believed that the Young Turks would fulfill their promise to reform the Empire and improve the lives of its minorities.

Unfortunately, the Young Turks proved not much better at managing the collapsing Ottoman state than the Sultan. Political divisions and military defeats conspired to create a new nationalist ideology, pan-Turkism, which would have disastrous consequences for the region’s minorities, especially the Armenians. As early as the 1890s the Young Turks had been divided into two camps: a liberal faction “more pro-European in its democratic thinking, hence more sympathetic to the Armenians,” and a nationalist element “with little interest in the


plight of the Christian minorities of the Empire." Obsessed with the idea of freeing the empire from external pressure, and with creating a purely-Turkish society, this nationalist element ascended to power as the more liberal element struggled to rule the country in the midst of the disastrous Balkan Wars.

Following the 1878 Congress of Berlin, which granted independence to some Balkan states, the region’s Christian minorities in territories still belonging to the Empire began agitating for their own independence. War broke out in 1912 between the Empire and the Balkan states, and despite a brief reversal of fortune in 1913, by the end of that year the Ottoman Empire’s European territory had been almost completely severed: 85 percent of its territory was lost, as was 70 percent of its European population. It was a huge blow, worsening relations between the Turks and their non-Muslim subjects. The eminent historian Bernard Lewis writes, “The struggle of the Christian peoples for national independence . . . helped to create in the Turks a profound mistrust of their Christian compatriots and of the European great powers looming behind them; at the same time the repressions and massacres with which the Turks responded reinforced the determination of the Christian peoples in the Empire to seek their salvation, not in citizenship, but in separation.” The Armenians were now the most visible Christian minority left in the Empire, and they were directly in the line of sight of an angry, restless, distrustful, and increasingly ideologically obsessed Young Turk government.

67 Ibid. pg. 140.
68 Ibid. pg. 161.
The failure of the Young Turks’ more liberal faction and the military defeats it was unable to prevent gave rise to the nationalist faction, which took power in a bloody daytime coup on January 26, 1913. Rejecting any notions of Ottomanism, pan-Islamism, or pluralism, the Young Turkish leaders instead had a three-pronged ideological platform: pan-Turkism (“Turkey for Turks”), Turkification (a program of education and indoctrination for the Empire’s subjects), and, most dangerously for the Armenians, pan-Turanism (the idea that the Caucasus and central Asia belonged to the Turkish people, and thus the Turks ought to conquer and annex those regions). In other words, no longer would the Ottoman Empire be an Islamic state with tolerated minorities; from now on the region would be Turkish, as would its people. It is important to understand, for Jewish leaders often and quite innocently make this mistake, that this ideology is not race-based; it is not an equivalent of the Nazi-Jewish paradigm during the 1930s and 40s. Rather, this ideology is nationalist in outlook, such that being “Turkish” is a distinction not of race but of nationality, and those who are not “Turkish,” like the Armenians, therefore do not belong in the “Turkish” state. For the Armenians, this change in outlook meant “they ceased being perceived in religious terms as a millet [non-Muslim community] and came to be viewed as a rival nationality occupying the same land claimed by the Turks. It is significant as well that the land in question lay on the border between Turkey and Russia, Turkey’s traditional enemy.”

The hatred leveled against the Armenians under the reign of Sultan Hamid was therefore quite

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different than the attitude of the Young Turks. But the outcome would prove the same: severe acts of violence.

In 1909, shortly after the Young Turks came to power, Sultan Hamid staged a counterrevolution in an attempt to win back the throne. In the instability that ensued, Turks in the town of Adana took advantage of the vacuum to stage a massacre against the Armenians. The counterrevolution was quelled, the Sultan permanently exiled, and Young Turkish troops appeared in Adana in April on the pretense of restoring order. Claiming to be provoked by the Armenians – “a strategy the Turks and the Ottoman government had used before and would again to justify massacre” – the Young Turks set the city ablaze for a second time, and this time “the killing was even more brutal and well organized because it was conducted by the Young Turk liberation army.”71 The violence spread throughout the Cilician region and whole Armenian villages were destroyed; in some places, the entire Armenian population of a particular town was murdered. In just a few weeks, some 15,000-25,000 people were killed.72 This was, writes Armenian historian Richard Hovannisian, the first massacre of the Young Turk era, demonstrating that even a change in government was failing to bring either equality or relief.73 This experience also left the Armenians in an impossible bind. If they were complacent about their status in the Empire, they were at the mercy of periodic bouts of extreme violence. On the other hand, if they agitated

72 Ibid. pg. 154.
for change, appealed to Europe for help, or defended themselves, they were accused of rebellion and attacked anyway. This pattern was well established by the time of the 1915 Genocide, but it was used then and continues to be used today as justification for any atrocities visited on the Armenians: that as a rebellious, separatist group they brought this violence upon themselves. And yet, while it is certainly true that elements of the Armenian populace were in places “rebellious,” it is also true that this rebelliousness was born of decades of oppression that various Ottoman regimes refused to resolve except through violence; and it was certainly not prevalent in every Armenian town and village in all six eastern provinces, almost none of which escaped the extreme violence that characterized this period. But as 1915 approached, thoughts of rebellion turned instead to self-defense, as Armenians throughout the Empire endeavored to defend themselves against attacks they knew from experience would result in almost certain death. This, too, as we shall see, continues to be used as both a justification for – and evidence against – the acts of genocide.

It seems, then, that the Young Turks’ approach to the Armenians was fueled by three elements: the traditional hatred for the Armenian minority’s status in the Empire, the Young Turks’ nationalist ideology which emphasized Turkey for Turks, and the Armenians’ reliance on outside powers – Europe and Russia – for assistance in securing civil rights, which came at a time when the Young Turks were resentful of such interventionism, and so blamed the Armenians for the Empire’s hardships. According to Peter Balakian, there is another element, as well:
“This chain of Armenian massacre, which began in its modern instance in 1878 after the Berlin Conference, escalated in 1894-96, and occurred again in 1909, created what the social psychologist Irvin Staub calls a ‘continuum of destruction’ – a history and cultural orientation that can lead to conditions for genocide. … The ‘long history of devaluation and mistreatment of the Armenians,’ Staub continues, which includes ‘large-scale mass killings,’ was a result of government bureaucracy ordering and encouraging the killings, and of individuals who participate and then become socialized by them.”74

In other words, violence against Armenians had become something of a cultural norm, and, for Turkish society at large, was almost a natural byproduct of government friction over the Armenian Question. It inured Turkish society to the violence and made it easier for persecution and oppression to build on itself unchallenged, enabling genocide to occur given the right conditions. For the Armenians, those conditions were just around the corner.

The onset of World War One

The reverberations of the Balkan Wars left the ominous cloud of war hanging over Europe. The complex series of European military alliances spilled into warfare after a Serbian nationalist assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary in June, 1914. The Triple-Entente, or Allies – England, France, and Russia – who were aligned with Serbia, faced off against the Central

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Powers, Austria-Hungary and Germany. Germany invaded Belgium and Austria-Hungary attacked Russia, turning the situation into a two-front war that encompassed the whole continent. The United States was then neutral, and President Woodrow Wilson was determined to keep it that way.

The struggling Young Turk regime sensed an opportunity to achieve two goals: free themselves of external pressure from the European Powers, and acquire the territory in the Caucasus and Central Asia that would fulfill their pan-Turanism ambitions. Aligning themselves with Germany, Turkey entered the war on November 2, 1914. Under Minister of War Enver Pasha, Ottoman forces invaded the Russian Caucasus region, “a campaign best characterized as sheer folly,” and a devastating setback to the Ottomans.\(^{75}\) In the west, however, the military picture was different. Turkey blocked the Dardanelles – the thin waterway linking the Mediterranean and Black Seas, and the essential supply route to Russia – a crucial strategic territory badly needed by the Allies. In April 1915, the Allies landed at Gallipoli, the peninsula abutting the Dardanelles, in an attempt to win control of the waterway from Ottoman forces. Immortalized as one of the most horrific examples of trench warfare in history, the Allies were forced to retreat after suffering more than 250,000 casualties. The United States Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Henry Morgenthau, wrote that the effect of the Allied defeat was “the Turks now perceived that a series of dazzling events had changed them from cringing dependents of the European Powers into free

agents. For the first time in two centuries they could now live their national life according to their own will.”76

The military situation, then, presented two conclusions: on the one hand, in the west, the Turks were successfully shucking the yoke of Allied pressure on their regime, convincing the Young Turks that their side would win the war. On the other hand, the bleak picture along the eastern front with Russia was frustrating their territorial ambitions, and they began to seek out a scapegoat to explain away these failures.

The Armenian Genocide

World War One was not the cause of the Armenian Genocide but rather the opportunity. Under the cover of war the Young Turkish leaders – Talaat Pasha (minister of the interior), Enver Pasha (minister of war), and Jemal Pasha (minister of the navy) – hoped to finally resolve the Armenian Question, pushing the Armenians out of any lands the regime considered “Turkish.” So although the Armenians continued to be subjected to the same kind of violence – massacres – the goals of the violence were very different. “The beleaguered sultan resorted to massacres in his futile efforts to maintain the old order, whereas the Young Turks perpetrated the genocide to overturn the status quo and create a new order and a new frame of reference in which there was no

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76 Morgenthau, Henry. *Ambassador Morgenthau’s Story*, Wayne State University Press (Detroit, 2003), pg. 190.
place at all for Armenians.” Military defeats in the east afforded the opportunity
to blame the Armenians, who lived on both sides of the border, for collaborating
with the Russians. And the Turks’ nationalist ambitious set the justification for
ridding Anatolia of all non-Turks, which included Armenians, Greeks, and other
minorities. In other words, the Armenians were not, as Turkey still argues, an
accidental or haphazard casualty of war or a natural byproduct of the kinds of
violence experienced by all peoples during wartime. The pieces for the
destruction of the Armenians were all in place before the war: the fire was
already built and just awaiting the match. World War One was that match, and
the Young Turks took advantage of the military situation to carry out their policies
against the Armenians.

Peter Balakian lists seven “threshold events and circumstances” that
describe the Genocide process. In brief, they are:

1) Armenian men were conscripted into Ottoman military labor
battalions at the beginning of the war, but were scapegoated
after the defeat by Russia in early 1915. Tens of thousands
were summarily executed by the military in an organized
process in the following months

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77 Hovannisian, Richard G. “The Armenian Question in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1914,” in _____ [ed.],
79 The Armenians were not the only peoples to be deported or suffer horrific violence during the war.
Greeks, too, were forcibly deported in a “population exchange” that emptied Greece of ethnic Turks and Turkey of ethnic Greeks. All groups suffered terribly during the war, including Turkish Muslims, but other minorities avoided the level of genocidal violence directed against the Armenians, which explains the absence of their experiences in this study.
2) An empire-wide disarmament process occurred, a “reign of terror” that stripped Armenians everywhere of their weapons, which often led to arbitrary executions.

3) Killing squads were organized in the winter of 1915 under the Committee for Union and Progress’ leadership.

4) April 8 – first deportation was carried out in the city of Zeitun.

5) April 17 – uprising in Van over mass arrests, executions, and forced conscription, which led Turkish troops to attack the city.
under the pretext of putting down Armenian disloyalty

6) April 24 – mass arrest of 250 Armenian intellectuals and civic and cultural leaders in Constantinople, who were taken to the east and executed. This is commemorated as the traditional start date of the Genocide

7) Spring through Fall, 1915 – massacres and deportations throughout all six Armenian vilayets (provinces).  

The Genocide began in 1915 and by the following year most of the killings and deportations were done. But Armenian suffering persisted through the postwar era until the founding of the modern-day Republic of Turkey in 1923. In the postwar confusion and Turkish War of Independence, Armenians continued to be deported en masse from areas conquered by the new Turkish military, though without the massive killing sprees witnessed in 1915-1916. In 1915, through massacre and deportation, the Young Turk regime sought to clear Anatolia of its Armenian population. Helen Fein describes the typical pattern:

“The remaining males in each village were summoned by the town crier to report immediately, led out of town, and slain. Women, children, and a few infirm males previously exempted were then bid by the crier to prepare themselves for deportation. They were driven into the desert by soldiers, staggering along until they dropped from drought, starvation, the lash, or their festering wounds. Women might elect or be selected to become wives of Muslims, thus gaining exemption but also requiring them to part with their children. The military was aided by surrounding Kurdish and Circassian tribesmen who looted and raped the women,

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kidnapped a few favorites and murdered many. For months, packs of bedraggled survivors wound through the deserts of western Asia until they fell or were slain.”

The various horrors were described in great detail by accounts from eyewitnesses, survivors, and other outside observers. Indeed, we are aware of this violence, this process, and the Young Turks’ complicity primarily because of eyewitness observations, mostly from neutral American diplomats stationed around the Empire, but also from American missionaries and European diplomats and observers. In fact, it was well clear to all governments what was going on in the Empire. On May 24, 1915, the Allies issued a joint declaration “that took the unprecedented step of condemning ‘crimes against humanity and civilization,’” and “warned the Turkish government that they and their ‘agents’ would be held ‘personally responsible’ for the massacres.” The United States, however, was determined to maintain neutrality and refused to join in the declaration. “President Woodrow Wilson chose not to pressure either the Turks or their German backers. It was better not to draw attention to the atrocities, lest U.S. public opinion get stirred up and begin demanding U.S. involvement. Because the Turks had not violated the rights of Americans, Wilson did not formerly protest.”

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82 Power, Samantha. *“A Problem From Hell”: America and the Age of Genocide*, Perennial (New York, 2002), pg. 5.
83 Ibid. pg. 5.
But a hero does emerge from the Genocide: the United States Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, the German-Jewish lawyer Henry Morgenthau. Appointed by his longtime friend President Woodrow Wilson, Morgenthau served as Ambassador from 1913 to 1916 and wrote a remarkable book, *Ambassador Morgenthau’s Story*, about his wrenching experiences. He condemns not only the Young Turk regime for responsibility for the massacres but devotes considerable effort to demonstrate German complicity in the atrocities (as we will see in Part Three of this paper, Germany has recently acknowledged the role it played). His analysis of the situation leads little doubt of Ottoman responsibility for the plight of the Armenians, and his retelling (often directly from his diary) of conversations with Young Turk leaders belies Turkey’s later efforts to absolve the CUP of responsibility. Although we will delve further into Turkish denial efforts later, it is worthwhile to relate some aspects of Morgenthau’s reporting here, to understand that there was little ambiguity, even during the perpetration of the atrocities, about the nature of the Young Turks’ objectives.

Other American diplomats stationed throughout the Empire aided Morgenthau in his efforts. These dispatches are crucial accounts from neutral diplomats who directly observed the massacres and deportations. One diplomat
in particular, Leslie Davis, was the U.S. consul in Harput, “the only neutral diplomat station in the heart of Turkish Armenia,” a province even then known as the “Slaughterhouse Vilayet” because of the mass murder that took place there. In a letter to Morgenthau on July 24, 1915, Davis wrote:

“What [sic] the order is officially and nominally to exile the Armenians from this Vilayets may mislead the outside world for a time, but the measure is nothing but a massacre of the most atrocious nature. It would be that even if all the people had been allowed to perish on the road [sic]. As the greater part of them, however, have been actually murdered and as there is no doubt that this was done by order of the Government, there can be no pretense that the measure is anything else but a general massacre.”

Other diplomats elsewhere in the Empire observed much the same. The American consul in Aleppo, Jesse B. Jackson, wrote to Morgenthau on June 5, 1915:

“The [Turkish] Government has been appealed to by various prominent people and even by those in authority to put an end to these conditions, under the representations that it can only lead to the greatest blame and reproach, but all to no avail. It is without a

85 Ibid. pgs. 156-157.
doubt a carefully planned scheme to thoroughly extinguish the Armenian race.”86

Morgenthau was able to take these aggregate reports, and his own conversations with Armenian survivors who appealed to the U.S. Embassy for assistance, to determine that “these massacres were not isolated happenings . . . throughout the Turkish Empire a systematic attempt was made to kill all able-bodied men, not only for the purpose of removing all males who might propagate a new generation of Armenians, but for the purpose of rendering the weaker part of the population an easy prey.”87 This notion of ubiquity is crucial to understanding the Genocide and countering the arguments of those who insist it was not genocide. The widespread massacres and deportations, the fact that they took place throughout the Empire and followed roughly the same pattern, implies the kind of organization and bureaucratic planning that could only come from the highest reaches of government. If instead the atrocities inflicted on the Armenians were haphazard, wholly different depending on time and place, then it would be harder to dismiss the argument that the Young Turk regime had no control over its eastern armies and had no intention of carrying out mass murder.

Turkey and its supporters openly acknowledge that Armenians were murdered in the hundreds of thousands – but insist that there was no Genocide because the Young Turks were merely “deporting” the Armenians, not specifically targeting them for annihilation. In a fact sheet entitled “Armenian

87 Morgenthau, Henry. Ambassador Morgenthau’s Story, Wayne State University Press (Detroit, 2003), pg. 209.
Allegations” on the webpage of its Washington embassy, the Turkish government states, “None of the Ottoman orders commanding the relocation of Armenians . . . orders killings. To the contrary, they order Ottoman officials to protect relocated Armenians.”88 To the extent that Armenians did die is a function, claims Turkey, of natural activities during wartime, in which millions of Turks also suffered and died. But Morgenthau and others insist that that deportation amounted to death, and, crucially, that the Young Turks were well aware of this. Morgenthau writes that where Sultan Hamid had resorted to wholesale slaughter, the Young Turks decided to deport the Armenians to the “dreary, desolate waste” of the Syrian Desert. The CUP, claims Morgenthau, knew that most would never survive the journey, dying either from thirst, starvation or murder, and that “the real purpose of the deportation was robbery and destruction. ... When the Turkish authorities have the orders for these deportations, they were merely giving the death warrant to a whole race; they understood this well, and, in their conversations with me they made no particular attempt to conceal the fact.”89 Morgenthau goes on to insist “It is absurd for the Turkish Government to assert that it ever seriously intended to ‘deport the Armenians to new homes’; the treatment which was given the convoys clearly shows that extermination was the real purpose of

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89 Morgenthau, Henry. Ambassador Morgenthau’s Story, Wayne State University Press (Detroit, 2003), pgs. 211-213.
Enver and Talaat." Leslie Davis also addresses this issue in his accounts, and comes to the same conclusion.

It is difficult to tally the exact toll of the Genocide on the Armenians. This has become a key defense for Turkey, which complains that Armenians greatly exaggerate the numbers killed. The difficulty lies in determining the accuracy of various censuses prior to the Genocide, which drew various conclusions about population size and distribution. Were more than half of all Armenians located in Turkey, or was it only one-third? What was concentration percentage of Armenians in the six Anatolian provinces? Where the Nazis kept meticulous records of their extermination efforts, it appears that the Young Turks did not – or at least outside scholars have never been permitted to access them. And whereas Jews were often murdered in concentrated milieus – centrally organized concentration camps, or, under the Einsatzgruppen, on a town-by-town basis, Armenians instead died in the desert wastelands, or in region-wide massacres, or, for conscripted males, under military control. That the Genocide was followed by a prolonged period of deportation and emigration makes accounting for the true number of deaths impossible. Figures range from an unlikely two million to not less than 600,000. Scholars generally agree on “at least one million” or “one-and-a-half million.” In either case, it appears that the period from the 1890s through the 1920s reduced the world’s Armenian population by between one-third and one-half, if not more.

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90 Ibid. pg. 219.
The Aftermath

Americans are most familiar with the aftermath of World War One – which ended on Armistice Day, November 11, 1918 – for the Treaty of Versailles, which, we learn, so devastated Germany that it paved the way for Hitler’s rise to power. For Turkey, Armenia, and the Near East (including Palestine) the aftermath is defined by two treaties, Sevres and Lausanne, and a period of about four years that saw promises, disappointments, multiple changes of governments, more war, and, finally, the emergence of the modern-day Republic of Turkey. In a complex web of international intrigues, geopolitical power plays, humanitarian advocacy, and postwar justice, the Armenians lost out on virtually all fronts.

As the Allies went about the task of punishing the losers and dividing up the spoils, redrawing the borders of Europe and the Middle East, in Turkey new forces emerged determined to placate the Allies and salvage the Turkish nation. In order to avoid “a crushing peace treaty,” and “emphasiz[ing] its opposition to the previous Young Turk regime . . . the postwar Turkish government set out to institute court-martial proceedings against top leaders of [the CUP].”93 Much has been made of these postwar Turkish trials; some scholars see the various testimonies and verdicts as vindication of what would later be called “genocide.” Others, and the current Turkish government, instead question their veracity, accuracy, and the political nature they were designed to achieve. Ultimately, the trials found several CUP leaders guilty; but many of the highest-ranking Young

Turks managed to sneak out of the country and avoid prosecution. European governments also engaged in their own trials and investigations. But no “Nuremberg Trial” permanently and unimpeachable recorded and adequately punished the crimes and misdeeds of the Young Turks. This lack of judicial closure contributed to Turkey’s denial effort and has been the source of decades of Armenian frustration.

The collapse of Russia in the 1917 Russian Revolution and the subsequent Treaty of Brest-Litovsk had left Armenians in the Russian-Armenian provinces (roughly in the region of the current state of Armenia) at the mercy of Turkish rule. Amidst fierce fighting the Armenians declared the independent Democratic Republic of Armenia on May 30, 1918. It was to be a short, two-year experiment. In Ankara, a city in central Anatolia, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and his supporters assumed the leadership of Turkey and initiated what became known as the Turkish War for Independence, in effect a resistance movement against the various powers that were carving Anatolia into blocks of European influence.

The Treaty of Sevres, signed by the Sultan and the Allies on August 10, 1920, was an attempt to divide up Anatolia largely along ethnic national lines (see map next page). Several clauses specified the independence of Armenia and the various boundaries it would have, to be determined by the President of the United States.94 The Turkish historian Taner Akcam argues that this was an effort to create a small, weak Turkish state both to punish Turkey and to rescue

the various minority groups from Turkish domination. For the minorities, namely the Armenians, Kurds, and Greeks, while the treaty was not perfect it was nevertheless seen “as an unprecedented historical opportunity to resolve the issue in their favor.” Naturally, Ataturk, who was soon to become the father of modern Turkey and the most revered figure in its recent history, hated the treaty.

Kemalist forces fought successful battles against the various ethnic groups: Greeks, Armenians, and Kurds. Where the Turks took territory they

Map obtained from upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/3/3e/TreatyOfSevres.png/800px-TreatyOfSevres.png.

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96 Ibid. pg. 180.
forcibly resettled the non-Turkish populations; thus were the remaining Armenians in the Ottoman lands permanently removed from what was to become modern-day Turkey. Although these resettlements were met with bouts of violence and loss of property, it was nowhere near the numbers endured during the Genocide. In the east, during the so-called Turkish-Armenia War in the Fall of 1920, the Kemalist forces made significant advances into Armenian territory, and in that fighting there were several instances of outright massacre (outside of the course of military combat). Defeated, their population scattered and suffering, the Armenians were offered peace terms by both Turkey and Russia. They chose the latter, and Armenia was reorganized with new borders as the Soviet Socialist Republic in 1921.\textsuperscript{97} It would remain a part of Russia until 1991, when Armenia became the first republic to break away from the collapsing Soviet Union.

Thanks to Ataturk’s military and political successes, by 1922 a new Turkish state was emerging from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire, a country much different than the one that had been defeated just a few years earlier. In fact, the whole region was changing, and where the Allies once sought to severely punish the Turks for their crimes against humanity, suddenly new geopolitical elements were taking shape. For a variety of reasons, including wanting to keep the Soviet Union in check and securing access to the Middle East’s oil supplies, the Allies began to see the wisdom of retaining Turkey’s support. Bowing to Ataturk’s revulsion at the Treaty of Sevres – which had

anyway became useless in the face of his military gains – the Allies organized a new peace conference at Lausanne, Switzerland, in November 1922, followed by a peace treaty of same name in July, 1923. Lausanne conferred on Turkey complete sovereignty of almost all the territory that makes up today’s nation. The Republic of Turkey was proclaimed on October 29, 1923, with Ataturk as its first President, and the capital at Ankara. Turkey, “alone among the defeated powers of the First World War, succeeded in rising from her own ruins, rejecting the dictated peace imposed on her by the victors, [and] secur[ing] the acceptance of her own terms.”

For the Armenians the Treaty of Lausanne was the final blow. As part of the renegotiations at Lausanne, the Allies agreed to cease efforts to punish
Turkish officials for the crimes against the Armenians. “After expunging any and all references to Armenian massacres, and to Armenia from the draft treaty, [the Allies] put their signatures on the Lausanne Peace Treaty, thereby insidiously helping to codify the condition of impunity by obversely pleading *nolo contendere*, i.e., they would not contest the Turkish insistence to consign to oblivion the episode of the Armenian genocide.”99 Turkish denial was thus aided, and Armenian quest for justice deterred, by geopolitical concerns codified in international agreement.

But throughout this postwar period, the Armenians had not been out of the minds of the American public or the Jewish community. Continuing their relief efforts throughout the 1915 Genocide, American Jews may also have made a small but significant contribution to America’s entry into the war, and the subsequent international efforts to create an independent Armenian republic.

**American and Jewish relief efforts**

As the mass killings and deportations continued throughout 1915, Ambassador Henry Morgenthau found himself continually frustrated by his inability to act in a meaningful way. Despite his pleas for U.S. diplomatic and humanitarian intervention, he was constrained by America’s policy of neutrality. When government officials suggested that he instead seek aid from private sources, Morgenthau followed through.100 What ensued was a massive human

100 Power, Samantha. “*A Problem From Hell*”: America and the Age of Genocide, Perennial (New York, 2002), pg. 10.
rights campaign that galvanized the American public and enveloped the efforts of the American Jewish community.

Armenian relief represents perhaps the earliest example of a substantial, organized, and directed American humanitarian relief effort. Today’s Darfur relief effort is the direct descendent of the Armenian cause: a loose confederation of a variety of organizations and individuals dedicated to philanthropic and political advocacy activities with the goal of protesting and relieving an identified humanitarian plight. In the early twentieth century, not only were many of America’s more prominent citizens involved but so were its most: cherished political, cultural, and intellectual leaders who spoke out against the Armenian atrocities included John D. Rockefeller, Mark Twain, Clara Barton, William Jennings Bryan, William Lloyd Garrison – even America’s highest-ranking political leaders, such as former President Teddy Roosevelt and even the current President, Woodrow Wilson. 101 It is also important to note the extent to which Americans were aware of the atrocities occurring in eastern Turkey. Unlike the still-recurring debates about how much the American public – and American Jewry – was aware of the Nazi’s extermination efforts, the Armenians’ plight was no secret. The New York Times ran hundreds of articles about the crisis, and, indeed, the fact that so many important public figures continuously spoke out about the cause suggests that it was an ever-present reality.

This analysis holds true when considering the American Jewish community’s response in both the Armenian and Darfur cases; the “Jewish” effort

is mostly indistinguishable from the “American.” Although the most prominent Armenian relief organizations were founded or inspired by American missionaries and other Christian organizations, Jewish leaders were ever-present. Rabbi Stephen Wise consistently appears as a founding or Board member of a range of philanthropic committees. And it was Henry Morgenthau more than anyone else who brought the Armenians’ troubles to the attention of America and spurred the massive stateside Armenian relief movement.

Numerous organizations and philanthropic drives were created between 1915 and 1923, such as the Committee on Armenian Atrocities, the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief (which became the American Committee for Relief in the Near East and then just Near East Relief), the American Committee for the Independence of Armenia, and others. These efforts raised $177,000 in 1915 followed by $2.4 million the following year. In 2007 dollars, that comes to $3.6 million and $48.6 million, respectively.

Many of the same Jewish groups and individuals who had taken part in the relief efforts of the Hamidian era continued their efforts,

\[\text{Image obtained from en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:They_Shall_Not_Perish.png}\]

including Jacob Schiff and Rabbi Wise. Rabbi Wise was one of the main speakers at a mass meeting of the Armenian Atrocities Committee, of which he was a founding member, in October 1915. The meeting was called “to make a protest in the name of the American people against what has every appearance of being a governmental policy the part of Turkey to wipe out the entire non-Moslem population of Turkey,” and “to interest the public in the necessity of raising funds . . . .”

The Jewish financier Jacob Schiff was similarly active, as was the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which “focused in particular on the plight of the Jews, Armenians, Greeks, and Syrians who were in peril in the Ottoman Empire.” In 1916 Rabbi William Rosenau, the President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) noted that he “allowed his signature to be affixed to several appeals. One is the appeal of the Joint Distribution Committee for contributions to Jewish War Relief on Rosh Hashanah, 1916; another bespeaking the co-operation of the members of the Conference in the asking of contributions to be made by their respective congregations to Armenian War Sufferers, on October 21, a day set aside by President Wilson for Armenian War Relief.”

American Jewry’s effort on behalf of the Armenians was part of the larger drive to relieve Jewish suffering in Europe and the Near East. We already saw in Part One that the CCAR’s 1909 resolution urged the European Powers to honor

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the obligations of the 1878 Treaty of Berlin to protect Jewish and Christian minorities, including the Armenians. American Jewry was particularly concerned with the continued instability of the Jews’ status in Russia and Eastern Europe, and, with the onset of war, the Jews’ situation in the Ottoman lands. “The plight of the Jews in Palestine, as well as the millions of Jews suffering under German and Austrian occupation in Poland, the Baltic provinces, and Russia, instantly captured the sympathy of American Jewish relief organizations. In the end, a remarkable $63 million was raised by American Jews and Gentiles together to assist the Jews overseas.”\textsuperscript{106} In 2007 dollars, that amounts to almost $900 million!

As the war dragged on and Armenian suffering continued, Jews became involved in two linked causes beyond simple relief: the quest for Armenian independence and American intervention in the war. The American Committee for the Independence of Armenia, founded in 1918, counted prominent Jews Rabbi Wise, labor leader Samuel Gompers, and Oscar Straus – the first Jewish Cabinet member (under Theodore Roosevelt) and the U.S. Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire prior to Morgenthau – as members.\textsuperscript{107} At a 1919 campaign event for the Committee for Relief in the Near East, Rabbi Wise reported on his trip to the Paris Peace Conference. Praising President Wilson, Rabbi Wise shared the “good tidings” that the “day of liberation for Armenia must come soon, that Armenia is at last to be free to weave its own destiny.” Nevertheless, he


declared, “we must remember two things – we must keep Armenia from Turkish Iniquity, and then, we must feed her.” This speech was after the creation of the Democratic Republic of Armenia but before such an arrangement was codified by the Allies in the ill-fated Treaty of Sevres.

A little over a year later Rabbi Wise spoke to an audience of 1,000 “friends of Armenia” about America’s role in securing Armenian independence. He revealed that President Wilson had promised him in 1917 that when the war ended neither Christian Armenia nor Jewish Palestine would be returned to Turkey. Reporting to his audience on the creation of the British Mandate in Palestine, Rabbi Wise noted that the same conference requested from the American government, through Congress, a mandate for Armenia. With wonderful rhetoric Rabbi Wise extolled the audience not to “leave this to Congress and to the President. It is not their job. It is your job and mine. … Remember that the holiest privilege has been offered America. We can decide tomorrow if Armenia is to live or die, to remain alive as a nation or pitiably perish. In every church, Roman and Protestant, and every Jewish synagogue, the cry must go up, ‘America must save Armenia’.” The meeting ended with those in attendance promising to write ten letters each to Wilson and their Members of Congress.

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Rabbi Wise, Henry Morgenthau, and other Jewish Americans also joined the movement to end American neutrality and enter the war. Woodrow Wilson was a staunch advocate of neutrality, winning reelection by promising to stay out of the war, and he remained steadfast even after the infamous sinking of the *Lusitania* passenger ship in 1915. But he was under increasing pressure to intervene in the war, and Americans quickly became divided between those who advocated a pacifist approach and those who argued for military intervention. Rabbi Wise “believed that France, England, and the United States would be in a far better position to help the Jews and the Christians of the Ottoman Empire if the United States declared war on the Turks.”\(^{110}\) Peter Balakian quotes from a letter Wise sent to Clara Barton expressing his concern for the Armenians and insisting that the “liberation” of Armenia would not be possible without intervention.\(^{111}\)

American Jewish interventionists had a powerful ally: former President Theodore Roosevelt. A staunch advocate of intervention, he had in fact been deeply upset and concerned with the fate of the Armenians since his own presidency in the first decade of the twentieth century, as he wrote to friends and acquaintances, including Jacob Schiff and Oscar Straus.\(^{112}\) In numerous letters and speeches Roosevelt cited Turkey’s treatment of the Armenians as one of the

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\(^{111}\) Ibid. pg. 306.

foremost moral underpinnings of the case for U.S. interventionism. In a lengthy 1918 speech laying out his view of America’s war aims, Roosevelt declared that “if Turkey . . . is allowed to rule over the Armenian and Syrian Christians and the Jews of Palestine . . . the peace will represent a German victory . . . .” Elsewhere in the same speech Roosevelt affirmed, “The Turks must be driven from Europe. The Jew must have Palestine. . . Armenia must become a separate commonwealth.” Roosevelt connected the two issues in private correspondence as well. “It seems to me,” he wrote in a September 16, 1918 letter to Rabbi Julian Miller of Chattanooga, Tennessee, “that it is entirely proper to start a Zionist State around Jerusalem, for the same reasons that make me earnestly hope to see Armenian made a separate state.”

Finally, on April 6, 1917, the United States entered the war against Germany. Not, however, against Turkey. It seems, according to Rabbi Wise and others, that Wilson was persuaded that an open declaration of war against Turkey would result in the destruction of American colleges in the Empire. As we saw, even when the war ended the Allies continued to frustrate Armenian desires for independence, revising the terms of the Treaties of Sevres and Lausanne to suit Turkey’s needs. But American Jews continued to press for action. At an observance of Armistice Day in 1920 Ambassadors Morgenthau and Straus urged the United States to intervene to “save the remnant of the Armenian people from annihilation,” reflecting their concerns about the ongoing

Turkish-Armenian War for control over Armenian-held territory in Anatolia.\textsuperscript{116}

Even as late as 1923, during the Senate debate over the Lausanne Treaty – stalled “because of continued wrangling about the Armenian massacres and U.S. policy towards Turkey” – an American Committee to Oppose the Lausanne Treaty was established, led by none other than the tireless advocate Rabbi Wise, who, along with Henry Morgenthau, continued to speak out.\textsuperscript{117} Pretty soon, however, with Armenians scattered from their native land and the remaining under the domination of the Soviet Union, American relief efforts diminished. As Turkish denial became an element of its foreign policy, the Armenian Genocide faded further from people’s minds, including the Jewish community. In a few years, of course, American Jewry would become preoccupied by another genocide.


It is only natural for both Armenians and Jews to appeal to comparisons between the Holocaust and the Genocide in order to conceptualize the two events. An analysis of the similarities and differences is certainly advantageous for communal relations and for the general study of genocide. But lurking just beneath the surface of these comparisons is a great difficulty. The intra-Jewish struggle over the Holocaust’s uniqueness or universality often impacts our community’s discussion about the Armenian Genocide; Armenians sometimes interpret this as straying into denial about their experience, leading to hurt feelings on both sides. Rather than delve too deeply into the similarities-vs.-differences arguments, which many scholars have already admirably covered, we will instead attempt a “big picture” look from the top down on how this analysis impacts the two communities and leads to some confusion.

Regardless of the similarities and differences, the Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide are forever linked because of the efforts of Raphael Lemkin. Lemkin, a Polish Jew and lawyer by training, arrived in the United States in 1941 after fleeing his native Poland. Fascinated by so-called “crimes against humanity,” he studied and wrote extensively on the subject, eventually producing his 1944 definitive work, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, an exhaustive account of Nazi Germany’s treatment of the Jews, in which Lemkin defines what he calls “genocide.” Although he did not write about the Armenians in that study,
scholars have long noted that the Armenian case was crucial to his understanding of the concepts of genocide, state sovereignty, war crimes, and national justice; and among his papers were two manuscripts on the Armenian experience.\textsuperscript{118} While still a student, Lemkin “followed with great interest the trail of another student, Soghomon Tehlirian, who in 1921 assassinated Talaat Pasha, a prime architect of the Armenian Genocide, on a Berlin thoroughfare. In his [unpublished] autobiography, Lemkin expresses disappointment and concern that the perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide had not been punished by the Allied Powers.”\textsuperscript{119}

Lemkin defined genocide – a combination of the Greek \textit{genos} (tribe, race) and the Latin \textit{cide} (as in homicide, etc) – as “the practice of extermination of nations and ethnic groups as carried out by the invaders,” referring here to Nazi Germany.\textsuperscript{120} Crucially, genocide did not have to mean the murder of every last individual of a certain group – although it could – but instead was also a prolonged attempt at the destruction of a national way of life, with the goal that eventually that group would be destroyed. He writes,

“Generally speaking, genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, except when accomplished by mass killings of all members of a nation. It is intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[119] Ibid. pg. 126.
\item[120] Lemkin, Raphael. \textit{Axis Rule in Occupied Europe}, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Washington, DC, 1944), pgs. xi-xii.
\end{footnotes}
with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objectives of such a plan would be disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups. Genocide is directed against individuals, not in their individual capacity, but as members of the national group.”

What made genocide stand out, argued Lemkin, was that the conception of war had changed in the modern era. In the Middle Ages and ancient times wars were essentially fought with the goal of annihilating an opposing population, or at the very least enslaving its people. There was little distinction between armies and civilians, and, as we know from history, armies often followed up their victories by raiding the closest cities and villages, raping, pillaging and murdering along the way. Most cultures did this and so the phenomenon was not unique or uncommon. But Lemkin notes that in “civilized society,” war is “conducted against states and armed forces and not against populations,” as affirmed in the Hague Regulations on war. The massacre of civilians, then, is an outlier event in warfare, an act contrary to the established norms of war. These “crimes against humanity” become “genocide” when the effort goes beyond a single instance of massacre and instead becomes an organized effort to destroy a national group, in essence a return to our “barbaric” ancient and medieval modes of war.

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121 Ibid. pg 79.
122 Ibid. pg. 80.
After working as an adviser to the postwar Nuremberg Trials Lemkin endeavored to have the newly created United Nations pass a resolution prohibiting genocide. In 1948 the General Assembly approved the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which defines genocide much along the lines that Lemkin laid out. Genocide is “any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, national, ethnical, racial or religious group, such as:

a) Killing members of the group;
b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part
d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”123

The United States was an original signatory of the Convention. Both Turkey and Israel ratified the agreement in 1950, and Armenia did so in 1993 (two years after achieving independence from the Soviet Union).

We see, then, that the current international conception of genocide, modeled on Nazi Germany’s activities with respect to the Jews, also has its roots in Lemkin’s understanding of the Armenian experience.

The widespread recognition – whether officially or popularly – of genocide as occurring in other parts of the world forces the Jewish community to consider

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a profound question about the Holocaust. Was it a truly unique event, un paralleled, unprecedented, and un-comparable to any other? Or are there universal aspects to the Jewish experience that other groups, too, have encountered? This has been a prominent and passionate debate in recent decades, and contributes to Israeli and American Jews’ reluctance to support recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

The link between the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust has led many scholars to consider the similarities between the two experiences. Robert Melson writes, “Both catastrophes were the products of state-initiated policies whose practical results were the elimination of the two communities from Turkey and most of Europe respectively. Both victimized groups were ethnoreligious communal minorities that had been partially integrated and assimilated into their larger society. The first assertion suggests that the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust were unmistakable instances of genocide, and the second distinguishes these two from other similar disasters.”

In other words, the Genocide and the Holocaust occupy their own category together, apart from even other incidences of genocide. The combination of Jews’ and Armenians’ integration in the surrounding majority society and the government-driven effort to murder them en masse is what links the two events. Melson elaborates on this notion with three examples:

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(1) Both Armenians and Jews were despised minorities undergoing rapid social mobilization and adaptation to the modern world, under the regimes of the Ottoman Empire and Imperial Germany respectively.

(2) Both imperial regimes were swept away by revolution and war, and both were succeeded by revolutionary vanguards that became the perpetrators of the two genocides.

(3) Both genocides occurred in the midst of major wars.\(^\text{125}\)

These links exemplify the “perfect storm” that enabled the Armenian Genocide, as we discussed earlier. Turkey’s long-history of ethno-religious hatred of the Armenians, combined with the Young Turks’ nationalist and pan-Turanism ideology, took advantage of World War One to remove the Armenians from Turkish lands, destroying the population in the process. We see a similar process in Germany with respect to anti-Semitism, the Nazi regime, and World War Two. Jay Lifton sees a similar confluence, arguing that the Young Turks’ effort “to modernize and in some degree democratize Turkey failed miserably and ended in a despotic autocracy, just as Germany’s hopes for revitalization by means of military triumph, bitterly dashed by the defeat in World War I, enabled the rise of the Nazi dictatorship.”\(^\text{126}\) Pan-Turkism’s extreme ideology, like Nazism, Lifton argues, enabled popular support for genocide to occur when the

\(^{125}\) Ibid. pg. 82.
“decision was made to eliminate a minority group in the service of ethnic purification and regeneration.”

The Armenian scholar Vahakn Dadrian sees the similarity between the Genocide and the Holocaust as one of power relations. Genocide, he writes, “presupposes a substantial disparity in the power relations between a potential perpetrator and a potential victim. One of the most common elements in the vulnerability syndrome of the Armenians and the Jews has been the inferior status to which for centuries they have been relegated as disdained minorities by nation-states and dominant groups . . .”

The Jews’ and Armenians’ long-standing degraded status in Christian Europe and Muslim Turkey, respectively, created this massive power gap, rendering the two groups completely vulnerable to the whims of the majority culture, which required then only the right combination of prodding and opportunity to initiate mass murder. James Reid argues that the destruction of both groups was also part of the war effort, writing, “Just as the Nazi concentration camps were built to contain prisoners and fifth-columnists deemed dangerous to Nazi expansionist drives, so also was the destruction of Armenia considered a war objective.”

Beyond these intellectual conceptions of the similarities – of which we have only just scratched the surface of a rich literature – there are of course the more obvious connections. Helen Fein notes that both group engaged in “open rebellion – armed, defensive confrontation with the enemy – . . . only when there

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was no way out for flight and the cornered victims were convinced that submission meant collective death."\textsuperscript{129} Jews most famously fought back in the Warsaw Ghetto, while the Armenians engaged in this type of self-defense throughout many cities in Turkey, which led Turkey to argue that they actually were a rebellious, separatist minority which brought much of their suffering on themselves (see next section). In both instances the groups’ respective experiences led to the establishment of diaspora communities around the globe, especially in the United States. Both groups saw roughly the same reduction in population: Jews lost about one-third of their coreligionists in the Holocaust, Armenians between roughly one-third and one-half. And, as we saw in Part One of this paper, both Armenians and Jews have developed a similar self-conception in response to their historical narrative, an identity strongly based on the notion of victimhood, which was enhanced by their twentieth-century experiences. We see, then, that there is some universality in experience between Jews and Armenians, that elements of the Armenian Genocide are found in the Holocaust which occurred some 25 years later.

Despite these similarities, though, many scholars and ordinary Jews alike are reluctant to equate the Genocide and the Holocaust. The insistence on Holocaust “uniqueness” is often a prerequisite to discussion about the Armenian Genocide, and often strays too close to what the Armenians consider to be denial of their own tragedy. This rests in part on some key differences between the two experiences, and also on Jewish sensitivity with respect to preserving the

\textsuperscript{129} Fein, Helen. \textit{Accounting for Genocide: National Responses and Jewish Victimization during the Holocaust}, The Free Press (New York, 1979), pg. 15
uniqueness of the Holocaust against even other genocides. The clearest
difference is on the totality of the Nazi's murderous efforts. Where the Young
Turks sought to eliminate the Armenian population in certain areas, the Nazis
attempted to murder every last Jew in all areas. Some Armenian communities,
particularly in the Western part of the Ottoman Empire, were exempt from the
massacres and deportations experienced by their coreligionists in the East. But
Jews suffered similar fates all over Europe, whether in Poland, France, Hungary
or Greece. This fact is essential to the Jewish conception of Holocaust
uniqueness, and certainly provides a clear division between the Jewish and
Armenian experiences. Yair Auron, who details the relationship between Israel
and the Armenian Genocide in his groundbreaking book The Banality of
Indifference (which we will return to in Part Three), also notes this absence of an
“intention to total eradication to the very last Armenians,” which he suggests may
be because the clash between Armenians and Turks “was free of racial
dimensions. It was a bloody ethno religious conflict, within the larger framework
of nationalist struggles for independence . . .”

Auron touches upon another uncomfortable truth that other scholars have
noted. Where the Jewish population in Europe utterly lacked a militant, violent
revolutionary element, “a small revolutionary segment of the Armenian people
was a rebellious, agitating, unsubmitive element in the crumbling Ottoman
Empire.” And while he correctly points out that this is not justification for the
Young Turks’ actions, it is a key difference between the two groups. Regardless

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131 Ibid. pg. 14.
of their reasons for rebellious activity – whether justifiable or not, and despite much exaggeration from both Ottoman and Young Turk governments – the acts of some Armenian groups greatly irked the wider Turkish population and in no small part contributed to their anger. The Jews of Europe were utterly devoid of such activity.

Yehuda Bauer offers perhaps the most profound summation of the Armenian Genocide-Holocaust dynamic. While noting the importance of the similarities, he insists that the differences between the two experiences are such that to equate them is to “mystify history.” He is worth quoting at length:

“To sum up, there may be no difference between Holocaust and genocide for the victim of either. But there are gradations of evil, unfortunately. Holocaust was the policy of the total, sacral Nazi act of mass murder of all Jews they could lay hands on. Genocide was horrible enough, but it did not entail total murder if only because the subject peoples were needed as slaves. They were, indeed, “subhumans” in Nazi terminology. The Jews were not human at all.

“Not to see the difference between the concepts, not to realize that the Jewish situation was unique, is to mystify history. On the other hand, to declare that there are no parallels, and that the whole phenomenon is inexplicable, is equally a mystification. … During World War I, about half of the Armenian population in Anatolia was murdered by Enver Pasha’s troops. Yet at the same time, the Armenians at Istanbul, the heart of the Ottoman Empire, were not killed. The Armenian massacres are indeed the closest parallel to the Holocaust; they were motivated largely by extreme nationalism and religious fanaticism, and were not total – whereas the Nazi
policy towards the Jews was motivated by a pseudoreligious and anti-Christian ideology that was based on a very deep anti-Semitic European tradition, and it was total and logical. The differences are as important as the parallels are.”

Jews, then, rightly bristle at attempts to equate the Genocide and the Holocaust. But this causes some difficulty in relations between the two groups, because where Jews want to insist on the Holocaust’s uniqueness, Armenians and their supporters often assume that Jews are denying the Genocide outright. And, indeed, scholars and political figures have explicitly denied the Genocide, which tends to garner the headlines; but often, if we dig a bit deeper into the statements, we can also see that the issue of Holocaust uniqueness is what, in part, drives their comments.

In 2001 then-Israeli Foreign Minister (and now President) Shimon Peres found himself the subject of much criticism for dismissing Armenian claims to “genocide” in an interview with the Turkish Daily News. Prior to an official visit to Turkey, Peres stated in an interview that “we reject attempts to create a similarity between the Holocaust and the Armenian allegations. Nothing similar to the Holocaust occurred. It is a tragedy what the Armenians went through but not a genocide.” The article recorded that “Peres said Israel should not determine a historical or philosophical position on the Armenian issue but added: ‘If we have to determine a position, it should be done with great care not to distort the historical realities.’” Holocaust and genocide scholar Israel Charny sent a letter

to Peres accusing him of going “beyond a moral boundary that no Jew should allow himself to trespass,” even if, in Peres’ official capacity “it is your obligation to circumvent and desist from bringing up the subject with Turkey.”

Charny may well be correct in his analysis. As we will see in Part Three of this study, Israel’s policy has always been to deter recognition of the Armenian Genocide in order to preserve its mutually-beneficial relationship with Turkey. But from our “top-down” perspective on the Holocaust-Genocide dynamic, something else pops out from this interview. While we have no way of knowing what the reporter’s actual question was, Peres’ first response was to assert Holocaust uniqueness. Charny is correct that Peres certainly strayed into denial, but might there be another element at play? Yair Auron notes that Holocaust uniqueness played a role in Israel’s anti-recognition efforts. He quotes from a 1990 article in Kol Haeir, an Israeli weekly magazine supplement in Ha’aretz, regarding the cancellation of a film about the Genocide. “The decision,” writes Auron, “was interpreted as a ‘desire to preserve the uniqueness of the Jewish Holocaust and the lack of desire, or inability, to accept the possibility that another people had experienced a Holocaust.’”

A 2001 article in The Guardian makes the similar point that “some Israelis are reluctant to ally themselves publicly, fearing that an emphasis on the Armenian genocide might detract from the uniqueness of the Jewish holocaust . . .”

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expression of this worry, rather than a wholly pernicious effort to willfully disparage Armenian memory?

The eminent historian Bernard Lewis also found himself in trouble – legally – for his statements about the Armenian Genocide. Long a doubter of the Genocide, he, like Peres, also denied that what the Armenian’s experienced was genocide. Although we will examine some of his claims more closely in the next section, Lewis asserted in a 1993 interview with the French paper *Le Monde* that the Armenians, while suffering terribly, were not the subject of a deliberate effort at annihilation, and thus did not experience Genocide. He was sued in French court by the French Forum of Armenian Associations and in 1995 was found “at fault” for doing harm to a third party, and ordered to pay a fine of one franc. But again, what is interesting with the Lewis case is that he makes reference to comparisons with the Holocaust. And while we again do not know the interviewer’s question, the French court decision cites another *Le Monde* article, “Clarifications Offered by Bernard Lewis,” published shortly after the original interview, in which Lewis lists several additional points that belie comparison with the Holocaust. Later, in a 2002 appearance on C-SPAN, Lewis, in response to a question about this case, said that “the point that was being made was that the massacre of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire was the same as what happened to Jews in Nazi Germany and that is a downright falsehood.”

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Beyond Lewis’ denial of the Genocide, we see here sensitivity to the question of comparing the Armenian experience with the Holocaust. This is not to suggest that Lewis did not deny the Genocide: he did, as we will see in the next section. But this suggests that something besides willful neglect or Holocaust “ownership” is behind the tendency to diminish the comparisons between the Holocaust and the Genocide.

Armenians and their supporters want Jews to recognize and empathize with the many similarities between the Holocaust and the Genocide in order to better conceptualize the Armenians’ experiences. But the Jewish community is wary of taking those comparisons too far, concerned that it will stray into diluting the Holocaust’s “uniqueness,” and so while acknowledging the Genocide, Jews also moderate their inclination to see the events as one and the same. Sometimes this tendency goes too far: Shimon Peres’ insistence that Israel not make either a philosophical or historical determination on the efficacy of the debate seems to contradict his declaration that the Armenians’ “tragedy” was not genocide. And so it seems that perhaps Peres was instead asserting the uniqueness of the Holocaust. The Jewish community’s acknowledgement of genocide, massacre, or even just “tragedy” is often tempered by an insistence on the Holocaust’s uniqueness.
“Denial” is a strong word in the context of genocide. Successive Turkish governments, since that country’s inception in 1923, have denied not that the Armenians experienced a great tragedy but rather that the experience amounted to genocide perpetrated by Turkey. The gist of their argument is that the Armenians were a rebellious group that sided with Turkey’s enemy, Russia, which necessitated their deportation from the eastern region; during this process massacres were committed and many hundreds of thousands also died from starvation, exposure, and the violence inflicted from other ethnic groups. But, says Turkey, the government did not order their annihilation; and regardless, this is a matter for historians to decide, not outside governments to legislate. Turkish denial rests on two pillars: the academic and the political. While some scholars uphold Turkey’s version of history, such as Bernard Lewis, others argue that the Armenian Genocide is an incontrovertible fact. On the political front, while Turkey’s methods may be disturbing, its motives are not entirely pernicious: the government does have legitimate concerns about the potential consequences of recognizing the Genocide. While we cannot explicate every aspect of this intense debate here, we will get a sense of the general thrust of Turkey’s campaign and discuss a few examples.

Turkey ironically uses the Holocaust to help make its case. Roger Smith writes that Turkey makes a special effort to both recognize the “Jewish Holocaust and show compassion for its victims” as well as go to “extraordinary lengths to
prevent Jews from learning about the Armenian Genocide." Turkey does this, argues Smith, in order to thwart the notion that “what was done to the Armenians belongs to a common category: genocide. It is especially important for Turkey to stifle this awareness among Jews because for victims of Nazism to state publicly that Armenians and Jews alike have been subjected to genocide carries a kind of moral persuasiveness that non-victims may lack . . .” Turkey highlights the differences between the Armenian and Jewish experiences, using the Jewish sensitivity to Holocaust “uniqueness” to make the case that what the Armenians experienced was terrible, but not genocide. By calling into question assumptions about the Armenian Genocide, Turkey creates a sense of “reasonable doubt” that makes it easy to avoid a definitive declaration of support for recognition efforts. This effort has been ongoing since World War One, helped by Allied complicity in covering up the crimes in favor of political rapprochement with the nascent Republic of Turkey. With Armenians scattered and devastated, Turkey was able to take advantage of this vacuum of memory to install a permanent sense of doubt about the nature of the atrocities committed by the Young Turk regime.

Today, writes Balakian, “Turkey would like the media and the public to believe there are ‘two sides’ to the Armenian Genocide. When scholars and writers of Armenian descent write about the Armenian Genocide, the Turkish government calls this a biased ‘Armenian point of view.’ This accusation is as slanderous as it would be for the German government to claim that the work of Jewish scholars

141 Ibid. pgs. 9-10.
and writers represented merely a ‘Jewish side’ of the Holocaust, which is to say a biased and illegitimate version of history.”\textsuperscript{142} The Armenian historian Vahakn Dadrian suggests that Turkey’s perspective rests on three major points: “(1) replacing the notion of a sweeping genocide by that of local and scattered massacres; (2) portraying the massacres as resulting from interethnic strife and communal clashes; (3) maintaining that there can be no question of a premeditated, centrally organized and directed mass murder. In other words, there was no genocide, but rather a civil war within the context of a broader global war.”\textsuperscript{143} We will look here at two popular components of denial, the notion of the Armenians as a rebellious group that compelled Turkey to act, and the lack of evidence of “premeditation,” suggesting that the Genocide was instead a matter of wartime exigency.

\textbf{The Armenians as a rebellious group}

From the very beginning of the Armenian Question, various Turkish governments – from Sultan Hamid to the Young Turks to today – portrayed the Armenians as a rebellious column aligned with Russia, a menace so widespread and deadly that it posed a catastrophic threat to the regime. This necessitated their physical removal from the land, an effort that, due to the unfortunate circumstances of war, resulted in mass death and suffering.

The historian Bernard Lewis is a major proponent of this notion. Lewis argues that the Armenians’ geographic location “in the very heart of the Turkish homeland” would have meant the dissolution of the Turkish state if the Armenians succeeded in separating. This resulted in a “desperate struggle . . . a struggle between two nations for the possession of a single homeland, that ended with the terrible slaughter of 1915, when, according to estimates, more than a million Armenians perished, as well as an unknown number of Turks.”

In his 1993 *Le Monde* interview, quoted in the French court decision discussed earlier, Lewis argues that “for the Turks it was a matter of taking punitive and preventative measures against an unreliable population in a region threatened with foreign invasion. For the Armenians it was a matter of wanting to free their country.” In other words, Armenians bear the burden for their experience during the war, for it was their unreliability as a loyal populace that forced the Young Turks to act against them. Although these actions were, as Lewis allows, “disproportionate in scope,” he argues that they were the result of the Armenians’ rebelliousness and the Russian advance in the east, in which the massacres were the result of “all-too-familiar wartime neuroses.”

This theory is seductive because it contains an element of truth. The Russians *were* making designs on eastern Ottoman territory. Many Armenians (but far from all) *did* look to a Russian victory to free them from decades of

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144 Lewis, Bernard. *The Emergence of Modern Turkey: 3rd edition*, Oxford University Press (Oxford, 2002), pg. 356. Interestingly, most scholars quote from the first edition of this book, in which Lewis refers to the Armenian experience as a “holocaust.” In the 3rd edition, used here, “holocaust” was changed to “terrible slaughter.”


146 Ibid.
Ottoman persecution. And there were rebellious Armenian groups committing acts of violence against Ottoman officials. But surely widespread dissatisfaction with the Ottoman government was understandable: for decades the Armenians had been promised civil rights and an end to persecution, only to have successive governments rescind those promises and instead visit yet more violence and abuse upon the Armenians. It is not difficult to understand why the hitherto loyal Armenians would be increasingly frustrated with the failure of the liberal faction of the Young Turks. As Henry Morgenthau wrote, “The Turkish Government made much of the ‘treasonable’ behavior of the Armenians of Van and have even urged it as an excuse for their subsequent treatment of the whole race. … After massacring hundreds of thousands of Armenians in the course of thirty years, outraging their women and girls, and robbing and maltreating them in every conceivable way, the Turks still apparently believed that they had the right to expect from them the most enthusiastic ‘loyalty.”147

And how widespread was this “rebellion”? Surely it did not encompass every Armenian male in the Ottoman military, the vast majority of whom were executed. Surely not every woman and child in every eastern Armenian village was in active, violent resistance. Indeed, many scholars argue that the threat was exaggerated by the Young Turks, and that while incidences of Armenian rebellion did increase during World War One, it was in response to the deportations and massacres, not, predominantly, a possible Russian victory.

147 Morgenthau, Henry. *Ambassador Morgenthau’s Story*, Wayne State University Press (Detroit, 2003), pg. 203.
This theory is supported by a large corpus of neutral documents: reports from United States officials and missionaries.

Ara Sarafian writes that “despite the official opening of the Ottoman archives in the 1980s . . . there has also been no substantiation of the charge that during the First World War ‘Armenians’ were in revolt, that the country was in a state of civil war, or that the Ottomans had to ‘resettle’ Armenians elsewhere in the Empire. Even where there was ‘resistance’ shown by some Armenian communities . . . American materials clearly point out that this was in response to the ‘deportation policies’ of the Ottoman authorities and the accompanying murder of Armenians.”\(^\text{148}\) American missionaries also contested this accusation. “The Turks cite the April 1915 revolt of Van as the prime example of scheming Armenian sedition. ... Yet, religionists living there testified that the fighting in Van was a result of Armenian self-defense rather than Armenian treason.”\(^\text{149}\)

The logical conclusion from the arguments of Lewis and others is that if only the Armenians had not been “rebellious,” such disaster would not have befallen. This seems hard to believe, for we have seen in this study how the Armenians had been victimized by successive Ottoman regimes for decades, irrespective of the degree to which they rebelled. Robert Melson writes that “the problem with the provocation thesis derives from its exaggerating the extent and threat of Armenian nationalism, while neglecting to pay attention to the role that


Turkish nationalism might have played in the genocide.¹⁵⁰ We saw that the rise of pan-Turkism and pan-Turanism necessitated a reconsideration of the Armenian Question, of which the answer was deemed to be the complete removal of the Armenian population from eastern Anatolia. This argument often sounds like a chicken-vs.-egg discussion: which came first, Ottoman persecution or Armenian rebellion? Although we can go around and around this issue, it seems clear that Armenian rebellion during the World War One era was actually resistance. It was a direct response to the massacres and deportations of their coreligionists.

**Premeditation**

The question here is tricky: Turkey does not deny that the Young Turks ordered the Armenians to be deported *en masse*, but the government does deny that the intention was ever to murder the Armenians. The problem is that this deportation effort *did* result in mass death, and so the question instead becomes to what extent the Young Turks were aware that deportation was the equivalent of death for the Armenians. Like the notion of Armenians as rebellions, this argument can go in circles. But again scholars rely on the politically neutral observations of Morgenthau and others to make the case that the Turks knew what deportation meant, and that the massacres were centrally directed.

Morgenthau relates a conversation with Talaat Pasha, minister of the interior, in which the minister told him “that the Union and Progress Committee

had carefully considered the matter . . . . He said that I must not get the idea that the deportations had been decided upon hastily; in reality, they were the result of prolonged and careful deliberation.\textsuperscript{151} This is not controversial and indeed makes sense: the sheer scale of the deportations of hundreds of thousands of Armenians required an organized, bureaucratic process, and indeed Turkey does not deny this aspect. This, Turkey correctly points out, does not mean Genocide. But even Turkey’s own ally in the war – Germany – understood the real meaning of these deportations. Roger Smith quotes an April 1915, report from the German Ambassador: “‘Turks began deportations from areas now not being threatened by invasion. This fact and the manner in which the relocation is being carried out demonstrate that the government is really pursuing the aim of destroying the Armenian race in Turkey.’\textsuperscript{152} This report belies both the excuse of Armenian rebellion and the idea that deportation was merely the removal of the population, not an attempt to annihilate the Armenians as a people. Leslie Davis, in a July 1915, letter to Morgenthau, backs up this assertion:

“Any doubt that may have been expressed in previous reports as to the Government’s intention in sending away the Armenians have [sic] been removed and any hope that may have been expressed as to the possibility of some of them surviving has been destroyed. It has been no secret that the plan was to destroy the Armenian race as a race, but the methods used have been more cold-

\textsuperscript{151} Morgenthau, Henry. \textit{Ambassador Morgenthau’s Story}, Wayne State University Press (Detroit, 2003), pg. 229.
\textsuperscript{152} Smith, Roger. “Introduction,” in Morgenthau, Henry. \textit{Ambassador Morgenthau’s Story}, Wayne State University Press (Detroit, 2003), pg. xxix.
blooded and barbarous, if not more effective, than I had at first supposed.”

In other reports Davis also noted that the Young Turks were aware that the deportation of Armenians would result in their being decimated not only by Turkish soldiers but also by other ethnic groups, like the Kurds. Davis reported:

“Furthermore, it was known that the roads were dangerous, even though the government had promised to provide a sufficient escort for all who left. They were filled with Kurds and ‘chetehs’ who were turned loose to rob and pillage. ... A ‘cheteh’ is a convict who has been released from prison and furnished a gun. These were the people whom the Armenians were to meet on the way and, as the Government knew it and had undoubtedly arranged it, its real intentions in deporting the Armenians can readily be understood.”

Deportations were not the only method by which the Armenians were killed; they were murdered outright in massacres throughout the empire. As we saw earlier in this report, the pattern of massacres was such that it seems hard to believe they were not somehow organized: how else to explain that two villages in separate parts of the region would suffer almost the exact same experience? And how to explain the systematic execution of Armenian men in the Ottoman military, if not through a centrally directed process ordered from the highest leadership ranking of either the military of the civilian government? Morgenthau

154 Ibid. pg. 58.
also reports on this phenomenon, noting that the onset of war brought the removal of the “conciliatory” governor of Van, who was replaced with a brother-in-law of Enver Pasha. “This act in itself was most disquieting. Turkish officialdom has always contained a minority of men who do not believe in massacre as state policy . . . . Whenever massacres have been planned, therefore, it has been customary first to remove such ‘untrustworthy’ public servants and replace them by men who are regarded as more reliable.”

Again, this seems to refute the notion that there was no premeditation.

Finally, Helen Fein quotes from a telegram from the Jemiyet – the leadership committee of the Young Turks – to the governors of the six Armenian vilayets (provinces) on February 28, 1915: “Unable to forget the disgrace and bitterness of the past, filled with vengeful episodes, Jemiyet, hopeful about its future, has decided to exterminate all Armenians living in Turkey, without allowing a single one to remain alive and to this regard has given the Government extensive authority.” Turkey’s strategy with such documents has been to question their authenticity. And indeed, in some instances scholars have had some difficulty determining the definite origins of various texts. But we can see that the aggregate evidence is nevertheless compelling: the fact that sources as disparate as American and German diplomatic reports and actions by the Young Turks government strongly suggest that the destruction of the Armenians was premeditated, that is, thought out, planned, and centrally organized.

155 Morgenthau, Henry. Ambassador Morgenthau’s Story, Wayne State University Press (Detroit, 2003), pg. 204.
The American Jewish community played a role in Turkey’s denial effort even before 2007. In the 1980s, as the effort got underway to build a museum to the Holocaust in Washington – what would become the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum – there was a question about whether to include the Armenian experience as part of the permanent exhibit. The museum considered many past atrocities, from pogroms in Russia to Cambodia to the American Indians, but some of those involved, including Elie Wiesel, wanted to keep the focus on the Holocaust; nevertheless, Wiesel supported including the Armenian experience as an example of genocide.\(^\text{157}\) Turkey’s approach was twofold and a precursor to its efforts in 2007: the Turkish government threatened to pull out of NATO if the United States government allowed the Genocide to be featured at the museum, and Turkey approached both Israel and the American Jewish community to help kill the effort, alleging threatening harm to Turkey’s Jewish community (Turkish diplomats vehemently denied the latter threat).\(^\text{158}\) The Israeli Embassy heeded Turkey’s concerns, arguing not only on behalf of the importance of Turkish-Israeli relations but also that “the uniqueness of the Holocaust would be harmed with all of the resulting ramifications.”\(^\text{159}\)

In the end the Holocaust Memorial Council opted to include the Armenian Genocide as part of the Museum’s educational message. It remains a part of the


Museum to this day. In fact, etched on a wall in the museum is Adolf Hitler’s oft cited quote about the Armenians:

“I have issued the command – and I’ll have anybody who utters but one word of criticism executed by a firing squad – that our war aim does not consist in reaching certain lines, but in the physical destruction of the enemy. Accordingly, I have placed my death-head formations in readiness – for the present only in the East – with orders to send to death mercilessly and without compassion, men, women, and children of Polish derivation and language. Only thus shall we gain the living space (Lebensraum) which we need. Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?”

This quote has become ubiquitous when speaking of the connections between the Holocaust and the Genocide and the importance of “never forgetting.” Its widespread usage made ascertaining its source difficult, but it seems to have come from a book, What About Germany, published in 1942 and written by the former Bureau Chief of the Associated Press in Berlin, Louis P. Lochner, a one-time pacifist who instead became a passionate supporter of the drive to defeat Hitler. The above statement came to Lochner via a Nazi informant, who presented him with a copy of a speech Hitler gave to his military commanders on August 22, 1939, just prior to the invasion of Poland. Interestingly, Jews were not mentioned in that speech: Hitler’s reference to the Armenians was in the context of eliminating the Poles. Nevertheless, it has made a durable impact.

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What is interesting about the Museum story is that Turkey never made good on its threats. Turkey neither pulled out of NATO nor initiated a government-backed campaign against Turkey’s Jews nor downgraded its relations with Israel because of this incident. On the contrary economic and military ties increased between the two nations. Why? Perhaps Turkey stood more to lose than gain by exacting revenge for the Museum’s recognition of the Armenian Genocide. Turkey has always been a Western-learning nation, avowedly secular and democratic, and, in recent decades, hoping to join the European Union. Turkey also benefited greatly from its NATO alliance, given its location adjacent to the Soviet Union. And its relations with Israel garnered respect and appreciation from Western countries, including the United States. Why jeopardize that? This incident has been overlooked in recent years, as the United States and American Jewry have often yielded to Turkey’s threats, as we will see in Part Three of this study.

Outside of politics the Jewish community maintained an active interest in Genocide recognition. A petition signed by 126 Holocaust scholars appeared in The New York Times on June 9, 2000 (see Appendix). The statement, “126 Holocaust scholars affirm the incontestable fact of the Armenian Genocide and urge Western democracies to officially recognize it,” also “asked the Western Democracies to urge the Government and Parliament of Turkey to finally come to terms with a dark chapter of Ottoman-Turkish history and to recognize the Armenian Genocide. This would provide a valuable impetus to the process of the
democratization of Turkey.”161 Signatories included Elie Wiesel, Yehuda Bauer, Israel Charny, Stephen Feinstein, Saul Friedman, and other notable scholars of the Holocaust and genocide.

Armenians as a rebellious group and the lack of premeditation are just two of the many arguments Turkey and its supporters proffer to dispute the Armenian Genocide. These arguments all contain elements of truth, but they are also all refuted by various documents and eyewitness reports, and this is what makes determination so difficult – and so easy to avoid on the premise of wanting to see “both sides” of the issue. But we should also be careful about ascribing only nefarious intentions to Turkey’s arguments. In fact the government does have legitimate political concerns that compel it to include denial as state policy.

The politics of denial

We can divine legitimate concerns about recognizing the Armenian Genocide: reparations, separatism, and harm to the Turkish national myth. We should not dismiss such concerns lightly. Although we will examine the practical applications of the politics of denial in Part Three, we will here briefly survey the above concerns.

In the immediate postwar era, these worries were not prevalent for the emerging Republic of Turkey. Although “world public opinion universally condemned Turkey for committing such mass murder . . . as the major powers vied for influence in the Middle East and for favor from the new Turkish Republic

under Mustafa Kemal [Ataturk], the Turkish denial gained tacit acceptance. ... Deliberate forgetfulness suited the ‘needs’ of the times.”¹⁶² But as Armenians agitated more forcefully for recognition in the latter half of the twentieth century, the above concerns began to appear.

Several Armenian acts of terrorism in the 1970s and 80s were part of an effort to gain international publicity, which would then lead to recognition of Armenian grievances, similar in many respects to the Palestinian terrorist movements of the same era. The Armenian Liberation Army killed 39 diplomats in ten years and in 1982 attacked the Turkish Airlines counter at Orly airport in Paris, killing six and wounding 48.¹⁶³ Oddly, some of the more militant Armenian groups saw themselves as something of a cross between Jews and Palestinians: at a 1983 conference to discuss the creation of an independent Armenian state in northeastern Turkey, the Armenians there described the meeting as “something halfway between the World Jewish Congress and the Palestine National Council.”¹⁶⁴

Turkey feared that Turkish recognition of the Genocide “would lend legitimacy to the ultimate Armenian aims: the creation of an Armenian state and the payment of reparations.” (Recall that at this time Armenia was not an independent nation but a republic of the Soviet Union). This is an understandable concern, for a combination of massive reparations and the loss of half a country’s territory would be a terrible blow to any nation, regardless of

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.
whether such punishment is deserved or not. And Turkey could well argue that it was the pre-Republic government that imitated the atrocities – why should the present nation be held responsible? This notion is full of holes, naturally, and perhaps this is why Turkey instead chose the route of total denial. In another reference to the Zionists, “Armenians admit that their demand for an independent state does not sound realistic. But neither, they say, did the goal of setting up the state of Israel when the first Zionist Congress met in Basle in 1897.”

Separatism, then, remained a legitimate concern for the Turkish government, which, as we will see in Part Three, was also dealing with a restless Kurdish population in eastern Anatolia.

We might also consider the impact of recognition on the Turkish notion of its history. For one, Turkey does not want to be seen as a people akin to the Nazis. Indeed, Turkey was a neutral power during World War Two and even a place of refuge for Jews fleeing Europe. The fear of being likened to the Nazis has played a role in Turkey’s dire warnings about the potential harm to relations between itself and the West. Second, although the previous regime was responsible for the Genocide, Turkey’s great hero Mustafa Kemal Ataturk was responsible for finally pushing the Armenians completely out of the Turkish territory, during which some massacres took place. Ataturk is revered in Turkey, and the government therefore goes to great lengths to protect his image. This is understandable: what if Americans were suddenly told by another country that George Washington had massacred whole New England towns he suspected of loyalty to England?

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Unfortunately Turkey resorts to decidedly undemocratic means to preserve the Turkish view of history. In 2005, as part of a larger reform package of the penal code, Article 301 was included to prevent “insulting Turkishness.” The infamous provision makes it a crime to, among other activities, publicly denigrate Turkishness, the Republic, the Grand National Assembly, the government, the judicial institutions, or the military, violations of which are punishable by varying lengths of jail time (which are increased when performed by a Turkish citizen outside of the country). Numerous prominent writers, thinkers and journalists have been tried under this code, including Hrant Dink, who appears in the Introduction to this report. In 2005 he was given a six-month suspended sentence for “denigrating Turkishness” in an article on Armenian identity.

If we cannot sympathize with Article 301 we can perhaps empathize with the desire to preserve a national sense of self. Turkish nationalism has been a dominant theme in Turkish identity for over a century. Turkish students today are taught that the Genocide never occurred, that it is a lie propounded by Armenians and other countries attempting to exert external control over Turkey and disparage Turkey great hero, Ataturk. Such thinking requires generational shifts to change.

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167 Ibid.
Many in the Jewish community understandably compare denial of the Armenian Genocide to denial of the Holocaust. This is not, in my view, an apt analogy. Holocaust denial is relegated to the fringes of historic debate. It is espoused by mostly-discredited scholars and the occasional Middle East dictator looking to shore up domestic support. Neither the nation of Germany, nor any other European nations or peoples who played a role in promulgating the Holocaust, deny that it took place, again notwithstanding the occasional demagogic politician. Millions upon millions of documents testify irrefutably to the Nazi persecution of the Jews, tying not only its leadership but also even its lowest-ranking foot soldiers to the death camps of Eastern Europe. In comparison to Turkish denial of the Armenian Genocide, Holocaust denial does not even come close in scope, for Genocide denial, as we will see in Part Three, is a multimillion dollar effort that crosses a broad swath of international politics and American foreign policy, enveloping Western governments in a geopolitical knot of increasingly complex proportions.

Indeed, what is most fascinating about Turkey’s efforts to deny the Genocide is that this denial often seems to be the governing dynamic of its foreign policy, at least where the West is concerned. Such is the fear of affirming the Genocide that Turkey routinely threatens governments that verge on recognizing the Genocide. Western governments adhere to the credo that in order to do any kind of business with Turkey one must first deny, or ignore, or at least be seen to place obstacles in the way of affirmation efforts of, the Armenian Genocide. Turkey’s response to House Resolution 106 is a perfect example.
When their massive lobbying campaign, successful against previous congressional efforts, failed to prevent H.Res. 106 from moving forward, Turkey resorted to all-out threats: against the United States with respect to Middle East relations and most especially the War in Iraq, against Israel with respect to its bilateral relations, and against the American Jewish community, with respect to relations with Israel and even, in the most subtle of hints, the fate of Turkey’s own Jewish community. This was the case in 2007 as the American Jewish community was asked to take up the issue of the Armenian Genocide.
Part Three

House Resolution 106 and the American Jewish community

The San Francisco JCRC and H.Res. 106

Israel, Turkey, and Genocide recognition

Turkey’s anti-resolution lobbying campaign

The JCRC and the U.S. House of Representatives vote on the resolution
In February 2007, the San Francisco JCRC’s Director of Legislative Affairs and Intergroup Relations, Jessica Trubowitch, received a request from the Armenian National Committee to participate in a press conference about the recently assassinated Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink. The local Bay Area chapter of the Armenian National Committee requested the JCRC’s presence at the event, undoubtedly assuming (or expecting or hoping) that the Bay Area Jewish community would rally around a similarly beleaguered minority population struggling for international recognition of an historic catastrophe. Just prior to this event, on January 30, House Resolution 106 (H.Res. 106) had been introduced in Congress, and the Armenian community was looking for the JCRC’s support on that issue, too.

But there was a catch. The JCRC, as the primary public affairs agency for the Bay Area Jewish community, represents over 80 synagogues and other organizations. Its website notes that “JCRC seeks to establish the consensus of the local organized Jewish community on public issues and to present this consensual position to the general community, the media and public officials.” How that is done is at first blush Byzantine: the mandatory back-and-forth amongst the various JCRC committees, lay leaders and staff seems destined to ensure that little is decided in a long period of time. But in fact it works surprisingly well. From education to gay marriage to foreign policy matters, the
JCRC has in recent years taken a firm stand on a number of controversial issues, producing at the end of each process a polished consensus statement that carefully iterates the JCRC’s stance. Trubowitch, then, was constrained in her actions by the absence of a recent official consensus statement proclaiming the JCRC’s support for the Armenians’ aspirations.

This chapter does not intend to critique or criticize the JCRC’s internal methods but to use it as an example of the intersection of community relations, politics and public policy, and organizational structure. It does not suggest that the JCRC was “wrong” at any point; rather, with respect to the Armenian genocide, I hope to explain how the process impacted this issue. With full disclosure in mind, I remind the reader that during several months – from June through August of 2007 – I was an intern in this office and worked on the Armenian Genocide issue. It was my observation then that the JCRC remained faithful to its process.

The JCRC’s 2001 Strategic Plan defines a “Jewish issue” as falling into five categories, listed in order of priority (though, depending on the circumstances, there is flexibility for reshuffling).168

Category One: Issues that directly affect the interests of the organized Jewish community (such as anti-Semitism, hate crimes, immigration, church/state separation, U.S.-Israel relations, political extremism, and Holocaust remembrance, etc),

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Category Two: Issues that indirectly but clearly affect the interests of the organized Jewish community (general discrimination, race/inter-group relations, public education, etc),

Category Three: Issues that resonate with the Jewish values/history of the organized Jewish community (international human rights, domestic abuse, violence and gun control, poverty, etc),

Category Four: Issues that provide significant opportunity for social action within a Jewish context where there is not organized or strong dissent within the organized Jewish community (environmental, nuclear disarmament, humanitarian issues, etc),

Category Five: Issues of vital importance to JCRC coalition partners where there is not organized or strong dissent within the organized Jewish community (labor issues, etc).

Beyond this there is a process for how a “bill becomes a law” at the JCRC. This process seems to be dictated by two factors: the need for consensus, and geography. Consensus, as noted earlier, is seen as the best way to refine scores of Jewish agencies into a coherent and effective position on any given issue. That the process of decision-making is spread over numerous committees, organized into a hierarchy (discussed below), ensures that a fairly democratic, egalitarian process of majority-based decisions builds into a community-wide consensus from which the JCRC can act.

The second factor is geography: despite San Jose, the larger city some 40 miles to the south at the bottom of the Bay, San Francisco is the spoke of the half-circle that is the Bay Area: North Bay, wealthy Marin, Sonoma and Napa counties, just above the Golden Gate Bridge; ethnically- and economically-
diverse Contra Costa and Alameda counties in the East; Santa Clara in the South; and San Mateo County just below the city limits, popularly known as the “Peninsula.” Just look at a map: every feature seems to pour into San Francisco across those few bridges. From wineries to barrios, million-dollar homes to urban ghettos, the Bay Area presents a wide regional variation in almost all socio-economic and cultural matters (though politics tends to be fairly monolithically left). The JCRC then, organizes its lay leadership into various regional committees – one for each area mentioned above. There are also other established committees, such as Legislative Affairs. Issues, which pass through the various relevant committees, eventually reach the Metropolitan (Metro) JCRC Board, the organization's highest decision-making body, which votes on issues as they arise and includes representatives from numerous local and national Jewish communal organizations.

On any given issue, two items may emerge: a consensus statement and a yes-or-no vote. For example, the JCRC may hypothetically want to consider whether to vote yes or no in support of U.S. military action somewhere. It is guided to that decision by a consensus statement, which perhaps notes that the JCRC, say, “does not support war for any reason.” The JCRC may then vote “no” on this hypothetical issue, based on the consensus statement. The absence
of a consensus statement makes it difficult for the agency to justify a particular position, ever more so when an issue is controversial. This is the barrier that Jessica Trubowitch ran into when approached by the Armenian community, with respect to both the press conference and H.Res. 106. There was no up-to-date consensus statement on the JCRC’s – and by extension the wider Bay Area Jewish community’s – stance regarding any aspect of the Armenian genocide. “Consensus statements are the filter by which the JCRC looks at any issue,” explains Rabbi Doug Kahn, the JCRC’s Executive Director. “The committee can look at a bill and decide the JCRC position on the bill based on its being covered by a particular consensus statement.”¹⁶⁹ There are various ways for an issue to be inputted into the JCRC’s deliberative process – it can be brought to the Legislative Affairs Committee’s attention by a regional committee, or by a Legislative Committee member, or by JCRC staff. Regional boards generally require a 75% majority vote to pass an issue onto the Legislative Committee, which in turns require a majority vote to send the issue up to the full Metro Board.

**House Resolution 106**

House Resolution 106 was introduced in the 110th Congress on January 20, 2007. California Democratic Congressman Adam Schiff, who represents the state’s 29th congressional district, located in Los Angeles County and including cities such as Pasadena, Glendale and San Gabriel, introduced the legislation along with five original cosponsors – that is, other Representatives who signed

¹⁶⁹ JCRC Legislative Affairs Committee. Quotation is a paraphrase from the minutes from a June 21, 2007 meeting. Internal document.
on to support the legislation as it was introduced in Congress. The legislation officially calls "upon the President to ensure that the foreign policy of the United States reflects appropriate understanding and sensitivity concerning issues related to human rights, ethnic cleansing, and genocide documented in the United States record relating to the Armenian Genocide" (see Appendix). It reanimated a debate that arises whenever similar legislation is introduced in Congress, pitting the Turkish government and the Executive Branch against the Armenian community and its congressional allies, threatening to derail foreign relations between the United States and Turkey, and raising a host of concerns about geopolitics, the Middle East, and Israel.

It is important to distinguish between a congressional “resolution” and a congressional “bill,” though these terms sometimes get used interchangeably. A “bill” is legally binding – when passed by the House and the Senate and then signed by the President, it becomes law. These bills are designated by the term “H.R.” (in the House; the Senate is simply “S.”), followed by a number, and often contain a pithy and summary title. A resolution, on the other hand, is a non-binding expression of the “sense” of Congress, and can range from the mundane – congratulating the Red Sox for winning the World Series, say – to the controversial – authorizing the President to take military action against a foreign country. But it is important to understand that even if passed by both the House and Senate, a resolution is not law – there is no obligation of any government official to obey its provisions, and even an “authorizing” resolution – such as the now-infamous one relating to the war in Iraq – is not a legal justification, merely a
political one. Thus, House Resolution 106 is an *expression* that Congress feels that the President should take a certain stance with respect to U.S. foreign policy and the Armenian Genocide. In no way does it *compel* the President to do so, even if it were to be passed by the full House of Representatives. While it can have consequences, especially if the Executive Branch acts in accordance with the resolution, it is often a wholly symbolic effort.

Nevertheless, resolutions – political symbols – can carry great weight, such as the above-mentioned resolution authorizing President Bush to use military force against Iraq. Resolutions, when passed by Congress, carry the political backing of the United States government, no mean feat. Thousands of bills and resolutions are introduced in Congress each year; few make it to the floor for a vote by the entire body, and even fewer, of course, pass into law.

H.Res. 106 presents the typical structure of a congressional resolution, though it is perhaps bit longer than the usual standard. It breaks down into three sections: Short Title (the pithy summary), Findings (the substance, or justification for its prescription), and Declaration of Policy (though, as we have seen, this is non-binding). The title of the resolution is “Affirmation of the United States Record on the Armenian Genocide Resolution.” The Findings section is lengthy, thirty paragraphs that lay out a history of the Genocide, explanations of various documents and reports that purport to prove its historical validity, and United States policy and congressional action with respect to the events of 1915-1923. The Statement of Policy contains only two paragraphs, the first iterating the responsibility of the President to ensure that U.S. foreign policy reflects sensitivity
to the Genocide, and for the President, in his annual commemoration address of
the event, to “accurately characterize the systematic and deliberate annihilation
of 1,500,000 Armenians as genocide and to recall the proud history of United
States intervention in opposition to the Armenian Genocide.”

This was not the first resolution introduced in Congress relating to the
Armenian Genocide. Indeed, numerous legislative items in both the House and
Senate has been introduced in the past three decades, though only a very few
made it out of their respective committees to be voted on by either full body. A
few “commemorative” resolutions were passed by the House in the 1970s and
1980s, while other efforts were tabled or defeated in committee. Several
attempts to pass Genocide-recognition legislation took place in the mid-1980s
amidst great debate in both the House and Senate, documented in a fascinating
essay by Vigen Guroian, who argues that the debates “stand as unstinting
lessons in how historical memory can be held captive by a politics of
expediency.”

The 1997 Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs
Appropriations Act (actually taken up in June 1996) contained a provision
reducing aid to Turkey by $3 million until the government acknowledges the
Genocide, on the premise that Turkey had spent that amount on anti-genocide
lobbying efforts. Senate Joint Resolution 212, introduced by Senator Bob
Dole in September, 1989 “designated” April 24, 1990 as a National Day of

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171 House Report 106-933: H.Res. 596, Affirmation of the United States Record on the Armenian Genocide
Remembrance for the 75th anniversary of the Genocide (it had an identical “twin” in the House, H.J.Res. 36). Its short text authorized and requested the President to “issue a proclamation calling upon the people of the United States to observe this date as a day of remembrance for the 1,500,000 people of Armenian ancestry who were victims of the genocide perpetrated by the governments of the Ottoman Empire from 1915 to 1923, prior to the establishment of the Republic of Turkey . . . .” This bill was not voted out of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, and thus never made it to the floor of the Senate (or the House) for a full vote. In 1995, House Concurrent Resolution 47 was introduced “honoring the memory of the victims of the Armenian Genocide,” though this does not appear to have ever even been considered in committee, let alone voted on. These bills make mention of responsibility for the Genocide, the latter stipulating that the “United States should encourage the Republic of Turkey to take all appropriate steps to acknowledge and commemorate the atrocity committed against the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire from 1915 to 1923.”

The closest Armenian Genocide-related legislation has come to consideration by the full House of Representatives was in 2000, with H.Res. 596, introduced by Representative George Radanovich (R-CA) and considered in the House Committee on International Relations. The controversy then was very similar to the present one, in which congressional enthusiasm for passing the legislation was dampened by the geopolitical concerns of Executive Branch

officials (including President Bill Clinton) as well as some prominent members of
the House International Relations Committee. H.Res. 106 is very similar to this
legislation, using much of the same language, though with a few key differences
(discussed later) to perhaps make it more palatable to wary elected officials.
H.Res. 596 ignited a firestorm of debate in Congress and throughout the U.S.
government, some of which is recounted in the official congressional report on
the legislation, House Report 106-933 from the 106th Congress. The Report
notes that the resolution “relates facts and statements that would serve to
support the conclusions that the deaths of hundreds of thousands of ethnic
Armenians . . . in regions controlled by the former Ottoman Empire were the
result of a purposeful campaign of genocide against the Armenian nation.”173
The problem with the language – which was adopted almost verbatim by H.Res.
106 – was that “the statements in this resolution go beyond the factual evidence
in terms of the role of the Ottoman government in perpetrating the atrocities that
were committed,” noted in the dissenting views of Congressmen Tom Lantos,
Dan Burton, and Eni Faleomavaega, then-members of the House International
Relations Committee, and contained in the House Report. In addition to the
historical “inaccuracies” in the resolution, the congressmen also fretted about the
impact on United States interests in the Middle East and beyond. The report
discusses these issues at length, and what is interesting is that despite the
international upheavals of the past eight years, particularly within the Middle East
and its environs, the concerns expressed then are almost exactly the same as

173 House Report 106-933: H.Res. 596, Affirmation of the United States Record on the Armenian Genocide
now with respect to H.Res. 106. It is worth listing the variety of objections raised by those who argued against the passage of H.Res. 596 to demonstrate what the Armenian community and its supporters were and are up against.

- Turkey is a member of NATO,
- Turkey borders on several Middle Eastern states (Iraq, Iran and Syria, etc) that are important to U.S. efforts to support Israel and bring peace to the Middle East,
- Turkey enforces United Nations sanctions against Saddam Hussein’s Iraq and permits U.S. and NATO aircraft to patrol the no-fly zone,
- Turkey plays a major role in international efforts to achieve stability in both the Balkans and the Caucasus, and has deployed peacekeepers to the Balkans,
- Turkey is an emerging, major market for U.S. exports and trade relations are on the rise,
- The U.S. and Turkey have worked together on efforts to construct oil and gas pipelines from the Caucuses and Central Asia to ports in Turkey, thereby bypassing Iranian or Russian control of important energy reserves,
- Turkey has relations with Israel, including military and economic cooperation, unprecedented for a Muslim state,
- The Turkish government is faced with challenges from Islamist fundamentalist and Turkish nationalist movements,
- Passage of the Armenian Genocide-recognition resolution could undermine pro-Western elements in Turkey, increasing the power and support of the above political movements.\(^{174}\)

\(^{174}\) Ibid.
In letters addressed to the House Committee, and recorded in the House Report, several then-current and former Administration officials urged the Committee not to pass the legislation, claiming that “now is not the time to test the will of an indispensable ally which, for over forty years, has proven its loyalty and strategic importance.” Clinton Administration Assistant Secretary of State Barbara Larkin cited “the position adopted by other friends of both Armenia and Turkey, including France and Israel, that the question of how these massacres are characterized is best left to historians, and cannot be legislated from the outside.” This is exactly the Turkish government’s official position regarding congressional efforts on the Armenian Genocide.

Ultimately the House Committee on International Relations passed H.Res. 596 in October, 2000 by a vote of 24-11. From there it was placed on the House Calendar, meaning that it was scheduled for a vote by the full House of Representatives. What happened next was a devastating blow for proponents of the legislation. On the day of the vote then-Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert pulled the legislation off the floor after conferring with President Clinton, who “warned [Hastert] that the symbolic but emotion-charged resolution could damage national security.”175 The legislation was dead and efforts to revive the Armenian Genocide resolution would have to wait until the Democratic takeover of Congress in the 2006 congressional elections.

Where was the American Jewish community during all of this? America’s major Jewish public policy organizations took much the same position then as

they would do in 2007: largely neutral, with an edge towards working against the resolution’s passage. As we will discuss later in this section, Turkey’s intense lobbying campaign focused on the Jewish community by threatening to derail Turkish-Israeli relations unless America’s Jewish organizations took steps to halt the legislation. Torn between the moral question of recognizing the genocide and not wanting to harm Israel’s strategic interests, most major groups attempted to duck the problem altogether; the absence of a strong Jewish voice, however, probably contributed to the resolution’s ultimate demise. Yet not all organizations remained silent: many smaller agencies took a stand in favor of the legislation, including the American Jewish World Service, the JCRCs of Greater Boston and Palm Beach, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, and the Union of Orthodox Rabbis.176

It is difficult to reconstruct the various communal positions on these resolutions, even more so locally across the nation. The San Francisco JCRC voted unanimously to support S.J.R. 212 in 1989-90. The JCRC debate then reflected the same concerns that would appear in the summer of 2007, primarily the effect such support would have on Israel’s relations with Turkey. Nevertheless, the JCRC unanimously passed a motion in support of S.J.R 212, citing “strong feeling about the moral and ethical reasons to support this legislation, notwithstanding the supposed political issues.”177 Nationally, however, the Armenian-Jewish relationship had turned lukewarm, if not downright cold. Shifting geopolitical realities in the post-Cold War world were

177 JCRC Metro Board meeting minutes, 1989 (undated day and month). Internal document.
moving the Middle East – Israel in particular – in new directions, trends that were diametrically in opposition to Armenian interests. But as Israel went, so, too, tended major American Jewish organizations, and this sparked recrimination on both sides. Although the Genocide was not an explicit part of this process, it lurked in the background as an issue that ought to tie to the two communities ever closer, but to no avail.

The fall of the Soviet Union and the declaration of independence by various Caucasian nations – such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, etc – opened up new strategic and political possibilities in the Middle East. Not only were these newly independent nations sitting on vast reserves of Caspian Sea oil and gas resources, but their mild Islamic status and proximity to two of the West’s major enemies – Iraq and Iran – meant that suddenly the West took a great interest in this part of the world. Though not newly independent, Turkey came to play a major role in this realignment during the 1990s.

At the close of the decade foreign aid to Azerbaijan became a highly contentious issue, most especially between the American Armenian and Jewish communities. In 1992 Congress passed the Freedom Support Act, providing

Armenia was included as a major recipient but one country was left out: Azerbaijan. The two nations continued to be at war with one another, and under Section 907 of the law assistance was prohibited to Azerbaijan on the basis of that conflict, thanks to pressure from Armenian-American lobbying. But towards the end of the 1990s the picture began to change as Azerbaijan and Jewish organizations lobbied Congress to repeal the sanctions. Why? For the Jewish community, the answer was almost entirely because of Israel’s newly formed strategic alliance with Azerbaijan, a secular Muslim country bordering Iraq and Iran, similar in mien to Turkey, with which Israel also recently established a strategic partnership. Both countries were enemies of Armenia. B’nai B’rith, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League, the National Conference on Soviet Jewry and the American Jewish Congress all endeavored to lift the sanctions for the purpose of “upholding the strategic interests of Israel” to “contain Iran and Iraq,” with “no apologies for caring about Israel,” according to Daniel Mariaschin, B’nai B’rith’s public policy director.\footnote{Morgan, Dan; Ottaway, David B. “Jewish-Armenian Split Spreads on the Hill; Strategic Issues Put Onetime Lobbying Allies at Odds,” The Washington Post, February 9, 1999.} Two communities who are, noted The Washington Post, “linked by similar immigrant experiences and shared memories of genocide,” and who have “usually lobbied side by side . . . to
defend the interests of their respective homelands,” now found themselves at opposite ends of thorny foreign policy questions, though, interestingly, 17 of 23 Jewish members of the House of Representatives voted to keep the sanctions in place.  

Although the Armenian Genocide was not an explicit part of this debate, it was certainly present. The co-chairman of the Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues, Representative John Edward Porter (R-Ill) remarked in 1999 that Jewish organizations “should think very long and hard about the kind of oppression the Armenians have experienced, just like the Jewish people.”

Contemporary Jewish communal ambivalence about the Armenian Genocide and H.Res. 106 – and the community’s relationship with Armenia and Armenian-Americans – has a history that goes beyond the debates in 2007; it reflects, whether individual Jewish leaders realize it or not, recent past arguments and hurt feelings over a variety of sensitive matters: historic suffering, contemporary geopolitics, Israel’s Middle East relations, Armenia’s struggle for prosperous democracy, open and cold war in the former Soviet republics, and, indeed, the power of the Jewish community in Washington D.C. Despite the growing clout in recent years of the Armenian-American community – evidenced, for example, by the creation of the Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues in the mid-1990s and with a current bipartisan membership of 155 Members of Congress – the Jewish community’s presence in the nation’s capitol continues to top all rankings of interest group power. As Ilham Aliyev, son of then-Azerbaijani President

180 Ibid.
181 Ibid.
Aliyev, boasted at a meeting with Jewish groups in 1999, “No matter how strong the Armenian lobby is, I think the Jewish one is stronger.” When the two communities clash, then, there is bound to be bad blood.

After more than six years of virtual congressional silence on the Armenian genocide, the issue rose to prominence once again in 2006 with the Democratic takeover of the House of Representatives. Democrats, who had tended to be more active on Armenian Genocide activities than their Republican counterparts, now also had an ace in the hole: newly minted Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, the congresswoman from San Francisco who had on many previous occasions advocated for Genocide legislation, and who was now promising to see those efforts come to fruition. With Representative Adam Schiff’s H.Res. 106 introduced, the battle began once more between Turkey, Armenian-Americans, Congress, and the White House, with the American Jewish community caught right in between.

Schiff’s H.Res. 106 is mostly identical to Rep. Radanovich’s H.Res. 596, though with some interesting differences. Several controversial provisions in H.Res. 596 were removed in H.Res. 106, which also remarked on a few events which had not yet occurred in 2000. H.Res. 106 reads like an attempt to weed out some of the more controversial provisions of H.Res. 596, those that spoke to the Ottoman Turks’ responsibility for the Genocide and that made mention of what the Turkish government ought to do. For instance, where H.Res. 596

182 Ibid.
183 This is not unusual. A new congressional term is sworn in every two years and any outstanding legislation is thereby rendered void. Many Members of Congress simply reintroduce their exact same bills as before, literally just changing the date. Similar bills very often borrow the same language from before, Members and their staff seeing no need to “reinvent the wheel.”
provided that “the national archives of Turkey should also include all of the
records pertaining to the indictment, trial and conviction of the Ottoman
authorities responsible for the Armenian Genocide,” H.Res. 106 left this phrase
out entirely. Also stripped from H.Res. 106 was a clause noting a “commendable
letter” from Clinton Undersecretary of State Stuart Eizenstat pledging the United
States to raise with the Turkish government the issue of recovering Armenian
assets seized during the genocide period. Finally, H.Res 106 does not include
H.Res. 596’s last paragraph, which calls upon “the President in the President’s
annual message commemorating the Armenians Genocide to state that the
modern day Republic of Turkey did not conduct the Armenian Genocide, which
was perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire.” H.Res. 106 seems to be, then,
attempting to counter potential specific Turkish objections about the nature and
scope of the resolution, vis-à-vis Turkish responsibility and potential obligations
of that responsibility. In other words, writing out Turkey as much as possible
takes away some of the steam from Turkey’s counter-genocide campaign.

About one-third of H.Res. 106’s thirty provisions are devoted to an
historical accounting of the genocide, making mention of Allied governments’
knowledge of the atrocities and the Ottoman government’s responsibility. The
legislation cites Morgenthau and U.S. archives, as well as post-World War One
Turkish government efforts to indict the ringleaders of the Armenian atrocities.
This paper has already discussed the history of the Genocide and its aftermath;
this resolution does contain material that some scholars – and the Turkish
government – object to as historically inaccurate or unfounded. H.Res. 106 also
attempts to establish a legislative precedent, citing past resolutions from the
World War I and postwar era, more recent initiatives commemorating a day of
remembrance, as well as H.R. 3540, which reduced foreign aid to Turkey. The
resolution further points to various studies and pronouncements – from the
United Nations, the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, and the U.S.
Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia – pertaining to the Armenian
atrocities being a genocide perpetrated by the Ottoman government.

The problem with H.Res. 106 is, ironically, that the weight of the presented
evidence makes the case weaker. The resolution cites as fact history that is
legitimately disputed. For example, the first paragraph in Section Two cites a
range of numbers: two million deportations, 1.5 million murders, 500,000
survivors, 2,500-year presence of Armenians in their historic homeland. These
numbers are far from being confirmed fact. While the generally-agreed upon
death count is “about” one to one-and-a-half million, estimates range from as low
as 600,000 to upwards of two million; and the 2,500-year presence is also a
question of interpretation: some Armenians and scholars of ancient history
actually trace the people back much earlier. Indeed, the resolution contradicts
itself in Paragraph 24 by citing a United Nations report that “at least 1,000,000
and possibly well over half of the Armenian population . . .” were killed. The
resolution would have been stronger with a few qualifiers; the degree of certainty
presented is too easy to contradict, and the few historical examples the
legislation presents – such as the postwar trials of “top leaders” – are presented
as ambiguous fact without any discussion. What purports to be a rigorous academic document is not.

The resolution is also weakened by two glaring omissions: acquittal of the Republic of Turkey for the crimes, and any mention of the need for reconciliation between Armenians and Turks. Past congressional efforts, like H.Res. 596, did so. In that legislation, Paragraph 3 of the section on Declaration of Policy “calls upon the President in the President’s annual message commemorating the Armenian Genocide to state that the modern day Republic of Turkey did not conduct the Armenian Genocide, which was perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire.”184 Given the sensitivity of this matter with the Turkish government, such a clause is absolutely necessary – in addition to being historically correct.

Recognizing the Armenian Genocide, however legitimate in its own right, should not come about in a vacuum. If the United States Congress is to adjudicate matters of history, the body ought to at least state an end purpose for the effort. The United States’ policy has been to encourage both Armenia and Turkey to discuss the events of World War One in an open manner, with the goal of reconciling the two peoples to a difficult history and relieving some of the near-war tensions in that region today.

Although this paper focuses much of its attention on Turkey’s response to the legislation, there was also an effort to lobby for its passage. It is no coincidence that many of H.Res. 106’s most vociferous congressional supporters hail from California, a state with a significant slice of the Armenia diaspora, many

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of whom descend directly from Genocide survivors; Congressman Schiff’s congressional district is home to about 75,000 Armenians.¹⁸⁵ San Francisco – home to both Nancy Pelosi and then-Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman (and Holocaust survivor) Tom Lantos – also boasts tens of thousands of Armenians. And American Armenians had support from the Armenian Congressional Caucus. So, too, had H.Res. 106 received well over 200 cosponsors: Members of Congress signaling their support. Even President George W. Bush, during his 2000 presidential campaign, had promised “to ensure that ‘our nation properly recognizes’ what he called ‘a genocidal campaign . . . .’”¹⁸⁶ Yet on April 24, 2007, the anniversary of the start of the genocide, in his “Presidential Message Honoring the Memory of 1.5 Million Armenians Lives Lost During the Ottoman Empire,” Bush failed to mention the word “genocide,” instead referring to “mass killings and forced exile.” (See Appendix)

In sum, for a symbolic resolution, H.Res. 106 delves too deeply into disputed history. While the provisions are non-binding, the legislation is nevertheless weakened by its inaccuracies. Ironically, given the sensitivity of this issue, a short, brief statement of recognition would be preferable to a lengthy historical argument. Yet no legislation is ever perfect, and for the Armenian community, H.Res. 106 became another rallying point around which to press for recognition. Back in San Francisco, the JCRC was about to delve into a months-

long process to determine just what its position would be on both the resolution and the Armenian Genocide itself.

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Shortly after Jessica Trubowitch, the JCRC’s Director of Legislative Affairs and Intergroup Relations, declined the invitation to appear at the Hrant Dink press conference, she met with several representatives of the Armenian community, who briefly explained the history of the genocide and stressed the importance of the JCRC being supportive of the community’s efforts to pass H.Res. 106.187 Trubowitch brought the issue – and the resolution – to the Legislative Affairs Committee. According to the minutes of the April 2007 meeting, the committee voted “to take no position on this resolution with the advisement that it is the language of the resolution they have issue with and that they continue to maintain the JCRC position of recognizing the Armenian Genocide.188 Specifically, according to Trubowitch, the objectionable language was in respect to the resolution compelling the President to express very specific phrases, not with the veracity of genocide claims.

The allusion to maintaining the JCRC’s recognition of the Armenian Genocide refers to the agency’s unanimous support for Senate Joint Resolution 212 in 1989-90. In 1989 the JCRC sent a letter to the San Francisco bishop of the Armenian Apostolic Church explaining the community’s position. It is helpful to quote the entirety of then-JCRC Board Chairman Ephraim Margolin’s one-

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187 Interview with Jessica Trubowitch, August 2, 2007.
188 JCRC Legislative Affairs Committee. Minutes from April 2007 meeting.
paragraph position in order to show how the agency decided that it was not a “consensus” statement for the purposes of the 2007 H.Res. 106.

“Nearly all nations have been victimized during the course of history. Yet being singled out for genocide is a horror that, fortunately, has been visited upon very few peoples. We in the Jewish community realize that no bill nor even official recognition of the attempt at genocide can ever truly ease the pain of that period in our history. But, for the sake of those who died and for the sake of future generations, to forget would be the ultimate tragedy. We applaud the efforts of the Armenian community to educate those in this country about ‘the forgotten genocide.’ A bill such as Senate Joint Resolution 212 is an important step in the public education about the attempts at Armenian genocide.”

The letter twice mentions educating the public about the genocide with respect to remembrance, an ideal encapsulated in S.J.Res. 212’s short general description of the genocide, but far from the later H.Res. 106’s length and depth. The JCRC perhaps felt in 2007 that, despite its support for a genocide-related congressional resolution almost two decades prior, Margolin’s letter was not enough with which to continue the policy of unequivocal support, particularly given the continuing political sensitivity of the issue as well as the more exhaustive H.Res. 106. Thus the need for the Legislative Affairs Committee to reconsider this issue in the spring of 2007.

Normally, the decision to “take no position” would effectively table the issue, rendering the JCRC without the ability to take a position one way or the other on the question of whether or not to support H.Res. 106. But, according to Trubowitch, there was dissatisfaction from some of the members of the committee who did not want to dismiss the entire issue merely out of concern for the resolution’s language. In a memo to the chair of the committee, Trubowitch wrote that it was worth reconsidering the question, as the JCRC had been solicited for support from the Armenian community and, too, because many of the JCRC’s member organizations and lay leaders had expressed “strong feelings that the JCRC should have a position on the Genocide.” Trubowitch suggested that a potential next step could be to invite a speaker from the Armenian National Committee to educate committee members about the importance of the legislation to the Armenian community.190

This memo speaks to the importance that the JCRC places on external relations, and demonstrates the extent to which the agency sees its role in a community paradigm that is wider than just the Jewish community. Although the memo’s main arguments for reconsidering the issue were based on committee members’ dissatisfaction, the memo makes explicit mention both that the Armenian community requested JCRC support and that it might be prudent to bring in an Armenian community leader to educate JCRC members about the issue.

By May the Legislative Affairs Committee had decided on a strategy to deal with the resolution: they would not debate whether or not to recognize the

190 Trubowitch, Jessica. Memo to chair of the JCRC Legislative Affairs Committee. Internal document.
genocide, maintaining that the JCRC had already recognized the atrocities as such in the 1989 statement. Instead, the debate would be about H.Res. 106 itself and whether the JCRC ought to support it based on its merits, not on the question of recognizing the genocide. This carefully parsed strategy seemed designed to satisfy everyone, assuring those in favor of the resolution that the JCRC’s recognition of the genocide would not change, and alleviating the concerns of those against the resolution that their voices would be heard. This was explained in a May meeting to a representative of the Bay Area Armenian National Committee, who explained to the members that the language of the resolution was important because of the “power of words and the importance of using the correct wording to describe events such as the genocide of the Armenian people.”

The committee debate in this May meeting turned around the language of the resolution. On one side were those who felt that endorsing the resolution would be akin to the JCRC telling the Executive Branch what language to use; on the other hand, other members “felt that President Bush needs to be accurate in his statements – by calling genocide ‘genocide,’ one establishes accountability for the events.” Interestingly, the minutes from that meeting do not record any discussion of other issues, especially those relating to Turkey’s pushback effort and its relations with Israel. The committee voted 7-2 to support the resolution and send it out to the various regional committees for their vote. At this point

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191 JCRC Legislative Affairs Committee meeting minutes, May 22, 2007. Internal document.
192 Ibid.
193 Ibid.
there was as yet no consensus statement – the closest statement of policy and position was still the Margolin letter of 1989.

The East Bay regional committee, a few of whose members had agitated for the Legislative Affairs Committee to revisit the issue after tabling it in April, discussed the resolution in their June meeting. Several issues were raised, from Turkey’s relationship with Israel to its pushback against the genocide, from comparisons with the Holocaust to the worry that the JCRC risks “its moral authority” by not taking a stand. The concerns about the use of language, prevalent in the Legislative Affairs Committee, merited only passing mention in the minutes from this meeting, the scribe noting only that the resolution requests – not requires – that the President do anything specific. As we saw earlier, this is closer to the truth of a congressional resolution’s purpose. The committee voted unanimously to support the resolution; other JCRC regional committees acted similarly, and so H.Res. 106 moved up to the full Metro Board for consideration.

From a Jewish organizational standpoint, this entire exchange shows the extent to which moral questions play a major role in policy development. Concerns about a variety of matters – the language of the resolution, Turkey’s relationship with the United States and Israel, etc – were clearly brushed aside in favor of viewing this issue as almost purely a moral issue. That the Legislative Affairs Committee first tabled the legislation, only to reconsider it after pressure from JCRC lay members and external interests (i.e. the Armenian community) demonstrates the power of moral arguments in the practice of Jewish community relations and policy advocacy. While the moral considerations, namely, that the

194 JCRC East Bay regional committee meeting minutes, June 4, 2007. Internal document.
Jewish community has a moral obligation to support a group of people victimized by genocide, would continue to play a role in the Metro Board’s consideration of the issue, other geopolitical concerns would rise to a much higher prominence than they had thus far been accorded. Indeed, throughout 2007 the Turkish government and its compatriot American groups aggressively pushed back against H.Res. 106, and had of late been lobbying the Jewish community to support its efforts. This effort paid off, as concerns about the political dimension – particularly where it concerned Israel – took hold and began dominating discussion about the Jewish community’s place in drive for recognition.
Jews have a long history of life under Ottoman rule, much of which is remembered as positive. Prior to the end of World War One and the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, Palestine was under Ottoman domain; while Jews experienced the same kinds of hardships that all Ottomans faced during the war, they were not subjected to the kinds of horrific violence visited on the Armenians. The State of Israel has enjoyed an overall positive relationship with Turkey going back to 1949, when the Turkish government became the first Muslim nation to recognize the nascent Jewish state. Since then Israel, and American Jewry, have valued that rapport as a vital contribution to Israel’s physical and economic security, and have gone to great lengths to ensure that, despite bumps in the road, the relationship remains strong. Part of the price of this assurance is that Israel endeavor to minimize official recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

Armenians in Israel can date their community back to the early medieval period. In the first centuries after the Armenians adopted Christianity, the Holy Land, and especially Jerusalem, was a popular place of pilgrimage to “enhance their spiritual life . . . [see] holy places and [acquire] relics of them.”195 By the fourth and fifth centuries Armenians began to permanently settle there and in the seventh century the patriarchate of Jerusalem was established to protect the Armenian Church’s interests. Communal life was centered in the Old City’s

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Armenian Quarter, still today controlled by the Armenian Church. After World War One several thousand Armenians came to Palestine, but the onset of Arab-Israeli fighting and the partition of the country separated many communities, who were prevented by Israel from reuniting until after the Six Day War left Israel in control of Jerusalem and the West Bank. Today around 6,000 Armenians live in Israel.

The modern State of Israel’s relationship with Turkey began when the secular Muslim nation officially recognized Israel on March 28, 1949, the only Islamic country to do so. The relationship has had its ups and downs. In the 1950s the two countries secretly agreed to initiate a public relations campaign aimed at influencing their respective citizens about the positive attributes of the other country; they also agreed to share intelligence information and military support. But the 1960s through 1980s was marked by some significant downturns as a result of the various Israeli-Arab wars. Turkey condemned Israeli territorial gains in 1967 and allowed Yasser Arafat to open a PLO office in Ankara. During the first intifada during the late 1980s Turkey recognized a Palestinian state and denounced “Israeli oppression.” But in other ways the relationship was positive. Despite pressure from other Arab states Turkey refused to break diplomatic relations with Israel; the government condemned the 1986 terrorist attack on Istanbul’s Neve Shalom synagogue, which killed 22

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197 Ibid. pgs. 427-428.
200 Ibid.
Jews; and by 1990 the two countries seemed more interested in economic, cultural, and military cooperation than the vagaries of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The 1990s saw the Turkish-Israel relationship blossom. In the early part of the decade the two countries normalized diplomatic relations, signed various defense cooperation, intelligence-sharing, and regional-security agreements, participated in Middle East arms control talks, and experienced an explosion of tourism. By 1994, 200,000 Israelis were visiting Turkey, and over $300 million was generated from bilateral trade.\(^{201}\) The mid-1990s was much the same. Turkey contracted various Israeli military industries to develop and upgrade Turkish military equipment, the two countries signed defense-related and free trade agreements, and assorted agricultural-development projects were initiated; all told, Israel's relationship with Turkey was netting not only good diplomatic rapport but hundreds of millions of dollars in arms and other industrial sales.

Official recognition of the Armenian Genocide – or rather, Israel's consistent refusal to do so – was not insignificant to this relationship. In his book *The Banality of Indifference*, Yair Auron does a thorough investigation of the history between the Genocide and Israel, although he devotes the bulk of the book to Jewish efforts in Palestine during World War One and shortly thereafter. He delves into modern Israel's refusal to acknowledge the Genocide, which tended to arouse controversy around high-publicity media events like film

\(^{201}\) Ibid.
screenings, television series, and academic conferences, as well as the teaching of the Genocide in public schools.  

Auron and other scholars highlight a particular incident to illustrate the lengths to which Israel has gone to avoid recognition of the Genocide. In 1982 an international conference on the Holocaust and Genocide was organized in Israel, with over 150 presentations to be made on various aspects of the above topics. Six of those lectures were slated to be on the Armenian Genocide. But the Turkish government “demanded that the government of Israel cancel the meeting if Armenians were participants and it backed up its demands with threats to the safety of Jews living in Turkey.” Under pressure from the Israeli Foreign Ministry about half of the participating scholars backed out, and although the conference was still held in Israel, “the formal opening, scheduled to be held at Yad Vashem, was moved to Tel Aviv; and Yad Vashem boycotted the conference.” Ironically, writes Auron, “the conference became a rallying point for the battle to advance knowledge of the Armenian genocide and for academic freedom.” This was one of many incidences when pressure from the Israeli government forced the Armenian Genocide issue off the table. But although in this instance it was suggested that Turkey threatened its Jewish population, in other instances Auron writes that there were other considerations. “The Turkish people had been outstanding in its humane and tolerant treatment of its Jewish

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204 Ibid.

205 Ibid.

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minority for 500 years following the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain . . . said a letter . . . signed by the heads of three organizations which represented 100,000 Israeli citizens of Turkish descent." So, too, were Israel’s lucrative military, intelligence, and trade pacts considered too important to jeopardize over an essentially symbolic recognition.

Israel declined to recognize the Genocide in others way, too. Government officials refused to participate in memorial assemblies held every year on April 24, provoking “harsh articles . . . in the Israeli press about Israeli involvement in preventing a memorial day for the Armenians.” Auron also writes that the lack of research, Hebrew-language books, and education on the Genocide means that “young Israelis have only foggy knowledge – if at all – about something that happened to the Armenians, sometime in the past. … Until recently there was no educational curriculum of textbook available to teachers in the various frameworks of the Israeli education system . . . .” All of this adds up to a conscious effort on the part of the Israeli government to not only refuse to officially recognize the Genocide but also to ensure that even knowledge of the atrocities is minimized amongst Israel’s cultural and academic endeavors.

Still, not all government institutions were so reticent. In 1988 the Knesset’s Defense and Foreign Affairs Committee acknowledged the Armenian “massacres” in expressing disapproval of reports of Israeli government efforts to dissuade the United States from observing an official day of commemoration. The Knesset committee wrote, “The Defense and Foreign Affairs Committee

\[^{206}\text{Ibid. pg. 360.}\]
\[^{207}\text{Ibid. pg. 358.}\]
\[^{208}\text{Ibid. pg. 364.}\]
believes that efforts to preserve the memory of the massacre of the Armenian People during the First World War should be viewed with understanding and support. The Committee believes that any attempt to blur or deny Holocaust or mass murder inflicted on any people is inherently invalid. As members of a people which has known suffering and persecution we understand the suffering of the Armenian People.”

Although this stopped short of recognizing “genocide,” the resolution was nevertheless a departure from the official line.

By the late 1990s and into the new millennium, the political situation began to change. Israel and Turkey found themselves increasingly at odds over Middle East politics, especially with the onset of the second intifada and the ascension to power of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his mildly Islamist government. The Economist detailed a litany of terse exchanges between Israel and Turkey, including comments by Erdogan about Israeli “state terrorism,” its military actions against Palestinians in Gaza the Strip, and the rumors of Israeli covert support for Kurdish separatists in northern Iraq, who frequently carry out attacks on Turkish soil, and, Turkey fears, inspire its own Kurds towards separatist notions.

After the 2006 Palestinian elections that ushered Hamas into power, Erdogan was one of the first leaders to invite Hamas leader Khaled Mashal to Ankara, and the Prime Minister also declared “illegitimate” Israel’s 2006 war in Lebanon. However, this period was also marked by the continued growth of military, economic, and tourist ties between

209 Ibid. pg. 363.
the two countries, as both bilateral imports and exports ran into the billions of dollars. Interesting, though, Armenians in Israel have become a valuable constituency: “Since the current intifada, the Israeli/Palestinian struggle for Jerusalem has intensified. Israelis have traditionally appreciated Turkey’s support, but they may now need Armenian sympathy even more: a sixth of non-Jewish, non-Arab Jerusalem is in Armenian hands.”212

Despite these changes Israel still today remains opposed to Armenian Genocide-recognition. Turkey enlisted Israeli support to lobby the American Jewish community to oppose House Resolution 106, “demanding that Jerusalem ‘deliver’ American Jewish organizations and ensure that Congress does not pass the genocide resolution.”213 In response to a request from Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, the Knesset tabled a proposal for a debate on the Genocide.214 Olmert reaffirmed Israel’s longstanding position on the Genocide, saying that while it was up to Congress to decide on the resolution, “‘it will be better if independent experts come together and look into this matter.’”215

Israel’s position has thus not changed over time. It remains committed to avoiding any efforts to recognize the Armenian Genocide, and the government has even gone beyond its own jurisdiction, working with the American Jewish community to lobby against congressional recognition. Israel’s position on the Genocide made the American Jewish community wary of supporting the

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Armenians, and, as we will see in the next section, this effort, combined with Turkey's anti-recognition lobbying campaign, convinced most major Jewish public policy organizations to try to stay out of the question altogether.
As soon as House Resolution 106 was introduced in January 2007, Turkey initiated its standard lobbying campaign against congressional efforts to recognize the Armenian Genocide. Continuing to make genocide denial the centerpiece of its foreign policy aims, the Turkish government resorted to many of the same arguments it had used in previous years: recognition will damage Turkish-Western relations, particularly in the military and national security realm; with regards to America’s Jewish community, support for recognition will harm Turkish-Israeli relations. It is difficult to assess the sincerity of Turkey’s threatening posture. Some evidence points to a cooling off between Turkey and European countries that have recognized the genocide. But other factors suggest that Turkey is not in as strong of a position as it would seem, and that the reality of U.S.-Turkish relations, as well as Israel-Turkish relations, are both more powerful and more complex than the impression given by the debate over the Genocide. In other words, while recognition of the Genocide is bound to be disruptive, just how disruptive is unknown.

By the year 2000 many European powers had recognized the genocide, including the European Parliament, France, Sweden, the Vatican, Russia, and Italy. In 1987 the Council of Europe declared that the refusal to recognize the Genocide was “an insurmountable obstacle to Turkey’s admission to the EU.”

Indeed, EU admission has been a sore point in recent years between Turkey and

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the EU states, with some nations eager to allow in the secular Muslim state while others working to keep it out. It is hard to know what Turkey desires more: symbolic exculpation of the Genocide or admission to the EU. That various European countries have acknowledged the genocide at no catastrophic cost to European-Turkish relations suggests that Turkey’s present government is not willing to forgo its economic and political future over events that took place during World War One, and that there is some bluster to the dire threats issued forth from Ankara. For example, while some sources suggest that certain commercial ties were rolled back following France’s recognition of the Genocide in January 2001, other sources note that trade between the two countries actually increased by 131 percent over the next four years.\textsuperscript{217} Great Britain has refused to recognize the Genocide; then-Prime Minister Tony Blair’s government rejected a 2000 petition from British parliamentarians to do so, and has maintained that position.\textsuperscript{218} Germany, held partly responsible for the Genocide by Ambassador Morgenthau, offered a lengthy and strong resolution in 2005, though mentioning “genocide” only once (see Appendix). The resolution states, “Many independent historians, parliaments and international organizations describe the expulsion and annihilation of the Armenians as genocide.”\textsuperscript{219} The text “deplores the deeds of the Young Turkish government in the Ottoman Empire” (i.e. not Turkey) as well as the “inglorious role played by the German Reich,” though with respect to


failing to intervene to stop the atrocities, not for enabling the Ottoman
government to perpetrate it in the first place, as Morgenthau alleged. And while
the resolution further “deplores” the silencing of Turkish intellectuals wishing to
discuss the Genocide in Turkey as a violation of the “European culture of
remembrance,” the resolution also acknowledges the difficulty in facing “the dark
sides” of one’s own history, and applauds a few examples of greater Turkish
openness. Acknowledgment and openness on this manner, writes the
Bundestag, is essential to promoting reconciliation between Turkey and Armenia
and thus stabilizing the Caucasus region.

In the United States, anti-Genocide lobbying is a multimillion dollar
business, employing Washington DC’s high-priced public relations and lobbying
firms as well as individual lobbyists, notably even former Members of Congress
who themselves once advocated Genocide-recognition legislation.220 Turkey’s
lobbying presence is so prevalent that, as already discussed, the 1997 Foreign
Operations Appropriations reduced foreign aid to Turkey by the amount it had
spent lobbying against the genocide: some $3 million. During 2007’s
congressional showdown, the Washington Post reported that Turkey spent in
excess of $300,000 a month on lobbyists.221 In additional to direct lobbying,
Turkey also ran an advertisement in several newspapers titled “An Appeal to
Members of the United States Congress,” claiming that H.Res. 106 (and its
Senate companion S. 106) “impose a one-sided interpretation of the tragedies

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221 Kessler, Glenn. “White House and Turkey Fight Bill On Armenia,” The Washington Post, October 10,
2007.
that befell upon many in the last years of the Ottoman Empire . . . .” (See Appendix). The advertisement cites Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan’s 2005 effort to establish a Joint History Commission with Armenia, to be presided over by third-party scholars with access to both nations’ archives, in order to achieve “reconciliation.” The advertisement concludes with a plea to “support efforts to examine history, not to legislate it.”222 This ad, of course, negates the mountains of research that has already been done in the intervening decades since the Armenian Genocide, which, as noted in this paper, overwhelmingly demonstrates Turkish responsibility for the atrocities, and which has been affirmed as genocide time and time again. But H.Res. 106 also includes material that some scholars have found objectionable. The Armenians, of course, have not been without their own lobbying efforts, likewise spending millions of dollars on a campaign to pass the resolution, and utilizing the power of the Congressional Armenian Caucus to sway other members.

The thrust of Turkey’s lobbying focused on the national security implications of Congress passing H.Res. 106. The arguments were similar to the ones issued in 2000 over H.Res. 596 (as listed earlier in this paper): essentially, that Turkey’s support for American policies in Middle East is indispensable to the success of U.S. interests there, whether in regards to Iraq, Israel’s security, and preventing Islamist regimes from taking over otherwise moderate nations like Turkey. Interestingly, in 2007, while the arguments were often the same, the circumstances had become trickier.

222 “An Appeal to Members of the United States Congress,” newspaper advertisement, retrieved on April 4, 2008 from the Turkish Embassy at www.turkishembassy.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=612&Itemid=338
For example, Incirlik air base – a United States military facility located in Turkey (see map next page) – has become both an exemplar of the close U.S.-Turkish strategic relationship as well as a point of contention, especially where the Armenian Genocide situation is concerned. In 2000, with the imminent passage of H.Res. 596, President Bill Clinton pleaded with Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert to forgo the vote on the grounds that Turkey was threatening to shut down Incirlik – the key base from which the U.S. patrolled northern Iraq’s no-fly zone. By 2007 Incirlik was continuing to serve a vital function, but this time as the chief supply route for U.S. occupation forces in the country following the fall of Saddam Hussein. In other words, shutting down Incirlik then was “a far more dire threat,” given the extent to which the base serves as a linchpin for the Iraq war effort. Yet the air base, situated on the outskirts of Adana, has a long and storied history of multiple functions; though built by the United States it is a base for U.S., NATO, and Turkish forces, and is the hub for regional military, logistical, and humanitarian relief efforts. In the Cold War it was a symbol of U.S. protection for Turkey, a Western ally abutting the Soviet Union. Interestingly, Turkey has already leveraged the use of Incirlik against the United States, refusing to allow U.S. troops to use the base (or anywhere in Turkish territory) from which to launch the 2003 invasion of Iraq. This, despite several years of United States Administration and congressional opposition to Armenian genocide

224 Ibid. pg. 31.
legislation, “a move that the Defense Department has said added significantly to the problems currently facing our forces in the region.”

Although Congress has not passed H.Res. 106 – and thus not forced Turkey’s hand – it seems hard to believe that Turkey would unilaterally shut down such a crucial strategic asset, indefinitely hampering U.S. efforts. In fact, if U.S. efforts in Iraq were imperiled, it could pose a threat to Turkey’s own national security interests by enabling Iraq’s Kurds to step up their cross-border raids inside Turkish territory.

This very issue also caused a strain in relations between Turkey and the United States, and again the Armenian Genocide played a role, though perhaps more tangentially than some news accounts assumed. Turkey has long had a restless ethnic Kurdish population in its eastern provinces, one of the reasons why Sultan Hamid II pitted them against the Armenians (as a way to keep the two minorities fighting each other rather than the Ottoman Empire). Iraq’s Kurds, located in the north of that country and largely independent from Saddam

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Hussein’s reach, thanks to the 1990s no-fly zone, frequently carried out attacks inside Turkey’s borders in the hopes of someday carving out an independent Kurdish nation with Turkey’s Kurds. These attacks continued from Iraq even after the U.S. occupation, and Iraq’s Kurdish militants are considered terrorists by Turkey. They certainly do cause harm, including the killing of Turkish troops. Ankara has thus threatened on occasion to invade northern Iraq (Jewish communal leaders will recognize similarities between this effort and Israel’s invasion and occupation of southern Lebanon in the 1980s-90s), but have been dissuaded by United States assurances to more closely work with the Kurds. The argument could be made, then, that continuing to support U.S. efforts in Iraq is thus preventing greater Iraqi Kurdish incursions, and staving off separatist notions of Turkey’s own Kurdish population.

Unfortunately, the Armenian Genocide may have interfered with this calculus, demonstrating the extent to which the Turkish government prioritizes Genocide denial over other interests. Following the passage of H.Res. 106 by the House Foreign Affairs Committee in October 2007, Turkey’s Prime Minister Erdogan announced that he would ask Parliament to approval retaliatory raids into Iraqi territory. “Although Turkey has long considered stronger action against cross-border raids from Kurdish militants, some saw the timing of the announcement, close to the committee vote, as a veiled warning to the United States, which opposes the move.”226 Parliament soon approved Erdogan’s

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request, but no military action was taken at that time. It is certainly possible that Parliament’s action was a response to the House’s vote, and perhaps some Parliamentarians cast their vote on this matter, but the Kurdish situation was a longstanding thorn in Turkey’s side, and one for which many in the country had agitated against for some time. It seems likely, given the United States’ difficulties in Iraq and the tempo of Iraqi Kurdish operations against Turkey, that this frustration would have come to boil without the Armenian Genocide resolution in Congress. But the Committee’s efforts probably didn’t help.

Turkey also played on Washington’s fears of Islamist power in Turkey. Since the fall of the Ottoman Empire Turkey had been avowedly secular, but in 2002 Prime Minister Erdogan came to power on a mildly-Islamist party platform. Despite retaining Turkey’s moderate, secular Islamic posterity, some observers worried that the “the issue is so incendiary that even a symbolic recognition by Congress could embolden ultranationalists [in Turkey] to unleash enough anti-American sentiment to . . . affect Washington’s position throughout the Middle East.”

In all, Turkey’s extensive lobbying efforts over more than a decade, emphasizing the adverse national security implications of going against Ankara’s will, have proven effective in scuttling Armenian Genocide-related legislation in Congress. By threatening to disrupt U.S. interests in the Middle East, particularly with regards to Iraq, Turkey has managed to scare enough Presidents and

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227 Turkey did recently invade northern Iraq on the premise of fighting Kurdish rebels, and quickly withdrew after the completion of several operations.
Members of Congress to ensure that the occasional Genocide resolution never passes. But Turkey has also had another tool in its belt to counter Armenian efforts to secure congressional support: American Jews.

For years Turkey has both targeted and worked with the American Jewish community and its varied national agencies to spoil congressional efforts. Turkey has alternately accused “the Jewish lobby” of supporting Genocide-recognition legislation and praised “the Jews” as helping to stave off these resolution. As with most studies of Jewish communal affairs, the myth of “Jewish unity” disappears when closely examined, even on a case around which many persons seemed to think there was no debate: justice for victims of genocide. But Turkey brilliantly – and ultimately successfully – sidestepped the moral imperative to make the question not about the Armenians but about Israel. Although some other matters rose to the surface – the fate of Turkey’s Jewish population, Jewry’s longstanding appreciation for medieval Ottoman protection – Israel remained the dominant concern in Jewish agencies around the country, from the traditional national “majors” to local and regional offices, such as the San Francisco JCRC.

This paper already examined Israel’s position on the Armenian Genocide, which tended towards the Turkish viewpoint that the Armenian atrocities are not a matter for outside parties to adjudicate. Turkey seemed to expect a similar approach from American Jewry, whom the Turkish government insisted should use their political clout in Washington to permanently frustrate H.Res. 106.
Although Jewish groups had been helpful in past efforts to sink Genocide-recognition legislation, the 2006 congressional elections, which ushered in the Democrats, changed the calculation. Wanting to avoid a battle with the new Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, who had promised to see H.Res. 106 come to a vote, Jewish groups at first stayed on the sidelines of the debate, neither advocating nor opposing the resolution. But a fateful February 2007, meeting in Washington with Turkey’s Foreign Minister and a dozen representatives of national Jewish agencies seemed to change the community’s stance. While there is no official public accounting of the meeting, multiple news sources reported that the Turkish officials outright claimed that relations between Turkey and Israel would suffer if American Jews allowed the resolution to pass in Congress; and not just economic or diplomatic relations, but security-related strategic and military ties as well. Jewish leaders took Ankara’s warnings and passed them on to the wider community. “Jewish leaders warned that recognizing the genocide . . . could undermine American strategic interests in the Middle East and Turkey’s robust military and economic partnership with Israel.”

Where some Jewish groups had previously leaned in favor of the resolution, they now took no official position. Other groups began openly opposing the legislation. In other words, where the Jewish community had once been relatively quiet, voices were now getting louder that Israel’s security was at risk, thanks to H.Res. 106.

Turkey shrewdly played on American Jewish groups’ concerns with Israel’s security and status in the Middle East. With Turkey’s continued prodding these groups began rationalizing their opposition to the resolution on the grounds of Israel’s “interests.” “Most Jewish organizations are quick to underscore that Turkey became the first Muslim country to recognize Israel, praising it as a rare Muslim ally of Israel and the United States. As Ankara continued to make clear . . . Turkish cooperation is dependent in no small part on the understanding that the topic of Armenian genocide is not one for public debate.”232 The Jewish community’s major national agencies – the American Jewish Committee, B’nai B’rith, the Anti-Defamation League, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, etc – all hued this line; virtually every news source on this topic, whether in Jewish or mainstream newspapers, quoted officials from these and other agencies emphasizing the implications to Israeli foreign policy should the Genocide legislation go forward.

The American Jewish community was also lobbied from another angle: by Turkey’s Jewish community, about 17,000-strong.233 (Armenia today has between 500-1,000 Jews.234) In an October 2007 advertisement in the Washington Times, Turkey’s Jewish leaders “warned that the overwhelming majority of Turks view Congress’s intervention as ‘inappropriate, unjust, and gratuitously anti-Turkish.’”235 The ad went on to “note that the world recognizes

the Holocaust because of the overwhelming evidence, not because of the declarations of parliaments,” and that the “more immediate concern . . . is the viability of U.S.-Turkish bilateral relations.” Curiously, a rumor circulated that passage of the resolution would threaten the safety of Turkey’s Jews. It is hard to pinpoint the origin of this worry, but it seems to have come from the February meeting with Turkish officials. “Neither side raised the issue of Turkey’s Jewish community in the context of the Armenian genocide resolution. But in interviews after the meeting, representatives of Jewish organizations said that they were concerned over the well-being of the Turkish Jews community if the government in Ankara decides to express its dismay with America.” Both the Turkish government and its Jewish citizens tried to dispel this notion. In the above advertisement Turkey’s Jews claimed to be “deeply perturbed” by this rumor. Ankara further sought to dispel American Jewry’s concerns, stating that while opposed to the resolution, “the Turkish Jewish community had nothing to fear in any case.” Although this matter seems to have been secondary to concerns about Israel, this rumor persisted.

American Jewry was approached from domestic groups as well. In one strange statement the president-elect of the Assembly of Turkish American Associations, Gunay Evinch, said, “We see the Holocaust as an act of genocide. If lawmakers will decide that the Armenians had suffered genocide, as well, that

236 Ibid.
would make us confused." It is hard to know how to interpret this statement: as threatening Holocaust revisionism? As genuine confusion? In any case, anti-resolution lobbying was effective in quashing potential support amongst the major American Jewish organizations. Despite occasional efforts to indicate support for the Armenians, such as the Anti Defamation League’s decision to refer to the 1915 atrocities as “tantamount to genocide,” the ADL and other groups remained either neutral or opposed to the resolution.

The ADL’s engagement on this issue stirred up controversy not only within the Jewish community but also within the Boston metropolitan area and its large Armenian-American community. Like other major Jewish organizations, the ADL took no position on H.Res. 106. At the same time, its national director, Abraham Foxman, spoke out against the resolution as not within Congress’ purview, arguing both that while massacres took place it is unclear whether they amounted to genocide, and that “this is an issue which needs to be resolved by the parties, not by us. We are neither historians nor arbitrers.” Although Foxman tried to temper his critics by issuing a statement equating the Armenian massacres as “tantamount to genocide,” he remained opposed to the resolution. This position was ill-received by the Boston area’s Armenian community – one of the largest in the United States – which lobbied various town councils in the region to withdraw their support for the ADL-sponsored “No Place for Hate” anti-bigotry campaign, in which the Armenian community also played a

role. Several cities did so, including Watertown, Belmont, Newton, Needham, and Lexington. At the same time, Foxman’s stance caused a row with Andrew Tarsy, the Regional Director of the New England ADL – based in Boston – who had worked closely with the Armenian community and declared the ADL’s position “morally indefensible” in light of the ADL’s Holocaust-education efforts.\(^{243}\) Foxman fired Tarsy, sparking a rift between the national organization and the ADL’s New England regional board, which supported Tarsy, as well as from other Boston-area Jewish groups and individuals who criticized Foxman’s position. Tarsy’s firing and the backlash against No Place for Hate continues to rankle relations between Boston’s Jewish and Armenian communities.

But not all Jewish organizations or individuals were either overtly or tacitly opposed to the resolution. There were voices arguing in favor of its passage both as a matter of historical justice as well as in the interest of world Jewry. The Jewish community’s own concerns about anti-Semitism and the Holocaust played a role in some pro-resolution efforts. “Jewish historians are alert to the fact that the murder of Armenians was helped by German officers and that Hitler saw the Armenian genocide as an inspiration for the Final Solution. They also know that denying the Armenian massacres is only one small step away from denying the destruction of the Jews.”\(^{244}\) Indeed, some Jewish officials indicated that “a community struggling to stem the tide of Holocaust revisionism is hardly in


a position to endorse efforts to deny what Lemkin and other Holocaust chroniclers have described as the Holocaust’s antecedent.245

Additionally, as discussed earlier in this paper, despite the strong relationship between Turkey and Israel, the partnership has been under some strain in recent years, on matters relating to Turkey’s relationship with Hamas, its perspective on Israel’s recent war in Lebanon, and a range of other issues. Some American Jewish leaders took note of these developments to suggest that perhaps there is a more equal balance of power between Israel and Turkey, such that any harmful spillover from H.Res. 106 would be mitigated by the two countries’ mutual interests.

As with so many matters of public policy, the Jewish community was split on the Genocide legislation, with most major national organizations opting to take no position on the legislation. In other words, while Jewish agencies did not actively advocate for the legislation, in most instances they did not overtly oppose it, either, perhaps indicating displeasure with Turkey’s tactics or with the recent diplomatic ruffles between Ankara and Israel. In any case, Turkey’s strategy worked. By threatening to spoil its strategic relationship with Israel unless the Jewish community lobbied successful to kill H.Res. 106, Turkey knew just which buttons to push with America’s national Jewish leadership to alleviate any tendencies to support H.Res. 106. This deprived the Armenian community of a key ally in their effort to locate official recognition for their own genocide. This process was observed not only at the national level but the local; in the

summer of 2007, the San Francisco JCRC Metro Board was ready to take up the issue.

*The vote on House Resolution 106*

In mid-June 2007, the San Francisco JCRC’s Metropolitan Board debated H.Res. 106 at its monthly meeting. Given the level of controversy that had developed in recent months, the agency’s lay leadership had decided that this June meeting would be for debate only; a vote on the resolution would be postponed until its August meeting to allow its members time to get educated on the issue, and for outside agency representatives to get instructions from their host organizations (as the Bay Area’s central public affairs agency, other Jewish organizations had representatives sitting on the Metro Board).

Prior to this meeting, and updated afterwards, the JCRC staff prepared a resource packet for its members on various aspects of this issue: H.Res. 106, historical background of the Genocide and Israel-Turkish relations, past presidential statements, the JCRC’s 1989 letter, and contemporary news accounts to aid its members in learning about the issue.246

Some Board members naturally inquired about past JCRC experiences with this issue. The 1989 letter (discussed earlier) in support of legislation was noted, but JCRC Executive Director Doug Kahn explained that there was a difference between the legislation then and now: the 1989 legislation called for a national day of mourning, while H.Res. 106 is more specific to government

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246 Full disclosure: I was assigned to prepare several of the background documents, as well as put together the packet in advance of the June meeting.
policies. It was also noted that the JCRC had no consensus policy from which to take guidance.

At the beginning of the discussion one lay leader explained that the “issue of contention is the pressure from Turkey.” Indeed, the Metro Board’s debate followed much the same pattern as the umbrella Jewish organizations, that is, how to balance the perceived moral obligation to recognize the genocide against the implications for Israel. The meeting minutes records both perspectives. One member insisted that the Jewish community could be three things simultaneously: pro-Israel, pro-Turkey, and “pro-witnessing a past genocide,” and that “the notion of genocide supercedes everything else.” Another compared the Genocide with the current situation in Darfur, saying that it “is not a political issue.” Yet other members expressed concerns about Israel as well as the Turkish Jewish community’s opposition to the resolution. “. . . [O]ur goal is to support Israel,” noted one Board member. “[T]here is a righteous course, and there is a practical one, and sometimes the latter must be chosen.” Another member, expressing his personal support for the resolution, indicated that he would nevertheless abstain from voting because his host organization would not permit him to vote in favor of the legislation. The meeting adjourned with the goal of voting on the issue in August.

By this time American Jewry’s most prominent national public policy agencies had taken a position on H.Res. 106 — which is to say, they took the position to take no position. What follows is a brief summary of their policies:

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247 JCRC Metro Board meeting minutes, June 12, 2007. Internal document.
Zionist Organization of America: in favor. “. . . [T]he right thing for the Jewish community is to recognize the Armenian genocide as a fact, because virtually every historian and scholar of note in this area calls it a genocide.” Morton Klein, ZOA President.248

Anti-Defamation League: against / no position. “I don’t think a bill in Congress will help reconcile this issue . . . the Turks and Armenians need to revisit their past. The Jewish community shouldn’t be the arbiter of that history . . . and I don’t think the U.S. Congress should be the arbiter either.” Abraham Foxman, ADL National Director.249 Although the ADL would later declare that the Armenian atrocities were “tantamount to genocide,” its official position remained against the resolution.

American Jewish Committee: no position. “In a blog post, the American Jewish Committee’s executive director, David Harris, wrote that while he could not escape the conclusions of credible experts that the 1915 events were in fact ‘genocide,’ he argued, as Ankara does, that Turkish and Armenian historians should review the record and seek common ground.”250

United Jewish Communities: no position. “There is no commitment on behalf of Jewish communal leaders on this issue.” William Daroff, UJC Washington Director.251

American Jewish Congress: no position. “As Jews, we have a tremendous reverence for the moral imperatives of history. But

249 Ibid.
then there is the aspect that no Muslim country is closer to Israel than Turkey. So we feel paralyzed by a set of conflicting emotions.”

David Twersky, Director of International Affairs.252

Jewish Council for Public Affairs (umbrella organization for nationwide JCRCs): no position, as in 1989.253

Ultimately, as noted earlier, the American Jewish community’s major public policy agencies broadly decided to take no official position on the legislation. Perhaps some sympathy can be located for their position: they were caught between two powerful pressure points, their Jewish constituencies which broadly advocated from the ground up for the resolution, and the pushback from Turkey and its constituencies that the resolution would harm relations with Israel.

Yet other Jewish organizations were less reluctant to take a position. The American Jewish World Service, the Union for Reform Judaism and the Progressive Jewish Alliance all came out in favor of H.Res. 106.

At the San Francisco JCRC the resolution came to a vote in their August 13 Metro Board meeting. In order to support the resolution, 75% of the Board would have to vote in favor of it – the consensus threshold for policy decision-making. In two separate votes the percentage in favor never broke above 65%, so no consensus was achieved.254 The JCRC, reflecting the national tendency, was unable to take a position on the resolution. Later, in November, a consensus statement was written and posted on the agency’s website (see

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253 JCRC Metro Board meeting minutes, June 12, 2007. Internal document.

254 JCRC Metro Board meeting, August 13, 2007. Author’s notes.
Appendix). In the four-paragraph statement the JCRC references its 1989 letter to the Armenian Bishop of San Francisco expressing support for Senate Joint Resolution 212. The JCRC deftly walks the geopolitical line in the statement’s second paragraph, stating that “it is not our intent to harm or discredit the current government and people of Turkey. We greatly value our relationship with the Turkish community here and abroad. We also recognize and respect the long history of the Jewish community in Turkey.”

The statement acknowledges that the experience of the Holocaust “propels our sense of moral duty to recognize and acknowledge genocide suffered by any people . . . .” The statement ends by reaffirming the JCRC’s position as expressed in 1989. This brief statement struck the right note: conciliatory and direct, it does not, as H.Res. 106 does, descend into a lengthy historical analysis with castigations of blame. Although it could be criticized for failing to explicitly declare the Armenian atrocities a “genocide,” the statement in effect shields the JCRC from that acrimonious debate and yet still enables the agency, under the cover of acknowledging “genocide suffered by any people” (emphasis mine), to support future recognition efforts without seeming to impose on Turkey’s dearly-held policy of denial. Given the current political situation around this issue, this is probably the better part of valor.

Back in Washington H.Res. 106 was going through its own gyrations. Despite the political pressure to kill the legislation in committee, the House Foreign Affairs Committee voted favorably (27-21) on H.Res. 106 on October 10, 2007.

2007. The Jewish members of the committee, all Democrats, voted 7-1 in favor.\textsuperscript{256} In response Turkey recalled its ambassador for “consultations,” diplomatic parlance for extreme irritation.

With House Resolution 106 out of committee, the only remaining hurdle was for Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi to place it on the calendar, that is, schedule a date for a vote. That never happened. The legislation remains in limbo: passed by the Foreign Affairs Committee but waiting consideration by the full House of Representatives. At the time of this writing, April 2008, no vote has been scheduled, and there is no indication that the House or Senate will debate Armenian Genocide-recognition anytime soon. Although the Armenians and their congressional supporters had come so close, Turkey, in the end, won the day.

Conclusion

Between righteous and practical
Would House Resolution 106 have passed with Jewish communal support? Such “what if” questions are always problematic, but given how close the legislation came to making it to the House floor, it certainly seems quite possible. What if the legislation had indeed passed, but without the American Jewish community’s support? Or, perhaps a better question: why did the Armenians approach our community in the first place? The answer is probably not very complicated: our support is desired because we are seen as an influential power group with a strong sense of morality and justice, based on our own terrible experiences in the twentieth century. Perhaps our fellow minorities assume that when it comes to questions of historical injustice – let alone genocide – Jews do not allow political considerations to trump questions of morality. The Armenian community undoubtedly saw the similarities between their Genocide and our Holocaust and assumed that American Jewry could be counted on for unequivocal support. After all, that is what we expect and demand of others when it comes to the Holocaust. And yet a great swath of the organized American Jewish community did not support H.Res. 106 or the Armenians.

This paper attempted to provide the historical background to the question of Armenian Genocide-recognition, to ensure that Jewish leaders had a comprehensive and broad understanding of the Armenian Genocide and the issues that surround this controversy. We have throughout considered American Jewry’s response to the various tribulations experienced by the Armenians in the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In fact, we saw that
Armenian and Jewish history is replete with similarities and commonalities, going back even to ancient times. Perhaps a rough comparison can be made between those efforts and the contemporary campaign in response to genocide in Darfur: both movements rest generally on the contributions – financial and otherwise – of private citizens and organizations; so too are both movements galvanized by prominent media attention and awareness campaigns. Indeed, the response to the Armenian Genocide was the forerunner of Americans’ conception of humanitarian relief. Darfur is the latest incarnation of that movement. For the Jewish community the two movements are similar in another way: neither are explicitly “Jewish” but rather “American.” While individual Jews and Jewish organizations play a disproportionate role, they are part of the larger picture of American action rather than of a singular parochial concern.

But as of late the Armenians, instead of being a cause célèbre of America’s humanitarian-minded public, have instead become a thorn in the side of the United States government, raising sticky questions of geopolitics with their demand for official recognition of their Genocide. Although legislation to this effect is introduced in Congress every few years, and though it occasional comes close to a vote by the full House of Representatives, it inevitably fails. Thanks to Turkey’s decades-long campaign of denial, successive Turkish governments have been able to frustrate these congressional efforts by threatening to derail U.S.-Turkish relations and harming American interests in the Middle East, most importantly its various military operations in Iraq. We saw that Turkey’s purpose is not entirely pernicious, resting as it does on some real concerns about
reparations, land claims, and fears about national unity. Turkey’s campaign of denial – combining elements of historical scholarship as well as hard-nosed political tactics – has also been successful in sowing doubt as to whether the Genocide ever really took place and appealing to Americans’ sense of fairness to suggest that there are “two sides” to this issue, and thus there ought to be no judgment levied. In this way Turkey’s efforts are reminiscent not of Holocaust denial, which is a fringe and discredited effort, but perhaps the campaign against global warming. There are scientists, some even quite prominent, who disagree with this or that aspect of climate change and conclude thus that global warming is simply not as catastrophic as “green” advocates claim it soon will be, although the vast majority of anybody who knows anything about this subject believes otherwise. The situation is similar with Turkish denial, but it is so entrenched in the study of the Armenian Genocide that it has become legitimate.

With respect to the Jewish community, Turkey has appealed to the very issues calculated to bring about a knee-jerk response within the Jewish community. Our concern for the well being of our fellow Jews, our sensitivities regarding the uniqueness of the Holocaust, and our devotion to the welfare of Israel are essential values for our community. What are the larger implications of these values when it comes to future decisions?

Allegations were made in 2007 – and in earlier years – that Turkey subtly threatened the safety of Turkey’s Jewish population should Genocide-recognition legislation garner Jewish support. Although Turkish government officials quickly and vehemently denied these rumors – and the Turkish Jewish community
issued its own statements of support for Turkey’s government and its denial efforts – American Jews remained concerned about the consequences of our actions on this legislation. (Oddly, I never once heard, nor encountered, a question about what the fate would be of Armenia’s Jewish community if “the Jews” were seen as having derailed Armenians’ quest for justice. There remains in Armenia between five hundred and one thousand Jews.) But did we adequately gauge the nature of the threat, or just accept it at face value? We saw that that there was similar concern for the welfare of Turkey’s Jews during the debate about whether to include the Armenian Genocide in the Holocaust museum in Washington DC. Despite the warnings of dire consequences, the museum went ahead with the inclusion of the Genocide, and no harm befell Turkey’s Jews from this incident. In 2007, however, many in our community judged the situation differently and came to the opposite conclusion. Do we ever have the luxury of such nuance, or must we always assume that every threat is of equal and imminent danger?

Another reason that the American Jewish community failed to support the Armenians in 2007 was the ever-present sensitivity to the Holocaust. We have struggled to understand the Armenian Genocide in this context. Building on Yehuda Bauer, Robert Melson, and others, it seems that the Jewish community might be particularly susceptible to Turkish denial claims in two areas: the concepts of genocide and premeditation. We Jews know about the Holocaust: at root, the attempted annihilation of every single last Jew. And we know that the Holocaust was genocide; therefore, it is easy to conflate the two concepts as one
and the same, that is, that genocide (in our eyes) must be the attempt at the complete murder of every single member of a given group. But is this necessarily so?

Second, our notions of “premeditation,” another major point of Turkish denial, similarly rest on our knowledge of the Holocaust. We understand “premeditation” in the context of Adolf Hitler’s decades-long murderous drive to eliminate the Jews of Europe. Therefore we equate the Holocaust with a long period of gestation in which the “premeditation” is quite obvious, despite the lack of any documents from the Nazi era saying, “Kill all the Jews. Signed, Adolf Hitler.” Turkey argues that the Armenian atrocities could not have been genocide because there was no premeditation. While many scholars take issue with this claim, let us at least question how long “premeditation” ought to be for our understanding of genocide. In other words, perhaps the Armenian Genocide did not have a gestation period as long as Hitler’s fixation with annihilating the Jews, but does that matter? Even if we agree that the Holocaust was unequivocally unique, should we still look beyond just our understanding of the Holocaust – and the assumptions we’ve built-in – to examine the Armenian experience as well?

Essential to Turkey’s efforts to dissuade the American Jewish community from supporting Genocide recognition was the threat to drastically scale back Turkey’s political, economic, military, and cultural ties with Israel. Turkey, as a secular, democratic, moderate Islamic nation in the hostile Middle East, has been an important ally for Israel, a small nation that has often found itself in need of a friendly face amongst hostile neighbors. Speaking to this question, one of the
San Francisco JCRC’s Board members remarked that “[T]here is a righteous course, and there is a practical one, and sometimes the latter must be chosen.” But is the Armenian Genocide case a time to be righteous or practical?

Is Israel’s relationship with Turkey so vital that if any harm should come to it, *Israel’s very existence is threatened*? Conversely, if Turkey’s threats to downgrade relations instead will result in a temporary, even if tense, diplomatic row, then is this perhaps a matter best left to the Israeli Foreign Ministry? We saw that Turkey did not follow through on its threats during the debate over inclusion of the Genocide in the Holocaust museum; we also noted that while some aspects of Turkey’s relationships with various European countries, such as France, *did* cool upon those countries’ recognition of the Genocide, those disruptions have not proved either fatal or lasting. What are we to make of this? Has Turkey distorted the power relationship between the government in Ankara and other Western nations, including Israel, that is, does Turkey need a positive relationship with the West as much as the West needs Turkey? Or, when it comes to Israel, can we even take that chance?

What are the costs of practicality versus righteousness? Would the consequences of Genocide-recognition be so dire as to render the “righteous” course unthinkable? Put another way, given our own genocide experience, can we ignore another people’s plight? Yair Auron, whose work on Israel’s connection to the question of the Armenian Genocide we have looked at in various places, writes that in the 1989 Knesset debate over the issue, Knesset member Yossi Sarid asserted that the Jewish People were the last who ought to
sanction the denial of the Holocaust of another people, no matter what the momentary considerations might be. Auron also quotes the Israeli journalist Amos Elon, who asked, “What happens when the survivors of one Holocaust make a political deal over the bitter memory of the survivors of another Holocaust?” Or, as mentioned in Part Three of this paper, how can a community struggling to combat Holocaust revisionism support efforts to deny what Raphael Lemkin and other scholars have affirmed is not only genocide but also the direct antecedent of the Holocaust? On the other hand, Abraham Foxman has argued that the ADL’s mission is to both work on behalf of the Jewish community as well as with other groups who share universal goals, but when those two come into conflict, “we do not abandon the Jewish community.” To what extent should American Jewish organizations advocate for the interests of non-Jewish communities when the possibility exists that such advocacy might harm our own community? These sentiments seem to get to the core of this paper.

Earlier, I likened American Jewry’s Armenian relief efforts to our current efforts on behalf of Darfur. But what if Sudan had a “strategic relationship” with Israel? Would we be so supportive of efforts to compel the Sudanese government to cease its behavior? In fact, we do not even have to turn to such hypotheticals. In a March 27, 2008 editorial, “Our Debt to Tibet,” the Forward wrote, “China is one of Israel’s important trading partners and arms customers, and Israel doesn’t feel secure enough to risk upsetting its friends over matters of principle.” As for the Diaspora’s “considerable clout” in Washington and “reputation for stepping forward on matters of conscience,” the Forward noted “it
is a muscle they haven’t much used in some time, out of fear for Israel’s safety.”
We see, then, that the Armenian Genocide case is not relegated to some far off history but rather reflects on our contemporary circumstances. There is no one right answer and each instance will have to be examined with knowledge, precision, accuracy, and, most of all, sensitivity.

Finally, this study leaves us with questions about purpose and legacy. Plainly, what is our purpose? Does the American Jewish community – or any Jewish community anywhere – exist as an extension of the political entity “State of Israel”? Or do we have a higher purpose than politics and diplomacy, that is, does our purpose encompass Israel or is it driven by it? In what light do we see ourselves, and are we now living and acting in accordance with that perception? And what about our legacy – how are we perceived by others and by our future selves? We are today the eminence of practicality, power-politics, and status quo preservation in this globalized, networked, interdependent world. But are some things so close to our hearts, so essential to our heritage, so inimical to the dearest of our traditions, that we quite simply cannot forsake them?

* * * * *
Armenia today is a remnant of its historic empire. It is a small, mountainous country landlocked in the Caucasus region between the Black and Caspian Seas, sandwiched amid the nations of Georgia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Iran, with half of its people scattered in Diaspora communities around the world. Despite the promise that independence seemed to hold in the 1990s, Armenia continues to be plagued by instability, conflict, ethnic separatist strife in Nagorno-
Karabakh, and a struggling economy. Its recent elections, hailed as democratic, were instead much less so, resulting in protests and violence that claimed several lives. And towering over the country is Mount Ararat, the Armenian people's most ancient national symbol, the landing place of Noah's Ark, the holy mountain from which the Armenians believe themselves to have descended as the grandsons and granddaughters of Noah himself. And yet, located just over the border inside Turkey, so close but so far out of their reach, it is also a beautiful, heartbreaking, snow-capped reminder of great historical injustice.
Appendix

List of documents included here:

1) House Resolution 106


3) Central Conference of American Rabbis 1909 resolution

4) Statement by 126 Holocaust scholars affirming the Armenian Genocide

5) “An Appeal to Congress” advertisement by the Republic of Turkey

6) 2005 Bundestag resolution on the Armenian Genocide

7) President George W. Bush Presidential Message Honoring the Memory of 1.5 Million Armenians Lives Lost During Ottoman Empire, April 24, 2007

8) San Francisco JCRC consensus statement on the Armenian Genocide
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Books


**Articles**


“City Gives Million to Armenian Relief: Dr. Wise, at Luncheon of Campaign Workers, Tells Plans for Ending Turkish Rule,” February 8, 1919.

“Roosevelt Defines America’s War Aims,” July 5, 1918.

“To Plead for Armenians: Mass Meeting to be Held at Century Theatre Sunday,” October 11, 1915.


“Relief for Armenians: Action Taken at the Meeting of the Chamber of Commerce,” December 6, 1895.


Documents

Amnesty International. “Article 301 is a threat to freedom of expression and must be repealed.”


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_______ Memo to chair of the JCRC Legislative Affairs Committee from Jessica Trubowitch. Internal document

_______ Metro Board meeting, August 13, 2007. Author’s notes

_______ Interview with Jessica Trubowitch, August 2, 2007.

_______ Metro Board meeting minutes, June 12, 2007. Internal document.

_______ Legislative Affairs Committee meeting, June 21, 2007 meeting. Internal document.

_______ East Bay regional committee meeting minutes, June 4, 2007. Internal document

_______ Legislative Affairs Committee meeting minutes, May 22, 2007. Internal document

_______ Legislative Affairs Committee. Minutes from April 2007 meeting


_______ Metro Board meeting minutes, 1989 (undated day and month). Internal document


H. RES. 106

Calling upon the President to ensure that the foreign policy of the United States reflects appropriate understanding and sensitivity concerning issues related to human rights, ethnic cleansing, and genocide documented in the United States record relating to the Armenian Genocide, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JANUARY 30, 2007

Mr. Schiff (for himself, Mr. Radanovich, Mr. Pallone, Mr. Krolenberg, Mr. Sherman, and Mr. McCotter) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

Resolved,

1  Resolved,

2  SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

3  This resolution may be cited as the “Affirmation of

4  the United States Record on the Armenian Genocide Reso-

5  lution”.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

The House of Representatives finds the following:

(1) The Armenian Genocide was conceived and carried out by the Ottoman Empire from 1915 to 1923, resulting in the deportation of nearly 2,000,000 Armenians, of whom 1,500,000 men, women, and children were killed, 500,000 survivors were expelled from their homes, and which succeeded in the elimination of the over 2,500-year presence of Armenians in their historic homeland.

(2) On May 24, 1915, the Allied Powers, England, France, and Russia, jointly issued a statement explicitly charging for the first time ever another government of committing “a crime against humanity”.

(3) This joint statement stated “the Allied Governments announce publicly to the Sublime Porte that they will hold personally responsible for these crimes all members of the Ottoman Government, as well as those of their agents who are implicated in such massacres”.

(4) The post-World War I Turkish Government indicted the top leaders involved in the “organization and execution” of the Armenian Genocide and in the “massacre and destruction of the Armenians”.
(5) In a series of courts-martial, officials of the Young Turk Regime were tried and convicted, as charged, for organizing and executing massacres against the Armenian people.

(6) The chief organizers of the Armenian Genocide, Minister of War Enver, Minister of the Interior Talaat, and Minister of the Navy Jemal were all condemned to death for their crimes, however, the verdicts of the courts were not enforced.

(7) The Armenian Genocide and these domestic judicial failures are documented with overwhelming evidence in the national archives of Austria, France, Germany, Great Britain, Russia, the United States, the Vatican and many other countries, and this vast body of evidence attests to the same facts, the same events, and the same consequences.

(8) The United States National Archives and Record Administration holds extensive and thorough documentation on the Armenian Genocide, especially in its holdings under Record Group 59 of the United States Department of State, files 867.00 and 867.40, which are open and widely available to the public and interested institutions.

(9) The Honorable Henry Morgenthau, United States Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire from
1913 to 1916, organized and led protests by officials of many countries, among them the allies of the Ottoman Empire, against the Armenian Genocide.

(10) Ambassador Morgenthau explicitly described to the United States Department of State the policy of the Government of the Ottoman Empire as “a campaign of race extermination,” and was instructed on July 16, 1915, by United States Secretary of State Robert Lansing that the “Department approves your procedure . . . to stop Armenian persecution”.

(11) Senate Concurrent Resolution 12 of February 9, 1916, resolved that “the President of the United States be respectfully asked to designate a day on which the citizens of this country may give expression to their sympathy by contributing funds now being raised for the relief of the Armenians”, who at the time were enduring “starvation, disease, and untold suffering”.

(12) President Woodrow Wilson concurred and also encouraged the formation of the organization known as Near East Relief, chartered by an Act of Congress, which contributed some $116,000,000 from 1915 to 1930 to aid Armenian Genocide sur-
vivors, including 132,000 orphans who became foster children of the American people.

(13) Senate Resolution 359, dated May 11, 1920, stated in part, “the testimony adduced at the hearings conducted by the sub-committee of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations have clearly established the truth of the reported massacres and other atrocities from which the Armenian people have suffered”.

(14) The resolution followed the April 13, 1920, report to the Senate of the American Military Mission to Armenia led by General James Harbord, that stated “[m]utilation, violation, torture, and death have left their haunting memories in a hundred beautiful Armenian valleys, and the traveler in that region is seldom free from the evidence of this most colossal crime of all the ages”.

(15) As displayed in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Adolf Hitler, on ordering his military commanders to attack Poland without provocation in 1939, dismissed objections by saying “[w]ho, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?” and thus set the stage for the Holocaust.
(16) Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term “genocide” in 1944, and who was the earliest proponent of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, invoked the Armenian case as a definitive example of genocide in the 20th century.

(17) The first resolution on genocide adopted by the United Nations at Lemkin’s urging, the December 11, 1946, United Nations General Assembly Resolution 96(1) and the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide itself recognized the Armenian Genocide as the type of crime the United Nations intended to prevent and punish by codifying existing standards.

(18) In 1948, the United Nations War Crimes Commission invoked the Armenian Genocide “precisely . . . one of the types of acts which the modern term ‘crimes against humanity’ is intended to cover” as a precedent for the Nuremberg tribunals.

(19) The Commission stated that “[t]he provisions of Article 230 of the Peace Treaty of Sevres were obviously intended to cover, in conformity with the Allied note of 1915 . . ., offenses which had been committed on Turkish territory against persons of Turkish citizenship, though of Armenian or Greek
race. This article constitutes therefore a precedent for Article 6c and 5c of the Nuremberg and Tokyo Charters, and offers an example of one of the categories of ‘crimes against humanity’ as understood by these enactments”.

(20) House Joint Resolution 148, adopted on April 8, 1975, resolved: “[t]hat April 24, 1975, is hereby designated as ‘National Day of Remembrance of Man’s Inhumanity to Man’, and the President of the United States is authorized and requested to issue a proclamation calling upon the people of the United States to observe such day as a day of remembrance for all the victims of genocide, especially those of Armenian ancestry . . .”.

(21) President Ronald Reagan in proclamation number 4838, dated April 22, 1981, stated in part “like the genocide of the Armenians before it, and the genocide of the Cambodians, which followed it—and like too many other persecutions of too many other people—the lessons of the Holocaust must never be forgotten”.

(22) House Joint Resolution 247, adopted on September 10, 1984, resolved: “[t]hat April 24, 1985, is hereby designated as ‘National Day of Remembrance of Man’s Inhumanity to Man’, and the
President of the United States is authorized and requested to issue a proclamation calling upon the people of the United States to observe such day as a day of remembrance for all the victims of genocide, especially the one and one-half million people of Armenian ancestry . . .”.

(23) In August 1985, after extensive study and deliberation, the United Nations SubCommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities voted 14 to 1 to accept a report entitled “Study of the Question of the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide,” which stated “[t]he Nazi aberration has unfortunately not been the only case of genocide in the 20th century. Among other examples which can be cited as qualifying are . . . the Ottoman massacre of Armenians in 1915–1916”.

(24) This report also explained that “[a]t least 1,000,000, and possibly well over half of the Armenian population, are reliably estimated to have been killed or death marched by independent authorities and eye-witnesses. This is corroborated by reports in United States, German and British archives and of contemporary diplomats in the Ottoman Empire, including those of its ally Germany.”. 
(25) The United States Holocaust Memorial Council, an independent Federal agency, unanimously resolved on April 30, 1981, that the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum would include the Armenian Genocide in the Museum and has since done so.

(26) Reviewing an aberrant 1982 expression (later retracted) by the United States Department of State asserting that the facts of the Armenian Genocide may be ambiguous, the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia in 1993, after a review of documents pertaining to the policy record of the United States, noted that the assertion on ambiguity in the United States record about the Armenian Genocide “contradicted longstanding United States policy and was eventually retracted”.

(27) On June 5, 1996, the House of Representatives adopted an amendment to House Bill 3540 (the Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 1997) to reduce aid to Turkey by $3,000,000 (an estimate of its payment of lobbying fees in the United States) until the Turkish Government acknowledged the Armenian Genocide and took steps to honor the memory of its victims.
(28) President William Jefferson Clinton, on April 24, 1998, stated: “This year, as in the past, we join with Armenian-Americans throughout the nation in commemorating one of the saddest chapters in the history of this century, the deportations and massacres of a million and a half Armenians in the Ottoman Empire in the years 1915–1923.”.

(29) President George W. Bush, on April 24, 2004, stated: “On this day, we pause in remembrance of one of the most horrible tragedies of the 20th century, the annihilation of as many as 1,500,000 Armenians through forced exile and murder at the end of the Ottoman Empire.”.

(30) Despite the international recognition and affirmation of the Armenian Genocide, the failure of the domestic and international authorities to punish those responsible for the Armenian Genocide is a reason why similar genocides have recurred and may recur in the future, and that a just resolution will help prevent future genocides.

SEC. 3. DECLARATION OF POLICY.

The House of Representatives—

(1) calls upon the President to ensure that the foreign policy of the United States reflects appropriate understanding and sensitivity concerning
issues related to human rights, ethnic cleansing, and genocide documented in the United States record relating to the Armenian Genocide and the consequences of the failure to realize a just resolution;

and

(2) calls upon the President in the President’s annual message commemorating the Armenian Genocide issued on or about April 24, to accurately characterize the systematic and deliberate annihilation of 1,500,000 Armenians as genocide and to recall the proud history of United States intervention in opposition to the Armenian Genocide.
ANOTHER ARMENIAN HOLOCAUST

Five Villages Burned, Five Thousand Persons Made Homeless, and Anti-
Christians Organized.

LONDON, Sept. 9.—The Daily News will to-morrow publish a dispatch from Kars,
stating that fresh outrages have been perpetrated in the Erzinzlian district.

A band of brigands attacked a company of Turkish gendarmes on Aug. 12, killing a
Sergeant. Therefore, the Turkish authorities, without making any inquiry, decided
that the assailants were Armenian revolutionaries from Kemakh, who intended to
release exalted Armenians who are still in prison at Kars.

A force of 1,000 Turkish troops was sent to Kemokh, and five villages were pil-
laged. Five thousand persons were rendered homeless. Men, women, and children were
tortured. Four monasteries were sacked.

It is reported that the Turkish minor officials have formed an anti-Christian so-
ciety to slaughter Christians if the Porte accepts the scheme of reforms the powers
insist upon.
Central Conference of American Rabbis

Resolution on the Berlin Treaty with respect to Jews and Armenians*

1909

“Bearing in mind the arrangements made between both Turkey and Roumania, and the Powers by the Berlin Treaty of 1878, whereby Turkey agreed to introduce reforms in the government for the protection of Christians, the steps taken to be superintended by the Powers, and Roumania agreed to grant and protect the equal rights of Jews as citizens, and

“Whereas, these agreements have not been kept, but many thousands of Armenia Christians have been barbarously murdered, and with little but expressions of sympathy resulting from the Powers, and the Jews in Roumania have been persecuted, robbed of their rights, and deprived of citizenship, without any protest from the Powers, and

“Whereas, these conditions have long been a disgrace before the civilized world,

We, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, now put ourselves on record as urging the governments of the civilized world, particularly the Signatory Powers of the Berlin Treaty, to take vigorous and persevering action for the protection of Armenian Christians in Turkey, and for the protection of and granting of rights of citizenship to Jews in Roumania.”

126 HOLOCAUST SCHOLARS AFFIRM THE INCONTESTABLE FACT OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE AND URGE WESTERN DEMOCRACIES TO OFFICIALLY RECOGNIZE IT

At the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Scholars' Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches convening at St. Joseph University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, March 3-7, 2000, one hundred twenty-six Holocaust Scholars, holders of Academic Chairs and Directors of Holocaust Research and Studies Centers, participants of the Conference, signed a statement affirming that the World War I Armenian Genocide is an incontestable historical fact and accordingly urge the governments of Western democracies to likewise recognize it as such. The petitioners, among whom is Nobel Laureate for Peace Elie Wiesel, who was the keynote speaker at the conference, also asked the Western Democracies to urge the Government and Parliament of Turkey to finally come to terms with a dark chapter of Ottoman-Turkish history and to recognize the Armenian Genocide. This would provide an invaluable impetus to the process of the democratization of Turkey.

Below is a partial list of the signatories:

Prof. Yehuda Bauer, Distinguished Professor, Hebrew University, Director, The International Institute of Holocaust Research, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem.

Prof. Israel Charny, Director, Institute for the Holocaust and Genocide, Jerusalem, Professor of Modern Hebrew, Editor-in-Chief of Encyclopedia of Genocide.

Prof. Ward Churchhill, Ethnic Studies, University of Colorado, Boulder.

Prof. Stephen Feinstein, Director, Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, University of Minnesota.

Prof. Saul Friedländer, Director, Holocaust and Jewish Studies, Youngstown State University, Ohio.

Prof. Edward Gaffney, Vassar College, Law School.

Prof. Zev Garber, Los Angeles Valley College.

Prof. Doron Gilead, University of King's College, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Dr. Irving Greenberg, President, Jewish Life Network.

Prof. Herbert Hirsch, Virginia Commonwealth University.

Prof. Irving L. Horowitz, Hebrew University, Chair, Departments of Hebrew Literature and Jewish Studies.

Dr. Steven Jacobo, Rabbi, Temple Beth Or, Huntington, NY.

Prof. Steven Katz, Distiguished Professor, Director, Center for Jewish Studies, Temple University.

Prof. Richard Libowsky, Temple University.

Dr. Marcia Linde, Stony Brook University, Executive Director, Scholars Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches.

Franklin Littled, Emeritus Professor, Temple University.

Prof. Hubert G. Locke, Washington University, Chair, Scholars' Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches.

Dr. Elizabeth Mannix, Executive Director of the International Scholars' Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches.

Prof. Erik Markussen, Southwestern State University, MN.

Prof. Saul Mendlovitz, Jewish Studies, Professors' College, University of Minnesota.

Prof. Jack Needle, Director.

I hereby declare that the originals of these one hundred and twenty-six signatures are on file in my office.

All affiliations supplied are for identification purposes only.

Dr. Stephen Feinstein, Director, Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, University of Minnesota.

PAID FOR BY DESCENDANTS OF SURVIVORS OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE AND THE JEWISH HOLOCAUST
AN APPEAL
TO MEMBERS OF THE
UNITED STATES CONGRESS

Legislation is pending in the United States Congress that would impose a one-sided interpretation of the tragedies that befell upon many in the last years of the Ottoman Empire and would commit injustice to those who are seeking the truth. Such measures would not only affect relations between the United States and Turkey—vital allies in efforts to promote regional peace, security and prosperity—but would further complicate Turkish-Armenian relations and frustrate Turkey’s pursuit of reconciliation.

To properly address this historical question, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan proposed to Armenia in 2005 the establishment of a Joint History Commission with the participation of experts from third countries to study the events of the period in the archives of Turkey and Armenia, as well as other relevant archives, and to present their findings to the international community. As Prime Minister Erdoğan noted, “…such an initiative would shed light on a disputed period of history and also constitute a step towards contributing to the normalization of relations between our countries.”

Turkey has encouraged scholars of all nations to study the Ottoman Archives in Turkey, which are open for research. The Armenian archives in Yerevan, as well as the Armenian Revolutionary Federation and Armenian Republic Delegation Archives in Boston, must also be opened to achieve a full accounting of the shared past of the Turks and the Armenians.

This is a solemn appeal to members of Congress to support Turkey’s efforts to launch an open and objective study that leads to a full understanding of history, not the biased view expressed in House Resolution 106 and Senate Resolution 106.

Achieving reconciliation is the ultimate goal and our collective responsibility to present and future generations.

SUPPORT EFFORTS TO EXAMINE HISTORY, NOT TO LEGISLATE IT

For more information on this subject please visit www.turkishembassy.org

Paid for by the Embassy of the Republic of Turkey, Washington, DC
Bundestag resolution on the Armenian Genocide, June 15, 2005*

German Bundestag Printed matter 15/5689 15th electoral period June 15, 2005

Motion by the parliamentary groups of SPD, CDU/CSU, BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN and FDP

Commemorating the expulsion and massacre of the Armenians in 1915 – Germany must make her contribution to the reconciliation between Turks and Armenians.

[English Translation from German]

The Bundestag may resolve:

The German Bundestag honors and commemorates the victims of violence, murder and expulsion among the Armenian people before and during the First World War. The Bundestag deplores the deeds of the Young Turkish government in the Ottoman Empire which have resulted in the almost total annihilation of the Armenians in Anatolia. It also deplores the inglorious role played by the German Reich which, in spite of a wealth of information on the organized expulsion and annihilation of Armenians, has made no attempt to intervene and stop these atrocities.

The German Bundestag honors and commemorates the efforts made both by Turks and Germans who, working under difficult circumstances and conditions and against the resistance of their respective governments, have committed themselves in word and deed to saving Armenian women, men and children. It is particularly the memory and the work of Dr. Johannes Lepsius, who fought vigorously and effectively for the survival of the Armenian people, which is to be redeemed from oblivion and cherished and maintained to improve the relationship between the Armenian, the German and the Turkish people.

The German Bundestag is painfully aware from its own national experience how hard it is for every people to face the dark sides of its past. But it also believes that facing one’s own history fairly and squarely is necessary and constitutes an important basis for reconciliation. This is true, in particular, within the European

culture of remembrance to which belongs the open discussion of the dark sides of each national history.

Against this Background, the German Bundestag deplores the fact that a full discussion of these events of the past in the Ottoman Empire is still not possible today in Turkey and that scientists and writers who wish to deal with this aspect of Turkish history are being prosecuted and exposed to public defamation. However, the German Bundestag also sees positive signs that Turkey, to an ever-increasing degree, approaches this subject within the above European culture of remembering. Examples include:
- The Great Turkish Assembly has, for the first time, invited Turkish people of Armenian descent to discussions involving the crimes committed against the Armenians and the Turkish-Armenian relationship - A Turkish-Armenian women’s dialog was held in Vienna - Initial contacts between Turkish and Armenian historians resulted in a first exchange of documents - Minister President Erdogan inaugurated Turkey’s first Armenian museum in Istanbul with the Armenian patriarch Mesrab and publicly suggested the establishment of a bilateral Turkish-Armenian panel of historians.

However, in this context, the German Bundestag perceives with great concern that the Armenian Conference of internationally renowned Turkish scientists, which was to be held in Istanbul from 25-27 May 2005, has been prevented by the Turkish Minister of Justice and that the positions taken by these scientists, which diverged from the government’s opinion, were defamed as “a stab in the back of the Turkish nation”. The proposal by Minister President Erdogan to set up a joint Turkish-Armenian commission of historians can only succeed if it is implemented on the basis of a free and public scientific discourse.

Germany, which has also made its contribution to the crimes against the Armenian people falling into oblivion, is now obliged to face her own responsibility. This responsibility involves supporting Turks and Armenians in seeking reconciliation and mutual understanding over the trenches of the past.

Both major churches in Germany, in particular, have for many years advocated the integration of the Armenians from Turkey. The Armenian communities which have settled here offer the opportunity of reconciliation and remembrance. Particularly in view of the large number of Turkish Muslims living in Germany, it is an important task to bring to mind the past and so to make the first steps toward reconciliation.

But dealing with these historical events also has an immediate significance for the present. Today, the normalization of the relations between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Armenia is of paramount interest and importance for the future of the entire region. What is urgently needed is to establish trust-forming measures on both sides as defined in the OSCE principles. Turkey
opening the borders to Armenia could, for instance, help to relieve Armenia’s isolation and promote the taking up of diplomatic relations.

Due to its historic role in the Turkish-Armenian relations, Germany must assume a special responsibility as part of its neighborhood initiative of the EU. The aim must be to help normalize and improve the situation between Armenia and Turkey and so to help stabilize the Caucasus region.

One important contribution toward remembrance can be made by the German federal states. The duty of the information and education policy involves actions for facing the expulsion and annihilation of the Armenians as part of the whole history of ethnic conflicts in the 20th century, also in Germany.

The German Bundestag requests the Federal Government
- to help the Turks and Armenians to arrive at a settlement by remembering, reconciliation and forgiving historical guilt
- to ensure that Parliament, Government and society in Turkey deal without reservation with their role in relation to the Armenian people in the past and in the present
- to advocate the establishment of a commission of historians including Turkish, Armenian and international experts
- to ensure that not only the archives of the Ottoman Empire on this issue are made accessible to the general public, but also the copies of the German Foreign Office archives given by Germany to Turkey
- to insist on the actual organization of the conference scheduled in Istanbul but postponed under governmental pressure
- to press for freedom of opinion in Turkey, in particular with respect to the fate of the Armenians
- to help Turkey and Armenia to normalize their interstate relationships.

Berlin, June 15, 2005

Franz Müntefering and parliamentary group Dr. Angela Merkel, Michael Glos and parliamentary group Katrin Göring-Eckardt, Krista Sager and parliamentary group Dr. Wolfgang Gerhard and parliamentary group

**Reasons for the motion**

Ninety years ago, on April 24, 1915, the Young Turkish movement controlling the Ottoman Empire ordered the Armenian cultural and political elite in Istanbul to be arrested, deported inland and for the most part murdered. This day has become the day of remembrance for Armenians throughout the world for the expulsion and massacre of the Armenian subjects of the Ottoman Empire which took place as early as the end of the 19th century and intensified during the First World War.
When the Ottoman Empire joined the war, the Armenian soldiers drafted into the Ottoman army were grouped into work battalions and most were murdered. Beginning in the spring of 1915, women, children and old people were sent on death marches through the Syrian desert. Those who had not died or been murdered on the way met this fate at the latest when they reached the inhuman camps in the desert near Deir ez Zôr. Massacres were also committed by units specially set up for this purpose. Resistance by high-ranking Turkish officials against this course of action, as well as criticism from the Ottoman parliament, was brutally suppressed by the Young Turkish regime. Many areas from which Christian Armenians had been expelled were later settled with Kurds and Muslim refugees from the Balkan wars. Members of other ethnic Christian groups, in particular Arameic/Assyrian and Chaldean Christians, but also certain Muslim minorities, were also affected by deportations and massacres.

According to independent estimates, more than 1 million Armenians fell victim to the deportations and mass murders. Many independent historians, parliaments and international organizations describe the expulsion and annihilation of the Armenians as genocide.

Until this day and contrary to the facts, the Turkish Republic as the legal successor of the Ottoman Empire denies that these atrocities had been well planned and organized and/or that the mass deaths during the resettlement treks and the massacres had been desired by the Ottoman government. The admitted severity of the actions against the Armenians has always been justified by the fact that many Armenians had fought on Russia’s side against Turkey both in 1878 and in 1914/1915 and that there had supposedly been the danger that these Armenians would also have fallen into the back of the Ottoman Empire during WW I. Other Turkish defenses invoked the acts of violence committed by Armenians against Turks which occurred during the armed resistance to the Turkish resettlement measures. The terrorist attacks by Armenians against Turks perpetrated right into the eighties of the twentieth century are also used as justification for the Turkish position.

In all, the true extent of the massacres and deportations is still belittled and largely disputed in Turkey today. This Turkish attitude stands in opposition to the idea of reconciliation which guides the common values of the European Union. Even today, historians in Turkey are not free in coming to terms with the history of deportations and murder of Armenians and, in spite of some relaxation in the previous criminal liability, still find themselves under great pressure.

The German Empire as the major military ally of the Ottoman Empire was also deeply involved in these events. Both the political and the military leadership of the German Empire had been aware of the persecution and murder of the Armenians right from the beginning. The files of the German Foreign Office resting on reports by the German embassy and consulates in the Ottoman Empire document the planned and organized execution of the massacres and
deportations. In spite of urgent requests by many German personalities in science, politics and the churches, among these politicians like Philipp Scheidemann, Karl Liebknecht or Matthias Erzberger, and eminent persons of the protestant and catholic churches such as Adolf von Harnack and Lorenz Werthmann, the German Reich government failed to exert pressure on its Ottoman ally.

When the protestant theologian Dr. Johannes Lepsius presented the outcome of his research in Istanbul to the German Reichstag on October 5, 1915, the whole of the subject of the Armenians was censored by the German Reich government. In 1916, the German military censorship banned and confiscated Johannes Lepsius’ “Report on the Situation of the Armenian People in Turkey”. The copies of this documentation which Lepsius had sent directly to the delegates of the German Reichstag were intercepted by the authorities and not handed to the delegates until after the war in 1919.

This almost forgotten policy of repression by the German Reich demonstrates that this chapter of history still waits to be dealt with in a satisfactory manner here in Germany.
Each year on this day, we pause to remember the victims of one of the greatest tragedies of the 20th century, when as many as 1.5 million Armenians lost their lives in the final years of the Ottoman Empire, many of them victims of mass killings and forced exile. I join my fellow Americans and Armenian people around the world in commemorating this tragedy and honoring the memory of the innocent lives that were taken. The world must never forget this painful chapter of its history.

All who cherish freedom and value the sanctity of human life look back on these horrific events in sorrow and disbelief. Many of those who survived were forced from their ancestral home and spread across the globe. Yet, in the midst of this terrible struggle, the world witnessed the indomitable spirit and character of the Armenian people. Many of the brave survivors came to America, where they have preserved a deep connection with their history and culture. Generations of Armenians in the United States have enriched our country and inspired us with their courage and conviction.

Today, we remember the past and also look forward to a brighter future. We commend the individuals in Armenia and Turkey who are working to normalize the relationship between their two countries. A sincere and open examination of the historic events of the late-Ottoman period is an essential part of this process. The United States supports and encourages those in both countries who are working to build a shared understanding of history as a basis for a more hopeful future.

We value the strong and vibrant ties between the United States and Armenia. Our Nation is grateful for Armenia's contributions to the war on terror, particularly for its efforts to help build a peaceful and democratic Iraq. The United States remains committed to working with Armenia and Azerbaijan to promote a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. We are also working to promote democratic and economic reform in Armenia that will advance the cause of freedom and justice.

Laura and I express our deepest condolences to Armenian people around the world on this solemn day of remembrance. We stand together in our determination to build a more peaceful, more prosperous, and more just world.

GEORGE W. BUSH

In 1989 the Jewish Community Relations Council of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin, Sonoma, Alameda, and Contra Costa Counties (JCRC) sent a letter to the Armenian Bishop of San Francisco supporting U.S. Senate Joint Resolution 212 which designated April 24, 1990, as a National Day of Remembrance for the genocidal attacks of 1915–1923 on the Armenian population by the Ottoman regime of the time.

In recalling the tragic events that occurred almost a century ago, it is not our intent to harm or discredit the current government and people of Turkey. We greatly value our relationship with the Turkish community here and abroad. We also recognize and respect the long history of the Jewish community in Turkey.

Our historical experience as victims of the Nazi Holocaust, only two decades after the tragedy meted out to the Armenian people, propels our sense of moral duty to recognize and acknowledge genocide suffered by any people as well as to oppose current acts of genocide targeting any ethnic population. We must do whatever we can to prevent such catastrophes from happening again.

Therefore, we strongly reiterate our 1989 position expressed in our letter to the Armenian Bishop of San Francisco supporting efforts to educate Americans about the tragic events of 1915–1923.