

## Reading 5 — PLANNING MASS MURDER

As the situation for Armenians in the Ottoman Empire deteriorated, Talaat and other Turkish leaders warned the Armenians not to turn to the European powers for help. In February 1914, however, after intense negotiation European leaders and the Young Turk government agreed that two foreign inspector generals would be allowed to monitor the treatment of Armenians in the empire.

Despite the Armenians' growing frustration with the Young Turk government, thousands of Armenian soldiers entered the armed forces to fight to defend their country after the outbreak of World War I. Russian efforts to expand into Ottoman Armenian provinces had little success. Ottoman Armenians pledged loyalty to the empire.

In December 1914 or January 1915, a small group of Young Turk leaders met secretly to discuss the fate of the Armenians and other minorities living within their dwindling empire. Their attitudes have been recorded in several documents that now reside in national archives and research libraries around the world. Plans were circulated to very few people to prevent leaks. Most of those documents were immediately destroyed. With the documents that remain, the information on one document often has to be understood in relation to another and then a case has to be pieced together in relationship with the physical evidence and the stories of survivors, perpetrators, and bystanders.

Many historians of the Armenian Genocide have been struck by a document that appears to outline the original plans for the mass murder of the Armenians. The document was acquired early in 1919 with several other incriminating documents by British officials. A cover note from one of the officials explains the context in which the document was found:

*Just before Christmas, I was approached confidentially by someone who stated that there was still in the Direction of Public Security, Constantinople, an official who has been in the Minister of the Interior's Department during the whole of the war, and who had charge of the archives relating to the secret measures and orders issued by the Minister of the Interior as a result of the decisions taken by the Committee of Union and Progress. He said that just before the Armistice, officials had been going to the archives department at night and making a clean sweep of most of the documents, but that the original draft of the orders relating to the Armenian massacres had been saved and could probably be procured by us through him on payment of Ltq. £10,000 paper money. He pledged me to secrecy if I went any further in the matter.*

*In the course of the next few weeks, I followed the matter up. The man who stole or rescued this draft copy is today an official in the Direction of Public Security. I persuaded him without any great difficulty that it would be in his own interests to let us have the documents without payment, and that if in the future he gets into trouble, we would protect him.*

There are four documents in this dossier. The first is what is called the “Ten Commandments” and is by far the most interesting. It is unsigned and is the rough draft, but the handwriting is said to be that of Essad Bey, who was at the time one of the confidential secretaries keeping secret archives in the Ministry of the Interior. . . . My informant states that at the meeting when this draft was drawn up, there were present Talaat Pasha, Dr. Beheddin, Shakir, Dr. Nazim, Ismail Jambolet (the Young Turk central committee) and Colonel Sefi, sub-Director of the Political Section at the Ministry of War; its date is given as December or January 1914 or 1915.

My informant declares that messengers were sent to the different [governors] in the provinces with instructions to read these orders to them and then return the originals which were to be destroyed. Analysis of the documents the “Ten Commandments” numbers 3 and 4 shows that in order to economize their forces, the Turks distinguished between places where they could rely on the population to go ahead with the massacres almost unaided, and other localities where they felt it required the presence of the military in case the population did not show sufficient zeal.

## THE 10 COMMANDMENTS OF THE COMITÉ UNION AND PROGRES.

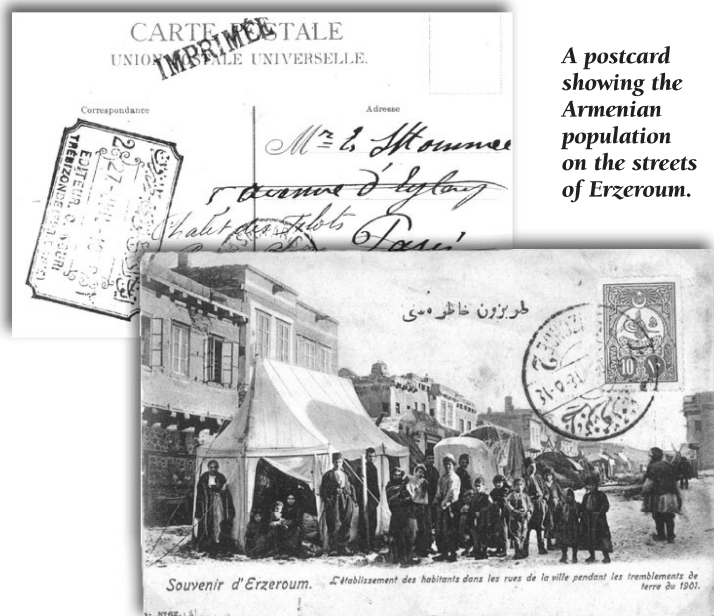
(1). Profiting by Arts 3 and 4 of [the Committee of Union and Progress], close all Armenian Societies, and arrest all who worked against Government at any time among them and send them into the provinces such as Baghdad or Mosul, and wipe them out either on the road or there.

(2). Collect arms.

(3). Excite [Muslim] opinion by suitable and special means...

(4). Leave all executive to the people in the provinces such as Erzeroum, Van, Mumuret ul Aziz, and Bitlis, and use Military disciplinary forces (i.e. Gendarmerie) ostensibly to stop massacres, while on the contrary in places as Adana, Sivas, Broussa, Ismidt and Smyrna actively help the [Muslims] with military force.

(5). Apply measures to exterminate all males under 50, priests



From the private collection of Berj Fenarici

*and teachers, leave girls and children to be Islamized.*

*(6). Carry away the families of all who succeed in escaping and apply measures to cut them off from all connection with their native place.*

*(7). On the ground that Armenian officials may be spies, expel and drive them out absolutely from every Government department or post.*

*(8). Kill off in an appropriate manner all Armenians in the Army—this to be left to the military to do.*

*(9). All action to begin everywhere simultaneously, and thus leave no time for preparation of defensive measures.*

*(10). Pay attention to the strictly confidential nature of these instructions, which may not go beyond two or three persons.*

*N.b. Above is verbatim translation—date December 1914 or January 1915.<sup>53</sup>*

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## CONNECTIONS

❖ Historian Helen Fein describes four “preconditions, intervening factors, and causes that lead toward genocide.” She suggests that these follow one another in order.

*1. The victims have previously been defined outside the universe of obligation of the dominant group.*

*2. The rank of the state has been reduced by defeat in war or internal strife. (This is a predisposing condition toward a political or cultural crisis of national identity in which the third step becomes more likely to occur.)*

*3. An elite that adopts a new political formula to justify the nation’s position and idealizes the rights of the dominant group.*

*4. The calculus of exterminating the victim group—a group excluded from the moral universe of obligation—changes as the perpetrators become part of a coalition at war against antagonists who have previously protested the persecution of the victim. Under these conditions the crime planned becomes less visible, and they no longer fear pressure from the antagonists.<sup>54</sup>*

❖ How many of these conditions were met by the winter of 1914–1915? Like Helen Fein, Israel Charny, editor of the *Encyclopedia of Genocide*, has worked to understand conditions that increase the likeli-

hood of genocide. Among them, he notes that perpetrators often feel that “retaliation for genocidal acts” by neutral nations is unlikely. What actions can be taken by neutral nations to prevent genocide before it actually begins? How would you respond to the concern of critics of international intervention who argue that proof of the perpetrators’ intent is needed before any preemptive measures are taken? How does the work of Fein and Charny attempt to answer those critics?

- ❖ Point 3 of the “10 Commandments” document describes the need to “excite” public opinion against the Armenians. How can leaders “excite” opinion and turn one group of people against another?
- ❖ Point 5 of the document describes the goals to “exterminate all males under 50, priests and teachers, leave girls and children to be Islamized.” Why would they treat men and women differently? What would be the fate of those who were “Islamized” or converted?
- ❖ It is likely that the meeting described by the British official took place secretly during one of the meetings of the inner circle of the Committee of Union and Progress’s party meetings. Scholar Vahakn Dadrian describes these meetings:

*The picture that emerges from these party congresses is the dual track performance of Ittihad [Committee of Union and Progress]. On one hand there is the formulation of a platform outlining a party program that is intended strictly for public consumption. On the other hand, there is the clandestine mapping of a sketchy plan that is ominous and undoubtedly sinister in nature, and is, therefore kept secret from the public, even from the regular organs of the party leadership and naturally from rank and file.*

Why would the leaders require such secrecy? What do you think they feared if their plans were made public?

- ❖ This document included in translation in this reading is a primary source. What techniques have you used for analyzing primary sources? What do you learn by analyzing this document? What questions does it raise?
- ❖ Deniers of the Armenian Genocide have often worked to discredit much of the primary source evidence of the genocide—telegrams sent by the perpetrators, copies of orders, as well as this document—by claiming they are forged or mistranslated or incomplete. Although the veracity of the documents have been authenticated by countless historians, deniers continue their efforts. Why would deniers focus on documents such as this one? What does the document tell us about the genocide?