

## Reading 4 — THE GERMAN CONNECTION

Before becoming part of the triumvirate that ceased power in Turkey at the beginning of 1913, Enver, the Ottoman minister of war, served as a military attaché to Berlin. During his four-year commission Enver developed a close relationship with German Kaiser Wilhelm II.<sup>73</sup> After the coup of 1913 that brought Enver to power, German-Ottoman military cooperation became national policy.

In December 1913, a German mission arrived in Turkey with the task of reorganizing the Ottoman army. Officers of the German military mission assumed responsibility for the command of the Turkish army under the leadership of Enver. The German-Turkish relationship was strengthened after the agreement of a military alliance between Germany and the Ottoman Empire in August 1914.

In notes written after a meeting with Young Turk leaders, Max Scheubner-Richter, a German vice consul and commander of a joint German-Turkish special guerrilla force, described plans to “destroy” the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire.



Morgenthau

**Kaiser Wilhelm II, of Germany  
wearing a Turkish Fez**

*The first item on this agenda concerns the liquidation of the Armenians. Ittihad will dangle before the Allies a specter of an alleged revolution prepared by the Armenian Dashnak party. Moreover, local incidents of social unrest and acts of Armenian self-defense will deliberately be provoked and inflated and will be used as pretexts to effect the deportations. Once en route, however, the convoys will be attacked and exterminated by Kurdish and Turkish brigands, and in part by gendarmes, who will be instigated for that purpose by Ittihad.*<sup>74</sup>

From their unique position as overseers of the Ottoman army, German soldiers watched as the genocide was carried out. The highest-ranking member of Germany's military mission to Turkey, General Bronsart von Schellendorf, directly issued orders for the round up and deportation of Armenians. Another high-ranking German officer, Lieutenant Colonel Boettrich, the military chief overseeing the construction of the Baghdad Railway, produced orders to deport the Armenian laborers, workmen, technicians, engineers, and administrators who were working on the railroad.<sup>75</sup> When Franz Gunther, deputy director of the

Anatolian Railway, learned about Boettlich's orders, he warned:

*Our enemies will some day pay a good price to obtain possession of this document . . . they will be able to prove that the Germans have not only done nothing to prevent the Armenian persecutions but they even issued certain orders to this effect, as the [Turkish] Military Commander has ecstatically pointed out.*<sup>76</sup>

In a study of German participation in the Armenian Genocide, Vahakn Dadrian notes: "Whereas some German operatives went out of their way to avoid being drawn into acts that would have been tantamount to complicity, others willingly allowed the Turks to coopt them. . . . What is most noteworthy in this connection is the additional fact that the Germans belonging to the latter category had more power."<sup>77</sup>

On October 8, 1915, four members of the German missionaries staff to Turkey appealed to the German Minister of Foreign Affairs to intercede with their ally on behalf of the Armenians.



**Enver Pasha**

Courtesy of the Library of Congress

*We think it our duty to draw the attention of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the fact that our school work will be deprived, for the future, of its moral basis and will lose all authority in the eyes of the natives, if it is really beyond the power of the German Government to mitigate the brutality of the treatment which the exiled women and children of the massacred Armenians are receiving.*

*In face of the scenes of horror which are being unfolded daily before our eyes in the neighborhood of our school, our educational activity becomes a mockery of humanity. How can we make our pupils listen to the Tales of the Seven Dwarfs, how can we teach them conjugations and declensions, when, in the compounds next door to our school, death is carrying off their starving compatriots—when there are girls and women and children, practically naked, some lying on the ground, others stretched between the dead or the coffins made ready for them beforehand, and breathing their last breath!*

*Out of 2,000 to 3,000 peasant women from the Armenian Plateau who were brought here in good health, only forty or fifty skeletons are left. The prettier ones are the victims of their gaolers' [jailers'] lust; the plain ones succumb to blows, hunger and thirst (they lie by the water's edge, but are not allowed to quench their thirst). The Europeans are forbidden to distribute bread to the starving,*

*Every day more than a hundred corpses are carried out of Aleppo.*

*All this happens under the eyes of high Turkish officials. There are forty or fifty emaciated phantoms crowded into the compound opposite our school. They are women out of their mind; they have forgotten how to eat; when one offers them bread, they throw it aside with indifference. They only groan and wait for death.*

*“See,” say the natives, “Taâlim el Alman (the teaching of the Germans).”*

*The German scutcheon [a shield with a coat of arms] is in danger of being smirched forever in the memory of the Near Eastern peoples. There are natives of Aleppo, more enlightened than the rest, who say: “The Germans do not want these horrors. Perhaps the German nation does not know about them. If it did, how could the German Press, which is attached to the truth, talk about the humanity of the treatment accorded to the Armenians who are guilty of High Treason? Perhaps, too, the German Government has its hands tied by some contract defining the powers of the [German and Turkish] State; in regard to one another’s affairs?”*

*No, when it is a question of giving over thousands of women and children to death by starvation, the words “Opportunism” and “definition of powers” lose their meaning. Every civilized human being is “empowered” in this case to interfere, and it is his bounden duty to do so. Our prestige in the East is the thing at stake. There are even Turks and Arabs who have remained human, and who shake their heads in sorrow when they see, in the exile convoys that pass through the town, how the brutal soldiers shower blows on women with child who can march no farther.*

*We may expect further and still more dreadful hecatombs after the order published by Djemal Pasha. (The engineers of the Baghdad Railway are forbidden, by this order, to photograph the Armenian convoys; any plates they have already used for this must be given up within twenty-four hours, under penalty of prosecution before the Council of War.) It is a proof that the responsible authorities fear the light, but have no intention of putting an end to scenes which are a disgrace to humanity.*

*. . . We know that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has already, from other sources, received detailed descriptions of what is happening here. But as no change has occurred in the system of the deportations, we feel ourselves under a double obligation to make this report, all the more because the fact of our living abroad enables us to see more clearly the immense danger by which the German name is threatened here.<sup>78</sup>*

Despite the pleas of the mission’s staff and many ordinary German citizens who witnessed the treatment of Christian minorities in the Ottoman Empire, the German government chose not to intervene.

## CONNECTIONS

- ❖ Vahakn Dadrian believes that German officials were “indirect accessories to crimes perpetrated by the [Turkish] Special Organization functionaries whose overall goal they endorsed, financed to some extent, and shepherded.” Dadrian uses legal language to describe the German officials’ participation in the genocide. How would you describe the relationship in moral terms?
- ❖ How do the German missionaries express their outrage? What arguments do they make to convince the German foreign minister to intervene? What words or phrases from the letter stand out? What rules are needed so that individuals can know they are protected as they voice dissent?
- ❖ In the letter the German missionaries ask: “How can we make our pupils listen to the Tales of the Seven Dwarfs, how can we teach them conjugations and declensions, when, in the compounds next door to our school, death is carrying off their starving compatriots?” How would you answer their question?
- ❖ After the war, General von Schellendorf compared the Armenians and the Jews living in his country, Germany. In language laden with stereotypes, Bronsart von Schellendorf explains:

*...the Armenian is just like the Jew, a parasite outside of the confines of his homeland, sucking the marrow of the people of the host country. Year after year they abandon their native land—just like the Polish Jews who migrate to Germany—to engage in usurious activities. Hence, the hatred which, in a medieval form, has unleashed itself against them as an unpleasant people, entailing their murder.* <sup>79</sup>

What stereotypes are reflected in his comparisons? Whom does he blame for the mistreatment of Armenians and Jews?

Between 1904 and 1907, German troops killed between 65,000 and 80,000 of the Herero people who inhabited present-day Namibia in Southwest Africa, then a German colony. Some scholars suggest that Germany’s colonial experience, and its experiences during World War I and the Armenian Genocide served as models for the Nazi Holocaust. To research the relationship between the treatment of colonized Africans and genocide, see the book *Exterminate All the Brutes: One Man’s Odyssey into the Heart of Darkness and the Origins of European Genocide* by Sven Lindqvist.

