

Review Essay

“Proving” a “Crime against Humanity”?

The Young Turks’ Crime against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire

TANER AKÇAM, 2012

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Introduction

After a presentation of what he considers as the relevant context (the Ottoman archives, Balkan wars and their aftermath, “ethnic cleansing” against the Greeks), Taner Akçam bases his “demonstration” primarily on Ottoman and German sources to “prove” that a “genocidal” decision was taken by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) leadership in March 1915, after discussion with the German government, and carried out during the war, mostly during the years 1915 and 1916, not only by massacres and deportations but also by “forced assimilation” of women and children. Taner Akçam finishes by a chapter consisting in a strident response to some arguments developed by both Turkish and non-Turkish historians who have criticized the “Armenian genocide” label (especially the exemptions of relocation, the issue of the Special Organization and the punishment of Muslim criminals from 1915 to 1917).

Taner Akçam’s previous book in English, *A Shameful Act* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), contained numerous typographical and factual errors.¹ Such flaws appear once again in *The Young Turks*’—the present book under review. For instance, even the name of the important Turkish city of Erzurum in eastern Anatolia is not in the index and other examples are provided below. Correspondingly, the style of this book—especially in the last chapter—does not present the desirable precision and impartiality needed for a scholarly work. The book’s argument aside, it bases itself on a limited range of primary sources. It is apparent that Taner Akçam did not conduct any research in the British archives. Instead, he only used published documents and photocopies provided by his mentor, the sociologist Vahakn N. Dadrian. For instance, the work is lacking any discussion on the important investigations of 144 former Ottoman officials interned in Malta between 1919 and 1921, upon which the British prosecutor and his assistants concluded that there was no evidence against any of them.² Furthermore, Taner Akçam did not make any use of the French archives, not even the compilations published years ago by Arthur Beylerian and Hasan Dilan.³ In addition, Taner Akçam did not use at all the Russian archives,⁴ or the Bristol papers at the Library of Congress, and even the Dashnak archives in Watertown, Massachusetts. Along these lines of selective research, Taner Akçam makes no reference at all to secondary sources by historians such as F. Ata, Yücel Güçlü, Bernard Lewis, Heath Lowry, Andrew Mango, Jeremy Salt, Stanford Jay Shaw, Salâhi Sonyel, Gilles Veinstein and Robert Zeidner, not even to challenge their analyses.

These deficiencies may point at Taner Akçam’s tendentious approach. The virulent manner in which he presents Guenter Lewy—an Emeritus professor of political

science at Massachusetts University and Holocaust survivor who successfully sued for defamation those who had accused him to have received money from Turkey⁵—as belonging in the category of the “denialist industry” (p. 411) reveals a purpose that extends beyond scholarly objectives. Similarly, the book suffers from an imbalanced view of history. While it is dedicated to the murder of the journalist Hrant Dink, it neglects to mention, let alone assess the significance of the preceding barrage of Armenian terrorism in the 1970s and 1980s, which took the lives of more than 70 Turks and others.⁶

Even more disconcerting is the fact that Mr Akçam’s book offers no reference to the development of the Armenian revolutionary parties, their provocation strategy during the 1890s⁷ and in 1909,⁸ their assassinations of loyalist Armenians⁹ or their devastating policies after 1918.¹⁰ Also, the book shows no recognition of the Armenian contribution to the CUP administrations, before *and* after 1914.¹¹ The only element of framework is a clearly inaccurate description of the Balkan wars and their aftermath—previously present in the Turkish version of the book and already criticized.¹²

The goal of this paper is to survey the methods used by Akçam in this book, and offer readers an opportunity to assess whether these methods are suitable for academic literature.

Use of False Documents

One of the most disturbing aspects of *Young Turks* is that Taner Akçam’s search for “evidence” of a “genocidal intent” against the Ottoman Armenians leads him to use more than questionable sources. On page 197, he relies on the so-called Ten Commands, attributed to the CUP leadership. Canadian historian Gwynne Dyer has demonstrated, as early as 1973 during a debate with Christopher J. Walker, that this “document” is apocryphal.¹³ Since then, Mr Walker—who still applies the “Armenian genocide” label—has carefully refrained from using the “Ten Commands”. In addition, Donald Bloxham, who sides with the “genocide” charge against the CUP, has stated that this “document” is “probably a fake”.¹⁴ On the other side of the debate, Stanford Jay Shaw provided additional data in 2000 to corroborate Gwynne Dyer’s findings.¹⁵ However, Mr Akçam does not acknowledge the scholarly dialog in the field of study; instead, he merely refers to a paper by Vahakn N. Dadrian (p. 197, n.130) whose own work on the document is highly questionable¹⁶ and whose translation of it is not entirely accurate.¹⁷

Correspondingly, Taner Akçam also bases his claims on the “Andonian documents”. In 2001, he had argued rightfully: “there are important grounds for considering these documents fake”.¹⁸ Also, in his current book, he says that “a reexamination of the validity of the Andonian telegrams” is “necessary” (p. 254), but then he uses one of the fake documents of Andonian without qualification (p. 272), as if the authenticity was beyond any reasonable doubt. Akçam does not provide any rebuttal of the studies that have shown the “Andonian documents” to be fakes.¹⁹ He freely discusses their content, in utter disregard for the work brought forth by scholars to demonstrate that these are forged telegrams.

He only tries to find few sources which are supposed to corroborate the content of the “telegrams” published by Andonian. Not only this would be not a convincing argument even if true, but also Akçam deliberately distorts these sources.

He writes that a “letter” quoted by Ahmet Emin Yalman in his book *Turkey in the World War* presents “similarities” with those attributed to Şakir by Andonian (p. 136). The problem is that Yalman does not reproduce any “letter”, but only mentions, without any reference, a rumor about some CUP leaders, and without even giving their

names.²⁰ Correspondingly, on p. 254, n. 90, Taner Akçam affirms that the content of one Andonian “telegram” is “nearly identical to those of Talat Pasha’s directive of 29 August 1915 to all provinces”. Margaret Lavinia Anderson enthusiastically endorses this argument: “Indeed, the contents of one of the telegrams published in 1919 by Aram Andonian, mocked as forgeries by spokesmen for the Turkish Republic, ‘are nearly identical to those of Talat’s [...] directive to all provinces of 29 August 1915’, which Akçam found in the Prime Ministerial Ottoman Archives.”²¹

In fact, the fake documents published by Andonian (in 1920 and 1921, not in 1919) are considered to be forgeries not only by “spokesmen of the Turkish Republic” but also by many non-Turkish scholars of various stances.²² Even some supporters of the “Armenian genocide” label consider the “Andonian documents” to be dubious.²³ It is also dubious that Mr Akçam “found” the authentic telegram of Talat Pasha in the Ottoman archives, because this document has been published (and translated) several times since 1983, before *Young Turks*, including in a book specifically devoted to showing Andonian-published false documents. Moreover, the content of the telegram radically contradicts, rather than confirms, Andonian’s fabrication (my emphasis):

Objective of the transfer of the Armenians from the places they are currently living to the certain determined regions is to prevent their attempts and activities against the government and to render them unable to pursue their national goal of establishing an Armenian government. Since *there is no intention like the complete destruction of the Armenians* it is absolutely necessary to *protect the lives* of the individuals being transferred in convoys and to take every measure to provide their food supplies regularly during their travel, the cost of which to be met from the immigrants fund. It is also necessary for the government that, with the exclusion of those who were decided to be relocated, the Armenians, particularly the families of the army members, as mentioned in the previous notice, as well as artisans and those belonging to the Protestant and Catholic sects will be left at their current place of residence. About those who attack the convoys and seize their properties and dare to rape the Armenians by acting on bestial instincts, as well as the officials and gendarme members who act as the initiator of such acts, the legal investigation shall be started immediately for their severe punishment, without showing any mercy on them. Such officials shall be immediately dismissed from the service and brought before the military court. Furthermore, their names should be reported. In case similar attacks are repeated, the administration of the province where such attacks occur shall be held responsible.²⁴

Misrepresentation of Key Sources

When the sources are not forged, Taner Akçam is found distorting the meaning of key sources in order to provide evidence for the “genocide” charge.

Falsifying Talat Pasha’s Words

Taner Akçam argues that the telegram dispatched by Talat Pasha to Ankara’s province on 29 August 1915 is the remarkable evidence that “the policies adopted against the Armenians were aiming at their annihilation” (pp. 203–204). Interestingly, in an inaccurate translation, Akçam quotes only the two first sentences of this text: “The Armenian

issue in the Eastern Provinces has been resolved. There is no need to sully the nation and the government[’s honor] with further atrocities.” Taner Akçam’s replacement of context with his own speculations distorts the meaning of the full telegram. Reading the full and accurate text of the document is enlightening (my emphasis):

The Armenian issue pertaining to the Eastern provinces has been solved. *Therefore*, there is no need to harm the reputation of our nation and government by conducting *unnecessary* cruelties. Particularly the recent attack conducted on the Armenians at a place close to Ankara has caused great regret of the Ministry, considering its way of occurring, the obvious incompetence of the officials charged with supervising the transfer of Armenians, and audacity on part of the gendarmes and the local people who acted on their bestial instincts to rape and rob the Armenians. The transfer of Armenians, which is desired to be carried out in an orderly and prudent manner, should henceforth never be left to the individuals having fanatical feelings of enmity, and that *the Armenians, whether or not they are subject to relocation, will be definitely protected against any assault and attack*. At the places where such a protection could not be provided, the transfer of Armenians should be postponed. From now on, all of the officials in charge shall be held responsible with respect to their ranks for any attack, which may occur and shall be brought before the military courts. It is necessary to give very strict orders to the relevant personnel in this regard.²⁵

Instead of proving any “genocidal” design on the part of Talat Pasha, this document might actually prove the reverse. Although Akçam’s distortion has been publicized at least on three separate platforms, he has shown no interest in offering a rebuttal.²⁶

There is another misrepresentation of Talat Pasha’s words that cannot be detected by readers for whom Taner Akçam is the only source of information. Claims that the note sent by the Minister of Interior Talat Pasha to the Grand Vizier Sait Halim on 26 May 1915 “has never been completely translated into modern Turkish” are false.²⁷ Furthermore, Taner Akçam cherry picks which parts of the several paragraphs contained in the document he wishes to share with his readers. This is not a random choice, for it allows him to claim that the document is

the clearest possible refutation of the official Turkish version of the events of 1915, which insists that the policies toward the Armenians were the result of the wartime exigencies. On the contrary, Unionist policy was aimed at resolving the issue of Armenian reforms in a definitive manner. (pp. 136–137)

However, access to the full document would reveal that the relocation of Armenians was decided upon as a measure against “armed attacks on security forces and armed uprisings”. The text also states the following (my emphasis):

Unfortunately, while the means to bring about a final solution to this problem [by reforms] is being worked out, some of the Armenians living in places close to the battlefields have recently become involved in activities aimed at creating difficulties for our army in its fight against the enemy to protect the Ottoman borders. Those Armenians are trying to impede the operations of the army, and the transfer of supply and ammunition. They are combining their aspirations and activities with those of the enemy’s and are fighting against us in the ranks of the enemy. Within the country, they dare to carry out armed attacks against the military forces and the innocent civilians, to

become involved in acts of murder, looting and plundering in the Ottoman cities and towns, to provide supplies to the enemy's navy and to inform them of the places with fortified posts. *The conduct of such rebel elements has rendered it necessary to remove them from the area of military operations and to evacuate the villages serving as operational bases and shelters for the rebels.*

It bears noting that the allusion to the reforms proposed in 1914 is only incidental and not the reason given by Talat Pasha for the relocation decision.

Taner Akçam also removes the reference to the protection of relocated Armenians, especially the following:

A decision has been taken to ensure the comfort of those subjects on their way to places allocated for their resettling. To ensure the subjects arrival at the resettlement places, and facilitate their rest, and protect of their live [*sic.*] and properties on their journey.²⁸

By every aspect, this letter by Talat Pasha may serve as a clear refutation of Taner Akçam's claims.

The third main instance of complete inversion of the meaning of Talat Pasha's words by Taner Akçam is his misuse of the telegram sent by the Ottoman Minister of Interior on 22 July 1915 (p. 210). Once again, Mr Akçam bases his speculations on few words while cutting out the most relevant part of the source:

Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to enforce the public security in a firm manner on the border of the province, and especially on the route of the Armenian convoys, and to avoid any delay in the military transportation and dispatch. The results of the measures which would be taken should be reported.²⁹

Falsifying Testimonies

In addition to the fake "Ten Commands", Taner Akçam relies on two key sources to "prove" that the "genocide" decision was made in March 1915 and discussed by the German government: the Memoirs of Halil Menteşe and of Arif Cemil Denker. Four years before the publication of *Young Turks' Crime*, Hilmar Kaiser, a supporter of the "Armenian genocide" label, protested against Mr Akçam's misquotation (in *A Shameful Act*) of Menteşe's Memoirs: the book "says exactly the opposite" of what Taner Akçam affirms. It says: Taner Akçam's use of Turkish sources "is totally unscholarly".³⁰ Once again, this criticism was completely unanswered and the same manipulation of the source is repeated in *Young Turks' Crime*, in an even less sophisticated form than in *A Shameful Act*. Indeed, Taner Akçam pretends (p. 184):

On March 18 [1915], foreign minister Halil Menteşe traveled to Berlin for talks with the German government on the Armenian deportation. (Finance minister Cavit Bey, who opposed Ottoman entry into the war, was also in Berlin at this time but was not trusted in the Armenian matter.) Upon returning at Istanbul, Menteşe was welcomed at the train station by Talat, who greeted him thus: 'Tell me, dear Halil, what did you discuss in Berlin regarding the deportation of Armenians?'

On the same page, Mr Akçam affirms: "all this information was reported by Menteşe himself" in his Memoirs. Firstly, Halil Menteşe was not, in March (or even later in spring) 1915, the Ottoman Minister of Foreign Affairs. He took his position in

October; in March, he was still the president of the National Assembly. Secondly, and more important, Taner Akçam's summary is, as pointed by Hilmar Kaiser, a complete inversion of the sense of Menteşe's account. Indeed, the president of the Ottoman National Assembly does not pretend at all that he was sent to Berlin "for talks with the German government on the Armenian deportation". He explains that the goal of his trip was the supply to the Ottoman Empire of German products through the Balkans. Nowhere does this Ottoman leader pretend that "Finance minister Cavit Bey was not trusted in the Armenian matter." Correspondingly, Menteşe does not mention any conversation about the Armenian issue with the German officials. Right after the question "Dear Halil, tell me what you spoke in Berlin for this Armenian relocation?" Menteşe quotes the reaction of Talat Pasha to his response:

Dear Halil, I wronged you unfairly. If Halil comes, he would influence my moral matters, I decided: let me finish this work and let him come after that, it turns out I was mistaken.

And just after these lines, at the same page, Menteşe explains that "one morning" after this conversation (the date are not provided, but it must be at the beginning of summer 1915), Talat Pasha told him how sad he was, learning by the governor of Erzurum that some convoys of relocated Armenians have been attacked.³¹ A checking in the Memoirs of the president of the Ottoman National Assembly clearly shows that:

- This leader was not sent to Berlin to discuss the Armenian relocation, quite the contrary.
- The goal of the relocation was not "genocide".

One may find that in his treatment of Arif Cemil Denker's Memoirs (p. 183), Akçam was trying to offer a more subtle version of Dadrian's work:³²

There is a strong possibility for that the final decisions to eliminate the Armenian population were made during discussions held in Istanbul at the end of March. As a result of these discussions, 'it was decided in Istanbul that, while the Special Organization concerned itself with matters concerning [the country's] foreign enemies, Bahaeddin Şakir Bey would occupy himself with the country's internal enemies.' In other words, Bahaeddin Şakir was entrusted with the task of destroying the empire's Armenian population.

The fact remains, however, that Taner Akçam's summary is selective, and thereby misleading. There is nothing in Denker's Memoirs to suggest that Şakir was in charge of any "destruction of the Armenian population". Denker actually wrote:

In İstanbul now, Dr. Bahattin Şakir Bey has decided to concentrate on the country's internal enemies by abandoning the Special Organization's affairs related to foreign enemies.

This was because Dr. Bahattin Şakir Bey has witnessed many facts during the period of four-five months he has spent in Erzurum and at different points of the Caucasian front. The attitudes the Armenians have taken against Turkey and the assistance they provided to the Russian army have convinced him [Bahattin Şakir] that it was necessary to *fear* the internal enemies as much as the external ones. The Armenians inside through formation of bands were threatening the rear of our army and were trying to cut our lines of retreat.

[...] In İstanbul Dr. Bahattin Şakir Bey was busy with discussing *the precautions to be taken* to save the army from a grave danger by placing these [documents] to the attention of the CUP's Central Committee. These discussions finally resulted in the formulation of Relocation Law. When Dr. Bahattin Şakir Bey returned to the Caucasian front after a while, the new situation had completely come into existence. But again we will pass on without touching these matters. *Because the issue of the Armenians' relocation was completely out of the O.S.'s scope.*³³

There is quite a big difference between “precautions to be taken” and “destroying” a whole ethnic group; and there is no basis in the context to affirm that the discussions gave any responsibility to Şakir: on the contrary, it appears as a personal initiative. In addition, Denker's Memoirs contradict two fundamental allegations of Taner Akçam: the alleged role of the Special Organization in the Armenian relocations³⁴ and the supposedly negligible importance of the insurrections in the decision-making which eventually led to the relocation decision.

In any case, pretending that a general decision regarding the Armenian problem was taken by the Ottoman leadership before May 1915 is in contradiction with the information contained in the Ottoman archives. Indeed, as late as 2 May 1915, Enver sent a letter to Talat Pasha, advocating the removal of the Armenians from Van and Bitlis provinces, and “to either send these Armenians and their families to Russia, or to disperse them within Anatolia”. This extremely important document proves that, at the beginning of 2 May 1915, no decision was yet taken about the future scope of the relocation, and the place where the relocated Armenians should be forced to go was not even fixed, too.³⁵

Exaggeration of Selected and Questionable Material

Not unlike in his previous books, Taner Akçam heavily relies on the accounts of trials that took place in front of courts-martial in İstanbul, during the years 1919 and 1920. However, the justice issued by these courts-martial was subject to political considerations, and may not be discussed responsibly and accurately without recognizing the conditions in which they were set. Indeed, the *Entente libérale* (Liberal Union), reconstituted in 1910–1911 under British and Greek sponsorship,³⁶ came back to power in March 1919 as a British initiative. In the words of the liaison officer of the French High Commissioner, lieutenant-colonel Louis Mougín, “*l'Entente libérale est leur chose*”.³⁷

The Damat Ferit Paşa government had chosen an unconstitutional procedure against the former CUP ministers: instead of putting them on trial in front of the High Court, it took place in front of a court-martial; according to the Ottoman Constitution, only the High Court was competent for the crimes committed by the members of cabinet in the exercise of their functions. Such an unconstitutional (and so, without legal value from the beginning) procedure was chosen because it deprived the indicted CUP leaders of the right to be assisted by a lawyer during the investigation, and banned the right of cross-examination of the witnesses and “documents” introduced by the prosecutor during the trial.³⁸

In April 1920, Damat Ferit even suppressed the right of the defendants to hire a lawyer, at any moment, even during the trial.³⁹ Taner Akçam does not discuss these conditions. In a previous article, he reiterated Vahakn N. Dadrian's argument, pretending that the Ottoman military law was the same as the French law.⁴⁰ Mr Akçam, who does not speak any French and has no degree in law, is at least mistaken. The right to be assisted by a lawyer during the investigation was definitely established in France by the Constans

Act, on 8 December 1897,⁴¹ more than 20 years before the first trial in İstanbul (and this right already existed in the Paris tribunal at least since the circular of the general prosecutor, in 1884⁴²). For the trial, this same right was established a long time prior to that, in 1327.⁴³

The first prosecutor of the ministers' trial was removed in May 1919 by the Damat Ferit cabinet as a result of his "incompetence"⁴⁴ and one of the main presiding judges, Nemrut Mustafa Paşa (a Kurd actively involved in Kurdish nationalist activities during the 1920s), was sentenced in December 1920 for abuses.⁴⁵ Among the indicted ministers, there was even Oskan Mardikian, an Armenian and a member of the CUP, minister of the posts, telephones and telegraphs from 1913 to 1914.⁴⁶ In January 1921, most of the sentences pronounced between April and October 1920 were overruled in appeal, and in March 1922, the last Ottoman government had to admit, after an investigation, serious irregularities in the conduct of the 1919–1920 trials.⁴⁷ That is probably for such reasons that the *Entente's* representatives in İstanbul were generally skeptical, not to say worse, vis-à-vis these trials, as early as 1919. On 1 August 1919, Admiral Calthorpe, the British High Commissioner, forwarded to London a memorandum of the Armeno-Greek section of his staff, saying that, since May, the trials were "proving to be a farce and injurious to our own prestige and to that of the Turkish government".⁴⁸

The original records of the proceedings are lost. Current studies of the courts-martial are based on partial accounts of the trials and verdicts, and copies of documents published in İstanbul newspapers. These newspapers were submitted to censorship, and the French military in İstanbul complained several times about unsubstantiated rumors and selective information published by at least some of these newspapers.⁴⁹ Regarding the editor of the *Entente libérale's* newspaper, *Alemdar*, to which Taner Akçam makes several references in *Young Turks*, lieutenant-colonel Mougin wrote he was "a tinhorn", an "English agent" and even an "accomplice of the Armenian intrigues".⁵⁰

In the style of his previous publications,⁵¹ and much like other authors with whom he shares similar conclusions,⁵² Akçam relies on written testimony provided by General Vehip (pp. 6–8, 194, 199), who elsewhere stated that the war of independence launched by Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) was ruining Turkey.⁵³ While Vehip's credibility should be put into question due to his known anti-patriotic disposition, Taner Akçam relates to him without relating to his readers the context in which Vehip formed his views. Vehip, who had long made anti-CUP and anti-Kemalist statements, was indicted for embezzlement, and eventually sentenced in September 1921, but managed to escape before being put in jail.⁵⁴

Furthermore, Mr Akçam presents a highly questionable document as incontrovertible evidence, which he describes as the "written deposition of Kastamonu governor Reşid Pasha", relating that

In his statement, the governor recounted that he had at one point received a memo from Bahaeddin Şakir (signed 'Head of the Special Organization') announcing that the Armenians of Kastamonu were to be deported and informing him that he was being removed from his position for noncompliance with this order. (p. 416)

However, Şakir was never the "head of the Special Organization" and could not have signed any "memo" with such a title.⁵⁵ Also, even after the removal of Reşid, the ministry of Interior made clear that the Armenians of Kastamonu should not be removed. Eventually, in 1916, a part of this population was scattered within the limits of the province.⁵⁶

Even more strikingly, by an inaccurate translation, selective ellipses and a wittingly wrong extrapolation, Taner Akçam changes the sense of the words pronounced by Yusuf Rıza Bey, a CUP official (pp. 414–415):

In seventh session of the trial, when Yusuf Rıza was read some incriminating testimony and documents regarding the involvement of the SO units in crimes, he responded that ‘it is a shame that conditions have now, today, come to such a state [so as to show] that the Special Organization became a means for carrying out all of these crimes under the orders from the [CUP] Central Committee. Your servant cannot find words to reply to this [state of affairs], Your Honor.’ In short, under the weight of such compelling documentation, Yusuf Rıza was forced to admit that both the CUP’s Central Committee and the SO had played an important role in the various wartime crimes against the Armenians and others.

In fact, no “document” was read during this interrogation of Yusuf Rıza, and there is no basis for the words “so as to show” put into brackets by Taner Akçam, and still less for his extrapolation about any “role” of the SO in “wartime crimes” (*italics added*):

My presence in the SO along with Dr. Nazim Bey, was a patriotic service, Your Excellency. We believed that there was a war going on, and that all of us should serve this state, this nation, this homeland as much as we were able to cope with. [...] Unfortunately, today the circumstances bring [this] to such a position that the SO had become an instrument for the execution of all crimes under the orders of the Central Committee. *I am myself unable to find and give an answer to this, Your Excellency.* [...]

I swear to God, in any form you may wish, that no one from here [the Central Committee] intervened [in the relocations]. *The Central Committee has nothing to do with these affairs.* Please investigate [this]. Please be assured that there is none.⁵⁷

Denial of Armenian Rebellion

To defend his thesis of a virtually unprovoked “genocide”, Taner Akçam tries to trivialize the series of insurrection organized in 1914–1915 by the Armenian revolutionary committees. Without any argument, he avoids a discussion about the Armenian rebellion at Van, or the crucial issue of the lines of communication attacked by Armenian guerillas. Although there have been studies on the subject, Mr Akçam does not even mention them by name, let alone attempt to challenge their conclusions.⁵⁸

In order to downplay the level of threat posed by the insurrection in Zeytun, Akçam discusses a document in the following manner:

In a report to the Ottoman Fourth Army Command sent on 14 March 1915, the author states that he ‘does not entertain the possibility of a general Armenian uprising’ and states that ‘in the face of the oppositional stance and rebellion displayed by certain Armenian military deserters in Zeytun, the state has attempted to take measure [to punish them].’ He relates the local population’s attitude toward the events as follows: ‘A large portion of our Armenian compatriots are sorely grieved by these actions of just a small, wicked remnants; their sense of connection of the homeland is beyond all doubt and suspicion.’

However, the report actually says:

As I have received your telegram, dated March 14, 1915, this morning I did not have time to reply during the night. As far as I am concerned about the events in Zeytûn, the only information I have is limited to the martyring of several gendarme soldiers during a clash that broke out upon the attack of several people to the prison. I do not have enough information neither on the identities of the aggressors nor about the sources that led to the occurrence of the events. However, I am definitely of the opinion that the aggressors who attempted to violate the soldiers and dared to commit massacres ought to be punished with the heaviest penalties.

I have read one or two of telegrams, sent by the people of Zeytûn to Istanbul Armenian Patriarchate and to Sis Armenian Catechumenate, as shown by the censor officer. As far as I have gathered from those telegrams and from the Armenian delegate as well as from the notables here, the Armenians are in a great hurry. *They are claiming* that these events were incited by couple of discreditable people, and that all of the Armenian people were in fact truly loyal and devoted to the government. I believe that, punishing of the murderers and the aggressors will be sufficient for the sake of delicacy of the situation; however, we should pretend that we believe in *their so-called sincerity*.

Under the present circumstances, the holding of the Armenian notables and spiritual leaders in Maraş and Aleppo in pledge might lead to a misunderstanding that the government considers the Armenians residing in Zeytûn as accomplices, and this will eventually lead to a more severe sense of insecurity among the Armenians, and to a severe hatred and anger among the Muslims. At this point, when the major states, which used to defend them no matter the circumstances were, whether they were right or wrong, are struggling with their own problems, the wise Armenians will conceive the delicacy of the situation and evaluate the reasons of upheavals better, and therefore, I do not think that the Armenians will rise.

Nevertheless, all of these are nothing but my personal evaluations, right or wrong, as *I am not equipped with thorough investigations on the issue*.

It is clear that Mr Akçam attributes to an Ottoman officer the statements of Armenian delegates, in spite of the skepticism of this very same officer regarding these affirmations. In addition, this officer indeed said he did not think “the Armenians will rise”, but, once again, Mr Akçam cuts out crucial words: this officer was not in position to investigate the matter deeply. It should be added that another report describes the seizure of the gendarmerie’s armory, the cutting of the telegraphic line and the killing of Ottoman soldiers by Armenian insurgents of Zeytun.⁵⁹ At the end, the crushing of this rebellion costed the life of 500 Ottoman soldiers.⁶⁰

Taner Akçam also tries to present as virtually unimportant the projects of landing in Cilicia in 1914–1915, affirming (p. 180) that if Armenian representatives, including “a certain Varandian” presented projects, “Great Britain did not take these proposals seriously and soon abandoned the idea of a landing in or near Iskenderun”. Apparently, Taner Akçam does not know that Mikael Varandian was a leader of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation and its main ideologue, from 1905 to his death in 1934.

More seriously, his main assertion on the reception of the Armenian nationalist proposals is plainly wrong. After some efficient operations during winter 1914–1915,⁶¹ the

British government gave the priority to the landing in Çanakkale, because Winston Churchill considered this operation as the best solution from a military perspective.⁶² The French minister of foreign affairs Théophile Delcassé made a more political analysis in a letter sent to the minister of War. The landing in the Dardanelles was the best way, argued Delcassé, because it would lead quickly to a change of the government in İstanbul, as a result of the arrival of Entente's armies; after this change, only a more effective control on the Ottoman Empire would be needed. For Delcassé, as late as April 1915, it was out of question to share the Ottoman lands—above all, because France was already the prominent power in this part of the world, and, as a result, had no interest in sharing what she possessed already.⁶³

Regardless, far from having renounced the idea of a landing in Cilicia, the British War Office advocated once again for it at the end of summer 1915,⁶⁴ and the Armenian guerillas in Musa Dağ were rescued by a French military ship.⁶⁵ The idea was studied very seriously in Paris.⁶⁶ However, the French and British armies were already in the Balkans, in the Dardanelles, in Egypt and in Kuwait. A new landing would suppress the last hopes of victory at the Dardanelles and would relieve the Ottomans, even more since Bulgaria joined the Triple-Alliance. The building of new Ottoman defenses during the summer 1915 increased the difficulties and it was impossible to use any unit fighting against the Germans in France.⁶⁷

It is so impossible to affirm, as Taner Akçam does without having worked in the British or the French archives, that “Great Britain did not take these proposals seriously and soon abandoned the idea of a landing in or near İskenderun.”

Taner Akçam also conveniently avoids any description of the war crimes committed by the Armenian volunteers of the Russian army and by the Armenian insurgents.⁶⁸ This is not only a striking example of double standards, but also a serious problem in the presentation of the framework: after the massacre of innocent Turks and Kurds, their friends and relatives did not need any instruction from the government to commit violent and bloody reprisals against equally innocent Armenians.⁶⁹

Misrepresentation of Ottoman Government's Relocation Policy

Denying the exemption for a very significant number of Armenians, Taner Akçam contradicts himself once again, since he refers as a reliable source to a draft written in 1917 by a secretary of Talat Pasha: this draft indeed explains that between 350,000 and 400,000 Armenians have been not relocated at all, especially in the western half of Anatolia.⁷⁰ More seriously, Taner Akçam distorts one more time the record (p. 378), he alleges that “the new order was emphatically not retroactive but solely applied to ‘the Armenians who were not [already] uprooted and deported’”. The word “already”, added by Taner Akçam into brackets, has no basis at all in the text: this document is the telegram sent by Talat Pasha on August 29, to various provinces, previously quoted in this article (see Note 24).

Similarly, Taner Akçam alleges that “the distribution of aid to the [Armenian] deportees was absolutely forbidden. Humanitarian workers and the government officials who closed their eyes to these distributions were to be ‘severely punished’” (pp. 277–278). To support such a serious accusation, Mr Akçam relies on a “Communication from interior minister Talat Pasha to the Command of the Ottoman Army, dated 25 March 1916”. In fact, the words “severely punished” are not in the text written by Talat Pasha himself, but in a document (dated 28 January 1916) forwarded (with approval) by the minister of interior. Much more seriously, Akçam quotes the words “severely pun-

ished” out of context. The document dated 25 March 1916 actually speaks about “the heavy penalties given to the officials who allow the *secret distribution of money* [my emphasis] among the Armenians”. And the communication of Talat Pasha says that “the distribution of the money to the Armenians which hereafter should be carried out only by the government officials and under the supervision of the local authorities”.⁷¹ This is only the “secret distribution of money” and not the distribution of money as such that was forbidden; the in-kind assistance is not even mentioned in these documents.

More generally, Taner Akçam’s assertion about a general famine organized by the Ottoman government is radically contradicted by both American and Ottoman sources. In March 1916, William W. Peet, the treasurer of the American Board of Commissioners for Missions Abroad (ABCFM), stated that “the relief already received has worked wonders”. In June of the same year, the American missionaries’ representatives told the U.S. Congress that “the situation from the point of view of human life is not quite so black as it seemed”.⁷² Peet, who, like U.S. High Commissioner Mark L. Bristol, is never mentioned in Taner Akçam’s book, had a very positive recollection of Talat Pasha’s willing collaboration with the American missionaries.⁷³ Correspondingly, Abram Elkus, U.S. ambassador in İstanbul from 1916 to 1917, wrote that the American relief work was “carried on effectively at all of the centers under increasing friendliness on the part of the Turkish officials”, even after the severance of diplomatic relations.⁷⁴ In addition to this Western relief, Talat Pasha ordered the local civil servants to provide food to Armenians.⁷⁵ Cemal Paşa, the strong man of the CUP in the Near East, was the most efficient in this distribution of Ottoman relief and cooperated with Americans as well as with Germans,⁷⁶ but Taner Akçam avoids any description of such efforts.

To present Talat Pasha as machiavelian and to support the “double track” conspiracy theory (Talat Pasha is supposed to have sent dozens of telegrams only to mislead future historians), Taner Akçam also takes liberties with the reports and telegrams of Ernst zu Hohenlohe-Langenburg, acting German ambassador in İstanbul in 1915. Indeed, Akçam quotes a report of Hohenhole, dated 25 September 1915, regarding the difficulties of Armenians in Adana, and then writes: “for this reason, the ambassador’s report referred to Talat Pasha as a ‘liar’” (p. 380). The word “liar”, or any synonyms, any periphrasis of the same meaning, is not used in this report.⁷⁷ In a previous report (September 14), Hohenhole even denied any dishonesty from Talat Pasha.⁷⁸

Correspondingly, Taner Akçam wittingly mistranslates (p. 208) a telegram sent by the minister of interior Talat Pasha to the governor Mehmet Reşit on 12 July 1915 (my emphasis):

In Mardin the Armenian bishop and some 700 persons from among Armenian and other Christian population were taken outside the city and slaughtered like sheep *by some persons arrived from Diyarbakır*.

Actually, the document says:

Particularly, *from individuals sent from Diyarbakır recently, it has been learnt* that in Mardin, a total of seven hundred people consisting of Armenians and other Christians, also including the bishop, had been taken from their houses at nights and killed by beheading like sheep.⁷⁹

Mr Akçam’s intention is obvious: if “individuals” were “sent from Diyarbakır” to inform the ministry, it implies that Talat Pasha was involved with such misdeeds.

The core of Taner Akçam's argumentation for the "double track" is based on Henry Morgenthau's so-called Memoirs and an anecdote mentioned by Falih Rifki Atay, who was, during the First World War, a secretary of Talat Pasha. Morgenthau indeed alleges that Talat Pasha sent secret order form his house, by a private telegraphic line. Heath Lowry has demonstrated, more than 20 years before the publication of Taner Akçam's book, that this telegraph is a pure invention of Morgenthau, and a checking in the full text of Morgenthau's diary confirms that.⁸⁰ Similarly, four years before the publication of *The Young Turks' Crime against Humanity*, it has been established that Taner Akçam distorted what Falih Rifki Atay actually wrote.⁸¹

Regardless, the most devastating argument against the theory of a "double track" is the repression, by the CUP government, of the crimes committed against Armenians. That is why the sociologist Taner Akçam tries to mock the historians—such as Yusuf Halaçoğlu—who worked on this subject. In fact, Mr Akçam does not discuss at all the main documents used. He simply presents (pp. 395–398) a short list of "those who received the death penalty", as if it was a comprehensive one. It is not. Only from February to May 1916, as a result of the work of investigative commissions established at the initiative of Talat Pasha,⁸² 67 Muslims have been sentenced to death, 524 to jail, 68 to exile, hard labor or imprisonment in forts (*kalabendlik*); 227 have been acquitted and the fate of 783 indicted persons is yet unknown.⁸³ Among the 67 who were sentenced to death, 51 had been already hanged at the beginning of June.⁸⁴

Conclusion

The Young Turks' Crime against Humanity is by no means "the state of the art" on the Armenian issue, as it has been described without sufficient checking,⁸⁵ but a climax in distortion of sources, selective evidence and selective indignation. In this regard, the examples are so numerous that this review essay has no claim to completeness.⁸⁶ This reviewer does not pretend to agree on everything with Hilmar Kaiser and his views on the subject—far from that—but he joins him in this appraisal of Taner Akçam and his reception: "The celebration is there because no one is able to check the sources." However, sooner or later, Taner Akçam's disregard for the truth will be widely known in academia, and those who endorsed, explicitly or implicitly, his baseless accusations, without proceeding to any verification of the sources, will have to explain why they did so.

NOTES

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2. Salâhi R. Sonyel, "Armenian Deportations: A Reappraisal in the Light of New Documents", *Belleten*, January 1972, pp. 58–60; Bilâl N. Şimşir, *Malta Sürgünleri*, third edition, Ankara-İstanbul: Bilgi Yayınevi, 2008.
3. Arthur Beylerian, *Les Grandes puissances, l'Empire ottoman et les Arméniens dans les archives françaises (1914–1918)* [The Great Powers, the Ottoman Empire and the Armenians in the French archives (1914–1918)], Paris, 1983; Hasan Dilan, *Les Événements arméniens dans les documents diplomatiques français* [The Armenian Events in the French Diplomatic Documents]. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2005.
4. This flaw has been pointed out for *A Shameful Act* by Sean McMeekin, *The Russian Origins of the First World War*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011, p. 278, Note 75.
5. See the communiqué of Prof. Lewy's lawyers: <http://www.taldf.org/ProfessorLewysReputationRestored.html>

6. Maxime Gauin, "Remembering the Orly Attack", *Review of International Law and Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 27, September 2011, pp. 113–139. http://usak.org.tr/images_upload/files/uhp%2027_5.pdf
7. William L. Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism. 1890–1902*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960, pp. 150–160, 204–210 and 349–350.
8. Yücel Güçlü, *Armenians and the Allies in Cilicia (1914–1923)*, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2010, pp. 39–50.
9. Hasan Oktay, "On the Assassination of Van Mayor Kapamacıyan by the Tashnak Committee", *Review of Armenian Studies*, No. 1, 2002, pp. 79–89.
10. Maxime Gauin, "How to Create a Problem of Refugees: the Evacuation of Cilicia by France and the Flow of Armenian Civilians (1921–1922)", *Review of Armenian Studies*, No. 25, 2012, pp. 65–101.
11. Yücel Güçlü, *The Holocaust and the Armenian Case in Comparative Perspective*, Lanham–Boulder–New York–Toronto–Plymouth: University Press of America, 2012, pp. 79–87.
12. Let's compare *The Young Turks Crime against Humanity*, pp. 63–96, with Erman Şahin, "Review Essay: the Armenian Question", *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XVII, No. 1, Spring, 2010, pp. 144–146. Also see İlker Alp, *Bulgarian Atrocities*, Nicosia: K. Rüstem & Brothers, 1988; and Justin McCarthy, *Death and Exile. The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821–1922*, Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1995, pp. 135–177.
13. Christopher Walker and Gwynne Dyer, "Correspondence", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. IX, No. 3, 1973, pp. 376–379.
14. Donald Bloxham, "Donald Bloxham Replies", *History Today*, Vol. 55, No. 7, July 2005, p. 68.
15. Stanford Jay Shaw, *From Empire to Republic: The Turkish War of National Liberation, 1918–1923. A Documentary Study*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2000, Vol. I, pp. 315–317.
16. For an analysis of this article of Mr Dadrian, see Guenter Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey*, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005, pp. 49–50.
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- “Review Essay: The Armenian Question”, *op. cit.*, pp. 153–154; Maxime Gauin, “Scholarly Ethics vs. Politicized History”, *The Journal of Turkish Weekly*, 13 June 2011, <http://www.turkishweekly.net/columnist/3465/scholarly-ethic-vs-politicized-history.html>
27. Özdemir and Sarıay, eds., *Turkish-Armenian Conflict*, *op. cit.*, pp. 55–56; pp. 58–59 for the English translation.
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 34. On this point: Edward J. Erickson, “Armenian Massacres: New Records Undercut Old Blame”, *The Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 3, Summer, 2006, pp. 67–75.
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 37. Rapport du lieutenant-colonel Mougin, 1^{er} avril 1920, Service historique de la défense (SHD), Vincennes, 7 N 3210, dossier 2, sous-dossier 2. Mougin was some months later promoted to colonel then, in 1922, appointed as representative in Ankara. In 1924, just before going back to Ankara, he became a brigadier general (*général de brigade*).
 38. Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres*, *op. cit.*, p. 79.
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 82. Minutes of the Ministers' Council, 29 September 1915, Özdemir and Sarıay eds., *Turkish–Armenian Conflict*, *op. cit.*, p. 294.
 83. Yusuf Halaçoğlu, *The Story of 1915—What Happened to the Ottoman Armenians*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2008, pp. 82–87; Yusuf Sarıay, “The Relocation (*Tehcir*) of Armenians and the Trials of 1915–1916”, *Middle East Critique*, Vol. 3, No. 20, Fall 2011, pp. 299–315.
 84. “Turks Avenge Armenians—Fifty-one Muslim Soldiers are Shot for Mistreating Christians”, *The Washington Post*, 4 June 1916, p. A2.
 85. Michael A. Reynolds, “Missing Context”, *Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol. 4, No. 15, 2013, p. 478.
 86. Other examples could be provided by comparing Chapter 4 of Taner Akçam's *The Young Turks* (on the Ottoman Greeks) with a real scholarly work on the same subject by Stéphane Yerasimos, « *La question du Pont-Euxin (1912–1923)* » [The Pontus Issue (1912–1923)], *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* [World Wars and Contemporary Conflicts], No. 153, January, 1989, pp. 9–34.