

FACING HISTORY AND OURSELVES

*Crimes Against Humanity and Civilization*  
**THE GENOCIDE OF THE ARMENIANS**





*“Must the Armenians be once more disillusioned?  
The future of this small nation must not be relegated to obscurity  
behind the selfish schemes and plans of the great states.”*

*—Armin Wegner, an eyewitness to the Armenian Genocide*

## Chapter 6

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# “WHO REMEMBERS THE ARMENIANS?”

*Judgment, Memory, and Legacies*

THIS CHAPTER EXAMINES THE WAYS VARIOUS INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS RESPONDED IN THE WAKE OF THE Armenian Genocide. During the war, the Allies promised to hold Turkish leaders responsible for their crimes. After the war, however, international efforts to prosecute perpetrators of the genocide were aborted. In their place were a series of court martials within Turkey. By the time the prosecutions began many of the top leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress had already fled. Although the post-war trials did not fulfill the promise of bringing the perpetrators of the genocide to justice, the evidence collected offers some of the most important documentation of the Armenian Genocide.

A few months before the end of the World War I, at a time when a civil war was raging in Russia, Armenian leaders in Russian Armenia formed their own Republic. President Woodrow Wilson's support for the concept of national self-determination—the idea that groups should rule themselves in their own nation—encouraged the Armenians, and many other ethnic and national groups to seek support to create their own state. The Armenians would need support to help rebuild after the genocide. Although the Allies made promises, they did little to protect the emerging Armenian Republic. Empowered by the lack of commitment a Turkish nationalist named Mustafa Kemal led troops into the Republic of Armenia. Desperate to save their remaining land, the leaders of the fledgling Armenian Republic were forced to

turn to Communist Russia for help, forgoing national independence. Until the break up of the Soviet Union in 1991, Armenia existed as much in memory and diaspora as it did in any one place on the map.

Living scattered across the globe Armenians have struggled to hold on to their identity. Part of that struggle is an effort for acknowledgement of the genocide. An international campaign of genocide denial, often sponsored by the Turkish government, targeting politicians, academics, and diplomats, has attempted to turn what was a known fact into something unrecognizable to the witnesses and survivors of the genocide.

Despite those efforts, the history of the Armenian Genocide continues to influence international law and human rights policy. Raphael Lemkin, a Polish Jew, saw the connection between the crimes committed against the Armenians and the rise of the Nazis in Germany. Lemkin was profoundly frustrated by the failure of the international community to hold leaders of the Young Turk movement accountable after the war. He worked tirelessly to have "crimes against humanity" recognized as a violation of international law. Indeed it was Lemkin who coined the term "genocide"—a concept that stands as one of the foundations of the international movement for human rights. Although law and language have not been able to prevent genocide on their own, they have set a legal and moral standard making the protection of citizens a concern of not just one country, but the entire world.

Project SAVE Armenian Photograph Archives, Inc., Courtesy of Rev. Variton Hartunian



*Abraham and Shushan Hartunian and their family, Genocide survivors from Marash, Cilician Armenia, Ottoman Empire, pose in front of the camera on board the King Alexander, a Greek ship out of Athens, before stepping into a new life on a New York City pier, November 1, 1922.*

## Reading 1 — A MANDATE FOR ARMENIA?

By November 1917 a revolution in Russia brought down the czar and replaced the monarchy with a Bolshevik state. At the same time refugees from the genocide poured across the border from Turkey into Russia. On May 28, 1918, in what had been Russian Armenia, surviving Armenians organized an independent republic. At the same time, Armenians as well as other peoples and nations—Arabs, Kurds, Bulgarians, Greeks, Serbs, and Zionist Jews—claimed parts of the Ottoman Empire. Historian Richard Hovannisian describes the optimism that many Armenians felt as the war came to an end.

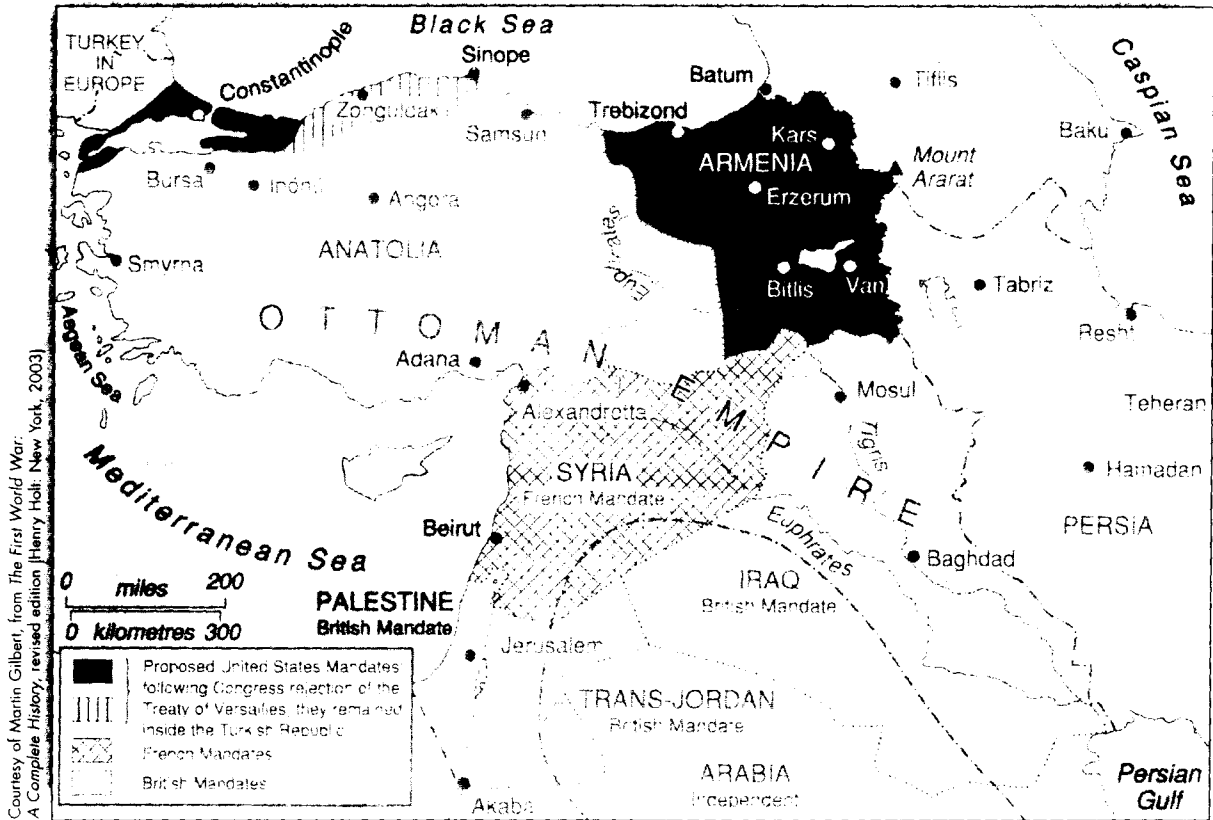


**Armenian deportees returning home to Marash from exile. Marash, Cilician Armenia, Ottoman Empire, 1919. Photo by E. Stanley Kerr, medical missionary.**

Project SAVE Armenian Photograph Archives, Inc.,  
Courtesy of Varian Hartunian

*The surrender of the Ottoman Empire and the flight of the Young Turk leaders in October 1918 evoked thanksgiving and hope among the Armenian survivors. The prospect of compatriots returning to the homeland from all over the world, some refugees and survivors of the genocide, and others longtime exiles from the days of Abdul-Hamid, excited imaginations. Every Allied power was pledged to a separate autonomous or independent existence for the Armenians in their historic lands. A small republic had already taken form in the Caucasus and now gradually expanded as the Turkish armies withdrew from the area. There were, of course, major obstacles to its incorporation of Turkish Armenia because the population had been massacred or driven out and the Turkish army still controlled the region. In drawing up the Mudros Armistice, British negotiators had required Turkish evacuation of the Caucasus but gave up their initial intent to demand also the clearance of Turkish Armenia, although they reserved for the Allies the right to occupy any or all of the region in case of disorder, an option they never exercised. Nonetheless, to the Armenians and their sympathizers, it seemed that the crucifixion of the nation would be followed by a veritable resurrection.<sup>121</sup>*

Allied leaders began to map out the future of the region at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. Attempting to organize the peace and mediate further conflict was the newly formed League of Nations. Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations provided mandates or protectorates, through which larger countries promised to support the developing states.



Courtesy of Martin Gilbert, from *The First World War: A Complete History*, revised edition (Henry Holt: New York, 2003)

## THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE MANDATES

*A map depicting mandates that were to be created from former Ottoman Territory after the end of World War I.*

The article read in part:

*Certain communities formerly belonging to the Turkish Empire have reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognized subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone. The wishes of these communities must be a principal consideration in the selection of the Mandatory.*

In July 1919, President Wilson sent Major General James Harbord to investigate the status of Armenians living in the emerging Armenian Republic and to consider whether the United States should accept an mandate over the territory. Both the report and the League of Nations itself set off a debate about the role of the United States in foreign affairs. In his report Harbord listed reasons for and against taking on a mandate for Armenia. Included here are excerpts from his report:

REASONS FOR	REASONS AGAINST
As one of the chief contributors to the formation of the League of Nations, the United States is morally bound to accept the obligations and responsibilities of a mandatory power.	The United States has prior and nearer foreign obligations, and ample responsibilities with domestic problems growing out of the war.
The Near East presents the greatest humanitarian opportunity of the age—a duty for which the United States is better fitted than any other—as witness Cuba, Puerto Rico, Philippines, Hawaii, Panama, and our altruistic policy of developing peoples rather than material resources alone.	Humanitarianism should begin at home. There is a sufficient number of difficult situations which call for our actions within the well-recognized spheres of American influence.
America is practically the unanimous choice and fervent hope of all the peoples involved.	The United States has in no way contributed to and is not responsible for the conditions, political, social, or economic, that prevail in this region. It will be entirely consistent to decline the invitation.
America is already spending millions to save starving people in Turkey and Transcaucasia and could do this with much more efficiency if in control. Whoever becomes a mandatory for these regions we shall be still expected to finance their relief, and will probably eventually furnish the capital for material development.	American philanthropy and charity are world wide. Such policy would commit us to a policy of meddling or draw upon our philanthropy to the point of exhaustion.
America is the only hope of the Armenians. They consider but one other nation, Great Britain...For a mandatory America is not only the first choice of all the peoples of the Near East but of each of the great powers, after itself. American power is adequate; its record is clean; its motives above suspicion.	Other powers, particularly Great Britain, and Russia, have shown continued interest in the welfare of Armenia...The United States is not capable of sustaining a continuity of foreign policy. One Congress cannot bind another. Even treaties can be nullified by cutting off appropriations.
The mandatory would be self-supporting after... five years. The building of railroads would offer opportunities to our capital. There would be great trade advantages.	Our country would be put to great expense, involving probably an increase of the Army and Navy... It is questionable if railroads could for many years pay interest on investments in their very difficult construction. The effort and money spent would get us more trade in nearer lands than we could hope for in Russia and Rumania.
It would definitely stop further massacres of Armenians and other Christians, give justice to the Turks, Kurds, Greeks, and other peoples.	Peace and justice would be equally assured under any other of the great powers.

*Continued on next page*

REASONS FOR	REASONS AGAINST
America has strong sentimental interests in the region—our missions and colleges.	These institutions have been respected even by the Turks throughout the war and the massacres: and sympathy and respect would be shown by any other mandatory.
If the United States does not take responsibility in this region, it is likely that international jealousies will result in a continuance of the unspeakable misrule of the Turk.	The peace conference has definitely informed the Turkish government that it may expect to go under a mandate. It is not conceivable that the League of Nations would permit further uncontrolled rule by that thoroughly discredited government.
“And the Lord said unto Cain, ‘Where is Abel, thy brother?’ And he said, ‘I know not; am I my brother’s keeper?’” Better millions for a mandate than billions for future wars.	The first duty of America is to its own people and its nearer neighbors. <sup>122</sup>

The last point, which Harbord presented without an opposing view read:

*Here is a man’s job that the world says can be better done by America than by any other. America can afford the money; she has the men; no duty to her own people would suffer; her traditional policy of isolation did not keep her from successful participation in the Great War. Shall it be said that our country lacks the courage to take up new and difficult duties?*

*Without visiting the Near East it is not possible for an American to realize even faintly the respect, faith, and affection with which our country is regarded throughout that region. Whether it is the world-wide reputation which we enjoy for fair dealing, a tribute perhaps to the crusading spirit which carried us into the Great War, not untinged with hope that the same spirit may urge us into the solution of great problems growing out of that conflict, or whether due to unselfish and impartial missionary and educational influence exerted for a century, it is the one faith which is held alike by Christian and [Muslim], by Jew and Gentile, by prince and peasant in the Near East. It is very gratifying to the pride of Americans far from home. But it brings with it the heavy responsibility of deciding great questions with a seriousness worthy of such faith. Burdens that might be assumed on the appeal of such sentiment would have to be carried for not less than a generation under circumstances so trying that we might easily forfeit the faith of the world. If we refuse to assume it, for no matter what reasons satisfactory to ourselves, we shall be considered by many millions of people as having left unfinished the task for which we entered the war, and as having betrayed their hopes.<sup>123</sup>*

After consideration, the United States did not take on a mandate for Armenia.