

NIKOLAY HOVHANNISYAN
Doctor of History, Professor,
Director of the Institute of Oriental Studies, NAS RA

THIRD PARTY INVOLVEMENT IN PREVENTION AND PERPETRATION: THE ARMENIAN CASE

The Genocide of Armenians in 1915, the Holocaust of Jews in World War II, genocides and attempts of genocides that followed these at different times in several countries evidence that genocide does not happen in a vacuum, isolated from any internal and external reality. It is committed within a complex political system, in which exceptional is the role of a third party.

Any genocide is first of all perceived as a process, which involves just two sides - the executioner and the victim. This, however, is only at the first glance. In reality, a third party is always there. It is important to identify the role of said third party, since it may help us make complete the picture of the complex phenomenon of genocide, of its causes and mechanisms of commitment.

A third party is present at all three phases of genocide - preparation, perpetration of genocide proper. and the post-genocidal phase. At all these phases, the third party may perform three functions, such as: preventing, perpetrating, and neutral, that of an outside observer. This latter one - the role of an outside observer - is equally dangerous, since indifference and neutral stand may willy-nilly encourage the executioner to perpetrate one's criminal intentions.

All said is true for the Armenian Genocide of 1915 in the Ottoman Empire, which having been defined by genocidology as a genocidal state, while the Armenian Genocide, or Armenocide - as the most genocidal genocide.

The issue of the third party is viewed at three levels: local, intergovernmental and international.

First - the local level.

In the case of the Armenian Genocide one party is the executioner - the Ottoman state, its sultan and the Young Turks' government, the other party is the victims - Armenians, the indigenous people living in their native land. The Turkish new-comers-conquerors executed the physical extermination of Armenians in the latter's own country - in Western Armenia, in its all six vilayets - in the provinces of Erzurum, Bitlis, Kharberd, Svaz, Van and Diarbekir, in all the Armenian inhabited areas in the Ottoman Empire, including the capital city of Istanbul.

Under the circumstances, in the Ottoman Empire there was no third party, able to prevent the Genocide of Armenians, or at least to make such attempt. This is explained by the specificity of the Ottoman society, designated today a genocidal society.

This has its own explanation. The Ottoman Empire was a dictatorial, despotic, military-feudal Empire, anchored on the policy of torture, violation of human rights and massacres of all the non-Turkish peoples, looked upon as rayyas: Assyrians, Arabs, Bulgarians, Armenians, Greeks, Macedonians, Serbs and others, which recurrent carnages - a common occurrence in the Ottoman Empire's internal political life -made the Turkish people not only indifferent, but accustomed to them. Inside the Ottoman Empire a stratum of society was formed, specialized in killing of the non-Turkish peoples, in slaughtering, robbing and expropriating their property. It became their profession, which ensured their material prosperity and even a definite position in the society.

Yet, given that there was no third party in the Ottoman Empire to prevent the Genocide of Armenians, there was a third party in the person of Kurds and Circassians to perform the perpetrating functions. These, however, were not just perpetrators, but the most active partakers of the Armenian Genocide. Thus, to accomplish the Genocide of Armenians, a triangle was formed of Kurds, Circassians and Turks, headed by the latter.

The Armenian Genocide, in terms of the area involved, may be divided into two phases. The first phase took in the terrain of Asia Minor, that is, Western Armenia and Anatolia. The second phase was deportation. It occurred beyond the geographic borders of Asia Minor proper, in the Arab territories of the Ottoman Empire. In accordance with the Young Turks' plans on the Armenian Genocide, the Armenians were to be exterminated through forcible eviction of Armenians to the Arab deserts. The felonious leaders of the Young Turks were hoping that the defenseless Armenian women, children, the sick and the old would be gulped down by the red-hot sands of the Arab desert, and, as Christians, killed by Arab Moslems. They were hoping to employ the factor of solidarity of the Moslem religion. It was a crucial mistake though. In the Arab territories - in Syria, Iraq, and, further, in Lebanon, Palestine and Egypt, the Arab people, their religious and national leaders did not only refuse to become instruments in the hands of the Young Turks and act as a third party in perpetration of the Armenian Genocide. Vice versa, they acted as a party, preventing the Genocide. Fortunately, lots of facts survived, which prove the honest and humane attitude of Arabs towards Armenian refugees, passing through Deyr az-Zor, Aleppo, Mesqene, Mosul, Baquba, Nahr al-Umar, Arab settlements, villages and towns. Many of the local governors withstood the Young Turk executioners' - Talat's and Enver's orders not to spare a single Armenian, even a newborn, and to fulfill to the end the decisions of Jamiyat, the central committee of the Young Turk «Union and Progress» Party, and to exterminate Armenians. For that very reason, for their dignified human stand, many of Arab local governors were not only dismissed from their positions, but paid their lives: they were killed by Turk soldiers.

That Arabs took the preventing side in the Armenian Genocide, is clear from the position taken by Hussein ibn Ali al-Hashemee, a religious leader of greatest authority of the time in the Muslem world, governor of Hijaz and sheriff of Mekka. With his fetwa and two letters, addressed to the spiritual leaders of the Muslem world, he put in the pillory the entire leadership of the Ottoman Empire, noting that they disgraced themselves by the adopted internal policy, by the felonious actions during World War I towards the non-Turkish peoples, including Arabs and Armenians, and severed their relationships with Islam, sacred Koran and the orthodox Sunna.

Hussein ibn Ali ordered his son Feisal and other leaders of the Arab rebellion of 1916 against the Ottoman Empire to help the Armenians in every way possible, "Protect them just as you protect your own selves, your children and your property, because they are the zimmi of the Muslems". The concept of zimmi, or "ahl al-zima" is given a specific place in Islam. Zimmis, as "people of the book" ("ahl al-qitab"), have their own sacred books or in Arabic-Kitab and were under the Muslem patronage. Christians, Armenians among them, Jews and Zoroastrians were regarded by Islam as "people of the book", because they have their own sacred books as Bible, Tora and Avesta accordingly. They were allowed to preserve and practice their own religion; guaranteed were their lives, freedom and inviolability of property. Exactly this was in Hussein ibn Ali's mind when he said the Armenians are the zimmi of the Muslems, and condemned the Ottoman government for slaughtering them and, by doing this, violating one of the fundamental principles of Islam.

Arabs, as a third party managed to prevent the Genocide of Armenians in their lands, thus from the claws of death saved were hundreds of thousands of Armenian refugees. They laid the foundation for the present-day Armenian Diaspora. The grateful Armenian people highly appreciates the honest and humane attitude of the Arab people and will never forget it.

Second - the intergovernmental level.

This model had had huge prospects and potentials at the preparatory phase of the Genocide. The Great European Powers, or the "European Concert", comprising England, France, Germany, Russia and Austria-Hungary, failed to rise to the occasion and to fulfill their historical mission - to prevent the Armenian Genocide. During the Armenian massacres in 1894-1896 and in 1909, which were the overture for the Armenian Genocide, they contented themselves with addressing notes to the Sublime Porte, and extending their compassion to Armenians. They did not endeavor to compel the Ottoman leadership to carry out their long promised reforms. The bloodthirsty sultan Abdul Hamid II and the Young Turk leaders knew very well that the European powers would never go beyond displaying their sympathy for the Armenians, would never take any definitive steps, and masterly took advantage of this passivity in order to realize their anti-Armenian plans.

When after the beginning of World War I the "European Concert" broke down and the European Powers appeared in opposite and hostile military-political blocks, the preventing function of these states dropped to the minimum. England, France and Russia, in war against the German-Austrian-Turkish block, in reality could no longer become a party, that would prevent the Genocide. Nonetheless, they did make an attempt to somehow prevent the Genocide. It goes about the joint English-French-Russian statement, made public on the same day of May 13th, 1915, in London, Paris and Petersburg, in which it said that slaughters of Armenians were committed all through Armenia by Turks and Kurds, that Armenian peaceful people were arrested, that Armenian villages were ruined and ravaged. «Taking into account these new crimes, committed in Turkey against humanity and civilization, - the statement read, - the allied governments of Russia, France and England by this publicly notify the Sublime Porte, that they place the responsibility for all these crimes on all the members of the Turkish government, as well as on those local representatives of it, who are accomplices in such slaughters." This extremely important document was a desperate and belated attempt to prevent the furtherance of the Armenian Genocide, which, however, did not work. This triple statement is of great historical significance in that the entire government of the state, which committed genocide, for the first time ever was claimed liable for the ethnic cleansing and slaughters, and that the carnages of Armenians were designated a crime against humanity and civilization, perpetrated by the Turkish government.

In the time of the Genocide there was only one state able to act as a preventing side. It was Kaiser Germany, the key ally of the Ottoman Empire, upon which Turkey was dependent militarily, economically and politically. Such role might have been played by Austria-Hungary in alliance with Germany. Germany, however, made another choice. Kaiser Germany did not make any attempts to prevent the Genocide of Armenians, to become a preventing side; instead, proceeding from its own interests, it became a perpetrating side. By doing this, Kaiser Wilhelm II, the German government and the supreme headquarter of the German army put their signature under the crime, perpetrated against Armenians. Germany along with Austria-Hungary, along with Turkey each have their own share of guilt in the cause of the Armenian Genocide. Therefore, in our opinion, it would be quite logical if they recognize the undeniable reality of perpetration of the Armenian Genocide, rather than attempt to deny it, and, as successors of once ally countries, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan and German Chancellor Schroeder, hand in hand, come to sacred Ejmiatzin, kneel down and ask the Armenian people for forgiveness.

Third - the international level.

This model is directly related with the existence and potential of the international mechanisms for prevention of genocide, thereby its role is of topmost importance. The specificity of it is in that it is evenly applicable for all the three phases. Unfortunately, in case of the Armenian Genocide, such an international mechanism did not exist. Hence, it proves more feasible to apply this model to the third phase, which we have designated post-genocidal. At first it appeared as an initiative by individual states. On December 29, 1917, the government of the Soviet Russia adopted the Decree on "Turkish Armenia", in which it said, that "the

government of Russia... supports the right of self-determination of Armenians up to complete independence in 'Turkish Armenia', occupied by Russia". It, however, did not offer any concrete ways to put the Decree into effect, and it remained on paper. Identical was the fate of the draft presented by Woodrow Wilson, then President of the USA, and the Treaty, signed in Sevres on August 10, 1920, by which a part of the Western Armenian territory was to be placed at the disposal of Armenians and united to the independent Republic of Armenia, and the return of the Armenian refugees was to be ensured. By the Treaty of Sevres, Turkey recognized the independence of Armenia within the boundaries, proposed by Woodrow Wilson and certified by the Treaty of Sevres. Nevertheless, this Treaty was not realized either. The League of Nations, the first comprehensive international organization, failed to fulfill its mission like in many other cases. It did not even attempt to raise the issue of condemnation of the Armenian Genocide and call to account the organizers. Hence, even post-factum it did not act as a preventive side of the Genocide.

Up until now, the Armenian Genocide has not been condemned, neither by UN. We share the viewpoint of those scholars, who believe that "the Armenian Genocide has not had its Numberg" - as opposed to the Holocaust.

Commemoration of the 90th year of the Armenian Genocide is not an end in itself. We are convinced that lessons must be learned from this Genocide, and those which followed. It is especially important in our days, when, on the one hand, the number of genocides or attempts of genocides increases, and on the other - there are more sophisticated, based on the declared by the UN humanitarian principles, international instruments, when there is a comprehensive theory on genocide such as genocidology, and quite a different mentality, which is - at least formally - based on the European values.

Hence, we are suggesting that, firstly, under the auspices of the UN, international armed forces be created only and solely for prevention of genocide - these should not be mistaken for the so-called peace-keeping forces of UN; secondly, a most serious and severe political, economic and military sanctions be prepared and used against the country perpetrating genocide, up to the temporary occupation of that country by the UN anti-genocidal forces and termination of its membership in the UN; thirdly, not only the responsible authorities of the country perpetrating genocide, but the UN Secretary-General, leaders of all five permanent, and at the time non-permanent Member States of the Security Council of UN, be called to certain responsibility for failure in preventing the genocide; fourthly, the appropriate amendments in the UN Charter be made.

Yet, in all cases, it is always more efficient to focus on the prevention of genocide, because afterwards it is always late, because the cost of being late is lives of millions.

The Armenian Genocide is the proof of it.