

UK MEDIA COVERAGE OF ARMENIAN MASSACRES II & III

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Katia M. Peltekian

Part 2: Part 1: Official Response

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- Trail of Death in Asia Minor: Torture of Armenian Women
- Children as Targets: Armenians Drowned by the Hundred
- Another Armenian Massacre: Thousands of Workmen Butchered
- An Armenian Exodus
- The Sufferings of Armenia: Organized Turkish Outrages

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... In reply to Mr. A. Williams, Lord Cecil said, "The Government has lately received information from a reliable source which gives much detailed evidence that systematic cruelty and outrages have been inflicted on masses of Armenians deported from their homes. The evidence goes to show that the Turkish officials have recourse to various methods in order to exterminate the Armenians by famine; by deliberate exposure to infectious disease, forced marches of old men, women and children, and lastly, by massacres of labourers on charges of insubordination."

The Headlines in the British Press from 1917 did not change much. Fewer articles on Armenia & Armenians were published in the newspaper, perhaps due to the difficulties that correspondents had reaching the war zones, but the headlines remained almost identical to the previous years:

- The Murder of a Race: How Armenians Were Exterminated
- 20,000 Homeless Armenian Orphans
- The Armenian Tragedy: Wholesale Massacres
- The Armenian Refugees: Pitiably Conditions

And although there was not much reaction in official quarters, the British appeals for Armenian orphans and refugees grew.

In 1918 the British media continued to print articles and editorials about the ongoing massacres committed against the Armenians and Christians by the Turks. Recurring headlines depicted the following:

- All Males Put to the Sword
- The Doom of Armenia: Will the World Permit it?
- The Armenian Horrors

In October of 1918, Lord Robert Cecil from the British Foreign Office released a statement in which he assured that the Armenians would be liberated from the Turks. He declared:

The services of the Armenians to the common cause have assuredly not been forgotten, and I venture to mention four points which the Armenians may, I think, regard as the charter of their right to liberation at the hand of the Allies.

1. In the autumn of 1914 the Turks sent emissaries to the National Congress of the Ottoman Armenians, then sitting at Erzerum, and made them offers of autonomy if they would actively assist Turkey in the war. The Armenians replied that they would do their duty, individually, as Ottoman subjects, but that as a nation they could not work for the cause of Turkey and her allies.

2. On account, in part, of this courageous refusal, the Ottoman Armenians were systematically murdered by the Turkish Government in 1915. Two-thirds of the population were exterminated by the most cold-blooded and fiendish methods - more than 700,000 people, men, women, and children alike.

3. From the beginning of the war, that half of the Armenian nation which was under the sovereignty of Russia organised volunteer forces, and under their heroic leader, Andranik, bore the brunt of some of the heaviest fighting in the Caucasian campaigns.

4. After the breakdown of the Russian army at the end of last year these Armenian forces took over the Caucasian front, and for five months delayed the advance of the Turks, thus rendering an important service to the British army in Mesopotamia. These operations in the region of Alexandropol and Erivan were, of course, unconnected with those at Baku.

I may add that Armenian soldiers are still fighting in the ranks of the Allied forces in Syria.

They are to be found serving alike in the British, French, and American armies, and they have borne their part in General Allenby's great victory in Palestine. He concluded saying: "Need I say after this that the policy of the Allies towards Armenia remains unaltered? ... I am quite ready to reaffirm our determination that wrongs such as Armenia has suffered shall be brought to an end, and their recurrence made impossible."

At the end of October 1918, however, the British press published concerns regarding some reports emerging in both Paris & London that there was an intention to conclude an arrangement with the Turks on the basis of leaving them in possession of Armenia, and even of acknowledging Turkish authority in the regions from which Turkey had been expelled. The British media called this "betrayal", and as one *The Guardian* correspondent wrote, ***"It may seem incredible that we should be guilty of this wicked abandonment of the Eastern Christians, of whom the Turks have massacred three-quarters of a million, but the War Office Turcophiles are strong, and it is unfortunately impossible to treat these reports as being wholly beyond belief."***

Lord Cecil, from the Foreign office, denied these rumors, as did the Secretary for Foreign Affairs Lord Balfour, who declared,

We have always regarded the freeing of the Armenians from Turkish misrule as an important part of our Middle Eastern policy, and we confidently look forward to its accomplishments. (Cheers.)

With the end of the Great War came the need to help Armenia (the nation), the survivors, the refugees and what the British press called "the Armenian Remnant". At a November 1918 meeting in the House of Commons dedicated to the Armenians situation,

Mr. Aneurin Williams called attention to the condition of the races that had hitherto been subject to Turkish misrule, and in particular of the Armenians. He said that since the beginning of the war 800,000 Armenian men, women, and children had been massacred. There were large numbers of refugees and deportees in concentration camps in the north of Syria and the higher parts of the Euphrates. He asked what was going to be done to save them from famine and death... He urged the Government to organize measures for saving the people from starvation and to promise that steps would be taken later to enable those who had been compelled to leave their country to return safely to the land of their forefathers.

Another Member of Parliament ***Mr. J. Bliss, described many of the tortures which the Armenians had been subjected to, the confiscations, personal outrages, deportations, and murders of which they had been victims.***

Moreover, MP ***Sir G. Greenwood urged that it should be a main principle of the British foreign policy that ... Turkish rule in Armenia must be forever gone, and the Armenian State placed under the protection of the Great Powers, with one Power as mandatory of all the Powers, at least for a term of years.***

After a number of members of parliament also made similar statements, the Government's reply came from Lord Robert Cecil, the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs:

... I was asked what measures have been completed or were about to be taken for the immediate protection of the Armenian people, apart from its future government. ... In the first place, provision has been made for the repatriation of the Armenians at present imprisoned or interned by the Turks, and in that matter the Armenians have been singled out from all the other races, and have been put upon the same terms as our own prisoners of war.

Lord Cecil also ***shared to the full the view that the enemy in this matter was the Turkish Government. He believed it to be true that every one of the atrocities in Armenia had not been the result of casual ferocity of isolated Turkish brigands, or even of the misdeeds of local governments; they had been ordered from Constantinople, so far as he knew, in every case. That was the central fact to be recognized in dealing with the situation. It was not a religious question. The Arabs had always protected the Armenians, and when the British Army came to Aleppo they found several bodies of Armenians living there under the protection of the Arabs.***

And despite several warnings from Britain and the Allies – the victors in the War - who constantly reminded the Turks – the losers in the War – of the clauses of the armistice to the Turks, the Turks went about with their business as usual. Headlines in the British Press in 1919 again drew the British public's attention to massacres and outrages committed against the Armenians and other Christians.

- Turkish Massacres of Armenians: Violation of the Armistice
- Tortured Armenians: Turkish Atrocities Continued
- Turks Harassing Christians: Smyrna District Terrorized
- Slaughter of Armenians
- Armenian Massacre: Hundreds of Women & Children Killed (in Karabakh by Azerbaijani forces)
- Armenians in Peril

As the massacres continued, the British Government's Press Bureau released yet another statement saying:

Evidence has been received that the Turkish army, in withdrawing from the invaded territories in the Caucasus, has continued, in spite of the terms of the armistice, to commit the grossest outrages on the Armenian population; in fact, individual Turks have openly acknowledged that the intention is to deal a final blow at the Armenians and to consummate the Turkish policy of exterminating the unfortunate race.

During the Summer of 1919, alarming reports sent by agents of the Allied governments in Armenia alerted the Peace Conference delegates that the withdrawal of the British troops from TransCaucasia would be the signal for a terrible outbreak of massacres and violence, of which the Armenians would again be the victim; however, the British government was adamant to start

withdrawing on June 15. That withdrawal was postponed for two whole months to give other governments interested in the welfare of Armenia to step in and take charge. This resulted in a few Parliamentary discussions during which friends of Armenia MPs Aneurin Williams, T.P. O'Connor and Lord Cecil questioned the Government about the measures it would take to ensure the safety of Armenians and prevent new massacres from taking place. The only answer given was that measures were being discussed at the Peace Conference.

But despite many pleas in and out of the official circles regarding the terrible consequences that could occur in Armenia, Britain began to gradually withdraw its army as the British press headlines read "**Armenia Abandoned**". Lord Robert Cecil (Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs) had this to say during one debate in August 1919 in the House of Commons.

With regard to Armenia, we would much like to avoid the risk of possible atrocities, but we had great responsibilities all over the world, and our first responsibility was to our own people. There was a very definite limit to what the country could do. The Government would gladly do everything in their power to avoid misfortune in Armenia, and there was reason to hope, from the representations which had been made to the Government by a commission sent to Armenia, that the atrocities would not take place again. The withdrawal of the troops must continue. The process of withdrawal would be slow; it would continue well into October. If any sign of help were coming from America we should only too gladly welcome it. This was really an American problem rather than British. They were in a better position to deal with it. They had interests as great as ours. If the President of the United States were officially to say to us: "We wish you to hold the fort a little until we can make arrangements," we should not only do our best, but we could hold out no hope of keeping troops longer in that part of the country. We had our own missions both at Baku and Batum.

British Response to Armenian Massacres of 1914-'23

Part 3: Part 1: Official Response

With the arrival of 1920 came more massacres of Armenians, this time at the hands of Mustapha Kemal Pasha (later known as Ataturk) and his Nationalist troops. The British Press's headlines sounded like history repeating itself:

- Fresh Armenian Massacres: 1,500 victims of the Turk
- Slaughter of the Armenians: 7,000 Victims of the Turk
- Armenian Call to the Allies: Massacred and Helpless

These reports did not go unnoticed in the official circles, and as the Peace Conference continued to discuss the future of Turkey and whether Constantinople would be given back to Turkey, members

of the Parliament Aneurin Williams and T.P. O'Connor again came to the defense of the Armenians with the following discussion.

Mr. A. Williams asked whether he had received news of the massacre of about 1,500 Armenians by Nationalist bands near Marash at the end of January, ... and whether he was aware that Europeans of Constantinople and Asia Minor... were calling out for protection against those continued outrages.

Sir Hamar Greenwood said: - The answer to question is, I regret to say, that similar information has been received from a private source by his Majesty's High Commissioner at Constantinople...

Mr. T. P. O'Connor - May I ask whether these massacres will not confirm the Government in their frequently announced policy that none of the Christian subjects of Turkey, like the Armenians, shall any longer, under the new arrangements with Turkey, be subjected to the possibility of massacre, as in the past.

SIR H. Greenwood - I wish it were possible for me to give an answer to the question satisfactorily both to the hon. member and to myself.

Mr. A. Williams - Is it not a fact that the Armenians went back to these districts under the encouragement of the British authorities?

SIR H. Greenwood - I must have notice of that question.

Debates in the House of Commons took place frequently during the first months of 1920, but the interest of the British Government seemed to diminish. Whenever similar questions were raised by members of the Parliament, the government either chose not to answer or completely avoided the issue saying that those territories were not under British responsibility but rather under the French jurisdiction. However, the British newspapers did not remain silent. In several editorials, the Government was called upon to do the honorable duty towards the Armenians. The Editor of *The Times* (February 18, 1920) described the situation well.

While the Supreme Council in London is preparing to deal indulgently with the Turkish Government, large forces of Turks and Kurds have begun a wholesale massacre of the remnants of the Armenian people in the province of Cilicia, in Asia Minor. These forces are under the control of the recalcitrant general, Mustapha Kemal Pasha, who is the head of the "Nationalist" movement in Anatolia... Mustapha Kemal appears to have adopted the policy of Enver and Talaat, who sought to "kill the Armenian question by "killing the Armenian nation."... Over fifty per cent. of the two million Armenians in Asia Minor are believed to have been exterminated as a consequence of the terrible "deportations" of 1915. The victims who have already been butchered in the last week or two by Mustapha Kemal 's men are said to number seven thousand. At Zeitun (the Armenian town which always maintained semi-independence until five years ago), at Furnus, and at other places the Armenians were not able to offer any effective resistance. At Hajin, a lonely

town set in the midst of high mountains, the Armenian inhabitants and a party of Frenchmen were, by last report, holding out... The Editorial continued describing the dire situation of the Armenians in Cilicia.

Another editorial in *The Times* warned that

The one thing the public will not tolerate is the abandonment of the Armenians to destruction. Mr.Lloyd George told the Armenian citizens of Manchester in 1918 that "those responsible for the government of this country are not unmindful of their responsibilities to your martyred race." The time has come to recall these responsibilities...

During subsequent meetings at the House of Lords and the House of Commons, news of fresh new massacres were confirmed by members of the Government, while the Prime Minister Lord Andrew Bonar Law and his cabinet confirmed that they were doing all that could be done.

... In regard to the carrying out of the pledges given to the Armenian and Christian peoples of the Turkish Empire, Sir Bonar Law said: - I do not think that it is necessary to assure my hon. friends and the House that the protection of the races referred to in the questions is one of the most vital subjects to be decided in the Turkish Treaty, and the steps necessary to secure that protection are being considered at the Conference.

It is during this time that two opposing groups emerged in the British Parliament: One side included Lord Robert Cecil, T.P. O'Connor, Aneurin Williams, and others who signed a declaration to the Prime Minister that it was essential in the interests of the permanent peace that Constantinople not be left to the Turks. Whereas a counter-move was made by 23 members of the House who circulated a letter to their colleagues at Westminster saying that they disagreed that the Turk should be thrown out of Constantinople because the British Empire had pledged its Indian citizens in 1918 that the British Empire was

"... not fighting to deprive Turkey of its capital or of the rich and renowned lands of Asia Minor ... which are predominantly Turkish in race. We believe that any departure from this undertaking would have disastrous effects on Moslem opinion in India.

At this point, matters took a different turn. The Indian Moslems of the British Empire showed their displeasure with the British officials at the Peace Conference who were negotiating the peace terms with Turkey as the topic of Constantinople hit the headlines: should Turkey stay out of Europe? In fact, in the Parliament, the debate on Constantinople took precedence over the rights of the minorities in Turkey. Indian Moslems were also disgruntled at the direction the debates were going: after all, the Moslem Caliphate was in Constantinople. Frequently, letters to the editor from the Indian Moslem community leaders, such as Ameer Ali, began to appear on the pages of *The Times*. These letters openly attacked Lords and MPs, such as Bryce and Williams, who wanted Turkey out of Europe and out of the Armenian provinces. Indian Moslem leaders claimed that ***the hundreds of millions of Moslems in the British Empire helped the Allies in the war because of the***

Prime Minister's declaration in 1918 that the aim was not to deprive Turkey of its capital or of the rich and renowned lands of Asia Minor and Thrace, which are predominantly Turkish in race." They even blamed Europe and Tsarist Russia for the misrule of Constantinople. Their discord and underlying threat to World Peace was even more evident with such claims in a Letter to the Editor of *The Times* in February 1920:

To drive the Turks out of Europe, and pen them in, within the plateau of Anatolia would mean that they would be excluded from free inter-association with other nations; would be deprived of all touch with the modern world, and thus have no chance of development. They would brood in sullen anger over their wrongs and wait for the hour of revenge... The Indian Moslem leaders in Britain even avowed that Turkey a victim of injustice. They hoped that Britain would not allow the cherished feelings of their Moslem fellow-subjects to be trampled upon and a gulf of bitterness and hatred created between the two great faiths within the British Empire.

After this sort of language emerged from the Moslem Indians of the British Empire, both Houses of the Parliament had long discussions and debates on Constantinople and Indian Moslem sentiments, but some officials remained firm in honoring other pledges such as those given to the Armenians.

Towards the end of February 1920, the British Labor Party protested against the treatment of Armenia by the Allied Powers: They issued a lengthy resolution regarding ***the minimum programme which the Allied Governments are bound in honour to carry out***, and which included: -

- 1. The entire region known as Turkish Armenia must be released absolutely from Turkish sovereignty.***
- 2. The best settlement would have been to place the whole of this region for a term of years and under strict conditions under the control of a single mandatory Power, charged to maintain religious and racial equality between the different elements of the population, to promote goodwill between them, and to train them to govern their country in common. But the party recognise that if America stands aside the country may have at least temporarily to be divided. But if a mandate for the south-western districts (Cilicia, Diarbekr, Kharput) is given to France, they demand that it shall be conferred under the strict conditions referred to above, and that at a date to be specified in the mandate the population shall be given an opportunity of deciding whether they wish to govern themselves as a separate State or to reunite with the rest of Armenia.***
- 3. The remainder of Turkish Armenia ought to be attached at once to the independent Armenian Republic, already in being in Trans-Caucasia.***
- 4. The party protests against any idea of subordinating the Armenian settlement to considerations of Indian policy.***

The British Press did not back down either: Headlines in 1920 now referred to

- The Scandal of Armenian Martyrdom
- The Massacre of Armenians: Deportation Horrors Repeated
- The Marash Massacres: 16,000 Armenians Killed out of 22,000
- Cilician Massacres: Nationalist Orgies

The Press also showed discontent at the Supreme Council's (at the Peace Negotiations) silence over the measures it would take to stop the massacres; in fact, Editorials demanded answers when they printed:

Armenia happens to be the subject upon which millions who care little for foreign affairs of the usual sort are now particularly interested... The question to these millions is not one of territorial or financial gains to this country or to that. It is a question of human life. It is a question of saving the remnant after massacres of the Armenian people, from the wholesale slaughter which is now being prepared for them.

However, whenever some MPs brought up the issue of these renewed slaughters, the Government chose to remain silent: At one House of Commons meeting in March of 1920:

SIR D. MacLean and Major D. Davies asked for information with regard to the massacres of Armenians by the Turks, and the action it was proposed to take.

Mr. Lloyd George (PM) - These matters are under discussion by the Allied Governments and between the Government and their representatives in Constantinople, and I hope my hon. friend will recognize the inadvisability of making an announcement on the subject at present...

The deterioration of morals of the British Government came at another House of Commons meeting during which the protection of Armenia was the topic of discussion on the number of Armenians massacred: (March 1920)

Mr. T. P. O'Connor asked the Prime Minister whether he had seen the most recent telegram from Cilicia giving full details of the massacre of Armenians there. He had seen a telegram stating that 18,000 had been massacred in the district of Marash, that 1,300 women and children had perished in a snowstorm, and that there were still 8,000 Armenians in daily peril.

Mr. Lloyd George replied: Such information as we have received does not, I am glad to say, indicate that the massacres have quite reached that formidable figure; but they are formidable enough. The latest figure we have comes to something like 15,000. Beyond that I do not think we have heard anything.

Mr. T. P. O'Connor asked whether details had been received as to the death of refugee women and children from snow and starvation.

Mr. Lloyd George - I think they would be included in the 15,000. No doubt many of them attempted to escape and perished in a snowstorm.

For one reason or another, the British government began putting all sorts of obstacles not to grant Armenia what it had promised. One such reason was whether the Armenians constituted a majority or a minority in the regions that were to be given to Armenia & Cilicia. During a long debate on Foreign Policy in the House of Commons, the following statement was made by the Prime Minister Mr. Lloyd George:

The difficulty about Armenia is that the Armenian population is scattered over several provinces. There is only one part of Turkey where you can say that the Armenians are in the majority. By no sort of self-determination can you add to the Republic of Armenia territories like Cilicia. In Cilicia they are in a very considerable minority. I rather think that there are in the proportion of three or four to one, ... Here are the figures: - Moslems, 546,000; Armenians, 130,000; Greeks, 36,000; other elements 18,000...

Of course, this issue of numbers was not dismissed that easily by Aneurin Williams when he asked whether the Prime Minister ***was speaking of the population of Cilicia as it was now or as it was before the massacres. Was he recognizing the majority created by the massacres?*** To which Lloyd George answered: ***We must take the facts as they are. I have no doubt that the horrible massacres have upset the balance of the population.***

When T.P. O'Connor demanded that it was Britain's greatest responsibility to prevent further massacres, the Prime Minister had only this to say:

I agree that we have a certain responsibility in the matter, but we really cannot police the whole world. With every desire to assist, we have used the British Fleet very freely. We practically policed that country for a year or two, and policed it successfully, but it cost a very considerable sum of money, and we cannot undertake that liability indefinitely. (Hear, hear.)... With regard to the Republic of Erivan... it depends entirely on the Armenians themselves whether they protect their independence. They must do so; they must begin to depend upon themselves. They are an exceptionally intelligent people. In fact it is their intelligence which gets them into trouble sometimes, from all I hear... The Prime Minister even had the audacity to declare that *Instead of always casting themselves upon other countries and sending supplications and appeals, let the defend themselves. When they do so the Turk will have too much respect for them to attempt any more massacres in that quarter.*

Note: All citations are taken from "The Times of the Armenian Genocide: Reports in the British Press," edited by Katia Minas Peltekian. The book in two volumes compiles over one thousand articles from the British Press during 1914-1923.

