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**THE KEY ELEMENTS IN THE
TURKISH DENIAL OF THE
ARMENIAN GENOCIDE:
A CASE STUDY OF
DISTORTION AND FALSIFICATION**

THE ZORYAN INSTITUTE

The Key Elements in the Turkish Denial of the Armenian Genocide: A Case Study of Distortion and Falsification

by

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...the troubles in Van and elsewhere merely served as a convenient excuse for getting a program of mass deportations and large-scale extermination started.

[These measures led to] the Armenian holocaust....

[The annihilation of the Armenians] was not the unfortunate by-product of an otherwise legitimate security program but the result of a deliberate effort by the Ittihad ve Terakki [Young Turk] regime to rid the Anatolian heartland of a politically troublesome ethnic group.

—Ulrich Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire 1914-1918*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968, pp. 203, 219, 268.

Slowly, yet with increasing authoritativeness, the reality of the Turkish genocide perpetrated against the Armenian people has come to be accepted as established, incontrovertible fact. Such a process...has overcome formidable obstacles, especially the well-orchestrated, shameful, as yet ongoing campaign by the Turkish government to impose silence by promoting a variety of coopting devices, by disseminating various falsifications of the historical record, and through cajolery and intimidation.

—Richard Falk, (Milbank Professor of International Law, Princeton University). From his foreword to the Special Issue of the *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* v. 22, no. 1 (Summer 1994): 1, titled, "The Armenian Genocide in Official Turkish Records," Roger Smith, guest editor.

Because the perpetrators of the Armenian genocide were not prosecuted, the Nazi-organized Holocaust against the Jews became possible. There is a direct linkage between the failure to prosecute the crimes against humanity before World War II and their commission during World War II.

This failure did not occur because there was no offense or because there was no jurisdiction. Both existed, and still the prosecutions did not occur. This reluctance to act, in spite of the offense and in spite of the jurisdiction, made the Nazis more brazen and the Holocaust more likely.

—David Matas, “Prosecuting Crimes Against Humanity: The Lessons of World War I.” *Fordham International Law Journal* (1989-90): 104.

“The future of Holocaust denial may be foreshadowed by the persistent denial of the Armenian genocide.”

—Katherine Bischooping, “Method and Meaning in Holocaust-knowledge Surveys.” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 12, no. 3 (Winter 1998): 463.

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Introduction

The Zoryan Institute has devoted itself to scholarly research on many Armenian-related issues, including the Armenian genocide, since its inception in 1982. Its members have always held the belief that if the Institute produced solid, scientific, and innovative works of scholarship, they would speak for themselves. However, in spite of all the research, all of the documentation, all of the conferences, and all of the publications produced by numerous organizations and individuals—including many not identified with Armenian interests—demonstrating that the mass murder of Armenians that took place during the years 1915-1923 was, indeed, the result of a premeditated plan of extermination by the successive Turkish governments of the time, this has not deterred present-day Turkish governments from continuing a long-standing policy of actively denying it.¹

Why, then, is the Zoryan Institute involving itself in directly refuting acute denialism regarding the Armenian genocide at this time? Three considerations make this denial especially problematic. First, because the documentation of the Armenian genocide is inextricably connected with the denial of the genocide by its perpetrators. Any effort at documenting the Armenian genocide must confront the “Turkish denial syndrome.” That syndrome has now grown into what I have described as “an industry of denial.” In fact, genocide denial is so prevalent that it is now becoming a field of study in its own right. The relative success of genocide denial is contingent on two factors: a) It takes advantage of our innate sense of fair play and willingness to hear “both sides of the story.” The late Terence des Pres cogently diagnosed the pitfalls for scholarship and for the quest for truth implicit in the manipulative adoption of this principle of fairness by the apologists skillfully

trying to conceal rather than reveal the pertinent facts at issue here.² There are others who think that when it comes to a crime such as genocide, there can be no “other side.” b) Denial does not require any proof, only an assertion and a call for the “reassessment” of history; the burden is on someone else to “disprove” the assertion. Second, genocide denial may be ignored when it is practiced by those who have no credibility and no external audience; it is another matter when genocide denial is practiced by the government of a powerful country and has as its target the governments of other powerful and influential countries, with whom that government is linked by bonds of political and military alliance. Third, the Zoryan Institute takes seriously the value of the study of history and the lessons the world has to learn from it. Genocide has become such a recurrent phenomenon in the twentieth century—and shows no signs of abating—that its study is very relevant to and important for the world today. As Auguste Comte, the founder of the discipline of Sociology almost two centuries ago, would say, it is necessary to fully understand past genocides in order to be able to predict future genocides, and it is necessary to be able to predict future genocides in order to be able to prevent them.

The most recent manifestation of the Turkish denial syndrome was triggered by an initiative of some sixty Congressmen in the United States House of Representatives in April 1999 to pass a resolution “to provide in a collection all United States records related to the Armenian Genocide and the consequences of the failure to enforce the judgments of the Turkish courts against the responsible officials, and deliver the collection to the House International Relations Committee, to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum for incorporation into its holdings of official documentation on genocide and for purposes of public awareness and education, and to the Armenian Genocide Museum in Yerevan, Armenia.” After enumerating eighteen findings affirming the historicity and importance of remembering the Armenian genocide, the Resolution goes on to require that the above be done “Within six months of the enactment of this resolution...in an act documenting and affirming the United States record of protest and recognition of this crime against humanity.”

It is the collection of the National Archives, which contain the World War I and post-World War I documentary records of the U.S. State Department that are at issue here. That department was entrusted with the task of collecting, through its officials stationed in Turkey at the time, evidence on the decision-making, organization, and implementation of the mass murder of the Ottoman Armenian population.

The Turkish government, through its ambassador in Washington, D.C., wrote a letter to all Congressmen, dated May 27, 1999, to which was attached an eleven-page report titled "An Objective Look At H.Res.155," with a view to blocking the passage of a resolution that proposes to utilize for purposes of research and scholarship the holdings of a strictly American institution. (See Appendix 1 for the respective texts.) Finally, it must not be allowed to pass without notice that the legislative process of the United States Government is being interfered with by a foreign government, which seeks to distort history for its own ignominious purposes.

One would think and hope that a government claiming to be infused with democratic principles would only welcome such a resolution. For decades now the world, especially the academic world, has been told by successive Turkish governments that only solid and reliable research based on primary sources and official documents can resolve the ongoing dispute they themselves have generated about the Armenian genocide. Obviously, and regretably, the quest for truth in this connection is, and remains, a hollow pretense. Indeed, a state system that, for more than eighty years, has withheld authentic material on this matter by selectively denying access to its own archives, can hardly be expected to favor a Congressional Resolution that proposes to reinvigorate the quest for truth by introducing new mechanisms of access to primary sources and official documents.

What follows is an effort to examine the objections and sets of allegations put forward in the lengthy Memorandum by the Turkish ambassador, to demonstrate the spurious character of some of them, and the untenable nature of most of them. In fact, practically all of these objections and allegations are part and parcel of the standard repertoire of Turkish denials that are repeated time after time,

blithely and almost ritualistically. It is as if none of them had been effectively rebutted and discredited by eighty years of research and publication.

This little book, by necessity, is only one small effort, but it is a response that transcends the particularity of the present case of denial and may well have application for other, future manifestations of denial by Turkish authorities, their partisan advocates and agents.

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