

Even if the World Had Paid Attention, Nothing Would Have Changed:  
If the Armenian Genocide Had Not Been Forgotten

Jack Sigman

The Armenian Genocide is referred to as both “The Forgotten Genocide,”<sup>1</sup> and “The Forgotten Holocaust”<sup>2</sup> in part due to the almost overwhelming attention paid to the Jewish Holocaust (hereafter referred to as the Holocaust) and what appears to be overwhelming ignorance of the Armenian Genocide. Adolf Hitler remarked “Who still talks nowadays of the extermination of the Armenians” implying that he could commit genocide with impunity.<sup>3</sup> It has been postulated that had proper attention been paid, the same as has been paid to the Holocaust for almost seventy years, the lessons learned from the Armenian Genocide would have prevented the occurrence of the Holocaust. Indeed, speaking at an event to commemorate the anniversary of the Armenian Genocide in 2011, United States (U.S.) Senator Chuck Schumer stated that if intervention had occurred to halt the Armenian Genocide, “the Holocaust may not have occurred.”<sup>4</sup> U.S. Congressman Joseph Knollenberg stated, “If the international community had spoken out against this merciless slaughtering of the Armenian people instead of ignoring it, the horrors of the Holocaust might never have taken place.”<sup>5</sup> Commenting on the beginning of the Nazi campaign against the Jews, Herbert Hirsch, a noted genocide scholar at Virginia Commonwealth University, opined that just eighteen years earlier, the Armenian Genocide occurred and had little attention drawn to it.<sup>6</sup> Finally, Cenap Cakmak, head of the department of international relations at Eskişehir Osmangazi University, reluctantly stated that elementary legal texts indicate that “the failure of the international community to deal with it (the Armenian Genocide) resulted in commission of similar subsequent campaigns.”<sup>7</sup>

The above statements are a fair representation of the general feeling that had the world paid more attention to the Armenian Genocide, the Holocaust might not have happened. However, there are several reasons why the Holocaust would have occurred no matter how well and how heavily the Armenian Genocide was publicized and politicized. The most important reason is that the Armenian Genocide, as well as the murderous events starting in 1876 which led up to the genocide, were well publicized, politicized, and discussed. This fact is clear, based on the known reactions of the Great Powers and their respective citizens as the events unfolded. The reactions, both public and private, to the massive amount of newspaper press and public discourse during more than four decades between the Bulgarian Massacre of 1876 and the Armenian Genocide, were significant, even though the action generated by them was not.<sup>8</sup> Noteworthy

secondary reasons include: at least thirty-five episodes of politicide and genocide since the Holocaust<sup>9</sup> occurred with little international interference, the inherent difficulties in formulating any type of humanitarian intervention policy, that humane treatment is not the norm between the state and its citizens, and that, too often, national interest is politically more important than national values.

### **Acts of Genocide since the Holocaust**

Barbara Harff, Professor of Political Science Emerita at the U.S. Naval Academy, detailed approximately thirty-five state-sanctioned acts of violence that occurred from 1955 through 1997 and which should be considered acts of genocide or politicide, a term that describes the destruction of a group of people who share a common political belief.<sup>10</sup> These episodes were examined to determine the probability that a series of events, based on the existing characteristics of the state, might lead to such acts. Determining such probability, based on events, will assist in the generation of a watch list with the intent of alleviating or minimizing the risk factors prior to triggering a genocide or politicide.

The relevance of this study to the question at hand is that given the overwhelming attention paid to the Holocaust, and the publicity geared toward educating all about the Holocaust, these acts of genocide and politicide still occurred. Some episodes of genocide, such as those that occurred in Burundi and Rwanda, were repeated periodically over several years with little international notice or involvement.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Harff's conclusion stresses the opinion that organizations such as the UN and governments that care about what happens in those states should promote human rights and inclusiveness in their relations with those states.<sup>12</sup> However, this lesson is sixty-eight years too late and still not truly heeded. Dr. Paul Bartrop, director of the Genocide Studies Center at Florida Gulf Coast University, indicates that the well-publicized guarantee that the world's revulsion of the events that occurred in the Holocaust would ensure its non-repetition has fallen by the wayside.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, that *Kristallnacht*, "The Night of Broken Glass," the 1938 forerunner of the Holocaust to come, occurred less than twenty years after the end of the Armenian Genocide is quite plausible, based on the number of genocidal episodes within the nearly seventy years since the end of the Holocaust, despite the publicity and memorialization of that event.

### **Humanitarian Intervention**

Humanitarian intervention is one of the most controversial subjects within the realm of international relations. Given that the concept of inviolate sovereignty has been in the forefront of international relations since the Peace of Westphalia (1648), it would seem hard to prove that sovereignty can and should be violated in order to stop

certain activities occurring within that state's borders.

The likely father of the concept of humanitarian intervention, Hugo Grotius, is also the father of the scholars criticizing the concept. Proposed in 1625, Grotius' "just war" concept included rendering assistance to those outside the state who were battling oppression emanating from their own sovereign.<sup>14</sup> However, in almost the same breath, he opined that this principle would more than likely be exploited by those who sought the resources of that state, thus utilizing the circumstances to justify a war for conquest.<sup>15</sup> Since that time, debate has continued. In 1999, former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan summarized the two sides of the debate: Is it legitimate for an organization to intervene without a UN mandate, or without such, is it legitimate to allow genocide to occur?<sup>16</sup>

Sixty-eight years ago, the French delegation attempted to amend the charter of the UN to allow states to intervene without UN authorization.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, the concept proved too vague to override the UN charter's proscription of non-violence. As David Mednicoff, director of the Master's in Public Policy and Middle Eastern Studies programs at the University of Massachusetts, relates, "international law in general and the post-World War II UN-based legal order in particular were established to deter the resort to war by powerful states."<sup>18</sup>

The events of the 1990s, particularly the ethnic violence in the Balkans and the genocide in Rwanda, have reopened the line of examination as to the justification of "unilateral humanitarian intervention" (UHI) when the UN finds itself unable to act. In this regard, it seems that the UN's shift from inviolate sovereignty to "right to protect" tends to be such a policy examination. Indeed, the UN investigation over NATO's UHI in Kosovo led the UN to endorse the "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P) policy.<sup>19</sup> However, there is still debate as to whether or not R2P fundamentally alters the age-old concept of sovereignty. Regardless, as it took fifty years for the concept, R2P, to emerge after the end of the Holocaust, it is unlikely that this concept would have been given thought or traction less than twenty years after the end of the Armenian Genocide, no matter how well publicized it was.

Still, for many, the concept of intervention lies with a moral high ground. Dr. Os Guinness, Senior Fellow at the Trinity Center, wrestles with the idea that countries of Western Civilization, particularly the U.S. and Britain, have committed their own heinous acts and escaped punishment for such.<sup>20</sup> In fact, the U.S. has refused to ratify the treaty establishing the International Criminal Court (ICC) thus exempting U.S. citizens from its jurisdiction.<sup>21</sup> On another note, many African Union member states have refused to heed the ICC's indictment and arrest warrant for the president of Sudan for the commission of genocidal crimes.<sup>22</sup>

## **The Bulgarian Massacre**

A precursor to the Armenian Massacre of 1894-96 was the Bulgarian Massacre of 1876. In 1876, a Bulgarian insurrection against the Ottoman Empire resulted in a brutal suppression of the uprising.<sup>23</sup> Due to the recent liberalization of the press as well as the recent introduction of telegraph service in Europe, allowing far faster transmission of current events than previously achievable, news of the massacre quickly spread all over Great Britain. However, British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli responding to Queen Victoria, who wanted some type of intervention in Bulgaria, indicated that there was nothing that should be done in "that there is not much to choose between the sides."<sup>24</sup> Although his comments made clear his political stance that there were atrocities committed by both sides of the conflict and that they were equally guilty, he knew that in reality tens of thousands of Bulgarians were murdered by Ottoman troops.<sup>25</sup>

Eventually, public opinion became so antagonistic toward Disraeli about this matter that his government almost fell. Regardless, the newspapers split between supporters of the Ottoman Empire and supporters of Bulgaria. Additionally, the Church of England was silent on the matter due to its support of the Disraeli government and its disdain for Orthodox Christianity.<sup>26</sup> Eventually, Disraeli convinced Queen Victoria that the actual fault for the massacres belonged to the Russians who had "instigated" the Bulgarian rebellion, which in turn caused the Ottoman Empire to suppress the Bulgarians so violently. Additionally, Britain's foreign policy was committed to support of the Ottoman Empire as a prophylactic response to Russian expansionism.<sup>27</sup> Finally, British political infighting (similar in nature to today's deadlocked U.S. Congress) prevented any succor for the Bulgarians. Therefore, despite the massive amount of publicity, as well as public support for such, no British government action occurred to directly aid the Bulgarians.

Russia was just as immobilized. Nevertheless, news of the Bulgarian massacre spread throughout Russia. The Russian Orthodox Church publically supported the Bulgarians. The Tsar's wife actively supported relief efforts.<sup>28</sup> The Russian foreign minister sent the other Great Powers official reports of the massacre, appealing for action. To forestall action by Russia, which would force the British to militarily defend the Ottoman Empire, Disraeli convinced the Ottoman Empire to accept a six-month armistice.<sup>29</sup> While the eventual war between the Russian and Ottoman Empires was successfully postponed, the delaying action came about because of Britain's desire to foil Russian expansion, not to save the Bulgarians.<sup>30</sup>

## **The Armenian Massacres**

Less than twenty years after the Bulgarian Massacres, another series of massacres involving Ottoman Empire troops occurred. This

time it was the Armenian's turn to suffer for the apparent sin of not being Turkish Muslims. Ostentatiously punished for insurrection, the truth of the matter is that the Armenians were protesting against unfair taxation and the failure of the Ottoman Empire to institute agreed upon reforms. Indeed, all indications reveal that the rationale had merely become "a pretext for killing Armenians."<sup>31</sup> It appears that the previous attention paid to the minorities of the Ottoman Empire by the Great Powers proved to be a particularly painful thorn in the Ottoman side that could only be exorcized through periodic massacres.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, there is indication that the massacres continued as a not so subtle diplomatic message to Western powers to mind their own business as well as a warning to the surviving Armenians that the results of appealing to the nations for rescue would only result in disaster for them.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps this was one lesson learned by the Jewish elites of Germany who sought to cancel a mass rally held in New York City protesting Nazi treatment of Jews, for fear of reprisals against the German Jewish population by the Nazis.<sup>34</sup>

Again, the major newspapers carried reports of the massacres. The people of Europe and America as well as their respective governments, were horrified at the events because the massacre was the first known instance of the Ottoman Empire organizing a mass murder of a specific ethnicity in a time of peace.<sup>35</sup> The U.S. Congress proposed resolutions calling for military intervention and the creation of an independent Armenia.<sup>36</sup> However, in the end, Congress merely resolved to support a presidential call to the European powers to uphold treaty obligations as they pertained to the Armenian people. Unfortunately, even that resolution was not acted upon by the Cleveland administration for fear that the Turkish Sultan would forbid American Red Cross aid to the Armenians.

The next notable massacre of Armenians occurred in 1909 at Adana. This massacre ended Armenian existence in Adana, which was a major Armenian economic center.<sup>37</sup> Despite diplomatic and missionary requests for intervention, and even though the warships of several states were anchored just off the coast, no state intervened.

## **The Armenian Genocide**

World War One (WWI) became the backdrop for the final chapter of Armenian existence in Ottoman Turkey. Henry Morgenthau, the U.S. ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, had a ringside seat to the genocide.<sup>38</sup> Continuous reports flowed into the State Department on the progress of the genocide, along with Morgenthau's requests that the U.S. government intervene. However, the U.S. government did nothing. Not even a letter of protest was sent to the Ottoman government.<sup>39</sup>

Germany, as an ally of the Ottoman Empire, refused to condemn the atrocities. Instead, they justified the violence as a normal and expected response to Armenian treason.<sup>40</sup> The French and British presses

publicized the atrocities, but their respective governments, already at war with the Ottoman Empire, believed that the quickest way to end the oppression was to win the war; the same excuse made by the Allied Forces thirty years later when asked why repeated requests to bomb Auschwitz were denied.<sup>41</sup>

The American press, like the European press, was not silent. Over twenty years of pro-Armenian and anti-Ottoman journalism permeated the American psyche.<sup>42</sup> Dr. Simon Payaslian, an Armenian historian at Boston University, citing Thomas C. Leonard in Winter's "America and the Armenian Genocide of 1915," indicates that the U.S. press provided extensive coverage of the Armenian Genocide because of the intense interest of the American people in the region.<sup>43</sup> This interest stemmed from the overwhelming religious familiarity with the "Bible Lands," in addition to the well-publicized practices of the "intolerable Turk," since the 1890s. However, despite pressure from former president Theodore Roosevelt,<sup>44</sup> an American public clamoring for intervention, and the existence of what might be termed the "Armenian Lobby,"<sup>45</sup> President Wilson chose to maintain the U.S.'s neutrality and did not even join France and Britain's denunciation of the "crimes against humanity and civilization."<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

There are questions regarding the relationship between the Armenian Genocide and the *Shoah*, the Jewish Holocaust. That there is a relationship is undeniable. However, the insistence that the world paying attention to the Armenian Genocide would have prevented the Holocaust is very questionable. Aside from the difficulties of states engaging in humanitarian intervention and the reality that numerous episodes of genocide have occurred since the end of the *Shoah*, the fact of the matter is that the Armenian Genocide, as well as the forty years of Ottoman genocidal massacres leading up to the Armenian Genocide, were well publicized and politicized, almost to the same degree as that which was seen during a similar time frame during and after the *Shoah*.

It is inconceivable that the pre-WWII leaders and leading politicians, as well as the political elites and the intelligentsia of the states that encompass Western Civilization were ignorant of the Armenian Genocide or the history leading up to that genocide. Leo Kuper, a noted South African sociologist and genocide scholar, contends that the genocide was immediately known outside of Turkey.<sup>47</sup> However, there is a *bon mot* attributed to Marcel Proust that might apply: "Everything has already been said but, since no one pays attention, it has to be repeated each morning."<sup>48</sup>

There is a sickness in the world. It is called propensity for genocide. This sickness transcends almost all nationalities and religions, and while we claim that it takes us by surprise, it always comes with ample warning. In some states, it is through government-manufac-

tured fear that a certain minority is acting as an enemy of the state. This scenario occurred in Turkey and Germany. In other countries, genocide is the response to years of downtrodden existence of the majority which blames, and then kills, a supposedly better-off minority. The pogroms in Poland and Russia in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are examples of such. Another scenario plays out when a long term animosity suddenly breaks into violence following a national crisis. All of these scenarios occurred in Rwanda. However, no matter what the cause, it always seems to come as a shock that no one saw the signs and warned the victims. A greater shock is that no outside government intervenes, at least not until the death toll is massive, and at times not even then. The worst shock is that we cannot believe it occurred, and we claim that we cannot understand why it happens. However, Woody Allen says it best through one of his film alter egos, "The question is not why. The question is, given what we are, why not more often?"<sup>49</sup>

Based on the information provided, it is clear that the Jewish Holocaust would have occurred regardless, as it happened in spite of the massive amounts of publicity about the Armenian Genocide that saturated the U.S. and Western European presses.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Leo Kuper, *Genocide: Its Political Use in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), 105.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Fisk, "The Forgotten Holocaust," *The Independent*, (August 28, 2007). <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/fisk/robert-fisk-the-forgotten-holocaust-463306.html>, (accessed July 1, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Deborah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt, *Holocaust: A History* (New York: Horton and Company, 2002), 41.

<sup>4</sup> Taleen Babayon, "Thousands Gather in Times Square to Commemorate 96th Anniversary of Genocide," *The Armenian Weekly*, (May 2, 2011), <http://www.armenianweekly.com/2011/05/02/thousands-gather-in-times-square-to-commemorate-96th-anniversary-of-genocide/>, (accessed February 12, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Congressional Record, "Commemoration of the Armenian Genocide," *House of Representatives*, (1998), <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CREC-1998-04-22-pt1-PgH2213.pdf#page=1>, (accessed February 26, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Herbert Hirsch, *Anti-Genocide: Building an American Movement to Prevent Genocide* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 119.

<sup>7</sup> Cenap Cakmak, "ICJ and Armenian Genocide dispute," *Zaman Amerika*, (March 3, 2008), [http://us.zaman.com.tr/us-tr/newsDetail\\_getNewsById.action?newsId=19991](http://us.zaman.com.tr/us-tr/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?newsId=19991), (accessed February 11, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), xiii.

<sup>9</sup> Barbara Harff, "No Lessons Learned from the Holocaust? Assessing Risks of Genocide and Political Mass Murder Since 1955," *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1, (February 2003): 57, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost (accessed July 9, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 57-73.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 71.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 72.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Bartrop, *A Biographical Encyclopedia of Contemporary Genocide: Portraits of Evil and Good* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2012), xvii.

<sup>14</sup> L. C. Green, "Enforcement of International Humanitarian Law," *Journal of Conflict and Security Law*, 8, no. 1, (2003): 104.

<sup>15</sup> Ryan Goodman, "Humanitarian Intervention and the Pretext for War," *The American Journal of International Law*, 100, no. 1 (2006): 107.

<sup>16</sup> John J. Merriam, "Kosovo and the Law of Humanitarian Intervention," *Case*

*Western Reserve Journal of International Law* 33, no. 1 (Winter2001): 113, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost (accessed July 9, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Franck, "Legal Interpretation and Change," In *Humanitarian Intervention: Ethical, Legal, and Political Dilemmas*, ed. J. I. Holzgrefe and Robert O. Keohane, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 206.

<sup>18</sup> David Mednicoff, "Humane Wars? International Law, Just War Theory and Contemporary Armed Humanitarian Intervention," *Law, Culture and the Humanities*, no. 2 (2006), 375.

<sup>19</sup> Karen A. Mingst and Margaret P. Karns, *The United Nations in the 21st Century*, 3rd ed., (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2007), 112.

<sup>20</sup> Os Guinness, *Unspeakable* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 218-20.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Elliott, "Bush Is Right to Refuse World Court," *Time.com* (July 9, 2002), <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,319117,00.html>, (accessed March 2, 2013).

<sup>22</sup> ICC-ASP, "President of the Assembly Regrets Visit of Sudanese President to Chad," *International Criminal Court*, (February 20, 2013), [http://www.icc-cpi.int/en\\_menus/icc/press%20and%20media/press%20releases/Pages/pr874.aspx](http://www.icc-cpi.int/en_menus/icc/press%20and%20media/press%20releases/Pages/pr874.aspx), (accessed February 23, 2013).

<sup>23</sup> Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 133.

<sup>24</sup> Gary J. Bass, *Freedom's Battle* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 262.

<sup>25</sup> Mark Rathbone, "Gladstone, Disraeli and the Bulgarian Horrors," *History Review*, no. 50: 3-7, (2004), 3, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost, (accessed February 13, 2013).

<sup>26</sup> Gary J. Bass, *Freedom's Battle*, 276.

<sup>27</sup> Mark Rathbone, "Gladstone, Disraeli and the Bulgarian Horrors," 4.

<sup>28</sup> Gary J. Bass, *Freedom's Battle*, 282.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 56-7.

<sup>32</sup> Donald Bloxham, "Rethinking the Armenian Genocide." *History Today*, 55, no.6, (June 2005), 28.

<sup>33</sup> Leo Kuper, *Genocide: Its Political Use in the Twentieth Century*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), 115-6.

<sup>34</sup> Yehuda Bauer, *History of the Holocaust*, (Danbury, CT: Franklin Watts, 1982), 99.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 56.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>37</sup> Bedross Der Matossian, "From Bloodless Revolution to Bloody Counterrevolution: The Adana Massacres of 1909," *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 6 no.2 (2011): 164.

<sup>38</sup> Gary J. Bass, *Freedom's Battle*, 322.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 325

<sup>40</sup> Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 4-5.

<sup>41</sup> David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews*, (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 291.

<sup>42</sup> Gary J. Bass, *Freedom's Battle*, 316.

<sup>43</sup> Simon Payaslian, "The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response/America and the Armenian Genocide of 1915/'Starving Armenians': America and the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1930 and After." *The Middle East Journal* 59 no.1 (2005): 135, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/218536496?accountid=8289>, (accessed February 23, 2013).

<sup>44</sup> Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 293-5.

<sup>45</sup> Norman Stone, "A Bungled Case for the Prosecution," *The Spectator*, (Apr 24, 2004): 43-44, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/201152502?accountid=8289>, (accessed February 23, 2013).

<sup>46</sup> Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide*, 5.

<sup>47</sup> Leo Kuper, *Genocide: Its Political Use in the Twentieth Century*, 107.

<sup>48</sup> Arthur Plotnik, *The Elements of Expression*, 2nd ed. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2012), 191.

<sup>49</sup> Woody Allen, *Hannah and Her Sisters* (United States: Orion Pictures Corporation, 1986).

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*Jack Sigman earned his BA in International Relations in 2011 from AMU. Jack led a twenty year career in the Navy, specializing in nuclear engineering onboard submarines from 1974-94. He was elected Director of the North Valley County Water and Sewer District (St Marie, Montana) 1998-99. Jack has been a professional actor in musical theatre in Florida from 2000-10. He is in the engineering department of Algenol, a bio-fuel R&D firm, since 2011. Jack is currently writing a thesis as the final step for completing the requirement for an MA in International Relations at AMU. He is a member of Sigma Iota Rho, Golden Key, and Mensa. Jack is married to Janet Nislow Sigman, a nationally recognized educator and has two children, Edward and Robert.*