

Uprisings of Armenian Revolutionary Associations and Armed Bands

The first uprising took place at Erzurum on June 20, 1890. It was followed by the demonstration taking place at Kumkapı in the same year July 15, 1890 and the incidents of 1892 – 1893 of Kayseri, Yozgat, Çorum and Merzifon; the first Sassoun uprising in August 1894, the demonstration at the Sublime Porte on September 30, 1895, the Zeytun rebellion from October 24, 1895 to January 28, 1896, the rebellion at Van on June 3, 1896; occupation of the Ottoman Bank on August 14, 1896; the second Sassoun uprising in 1903; the attempt to kill Sultan Abdulhamid at Yıldız on July 21, 1905; the incidents at Adana on April 14, 1909.

It is well documented that all the risings were staged with the aim of forcing the Great Powers to an armed intervention towards the Ottoman state.

It is worth noting that the Armenian Patriarch told the British Ambassador Elliot on December 6, 1876 that "if it is required to start revolution or to rise up in order to secure the intervention of Europe in this matter or to draw its attention, that can be done quite easily." (*Foreign Office 424/46, pp. 205-206, No: 336.*)

The British Ambassador Currie at İstanbul expressed the following view in his report he sent to the Foreign Office on March 28, 1894: "The Armenian revolutionaries stir up disorders with the aim of forcing the Ottomans to retaliate and thus pave the way for the intervention of foreign countries." (*Blue Book, (Turkey), No: 6 (1894), p. 57.*)

The British Consul Grave at Erzurum, in a message sent to the British Embassy at İstanbul on January 28, 1895, reports that "The purpose of Armenian revolutionaries is to compel the Turkish government and Turkish nation to take action against themselves because of the general discontent they create themselves and so draw the attention of foreign powers to the imaginary sufferings of the Armenian people and convince them of the necessity to improve the situation." (*Blue Book, (Turkey), No: 6 (1894), pp. 222-223.*)

Upon the question of New York Herald correspondent Sydney Whitman as to whether such clashes would still have happened if Armenian revolutionaries had not come and had not instigated Armenians to rise up, the British Consul Graves replied "of course not, I do not think that a single Armenian would have been killed." (*Esat Uras: op. cit., p. 426.*)

General Mayewski who served as Russia's Consul General at Bitlis and at Van, reports as follows in a report of 1912: "Armenian revolutionaries created such a suspicion between Armenians and the local people in 1895 and 1896 that it became impossible to carry out any reforms in this area. Armenian clergymen were not busy with religious education at all. They endeavoured instead to disseminate nationalistic ideas. Such ideas were developed within the walls of the mysterious monasteries and enmity of Christians towards Muslims replaced religious duties. The reason of the rebellions taking place in many provinces of Anatolia in the years 1895 and 1896 was neither the poverty of Armenian villagers nor the supposed oppression on them. For these villagers were richer and more prosperous than their neighbours. Three causes may be mentioned for the Armenian uprisings:

1) their increasing consciousness in political matters; 2) the spreading of the ideas of nationalism, liberation and independence in the Armenian public opinion and

3) support provided by western governments to such ideas and the effort of clergymen to disseminate them." (*General Mayewski: Les Massacres d'Arménie : Statistiques des Provinces de Van et de Bitlis. Petersburg, 1916, pp. 11-13.*)

The British Vice-consul at Van, Mr. Williams, points out in his report dated March 4, 1896 that "Tashnaks and Hinchaks incited people in an excessive and wild manner and paralysed all the effort and activities undertaken to implement the reforms and that Armenian revolutionaries were responsible for whatever happened in Anatolia." (*Blue Book, (Turkey), No: 8 (1896), p. 108.*) The British Consul General at Adana, Mr. Doughty Wily, says in his report dated 1909 that "Armenians have been striving to secure the intervention of foreign powers." (*Schemsi Kara [ReflitSaffetAtabinen]: TurcsetArméniensDevantl'histoire. Genève, 1919, p.11*)

General Mayewski states in another Report of his dated 1912 that "The Tashnak militants have been trying to pave the way for Russian intervention by inciting troubles between Armenians and muslims." (*Schemsi Kara: op. cit., p. 11.*)

The Armenian historian Papazian wrote that "The purpose of all the incidents and uprisings was to induce the European states to intervene in the domestic affairs of the Ottoman state." (*K.S. Papazian: op. cit., p. 19.*)

Every time Armenian revolutionaries incited an uprising, they did so after a propaganda campaign that European powers would intervene immediately after the start of the rebellion. As is quite clear, the reason for the uprisings staged by Armenian revolutionaries and armed bands was neither misery, need for reforms nor alleged oppression exerted on them. The real reason for uprisings was the desire on the part of the western great powers and Russia, to break up the Ottoman Empire, which had struck its stamp on history, in cooperation with Armenian revolutionaries and Armenian Church. Faced with an uprising, the Ottoman state reacted in the same way as any other state would have reacted and sent troops to put it down. Yet the suppression of every incident was presented to the world as "a new massacre" by Armenians and their sympathisers. Armenians formed numerous bands armed with the arms supplied from abroad, rose up against the Ottoman state and behaved as though they regarded it as a pleasant duty to shed the blood of Turks. This reality has been confirmed once more in a report submitted to his government by the Austrian Consul, one of the impartial representatives as follows: "The outcry and clamour of Armenians that Turks have been persecuting Armenians are nothing but lies. The Turkish government has done nothing evil to Armenians. Perhaps Armenians have planned a revolution taking advantage of the indifference of the government, have armed bands and sent them to mountains, as for the Turks, perhaps they have been trying only to pursue them and put down the risings." (*NikerledKrayblis: Rusya'nınfiarkSiyasetiveVileyet-ifiarkiyeyeMes'elesi.[Eastern Policy of Russia and the question of Eastern Provinces].Translated by HabilAdem. İstanbul, 1932, p. 178 (mentioned NevlideKeremDemir: op. cit., p. 61.)*)

The outbreak of the First World War and the entry of the Ottoman state in it on November 1, 1914 as an ally of Germany against the Entente Powers was regarded by Armenians as a great historic opportunity for them. As has been pointed out by the Armenian historian Louise Nalbandian "In the eyes of the Armenian revolutionaries, the most favourable time to start up a total insurrection to achieve their end was the time when the Ottoman state was at war." (*Louise Nalbandian: op. cit., p. 111.*)

Considering that Armenian Committees might get into action in the war, some representatives of the Ottoman government held a meeting, before the war, with some Tashnak leaders in August 1914 at Erzurum. At this meeting, the Tashnak representatives promised solemnly that they would serve in the ranks of the Ottoman army as faithful citizens just in case the Ottoman state take part in the war. However, they did not stick to their pledge. For, before this meeting, the Tashnak had held a congress at Erzurum in June and had resolved to go on with its struggle against the Ottoman state. (*ErmeniKomitelerininÂmâlveHarekât-ıHtilâliyesi: İlanı*)

Meşrutiyetten Evvel ve Sonra. [Aspirations and revolutionary movements of the Armenian parties: Before and after the Proclamation of Constitutional Monarchy]. Published by the Ministry of Interior. İstanbul, 1916, pp. 144 –146.)

As for the Russian Armenians, they had also begun preparing themselves to attack the Ottoman state in cooperation with the Russian Army and an agreement had already been reached between the Catholicos of Echmiazin and Worontsoff-Dachkof, Governor General for the Caucasus, to the effect that "the Russian Armenians would unconditionally support Russia, provided that Russia would, in return, have the Ottomans carry out some reforms in favour of Armenians" (*Gr. Tchalkouchian: Le Livre Rouge. Paris, 1919, p. 12.*) and the Catholicos had been received later on by Czar at Tblisi where he expressed to the Czar the view that "the liberation of Armenians in Anatolia can come true only if they can, weakening the Ottoman rule, manage to establish an autonomous Armenia and if this Armenia is protected by Russia." (*Gr. Tchalkouchian: op. cit., p.13.*) But Russia's policy was to annex East Anatolia by using Armenians. Upon the declaration of war by Russia to the Ottoman state, the Tashnak Committee published in Horizon, a Committee publication, the following statement: "Armenians took their place firmly, with no slightest hesitation, with the Entente Powers, placed all their forces at the disposal of Russia and also formed voluntary regiments." (*Esat Uras: op. cit., p. 594.*)

The Tashnak Committee also issued the following instructions to its organisation: "If and when Ottoman troops start retreat in front of the Russian Army crossing the border, riots and risings should be incited everywhere so that Ottoman forces would find themselves under double fire. If the Ottomans forces happen to advance, Armenian soldiers (in the Ottoman army) should desert with their rifles, form bands and join the Russians." (*Mehmet Hocaoğlu: Arfliv Vesikalar ıyla Tarihte Ermeni Mezelimive Ermeniler. [Armenian Atrocities and Armenians in History based on Archive Documents]. İstanbul, 1976, pp. 570-571.*) The Hinchak Committee too issued a circular to its organization informing them that "The Committee, taking part in the struggle as an ally of the Entente Powers and Russia in particular, will assist the Entente Powers by every means possible for the victory of Armenia, Cilicia, the Caucasus and Azerbaijan." (*Ermeni Komitelerinin Bmel ve Hareket-i Htiliyesi. [Aspirations and revolutionary movements of the Armenian parties]. pp. 151-153.*) With the entry of the Russian Army in the Turkish lands preceded by the voluntary regiments formed of Ottoman and Russian Armenians, Armenian soldiers in the Ottoman Army deserted with their arms and having joined the Russian forces they formed voluntary units or armed bands.