

Genocide and the Modern Age

ETIOLOGY AND CASE STUDIES
OF MASS DEATH

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**THE ULTIMATE REPRESSION:
THE GENOCIDE OF THE
ARMENIANS, 1915-1917**

Gerard J. Libaridian

INTRODUCTION

Exterminations of families, tribes, and ethnic or religious groups have been known to occur since the dawn of history. The particular heinousness of mass death, however, has brought the gradual recognition of such acts as crimes against humanity. Planned and systematic genocides have even acquired a wider scope, while technology has increased their efficiency. Given the technological advances in military and biological hardware, the degrees to which many groups depend on governmental policies for their survival, the abrupt changes which traditional societies undergo when facing the challenge of modernization, and the increase in tensions between nations due to the diminishing resources available for distribution, one can expect governments to have recourse to radical solutions such as genocide to solve real or imaginary problems. Genocide thus may become merely another manifestation of what differentiates a state from other institutions: its monopoly of the right to kill enemies of society and to ask its citizens to kill enemies of the state or to be killed doing it.

A corollary to the above hypothesis is that certain groups that seek change in a system, particularly a traditional one, are more likely to be victims of genocide. This is especially true when the ideology of the state characterizes a potential victim as both an enemy of society (of the internal order) and of the state.¹

The genocide of the Armenian people during World War I is the earliest case of a documented modern day extermination of a nation. Planned and carried out by the Ittihadist (Ittihad ve Terakke Jemiyeti, or the Committee of Union and Progress) government of the Ottoman

Empire, this first genocide of the twentieth century may also be a paradigm for a type of "political" genocide likely to become the pattern of twentieth-century genocides.

The purpose here is to suggest the possibility that twentieth-century genocides may have become radical means used by governments to resolve political problems. This chapter will briefly present the facts and impact of the Armenian genocide, discuss the generally accepted explanations of the holocaust as the final solution to a thorny national problem, introduce some newly discovered evidence on the relations between Armenian and Turkish leaders preceding the genocide, and suggest that the Ittihadist government perceived Armenians not only as an unwelcome ethnic group but also as a social group which threatened the traditional authoritarian order of Ottoman society.

The events between 1915 and 1917, the worst years of the genocide, are quite clear and documented in gruesome detail.² In early 1913, the Young Turk government was taken over by its militaristic and chauvinistic wing led by Enver, Talaat, and Jemal Pashas.³ This triumvirate led the country into World War I on the side of Germany. Sometime in early 1915 that same government developed and put into effect a plan for the extermination of its Armenian population, variously placed at between 2 and 3 million subjects. Most Armenians lived in the rural and small-town environment of historic Western Armenia, a part of the Ottoman Empire since the sixteenth century.⁴

The plan was carried out in phases. In April 1915, the religious, political, educational, and intellectual leadership of the Armenian people, close to 1,000 individuals, most educated in the Western tradition, were taken into custody throughout the Empire and killed within a few days. Then Armenian draftees of the Ottoman army, estimated at 200,000, were liquidated through mass burials, burnings, executions, and sheer exhaustion in labor battalions. Finally, the remainder of the population, now composed largely of elderly people, women, and children, was given orders for deportation in all parts of the Empire (except the capital and a few cities with European presences).⁵ While a few cities and districts resisted the orders, most followed them, with the faint hope that they might be given a chance to come back.⁶

The fate of the deportees was usually death. Caravans of women and children, ostensibly being led to southern parts of the Empire, became death marches. Within six months of the deportations half of the deportees were killed, buried alive, or thrown into the sea or the rivers. Few reached relatively safe cities such as Aleppo. Most survivors ended up in the deserts of Northern Mesopotamia, where starvation, dehydration, and outright murder awaited them. Subsequent sweeps of cities ensured the elimination of the Armenian people from the western and largest portion of their historic homeland.

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The extermination was accomplished under the supervision of a secretive organization which functioned as part of the government, the *Teshkilat-i Mahsusa* or Special Organization, run by the highest government officials, manned by convicts released from jail, and acting under the immediate supervision of select members of the Ittihad Party.⁷ The release of the vilest, unbridled animal passions served well the government's purpose of ensuring extermination in the most humiliating, dehumanizing fashion. The torture of thousands of women and children became a source of satisfaction for hundreds who sought and found official sanction from government officials as well as Muslim clergymen, since the murder of Armenians was characterized, like the war against the Entente, as a *jihad* or holy war. Human imagination labored to devise new ways of mutilating, burning, and killing. The suicide of hundreds of women and children attests to the particular brutality of the methods used.

The carnage took place in full view of the military and diplomatic representatives of governments allied with the Ottoman state, such as Germany, and neutral ones, such as the United States (until 1917). In addition, Western missionaries, journalists, travellers, and even sympathetic officers of the Ottoman army described the death marches and atrocities in daily letters and accounts. Reports of the extermination and its methods forwarded to Washington, Berlin, and other capitals by eyewitnesses confirm the stories told by thousands of survivors in subsequent memoirs and oral history interviews.⁸

The methods used to bring about the extermination of the Armenians are very significant, since they attest to the participation of an important segment of the general population. The acquiescence of Turkish, Kurdish, and, to a limited extent, Arab civilians was made easier by the promise of loot, of appropriation of children and women, and of an afterlife in heaven. A governmental decree making it illegal to assist refugees or orphans might ultimately have been responsible, however, for the absence of wholesale assistance from Turks to their former neighbors and friends. The penalty for such assistance was death by hanging in front of one's own house and the burning of that house.⁹ This did not stop some, nonetheless, from resisting orders. A number of Turkish governors and sub-governors were removed from office for their unwillingness to follow orders. Many Turks and Kurds, especially in the Dersim region, risked their lives to save straggling Armenians, and Arabs throughout the Empire's southern provinces accepted and helped the survivors.¹⁰

It is not clear whether it was the absence of technologically viable means to exterminate swiftly or the desire to keep the appearance of "deportations" that led the government to achieve extermination through such methods. The Ottoman government had a record of massacres, some against Armenians. Of these, the 1894-1896 and 1909 are the best

known.¹¹ But this was the first time such a wholesale operation was conducted, ending in the uprooting of a whole nation.

The impact of the genocide was devastating. Of the 2 to 3 million Western Armenians, 1.5 million perished during the holocaust. Up to 150,000 of those who had accepted Islam or had been kept, stolen, or protected by Turks and Kurds survived in Western Armenia without, however, any possibility of preserving a sense of religious or national identity. Close to 400,000 survived by fleeing to Russian Armenia and the Caucasus (where many more died as a consequence of disease and starvation) or Iran; perhaps 400,000 survived by reaching the southern or Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire.¹²

In addition to the death of some 50 to 70 percent of Armenians living under Ottoman Turkish rule, Armenians lost the right to live as a community in the lands of their ancestors; they lost their personal property and belongings. They left behind the schools, churches, community centers, ancient fortresses, and medieval cathedrals, witnesses to a long history. Survivors were forced to begin a new life truncated, deprived of a link with their past, subject to upheavals in the new lands where they suddenly found themselves as foreigners. The remnants of the largely peasant and rural population were now a wretched group of squatters on the outskirts of cities poorly equipped to handle an increase in population.

The genocide constituted a radical break with the past for Western Armenians. The normal transmission of ethical and cultural values was cut off. The traditional ways of explaining tragedies could not accommodate the final solution. Orphans grew to remember and tell the stories of childhood years; they did not know what to think of their Turkish neighbors and found it difficult to imagine that they had once lived together in relative peace.

ENEMIES BY DEFINITION

The victims of twentieth century premeditated genocide—the Jews, the Gypsies, the Armenians—were murdered in order to fulfill the state's design for a new order. . . . War was used in both cases (an opportunity anticipated and planned for by Germany but simply seized by Turkey after World War I began) to transform the nation to correspond to the ruling elite's formula by eliminating groups conceived of as alien, enemies by definition.¹³

So argues Helen Fein in *Accounting for Genocide*. This provides a basic and adequate explanation for the dynamics of the Armenian genocide. Whatever political, sociological, and other explanations one may end up accepting as part of the causal process, only such an encompassing, exclusive characteristic of the human mind can account for the radical nature of the "solution," for the act of genocide. It is when man

plays God and wants to recreate the world in his own image—however perverted man or the image—that the *other* can be reduced to a nuisance, to an enemy that by definition must be destroyed regardless of his or her actions and policies.

Explanations of the Armenian genocide have generally agreed with Fein's conclusion. The "formula" which historians have ascribed to the Ittihadist elite may vary; some stress a Pan-Islamist vision at work, others a Pan-Turanian one. Most have focused on the rise of an exclusive Turkish nationalism underlying or in the service of Pan-Turanian and/or Pan-Islamic dreams.¹⁴ This nationalism was tied to Anatolia, the "birthplace" of Turkism, a last bastion after the loss of European Turkey. In some cases, as if to moderate the burden of the crime, some have argued that the genocide was the violent manifestation of an otherwise predictable and historically natural clash of two nationalisms in conflict, Armenian against Turkish; this explanation allows for the equation of the motivations of the two groups, with a difference only in the means used by each to achieve their goal.¹⁵

Evolving Turkish nationalism was, in fact, the major factor which determined the course of Ottoman history during the first two decades of this century. Whatever subjective satisfaction Pan-Islamic and Pan-Turanian dreams gave to its adherents, whether under Sultan Abdul Hamid II or the Young Turks who replaced him, these ideologies remained vehicles by which energies outside Turkish nationalism could be harnessed to its service. The Young Turk-Ittihadist elite cared not under what ideology it continued its domination. Religion worked for a while, in some places. It was particularly potent in moving the ignorant masses, in ensuring the support of the *mollahs* (priests) and the *softas* (students of religion) for the Holy War. The idea of unification of Turkish groups across Asia had some success as well; but Pan-Turanism too remained an abstraction for most of the people it was supposed to inspire.

By the time the Ittihadist triumvirate decided to sign an alliance with Germany, its members had determined that whatever ideology emerged, and regardless of who won the war, drastic measures were needed if the Turkish elite were to continue to rule over the remains of the Empire. Long before the war, the Ittihadists were already pursuing a policy of Turkification which went beyond Pan-Islamism.¹⁶ Arabs and Albanians were to speak Turkish; it was not sufficient that they were largely Muslim. The problem with the Ittihadists was that they had not as yet given up on the idea of an empire, which required an ideology and a basis of legitimation wider than Turkish nationalism or dynastic allegiance.

Conditions were ripe for genocide to occur during a period of transition from the concept of an empire based on dynastic allegiance to that of a nation-state. Pan-Turanian and Pan-Islamic ideologies were stages that

helped the Ottomans accept the break from a tradition of conquest. One of the vehicles for the building of Turkish nationalism was the identification of "enemies" of the yet to be born nation; a second vehicle was its resistance to the loss of territory and dignity to Western imperialism. The self-definition in relation to the Armenian enemy was convenient, since Armenians were neither Turks nor Muslims; and the long history of the Armenian Question as an integral part of the Eastern Question made identification with outside enemies, in this case France, Great Britain, and Russia, easy.¹⁷

The Ottoman government had used wholesale massacres before against "enemies" of the state. Wartime conditions provided justification for extraordinary measures. Western governments, traditionally the only ones interested in and capable of intervention, were already at war, on the wrong side, as far as the Ottoman Empire was concerned. Germany, the Ottoman Empire's major ally, was capable of making a difference but opted not to.¹⁸ Armenians, based on their history of past victimization, could easily be perceived as enemies of society or the state, given the paranoia of Ittihadist leaders.¹⁹

It is possible to paraphrase Helen Fein, then, and reconstruct a Turkish "design for a new order." This would be based, on the one hand, on the assertion of sovereignty vis-à-vis the West by reversing the series of losses of territories; on the other hand, this design would insist on the establishment of "order" within the country, an order which was threatened by elements for whom the symbols of Turkism, Islamism, or Turanism could not mean much and who were seeking an alternate framework for identification with the state. In addition, these elements, i.e., Armenians, could be charged with collusion with the traditional enemy, Russia.²⁰

The basic explanation provided by Fein, however, does not preclude the further elaboration of the vision of the criminal state in its specific and more complex historical context. Many scholars have contributed to the understanding of genocide and to the identification of factors leading to genocide. Leo Kuper and Irving L. Horowitz have developed new perspectives on genocide as a political weapon in the twentieth century and argued for its study as a new category in social research.²¹ Vahakn Dadrian, a sociologist pioneering in studies on the Armenian genocide, has concentrated on the victimization theory and has pointed out sociological factors involved in the process of dehumanization leading to genocide resulting from the search for power.²²

The Kurdish historian Siyamend Othman, in his doctoral dissertation and a subsequent article, attempted to explain the reasons why Kurds played such a prominent role in the deportations and massacres. His argument is that for Kurds within a feudal structure the tribe provided group identity and therefore allegiance was to the chief, who was manipulated by the Ottoman government. Othman also points out that the

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common Kurd may have been harboring some resentment toward Armenians, who tended to be the usurers and capitalists in the marketplace.²³

In a recent paper Ronald Suny attempted an analysis of the sociological makeup of both Turks and Armenians and suggested that the existence of an Armenian upper class in control of many critical sectors of the economy might in fact have accentuated antagonisms.²⁴

Of major importance is the analysis provided by Robert Melson. Melson has recently argued that one must go beyond victimization theories that generally point to victims of genocide as scapegoats or as provocateurs. He found instead that groups that have social mobility and adaptability to modernization, and thus tend to disturb the traditional orders, may tend to become victims in times of crisis. Melson has called for a somewhat more complex model within which the paranoia of the victimizer is as important in understanding—and foreseeing—genocide as the "success" of the victim.²⁵

These recent points of view can be seen as suggestive and important efforts that provide specificity to the case of the Armenian genocide and help shed light on the "formula" operative in the minds of the Turkish leaders that made possible the dehumanization and, eventually, the extermination of Armenians.

A Populist Agenda and the Alienation of the State

To the extent that the Ittihad decision to exterminate Armenians in the Ottoman Empire can be explained by the history of relations between the two, the period from 1908 to 1914 is obviously the most important. Armenian political parties, the revolutionary Hunchakians and Dashnaktsutiune, had opposed the Sultan's government until 1908, as had the various Turkish groups known as the Young Turks, of which the Ittihad ve Terakke was the most important. When the Young Turks took over the government in 1908 and restored the Constitution that had been promulgated in 1876 and prorogued in 1878, Armenian revolutionaries ended their armed struggle and pledged allegiance to the new regime and kept their pledge until the beginning of the genocide.

Thus, the first point to be made regarding the pre-genocide period is that Armenian political parties functioned as legitimate Ottoman institutions, whose goals and bylaws were recognized by the Ottoman government. While they differed in their assessment of the chances for successful reforms under the Ittihad government, there was and there could have been nothing in their programs or actions which could have been considered illegitimate or detrimental to the Constitution.

The second important fact with regard to these relations is that, along with a change in the ruling elite of the Ottoman Empire, the 1908 Constitution also produced a change in the representation of the Armenians. To negotiate Armenian demands for reform the Ottoman Turkish govern-

ment had to deal with Armenian leaders of the revolutionary and guerrilla movement. The new spokesmen for the Armenians had won the right to represent Armenians by waging an armed struggle on behalf of economic and political rights; their religion had been Enlightenment. These new leaders supplanted the largely conservative clergymen of the Patriarchate who were bound by the dictates of the *millet* system which defined Armenians as a religious community and denied them an essentially political character.

A third important characteristic of the pre-genocide Armeno-Turkish relations is that they evolved between 1908 and 1914. The major factor which determined this change was the gradual elimination of the liberal program which some Young Turks had advocated prior to and immediately after the 1908 takeover. As a whole, the Young Turks had linked the imperative of preserving the territorial integrity of the Empire with the need to introduce general reforms. This willingness to recognize the importance of domestic social, economic, and political policies affecting the larger population had satisfied Armenians in their struggle to improve their situation, particularly the lot of the peasant and rural populations. Generally speaking, the Ittihad government discarded its liberal democratic ideals; it moved toward despotism and began relying, as its predecessor had done, on the reactionary classes, repressive measures, and symbols to secure its position in power.

Based on documents being studied for the first time, it is possible to argue that the critical period when the fundamental change occurred was between 1909 and 1911.²⁶ By 1909, the excitement of the first days was over. Elections for the first Parliament were completed. The Ittihad Party had run on a platform with the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) or Dashnaksutiune, and won. Furthermore, following the massacre of Adana, the government promised to take concrete steps to introduce long promised reforms, consolidate the constitutional regime, and resolve domestic issues which caused hardship to Armenians.

An agreement signed between the Ittihad and the Turkish Section of the Western Bureau (highest executive body) of the Dashnaksutiune seemed a secure path toward the realization of reforms throughout the Empire. In 1911 the Sixth World Congress of the Dashnaksutiune reached the conclusion that the party could no longer hope that the Ittihad would realize the reforms and consequently it could no longer remain in an alliance with the Ittihad.²⁷

According to the agreement, the two parties were to develop a joint committee, above and beyond formal contacts and parliamentary negotiations. This committee would be composed of high-level officials whose task it was to find ways to strengthen the Constitution, educate the public on political issues and against the reaction, educate the Turkish masses on anti-Armenian prejudices, and increase political rights for all. In addition to the main committee in Constantinople, regional and district

joint committees were also to be organized. The agreement was reached at a meeting between representatives of the Turkish Section of the ARF Bureau and the Central Committee of the Ittihad held in Salonika in August 1909, four months after the massacres of Adana. These negotiations may have been the price paid by the Ittihad in return for the willingness of the Dashnaksutiune to ascribe the massacres to the reaction, when in fact at least local Ittihad members were implicated.

The institutionalization of contacts at all levels appeared a good way to avoid future misunderstandings, to decrease tensions, and to open the way to important reforms. However, from the beginning, the Dashnaksutiune had difficulties in ensuring the functioning of the committee. The first and most important committee, to be established in the capital, did not get its Turkish appointees until early 1910. In addition, the Ittihad avoided regular meetings from March to June 1910, and none of the important issues, foreign or domestic, was placed on the agenda by the Ittihad.

The Dashnaksutiune had its own agenda, which constituted basically its minimum and practical program. The party demanded:

1. The end of feudal structures, laws, and practices in Anatolia.
2. A change in the government's policy of total indifference toward social and economic development and the concomitant crises affecting all segments of society; economic development was necessary to provide opportunities for the improvement in the standard of living.
3. The solution of the most critical issue, the agrarian crisis, which resulted both from inherent inequities and the feudal system as well as from the conscious policies of officials to expel Armenians from their farms, expropriate their lands, and give them to *muhajirs* or Muslim immigrants. The latter, often coming from the formerly Ottoman Balkan districts, were systematically directed into Armenian districts for resettlement, which would then take place at the expense of Armenian farmers.
4. The end of regressive, extralegal, and illegal taxes, which particularly affected Christians, but generally had a negative impact on all subjects.
5. The end of insecurity of life, honor, and property, particularly for Armenians whose communal existence was threatened by continuing pillaging, lawlessness, and renewed overt aggression and discrimination.²⁸

These issues, and especially the agrarian crisis and the tax laws, were pointed to as threatening the economic foundation of the Armenian community.²⁹

The Dashnaksutiune placed these and other, more specific, items on the agenda on many occasions. None of the issues, however, received

satisfactory solutions. A second trip was needed to Salonika to determine why there was no action. In March 1911 two party plenipotentiaries went to meet again with the Ittihad Central Committee. The result was renewed promises for reform, once a new study was completed by two Ittihad leaders who were sent on a tour of the provinces. The Ittihad leaders seem to have agreed with the Dashnaktsutiune representatives that the problem was not between Armenians and Turks or Kurds but between the poor and the rich, and that Turkish and Kurdish peasants often suffered as much as Armenians. Despite the agreement in principle and the promise to seriously confront the problem, the tour by the two dignitaries produced no changes in government policies. Reporting from Van, a member of the Dashnaktsutiune's local Central Committee echoed the observation of many Armenians when he wrote: "[The two representatives] are here now and, frankly, we cannot understand what they are doing. They have shied away from all contacts with the popular masses and the rural folk; they are constantly surrounded by the local notables and government officials."³⁰

Following two years of intense efforts and accommodation to an Ittihad agenda which seemed to be lacking focus, the Dashnaktsutiune came to the conclusion that it no longer could expect basic changes to come from the Ittihad. A Memorandum accompanying the Report to the Congress listed a number of reasons for the inability of the Ittihad to respond:

1. Feudalism was still not such an abhorrence to the Ittihad; at any rate, its leaders did not wish to alienate the Kurdish chieftains and local landlords, whose support they ultimately considered more important, and safer—since they demanded nothing in return—than that of the Armenians.
2. The Ittihad allowed reactionary elements, such as great landowners and *mollahs*, to become members of the local Ittihad clubs, changing the liberal character of the organization; it was gradually taken over by those forces which constituted the backbone of the previous regime and which had opposed constitutional change and parliamentary government.
3. The fear ascribed by Ittihad leaders to Kurds but in fact shared by some Turks that should Armenians have an equal chance in the system they would overwhelm others by their numbers and achievements.
4. The Ittihad did not wish to see the Dashnaktsutiune or any other Armenian party strengthened.
5. The Dashnaktsutiune's unqualified support of the Ittihad allowed them to take that support for granted; the Ittihad did not need to return any favors for the support.
6. The Ittihad did not wish to see an element in Asia Minor strengthened which might be favored by the Russians, particularly

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7. The disagreement between two Dashnaksutiune members of the Ottoman Parliament on the best methods to develop the proposed railroad in Eastern Anatolia.
8. Instability in the cabinet and its inability to make decisions.

In addition to the absence of reforms and the Ittihad's disregard for its own pledges, the authors of the Memorandum listed the following governmental actions to support their conclusions:

1. The Ittihad government had stopped prosecuting Kurdish chieftains accused of crimes against Armenians; one prominent criminal, Huseyin Pasha, had in fact been invited back into the country with a pardon.
2. The Ittihad had favored the Bagdad railway line which, in the view of the Dashnaksutiune, would only enrich foreign capitalists; the party had recommended instead the Anatolian railway, which would help the economic development of this poor region.
3. No concrete steps were taken to return to Armenian peasants and farmers their lands, their principal means of livelihood. Such a distribution would hardly have affected the Kurdish or Turkish peasant, but it would have hurt the large landowners and *muhajirs*. The Dashnaksutiune's proposal to achieve such a return through administrative decisions was frustrated by the Ittihad's recommendation that the regular courts be used for that purpose; pleas that the courts had not yet been reformed since the revolution and that peasants did not even have money to go to court or to bribe the corrupt officials were hardly heeded.
4. Where joint committees had been formed, the CUP representatives had on occasion made unreasonable and suspicious demands, such as assimilation of the Dashnaksutiune into the Ittihad ve Terakke or turning over the lists of party members to the Committee of Union and Progress.³¹

The Sixth World Congress of the Dashnaksutiune determined that the party could no longer be in alliance with the Ittihad, and that it would continue its efforts as a party in friendly opposition in Parliament.

Thus, during the period of intense relations following the revolution, when the two groups were able to know each other and act on this knowledge, Armenian leaders discussed security of life, land reform, economic development, and political equality, rather than autonomy or independence. Their disagreements and ultimate break were over bread and butter issues rather than over boundaries. Simon Zavarian, one of the founders of the party and a member of the Buro's Turkish Section,

argued in 1912 that of all the elements in the Ottoman Empire, Armenians had been the most supportive of the Constitution:

This sympathy was not the consequence of [the Armenians'] high morals, [their] pro-Turkish inclination, or [their] political maturity. Rather, it is a question of geo-political realities and the current situation. Dispersed all over Asia Minor and mixed with Turks and other nationalities over the centuries, Armenians could not seek their future in a territorial autonomy, to lead an even more isolated political life. Armenians have tried to create [favorable] conditions for all Ottomans by supporting reform for the Ottoman state, [and to change] for the better the status of Armenians and Armenia.³²

He observed, however, that Ottoman subjects had very little to show for the four years they had lived under a Constitution: "End of the internal identification cards, a few students to Europe, and some road projects. . . . But what do peasants and craftsmen have to show? . . . One also cannot hope much from the new Parliament, since most new deputies have titles such as *beys*, *zades*, *pashas* and *mufties*."³³ The alienation of the Armenians from the state was most dramatically illustrated in the final defense statement of the Hunchakian Paramaz in 1915, who after having been accused of plotting against the government, was hanged along with twenty other Hunchakian leaders. "I am not a separatist," said Paramaz. "It is this state which is separating itself from me, unable to come to terms with the ideas which inspire me."³⁴

It seems, then, that long before the beginning of World War I the Ittihad, as well as the Armenian parties, had concluded that the Young Turk revolution had failed. Jemal Pasha, one of the triumvirate, argued in his memoirs that the Ittihad failed to take root.³⁵ In 1912 Zavarian had been more explicit in his explanation of the failure of the Ittihad:

Instead of waging a struggle, of establishing a popular militia, of creating a democratic party, a party with [political] principles, [the Ittihadists] went the way of their predecessors: they chose "the easy path." They kissed and allied with all the dignitaries and created a "union" of coreligionists.³⁶

Armenian political parties wavered between clear signs that the liberal era had ended and the hope that they were mistaken. Meeting in Constanza in September 1913 for its Seventh World Conference, the Hunchakian Party had perceived the dangers inherent in Ittihad mentality. A new party policy was based, among other arguments, on

the fact that the fundamental principles [of the Ittihad] call for the preservation of a Turkish bureaucracy and that they do not allow for the emergence of a new state, and that it is the [Ittihad's] obvious goal not only to assimilate but also to eliminate, and if need be, exterminate, constituent nationalities.³⁷