# The Armenian Genocide: Human Rights and Intervention in the "First Genocide of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century"

## <mark>Answer Key</mark>

#### **Main Sources:**

A Shameful Act, by Turkish historian Taner Akçam

The Burning Tigris, by Armenian-American writer Peter Balakian

Survivors: An Oral History of the Armenian Genocide, Donald e. Miller and Loran Touryan Miller The Armenian Genocide: History, Politics, Ethics, edited by Richard G. Hovannisian

#### What is Genocide?

Article II of the United Nation's "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide:" In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

From December 9, 1948.

#### **The Ottoman Context:**

- 1) The Ottoman Empire was a multi-ethnic, multi-confessional empire under the leadership of the Ottoman Sultan who came from the house of Osman and which ruled through Islamic *sharia* law, Kanun law decreed by the sultan, and laws of convention.
- 2) While scholars debate its precise nature and time of establishment the <u>Millet</u> system organized non-Muslim minority groups religiously for purposes of government such as tax collection.
- 3) In Europe during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Empire was derogatorily known as "The <u>Sick</u> Man of Europe" and hoped to parcel up the land between powers like the British Empire, France, and Russia.
- 4) Sultan Abdülhamid II, sometimes called in Europe the "<u>Bloody or Red</u>" Sultan, gave his name to the so-called "Hamidian" massacres of Armenians in 1894-1896.

### The Committee of Union and Progress wing of the Young Turks

- 5) The three main "ideological supports" considered during the Late Ottoman Empire were Ottomanism, Islamism and Turkism.
- 6) Ziya Gökalp was the pen name of an important CUP thinker who espoused Pan Turkism.
- 7) The Committee of Union and Progress came to power on July 23, 1908.
- 8) Armenians were killed in large numbers in the city of <u>Adana</u> in 1909 following the political confusion caused by the "Countercoup" of Sultan Abdülhamid II.
- 8) Eventually, after a military coup in 1913, the CUP was dominated by the "triumvirate" of Enver, Jemal (Cemal) and Talat Bey, or later, Pasha.
- 9) The Ottoman Empire entered World War I on the side of the <u>Central</u> Powers, which included the German Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

#### The Armenian Genocide:

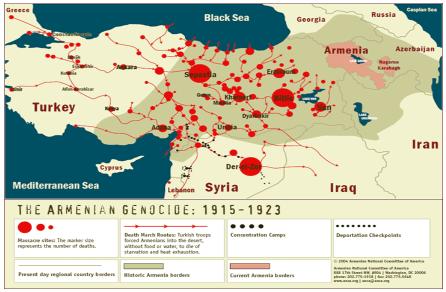
- 10) The traditional day of remembrance for the Armenian Genocide is April 24<sup>th</sup>, when on that day in 1915, hundreds of Armenian intellectual, cultural and political leaders were arrested in Istanbul.
- 11) In May of 1915, the emergency order called the <u>temporary law of deportation</u> was enacted, which authorized the deportation of anyone suspected of treason or espionage
- 12) Only Armenians in the large cities of <u>Istanbul</u> and <u>Izmir</u> were spared. Most other Armenians facing deportation who survived did so only due to the goodwill of ordinary Ottomans of other religions and ethnicities who aided them.
- During forced marches into the deserts of Syria Armenians were subject to the "special organization," made up of convicts and others, as well as rape and even medical "experiments."
- 14) The famous endpoint of the forced marches into the Syrian desert is called <u>derzor</u>.

#### **Some Big Questions:**

I) Peter Balakian makes the case that the figure of the "starving Armenian" which circulated throughout American starting from the Hamidian massacres was crucial to America's move away from isolationism and to an emergent discourse of "human rights."

What can we make of this claim? Do we need an abject refugee like the "starving Armenian" to be able to envision human rights? How does human rights discourse play into international intervention (hint: think about Libya today!)

- II) Scholars continue to argue over whether or not the Hamidian massacres and the Adana massacre should be seen as precursors to the Armenian Genocide which took place during the First World War. What is at stake in connecting these events? How might they be connected? How are they different events?
- III) Relating events together as history as in the question above brings us to the problem of genocide denial. Today, the Republic of Turkey does not admit that what happened during the days of the CUP should be called genocide. What would it mean to label something genocide *after* the fact (no genocides which occurred before the Holocaust are officially called "genocide")? Can we imagine the relationship between the Republics of Turkey and Armenia today as a result of the argument over whether or not what happened is genocide? What's in a name...?



Map: http://filipspagnoli.wordpress.com/2011/03/20/human-rights-maps-125-the-armenian-genocide/