
The Armenians and Ottoman Military Policy, 1915

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Mainstream western scholarship maintains that the Armenian insurrection of 1915 was never an actual threat to the security of the Ottoman state in the First World War and that the relocation of the Armenians of eastern Anatolia was unnecessary. In truth, no study of the Armenian insurrection and its effect on Ottoman military policy has ever been conducted. This article examines the Ottoman army's lines of communications architecture and logistics posture in eastern Anatolia in 1915. Armenian threats to the logistics and security of the Ottoman armies in Caucasia and Palestine are overlaid on this system. Evolving and escalatory Ottoman military policies are then explained in terms of threat assessments and contemporary counter-insurgency strategy. The article seeks to inform the reader why the Ottomans reacted so vigorously and violently to the events of the spring of 1915.

I. Introduction and Contextualization

Western scholarship disparages the Turkish claim that the relocation of the entire Armenian population of eastern Anatolia was necessary for reasons of national security during the First World War.¹ This line of scholarship maintains that the Armenian insurrection of 1915 was never an *actual* threat to the security of the Ottoman state. Moreover, much of the contemporary western historiography asserts that the Ottoman leaders manipulated the notion of an internal Armenian threat as a pretext for ethnic cleansing and genocide. The mechanics of the relocation and destruction of the Armenian population of eastern Anatolia in 1915 have been studied intensively over the past half-century and have been the source of much controversy. Many western historians have concluded that the Ottoman state and the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), in particular, conducted a genocidal policy of ethnic cleansing against helpless Armenians.² On the other

¹ A. Emin (Yalman), *Turkey in the World War* (New Haven, 1930), p. 214. Writing of the Armenian insurrection, Yalman noted it was 'a great military danger' but that the actual action was 'not commensurate with military necessity'. Yalman, unfortunately, did not support his assertions with facts (p. 219).

² For examples see P. Balakian, *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response* (New York, 2003), p. 209; D. Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism,*

hand, the modern Turkish position maintains that military necessity, caused by a large Armenian insurgency, provoked the relocations and some of the massacres. One recent work speaks to the idea of two rival historiographies, which are highly politicized and emotionally charged.³ There is little common ground between the two camps, leaving the standard accounts unable to explain fully the complexity of the events. One area in particular that illustrates this problem is the question of the nature of the Armenian insurrection in 1915 and its effect on Ottoman military policy. No comprehensive study of this question has ever been conducted and the opposing academic positions rely almost entirely on the personal opinions of participants and observers, rather than facts, to prove their veracity.

Because of the sensitivities of our times, understanding where this article fits into the contemporary historical context is important. It is fair to say that there are convergent Armenian and Turkish understandings of the Armenian experience until the winter of 1914. For example, prior to 1914, the Armenian community advocated autonomy and independence, and Armenian revolutionary committees heavily armed the Armenian population of eastern Anatolia, to which the Ottomans reacted with ferocity and violence on a large scale. It is also accurate to note that on its entry into the First World War a pan-Turkic nationalist ideology swept through the Ottoman government, while at the same time the Armenian committees increased their activities accordingly. Moreover, thousands of Muslim refugees flooded into the empire after the Balkan Wars, and the CUP evolved population-engineering schemes to change the demographics of Anatolia. To add complexity, Armenian nationalism was encouraged by the great powers and, reciprocally, the Ottomans encouraged Islamic and Turkic nationalism in the Caucasus, north Africa, and Persia. As war approached, all parties engaged in violent and subversive activities in the frontier regions. While the Turks today highlight that large numbers of Muslim civilians were killed during this time, even larger numbers of Armenians were killed as well. After November 1914, violence directed against the Armenians increased dramatically.

Unfortunately, there is great divergence concerning the issue of premeditation, and, after 1914, the scope of the operation, the numbers involved, and who acted under what authorities. Affecting this article

Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians (Oxford, 2005), pp. 208–10; and V.N. Dadrian, 'The Secret Young Turk Ithadist Conference and the Decision for the World War I Genocide of the Armenians', *Holocaust Studies and Genocide Studies* VII (1993), pp. 173–201, passim.

³ G. Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey: A Disputed Genocide* (Salt Lake City, 2005), pp. 43–130. The literature of these two camps is too exhaustive to detail in this article. For the Armenian position readers may refer to the works in English of Taner Akçam, Vahakn Dadrian, Richard Hovannisian, Raymond Kevorkian, and Robert Melson. For the Turkish position works include those of Bernard Lewis, Justin McCarthy, and Stanford Shaw.

is a divergence in the understandings of facts and interpretations of events by the Turkish and Armenian camps in the period after the winter of 1914/15 to late 1915. In establishing a balanced context for this article recent work by Donald Bloxham, which is arguably regarded as controversial by both sides, presents a middle ground of understanding and interpretation of what happened in 1914–15. Bloxham argues that the war was the key ingredient that led to the relocation and destruction of the Armenians. He posits that anti-Armenian ideology inflamed the CUP, causing it to react violently to the perception of Armenian threats. He also maintains that the great powers actively encouraged the Armenians to violence and that Armenian nationalist leaders unwisely led their people into a destructive confrontation with the Ottoman Empire. Most importantly, Bloxham asserts that Ottoman policies toward the Armenians became progressively radicalized, moving from localized relocations and massacres to a generalized policy of relocation and genocide in the late spring of 1915.⁴ This article is written within Bloxham's contextualization and is designed to complement his exposition of the political, cultural, and ideological events with a corresponding exposition of the military events during the period of August 1914 to the summer of 1915. The article does not detail the Armenian relocations and massacres, nor answer the genocide question; rather it seeks to inform the reader why the Ottoman military reacted in the manner that it did to the events of the spring and summer of 1915.

This article examines the threats to the logistics and security of the two Ottoman armies that were directly affected by the Armenian insurrection – the Ottoman 3rd Army in eastern Anatolia and the Ottoman 4th Army in Syria and Palestine. A further army, the 6th, in Mesopotamia, was indirectly affected because 100% of its logistical resupply chain ran through the other two armies. All three armies were in contact with the enemy in 1915 and the collapse of any one of them would have had a catastrophic effect on the national security of the Ottoman Empire. It is sometimes said that an army travels on its stomach, and serious studies of military history often reveal logistics to be the sine qua non of battlefield success (logistics includes, but is not limited to, rationing, fodder for animals, ammunition and munitions, replacement troops, medical services and hospitals, repair shops and facilities, and transportation). This article focuses on the lines of communications and logistical postures of the Ottoman 3rd and 4th Armies as these were affected by internal and external threats in the late spring of 1915. It also develops the idea of an evolving Ottoman military policy that changed from localized anti-terrorism measures to a generalized campaign of counter-insurgency, which corresponds to

⁴ Bloxham, *Great Game*, pp. 69–96. While Bloxham's claim of genocide alienated the Turkish camp, he also alienated the Armenian camp by asserting that there was little authentic evidence of any premeditated plan of extermination.

Bloxham's ideas about the cumulative radicalization of Ottoman policy towards the Armenians in 1915. The author hopes to fill a gap in the historiography rather than to join the partisan debate between the rival historiographies.

II. Ottoman Army Logistics

The Ottoman army of 1914 modelled itself, its doctrines, its operational thought, and its approach to war on the German army. Logistically the Ottomans mirrored the German army in separating their operational field armies from supporting logistics infrastructure by creating lines of communications inspectorates (LoCIs) upon mobilization.⁵ These 'formed the conveyor of the army' and were 'the middleman between home and army'.⁶ In military doctrinal terms, the LoCIs were a service support organization (as opposed to a combat or combat support formation) and had no intrinsic combat capabilities. This system enabled combat commanders at the front to focus their energy on operational and tactical matters while logisticians handled supply matters.

As its capstone logistics command element the Ottoman general staff activated the General Lines of Communications Inspectorate (*Menzil Genel Müfettişliği*) on 5 August 1914 in Constantinople. This organization exercised command authority over the logistical lifelines of the empire at the strategic level.⁷ High-level logistical planning and co-ordination remained a function of the general staff's Fourth Division, while the GLC Inspectorate co-ordinated daily movements and logistical functions through lower-level subordinate numbered army inspectorate commands.⁸

In eastern Anatolia the 3rd Army Lines of Communications Inspectorate (*3ncü Ordu Menzil Müfettişliği*, hereafter referred to as 3 LoCI) supported the Ottoman 3rd Army. The 3 LoCI headquarters became operational on 26 August 1914 in Erzurum using officers from the Ottoman X Corps and moved to Erzincan a week later.⁹ Colonel

⁵ TC Genelkurmay Başkanlığı, *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi, IIIncü Cilt, 6ncı Kısım (1908–1920)* (Ankara, 1971), pp. 459–63.

⁶ H. Cron, *Imperial German Army, 1914–18: Organisation, Structure, Orders-of-Battle* (Solihull, 2002), p. 237.

⁷ TC Genelkurmay Başkanlığı, *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi Osmanlı Devri Birinci Dünya Harbi İdari Faaliyetler ve Lojistik Xncü Cilt* (Ankara, 1985), p.115. Hereafter TCGB, *İdari Faaliyetler ve Lojistik*.

⁸ Op. cit., p. 102. Ottoman Army logistics doctrines as used in the First World War were formulated in 1911 with the publication of *Menzil Hidemati Nizamnamesi*. By 1914 most of the field armies had published a secondary tier of instructions specific to their areas, for example *İkinci Ordu Menzil Müfettişliği Hayvan Depoları Hakkında Talimat* (Istanbul, 1914). Unrelated to this study, Ottoman logistics doctrines were refined during the war in 1917 as *Seferber Ordularında ve Menzillerde Geri Hidemati Rehberi*. I am indebted to Dr Mesut Uyar (Major, Infantry, Turkish Army) for this information.

⁹ TC Genelkurmay Başkanlığı, *Birinci Dünya Harbinde, Türk Harbi, Kafkas Cephesi 3ncü Ordu Harekati*, Cilt II (Ankara, 1993), p. 645. Hereafter TCGB, *Kafkas Cephesi 3ncü Ordu Harekati II*.

Fuat Ziya assumed command¹⁰ of the 3 LoCI, which was assigned a variety of army support units, including ammunition depots and trains, transportation units, field hospitals, remount and veterinary stations, basic training depot battalions, bakeries and repair shops, supply depots, and labour battalions.¹¹ Its area of responsibility began at the rear edge of the combat corps areas and stretched 800 km westward and southward to the railway servicing eastern Anatolia. Fuat Ziya exercised command through subordinate local commanders called post or node commanders (*nokta komutanlıkları*). After a month of operations the 3 LoCI had stockpiled 30 of the minimum 45 days of rations and supplies required by war regulations for the 3rd Army.¹² Likewise, ammunition and medical supplies were in very short supply.¹³ This was a slim margin for war and the situation was aggravated by the huge losses of equipment and supplies suffered by the Ottoman army in the recent Balkan Wars.

By 26 September 1914, the 3rd Army reported 168 608 men and 53 794 animals (horses, camels, mules, and oxen) assigned to its rolls.¹⁴ The following month reports from the 3 LoCI indicated that it had stockpiled two and a half months of bread and meat, 13 days of oil and dried vegetables, 18 days of barley, 20 days of rice, and five months of sugar for a planned force of 200 000 men and 70 000 animals.¹⁵ Ammunition was a particularly difficult challenge because of the wide variety of rifles and cannon used by the Ottoman army, but there were about 1000 rounds of rifle ammunition per rifleman and about 850 shells per cannon.¹⁶ This was about half as many shells as the western powers considered as adequate stocks for war, which averaged about 1500 per mobile field-gun or howitzer.¹⁷

Bringing food, ammunition, and supplies forward challenged Colonel Fuat's organization to its fullest because of the vast distances to the front. Unlike the great powers of Europe, which built railway nets to accommodate mobilization and supply armies, the Ottoman Empire's railways were built by foreigners for economic profits. Consequently,

¹⁰ I. Görgülü, *On Yıllık Harbin Kadrosu 1912–1922, Balkan-Birinci Dünya ve İstiklal Harbi* (Ankara, 1993), p. 104.

¹¹ TCGB, *Kafkas Cephesi 3ncü Ordu Harekati II*, pp. 645–49.

¹² TC Genelkurmay Başkanlığı, *Birinci Dünya Harbinde, Türk Harbi İnci Cilt, Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun Siyasi ve Askeri Hazırlıkları ve Harbe Girişi* (Ankara, 1970), pp. 186–87. Hereafter TCGB, *Askeri Hazırlıkları ve Harbe Girişi*. The Ottoman 1st and 2nd Armies in Thrace stockpiled 34 and 38 days respectively, while the 4th Army in Palestine stockpiled 24 days.

¹³ TCGB, *İdari Faaliyetler ve Lojistik*, pp. 180–87.

¹⁴ 3rd Army report, Genelkurmay Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt, Ankara, Turkey (ATASE), archive 139, record 636, file 10-2/4, cited in TCGB, *Kafkas Cephesi 3ncü Ordu Harekati II*, p. 657.

¹⁵ 3 LoCI Reports, ATASE, archive 3055, record H-3, file 3–19, cited in TCGB, *Kafkas Cephesi 3ncü Ordu Harekati II*, p. 658.

¹⁶ Various reports, ATASE, archive 2130, record 833, file 16-20, cited in TCGB, *Kafkas Cephesi 3ncü Ordu Harekati II*, pp. 662–63.

¹⁷ H. Strachan, *The First World War*, vol. 1, *To Arms* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 995–96.

none ran to the eastern Anatolian theatre of operations, and the Ottoman front-line units there found themselves over 900 km from railheads. This situation was compounded by a tight Allied naval blockade that forced all logistics traffic onto the two macadamized all-weather roads (*Bellibaşlı karayolları*) that led into eastern Anatolia. Thus, the 3 LoCI supported a force approaching a quarter of a million men and animals 900 km from railheads using animal-drawn transport on two avenues (Sivas–Erzincan–Erzurum in the north and Diyarbakır–Bitlis–Van in the south). Figure 1 shows these critical routes.

War broke out on the Caucasian frontier on 1 November 1914 and after a month of combat operations, the logistical situation was already strained. Altogether the 3 LoCI had 70 days of rations on hand, but front-line units were reduced to 20–25 days on hand, while the fortress of Erzurum had 40–45 days on hand. The provinces of Trabzon and Van had 3–4 months on hand, but the logistics command lacked the transport to transfer supplies rapidly over the abysmal road system.¹⁸ The battles on the frontiers also depleted ammunition stocks and sent about 6000 wounded into the 3 LoCI hospitals at Hasankale and Erzurum.¹⁹

In Syria and Palestine the 4th Army formed on 6 September 1914. It activated the 4th Army Lines of Communications Inspectorate (*4ncü Ordu Menzül Müfettişliği*, hereafter referred to as 4 LoCI) on 12 November 1914 with the headquarters in Damascus.²⁰ The activation of 4 LoCI, which was commanded by Major Kazım, occurred after the declaration of war, and there was no opportunity to stockpile munitions or supplies. Unlike the 3rd Army, 4th Army was responsible for the security and maintenance of the railway line that led from the Pozantı Gap to the Euphrates River and south through Palestine to Medina. The railway posed particular problems because it was constructed by European entrepreneurs rather than by military planners. There were two uncompleted gaps in rugged mountains at Pozantı (54 km) and Osmaniye (36 km), different gauge tracks (for example: 1 m wide from Remleh to Jerusalem but 105 cm wide from there to Damascus), and the entire line was in an extremely poor state of repair.²¹ Compounding the difficulties all supplies for the Mesopotamian theatre were shipped through the 4 LoCI area and competed for the inadequate transportation resources.

The 4th Army began combat operations against the British in late January 1915 when it invaded Egypt in an attempt to block the Suez

¹⁸ Various reports, ATASE, archive 3027, record 3, file 1-17, cited in TCGB, *Kafkas Cephesi 3ncü Ordu Harekatı II*, p. 665.

¹⁹ T. Sağlam, *Büyük Harpte 3ncü Ordu'da Sıhhi Hizmet* (Istanbul, 1941), pp. 8–9, cited in TCGB, *Kafkas Cephesi 3ncü Ordu Harekatı II*, pp. 662–63.

²⁰ 4th Army orders, Damascus, 12 November, 1914, reproduced in TC Genelkurmay Başkanlığı, *Birinci Dünya Harbinde, Türk Harbi, IVncü, Cilt İnci Kısım, Sina-Filistin Cephesi, Harbin Başlangıcından İkinci Gazze Muharebeleri Sonuna Kadar* (Ankara, 1979), pp. 765–67. Hereafter TCGB, *Sina-Filistin cephesi*.

²¹ Op. cit., pp. 675–76.

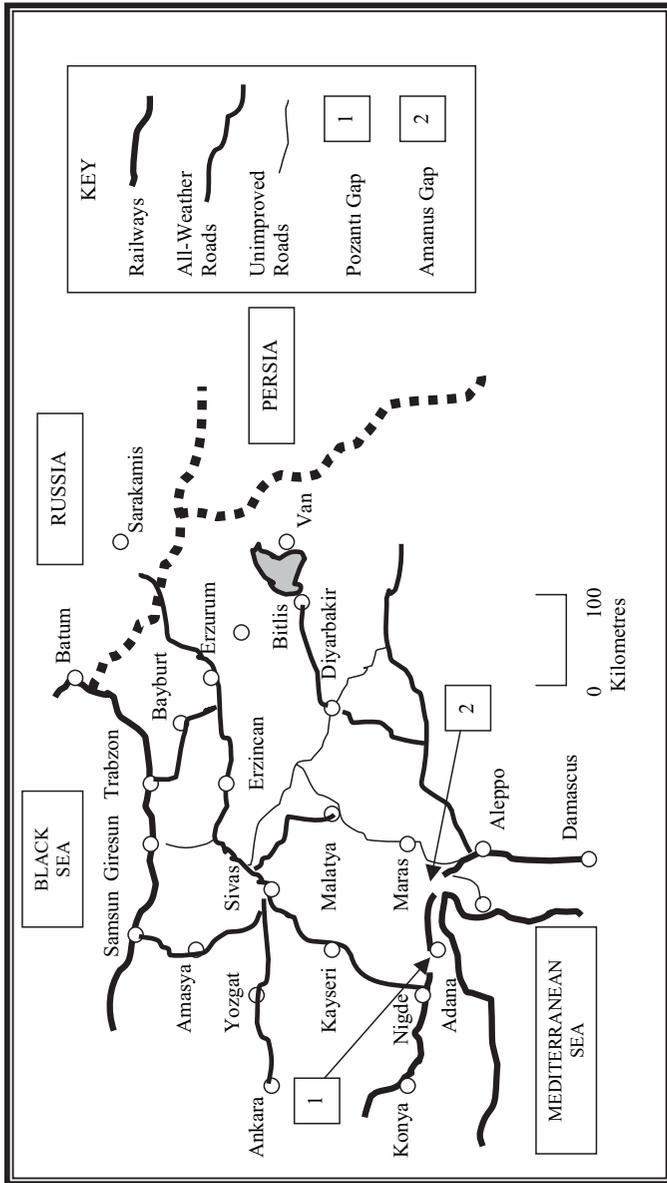


Figure 1 Anatolian lines of communication, 1915

Canal. As at Sarıkamış on the Caucasian front, this operation ended in failure, but casualties were very light and did not affect the combat capability of the 4th Army. No major combat operations happened on this front during the spring and summer of 1915. However, disaster struck the adjacent 6th Army, which lost all of inhabited Mesopotamia below Nasiriya on the Euphrates River by April 1915.

III. The Sarıkamış Campaign and Its Aftermath

In late December 1914 the Ottoman 3rd Army conducted an unsuccessful full-scale envelopment operation aimed at the destruction of a major part of the Russian army in Caucasia. The campaign has been singled out by some authors as a 'threshold event' for the 'extermination of the Armenians' because Ottoman losses gravely weakened the empire's strategic posture in the east, and Enver allegedly needed a scapegoat to blame the catastrophe on.²² Named after the town that was the Ottoman tactical objective, the Sarıkamış campaign was, in fact, a bloody disaster for the Ottomans and resulted in 33 000 dead, 7000 prisoners, and 10 000 wounded.²³ Most of these losses were infantrymen and this crippled the offensive capability of the 3rd Army (although well over 50 000 men remained present for duty). The effect on 3 LoCI was immediate as the previously wounded men were shifted rearward from Erzurum and Hasankale to hospitals in Sivas and Narman.²⁴ As the wounded went back, munitions, uniforms, food, and supplies were moved frantically forward. Several thousand replacements were also rushed forward from depots in Sivas, Giresun, and Tokat to the Köprüköy lines.²⁵ On 18 January 1915 further drafts from Elazığ (1500) and Tokat (2000) arrived at the front. Senior officer replacements were in very short supply and available officers were spread out between the infantry divisions. Thousands of reserve rifles were dispatched to make up losses as well.²⁶

By 8 February the 3rd Army reported 59 226 men and 14 833 animals available for combat duty and 10 074 men and 8277 animals assigned to the 3 LoCI.²⁷ North of Erzurum, supply stocks were down to about

²² Balakian, *Burning Tigris*, pp. 176–79. Balakian cited the 1915 wartime work of Arnold Toynbee, and other writers have carried this forward. In fact, the activities of Armenians as an operational factor leading to the defeat of the 3rd Army does not appear in the Ottoman record. Neither does the idea that the Armenians were a scapegoat for explaining the defeat.

²³ F. Belen, *Birinci Cihan Harbinde Türk Harbi, 1914 yılı hareketleri* (Ankara, 1970), p. 192. The most commonly used western figure for losses in the campaign is 90 000 dead, which originates in Commandant Larcher's 1926 history (M. Larcher, *La Guerre turque dan la Guerre Mondiale*, Paris, 1926) and is undocumented. This figure is greatly inflated.

²⁴ TCGB, *Kafkas Cephesi 3ncü Ordu Harekatı II*, p. 671.

²⁵ Op. cit., p. 672. Major İrfan led 2152 replacements forward on 5 January 1915.

²⁶ Op. cit., p. 674.

²⁷ Strength report, ATASE, archive 140, record 640, file 67, cited in TCGB, *Kafkas Cephesi 3ncü Ordu Harekatı II*, p. 676. A further 7025 men remained in hospital.

40 days of rations and 17 days of fodder, while stocks in the army rear areas were sufficient for 60 days and 16 days respectively.²⁸ In March stock levels rose to 39 days of rations and 14 days of fodder in the combat zone, and 129 days of rations and 37 days of fodder in the army rear area. April brought a Russian offensive toward the lakeside city of Van and Malazgirt. Renewed fighting in May witnessed a Russian offensive in the Tortum valley, which was barely halted. Ottoman losses in these months were severe and approached those of Sarıkamış (58 000 killed and wounded). The fighting quickly consumed accumulated supplies, and by 30 May 1915 stocks were down to critical levels of 41 days of rations and 7 days of fodder in the combat zone and 25 days of rations and 4 days of fodder in the army rear area.²⁹ It is apparent from these figures that resupply, especially of fodder (a critical commodity for an animal-drawn army), was not keeping up with the demands of campaigning.

Munitions were also in short supply in the 3rd Army during this period, and this was compounded by the variety of weapons in use. For example, the army used five models of rifle, two models of pistol, and four models of machine-gun.³⁰ Supplies for small arms and artillery are difficult to establish because these munitions were reported as cases of ammunition rather than as 'days of supplies'.³¹ However, the modern official Turkish history notes that losses of weapons and munitions in eastern Anatolia in the spring of 1915 exceeded the totals of incoming quantities.³² Likewise, personnel replacements, especially trained officers, were also desperately short, and the depot system could not draft and train men fast enough to keep up with losses. In late May 1915 the infantry divisions of the 3rd Army, which should have contained over 9000 infantrymen each, were worn down to an average strength of around 2000 infantrymen each.³³

While Sarıkamış is commonly seen as the proximate cause of Ottoman operational weakness in Anatolia in the spring of 1915, it is clear that the 3 LoCI was able to restore much of the 3rd Army's logistical posture and effectiveness in the following months. However, such capacity as existed was quickly exhausted, and it was the Tortum–Van–Malazgirt battles that wore the 3rd Army down to ineffectiveness. The idea that the losses and aftermath of Sarıkamış somehow 'fuelled the

²⁸ Op. cit., p. 676.

²⁹ Logistics reports, ATASE, archive 1261, record 539, file 1-9, cited in TCGB, *Idari Faaliyetler ve Lojistik*, p. 252.

³⁰ Various reports, 5 May 1915, ATASE, archive 1070, record 97, files 1-2/3/9, cited in TCGB, *Idari Faaliyetler ve Lojistik*, p. 269.

³¹ Computation of how much food and fodder a certain number of men and animals will consume follows a known formula. Ammunition usage, on the other hand, follows an unpredictable path of expenditure that is dependent on the tactical situation.

³² TCGB, *Idari Faaliyetler ve Lojistik*, p. 269.

³³ Strength reports, ATASE, archive 1964, record 305, files 1-29/1-143, cited in TC Genelkurmay Başkanlığı, *Birinci Dünya Harbinde, Türk Harbi, Kafkas Cephesi Üçüncü Ordu Harekatı*, Cilt I (Ankara, 1993), p. 645. Hereafter referred to as TCGB, *Kafkas Cephesi Üçüncü Ordu Harekatı I*.

zeal for exterminating the Armenians'³⁴ has no basis in fact. In any case by late May 1915 the logistics situation of the Ottoman 3rd Army was unsatisfactory, and any interruption of the supply chain would further degrade the army's effectiveness.

IV. The Armenian Threat

A full examination of the causes of the Armenian insurrection of 1915 is beyond the scope of this article. This section describes the internal situation as the Ottomans knew it in the late spring of 1915. Difficulties with the Armenian population had begun in 1877 during the Russo-Turkish War and continued intermittently into 1914. Encouraged by the successful insurrections and independence of the Serbs, Bulgars, and Greeks, dissident Armenians in the Ottoman Empire formed revolutionary committees, both in secret and in public, a formula that had worked especially well for the Christian peoples in the Balkans. There were several outbreaks of Armenian large-scale violence before the First World War (notably in 1894–96 and 1908–09).³⁵ These failed and were ruthlessly extinguished by the Ottomans, but two committees, the Daşnaks (the Armenian Revolutionary Federation) and the Hunçaks (the Armenian Social Democrat Party), grew in strength and influence. In addition to the committees, the Catholicos of All Armenians (a religious leader living in Russia), the Armenian Orthodox Patriarch (living in Constantinople), and the Security Council of the Armenian Parliament (in Constantinople) co-ordinated the Armenian National Delegation, which opened active negotiations in 1912 with the Russians, French, and British to advance the creation of an autonomous Armenia.

The Armenian revolutionary committees were instrumental in the arming of the Armenian community in eastern Anatolia. In July 1914 the Ottoman consulate in Kars intercepted a telegram outlining the smuggling of 400 rifles into the Eleşkirt valley.³⁶ Other intercepted letters sent by the Daşnak committee (predominant among the numerous Armenian nationalist committees of the time) requested weapons from the Russians. That summer the British Foreign Office also tracked similar numbers of military rifles being smuggled into Trabzon.³⁷ In July and August 1914 the Daşnaks held the important eighth general party congress in Erzurum, which was attended by rival party representatives as well as a delegation from the Ottoman government. Ostensibly

³⁴ Balakian, *Burning Tigris*, p. 178.

³⁵ TC Genelkurmay Başkanlığı, *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi, IIIncü Cilt, 5nci Kısım (1793–1908)* (Ankara, 1978), pp. 597–606. In 1909 in Adana the violence was directed against the Armenians, whose nationalist leaders can, however, be said to have provoked it.

³⁶ M. Demirel, *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Erzurum ve Cevresinde Ermeni Hareketleri (1914–1918)* (Ankara, 1996), p. 17.

³⁷ Smith to Mallet, 1 July 1914, The National Archives (TNA), Kew, UK, FO 195/2450.

conducted to advance Armenian concerns peacefully through legitimate means, the congress was regarded by the Ottomans as the seedbed for later insurrection. It was here, the Ottomans were convinced, that strong Armenian–Russian links solidified into detailed plans, and agreements were drawn up aiming at the detachment of Armenia from the Ottoman Empire.

In fact, some of the congress leaders quickly left for Tbilisi in Russia, where plans to organize Armenian volunteers on the Caucasian front were announced in September.³⁸ The Ottoman army soon became aware that regiments of expatriate Ottoman Armenians in the Russian army were mobilized and were conducting war-training exercises.³⁹ Indicators of potential violent intent accumulated as Ottoman authorities found bombs and weapons hidden in Armenian villages.⁴⁰ Near Erzurum, Russian rifles were discovered hidden in Armenian homes on 20 October. Earlier that month (prior to the commencement of hostilities) the 3rd Army had received reports of Armenians who served in the Russian army returning to the Ottoman Anatolian provinces with maps and money.⁴¹ There were also reports from infantry battalions concerning Armenian meetings at which large numbers of aggressively nationalist people were gathering.⁴² In late October 1914 the 3rd Army staff informed the Ottoman general staff that large numbers of Armenians with weapons were moving into Muş, Bitlis, Van, and Erivan.⁴³ Ottoman military staffs at all levels were also disturbed by reports that thousands of Armenian citizens were deliberately leaving their homes in Ottoman territory and traveling into Russian-held territory.⁴⁴ Although the Ottoman Empire was still officially at peace with Russia, many Ottoman officers were by now convinced that Russia was actively conspiring to foment an Armenian revolt.

War broke out on 2 November 1914. Later that month the Ottoman Special Organization and the local jandarma (a paramilitary gendarmerie) launched a bitter anti-guerrilla campaign against insurgent Armenians who had crossed into the empire near Hopa and Rize on

³⁸ A. Chalabian, *General Andranik and the Armenian Revolutionary Movement* (reprint USA, 1988), p. 227.

³⁹ Demirel, *Erzurum ve Cevresinde Ermeni Hareketleri*, p. 17. Even though Russia (already at war with Germany) was not at war with the Ottoman Empire the Ottomans were very disturbed by the mobilization of Ottoman Armenians on the Russian side of the frontier.

⁴⁰ In fact, in the next six months, Ottoman authorities would list 4780 military rifles and large quantities in the hands of known Armenian committees. See Demirel, *Erzurum ve Cevresinde Ermeni Hareketleri*, p. 19.

⁴¹ Headquarters, 3rd Army, Report on Criminal Activity, 8 October 1914, ATASE, archive 2828, record 59, file 2-85.

⁴² Report from Hudut (Frontier) Battalion to Headquarters, IX Corps, 22 October 1914, ATASE, archive 2818, record 59, file 2-39.

⁴³ Headquarters, 3rd Army Report to Acting Commander in Chief, 23 October 1914, ATASE, archive 2818, record 59, file 1-41, 1-42.

⁴⁴ TCGB, *İdari Faaliyetler ve Lojistik*, p. 105. There were enough Ottoman Armenians of conscription age to form four battalions immediately.

the north-east frontier.⁴⁵ Throughout the rest of 1914 and into January 1915, many reports to the Ottoman general staff outlined the danger posed by armed Armenians in the 3rd and 4th Army areas. Incidents of terrorism increased, particularly bombings⁴⁶ and assassinations of civilians and local Ottoman officials.⁴⁷ The areas around Erzurum were hotbeds of activity, and Ottoman intelligence tracked the local Armenian committee leaders and the villages that hid and supported them.⁴⁸ There were minor revolts in Bitlis and areas near Van in early February.⁴⁹ In Armenian villages on the road between Sivas and Erzincan, Ottoman officers found illustrated bulletins and posters advocating resistance and massacre of Muslims.⁵⁰ These incidents were especially disturbing to the Ottomans because they indicated a higher degree of organization, which also included the cutting of communications lines and the interdiction of roads.⁵¹ Whether the Armenian activities were acts of self-defence or acts of revolt remains controversial and inconclusive.⁵²

On 25 February 1915 the Operations Division of the Ottoman general staff sent a ciphered cable to the field armies directing them to take increased security precautions.⁵³ This directive noted increased dissident Armenian activity in Bitlis, Aleppo, Dörtyol, and Kayseri, and furthermore identified Russian and French influence and activities in these areas (in particular, code keys in French, Russian, and Armenian were discovered in Armenian homes in the city of Kayseri). The Operations Division directed that the 3rd and the 4th Armies increase both surveillance and security measures. Moreover, commanders were ordered to remove any ethnic Armenian soldiers from important headquarter staffs and command centres. The final measure was probably taken in response to a report that the Armenian Patriarchate in

⁴⁵ TCGB, *Kafkas Cephesi Üçüncü Ordu Harekatı I*, p. 599–601.

⁴⁶ K. Gurun, *Ermeni Dosyası* (Ankara, 1983). Included in this book are copies of numerous reports sent to the Ottoman general staff and the Ministry of Defence from the 3rd and 4th Army commanders.

⁴⁷ Headquarters, V Corps Report, 25 February 1915, on the bombing incident in Ankara, ATASE, archive 2287, record 32, file 8.

⁴⁸ Demirel, *Erzurum ve Çevresinde Ermeni Hareketleri*, pp. 40–45. Demirel included the names of specific Armenian leaders and their locations, for example Bogos Boyacıyan from Toti and Ohannes Kokasyan from Velibaba.

⁴⁹ K. Arı, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı Kronolojisi* (Ankara, 1997), pp. 105–10.

⁵⁰ G.N. Ege-Akter (trans.), *Babamın Emanetleri, Ragıp Nurettin Ege'nin Birinci Cihan Harbi Günlükleri ve Harbin Sonrası Hatıratı* (Istanbul, 2006), p. 56. See diary entry for 23 February 1915.

⁵¹ J. McCarthy, E. Arslan, C. Taşkiran, and Ö. Turan, *The Armenian Rebellion at Van* (Salt Lake City, 2006), pp. 187–90.

⁵² Bloxham wrote in 2005 that 'the distinction between acts of self-defence and acts of revolt remains blurred', and noted that it is difficult to separate acts of volunteerism from acts of desperation. See Bloxham, *Great Game*, p. 90. For more recent opposing viewpoints, see McCarthy et al., *Armenian Rebellion*, pp. 180–91, and T. Akçam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (New York, 2006), pp. 111–48.

⁵³ First Division, Ottoman General Staff cable, directive 8682, 25 February 1915, ATASE, archive 2287, record 32, file 9.

Constantinople was transmitting military secrets and dispositions to the Russians.⁵⁴ The timing of this order corresponded with information provided to the Russians from the Armenian committee in Zeitoun that 15 000 Armenians there were ready to take up arms and attack Ottoman lines of communications of the Ottoman army in Erzurum.⁵⁵

By mid-March 1915 the insurgent situation in the Doğubeyazıt–Van region had considerably worsened. The governor of Van reported numerous massacres of isolated Muslim villagers by armed groups of Armenian guerrillas.⁵⁶ On the other hand, the local Armenian community accused the governor of unprovoked massacres of Christians.⁵⁷ Regardless of cause, by this time the staff of the 3rd Army was sufficiently concerned by the possibility of armed insurrection that it began to shift jandarma and army units into the area to meet the threat. About the same time Armenian deserters from Maraş resisted arrest, killed six gendarmes, and then fled to Zeitoun, where they led an uprising on 12 March.⁵⁸ They and 150 other Armenians then broke out of the Ottoman cordon and went into the mountains on 23 March.⁵⁹ In fact, armed revolts by the Armenians soon broke out in many areas of south-eastern Anatolia. There is no question that the Russians supported the Armenians inside the Ottoman Empire with money, weapons, and encouragement.⁶⁰ Externally the Armenian National Council formed *druzhiny* (or regiments) from the enthusiastic volunteers, who were eager to invade the Ottoman Empire.⁶¹ The ‘Ararat Unit’ composed of the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th *Druzhiny* was assigned to capture the lakeside city of Van.

The event most associated with the beginning of the insurrection occurred when insurgents seized most of Van in a fierce attack on 14 April 1915.⁶² Venezuelan soldier of fortune Rafael De Nogales observed the battle and noted that ‘the Armenians of the Vilayet of

⁵⁴ Special ciphered correspondence no. 2086, Chief, Second Division, Ministry of the Interior, to Chief, Second Division, Ottoman General Staff, 31 January 1915, ATASE, archive 2029, file 2.

⁵⁵ Russian ambassador to Foreign Ministry, Paris, 23 February 1915, Archives du ministère des Affaires étrangères (AMAE), Guerre 1914–1915, Turquie, tome 849, f. 214, reprinted in A. Beylerian, *Les Grandes Puissances, l’Empire ottoman et les Arméniens dans les archives françaises 1914–1918* (Paris, 1983), p. 7.

⁵⁶ TCGB, *Kafkas Cephesi İncü Ordu Harekatı I*, pp. 587–88.

⁵⁷ Balakian, *Burning Tigris*, pp. 197–209.

⁵⁸ Wagenheim to Bethmann Hollweg, 26 March 1915, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts (AP), AA/RI 4085, translated and reprinted at <http://www.armenocide.de>.

⁵⁹ Roessler (Aleppo) to Bethmann Hollweg, 12 April 1915, AP, AA/RI 4085, translated and reprinted at <http://www.armenocide.de>.

⁶⁰ W.E.D. Allen and P. Muratoff, *Caucasian Battlefields: A History of the Wars on the Turco-Caucasian Border, 1828–1921* (Cambridge, 1953), pp. 242, 299–301.

⁶¹ M.A. Reynolds, ‘The Ottoman-Russian Struggle for Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasus, 1908–1918: Identity, Ideology and the Geopolitics of World Order,’ unpublished PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 2003, p. 206. General Andranik’s biographer, Chalabian, asserted that there were six regiments of Armenian volunteers, but that they were never employed en masse. See Chalabian, *General Andranik*, p. 229.

⁶² TCGB, *Kafkas Cephesi İncü Ordu Harekatı II*, p. 591.

Van rose *en masse*, were heavily armed and fought with courage and determination'.⁶³ In late May 1915 the American ambassador sent a confidential report to Washington elaborating the nature and the large scale of the insurrection:

it would seem as if an Armenian insurrection to help the Russians had broken out at Van. Thus a former deputy here, one Pastormadjian who had assisted our proposed railway concessions some years ago, is now supposed to be fighting with the Turks with a legion of Armenian volunteers. These insurgents are said to be in possession of a part of Van and to be conducting guerrilla warfare in a country where regular military operations are extremely difficult. To what extent they are organised or what successes they have gained it is impossible for me to say; their numbers have been variously estimated but none puts them at less than ten thousand and twenty-five thousand is probably closer to the truth.⁶⁴

Making things worse for the Ottomans, Armenian *çeteler* or guerrilla bands (this word may be translated as guerrilla, insurgent, or bandit depending on context) began to interdict the vulnerable Ottoman lines of communications by cutting telegraph wires and conducting road sabotage to cut and block roads (notably along the Erzurum–Sivas logistics corridor).⁶⁵ The Van uprising acted as a catalyst, and uprisings broke out in other cities in the 3 LoCI area of responsibility. The governor of Sivas reported on 22 April that large numbers of armed Armenians posed a security problem for unguarded Muslim villages.⁶⁶ Diyarbakır (situated on the southern logistics corridor) erupted in a rash of bombings later in the month,⁶⁷ and another uprising broke out in Zeitoun.⁶⁸ German cables from Constantinople reported that Armenian clubs in Erzurum committed a series of political murders and that Armenians were serving as guides for the Russian army.⁶⁹

⁶³ R. De Nogales, *Four Years beneath the Crescent* (New York, 1926), p. 45.

⁶⁴ Morgenthau to the Secretary of State, 25 May 1915, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park, Maryland, RG 353 (Internal Affairs, Turkey), roll 41, p. 2. While Morgenthau's figures seem high, the Armenian National Defence Committee (ANDC) reported in July that the British could 'rely on 25,000 Armenian insurgents in Cilicia and could rely on 15,000 more from nearby provinces.' See Announcement by ANDC to Sir J. Maxwell, CinC, Egypt, Cairo, 24 July 1915, document 119 in V. Ghazarian (ed.), *Boghos Nubar's Papers and the Armenian Question, 1915–1918* (Waltham, 1996), p. 203.

⁶⁵ DH ciphered cable, Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Istanbul, Turkey (BOA), archive 53/345, cited in Demirel, *Erzurum ve Çevresinde Ermeni Hareketleri*, p. 48. Demirel noted the Erzurum to Aşkale and Erzurum to Bayburt lines were cut and that the road from Erzurum to Diyarbakır was cut in four locations. Later the train lines from Constantinople to Ankara were blown up as well.

⁶⁶ Ciphered message from Muammer Bey, 22/23 April 1915, ATASE, archive 2820, record 69, file 3-45.

⁶⁷ Cmdr 11 Corps to 3rd Army, 29 April 1915, ATASE, archive 2820, record 69, file 1-21.

⁶⁸ 41nci Piyade Tümen Tarihçesi, unpublished staff study, 1969, ATASE, archive 26-344.

⁶⁹ Wagenheim to Bethmann Holweg, 15 and 25 April 1915, AP, AA/RI 4085, translated and reprinted at <http://www.armenocide.de>.

Along the front north-east of Erzurum, Armenian volunteers assisted the Russians in pushing the Stange Detachment back from the area around Artvin and were supported by Armenian insurgents (*çeteler*) operating behind Stange's lines.⁷⁰ The Germans also confirmed some of the Ottoman intelligence reports concerning Armenian arms caches, noting that bombs and bomb-making materials had been discovered in Kayseri.⁷¹

The Ottomans, the Russians, the Germans, the Americans, the Armenians themselves, and even an independent Venezuelan observer indicated that a large number of Armenians, who possessed large numbers of weapons, revolted in the eastern provinces of Anatolia in support of a Russian offensive. This point is often overlooked in examinations of what happened to the Armenians in 1915. In any case, the Ottomans did not have adequate forces in position to deal with the problem. In spite of months of tension the Ottoman army was largely unprepared for outbreaks of violence on the scale of the Van rebellion. There were pitched battles between the insurgents and the jandarma, Ottoman army paramilitary volunteer units, and the few regular army units in the area. Beginning in mid-April, the Ottoman general staff began to shift reinforcements into the region. In order to suppress the insurgents at Van, for example, the Ottoman general staff was forced to divert the 1st Expeditionary Force (a full army division equivalent) from the front where it was needed against the Russians.⁷²

In the 4th Army area a pattern of dissident Armenian and Allied naval activity appeared in the Alexandretta area.⁷³ As early as October 1914, the British consul at Aleppo noted that the local Christian population would welcome an Allied invasion.⁷⁴ Armenian groups of the region were in contact with the Allies in November 1914, and had volunteered to 'support a possible disembarkation at Alexandretta, Mersina, or Adana' and, moreover, promised that 'valuable assistance could also be provided by the Armenians of mountainous districts, who, if supplied with arms and ammunition, would rise against Turkey'.⁷⁵ In December 1914 there was also an increase in Allied naval activity, and

⁷⁰ Combat reports, 15 April 1915, ATASE, archive 2950, record H-13, file 1-29, cited in TCGB, *Kafkas Cephesi Üncü Ordu Harekatı I*, pp. 618–19.

⁷¹ Wagenheim to Bethmann Holweg, 8 May 1915, AP, AA/RI 4085, translated and reprinted at <http://www.armenocide.de>.

⁷² TCGB, *Kafkas Cephesi Üncü Ordu Harekatı II*, pp. 591–97.

⁷³ The Ottomans, who were especially concerned by an Allied propaganda campaign aimed at the Ottoman army, considered this a critical situation. See TCGB, *İdari Faaliyetler ve Lojistik*, p. 692.

⁷⁴ Mallet to Edward Grey, 14 October 1914, TNA, FO 438/3, 59458.

⁷⁵ Cheetham to Edward Grey, 12 November 1914. Boghos Nubar, an influential Armenian leader, presented this idea in Cairo to the British. TNA, FO 438/4, 70404. Nubar continued to press the Allies throughout 1915 to conduct an invasion of Cilicia, which would be supported by a 'unified rebellion of the Armenians against Turkish authorities wherever possible'. See Boghos Nubar to Sahag Catholicos of Cilicia, Heliopolis, 17 April 1915, document 5, Ghazarian, *Boghos Nubar's Papers*, p. 14.

British landing parties were ‘gleefully greeted’ by Armenians.⁷⁶ Numerous naval bombardments also contributed to the overall picture of impending intervention and insurgency.⁷⁷ The town of Dörtyol was of particular concern to the Ottoman general staff, which sent out warning messages outlining insurgent activity and subversive co-ordination with the Allies in Dörtyol, Bitlis, and Aleppo.⁷⁸ German diplomatic reports confirmed the actual landing of Armenian agents, who came ashore to recruit the inhabitants of Dörtyol against the Ottomans.⁷⁹

The area north of Dörtyol was particularly sensitive to Ottoman authorities because the railway from Adana to Osmaniye came to within 10 km of the sea near Ceyhan. A raid on an Armenian house next to the railway bridge at Ceyhan on 17 April netted the authorities 50 kilos of dynamite.⁸⁰ Simultaneously, armed attacks by Armenian guerrillas using guns and bombs began in the rear areas of the 4th Army.⁸¹

V. Characteristics of Ottoman Logistics Security

The Ottoman logistics system was a conveyor or pipeline that moved men and supplies from rear areas to forward depots for storage and further distribution to front-line corps and infantry divisions. Although 279 officers, 119 doctors, and 12 279 men were assigned to the 3 LoCI on 14 April 1915, few of these were available for point or area security.⁸² Most of them were needed to care for the 7924 draft animals and the thousands of various carts and wagons assigned to the inspectorate and to move supplies. Motorization was almost non-existent (for example, there were only 12 automobiles available in the 3 LoCI area, mainly for use by high-ranking officers in the Erzurum area).⁸³

Along the routes, node commanders were responsible for the security of the roads and for co-ordinating movements and convoys.

⁷⁶ D. Bloxham, ‘The Armenian Genocide of 1915–1916: Cumulative Radicalisation and the Development of a Destruction Policy’, *Past & Present* CLXXXI (2003), pp. 141–91. See pp. 174–76, where Bloxham also notes that a British landing party blew up a strategically important railway bridge on 18 December 1914.

⁷⁷ TC Genelkurmay Başkanlığı, *Harp Mıntakaları, şehir ve Kasabaların İşgal, İstirdat ve Bombardman Tarihleri* (Ankara, 1937), p. 54. Between 12 February and 19 August 1915 Alexandretta was bombarded four times, Mersin twice, and Dörtyol, Tarsus, and Adana once each.

⁷⁸ Directive 8682, Chief, Operations Division, OGS to armies, 25 February 1915, ATASE, archive 2287, record 32, file 9.

⁷⁹ See reports Hoffmann to Wagenheim, 7 March 1915, AP, AA, vol. 168, and Buge to Wagenheim, 13 March 1915, AP, AA, vol. 168, translated and reprinted at <http://www.armenocide.de>, which identify Armenians named Saldschiam and Koschkerian, who came ashore from Allied warships to recruit the inhabitants of Dörtyol against the Ottomans.

⁸⁰ A. Fuad Erden, *Birinci Dünya Harbinde Suriye Hatıraları* (Istanbul, 2003). At the time of the incident Ali Fuad was a staff officer in the Ottoman 4th Army.

⁸¹ Op. cit.

⁸² TCGB, *Kafkas Cephesi 3ncü Ordu Harekatı II*, p. 683.

⁸³ Op. cit.

Protection and self-defence were major concerns for the army: 3rd Army weapons reports from early May 1915 reveal that the soldiers assigned to the 3 LoCI were issued with a mere 1231 rifles and 82 cases of rifle ammunition (for a force of over 10 000 men).⁸⁴ Significantly, this reflected organizational weapons authorizations, rather than theatre weapons shortages, as the logistics inspectorate system was designed to operate in friendly territory (the soldiers were supply and services men and not fighting men). In early March 1915 the 3 LoCI ordered selected node commanders to establish 'protected logistics areas' (*toplama muhafaza*) that provided security for both convoys and for fixed facilities such as hospitals and magazines.⁸⁵ These improvised protected logistics areas were fortified hastily and reflected an immediate reaction to security problems. They were established notably along the Sivas–Erzurum corridor, which carried the bulk of the 3rd Army's supplies. They were also established along the Trabzon–Erzurum corridor, which contained the bulk of the army's magazine capacity (this was because most of the army's ammunition was shipped through the port of Trabzon in peacetime and the magazines were built to accommodate munitions movements from there to Erzurum). Figure 2 shows these protected areas as well as the remaining 3 LoCI logistics nodes that were unprotected. The establishment of these improvised fortified camps along what should have been secure rear-area lines of communications shows that the Ottoman logistics command reacted to an actual internal threat by adjusting its organizational architecture in a non-doctrinal way.

Adding to Ottoman vulnerability, the weak road-network within the 3rd Army area was rapidly deteriorating as a result of extraordinarily heavy use. The inability of the provinces to maintain the few all-weather roads in operational condition forced the military to assume this burden. This required the army to build up its labour services, which were organized into unarmed labour battalions (*amele taburu*). The 3rd Army was unprepared for this upon mobilization in 1914, and only had six road construction battalions (*yol inşaat taburu*) on its strength.⁸⁶ In 1915 these were reorganized and expanded into 30 *amele (yol) taburu*, or labour (road) battalions, of which 11 were deployed on the Erzincan–Erzurum–Hasankale–Tortum corridor.⁸⁷ These units were not penal battalions, but much of the manpower required for the increase in the number of battalions came from Armenian soldiers that the Ottomans forced out of combat units in the spring of 1915.

⁸⁴ 3rd Army Weapons/Munitions Report, 3 May 1915, ATASE, archive 2950, record 13, file 138, reproduced in TCGB, *Kafkas Cephesi 3ncü Ordu Harekatı I*, ek 3 (Document 3).

⁸⁵ TCGB, *Kafkas Cephesi 3ncü Ordu Harekatı II*, 3rd Army Logistics Situation, 10 March 1915, kroki (map) 113.

⁸⁶ 3 LoCI Situation Report, 27 September 1914, ATASE, archive 1129, record 27, file 1-2, reproduced in TCGB, *Kafkas Cephesi 3ncü Ordu Harekatı II*, p. 647.

⁸⁷ 3 LoCI reports, TCGB, archive 3055, record H-28, file 1-11, cited in TCGB, *Kafkas Cephesi 3ncü Ordu Harekatı II*, p. 696.

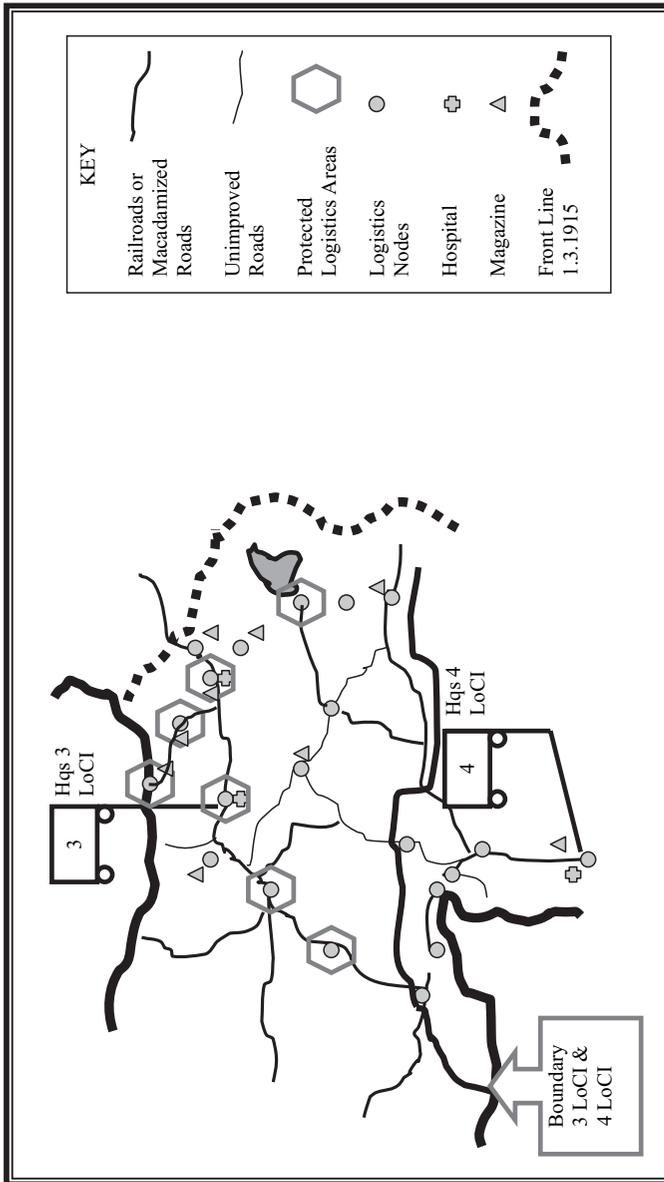


Figure 2 3 and 4 LoCI, late March 1915

Although some authors suggest that the labour battalions were designed for the intentional killing of Armenian soldiers assigned to their ranks,⁸⁸ in fact the battalions were an essential part of the logistics architecture. Later, in the summer of 1916, the surviving 28 labour battalions were reorganized into 17 battalions because of severe shortages of men.⁸⁹ These battalions had been weakened severely in the disastrous retreat from Erzurum and Trabzon and sustained heavy casualties, causing the merging of some battalions to bring others up to strength.⁹⁰ Regardless of the composition of the labour battalions it is evident that keeping the roads open was a priority for the 3rd Army.

To the south the railway ran directly through the 4 LoCI to the front, but that inspectorate likewise remained heavily reliant on human and animal labour. The 4 LoCI had 10 280 animals on hand in early 1915⁹¹ and about 18 000 men assigned.⁹² Much of this capacity was deployed south of Damascus and hence is not relevant to this article. In the area north of Damascus, the 4 LoCI was involved mainly in the movement of supplies. It did not stockpile rations or munitions for combat (as the fronts and associated supply and munitions depots were far to the south). From the records examined, it does not appear that the 4 LoCI fortified protected logistics areas, as did the 3 LoCI.

Taken as a whole, the Ottoman army modelled its LoCI system on a German organizational architecture that was designed to operate within the context of a regular army's friendly rear areas. Neither Ottoman nor German LoCIs were staffed or equipped to do much more than co-ordinate logistics and transport supplies. In both 3 LoCI and 4 LoCI areas there were very long stretches of undefended roads through which logistical convoys constantly moved. The convoys had extremely limited numbers of small arms and convoy guards, and they were very vulnerable targets that could be easily isolated by insurgents or bandits (although the improvised 'protected logistics areas' offered some relief in the 3 LoCI). Moreover, there were no combat forces assigned to the LoCI as reserves or as quick reaction forces in case convoys had trouble. In summary, when the LoCI architecture operated in a high-threat environment it was fragile and dangerously vulnerable to interdiction and destruction.

⁸⁸ See, for example, Balakian, *Burning Tigris*, pp. 184–85, and E.J. Zürcher, *Ottoman Labour Battalions in World War I*, <http://www.hist.net/kieser/agnet/Essays/EssayZurcher.html>. Dr Zürcher cites the work of Taner Akçam and Vahakn Dadrian. There is testimony that some Armenian soldiers were killed intentionally while assigned to the labour battalions; however, it is inaccurate to associate this characterization with the organization in general.

⁸⁹ Reorganization Chart, 30 August 1916, ATASE, archive 3055, record H-10, file 4-127, reproduced in TCGB, *Kafkas Cephesi 3ncü Ordu Harekatı II*, p. 721.

⁹⁰ TCGB, *Kafkas Cephesi 3ncü Ordu Harekatı II*, p. 721. See reorganization of Erzurum and Trabzon battalions.

⁹¹ TCGB, *Sina-Filistin Cephesi*, p. 684.

⁹² 4th Army Logistics Report, October 1915, ATASE, archive 1309, record 773, file 1/38, reproduced in TCGB, *Idari Faaliyetler ve Lojistik*, pp. 665–66. In October 1915 the 4 LoCI had 17 970 officers and men assigned.

VI. Spatial Characteristics of the Armenian Threat

The definitive study of the Caucasian campaigns assessed Kayseri as the critical ‘nodal point’ and ‘most important cross roads in Asia’ because the Ottoman 3rd Army was supplied through there via Sivas to Erzurum.⁹³ By mid-April 1915 the Ottoman army possessed convincing and genuine intelligence that Armenians had hidden weapons, including rifles, bombs, pistols, and military explosives, there and in many of the key cities that lay astride or adjacent to the northern line of communications in Anatolia.⁹⁴ Ottoman reports also indicated that almost 5000 rifles and tons of explosives were hidden in the cities of Aşkale, Bayburt, Elazığ (Harput), Kayseri, Erzincan, Erzurum, Malatya, and Sivas, all of which contained sizeable Armenian populations.⁹⁵ In the Bayburt and Erzurum areas large bands of insurgent Armenian guerrillas operated and actively assisted the Russian army. In the vicinity of Sivas there were very large numbers of guerrilla bands in the mountains that were attacking Muslim villages. There is no question that insurgents, armed by the Armenian revolutionary committees, possessed the military potential to interdict (at a minimum) or to destroy (at a maximum) the 3 LoCI’s primary supply route.

The southern route was equally threatened by armed insurgency. In the Adana–Alexandretta (Dörtyol)–Aleppo area, Armenian bands were in direct contact with the British and French fleets. The prospect of an amphibious invasion was an ever-present concern. Since the autumn of 1914 there had been frequent clashes between Ottoman paramilitary forces and Armenian terrorist and guerrilla groups in the areas of Adana, Bitlis, Malatya, Maraş, and Urfa. There was a large insurrection at Zeitoun. Moreover, there was a major insurrection at Van that was closely co-ordinated with the Russian army and with the Armenian committees. The insurrection at Van turned into a significant defeat for the Ottoman army and opened the strategic back door to Diyarbakır and Malazgirt. Again, there is no question that heavily armed insurgents possessed the capability to interdict or destroy both the 3 LoCI’s southern route and 4 LoCI’s supply routes.

The Armenian military capability in key locations was considered in the calculations of security for the Ottoman army. It is certain today that the Van insurrection provided the worst-case paradigm for Ottoman army planners and commanders.⁹⁶ At Van the Armenian committees quickly distributed large quantities of pre-positioned weapons and revolted in concert with a Russian offensive. The insurgents were in direct contact with fellow committeemen in the *druzhiny* fighting alongside the Russians. There were too few Ottoman forces

⁹³ Allen and Muratoff, *Caucasian Battlefields*, p. 233.

⁹⁴ Demirel, *Erzurum ve Çevresinde Ermeni Hareketleri*, p. 19.

⁹⁵ Op. cit. See chart on p. 19, which lists 21 known locations of Armenian arms caches containing 4780 rifles.

⁹⁶ TCGB, *Kafkas Cephesi Üçüncü Ordu Harekatı I*, pp. 676–77.

available to crush the Armenians, and the Ottomans lost the city. By late May the Ottoman staffs were advancing the idea that what had happened at Van was in the process of happening in other strategic locations.⁹⁷ Taken together the acts of insurgency and military capability became a genuine and identifiable threat to the security of the Ottoman state in 1915.

VII. Ottoman Strategic Posture and Reaction

To say that the Ottoman army was unprepared to deal with a major insurrection to its rear understates greatly its strategic dilemma in the spring of 1915. The mobilization and concentration plans of August 1914 sent 7 of 13 army corps to Thrace and the straits area; 2 were sent to Palestine, 1 remained in Arabia, and 3 remained on the 3rd Army front in Caucasia.⁹⁸ These plans anticipated renewed war against the Balkan states but not against any of Europe's great powers. They left the Ottomans badly positioned for a multi-front war against the Entente, particularly against Russia in Caucasia and Britain in Mesopotamia. Since the Ottomans did not plan for war against the great powers, likewise they did not make plans to deal with an Armenian insurrection, which was (as Bloxham pointed out) an outgrowth of global war. Consequently, no combat forces were positioned within the 3 and 4 LoCI areas of operations, except for depot regiments (which provided basic training for soldiers), jandarma battalions, and labour troops. Arguably, several first-class combat units were transiting the region en route to the front. Making matters worse, a centrally located strategic reserve did not exist, nor did the means exist to deploy such a force rapidly if it was needed. This strategic posture limited a coherent Ottoman military response to rear-area security concerns in eastern Anatolia.

The effect of contemporary military thinking and practice cannot be discounted in the equation of a strategic solution to the Armenian threat. In Cuba in the 1890s, the Spanish General Weyler devised a relocation-based strategy called 'reconcentration' that relocated a population involved in insurgency to protected enclaves. Later the British army relocated a large part of the civilian Boer population to concentration camps, thereby isolating the commandos from their sources of supply.⁹⁹ This brutal method proved to be the most successful

⁹⁷ ARI, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı Kronolojisi*, p. 150. A prominent Armenian concurred in this assessment and wrote to Boghos Nubar that after the fall of Van, as the Russians approached Bitlis, 'the Armenians there would have been of great assistance'. H.S. Ayzavian to Nubar, 8 July 1915, Athens, reproduced in Ghazarian, *Boghos Nubar's Papers*, pp. 145–48.

⁹⁸ TCGB, *Askeri Hazırlıkları ve Harbe Girişi*, pp. 212–20.

⁹⁹ T. Pakenham, *The Boer War* (New York, 1979), p. 607. Pakenham noted that between 18 000 and 28 000 Boer civilians perished in concentration camps, a number that does not include blacks who were imprisoned as well. A recent study noted 23 000 blacks and 'more than 28,000 whites (i.e. more than 10 percent of the Afrikaner population)' died. See A. Wessels, ed., *Lord Kitchener and the War in South Africa, 1899–1902* (Stroud, 2006).

counter-insurgency strategy of the early twentieth century, and when combined with cordon and search tactics decisively broke Boer resistance. The Ottoman army intensively studied the lessons of the Boer War, most notably Pertev Paşa, who maintained an active correspondence with Colmar von der Goltz about the lessons learned from the war.¹⁰⁰ Counter-insurgency operations were also actively discussed at the Ottoman War Academy in the period 1905–14.¹⁰¹ Since Enver Paşa, the division chiefs of the general staff, and most of the Ottoman field commanders were War Academy graduates, it may be argued that the Ottoman military leadership was most certainly aware of the precedents set by the western powers in counter-insurgency operations.¹⁰²

In fact, the idea of relocating a potentially hostile population was exercised several times during the Balkan Wars of 1912–13. The best-known relocation occurred in Thrace when the Ottomans moved thousands of Christians, who were ethnic Bulgarians and Greeks, across the Bosphorus to Asia because they were thought to be in sympathy with the Christian Balkan League and potentially hostile.¹⁰³ In early April 1915 the Ottomans relocated the Christian population (mostly Greek) of the Gallipoli peninsula because it was thought to be a rear-area threat to security.¹⁰⁴ In both cases the relocated population survived because the concentration camps were located in the resource-rich western provinces. By 1915, in theory and in practice, relocation and internment were military tactics applied in a wide context.

By late April 1915 the Ottoman general staff and the staffs of the 3rd and 4th Armies reached the conclusion that Armenian terrorism and weapons collection verged on erupting into a full-blown insurrection. The Ministry of Defence issued a directive on 24 April to begin localized evacuations of Armenians in the areas where the Armenians were actually in rebellion.¹⁰⁵ The directive also noted that ‘the Armenians were a great danger to the war effort, especially in east Anatolia’.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, the Ottomans decided that the Armenian committees (primarily the

¹⁰⁰ P. Demirhan, *Generalfeldmarschall Colmar von der Goltz: Das Lebensbild eines grossen Soldaten* (Göttingen, 1960), pp. 74–77, and F. Yasamee, ‘Colmar Freiherr von der Goltz and the Boer War’, in K. Wilson, ed., *The International Impact of the Russo-Japanese War* (London, 2001), pp. 193–210.

¹⁰¹ Y. Abadan, *Mustafa Kemal ve Ceteçilik* (Istanbul, 1996), pp. 53–56, and A. Gündüz, *Hatıralarım* (Istanbul, 1973), pp. 29–32.

¹⁰² It must be noted that the army possessed great depth in its practical institutional understandings of insurgency and counter-insurgency. Nearly all of the Ottoman senior commanders in the First World War were veterans of counter-insurgency operations in Macedonia and Albania against the revolutionary committees, in Yemen against rebel insurgents, or in Anatolia against rebel Kurdish tribal leaders. Moreover, some (like Enver and Mustafa Kemal) had led unconventional guerrilla campaigns against the Italians in Libya in 1911/12.

¹⁰³ TCGB, *Balkan Harbi (1912–1913), Birinci Çatalca Muharebesi* (Ankara, 1993), pp. 62–63.

¹⁰⁴ NARA, Report: Evacuation of Gallipoli, 3 May 1915, American Embassy, Constantinople, RG 353, roll 41. The American military attaché reported 22 000 Christians were displaced to Asia by 10 April 1915.

¹⁰⁵ Ministry of Defence directive, 24 April 1915, ATASE, archive 44, record 207, file 2–3.

¹⁰⁶ Op. cit.

revolutionary Daşnaks) were co-ordinating guerrilla operations in direct support of Russian army offensives aimed at Van–Diyarbakır and Erzurum.¹⁰⁷ The 4th Army staff was also particularly worried about the potential of an Allied amphibious invasion in the Dörtöyl area.¹⁰⁸ To summarize Ottoman concerns, armed hostile Armenians actively threatened the rear areas of front-line units of the 3rd Army and its lines of communications. There was a potential threat to the 4th Army lines of communications and there was strong evidence that an Allied amphibious invasion, supported by Armenians, was imminent in the Alexandretta–Dörtöyl area. These also constituted an indirect threat to the logistics posture of the 4th Army in Mesopotamia.

The Van rebellion and the events of April and May 1915 caught the Ottoman army without the regional combat strength necessary to deal effectively with the Armenian insurgency.¹⁰⁹ The Van Field Jandarma Division and part of the 1st Expeditionary Force (then transiting the area en route to the front) were sent into action in mid-April at Van, along with several light cavalry regiments. Additionally, the 36th Infantry Division, en route to the Caucasian front from Mesopotamia, was diverted briefly to the area as well. These divisions were all short of artillery, engineers, and ammunition trains. They represented the sum total of Ottoman army divisions available to quell the Armenian insurrection (3 divisions out of 46 in the order of battle). Reacting quickly the army activated three new, but understrength, infantry divisions (the 23rd, 41st, and 44th) in April from depot battalions in the Adana–Aleppo region. Composed of older reservists, they were unfit for combat until late summer. Effectively the strategic deployment of the Ottoman army concentrated combat forces at the fringes of the empire where the army was in contact with its Allied enemy and not in its centre core areas where an insurgency was likely to occur.¹¹⁰

The Ottomans reacted vigorously on a variety of levels to these actual and potential Armenian threats. A modern historian characterized the Ottoman state's political response in this period as moving 'from regional measures to general policy'.¹¹¹ Likewise, the development of the Ottoman general staff's military policy toward the Armenian rebellion can be characterized as moving from a localized response to a general counter-insurgency campaign. On 20 April 1915 the Ministry of Defence directed that field commanders were to use the local jandarma against the Armenians and Greeks who were forming insurgent

¹⁰⁷ TCGB, *Kafkas Cephesi Üçüncü Ordu Harekatı I*, pp. 565–66.

¹⁰⁸ TCGB, *İdari Faaliyetler ve Lojistik*, p. 702. Pages 698–704 are dedicated to the *Ermeni Problemi* (Armenian Problem).

¹⁰⁹ See E.J. Erickson, *Ordered to Die: A History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War* (Westport, CT, 2000), table 4.2, p. 102, for the deployment of Ottoman army corps and divisions in April 1915.

¹¹⁰ The documented absence of Ottoman military strength in the interior provinces of Anatolia in the spring of 1915 would seem to argue against the idea that attacks on the Armenian population were pre-planned.

¹¹¹ Bloxham, 'Armenian Genocide', pp. 141–91.

bands.¹¹² Furthermore, the ministry noted that it was undesirable to take regular army units and field jandarma from the front for these tasks. In fact the experienced Field Jandarma Division (the former Van Jandarma), 36th Infantry Division, and 1st Expeditionary Force were relieved from counter-insurgency duties and were sent to the front in May to participate in offensive operations. This military policy was maintained over the summer of 1915, and as late as 28 July the Ottomans were arming loyal Kurds and Cizre tribesmen to suppress the Armenians.¹¹³ This localized response was increasingly ineffective as the tempo of the insurgency accelerated.

It is difficult today to separate the effect of ideologically driven fears from actual security concerns but it appears that security concerns played into the hands of the ideologically hardline CUP, which wanted to alter the eastern Anatolian demographic situation. On 24 April 1915 Enver Paşa ordered that the relocations should result in a new demographic in which Armenians were less than 10% of the total population in the affected areas.¹¹⁴ Several days later, Enver ordered all Armenian leaders, regardless of affiliations, to be rounded up and sent away.¹¹⁵ He followed these instructions on 2 May 1915 with a recommendation to the Ministry of the Interior to drive 'Armenian rebels' away from the borders and resettle the areas with Muslim refugees.¹¹⁶ These directives did not order the extermination of the Armenians but they do indicate the existence of a policy of population engineering that has a range of interpretations from simple relocation to ethnic cleansing.¹¹⁷ The extant record does not reveal whether ideology or security concerns predominated but these factors certainly reinforced each other. At the political level Talat Paşa, the interior minister, notified the prime minister on 26 May 1915 that 'the insurgent Armenians did everything to obstruct the operations of the army against the enemy, prevented delivery of supplies and munitions to the soldiers on the battlefronts, collaborated with the enemy and that some of them joined the enemy's ranks'.¹¹⁸ He followed this with an outline of recommended measures for state security essentially based on relocation.¹¹⁹ The next day a

¹¹² Enver Paşa to Hqs, 3rd Army, 20 April 1915, ATASE, archive 2820, record 100, file 2.

¹¹³ Message no. 5828, 3rd Army to MoD, 28 July 1915, ATASE, archive 152, record 680, file 27-1. The 3rd Army reported the delivery of 2000 rifles to the provincial governor of Diyarbakır for this purpose.

¹¹⁴ Ministry of Defence directive, 24 April 1915, ATASE, archive 44, record 207, file 2-3.

¹¹⁵ Enver Paşa to the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Defence, 29 April 1915, ATASE, archive 2287, record 32-12, file 12-1.

¹¹⁶ Operations Division to Ministry of the Interior, 2 May 1915, ATASE, archive 44, record 207, file 2-1.

¹¹⁷ For varied commentary see Y. Halaçoğlu, 'Realities behind the Relocation', in T. Ataöv, ed., *The Armenians in the Late Ottoman Period* (Ankara, 2001), pp. 109-42; Bloxham, *Great Game*, pp. 83-90, and Akçam, *Shameful Act*, p. 178.

¹¹⁸ Talat to Prime Minister's Office, Memorandum 270, 26 May 1915, BOA, BEO, no. 326758, cited in Halaçoğlu, 'Realities behind the Relocation', p. 114.

¹¹⁹ Enver Paşa had previously on 2 May recommended the forced relocation of Armenians and resettlement of the vacated areas by Muslim refugees as a necessary solution to the

provisional law was passed directing the military to crush Armenian resistance and to begin to round up Armenians in response to military necessity. On 30 May 1915 the Ottoman Ministry of the Interior issued the now infamous relocation order to relocate the Armenian population of the six eastern provinces.¹²⁰ This regulation explicitly directed that the Armenians were to be sent to locations that were at least 25 km away from major lines of communication. The ministry regional relocation order replaced the existing Ministry of Defence directives authorizing selective localized relocations around the Lake Van and Erzurum areas as the government reacted to the growing insurgencies in a larger area. Over the coming summer Ottoman military and security forces began to concentrate all of the Armenians in the identified region for relocation. Many chose resistance, which in some cases was interpreted by the Ottomans as insurgency, making it difficult to determine the real reasons for the fighting in many locations.

Beginning in July 1915, full-blown insurgencies erupted in Antep, Antioch, Karahisar, Maraş, Urfa, and Zeitoun. This forced the Ottomans to move into actual large-scale (regimental and divisional level) counter-insurgency operations using inexperienced forces.¹²¹ The newly formed 41st Infantry Division was diverted from coastal and area defence duties to counter-insurgency missions to deal with these and later participated in the famous assaults on Musa Dagh. The following month the equally inexperienced 23rd and 44th Infantry Divisions would join in attacks on Zeitoun, Urfa, and Tarsus.¹²² Later, troops were sent to Karahisar to quell an uprising there. By autumn the Ottoman Army had its local defence and jandarma forces and three infantry divisions committed to the suppression of the eastern Anatolian insurgency. This was only about 7% of its operational combat strength. Nevertheless, by the early winter the Ottomans had forcibly relocated almost the entire Armenian population of the six eastern provinces. Thousands of insurgents were killed in this process and many more thousands of innocent Armenians were massacred or died of disease and starvation in the relocation process.

VIII. Military Necessity or Excuse for Genocide?

In fact the actual Armenian attacks on the rear of the Ottoman army and its lines of communications were isolated and sporadic, causing only minor disruptions to the war effort. Moreover, after July 1915

worsening situation around Van. Operations Division to Ministry of the Interior, 2 May 1915, ATASE, archive 44, record 207, file 2-1.

¹²⁰ Ministry of the Interior Regulation from the Department of Tribes and Immigrants, 30 May 1915, ATASE, archive 361, record 1445, file 1.

¹²¹ See E.J. Erickson, 'Bayonets on Musa Dagh: Ottoman Counterinsurgency Operations, 1915', *Journal of Strategic Studies* XXVIII (2005), pp. 529–48.

¹²² Op. cit., p. 544.

there was little interaction between the Russian army and dissident Ottoman Armenians in the Ottoman-controlled areas of Anatolia. And, although co-ordination with the Allies for an amphibious invasion near Dörtyol supported by '25,000 insurgent Armenians' continued, the expected assault never materialized.¹²³ So, was it necessary to relocate the entire Armenian population, the majority of whom were elderly, women, and children, because of an actual threat to the national security of the Ottoman state? The answer to this question will probably never be properly addressed because the Ottoman state did not wait for a regional insurrection to spread to the whole of Anatolia. A better question would be to ask what did the Ottomans know in May 1915 and what did they believe might happen that would account for them doing what they did?

The Ottoman leadership and staffs knew a great deal about the Armenian threat prior to 30 May 1915 (the date of the region-wide relocation order). They knew that the British, French, and Russians were in direct contact with the Armenian revolutionary committees and were planning co-ordinated combat operations against the Ottomans. The Ottomans had solid evidence of large Armenian weapons caches in key city locations. There were numbers of terrorist incidents and guerrilla attacks by Armenians on Ottoman lines of communications. There were reports of Armenian desertions from the army, and thousands of armed Armenians were reported in the hills. There was an uprising in Zeitoun. An Armenian insurrection began when well-organized insurgents seized the city of Van, and Armenian regiments with the Russian Army assisted in its capture. The Allies landed at Gallipoli on 25 April and in early May the Russians began a major offensive toward Erzurum supported by Armenians. Armenian agents had come ashore numerous times on the Mediterranean coast. Lastly, the Ottomans knew that their local forces and jandarma were unable to quell the gathering insurgency.

The Ministry of Defence, the Ottoman general staff, and the 3rd and 4th Army staffs reached a consensus in late April 1915, that the Armenians represented a great threat to their logistics and lines of communications, and hence to their war effort. In May the Ministry of the Interior notified the prime minister's office that Armenian guerrilla bands were actively interdicting the Ottoman lines of communications in eastern Anatolia. Stockpiles of munitions and supplies for the forward 3rd, 4th, and 6th Armies were insufficient for prolonged operations without continual replenishment, and the ongoing Russian offensives were rapidly depleting them. The 3 and 4 LoCI had almost no capacity for self-defence and convoy protection. Finally, there were very few combat forces available in central Anatolia to defend the army rear areas or to combat insurgents.

¹²³ Notes on Operations in Cilicia, Cairo, 24 July 1915, AMAE, *Guerre 1914–1915, Turquie*, tome 870, ff. 130–31*v*. reprinted in Beylerian, *Grandes Puissances*, pp. 106–08.

The record shows that the Ottoman leadership and military staffs engaged in a kind of threat-based thinking based on Armenian capabilities. Was there reason for concern and threat-based thinking? The record indicates that the Ottoman lines of communications in eastern Anatolia were acutely vulnerable and that the Armenians had the capacity to interdict or destroy those lines. Any interruption to the flow of logistics, even for a short time, to front-line forces in combat would have been a critical concern for the Ottoman army. The record also clearly shows that the Ottomans were unprepared to deal with a large-scale insurrection and shifted from a localized to a generalized campaign of counter-insurgency warfare. Finally, with so few regular forces available to suppress the insurrection, a strategy for the relocation of the civilian population was consistent with the counter-insurgency practices of that period.

The Ottoman state ordered the regional relocation of the Armenian population of the six provinces affected by the insurrection. This lends credence to the idea of a strategy of population removal for military rather than political reasons. However, the ruling CUP also actively considered altering the regional demographics, which points to population removal for political reasons. Factually, the localized relocations of April grew to regional relocations in June 1915, which led in turn to the tempo of the insurgency quickening thereafter. Soon the known epicentres of Armenian threats broke out in actual sustained rebellion in the summer of 1915, thereby validating Ottoman security concerns.

Nothing can justify the massacres of the Armenians nor can a case be made that the entire Armenian population of the six Anatolian provinces was an active and hostile threat to Ottoman national security. However, a case can be made that the Ottomans judged the Armenians to be a great threat to the 3rd and 4th Armies and that genuine intelligence and security concerns drove that decision. It may also be stated that the Ottoman reaction was escalatory and responsive rather than premeditated and pre-planned. In this context the Ottoman relocation decision becomes more understandable as a military solution to a military problem. While political and ideological imperatives perhaps drove the decision equally, if not harder, these do not negate the fact that the Armenians were a great military danger.

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