The Applicability of the Strategic Killing Model to the Case of the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire

By

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Comparing empirical studies of the antecedents of genocide

In the course of human history, most wars and revolutions have resulted in the enormous loss of civilian life, often due to the intentional elimination by power elites of ethnical and political diversity within the territorial confines of their nation-states and beyond. Genocide is the term coined by Raphael Lemkin in 1944 to define the deliberate elimination of a national, political, ethnical, or religious group, in whole or in part, whether by a state or a non-state power group. While genocides have taken place throughout the history of human civilization, only recently had the academia begun to investigate the causal factors of mass killing. Political theorists assess the significance of both micro and macro-scale factors conducive to violent behavior and genocide in societies. However, a more precise approach is critical to enhance the understanding of the mechanisms that generate acts of mass killing in various spatio-temporal settings and to develop adequate and timely policy measures to avert and cease mass killing in any part of the world. The atrocities committed by the Nazi regime against civilian populations in Germany and across Europe, the ethnic cleansing campaigns and mass murder of ethnical communities perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge regime and Pol Pot in what is now Cambodia and in the former Yugoslavia by the Milosevic regime; the Hutu-led killing of the Tutsi population in Rwanda and the recent events in Darfur have all stressed the leading role of ruling elites in the organization and implementation of genocide. Developing a proper approach that conforms to

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these dramatic historical experiences is not only an academic objective but also an ethical priority that will lay the foundation for effective policy mechanisms to prevent genocide and bring about justice and peace for future generations.

The attempt of power groups to achieve their narrow-interest objectives through the radical transformation of a society is at the core of the strategic killing theory. When adversary ethnic and religious communities become the obstacles of materializing these aims - and they often do, they get rid of, whether by deportation or extermination. In an attempt to transform a society, the ruling elites often rely on acts of mass killing. Benjamin Valentino provides a convincing explanation of how the decision-making process and specific policy issues of power elites serve as starting points of massacre.

Valentino contends that a strategic killing model needs to be the reference point of studies that seek to identify the primary circumstances leading to genocide. This approach can help identify the driving forces of a mass killing campaign. Valentino maintains that the main preconditions leading to mass murder are not so much related to the "structure, form of government or collective psychology of the societies in which they take place," as they are the products of specific goals and strategies of high political and military leadership.[2] He argues that "these killings were not driven by the 'bottom-up' public discontent or a popular desire to blame others, but rather by powerful political and military interests working from top down."[3]

According to Valentino, the idea of mass killing is conceived not in the minds of the populace, but among a narrow group of political and military leaders. The strategic killing model suggests that mass murder should be regarded as a goal-oriented policy, which is aimed to achieve leaders' most important political and military objectives. Valentino argues that macro-scale factors form the context for the execution of genocide by elite groups that spearhead a violent ideology. National upheaval and preexisting social cleavages can be brought into play by political groups to incite hatred and violence against adversary communities and encourage public participation in mass killing. Setting up a powerful administrative system and centralized governance ensure the realization of violent policies against a target group. It would be wrong to conclude empirically that a political upheaval is the main starting point of massacre. I am convinced that the adverse socio-political conditions that exist prior to genocide create an adequate atmosphere for ego-centric political groups that seek power to bring to fruition their plans to destroy a political or ethno-religious community. In doing so, the groups maximize their political power potential and secure the survival of their regime in the long run. Most often, negative social perceptions are introduced and enhanced by elite groups to aggravate intra-societal contention. They encourage and even enforce mass participation in violent action against target communities in order to distort the notion of guilt in the event of their defeat and avoid post-war trials.

In her study, Harff identifies six causal factors that are essential for the initiation of a genocidal campaign:

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[2]Benjamin Valentino, "Final solutions: The causes of mass killing and genocide," *Security Studies* 9:3 (2000): pp. 1-59.
[3]Ibid.

The risk factors include the extent of political upheaval and the occurrence of prior geno-/politicides. The probability of mass murders is highest under autocratic regimes and is most likely to be set in motion by elites who advocate an exclusionary ideology, or represent an ethnic minority, or both. International economic interdependencies sharply reduce the chances that internal war and regime instability will have genocidal consequences.[4]

Harff explains that a political upheaval, engendered by the "formation of a state through violent conflict, when national boundaries are reformed, or after a war is lost" as well as the presence of pre-existing social cleavages, play the most significant role in instigating mass murder.[5]Harff believes that cultural and socio-economic differences are likely to induce genocidal tendencies and groups which are most different from the dominant group have a higher chance of being targeted. However, she further states that in some cases cleavages are introduced by the new elite.[6]Harff argues that:

The beginning point is political upheaval, a concept that captures the essence of the structural crises and societal pressures that are preconditions for authorities' efforts to eliminate entire groups. Political upheaval is defined as an abrupt change in the political community caused by a formation of a state or regime through violent conflict, redrawing of state borders, or defeat in international war. Types of political upheavals include defeat in international war, revolutions, anticolonial rebellions, separatist wars, coups, and regime transitions that result in the ascendency of political elites who embrace extremist ideologies.[7]

Harff contends that a national upheaval provides the major context for the translation of some popular social perceptions and grievances into the political sphere. So, if the Armenians were resented before, the challenges brought about by the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the war as well as internal political pressures created fertile soil for the initiation of the Young Turks' genocidal campaign. When a state is in the midst of a crisis, whether economic or political, or combined, gathering popular support for extreme policies against certain groups - by means of a scapegoating campaign is not difficult because of the widespread discontent with the existing social and political order, and confusion with regard to making a proper and wise political choice. Revolutionary policies and groups rapidly gain popularity in the wake of wars and crises. Extreme groups take advantage of the political disorder and resentment towards the old regime; propose new solutions to intractable problems. They promise a drastic improvement in the socio-economic situation, especially for the titular group, by way of transforming the old order.

A second factor leading to the development of genocide is the existence of sharp cleavages combined with a history of struggle between groups prior to the upheaval. The stronger the

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[4]Barbara Harff, "No Lessons Learned from the Holocaust," *American Political Science Review,*97,(Cambridge UP, 2003): p. 70.

[5]Barbara Harff, "The Etiology of Genocides," in *Genocide and the Modern Age: Etiology and Case Studies of Mass Death,*eds. Isidor Wallimann et al. (Syracuse UP, 1987): pp. 41-58.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Barbara Harff, "No Lessons Learned from the Holocaust," *American Political Science Review,*97,(Cambridge UP, 2003): p. 62.

identification within competing groups the more likely that extreme measures will be undertaken to suppress the weaker groups. Polarization is usually intensified by such factors as the extent of differences in religion, values, and traditions between contending groups, and their ideological separation. There are numerous examples from past genocides in which group polarization provided the background to genocides.[8]

Valentino's standpoint is different in that he places a primary emphasis on elite group interests. He asserts that a national upheaval in the Ottoman Empire was aggravated by the policies of the Young Turks' regime and social cleavages rarely lead to genocide.[9] If national upheaval, to which Harff points, played a role in the annihilation of the Armenian minority, it was used by the CUP as a pretext in order to implement new policy objectives more effectively. Valentino underscores the finding that genocide normally occurs between similar social groups with a long history of peaceful co-existence.[10] This, to a degree, contradicts the so-called scapegoat theory, which suggests that mass killing is the result of resentment toward certain national groups that are seen as culprits in time of crises and wars. Scapegoating is generally regarded as a strategy used by power groups to accumulate public support for a violent action against another community which is seen as a threat to them. Many cases of genocide were preceded and accompanied by a strong propaganda that contained elements of scapegoating and the subsequent victimization of political or ethno-religious communities. However, Valentino believes that victims of mass killing tend to serve as scapegoats only for a small number of high-ranking political and military figures, but not for the majority of the populace.[11]

> these events encourage genocide not because they prompt societies to seek scapegoats, but because these events provide the incentives, opportunity and cover for revolutionary elites seeking to consolidate political power or implement genocidal ideologies.[12]

The decision to eliminate a certain community, whether religious, ethnical or political stems from a belief that a large-scale societal transformation is only possible when a rival group is physically removed through deportation, isolation and extermination. When deportation cannot help achieve the groups' political ends, extermination is deemed as a final solution. Thus, power elites believe they can achieve their primary political objectives through the extermination of a rival group.

Melson claims that "the perpetrators of the Armenian genocide were motivated by a variant of nationalist ideology. The victims were a territorial ethnic group that had sought autonomy, and the methods of destruction included massacre, forced deportations, and starvation."[13] This dramatic shift in ideology and identity, from Ottoman pluralism to an integral

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[8]Barbara Harff, "The Etiology of Genocides." in *Genocide and the Modern Age: Etiology and Case Studies of Mass Death*,eds. Isidor Wallimann et al. (Syracuse UP, 1987): pp. 41-58.
[9]Benjamin Valentino, "Final solutions: The causes of mass killing and genocide," *Security Studies* 9:3 (2000): pp. 1-59.
[10]Ibid.
[11]Ibid.
[12]Ibid., p. 18.
[13]Robert Melson, "The Paradigms of Genocide: The Holocaust, the Armenian Genocide, and Contemporary Mass Destructions." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 548, The Holocaust: Remembering for the Future (Nov. 1996): p. 157.

form of Turkish nationalism, had profound implications for the emergence of modern Turkey. Nevertheless, Pan-Turkism had tragic consequences for Ottoman minorities, most of all for the Armenians. From being once viewed as a constituent *millet* of the Ottoman regime, they suddenly were stereotyped as an alien nationality. Despite all attempts to conceal the scale of the Young Turks' atrocities and the ultimate goal of their actions, the consuls of foreign countries and missionaries constantly sent messages about the events in the Ottoman provinces. This forced the Young Turks to act cautiously. In August 1915, on the advice of the Germans, Turkish authorities banned the public killing of Armenians.

Astouryan suggests that "The resentment of the Turkish masses cannot be explained on political, religious, and cultural grounds alone. The lootings that accompanied all of the massacres suggest that hatred had also economic roots. Indeed, even before the establishment of the Ottoman Empire, Armenians played a role in international trade that was quite disproportionate to their number."[14]

In her analysis of the Armenian genocide perpetrated by the Turkish government, Rae argues "that the genocide was aimed at fundamentally reshaping the remains of the empire into a homogenous national state."[15] The Turkish regime that took power in 1908 embodied chauvinist and authoritarian nationalism and encouraged popular hatred of Armenians. By stressing the primary role of elite group interests, Valentino offers a substantive and convincing explanation of the principal driving forces of mass killing and their relative significance. Genocide generally occurs when power groups seek to consolidate their power base and bring about a large-scale societal transformation by eradicating adversary communities.

Barbara Harff, respectively, does not provide a sufficient and convincing explanation of the Armenian genocide in the Ottoman Empire. By asserting that a structural change and pre-existing cleavages are the primary factors that lead to mass killing, she fails to focus on the strategic motives of power elites that instigate genocide. The strategic killing model proposed by Valentino examines the roles of power elites and their policies. His study reveals and explains the essence of the most significant factor that leads to genocide, namely, the elite group interest. This leaves no doubt about the fact that the genocidal policy towards the Armenians was implemented consistently and ruthlessly by the Young Turks regime. This eventually led to the complete elimination of the Armenian presence in most parts of their historical homeland.

Valentino claims that deep pre-existing cleavages between ethnic groups are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for mass killing.[16] Cleavages between ethnic groups can contribute to the evolution of the process that would eventually lead to genocide so long as power elites have their vested interests in it. However, cleavages alone cannot drive the process leading to massacre, because there needs to be a moving force above - one that is capable of channeling any preexisting discontent into a new political idea. Elite groups organize the forces and resources around this idea against a certain group that is seen and presented as a threat to the prosperity and security of the titular group. Valentino stresses that deep social cleavages are

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[14]Stephan Astourian, "The Armenian Genocide: An Interpretation." *The History Teacher*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Feb., 1990): p. 126.
[15]Heather Rae, *State Identities and the Homogenization of Peoples*,(Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002),p. 127.
[16]Benjamin Valentino, "Final solutions: The causes of mass killing and genocide," *Security Studies*, 9:3 (2000): pp. 1- 59.

more the result than the cause or precondition of mass killing.[17] Furthermore, he suggests that ruling elites can enhance social cleavages between groups and augment the dehumanizing attitudes toward their adversaries even in homogeneous societies.[18]

The existence of economic links, mentioned by Harff, cannot completely eliminate the potential for internal or interstate warfare and genocide. Economic interdependencies can be hampered by warfare. Moreover, economic ties can trigger conflicts and even genocidal campaigns, especially when external economic or political interests are linked to rebellion movements, terrorist groups or radical regimes. In such instances, economic links between foreign states and titular groups increase the prospect of war, rather than reduce it. Minority communities might be alienated from such economic activities and subjected to discriminatory policies. Therefore, in some instances, the intrusion of an alien power or presence of foreign economic interests can not only provoke a conflict but also increase the likelihood of genocide. Economic interdependencies do not always reduce the likelihood of conflict, but in some cases aggravate social stratification, create class tensions and ultimately lead to inter-group warfare and even mass killing of an ethno-religious and political community. The economic benefits of cooperation are often not equally dispersed across societies. Many communities are excluded from benefit-sharing processes and subjected to structural discrimination by revolutionary and authoritarian regimes, in which case violence is most likely to occur.

However, even deep social divisions and wide economic disparities between social classes cannot fully explain and do not always lead to cleavages, let alone violent measures to bring about a structural social change and eliminate a rival group. There is ample evidence that social stratification does not always generate contention, violence or mass murder. Most importantly, it was the perception of economic inferiority and backwardness relative to the Armenian population that was spread by the elites among the Turks. The violent ideology was spearheaded by the Young Turks and directed against the Armenians thereafter.

There is no doubt that for violence to occur there must be some form of contention between societal strata; yet in Mann's view "class conflict has always been important in the development of modern society. It has tended to result in liberal and social–democratic institutions."[19] This perfectly fits into Valentino's claim about how elites influence the social and psychological atmosphere in societies prior to genocide. Had it not been for the revolutionary and anarchist nature of the Young Turks' regime and their determination to annihilate the Armenians, the genocide in the Ottoman Empire would never have occurred and the tensions might have been resolved by means of political negotiations. In democratic polities, national crises of any kind are generally approached collectively for which a consensus-based solution is sought.

In authoritarian states, only a narrow group of key political actors who belong to the ruling class or, sometimes, even one leader determines which nationalities policies to adopt. Only in the latter case genocide is most likely to occur because of the absence of checks on the leadership.

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[17]Ibid.
[18]Ibid.
[19]Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: The Modern Tradition of Ethnic and Political Cleansing*,(London: New Left Review, 1999), pp. 18-45.

Interestingly, genocides have never occurred in democratic polities where there is greater latitude for political discussion and participation.

The role of the Millet system in the execution of the Armenian genocide

Why were the Armenians and not other minority groups within the Ottoman Empire made targets for violence? In other words, what characteristics of the Armenians relative to other ethnic groups made them targets for victimization? In addition to the cleavages on religious and linguistic grounds, certain segments of the Armenian population were differentiated from the Turks on the basis of professional affiliation, cultural traits, mindsets, and political orientations. Like other minorities, the Armenian populace was organized in *millets*, which were governed by their leaders.[20] The institution of the *millet* system is indicative of how the Turkish leadership sought to transform the society in the Ottoman Empire. The inception of the *millet* system marked the beginning point of the process that eventually led to the genocide of the Armenian population.

> initially the intention then was for the state to get a handle on diversity within its realm, to increase 'legibility' and order, enabling administration to run smoothly and taxes to flow unhindered. The concept of legibility relates to the need of the state to map its terrain and its people, to arrange the population of a country or empire in ways that simplify important state functions such as taxation, administration, conscription and prevention of rebellion.[21]

Following the institution of the *millet* system, the discriminatory attitude towards the Armenians as well as their social and cultural exclusion from Muslim groups became the norm. Practices of social differentiation nurtured by the millet system provided the context for the successful execution of genocide by the Young Turks regime thereafter. Though initially the *millet* system provided the minorities a degree of legal autonomy at the local level, *de facto* the legislation ensuring their autonomy was ignored and they were barred from holding high government office.

Barkey suggests that "In its broad outlines the Ottoman state organized and administered a system of religious and communal rule that instituted religious boundaries, marking difference, yet allowing for enough space, movement and parallel alternative structures to maintain a divided, yet cohesive and tolerant imperial society."[22] Despite the fact that intergroup grievances existed long before the institution of the millet system; the introduction of new norms helped to proliferate and entrench preexisting perceptions and sentiments even further. The Armenians were extensively resented given their relative prosperity, liberal outlook, and educational attainment. The millet system provided a normative framework for the translation of those negative social perceptions into the legal, religious and political plane. Indeed, many Armenians were actively engaged in education, banking and commerce, traveled extensively in Europe, and were economically successful. However, most Armenians were peasants, but even they differed

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[20]Lewy Guenter, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey: A Disputed Genocide*,(Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005), pp. 3-89.
[21]Karen Barkey, "Islam and Toleration: Studying the Ottoman Imperial Model," *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol. 19, No. ½, The New Sociological Imagination (Dec. 2005): p. 16.
[22]Ibid.

significantly from others. As they were inclined to adopt western entrepreneurial methods, they were more prosperous than their Turkish counterparts, and because of this, resented.[23]

The differences in religion and language are important in accounting for the hostility that the Armenians encountered in the Ottoman Empire. They were the first to embrace Christianity as a nation. Within the Ottoman Empire they were divided from the Turks by both language and religion. They lived in relative peace with other Ottoman ethnic groups so long as the Empire prospered. However, once internal cohesion diminished and the empire began to contract rapidly, the Armenians increasingly became targets of violent massacres.

Rae also finds that the Turkish regime's "hostility toward the Armenians had its origins in the religious/cultural attitudes that were widespread in the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the century."[24] The strategy was a response to the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the rulers' desire to compete with European nations.

Notions of differentiation that were widespread in the Ottoman Empire prior to the rise of the CUP paved the way to the aggravation of hostility and resentment and led to the ultimate execution of genocidal policies against the Armenians. The *millet* system played one of the key roles in the process that made the success of the Young Turks' policies inevitable and significant. The *millet* system provided the Young Turks regime with institutional tools for the initiation of genocidal policies against non-Muslim minorities – primarily Armenians. Astouryan suggests that:

> In accordance with Islamic law, non-Muslim monotheistic believers, including the monophysite Armenians, were considered in the Ottoman Empire as belonging to the "Peoples of the Book." They were, therefore, granted the status of the "dhimmi", or protected non-Muslim subjects of a Muslim state. Although this status was quite tolerant by the standards of the late Middle Ages and the early modern era, it was nonetheless defined by many discriminatory measures that indicated the inferior position of the non-Muslim monotheistic subjects of the empire.[25]

Between 1908, when the Young Turks and the CUP came to power as a result of a coup against Sultan Abdul Hamid and the outbreak of World War I in 1914, extreme Turkish nationalism, stemming from new state policies, prevailed over the multinational Ottomanism. The Young Turks' government became confronted with the dilemma of how to consolidate the state and sustain the fragile ethno-national balance in the Ottoman Empire. It became clear for the Young Turks that a solution to the so called "Armenian Question" that had hindered the unification of all Turkic peoples for centuries and undermined the expansion of the Ottoman Empire would inevitably pave the way to the creation of a new and strong Turkish homeland. As the government and party merged, the Young Turk dictatorship even created the so-called "Special Organization" to monitor the execution of the measures to be undertaken against the

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[23]Lewy Guenter, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey: A Disputed Genocide*,(Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005),pp. 3-89.
[24]Heather Rae,*State Identities and the Homogenization of Peoples*,(Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002),p. 163.
[25]Stephan Astourian, "The Armenian Genocide: An Interpretation," *The History Teacher*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Feb., 1990): p. 117.

Armenians.[26] It gradually transformed into a full-scale state-sponsored campaign whose main objective was to diminish or eliminate the presence and influence of the Armenian minority in the Ottoman Empire.

National upheaval, to which Harff points, played a role in the extermination of the Armenians, but it was not the principal driving force of mass murder, as she suggests. The ruling elites used it in such a way as to manipulate the social consciousness to their own advantage and implement their narrow-interest policies more effectively. To instigate violence and resentment against the Armenians, the Young Turks resorted to discriminatory policies, cultural alienation and aggressive ideology. Astouryan argues that "genocides follow a clear pattern. They result not only from short-term military difficulties or a racist ideology carried by a revolutionary, centralized party, although both of those conditions are necessary, but from a long process of discriminatory relationships between a dominant and a dominated group."[27]

The Young Turks created a false perception among Muslims that the Armenians posed a deadly threat to their territorial integrity. It is important to mention that no such notion of the Armenian threat was ever present or expressed when the Young Turks came to power after the revolution. Furthermore, the Armenians saw it as the beginning of a new era of liberal reforms and an end to decades of oppression. By 1914, the Ottoman government became a dictatorship of three men from the Committee of Union and Progress. It became evident that the triumvirate and its leaders were extreme Turkish nationalists and military modernizers whose wish was to expand their influence eastward and rid the country of all minorities, primarily Armenians, who were seen as the supporters of the Russian Empire.[28] The *Jihad* or Holy War against "non-believers" that the CUP issued following the engagement of the empire in World War I alongside other Central Powers was another attempt to instigate hostility toward the Armenians. Yet, it never had the influence over the masses that the CUP leaders hoped for. It created an atmosphere of distrust toward Christian minorities across the Ottoman Empire.[29]

Barkey finds that prior to the rise of CUP the millet system could maintain at least some societal cohesion.

Many recurring examples show the degree to which each community leader was eager to preserve relations across communities as peaceful and bounded as possible, knowing that the outbreak of violence was dearly punishable by the state. Upholding peaceful relations across the communities was in the interest of both the state and its chosen state-community brokers.[30]

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[26]Lewy Guenter, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey: A Disputed Genocide*,(Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005), pp. 3-89.

[27]Stephan Astourian, "The Armenian Genocide: An Interpretation," *The History Teacher*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Feb., 1990): p. 143.

[28]Lewy Guenter, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey: A Disputed Genocide*,(Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005),pp. 3-89.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Karen Barkey, "Islam and Toleration: Studying the Ottoman Imperial Model," *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol. 19, No. ½, The New Sociological Imagination (Dec. 2005): pp. 5-19.

Another important aspect of a situation conducive to mass killing considered by many theorists is the perceived threat to the successful realization of the perpetrators' strategic goals caused by a rebellious activity of a target group or the actual attempt to change the existing political order by force of arms, which Harff describes as one of the causes of genocide. "In all the cases considered here genocides were preceded by some attempt to change the existing power structure. It should be obvious that any attempt to change existing power relations carries a certain amount of risk for the challenger."[31]

While some Armenian resistance movements in the form of political parties and moderate nationalist groups were present in the Ottoman Empire, they never sought to challenge the existing oppressive power structure. They were too disorganized and devoid of a strong leadership to conduct a military resistance. Rather, they pursued their goals by non-violent, political, and diplomatic means such as seeking foreign protection against Turkish and Kurdish massacres, which they never received. Furthermore, the Armenians never posed any real threat to the Turks' military might. Valentino views these two factors as essential to contributing to the ruling elites' decision to exterminate the Armenians.[32] He believes that the less the perpetrators of mass killing are constrained in the implementation of their violent policies by the external political and military pressure, the more likely that they will succeed. Harff also asserts that "in all cases external support for either the dominant group or a rebellious faction added significantly to the success or failure of the undertaking."[33]

Modern Turkish and pro-Turkish authors justify the policy of the Young Turks to destroy the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire by the fact that the Armenians sympathized with the Russians and prepared to revolt against the Turkish authorities. However, many facts suggest that the destruction was being prepared long before the war. The war only gave the Young Turks the opportunity to freely carry out their plans.

Though one can assume that when rebellions are supported by a major power or another neighboring state, the likelihood of genocide is lowered because of the risks that such policies carry to instigators of mass killing and those involved in the organization and execution of violent measures against identity groups. The execution of genocide in that case implies an enormous amount of threat to the regime, rather than certain benefits that such actions may entail. Nonetheless, the Young Turks were not restrained in the execution of their policies toward the Armenians who had longstanding ties with the Russian Empire. Moreover, the position of the Armenian population in the Ottoman Empire deteriorated day by day. The Turkish government had accused the Armenians in an attempt to revolt. Most of the Armenian conscripts in the army were sent to special labor battalions and subsequently destroyed. In early December 1914 the Turks began their offensive on the Caucasus front in the war against Russia. Suffering a crushing defeat, the Turks were forced to retreat. Retreating Turkish troops poured out the anger of their defeat on the Christian populations of front-line areas - the Armenians,

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[31]Barbara Harff, "The Etiology of Genocides," in *Genocide and the Modern Age: Etiology and Case Studies of Mass Death,* eds. Isidor Wallimann et al. (Syracuse UP, 1987): p. 56.

[32]Benjamin Valentino, "Final solutions: The causes of mass killing and genocide," *Security Studies* 9:3 (2000): pp. 42-43.

[33]Barbara Harff, "The Etiology of Genocides," in *Genocide and the Modern Age: Etiology and Case Studies of Mass Death,* eds. Isidor Wallimann et al. (Syracuse UP, 1987): p. 58.

Assyrians and Greeks. Simultaneously, arrests of prominent Armenians and attacks on Armenian villages continued across the country.

Finally, the Young Turks envisioned the future of the Ottoman Empire without the Armenian minority, whose successes in trade and education, liberalism, and western outlook simply did not fit into a new concept of a Turkish polity. The Young Turks saw it as a threat primarily to their own political survival.

Conclusion

Benjamin Valentino's strategic killing perspective represents an innovative approach to understanding the ultimate causes of mass killing. Rather than focusing on the wider structural conditions or the societal cleavages that exist prior to genocide, Valentino offers a convincing explanation of how adverse structural conditions, such as wars, political upheavals, or any forms of inter-group cleavages serve as vehicles of outright political campaigns of power elites aimed to transform a society and build a new national identity through the deportation, and, ultimately, the extermination of "inappropriate" social, ethnic, or political groups. Contrary to the national upheaval thesis brought forward by Harff, Valentino's strategic approach provides a conceptual framework for understanding the leading forces of mass killing. It is not popular resentment, economic and political crises, or the concentration of political power in the hands of the militarists, but it is their intent to rid the country of entire population groups in an effort to bring to fruition a new political vision and create a new national identity that leads to mass killing of civilian populations.