

# RELOCATION OF THE OTTOMAN ARMENIANS IN 1915: A REASSESSMENT

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**Abstract:** *This article criticizes the subjective approaches adopted by the historians in dealing with the events of 1915 and also the lack of consistency in the interpretations of the conflict between the Muslims and the Armenians. The author makes evaluations about the way the subject is handled in the light of archival documents. The evaluations are based on the closing of the Armenian Committees on 24 April 1915, the arrests of the leading political figures and how these events are handled both by the Turkish and Armenian historians. In his assessments of the arrests of April 24, 1915 the author argues that the state had only aimed at taking the activities of the revolutionaries under control, and that the claims concerning the arrests of these political figures was a preparation for the process to exterminate the Armenians is groundless. It is also argued in this article that the decision for relocation has been taken as a legal security measure and that the Armenian uprisings were the principle reason behind the decision. Also discussed in this article are the number of people relocated and the ratio of deaths which took place during the marches of the convoys to the designated locations in southern parts of the Ottoman Empire. The author emphasizing the importance of studying the events of 1915 on the basis of the archival documents welcomes the letter of the Turkish Prime Minister to the President of Armenia to the effect that an historical commission consisting of historians and other experts from two countries should be established to study the developments and events of 1915 not only in the archives of Turkey and Armenia but also in the archives of all relevant third countries.*

**Keywords:** *Armenians, Ottoman Empire, Armenian Question, Forced migrations*

The subject of this paper is the Turkish-Armenian Question. According to the Armenian historiography it all started on April 24, 1915, the date at which the Ottoman security forces arrested 235 leading personality<sup>1</sup> of the Armenian

1 The debate over the number of arrests that took place on April 24, 1915 and immediately afterwards is now over thanks to the newly found documents in the Ottoman Archives in Istanbul. See. Yusuf Sarıncı, "What Happened on April 24, 1915" The Circular of April 24, 1915, and the Arrest of the Armenian Committee Members in Istanbul", *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, Vol: 14/1-2 (Fall, 2008), s. 75-102. For the list of those arrested on April 24, 1915 see Grigoris Balakian, *La Golgotha Arménien: de Berlin à deir es-sor: mémoires*, *Le Cerde d'Écrits Caucasiens*, 2002. For English translation see, Grigoris Balakian, *Armenian Golgotha*, trans. Peter Balakian and Aris Sevag, Alfred A. Knopf publ, New York, 2009.

Revolutionary Party (ARF), Dasnaksutyun. The Turkish historiography, however, challenges this assertion and dates the origin of the Question to the Congress of Berlin, in 1878, when the internal conflict between the Armenians and Muslims became an international issue for the Great Powers of the period.<sup>2</sup> Be that as it may, the fact remains that the Turkish-Armenian Question should be the subject of history, and different opinions should be elaborated by historians. From this standpoint, on 10 April 2005, Turkish Prime Minister sent an official letter to Robert Koçaryan, the President of Armenia saying that:

*“The Turkish and Armenian peoples not only share a common history and geography in a sensitive region of the world, but also lived together over a long period of time. However, it is not a secret that we have diverging interpretations of events that took place during a particular period of our common history. These differences that have in the past left behind traces of painful memories for our nations continue to hamper the development of friendly relations between our two countries today. I believe that, as leaders of our countries, our primary duty is to leave to our future generations a peaceful and friendly environment in which tolerance and mutual respect shall prevail... In this connection, we are extending an invitation to your country to establish a joint group consisting of historians and other experts from our two countries to study the developments and events of 1915 not only in the archives of Turkey and Armenia but also in the archives of all relevant third countries and to share their findings with the international public. I believe that such an initiative would shed light on a disputed period of history and also constitute a step towards contributing to the normalization of relations between our countries”.*<sup>3</sup>

I am of the opinion that this was a courageous and constructive proposal to address to a conflict that has caused mistrust and enmity for years between the two nations. Unfortunately, Armenian leadership rejected this proposal arguing that Ottoman’s treatment of the Armenians within the Empire between 1915 and 1923 constituted “genocide” and this fact cannot be called into question. In his official reply, President Koçaryan replied that “Your proposal to address the past can not be productive unless it addresses the present and the future as well,” and in a counter proposal he offered to form an ‘intergovernmental commission’ that will tackle this and other problems hampering their relations”. The most striking phrase in the letter of Koçaryan, in my view, was this:

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2 Cevdet Küçük, *Osmanlı Diplomasisinde Ermeni Meselesinin Ortaya Çıkışı 1877-1897*, Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Vakfı, İstanbul, 1986.

3 For the text of the letters exchanged between the Presidents of Turkey and Armenia, see Aybars Görgülü, “Turkey Armenia Relations: A Vicious Circle”, *Foreign Policy Analysis Series-8*, TESEV Publications, İstanbul, 2008, Appendixes 2, p. 43.

*“Responsibility for the development of bilateral relations is borne by the governments and we have no right to delegate it to historians”.*<sup>4</sup>

By this, President Koçaryan implied that the question between Turkey and Armenia was a political one, and not historic. He is not alone in Armenia. Indeed many leading political groups in Armenia regard Erdoğan’s offer as a ploy designed to deflect international attention from the ongoing commemorations of the 90th anniversary of the start of the so-called genocide. Armenian historians have written their version of their history and led their people to believe that their facts are so solid that they cannot be challenged.<sup>5</sup>

In my visit to Armenia in 2005, unfortunately I had the impression that the People of Armenia share this official view and are not ready to define the events of 1915 and 1916 any other term than “genocide”. Under these circumstances, it may not be an exaggeration to say that Armenians believe their thesis as strong as a dogma. When they meet a Turk by coincidence they ask the very stereotype question: “Do you believe in Armenian Genocide?” And when one does not give the straight answer, which is “Yes” for an average Armenian, he/she is immediately called a “denier”.

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### **Distortion of the UN Convention of 1948 on Genocide**

Do the sources prove Armenian allegations beyond any shadow of a doubt? Is not there any fact that can be challenged about the events of 1915-16? Why do the Armenians not question their thesis? Was the treatment of Armenians by the Ottoman regime in 1915-1916 equal to genocide as defined by the UN Convention of 1948? According to the Armenian historiography everything is crystal clear and what happened was “genocide”. Is that really so? Of course not, and there is a saying “all that glitters is not gold”. First of all, we are dealing with a period of history and therefore it is natural that day by day as new documents come into light our knowledge of the period may be changed. There are many points and details that are open to debate about the nature of the incidents that took place between Armenians and Muslims in 1915 and onwards. The treatment of the Armenians by the Ottoman government can not be seen within the concept of the UN Convention of 1948 on Genocide. It is neither legal nor scholarly. From an international law

4 Ibid., p. 44.

5 “Opposition’s case: Dashnak leader explains why Sargsyan should not go to Turkey” October, 14, 2009 *Armenia Now*, [http://www.armenianow.com/news/10654/opposition\\_s\\_case\\_dashnak\\_leader](http://www.armenianow.com/news/10654/opposition_s_case_dashnak_leader) Last Access: March, 18, 2011

perspective, the Armenian Allegations regarding 1915 events is certainly disputed simply because the allegations are not based on legal verdicts by a competent international judicial institution. This is an important point and cannot be overlooked, since recognition of “genocide” requires a legal decision delivered by a competent international (or national) judicial institution in accordance with the UN Convention of 1948.<sup>6</sup>

Even though this very fact is sufficient to demonstrate that accusations against Turkey is unlawful, there are other reasons which cast doubts on the use of the word genocide in describing the events of 1915-1916 within the framework of the UN

Convention. Firstly, according to the UN Resolution 1948, genocide is described as “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group”. And the events of 1915-1916 should be assessed in the light of this definition.

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#### **Relocation: “A Legitimate Security Measure”**

In the light of the newly found documents, we have better understanding of the implementation of the law of relocation during which one 1.5

million Armenians are claimed to have perished owing to various reasons. What is more important is that archival documents reveal that the Ottoman government had no intention to destroy its Armenian population and cannot be held accountable for the Armenian losses. All studies dealing with the implementation of relocation have so far indicated that with the relocation of the Armenians, the Ottomans tried to prevent a full scale rebellion behind their army lines which had already started in the centers such as Erzurum, Zeytun and Bitlis just before the entry of the Ottoman Empire into WWI.<sup>7</sup>

It is known that when the Ottoman military declared mobilization in August 1914, most members of ARF and other Armenian political parties fled and joined the Russians, as was decided in the secret committee meetings. Even Karekin Pastermadjian, an Armenian deputy in the Ottoman Parliament and also a member of Dashnak party, had joined one of these units to lead the Armenian voluntary forces.<sup>8</sup> According to the Russian historians, there were 23 Ottoman-Armenian

6 See, William A. Schabas, *Genocide in International Law, The Crime of Genocide*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009, s. 400 <http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/komisyon/insanhaklari/pdf01/33-36.pdf>

7 See, Kemal Çiçek, *Ermenilerin Zorunlu Göçü*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Publications, Ankara, 2005, s. 7-33

8 For the role of Armenians in the World War I see, Dr. G. Pasdermadjian, *Why Armenia Should be Free: Armenia's Role in the Present War*, Hairenik Publishing Company, 1918.

units in the Russian army at the very beginning of the war, making roughly 11,500 soldiers.<sup>9</sup> Plus there were 40,000 Armenian armed volunteers only in the Caucasian region fighting for the Russians.<sup>10</sup> (Document-1: A letter of Bogos Nubar, President of Armenian National Delegation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France)

There were also Armenian volunteer units scattered all over Turkey. The number of these fugitives and/or collaborators within the Ottoman Empire will never be fully known. Bogos Nubar Pasha in one of his letters to the Foreign Ministry of France stated that they were fighting on the side of the Allied forces against the Ottoman Empire with almost 200,000 Armenian soldiers. In view of these figures, it can be seen how correct Arnold Toynbee was when he wrote that Ottoman Armenians became the ‘fifth column’ of the Russians in occupied territories of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>11</sup> This so-called “fifth column” was obviously accountable for the massacres of 124,000 Muslims between August 1914 and March 1916.<sup>12</sup> This very fact also justifies the necessity of removing Armenians behind army lines. Arthur Tremaine Chester in one of his article in The New York Times, Current History had this to say to explain the law of relocation to the American people:

*“The provinces in the rear of the army had a large Armenian population, and these people, feeling that there was an excellent chance of the Russians defeating the Turks, decided to make it a certainty by rising up in the rear of the army and cutting it off from its base of supplies. Let me draw a parallel imaginary case. Suppose that Mexico was a powerful and rival country with which we were at war, and suppose that we sent an army to the Mexican border to hold back the invading enemy; suppose further that not only the negroes in our army deserted to the enemy but those left at home organized and cut off our line of communication. What do you think we as a people, especially the Southerners, would do to the Negroes? Our Negroes have ten times the excuse for hating the whites than the Armenians have for their attitude toward the Turks.”*<sup>13</sup>

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9 For the number of Armenian volunteers see, Pasdermadjian, *Why Armenia Should be Free*, s. 19-21. For Armenian presence and activities in the Russian army, see, Mehmet Perinçek, “Taşnak ve Sovyet Ermenistanı Kaynaklarında Taşnaksütyun Gerçeği”, *Türk-Ermeni İlişkilerinin Gelişimi ve 1915 Olayları Uluslararası Sempozyumu Bildirileri*, ed. Hale Şıvgın, Gazi Üniversitesi, Ankara 2006, s. 501-502.

10 See Document No: 1

11 Arnold J. Toynbee, *Acquaintances*, Oxford University Press, New York – Toronto, 1967, s. 242.

12 *Ermeniler Tarafından Yapılan Katliam Belgeleri 1914-1919*, Cilt 1, Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü Yayınları, İstanbul,

13 Arnold J. Toynbee, *Acquaintances*, Oxford University Press, New York – Toronto, 1967, s. 242.

## The Limits of Transferring Armenians

When the term “war zone” is used, some may not have a full idea about the law and its implementation to Armenians, but the word “war zone” is important for several reasons. Firstly, the law of relocation was only limited to the areas of strategic importance for the military, and secondly, the law also left out a reasonable amount of the Armenian population from relocation.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Ottoman government of the time had defined many exemption categories for the Armenians. According to the documents released by the Directorate of Turkish Archives, the following groups were not to be transferred:

- Protestant and Catholic Armenians, (At the beginning they were totally exempted from relocation, but in time, due to changing circumstances some groups of Catholics and Protestants had to be sent away. However there were no mass transfers among them.)
- Armenians living in the cities of Istanbul, Edirne, Aydın, Bursa, İzmir, Antalya, Kütahya, Kastamonu and many other western towns,
- Armenian soldiers and their families,
- Officers and those in the medical corps of the Ottoman army and their families,
- Officers employed in the branches of the Ottoman Bank at Istanbul and the provinces,
- Employees in the Régie and Public Debt establishments,
- Employees of the foreign consulates,
- Officers of the post office,
- Teachers of the Armenian and Missionary schools and their families,
- The sick, the blinds and other disabled people etc.

Indeed, reports of the American diplomats and missionaries put the number of exempted Armenians at between 300,000 and 350,000.<sup>15</sup> Thus, one should ask here the crucial question: If the intention of the Ottoman government was to annihilate

<sup>14</sup> For exemptions see, Çiçek, *Zorunlu Göç*, p. 76-87

<sup>15</sup> For an analysis of the missionary reports on that matter, see Hikmet Özdemir et. Al. *Ermeniler Sürgün ve Göç*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Publications, 3. Print, Ankara, 2005, pp. 94-95; Çiçek, *Zorunlu Göç*., p. 86.

the Armenian people, in whole or in part, just because of their religious, ethnic or national identities, why would they have so many Armenians exempted? Why would they exclude the Armenian population of Istanbul from relocation? Before we answer these questions one cannot accuse the Ottoman Empire of deporting Armenians for their ethnic or religious identity.

### The Legend of the So-Called “Death March”

Armenian historiography claims that the central cadres of Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) initiated a program of extermination and with this aim they sent the Armenian population of Anatolia to the deserts of Mesopotamia for a “death march”.<sup>16</sup> It is argued that the time given for the journey was too short, mass transfers had been started without duly preparations and the authorities were aware of the dangers ahead of the convoys. Documents in Turkish and American archives, however, refute these claims. First of all, let us make clear that in certain cities there were Armenians who were relocated in a limited time ranging from 24 hours to 48 hours, but according to the concrete documents those transferred in two days were not peasants, but were Armenian committee members. They were all male. They were arrested and transferred immediately for security reasons to prisons in various cities. In other places people were given at least two weeks for preparations. In many cities first convoys left in the first week of July, which is roughly 35 days after the law was published in the Official Gazette. Therefore, it is not true that Armenians were rushed into the journey, that they didn’t have enough time to prepare and that they suffered numerous casualties during the journey.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, foreign observers of the relocation process reported that the Ottoman government issued strict instructions for the safe conduct of the relocation. Necessary orders were given to find ways to provide food for the people to be sent away, the means of transportation to be used to transfer them to their destinations, to determine which lands they were to be settled in, the amount of funds that would be needed to provide them with food and their livelihood and providing them with seeds and fertile lands to grow wheat. In a report that was sent to the American Ambassador on September 3, 1915, Dr W. M. Post, an American physician at the American Hospital in Konya, noted that the government “has been giving the

16 The term “Death March” is often used in Holocaust literature to describe the deportation of the Jews from various countries to the Concentration camps, but although there is no parallel, Armenian historians have also started using the same term for the transfer Armenians from their homes to the resettlement areas within the country. See, N. O. Oganessian, *The Armenian Genocide: Armenocide*. Armenia: Institute of Oriental Studies, Yerevan, 2002; J. Slater, J., *Death March*. London: Horowitz Publishers, 1966.

17 For relocation dates for different cities, see Kemal Çiçek, “Amerikan Kaynaklarında Tehcir”, *Türk-Ermeni İlişkilerinde Yeni Yaklaşımlar-Uluslar arası Sempozyum*, ed., Şafak Ural, Feridun Emecen, Mustafa Aydın, İstanbul Üniversitesi Yayınları, İstanbul, 2008, pp. 323-344.

[Armenian] adults 1 piaster and the children 20 paras a day.<sup>18</sup>” The American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief, Red Cross and other relief organization were allowed to help Armenians on the road to Syria and also in the camps established for the refugees. It is important to mention that not all Armenians were located in the camps, but many were settled in houses in Damascus, Aleppo, Ma’an, Ras-al-ayn, Raqqah, Deir-el-Zor as well. Orphans were sent to the orphanages established by the government and missionaries. Some were also given under the protection of families and the government paid their expenses. (Document 2: A view of Dier-el-Zor)

Last but not the least; they were not deported, as was claimed, to the deserts of Mesopotamia. As Rear Admiral Colby M. Chester wrote in The New York Times, Current History in September 1922;

***It is important to mention that not all Armenians were located in the camps, but many were settled in houses in Damascus, Aleppo, Ma’an, Ras-al-ayn, Raqqah, Deir-el-Zor as well.***

*“The Armenians were moved from the inhospitable regions where they were not welcome and could not actually prosper, to the most delightful and fertile part of Syria. Those from the mountains were taken into Mesopotamia, where the climate is as benign as Florida and California, whither New York millionaires journey every year for health and recreation. All this was done at great expense of money and effort, and the general outside report was that all, or at least many, had been murdered...In due course of time the relocated entirely unmassacred and fat and prosperous returned (if they wished so to do), and an English prisoner of war who was in one of the vacated towns after it had been repopulated told me that he found it filled with these astonishing living ghosts”.*<sup>19</sup> (Document-3: The new York Times Current History, September 1922)

### **“Living Ghosts” or Fiddling with the Numbers**

Indeed Chester was right in his observations. Unfortunately during the war, British and American propaganda declared entire Ottoman-Armenian population as being murdered and the people in the West were made to believe lamentable stories and ordeals of their fellows. What is more striking, however, is that this war time propaganda is still given credit and the loss of Armenians during the relocation is claimed to be 1.5 million. Luckily we have Western sources to refute these

18 NARA 867.4016/188. From Wilfred M. Post to Henry Morgenthau, Konia, 3 September 1915.

19 NARA 867.4016/188. From Wilfred M. Post to Henry Morgenthau, Konia, 3 September 1915.



exaggerated figures. American consular or missionaries were present in some cities from which the Armenians started their journey and cities in which they were resettled. They reported regularly the number of people left or arrived. Some consuls, like Jesse J. Jackson who was the American consul at Aleppo, reported to his embassy on a daily basis the number of arrivals by railway or on foot.<sup>20</sup> Therefore his documents are as precious for historians as a pearl. For instance in one of his reports dated February 8, 1916, he gives the total number of Armenians arrived in camps:

*“Reliable sources in reference to the number of Armenian immigrants in this vicinity, between here and Damascus and in that surrounding country, and down the Euphrates River as far as Dier-el-Zor, showing a total of about 500,000 persons”.*<sup>21</sup> (Document-4: From J. B. Jackson to the Henry Morgenthau, American Ambassador, February 8, 1916)

Juxtaposing these figures with that of Bogos Nubar Pasha makes sense. Bogos Nubar Pasha told the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 that “the number of the relocated was between 600,000 and 700,000”. The same person also wrote that 250,000 Ottoman Armenians left voluntarily for Russia following the Russian withdrawal, and another 40,000 for Persia.<sup>22</sup>

There are sources like Near East Relief which gives the number of Armenian refugees from Turkey as high as 350,000. If this refugee number added to the number of relocated Armenians within the country we get very close to the figures that appeared in the private papers of Talat Pasha, the then Interior Minister of the Empire. As is known in one of the documents published by Murat Bardakçı the number Armenian subjected to relocation is given as 924,158.<sup>23</sup> Moreover post-WWI population statistics prepared by the British Embassy in Istanbul and the agents of the Near East Relief Society gives the number of Armenian refugees from the Ottoman Empire as 817,873. The document further states that the total given does not include 281,000 Armenians living in Turkey and some 95,000 who became Muslim.<sup>24</sup> (Document 5: Approximate number of Armenians in the World, NARA 867.4016/816)

Thus, how can one talk about 1,000,000 deaths in the early days of displacement? It is clear that the figures that have become “facts” vary and should not be treated

20 Kemal Çiçek, “Halep Amerikan Konsolosu J. B. Jackson ve Ermeni Tehcirindeki Yeri”, *Tarihi Gerçekler ve Bilimin Işığında Ermeni Sorunu*, ed. Bülent Bakar, Necdet Öztürk ve Süleyman Beyoğlu, IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, İstanbul, 2007, s.204-223.

21 NARA 867.48/271. From Hoffman Philip to Secretary of State, Constantinople, 28 March 1916

22 Archives des Affaires Étrangères de France, Séries Levant, 1918-1928, vol.2, folio 47.

23 Murat Bardakçı, *Talat Paşa'nın Evrak-ı Metrûkesi*, Everest, İstanbul, 2008, p. 77.

24 NARA 867.4016/816. From James W. Gerard to Secretary of State. November 1922.

as the verses of the holy books. These figures clearly demonstrate that figures were distorted and the numbers of Armenian victims were exaggerated. A method of raising the death toll is unfortunately swelling up the population figures.

Many independent researchers estimate the Armenian population in the Ottoman Empire before 1914 between 1,400,000 and 1,700,000. Even such pro-Armenian scholars as Dr. Johannes Lepsius do not accept the figures ascertained by the Armenian Patriarchate at 2.1 million. Lepsius calculated the Armenian population to be around 1,845,450, which was in fact made up by averaging Ottoman official figures with that of the Patriarchate. There is not a single source that would indicate the population of the Ottoman Armenians was as high as 2.1 million.<sup>25</sup>

*Thus, how can one talk about 1,000,000 deaths in the early days of displacement? It is clear that the figures that have become “facts” vary and should not be treated as the verses of the holy books.*

At this stage the origin of the figure 1,000,000 (that later become 1.5 million) calls for investigation. Strikingly enough, this illogical figure originated from the report of Leslie Davis, the US consul at Harput. On July 24, 1915, he wrote that “It is impossible to say how many Armenians have been killed, but it is estimated that the number is not far from a million”.<sup>26</sup> One must note here that the report was written only

54 days after the law of relocation was published by the Official Gazette. In brief this figure was only guess-work just as that of Jackson, the consular at Aleppo, who wrote on 19 August 1915 that “conservative persons well-informed on the question place the total loss of life up to August 15 at over 500,000”.<sup>27</sup> In conclusion these figures does not mean anything for historians seeking the truth, but only indicate that what Armenian historians regard as established fact can be debatable.

### **Government Responsibility: To What Extent?**

Another important issue that should not be overlooked when assessing the events of 1915 and 1916 in the light of the UN Convention of 1948 is the question of genocidal intent. The UN Convention strongly stipulated that there must be a specific intent to exterminate a group. There must be hatred toward a group because of their national, ethnic, religious and racial identity. There is no evidence of any prejudices against Armenians by the CUP cadres. Nor has anyone been able to

25 For the population of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, see. Hikmet Özdemir et al, *Ermeniler Sürgün ve Göç*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, Ankara, 2004, s. 5-50.

26 NARA 867.4016/269. From Leslie Davis to Henry Morgenthau, Mamouret-ul-Aziz (Harput), 24 July 1915.

27 NARA 867.4016/148. From Jesse B. Jackson to Henry Morgenthau, Aleppo, 19 August 1915.

demonstrate that there had been any plan to exterminate the Ottoman Armenians. On the contrary, the CUP continued to employ Armenians in important and even strategic positions. According to a memorandum dated 24 July 1917, there were 522 Armenians occupying strategic posts in the Ottoman bureaucracy. This shows that Armenians that were loyal to the army who had nothing to do with the Dashnak and Hunchak organizations or who were committed to the Ottoman government were still working in the ranks of the army and the bureaucracy even in 1917. This is a clear indication of absence of any kind of hatred towards the Armenians as an ethnic group. More important, is the CUP's response to the maltreatment of Armenians en route by the bandits, mobs, and officials.

Documents recently released by the General Directorate of the Ottoman Archives reveal that the government had indeed mobilized its entire means for the security of the convoys. Each convoy was assigned gendarmes. The routes were determined and secured beforehand as much as possible. It was announced that military and administrative officials would be held responsible for the unlawful incidents that could be enacted on the convoys on their route. Unfortunately what was feared had occurred from time to time mostly in Eastern Anatolia, because there were no railroads and there was no way of moving people other than in ox-carts and on foot.<sup>28</sup>

This is a very important point because the government was then fulfilling its responsibility to enforce the law, and the maltreatment of the Armenians was severely punished by the extra-ordinary court-martials commissioned for this purpose. According to the documents 1,673 people had been arrested and tried by the Ottoman military courts during 1915 and 1916 for crimes against Armenians. 67 people were executed and 524 were imprisoned for various crimes. There were also 68 people who were sentenced to hard-labour. These trials and convictions must be regarded as the willingness of the Ottoman government in protecting the lives of the Armenians on their way to their destinations.<sup>29</sup> (Document-6: A sample page of the list of Muslims tried by the Military Courts in 1916)

On the whole, the government was successful in preventing many of the attacks even before they took place. Owing to these security measures, the number of Armenians who suffered attacks by brigands was not as high as it was exaggerated. However, it is also true that many Armenians succumbed to the hardships of the

28 *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermenilerin Sevk ve İskanı*, Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, Ankara 2007.

29 BOA HR. SYS. Nr. 2882/29. For some assessment and use of the documents see, Yusuf Sarınoy, "İstanbul'da Ermeni Faaliyetleri ve Alınan Tedbirler (1914-1918)", *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, Sayı 67-68-69, Cilt: XXIII, Mart-Temmuz-Kasım 2007; Yusuf Sarınoy, "Ermeni Tehciri ve Yargılamalar 1915-1916", *Türk-Ermeni İlişkilerinin Gelişimi ve 1915 Olayları Uluslararası Sempozyumu Bildirileri*, (ed. Hale Şivgin), Ankara, 2006, p. 257-265. For slightly different figures see, Kamuran Gürün, *The Armenian File: The Myth of Innocence Exposed*, Rüstem, Nicosia, 2001, p. 214-15.

relocation process and lost their lives. The difficulty encountered in the transportation of the Armenians was an important factor in the losses suffered by the relocated. In a report, dated September 27, 1915, Edward Nathan, the American Consul in Mersin, wrote that “the lack of proper transportation facilities is the most important factor in causing the misery”.<sup>30</sup> The spread of infectious diseases, moreover, had worsened the conditions for the relocated Armenians. However, these hardships and problems were not peculiar to the Armenian the relocated alone. The Muslim refugees as well as Turkish soldiers had to suffer a similar fate. The observations made by an American military historian shed further light to this aspect of the problem:

*“Even had the Turks been inclined to treat the Armenians kindly, they simply did not have the transportation and logistical means necessary with which to conduct population transfers on such a grand scale. Military transportation, which received top priority, illustrates this point, when first-class infantry units typically would lose a quarter of their strength to disease, inadequate rations, and poor hygiene while travelling through the empire. This routinely happened to regiments and divisions that were well equipped and composed of healthy young men, commanded by officers concerned with their well-being”.*<sup>31</sup>

## Conclusion

As is seen there are many points that need to be debated among historians. Therefore Turkey has officially invited interested parties to set up an historical commission to examine the events of 1915 and 1916. A similar offer was made in 1919 by the Ottoman Government to Holland, Spain and Sweden. None, then, had given a positive response. Now there may be a second chance for reconciliation, and some pressure on Armenia to bring her to the table may pave the way towards peace and dialogue. Unfortunately the position of Armenia is far from being conciliatory at this point. Seeking to obtain “Recognition, Reparations and the Return of land,” the so-called three-R policy,<sup>32</sup> Armenia refuses to engage in dialogue over the incidents of 1915-1916. Furthermore, Armenian Diaspora established terrorists groups like ASALA which killed 42 Turkish diplomats and citizens around the World in a total of 110 terrorist attacks between 1973 and 1984.<sup>33</sup> The same groups have still been putting pressure upon academicians who dare to write anything against the Armenian claims. For instance, Bernard Lewis, a

30 NARA 867.4016/200. From Edward I. Nathan to Henry Morgenthau, Mersina, 27 September 1915.

31 Edward J. Erickson, *Ordered to Die: A History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2001, p. 103.

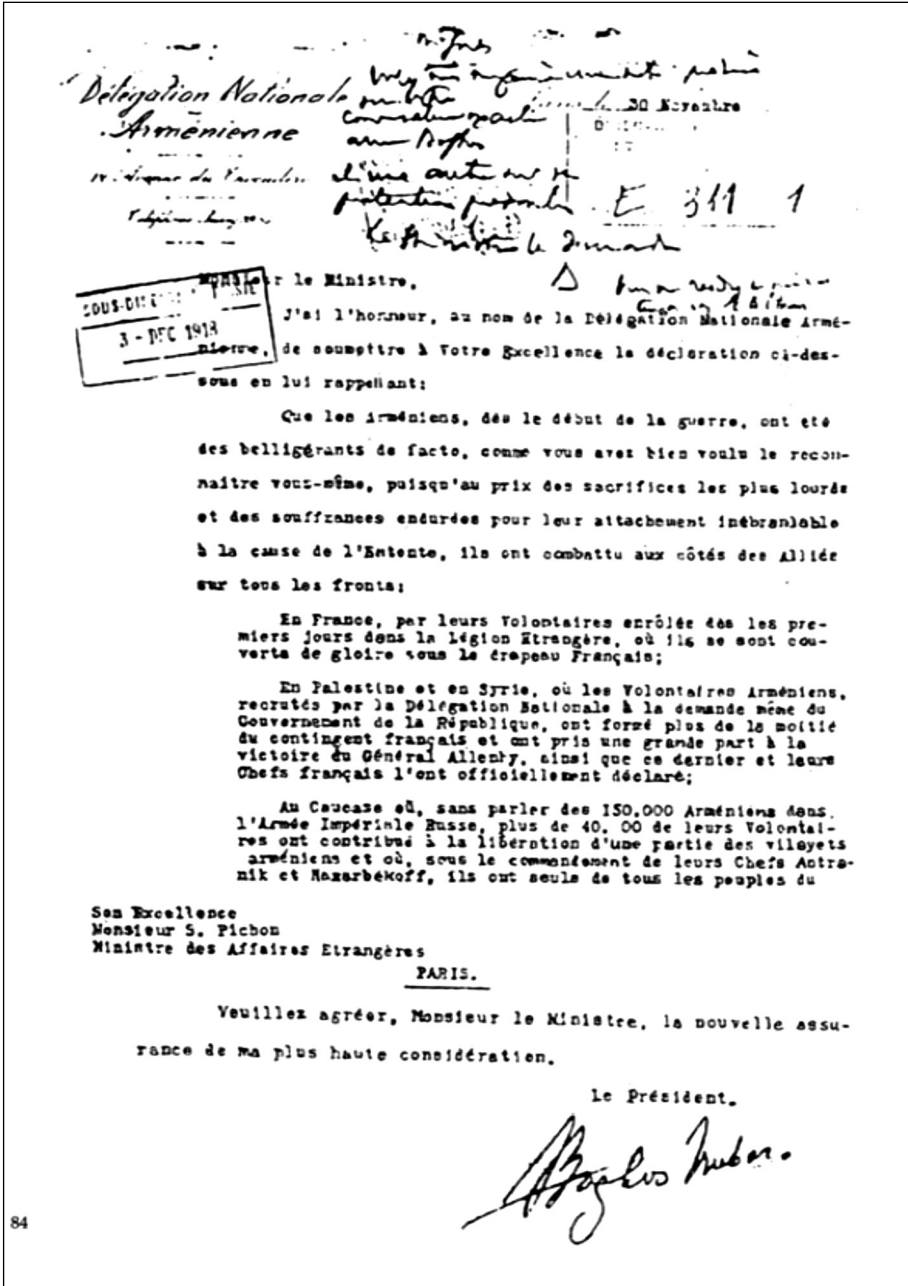
32 Kemal Çiçek, “Ermenistan Penceresinden Türkiye ile Uzlaşma Şartları”, *Türk-Ermeni İlişkilerinin Gelişimi ve 1915 Olayları Uluslararası Sempozyumu Bildirileri*, (ed. Hale Şıvgın), Ankara, 2006, p. 357-362.

33 Bilal Şimşir, *Şehit Diplomatlarımız*, Bilgi Publications, Ankara, 2000

distinguished scholar of the history of Middle East was sued by the Armenians for writing his research results in a correct manner from a scholarly perspective and Prof. Stanford J. Shaw's house was bombed by the Armenian terrorists. Despite all these misconducts of Armenians, it is to be hoped that Turkey and Armenia will one day seat around the table, and reassess the events of 1915 and 1916. Of course, the realization of this process shall be dependent upon Armenia and her giving up its historic claims on Turkey and building peaceful relations with its neighbors.

ANNEXES

Doc. 1: A letter of Bogos Nubar, President of Armenian National Delegation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France



Doc 2: Foto, A view of Dier-el-Zor



Doc 3: The new York Times Current History, September 1922

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*THE NEW YORK TIMES CURRENT HISTORY*

posed to be even then in progress. Learning of this, I was disgusted with the anti-Turkish propagandists.

I know that what I say will be astonishing to most Americans. I myself should be astonished by such reports if I knew nothing about Turkey except such things as I have read in newspapers published in America and Europe, and inspired—although the newspapers have not understood this—by the enemies of Turkey. One reason why these misrepresentations persist is that Turkey never has felt it worth while to organize any agency to state her case abroad.

There have been riots, now and then, when local Turks have felt that their rights have been outraged by outsiders. It seems to me that once or twice I have read something about riots in America in circumstances of like sort, although of differing detail. Speaking generally, the Turks are far more patient than Americans would be.

Armenian massacres by the Turks have been almost entirely unknown since constitutional government was proclaimed in 1908; or, at least, since the head of the Young Turk Party caused twenty Ottoman officers to be put to death for permitting acts of cruelty against the Armenians in 1915.

The worst "outrage" ever perpetrated

by the Turks on the Armenians occurred in 1915. The wholesale deportations of that period were brought about by Turkish fear that the procedure of this alien population, if left to continue without interruption, would get the agitators into real trouble; the Turks wished no such episode, though, naturally, they disliked Armenian interference with Turkey's operation of her own affairs, political, religious and domestic. So the Armenians were moved from the inhospitable regions where they were not welcome and could not actually prosper, to the most delightful and fertile part of Syria.

Those from the mountains were taken into Mesopotamia, where the climate is as benign as in Florida and California, whither New York millionaires journey every year for health and recreation. All this was done at great expense of money and effort, and the general outside report was that all, or at least many, had been murdered.

It seems almost a pity to upset the good old myth of Turkish viciousness and ter-



Doc 4: From J. B. Jackson to the Henry Morgenthau, American Ambassador,  
February 8, 1916

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                    |         |                               |        |                               |        |                                 |       |                                |       |                              |       |                                   |       |                                     |        |                                |        |                                     |         |              |                |
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| <p>No. 534<br/>COPY</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>AMERICAN CONSULATE</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Aleppo, Syria, February 8, 1916.</p> <p>THE HONORABLE<br/>HENRY MORGENTHAU,<br/>AMERICAN AMBASSADOR,<br/>CONSTANTINOPLE, TURKEY.</p> <p>SIR:</p> <p>I have the honor to transmit herewith a copy of a report received from reliable sources in reference to the number of Armenian immigrants in this vicinity, between here and Damascus and in that surrounding country, and down the Euphrates river as far as Dier-el-Zor, showing a total of about 500,000 persons. In connection with the relief sent by Mr. Peet for these people it would seem proper to state the sum of Ltq. 500 weekly is entirely inadequate to aid even a small part thereof, in fact as a person cannot live on less than 2 gold piasters per day, it will require the sum of Ltq. 10,000 a day to keep those alive who are in good health, to say nothing for the ill.</p> <p>The Protestants have a fairly good organization for the caring for and distribution of money and other help to those in the localities mentioned in the list. The two distributing centers are Aleppo, which comprises all of the places mentioned on the list except Damascus, which is the other distribution center. Rev. Vahran Tahmizian may be charged with the distribution at the latter place.</p> <p>Copy is enclosed for Mr. Peet. Please have him take energetic measures in this matter and advise me thereof.</p> <p>I have the honor to be, Sir,<br/>Your obedient servant<br/>Signed: J. B. Jackson<br/>Consul</p> <p>Enclosure: Copy<br/>310.</p> <p>Source: U.S. State Department Record Group 59, 867.48/271</p> | <p>COPY</p> <p>The following is the statistics of Armenian immigrants according to best information:</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Damascus as far as Maan, more than</td> <td>100,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Hama and surrounding villages</td> <td>12,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Homs and surrounding villages</td> <td>20,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Aleppo and surrounding villages</td> <td>7,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Maara and surrounding villages</td> <td>4,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Bab and surrounding villages</td> <td>8,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mumbidge and surrounding villages</td> <td>5,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ras-el-Ain and surrounding villages</td> <td>20,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Rakka and surrounding villages</td> <td>10,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Der-el-Zor and surrounding villages</td> <td>300,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Total</b></td> <td><b>486,000</b></td> </tr> </table> <p>February 3, 1916.</p> | Damascus as far as Maan, more than | 100,000 | Hama and surrounding villages | 12,000 | Homs and surrounding villages | 20,000 | Aleppo and surrounding villages | 7,000 | Maara and surrounding villages | 4,000 | Bab and surrounding villages | 8,000 | Mumbidge and surrounding villages | 5,000 | Ras-el-Ain and surrounding villages | 20,000 | Rakka and surrounding villages | 10,000 | Der-el-Zor and surrounding villages | 300,000 | <b>Total</b> | <b>486,000</b> |
| Damascus as far as Maan, more than                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 100,000                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                    |         |                               |        |                               |        |                                 |       |                                |       |                              |       |                                   |       |                                     |        |                                |        |                                     |         |              |                |
| Hama and surrounding villages                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 12,000                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                    |         |                               |        |                               |        |                                 |       |                                |       |                              |       |                                   |       |                                     |        |                                |        |                                     |         |              |                |
| Homs and surrounding villages                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 20,000                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                    |         |                               |        |                               |        |                                 |       |                                |       |                              |       |                                   |       |                                     |        |                                |        |                                     |         |              |                |
| Aleppo and surrounding villages                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 7,000                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                    |         |                               |        |                               |        |                                 |       |                                |       |                              |       |                                   |       |                                     |        |                                |        |                                     |         |              |                |
| Maara and surrounding villages                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 4,000                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                    |         |                               |        |                               |        |                                 |       |                                |       |                              |       |                                   |       |                                     |        |                                |        |                                     |         |              |                |
| Bab and surrounding villages                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 8,000                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                    |         |                               |        |                               |        |                                 |       |                                |       |                              |       |                                   |       |                                     |        |                                |        |                                     |         |              |                |
| Mumbidge and surrounding villages                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 5,000                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                    |         |                               |        |                               |        |                                 |       |                                |       |                              |       |                                   |       |                                     |        |                                |        |                                     |         |              |                |
| Ras-el-Ain and surrounding villages                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 20,000                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                    |         |                               |        |                               |        |                                 |       |                                |       |                              |       |                                   |       |                                     |        |                                |        |                                     |         |              |                |
| Rakka and surrounding villages                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 10,000                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                    |         |                               |        |                               |        |                                 |       |                                |       |                              |       |                                   |       |                                     |        |                                |        |                                     |         |              |                |
| Der-el-Zor and surrounding villages                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 300,000                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                    |         |                               |        |                               |        |                                 |       |                                |       |                              |       |                                   |       |                                     |        |                                |        |                                     |         |              |                |
| <b>Total</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <b>486,000</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                    |         |                               |        |                               |        |                                 |       |                                |       |                              |       |                                   |       |                                     |        |                                |        |                                     |         |              |                |

Doc 5: Approximate number of Armenians in the World, NARA 867.4016/816

CLASSIFICATION CANCELED AUTHORITY LETTER  
 OF 1-8-58 FROM W. H. ANDERSON, STATE DEP'T  
 BY *James W. Anderson* DATE *5 May 61*


Approximate number of Armenians in the world, November 1922.  
 Of the total indicated below, 817,873 are refugees from Turkey. The figures as to the refugees are based upon information furnished by the British Embassy, Constantinople, and by the agents of the Near East Relief Society, in 1921. The total given does not include the able-bodied Armenians, who are retained by the Kemalists, nor the women and children, - approximately 95,000,- according to the League of Nations- who have been forced to embrace Islam.

|                                        |                |                  |
|----------------------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| 1.- In Turkey :                        |                |                  |
| Constantinople.....                    | 150,000        |                  |
| Asia Minor.....                        | <u>131,000</u> | 281,000          |
| 2. In Russia :                         |                |                  |
| Republic of Erivan                     | 1,200,000      |                  |
| Georgia                                | 400,000        |                  |
| Azerbaijan                             | 340,000        |                  |
| Region of TransCaspian                 | 20,000         |                  |
| Other parts of Russia                  | <u>225,000</u> | 2,195,000        |
| 3. In Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia |                |                  |
| Egypt, Sudan and Abyssinia             | 104,000        |                  |
| India, Java and Australia              | 28,000         |                  |
| Persia                                 | <u>12,000</u>  | 194,000          |
| 4. In Greece and Cyprus                |                |                  |
| Bulgaria                               | 79,000         |                  |
| Rumania                                | 46,000         |                  |
| Central and Western Europe             | <u>43,000</u>  | 206,000          |
| 5. In the United States and Canada     |                |                  |
| South America                          | 125,000        |                  |
|                                        | <u>3,000</u>   | 128,000          |
|                                        |                | <u>2,004,000</u> |

NARA 867.4016/816  
 James W. Anderson  
 Bayler Baklanjian

Doc 6: A sample page of the list of Muslims tried by the Military Courts in 1916

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فهرست

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| <p>من کرده و اور باد مأمور این مقصد معقول و انفا سد سبب ده جان مرمز الامت زودت<br/>اوست زودت سراجینو حد جندیه اینست سبب ده ایزه معقول و انفا قبیح ایست و اینست</p> <p>مورث ایزه زودت در دست ما اصبیح برضه اولاده این مقصد نه عهد اولاده یا مکتوبه زودت<br/>آری ایست و اسلحه سمایه اولاد نیز جان جان زودت اولاد هموز بود ما صحت</p> <p>زودت ایزه زودت آوریم در مدخله ایمانه کربس اولاد بر این مقصد یا مکتوبه زودت<br/>جهت ایزه در اوج مورث ایزه زودت بود زودت زودت موجب انصاف و مستقیم ده<br/>سفر اولاد این آگوشید چه بر طرفنده آفامه اولاد مورث ایزه غایت ده</p> <p>مورث ایزه زودت بر نداد این مقصد مستند بر این ایزه اولاد بر نداد و اسلحه<br/>ایست و اینها ناست شبح ایست در ایوم اولاد در</p> <p>من کرده با شربط اولاد سکا یا مقصد و مورث سکا کربس به صمد مقصد یا مکتوبه زودت<br/>انفک ایست و در هر اولاد طلب اولاد زودت کور اولاد یا مکتوبه زودت بر کربس زودت<br/>ایست</p> <p>من کرده طریقه ایست و اینها مقصد مستند اولاد در با مقصد مستند زودت اولاد<br/>زودت سکا کربس طریقه زودت اولاد زودت اولاد زودت سکا کربس زودت<br/>کلیسا در بطریق زودت کور زودت</p> <p>من کرده مقصد انصاف حاصل اولاد سبب ده مله مقصد یا مکتوبه زودت تحقیقانه از زودت<br/>طریق زودت قیوسه اهل اینست سبب ده ایست کربس و مقصد یا مکتوبه زودت سبب اولاد<br/>آگوشید مقصد مستند اولاد زودت</p> <p>من کرده مله مله سبب مختلف اولاد زودت یا مکتوبه زودت تحقیقانه اولاد زودت<br/>کربس اولاد زودت یا مکتوبه زودت اولاد زودت سبب مستند اولاد زودت<br/>قیوسه ایست</p> | <p>۱ مقصد کربس مورث ایزه مورث ایزه مورث ایزه<br/>۲ مقصد کربس مورث ایزه مورث ایزه مورث ایزه<br/>۳ مقصد کربس مورث ایزه مورث ایزه مورث ایزه<br/>۴ مقصد کربس مورث ایزه مورث ایزه مورث ایزه<br/>۵ مقصد کربس مورث ایزه مورث ایزه مورث ایزه<br/>۶ مقصد کربس مورث ایزه مورث ایزه مورث ایزه<br/>۷ مقصد کربس مورث ایزه مورث ایزه مورث ایزه<br/>۸ مقصد کربس مورث ایزه مورث ایزه مورث ایزه</p> | <p>۱ آری ایست<br/>۲ آری ایست<br/>۳ آری ایست<br/>۴ آری ایست<br/>۵ آری ایست<br/>۶ آری ایست<br/>۷ آری ایست<br/>۸ آری ایست</p> | <p>۱ مقصد کربس مورث ایزه مورث ایزه مورث ایزه<br/>۲ مقصد کربس مورث ایزه مورث ایزه مورث ایزه<br/>۳ مقصد کربس مورث ایزه مورث ایزه مورث ایزه<br/>۴ مقصد کربس مورث ایزه مورث ایزه مورث ایزه<br/>۵ مقصد کربس مورث ایزه مورث ایزه مورث ایزه<br/>۶ مقصد کربس مورث ایزه مورث ایزه مورث ایزه<br/>۷ مقصد کربس مورث ایزه مورث ایزه مورث ایزه<br/>۸ مقصد کربس مورث ایزه مورث ایزه مورث ایزه</p> |
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