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**Solving the Refugee Crisis after the Armenian Genocide:  
The League of Nations and the Nansen Passports**

**The Remnants of the Armenians**

“At that point many, many people died. I know some very tragic events occurred there of mothers throwing their children into the river and themselves along with the children. So, this news came to us about a day and a half journey from there and my father, a revolutionary and organizer at first, but a traveling salesman of sorts...he knew the countryside and he led us and thousands of other *gacktaganer*...the remnants of the Armenians in Van. He led us to Persia.”

This is the testimony of Lemyel Amirian<sup>1</sup> leaving his hometown of Van, which is in modern day Turkey. Although Amirian and his family initially fled to Iran, they emigrated to the United States in 1921. After attending the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Amirian worked as an architect for the U.S. Navy and was transferred to San Francisco during WWII. During his life, he was active in many Armenian-American organizations and translated many pieces of literature from Armenian to English to increase awareness of the Armenian Genocide.<sup>2</sup>

After the Ottoman Empire’s systematic attempt to eradicate the Armenians, Iran was one of the neighboring countries that allowed Armenians to take refuge within its borders.<sup>3</sup> While many of its inhabitants did decide to flee, Van was one of the few Armenian provinces that fought back against the Ottoman troops when the conflict reached the western part of the Empire

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<sup>1</sup> “Lemyel Amirian.” USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> “Deaths.” Palo Alto Weekly, September 18, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> Iskandaryan, Gohar. “The Armenian community in Iran: Issues and emigration.” *Global Campus Human Rights Journal*, 2019.

in early 1915.<sup>4</sup> While the self-defense of Van was a huge victory for Armenians, it was far from a common occurrence during the Armenian Genocide. The genocide to which Adolf Hitler would later look for reassurance that he would not be held accountable for the Holocaust, saying, “Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?”<sup>5</sup> By the end of the Genocide in 1917, roughly 1.5 million Armenians had been killed and most of the remaining 320,000 refugees were scattered throughout various Middle Eastern countries, like Amirian’s family.<sup>6</sup> It wasn’t until the League of Nations was founded in 1920 that a solution would become possible.

### **President Wilson’s 14 Points**

The first World War exposed a hole in the international system that desperately needed to be filled: a way to resolve international conflicts. The American President Woodrow Wilson declared WWI “the war to end all wars” as the United States joined their allies in 1917. Although he eventually deemed U.S. involvement in WWI unavoidable, President Wilson had a particularly strong distaste for war. Mainly due to the fact that he was born in Virginia 5 years before the Civil War began.<sup>7</sup> As a strong idealist, he set out to ensure international conflicts would never reach the level that World War I did. On January 8, 1918, as World War I drew to a close, President Wilson gave the Fourteen Points Speech<sup>8</sup> to Congress. In his speech<sup>9</sup>, Wilson expressed,

We entered this war because violations of rights had occurred which touched us to the quick and made the life of our own people impossible unless they were corrected and the world secured once and for all against their recurrence. What we demand in this war,

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<sup>4</sup> “Genocide Museum: The Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute.” The Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute. Accessed December 13, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> “Armenian Genocide of 1915.” Genocide 1915. Accessed December 13, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Holborn, Louise W. “The League of Nations and the Refugee Problem.” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol 203, No. 1, 1939.

<sup>7</sup> “Woodrow Wilson.” The White House. The United States Government. Accessed December 13, 2019.

<sup>8</sup> The Fourteen Points were a set of principles that were used in peace negotiations. The 14th Point was the one that called for the League of Nations.

<sup>9</sup> “Woodrow Wilson: Fourteen Points Speech (1918).” U.S. Embassy & Consulate in Korea. Accessed December 13, 2019.

therefore, is nothing peculiar to ourselves. It is that the world be made fit and safe to live in; and particularly that it be made safe for every peace-loving nation which, like our own, wishes to live its own life, determine its own institutions, be assured of justice and fair dealing by the other peoples of the world as against force and selfish aggression. All the peoples of the world are in effect partners in this interest, and for our own part, we see very clearly that unless justice be done to others it will not be done to us. The program of the world's peace, therefore, is our program; and that program, the only possible program, as we see it, is this...

The program President Wilson described became known as the League of Nations, and while the United States never ratified the Treaty of Versailles<sup>10</sup> and joined the League, 63 countries eventually became members.

### **The Paris Peace Conference**

After coming up with his Fourteen Points, Wilson decided to build international support for his cause by traveling to the Paris Peace Conference in January 1919. This was the meeting where the Allied Powers<sup>11</sup> would decide the fate of the defeated Central Powers.<sup>12</sup> This trip made Wilson the first President to ever travel abroad for official business.<sup>13</sup> WWI had completely exhausted Europe, so European leaders had strong feelings about how the aftermath of the war should be addressed. The leaders of Britain, Prime Minister David Lloyd George, and France, Prime Minister George Clemenceau, would go on to help President Wilson write the Covenant of the League, which was its charter.<sup>14</sup> This triad would become known as the Big Three.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The peace treaty signed at the end of WWI with the intentions of punishing Germany.

<sup>11</sup> The victors of WWI, including the United States, Great Britain, France, Italy, and Russia.

<sup>12</sup> Austria-Hungary, Germany, and the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>13</sup> "The League of Nations, 1920." U.S. Department of State. U.S. Department of State. Accessed December 13, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Sometimes referred to as the Big Four, including Italian Prime Minister Vittorio Orlando, who was involved to a much lesser extent.

However, George and Clemenceau were not the biggest supporters of the League when Wilson first proposed it at the Paris Peace Conference.

Clemenceau in particular has been described as “the man who was still fighting the war months after the signing of the armistice.”<sup>16</sup> France had suffered the largest economic losses from the war. However, Clemenceau’s bitter hatred of the Germans originated after the Franco-Prussian War, in which France lost Alsace and Lorraine to the Germans; this truly caused his initial opposition to the League.<sup>17</sup> He would have preferred a plan that punished Germany much more severely. In particular, Clemenceau sought reparations from Germany to France and Allied occupation of the Rhineland to serve as a buffer between the two countries.<sup>18</sup> Much of the French population shared this same sentiment, which culminated in Clemenceau storming out of the Paris Peace Conference.<sup>19</sup>

For George, the issue of the League of Nations was even more complex. For starters, he led a coalition government in Great Britain, which in itself had different ideas for how Germany should be dealt with.<sup>20</sup> As an individual, George held a gentler feeling towards Germany, remembering its pre-war status as Britain’s best trading partner.<sup>21</sup> He believed that if Germany’s economic stability was restored, then Britain would regain some of its former prosperity. Even so, when negotiating at the Paris Peace Conference, George chose to portray the desire of his constituents, who favored harsher punishments for Germany.

President Wilson had greatly underscored how the historic tensions in Europe would impact how his allies saw the League of Nations. As a result, before the Paris Peace Conference was complete, the Treaty of Versailles included much harsher consequences for Germany than

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<sup>16</sup> “Personalities of the Big Three: Woodrow Wilson, Georges Clemenceau and David Lloyd George.” Big Three. University of Virginia. Accessed December 13, 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> “Personalities of the Big Three: Woodrow Wilson, Georges Clemenceau and David Lloyd George.” Big Three. University of Virginia. Accessed December 13, 2019.

<sup>19</sup> “Georges Clémenceau Leaves the Peace Conference.” The British Library. The British Library, November 13, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> “The Lloyd George Government and the Creation of the League of Nations.” *The American Historical Review*, 1974.

<sup>21</sup> “Personalities of the Big Three: Woodrow Wilson, Georges Clemenceau and David Lloyd George.” Big Three. University of Virginia. Accessed December 13, 2019.

Wilson had originally intended.<sup>22</sup> In particular, these consequences include a war guilt clause, which forced Germany to take responsibility of the war, reparations, new borders, and a reduction in the Germany troops.<sup>23</sup> However, Wilson was successful in getting George and Clemenceau poised to help him in drafting the Covenant of the League of Nations.

### **The Covenant of the League and the Treaty of Versailles**

During the Paris Peace Conference, President Wilson strongly advocated for what he believed needed to be included in the future agreement. The final product became known as the “Covenant of the League of Nations.” Within four months of Paris, the Big Three completed the finalized version on April 29, 1919.<sup>24</sup> This final version was based on the objectives described in the preamble:

The High Contracting Parties,  
In order to promote international cooperation and to achieve international peace and security  
by the acceptance of obligations not to resort to war, by the prescription of open, just and honorable relations between nations,  
by the firm establishment of the understandings of international law as the actual rule of conduct among governments, and  
by the maintenance of justice and a scrupulous respect for all treaty obligations in the dealings of organized peoples with one another,  
Agree to this covenant of the League of Nations.<sup>25</sup>

When President Wilson reported on the finalized version of the Covenant at the Plenary Session of the Peace Conference on April 28, 1919, he explained that this version was mainly a

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> “Treaty of Versailles.” Germany, Peace, Wilson, and War. American Law Library. Accessed December 13, 2019.

<sup>24</sup> “History of the League of Nations.” UNOG Library, Records, and Archives Unit. Accessed December 13, 2019.

<sup>25</sup> “The Covenant of the League of Nations.” *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 15, No. 1, Jan. 1921.

clarified form of the draft that had been created at the initial Peace Conference<sup>26</sup>. The Covenant had 26 articles and would be included in the Treaty of Versailles, which was scheduled to be signed on June 28, 1919.

However, Wilson had made an additional mistake. When he departed for the Paris Peace Conference, he had neglected to receive any input from American senators. While Wilson drafted the Covenant with his European counterparts, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, a Republican from Massachusetts, was attacking the League of Nations. In his opinion, the League would do away with central tenets of American foreign policy, such as national sovereignty. In a speech before the Senate on February 28, 1919, Lodge said, “I ask the press and the public and, of course, the Senate to consider well the gravity of this proposition before it takes the heavy responsibility of finally casting aside these policies which we have adhered to for a century or more and under which we have greatly served the cause of peace both at home and abroad.”<sup>27</sup> During his speech, Lodge heavily referred back to George Washington’s Farewell Address and the Monroe Doctrine, both of which call for American neutrality, and in particular, staying out of European affairs.<sup>28</sup> After his speech, Lodge and 39 other Republican Senators signed a resolution against the ratification of the League of Nations, which gave Lodge the one third of the Senate needed to block the ratification.<sup>29</sup> Ultimately, Lodge was victorious and the U.S. never ratified the Treaty of Versailles, but this created an opportunity for smaller states to take the lead in the newly formed League of Nations.

### **Fridtjof Nansen: An Arctic Explorer**

Norway had also sent a delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, whose chairman heavily advocated for the creation of the League. His name was Fridtjof Nansen. Nansen was

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<sup>26</sup> “Address of President Woodrow Wilson Upon Reporting the Covenant at the Plenary Session of the Peace Conference, April 28, 1919.” *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 13, No. 2, April 1919.

<sup>27</sup> “Classic Senate Speeches.” U.S. Senate: Classic Senate Speeches. United States Senate, October 21, 2019.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

born in Oslo, Norway in 1861 to a lawyer father and an athlete mother. From a young age, Nansen's father, a religious man, instilled in him a strong moral duty and his mother encouraged athleticism.<sup>30</sup> Due to his love of sciences and the outdoors, Nansen decided to study zoology at the Royal Frederik University.<sup>31</sup> He also went on to do his doctorate in neurobiology.<sup>32</sup> Although his dissertation was heavily disputed, his findings are now considered to be groundbreaking.<sup>33</sup> Later in his life, Nansen would return to the Royal Frederik University as a professor of zoology and later oceanography from 1897 until 1930.

Nansen's academic research in the latter part of his life was based on several expeditions that he went on. In 1888, Nansen decided to cross Greenland with a group of students from St. Andrews on skis. The interior of Greenland had never been explored and Nansen had been developing his plan for several years prior to the expedition. In August of 1888, Nansen set out on his journey, which took roughly 2 months. In October, Nansen and the other five students arrived on the west coast of Greenland. During their journey, Nansen had gathered a wealth of information about the uncharted interior of Greenland, which sparked a prolonged interest in the Arctic.

A few years later, in 1893, Nansen set off on the *Fram*, a ship built for his expedition to cross the Polar Sea. One of Nansen's main goals during his skiing expedition was to reach the North Pole, which he was not able to accomplish.<sup>34</sup> Before setting off on the *Fram*, Nansen made it a national ambition, saying, "Let it be Norwegians who show the way! Let it be the Norwegian flag that first flies above our Pole."<sup>35</sup> Without Nansen's expedition and subsequent writings,<sup>36</sup> the Norwegians would not have acquired management of many of their strategic sea areas. Additionally, due to his contributions to zoology, oceanography, neurobiology, and other

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<sup>30</sup> "Fridtjof Nansen." The Nobel Prize. The Nobel Foundation, 1922.

<sup>31</sup> Royal Frederik University is now known as the University of Oslo.

<sup>32</sup> Fredriksen, Stein Roar. "Fridtjof Nansen: A Pioneer of Knowledge." University of Oslo, October 19, 2011.

<sup>33</sup> His biographer believes he could have won the Nobel Prize in medicine.

<sup>34</sup> "Fridtjof Nansen." The Nobel Prize. The Nobel Foundation, 1922.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Wrote a book with Bjørn Helland-Hansen called *The Norwegian Sea* in 1909 which contributed to international acceptance of the term of the "Norwegian Sea."

scientific disciplines that remain relevant to this day, Fridtjof Nansen became, and remains, a national hero and symbol of Norwegian nationalism.

### **Explorer Turned Statesman**

In 1919, Nansen was elected as rector of the Royal Frederik University, however, inspired by the work of Woodrow Wilson, he did not take the position and decided to shift his focus to diplomatic efforts and human rights.<sup>37</sup> As president for the Norwegian Union for the League of Nations, Nansen attended the Paris Peace Conference and advocated for the League of Nations and the rights of middle powers. After the League of Nations' official founding in January 10, 1920, Nansen was appointed the chairman of the Norwegian delegation to the League. While in this position, he was in charge of the League's first large-scale humanitarian project, which was the repatriation of 450,000 prisoners of war.<sup>38</sup>

Nansen proved to be an outstanding leader in his first year working for the League of Nations and in 1921, he became the first High Commissioner for Refugees. In response to Nansen's work with the POWs, the Council of the League of Nations reported, "If there were any compensation for the evils of war, it was that war gave rise to great virtue. Dr. Nansen had been the embodiment of the great virtues of courage and charity. The work of repatriation was one of the greatest achievements of the League of Nations, and Dr. Nansen had most worthily executed it."<sup>39</sup>

### **The Passport Problem**

Prior to World War II, the use of a passport was not common and viewed as an unnecessary restriction. In fact, only a handful of countries, such as Russia, Turkey, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, among very few others, used passports regularly. However, after WWII,

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<sup>37</sup> Fredriksen, Stein Roar. "Fridtjof Nansen: A Pioneer of Knowledge." University of Oslo, October 19, 2011.

<sup>38</sup> "Fridtjof Nansen." The Nobel Prize. The Nobel Foundation, 1922.

<sup>39</sup> Housden, Martyn. *The League of Nations and the Organisation of Peace*. London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2014.

many states were concerned about military espionage and food rationing and believed it was necessary to limit foreigners for economic and security reasons, which popularized the use of the passport.<sup>40</sup> Although many countries made promises to eliminate the compulsory use of passports as soon as possible, that ultimately proved unlikely. As it became increasingly clear that passports were going to be a necessity in the post-War world, the League of Nations was called upon to create a uniform passport. After the League's first attempt at this failed, the Convention on Passports convened in 1926. Due to its inability to create a "uniform type of 'ordinary' passport" that was "identical for all countries," the Convention stated,

...the methods necessary to facilitate international passenger traffic by rail, at present more especially hindered by passport and Customs formalities, as well as by the difficulties of obtaining through tickets; Convinced that the many difficulties affecting personal relations between the peoples of various countries constitute a serious obstacle to the resumption of normal intercourse and to the economic recovery of the world...<sup>41</sup>

Although the Convention recognized the difficulties created by passports and proposed their abolition, they proved to be an enduring characteristic of the post-war system.

The problem of passports was of great concern to Fridtjof Nansen as well, but in regard to the obstacles they posed to refugees.<sup>42</sup> The first challenge that Nansen faced as the first High Commissioner for Refugees was what to do with the two million Russians displaced by the Bolshevik Revolution. He realized that refugees lacked an internationally recognized document that enabled them to travel to other countries where they could find better living conditions and economic opportunities. As an intense and tireless humanitarian, Nansen once said, "The refugees who were regarded as an intolerable burden would comprise a rich asset." Nansen's solution was a certificate that allowed its owner admittance to the country he or she intended to travel to, but did not allow he or she to return to his or her country of origin. This certificate

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<sup>40</sup> Reale, Egidio. "The Passport Question." *Foreign Affairs*, Vol 9, No. 3, April 1931.

<sup>41</sup> "Passport Conference: Preparatory Documents." In *Passport Conference: Preparatory Documents*. Geneva: League of Nations, 1925.

<sup>42</sup> Reale, Egidio. "The Passport Question." *Foreign Affairs*, Vol 9, No. 3, April 1931.

became known as the “Nansen Passport.” 51 countries agreed to recognize the first batch of Nansen passports that applied to the Russian refugees. Due to their success, the Council of the League of Nations approved a Convention that Nansen wrote and extended passports to another group of refugees in 1924: the Armenians.<sup>43</sup>

### **The Insigator of the Armenian Genocide**

Ismail Enver Pasha<sup>44</sup> was born in 1881 in Istanbul in the Ottoman Empire to a wealthy family. He went on to study at two military schools, in which he excelled. After graduation, he was sent to field duty in the Balkans where he became very well-versed in combat and was first introduced to the anti-Hamidian<sup>45</sup> Union and Progress movement. This movement was embodied by a party known as the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), which Enver became very active in. The party was divided into many factions, whose divisions were mainly based on what should be done with the Armenians.

The liberal majority was led by Prince Sultanzade Sabahaddin<sup>46</sup>, who believed that the separatist Armenian movement only existed because of the unfair policies towards Armenians.<sup>47</sup> Prince Sabahaddin argued that the Empire had an obligation to treat Armenians better, then there would no longer be a threat. In showing his belief that a multinational society was possible, Prince Sabahaddin said, “We and the minorities [Armenians] have lived separately. We have thought separately. Nothing has ever succeeded in bringing our social perspectives closer together. Since we are the ones who have marched on their lands and conquered them, it is now incumbent on us to soften our hearts. Our duty and our interests alike require that we do so.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Reale, Egidio. “The Passport Question.” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol 9, No. 3, April 1931.

<sup>44</sup> A high ranking officer in the Turkish military or political system.

<sup>45</sup> Another term for Armenian.

<sup>46</sup> A nephew of the Sultan. He was eventually exiled for opposing absolute rule.

<sup>47</sup> Suny, Ronald Grigor. *They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else": a History of the Armenian Genocide*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017.

<sup>48</sup> Suny, Ronald Grigor. *They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else": a History of the Armenian Genocide*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017.

This view was not shared by the nationalist minority, led by Ahmet Riza.<sup>49</sup> This group wanted a more unified Ottoman Empire, which involves reducing the power of the Armenians. This later faction became known as the Young Turks, in which Enver rose to prominence in 1908. Due to his strict sense of duty from the military, Enver was “ready to perform whatever task was necessary to improve the political-military fiber of his country”.<sup>50</sup> In a telegram to the Interior Minister, Enver would later write, “The Government has decided to destroy all Armenians living in Turkey. An end must be put to their existence, no matter what criminal measures are necessary to do so. No account should be taken of age or gender. Scruples of conscience have no place here.”<sup>51</sup>

### **The Armenian Question**

At its core, the Armenian Question was a religious one. The treatment of the Christian minorities of the Ottoman Empire had long been a point of contention. Perhaps most notably since the Treaty of Paris in 1856, when Christian states, namely Russia, had to give up the right of any interference in Turkey in defense of Christian populations in order to settle the Crimean War.<sup>52</sup> In return, the Ottoman Empire was required to sign the Edict of Gulhane<sup>53</sup>, which was intended to extend rights to non-Muslim citizens within the empire. In particular, the Edict abolished a discriminatory tax and allowed non-Muslims to join the military. However, despite the fact that the Ottoman Empire entered into the Concert of Europe, internally the Ottoman Empire was growing much more nationalistic, which had severe repercussions for its religious and ethnic minorities.

Eventually, the increasing nationalism led to the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877. The war was welcomed by the Armenian populations living within the Ottoman Empire, who hoped that

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<sup>49</sup> A prominent member of the Young Turks.

<sup>50</sup> Swanson, Glen W. “Enver Pasha: the Formative Years.” *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 1980.

<sup>51</sup> “Ismail Enver Pacha.” TRIAL International, June 2, 2016.

<sup>52</sup> Wood, Hugh Mckinnon. “The Treaty of Paris and Turkey's Status in International Law.” *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 1943.

<sup>53</sup> “Tanzimat Reforms.” Religious Literacy Project. Harvard Divinity School. Accessed December 13, 2019.

Russia would save them from the oppression they had been suffering.<sup>54</sup> As the war came to an end a year later with a Russian victory, the question of the fate of the Armenian provinces gained unprecedented international recognition. However, the Great Powers quickly squashed the hopes of Armenians hoping to finally gain their independence due to concerns about the threat it would pose to Great Power relationships. The ensuing frustration was best displayed by a famous speech given in Constantinople by former Armenian Patriarch Mkritch Khrimyan, who had been present at the 1878 Congress of Berlin,<sup>55</sup>

On a table with a green tablecloth in the middle of the Congress meeting room there was a large cauldron of harissa<sup>56</sup> from which peoples and governments, big and small, were to get a portion...First entered Bulgarian, then the Serbian, then the Gharataghian, as the noise of rattling sabers hung from their side caught everyone's attention. After much talking, these three delegates took out their swords and, as though they were sticking an iron ladle in the cauldron of harissa, took their share!...The Armenian delegation's turn came. I approached and presented the petition given to me by the National Assembly and I begged that they fill my bowl with harissa too. Just then, the plenipotentiaries standing at the head of the cauldron asked me, "Where is your iron ladle? Harissa is indeed being distributed here but those without an iron ladle may not approach."...Well, dear Armenians, I could have surely stuck my ladle made of paper into the cauldron of harissa, but it would have become wet and stayed there...What business did requests and petitions have in a place where weapons are what talked and where sabers shone?<sup>57</sup>

Despite the enormous disappointment suffered by the Armenians at the Congress of Berlin, this helped spur the Armenian Awakening, or the Armenian national liberation movement.<sup>58</sup>

Unfortunately, the Ottoman Empire was threatened by this movement and responded in kind.

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<sup>54</sup> Hut, Davut. "Armenians in 1877-1878 Ottoman-Russian War (The '93 War)." *Turks and Armenians - Turkish-Armenian Relations Throughout History*. Marmara University, 2019.

<sup>55</sup> The Congress that wrote the treaty for the end of the Ottoman-Russian War.

<sup>56</sup> A North African hot chili paste.

<sup>57</sup> Bairamian, William, Bedros Touryan, Malachi Simonyan, Harry Kezelian, and Khorene Nar Bey Lusignan. "Iron Ladle by Khrimyan Hayrig." *The Armenite*, November 18, 2019.

<sup>58</sup> Nalbandian, Louise. *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: the Development of Armenian Political Parties through the Nineteenth Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018.

## A Near Extinction

After the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, the CUP party seized power in 1913 in a coup lead by Enver Pasha, the Minister of War, Talaat Pasha, the Minister of Interior, and Jemal Pasha, the Minister of the Marine. This triumvirate would become known as the Three Pashas.<sup>59</sup> The Armenian Genocide began two years later in 1915 when the CUP began a secret massacre of Armenians under the guise of WWI. The Armenians population at the time was around 2 million. In a public declaration in 1916, Enver Pasha said, “The Ottoman Empire should be cleaned up of all Armenians and the Lebanese. We have destroyed the former by the sword, we shall destroy the latter through starvation.”<sup>60</sup>

Armenians were deported from their homes and driven toward the Syrian deserts. The government claimed that this was a resettlement program, however, it became clear that they were actually death marches, especially since the government was not providing any food to the deportees. Starvations took a huge toll on many of these Armenians. Additionally, since Armenians had been allowed to join the Ottoman forces under the Edict of Gulhane, Enver Pasha, as Minister of War, ordered the Armenian population to be disarmed and forced to work in labor battalions, in which many were executed. This method was particularly effective in eradicating all of the able-bodied men. Although women and children were not spared from the violence either. In only three years, half of the Armenian population had perished.<sup>61</sup>

## Transforming the League of Nations

When President Wilson and the other members of the Big Three wrote the Covenant of the League, they did not include a provision about the protection of refugees. Their goal had been to prevent war, not deal with the consequences of it. As a result, all the work the League did

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<sup>59</sup> Wasti, Syed Tanvir. “Amir Shakib Arslan and the CUP Triumvirate.” *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 6, 2008.

<sup>60</sup> “Armenian Genocide of 1915.” Genocide 1915. Accessed December 13, 2019.

<sup>61</sup> Adalian, Rouben Paul. “Armenian Genocide.” Armenian National Institute . Accessed December 13, 2019.

on behalf of refugees was completely due to the tireless effort of Fridtjof Nansen in his role as the High Commissioner for Refugees.<sup>62</sup>

After its founding in 1920, the League began receiving appeals to address the refugee crisis in Eastern Europe from governments and other agencies that believed they could not handle the scope of the problem. However, due to the structure of the League of Nations,<sup>63</sup> the Secretariat of the League could not respond to the appeal. To remedy this, the President of the International Red Cross Committee (IRCC), Gustave Ador, appealed to the Council of the League of Nations. He asked that they step in because he believed that the League of Nations was “the only supranational political authority capable of solving a problem which is beyond the power of exclusively humanitarian organizations.” This belief was based on the successful work Nansen had done as chairman of the Norwegian Delegation to the League with the prisoners of war. The IRCC believed that the League should appoint a High Commissioner of Refugees who would answer three main questions: what is the legal definition of a refugee? What should be done about their emigration to other countries? And how should relief be provided to them? The Council agree to undertake this responsibility, but would not finance the relief for refugees and would only do the work temporarily.<sup>64</sup>

This is what led to Nansen being appointed High Commissioner in 1921. With very little authority and financial resources, he was charged with creating an organization that would facilitate communication with countries providing financial resources and with the refugees. In order to do so, Nansen had to appoint representatives in various different countries. The IRCC helped by allowing Nansen to use any of their representatives. These representatives allowed Nansen to accomplish two major tasks that contributed significantly to his successes with handling the refugee crisis. The first was that he was able to interact directly with the refugees.<sup>65</sup> During one of his first trips to Constantinople, Nansen remarked,

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<sup>62</sup> Holborn, Louise W. “The League of Nations and the Refugee Problem.” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol 203, No. 1, 1939.

<sup>63</sup> The League of Nations is split into three bodies: the Secretariat of the League, the Council, and the Assembly. The Secretariat of the League does not answer appeals unless they come from the Council or the Assembly.

<sup>64</sup> Holborn, Louise W. “The League of Nations and the Refugee Problem.” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol 203, No. 1, 1939.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

When at night we came on top of a hill, I thought I saw a whole city before me with its thousands of lights--it was their [refugees'] camps spread out over the plain, camp-fire by camp-fire, and there they were sleeping on the ground without shelter of any kind. They do not know where they are going and will find no shelter when they come.<sup>66</sup>

The second accomplishment was that he could interact with the governments of countries that were interested in providing asylum or financial aid. Nansen was also able to make an Advisory Committee with international organizations, like IRCC, to create a coordinated effort between the office of the High Commissioner and the other countries to present to the League.

Nansen also put an emphasis on giving the refugees the means to become self-sufficient, which required them being able to obtain a job in the receiving countries. With the help of the local representatives, he conducted a census on refugees in 1921-22 in order to obtain the necessary information needed to obtain the legal statuses necessary for them to be able to work in the receiving countries. This data led Nansen to create a certificate of identity that could serve as the legal document necessary for refugees to move to another country and obtain a job. This certificate was approved by the Council of the League and became known as the previously mentioned Nansen Passport.

### **Unfinished Work**

By the time the Council of the League referred the case of the Armenians to Nansen in 1923, the number of victims of the genocide had risen to more than 1.5 million of the original Armenian population of 2 million. However, that left an estimated 320,000 Armenians scattered throughout the Middle East who could not return to their homeland.<sup>67</sup> While the Assembly of the League had discussed the Armenian Genocide every year since 1920, every proposal to address it had been rejected up until it was given to Nansen.

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<sup>66</sup> Housden, Martyn. *The League of Nations and the Organisation of Peace*. London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2014.

<sup>67</sup> Holborn, Louise W. "The League of Nations and the Refugee Problem." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol 203, No. 1, 1939.

After meeting with the International Labor Office, Nansen constructed his plan for resettling 25,000 Armenians in Erivan.<sup>68</sup> However, a loan of \$4,500,000 through the League would also be necessary for the resettlement. Initially, the League approved the plan. However, despite France agreeing to its portion of the loan, Great Britain refused to contribute financially. For three years, Nansen tried to raise the funds privately to save his plan, but his efforts lost momentum in 1929. A year later, Nansen passed away from a heart attack.

After his death, the High Commissioner position was abolished and the Nansen International Office for Refugees was created to replace it and to finish Nansen's work. In 1936, the Office was successful in resettling 15,500 Armenian survivors living in France to Erivan and 40,000 others to Syria.<sup>69</sup> Although he never got to see his resettlement plan reach fruition, he was able to get the Nansen Passport extended to the Armenian refugees, who were able to travel to countries all over the world and begin new lives as well.<sup>70</sup>

### **Justice Delayed**

At the end of WWI, Enver Pasha and the other Three Pashas fled to Germany. In 1919, a post-war tribunal in Constantinople ordered seven of the top leaders of the Young Turks to appear in court. When Enver failed to return, he was tried in absentia. When the verdict was issued in July, Enver was found guilty of causing the Ottoman Empire's entry into WWI and of the massacre of the Armenians. He was sentenced to death.<sup>71</sup> Despite the court being unable to enforce their ruling, Enver joined the Basmaji revolt<sup>72</sup> and was killed by Soviet forces in 1920. In the following year, Talaat Pasha was assassinated in Berlin and his assassin was acquitted by a

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<sup>68</sup> Erivan is the modern-day capital of Armenia.

<sup>69</sup> "Fridtjof Nansen." The Nobel Prize. The Nobel Foundation, 1922.

<sup>70</sup> Venkov, Jo. "A Scattered People - Remembering the Nansen Armenians." Torn Identity, May 24, 2019.

<sup>71</sup> Adalian, Rouben Paul. "Enver Pasha, Ismail." National Armenian Institute . Accessed December 13, 2019.

<sup>72</sup> A Muslim revolt in Central Asia. Enver had actually been hired by the Russian government to quell the revolt, but he ended up joining it.

jury after only one hour of deliberation.<sup>73</sup> Four hundred other CUP officials were also arrested for their involvement in the atrocities committed against the Armenians.<sup>74</sup>

### **An Honest Desire for Peace**

Less than two years after he began his work with refugees, in 1922, Fridtjof Nansen won the Nobel Peace Prize for his work with the POWs. Although the Nansen Passport had yet to be created, Nansen foreshadowed his commitment to improving the lives of stateless people until the end of his life in his acceptance speech. Additionally, Nansen International Office for Refugees that was created after Nansen's death also won the Nobel Peace Prize for completing Nansen's work with the Armenian refugees in 1938.<sup>75</sup> In his speech, Nansen said,

In the Capitoline Museum in Rome is a sculpture in marble which, in its simple pathos, seems to me to be a most beautiful creation. It is a statue of the "Dying Gaul." He is lying on the battlefield, mortally wounded. The vigorous body, hardened by work and combat, is sinking into death. The head, with its coarse hair, is bowed, the strong neck bends, the rough powerful workman's hand, till recently wielding the sword, now presses against the ground in a last effort to hold up the drooping body.

He was driven to fight for foreign god whom he did not know, far from his own country. And thus he met his fate. Now he lies there, dying in silence. The noise of the fray no longer reaches his ear. His dimmed eyes are turned inward, perhaps on a final vision of his childhood home where life was simple and happy, of his birthplace deep in the forests of Gaul.

That is how I see mankind in its suffering; that is how I see the suffering people of

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<sup>73</sup> Kifner, John. "Armenian Genocide of 1915: An Overview." The New York Times, December 7, 2007.

<sup>74</sup> Adalian, Rouben Paul. "Armenian Genocide." Armenian National Institute . Accessed December 13, 2019.

<sup>75</sup> "Nansen International Office for Refugees." The Nobel Foundation, 1938.

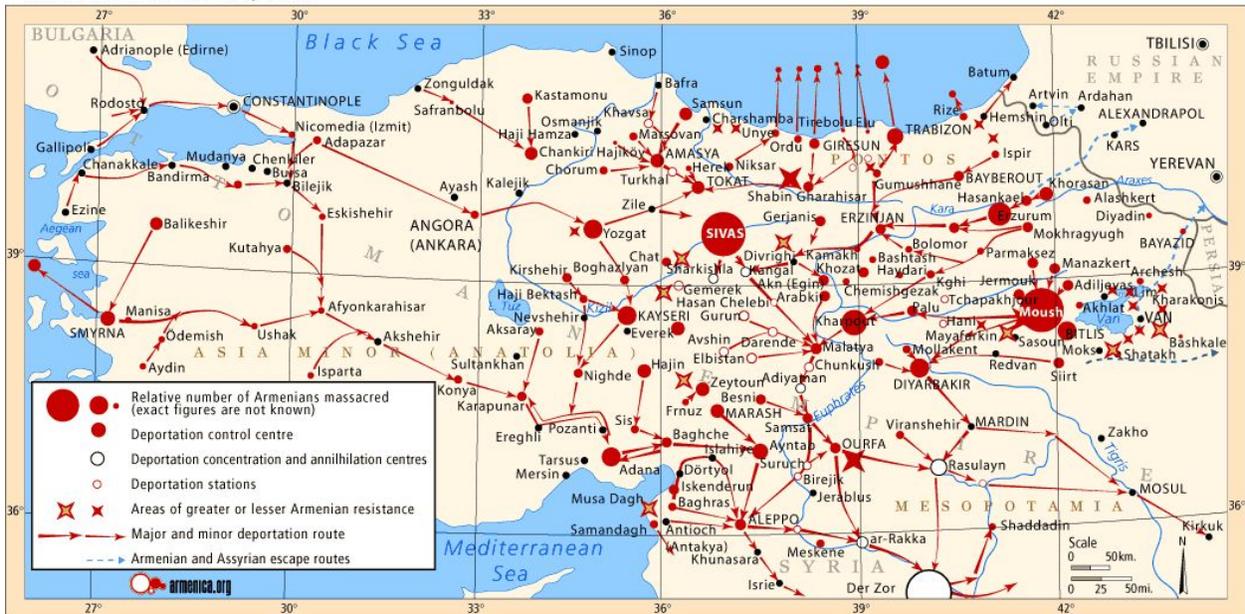
Europe, bleeding to death on a deserted battlefield after conflicts which to a great extent were not their own.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> "Fridtjof Nansen." The Nobel Prize. The Nobel Foundation, 1922.

## Appendix 1: Map of the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire<sup>77</sup>

### Armenian Genocide, 1915



<sup>77</sup> "The 1915 Armenian Genocide in the Turkish Empire." Facing History and Ourselves. Accessed December 13, 2019.

**Exhibit 2: Timeline of Events**

July 1908	Young Turk Revolution occurs in the Ottoman Empire.
January 23, 1913	The Committee of Union and Progress party seized power through a coup.
April 24, 1915	The Armenian Genocide begins.
April 6, 1917	U.S. joins Allied Powers in World War I.
January 8, 1918	U.S. President Woodrow Wilson gives his Fourteen Points Speech to Congress.
January 18, 1919	Paris Peace Conference begins.
February 28, 1919	Senator Henry Cabot Lodge gives his speech against the League of Nations before the U.S. Senate.
April 29, 1919	The Big Three completes the final version of the Covenant of the League.
June 28, 1919	Treaty of Versailles is signed.
January 10, 1920	The League of Nations is officially founded.
April 1920	Fridtjof Nansen begins working with the League of Nations to address the prisoners of war.
September 1, 1921	Fridtjof Nansen is appointed as the first High Commissioner for Refugees for the League of Nations.
March 1922	Nansen proposes the Nansen Passport to the League of Nations.
1922	Fridtjof Nansen wins the Nobel Peace Prize for his work with the prisoners of war.
1924	The League of Nations approves the Convention to extend passports to the Armenians.
May 13, 1930	Fridtjof Nansen passed away from a heart attack.
September 1930	The Nansen International Office for Refugees created to finish Nansen's work.
1938	The Nansen International Office for Refugees wins to Nobel Peace Prize for completing Nansen's resettlement plan for Armenian refugees.

### Appendix 3: Key Players

#### United States

Woodrow Wilson — U.S. President from March 13, 1913 - March 4, 1921

Henry Cabot Lodge — Senator from Massachusetts from March 4, 1893 - November 9, 1924

#### Great Britain

David Lloyd George — British Prime Minister from December 6, 1916 - October 19, 1922

#### France

Georges Clemenceau — French Prime Minister from November 16, 1917 - January 20, 1920

#### Norway

Fridtjof Nansen — High Commissioner for Refugees for the League of Nations from September 1, 1921 - May 13, 1930

#### The Ottoman Empire

Sultanzade Sabahaddin — Leader of the liberal majority of the CUP

Ahmet Rize — Leader of the national minority of the CUP

Ismail Enver Pasha — Ottoman Minister of War from January 4, 1914 - October 13, 1918

Mehmed Talaat Pasha — Ottoman Minister of Interior from January 23, 1913 - February 17, 1917

Ahmed Djemal Pasha — Ottoman Minister of Marine from January 1913 - December 1917

#### Armenians (within the Ottoman Empire)

Patriarch Mkritch Khrimyan — Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople from 1869 - 1973

#### Organizations

The League of Nations

The International Red Cross Committee

1. What were the different worldviews of the Big Three?
2. How did President Wilson fail at two-level games?
3. How would this case be different if the US had ratified the Treaty of Versailles?
4. Who were the Young Turks? How did they contribute to the start of the Armenian Genocide?
5. In the international system, who are the possessors of the iron ladle and who are the possessors of the paper ladles?
6. How were the goals of Wilson different from the goal of Nansen in regard to the League of Nations?
7. What was the role of international organizations in this case?
8. What problem did the Nansen Passport solve?
9. What the lessons that can be learned from Nansen's Nobel Prize acceptance speech?