AINA Editorial

Teaching People to Commit Genocide

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(AINA) -- The United Nations often pays lip service to the need to stop educational instruction that could motivate genocidal attacks on national or religious groups. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 defines the right to education in this way: “[Education] shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.” The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1966, recognizes the right to send and receive information and media content across international borders, but emphasizes that “propaganda for war” and “advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to ... violence” must be prohibited by law.

However, the United Nations has repeatedly recognized that its members’ educational systems fall short of these worthy ideals. In 1985, the UN Commission on Human Rights issued a report by Benjamin Whitaker stating that genocide had continued to occur since 1948, and that perpetrators simply take “refuge in sympathetic countries where all too often they have been hidden,” while there was no consistent international action against harmful propaganda.

On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of reports in the press of a “general massacre of Christians” in the Ottoman Empire, the path to 1915 has lessons for today. Specifically, the interplay between specialized military and religious discourses during World War I has parallels with the situation in contemporary Iraq. Indeed, there are biographical and educational connections between the two episodes of mass violence, described by one scholar as triggering “déjà vu.”

Prussian Military Doctrine

One specialized military discourse that developed during the years leading to 1915 was Prussian “total war” theory. Germany, in which Prussia was the leading state, viewed Carl von Clausewitz as its “great philosopher ... of war.” Clausewitz emphasized strength over civilian welfare, and criticized those “philanthropists” who argued for limited war, urging instead that violence be used “unsparingly” and to the “utmost extent.” Prussia’s entire economy “was always regarded as primarily an instrument not of the people’s welfare but of military policy.”¹ In the Franco-Prussian War, the Prussian side regarded it as necessary to kill the inhabitants and destroy the habitations of entire towns in response to insurrection or rebellion by the French side. Prussian soldiers under General Lothar von Trotha ruthlessly exterminated the Herero people of southwestern Africa.

http://www.aina.org/releases/20150422033622.htm
spared neither woman nor child as a rule, and driving many victims into the desert where they died of hunger or thirst. In World War I, German offensives against Belgium and Russia claimed 4.7 million Russian casualties and tens of thousands of Belgian victims, including among Belgian or other slaves of the German forces. It was one of the worst episodes of mass killing in Europe since the Thirty Years' War in Germany, called by Raphael Lemkin a genocide.

Paul Rohrbach, perhaps inspired by Clausewitz and von Trotha, publicly advocated removing the Armenians from Armenia, and replacing them by Turks. He looked to Australia, Canada, and South Africa as a model for replacing native populations with colonization, which created inhabitants with "forty times" the economic value per head, compared with native societies. Vahakn Dadrian refers to Rohrbach as having "implanted" an idea in Ottoman minds.

The Prussians were not alone in developing such a theory of total war. Adolf Hitler was grievously wounded in a poison-gas attack in World War I, and his plans for revenge were endorsed enthusiastically by many Prussian and German veterans of that war. Britain joined other nations in ignoring the Hague Regulations of 1907 and their prohibition on using poison gas in war. The British siege of Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire in World War I may have killed 250,000 civilians by denying them access to food and their incomes. The U.S. Civil War presaged the use of machine-guns and millions of tons of munitions in the World War I battles that caused tens of thousands of casualties in a day or two. Winston Churchill took hope from his study of the Civil War, seeing the Americans as a vast reserve army for industrial warfare on the German Empire. By World War II, the Soviet Red Army told Russian and other Soviet soldiers in a pamphlet that "there is nothing more joyful than a heap of German corpses."

Ottoman Religious Discourse

In coining the term "genocide," Raphael Lemkin referred to the typical victims, at least in the majority of the case studies he knew about in 1943, as being religious groups, or the capital cities of a religious group. These were: the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, "the religion wars of Islam and the Crusades," the killings in the Cathar Crusade and the French Wars of Religion (of Albigenses and Waldenses), the slaughter of Protestants by the Holy Roman Emperor in the Sack of Magdeburg, and the "massacres" by Genghis Khan and Tamerlane. In attempting to persuade states to sign on to the Genocide Convention, Lemkin referred to several other cases: "the destruction of Christians in the Ottoman Empire, ... the extermination of the Armenians, the slaughter of the Christian Assyrians in 1933, the destruction of the Maronites, the pogroms of the Jews in Tsarist Russia and Romania," and the Holocaust of Jews and Slavs.

Rohrbach's proposal for an evacuation of only the Armenians proved to be inadequate to the Ottomans. Prior to Rohrbach's proposal being published, the Young Turk (CUP) conference at Salonika in 1908 had resolved on "complete Ottomanization of all Turkish subjects." This was a strange formulation, as the subjects of the Turkish Sultan were already Ottoman subjects. The resolution might have referred to destruction of the international treaty guarantees for Turkish subjects, which brought about international inspection of sites where Armenians and Assyrians had been massacred within living memory by Ottoman or Kurdish forces. It might also have referred to eradication of non-Turkish minorities, however. This reading is reinforced by the teachings of Freidrich Naumann, a geopolitical strategist with followers in the Ottoman Empire, who openly defended massacres of tens of thousands of Armenians in the 1890s on the grounds of the political threat that "Christian peoples" posed. Talaat Pasha, later Ottoman Minister of the Interior, apparently told the Salonika conference that "equality" before the law could only occur after "Ottomanizing the Empire." Raphael Lemkin referred to a similar policy as "Germanization," of "the imposition by one stronger nation (Germany, Hungary, Italy) of its national pattern upon a national group controlled by it." He developed a synonym for this policy: genocide, or a "policy of imposing the German national pattern, particularly in the incorporated territories, [with] a system of colonization of these areas."
The policy of Ottomanization had religious overtones dating back to the 1890s, as Naumann suggested. The Chief Dragoman of the British Embassy in Constantinople wrote that the perpetrators of nineteenth-century massacres of Armenians justified these acts as a "religious duty and a righteous thing to destroy ... lives and property" after "the 'rayah' [subject] Christian attempts, by having recourse to foreign powers," to "free themselves from their bondage." The historian Richard Hovannisian has concluded that an "extreme wing of the CUP" hoped to establish "a new society based on a single ethno-religious, linguistic, and cultural identity." Dr. Nazim, an Ottoman figure vaguely resembling the Nazis' Eichmann, saw religion as the marker of successful "Ottomanization." Religious diversity would indicate that Ottomanization had failed.

Interplay of Theories on the Ground During World War I

The Germans seized upon this religious instinct or belief that found expression in the 1890s and 1900s. General Fritz Bronsart von Schellendorf, Chief of Staff at the Ottoman General Headquarters, endorsed massacre as retribution for Armenian treason. As Gabriele Yonan said in 2000, "Germany's Oriental Propaganda Department in Berlin counselled and urged the government of the Young Turks to declare a 'Holy War'" and did not demand a cessation once this declaration evolved into a policy of "annihilation of the Christians" under conditions of Germany's "shared responsibility." An attorney in the German Foreign Office recognized this in 1919, stating that the "grave incrimination" of German complicity was something the empire had to shake off for "financial" reasons, on account of the risk of being "held liable for damages" by the victims. This was apparently in response to a letter to von Schellendorf the previous week regarding reports in Turkey that German officers had counseled the evacuation of Armenians from border areas. The German press censored reports coming out of the Ottoman Empire, which were replete with synonyms for genocide of the Armenians and other Christians, such as "extermination." The German interim ambassador called the Ottoman Empire an "inflated frog" kept going by German guns, gold, and generals. Two to three million Christians and one to two million Muslims in Anatolia died in the extermination campaigns, acts of reprisal and revenge, diversion of resources from human needs to war, and battles with Britain, Russia, Persia, Arabia, Armenia, and other armies.

Pan-Arab Military Doctrine

The Arab nations that took root on the soil partitioned from the Ottoman Empire recognized a degree of religious freedom, leading to a rebound in Christian populations. At the same time, however, leading pan-Arab politicians and strategists approached the question of war and conflict with an assumption or presumption that enemy populations and not just military forces could be targeted.

An Ottoman holdover became the Director General of Education in Syria and later in Iraq after 1919. This individual, Sati al-Husri, taught Arabs to imagine a strong and unified Arab world, imitating the Turkish imperialist thought of CUP theorist Ziya Gökalp. Students raised under this system wished for a leader like Mustafa Kemal to help Iraq lead all the Arabs, just as the Prussians had once led all the Germans. According to Sargon Donabed, there were conspiracies to kill dozens of Assyrian leaders in Iraq in the early 1930s. A number of murders claimed Assyrians in Mosul and Rawanduz. In 1931, the Assyrian patriarch warned that unless resettled by the League of Nations, the Assyrians of Iraq would suffer extermination. A former British official in the mandate for Mesopotamia wrote that that "the Army Command was quite certain in its own mind that, in its decision to wipe out the Assyrians, it would ... be backed not only by Arab public opinion, but by the Baghdad Government." Facing a minor border skirmish with advocates of Assyrian autonomy in 1933, the Iraqi army carried out a "methodical massacre" and destroyed dozens of villages belonging to unrelated Assyrians, leading Raphael Lemkin to apply the term "genocide" to the events. The event helped persuade leaning Zionists that they could not accept British and other assurances of a secure future in an independent Palestine:

David Ben-Gurion and other leaders ... developed a plan to ensure that the Iraqis were included in the one million Jews in Islamic countries that eventually migrated to Israel. **"There's no need to wait**
until [the Iraqis] slaughter them,' Ben-Gurion said of Iraq's Jews." The example of the Assyrian massacres by the Iraqi army and allied tribes in 1933 was prominent in the writings of Zionists like Ben-Gurion and Chaim Weizmann.... "Do not submit to the fate of the Assyrians and give up Jewish Palestine," was Wizemann’s call to American Jews.  

In 1941, pan-Arab activists probably brought up under al-Husri’s educational system(s) carried out a coup with the assistance of Nazi German agents. A major pogrom against Iraqi Jews followed. Like the 1933 massacres, this pogrom was much larger than the "bread line massacre" of 16 persons that is often used as evidence of genocide in Bosnia starting in 1992, the year before an international criminal tribunal for genocide was convened for the former Yugoslav republic.

About two months after the coup in Iraq, the Nazis arrived at a treaty of friendship and mutual assistance with Turkey in June 1941. By the next summer, the Nazis planned to drive through Cairo and Palestine to Syria, and to reach the Caucasus from the northern fringes of the Middle East. German defeats in the Soviet Union and North Africa, and pro-German defeats in Iraq and Iran, prevented these plans from coming to fruition. The Nazi Foreign Policy Office planned to destroy the peace agreements from 1919-1920, Versailles and Sèvres, and replace the entire "intellectual crust" of the world with "a new ideology and cultural layer" of "National Socialism, Kemalism and Fascism." Turkey probably allowed arms to be shipped through Syria to the German side in Iraq, and schemed to occupy Aleppo in the event of further German victories in the summer of 1942, after which time it could revive the Baghdad Railway dreams of the Kaiser and the German Foreign Office from World War I. Turkey delivered a "wish list[]" to the Nazis, which included Aleppo, northern Syria, and Mosul.

The establishment of the State of Israel did not halt all threats to the Jewish people. Israel charged Arab nations with genocidal targeting of the Jews within their borders in 1949. Nearly 900,000 Jews in Arab countries felt it to be necessary or helpful to flee the country of their birth, in a forgotten episode of ethnic and religious cleansing accompanied by killings, deprivations of businesses and homes, revocations of citizenship, threatening marches and proclamations, and other discrimination and harassment designed to expel the Jews from Arab lands. Today, the combined Jewish population of Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Syria, and Yemen is probably in the low hundreds, or not many more than a thousand, while the Israeli and Palestinian Arab populations are measured in the millions.

Nor were Jews alone in being targeted within the Arab states. After the death of Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser in 1971, some of his officials went on trial for extrajudicial killings and torture, and at least one intelligence official was convicted. Adding up the maximum death tolls among leftists, Kurds, Shi'a Arabs, Marsh Arabs, and Sunni dissidents from 1968 to 2003, some scholars claim that Iraqi victims of the Ba'ath period could exceed 500,000. Iraq's war against Iran, termed "aggression" by the latter, killed approximately 700,000 to 1.2 million more persons. Saudi Arabia contributed an estimated $25.7 billion, and Kuwait $15 billion, to these campaigns of aggression and extermination; Iraq spent about $25 billion on French weapons.

Saudi- and Qatari-Based Extremist Theology

Voting blocs within the United Nations, some led by Saudi Arabia, have distorted the resolutions of the Security Council and the UN Human Rights Council for their own purposes. These bodies focus obsessively on Israel, while ignoring massacres of the Ibo, Hindu, Hazara, Dinka, Nuba, Tawerga, Alawite, Greek Orthodox, Kurd, Shi'a Arab, Shabak, Mandaeans, Yezidi, Assyrian, and other peoples victimized by rebels or nation-states. A deep anti-Semitism is manifest in that fact that Jewish conspiracy and Holocaust denial literature circulates widely throughout Saudi Arabia and Qatar. It spreads globally from those countries into allied states such as Turkey, including by means of Saudi- and Qatari-based satellite television channels. Just as Hitler admired Ghazi Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and imitated the techniques of the Young Turks, today radical Qatari-based theologians describe Hitler as the arm of divine justice on Al-Jazeera Arabic and other satellite channels.
In Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, al Qaeda has been conducting public educational and propaganda efforts since early in the 21st century, including such efforts as regular publications edited by al-Qaeda committees. In desert camps near the Kuwaiti-Saudi border, veterans of the anti-Soviet campaign in Afghanistan trained young Kuwaitis for international operations. The continued existence of Christian and Jewish religious sites on Arab lands, and the need to terminate their existence, are particular points of emphasis in these educational and training measures. The camps broadcast the writings of Osama bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders. Al Qaeda used Kuwait as a key base of operations in the lead-up to such events as September 11 or the ISI's attacks on civilians in Iraq and Syria. Killing hostages and massacring Shi'i Arabs were critical objectives for the groups trained in these bases. One man who trained 50 young people to fight in Iraq was released by the Kuwaiti authorities after serving only two months in detention. This kind of training was often discussed and described on the popular Al-Jazeera Arabic television channel, after which time Iraqi scholars began to seriously study whether to endorse hostage-taking as a matter of policy. Under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey also became a vital logistical waypoint for al-Qaeda forces, and even a "base" for them. Eyewitnesses have confirmed this in recent months in Turkish opposition newspaper Today's Zaman for the world to read. The former U.S. ambassador, Francis Ricciardone, has also recognized the problem.

Insofar as Syria has these types of leaders governing its neighbors, it is not surprising that ISIL was able to take advantage of international economic sanctions on Syria (and the existence of large-scale military bases in Turkey at the disposal of international fighters against Syria) to conquer eastern Aleppo, northern Syria, Mosul, the Nineveh Plains, and the Khabour river basin. These Turkish-backed rebels went on to attack Damascus, al-Qamishli, Kobani, Kirkuk, Tikrit, and other population centers. Like Qatar and Saudi Arabia, Turkey adopted a radical double standard as to whether rebellion, regime change, and international prosecution are appropriate responses to atrocities and dictatorship. These three countries ignored or publicly denounced calls for regime change in Sudan and an International Criminal Court arrest warrant for genocide against President Omar al-Bashir in Sudan, while insisting on exercising the right to support large-scale bombing and sniping operations in the residential urban areas of Syria, perpetrated by rebels as an alleged punishment of Syria's leaders for human-rights violations. Thus evolved the international community's policy of regime change in Syria due to 20,000 deaths from two-sided violence as of 2012, but regime perpetuation in Sudan after 450,000-plus deaths in the Darfur genocide and two million more in the South Sudan genocide.

When this kind of ad hoc interventionist military doctrine merges with Saudi- and Qatari-based extremist theologians being broadcast around the world on television networks, the possibility of a repetition of the events of 1915 cannot be discounted. When the U.N. Charter fails, the scourge of war is inevitable. When war comes, genocide often follows.

Interplay of Theories on the Ground in Contemporary Iraq

Just as Germany leveraged the Ottoman forces to carry out its grand strategic aims, extremist ideologists may be using what was once the Iraqi insurgency to carry out a much more expansive plan. ISIL may end up playing a role in not simply Iraq and Syria, but also in Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Yemen, and even in Afghanistan, Lebanon, Russia, the Central African Republic, Mali, Niger, Sudan, South Sudan, and other places. The funds raised to create bases in Iraq then helped Iraqis and allied Turkish, Tunisian, Libyan, and Saudi citizens invade Syria in 2011-2012, return with arms from Syria to invade Iraq in a more organized way in 2013-2014, and use further victories in Iraq to spread even more widely in Syria, Yemen, and elsewhere in 2014-2015. These events may represent the culmination of a plot hatched in Khartoum in 1991 by a number of Saudi-backed groups, including the proto-Taliban faction of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the Palestine Liberation Organization, the party of current president Rachid al-Ghannouchi of Tunisia (Tunisia-although not the president himself-has reportedly sent more than 3,000 conspirators to join ISIL since 2011), and other like-minded groups. As Turkey's current prime minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, advocated in 1998.
the 21st century will see the *Pax Americana* under the U.N. Charter replaced by regional warlords claiming a mandate to go to war, thereby waging a “clash of interests” from India to Israel and from Bosnia to the Philippines. Today, websites in Turkey supportive of ISIL are not censored in that way that nonviolent secular or Kurdish sites are. “Leaving the [ISIL] propaganda to flourish is equivalent to endorsement,” argued a former U.S. State Department official, now with Columbia University, who has researched Turkey’s policy on ISIL websites.

The impact of Saudi-based extremist theologians is also being felt. In 2002, the Saudi Crown Prince openly embraced Iraq’s security chief Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri, who was responsible in part for the Anfal campaign against the Kurds, and who would go on to become a "key figure" in ISIL. As Patrick Cockburn of Britain’s *The Independent* wrote during the rise of ISIL, Saudi Arabia was “a critical financial support base for al-Qaeda, the Taliban, LeT [Lashkar-e-Taiba in Pakistan] and other terrorist groups,” according to former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. The *siege* of Tel Tamr and the Khabour river basin by ISIL, after the religious cleansing of Homs, Kessab, Mosul, and the *Nineveh Plains,* is one more example of a long campaign by extremists against entire populations, waged since 1991 if not earlier. These events are not so different from the assaults on Hazaras and Hindus by the Taliban and the LeT, again backed by wealthy Saudis, except that Hazaras and Hindus are more numerous and better-defended.

Tragedies on such a global scale should motivate the United Nations to take seriously (for a change) its own declarations in 1948 and 1966 that peace and friendship among peoples should be promoted, and that war and hatred shall be prohibited.

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Notes:


13 Ibid., p. 318.


15 Travis, *Genocide in the Middle East*, p. 50.


18 Ibid., p. 177.

19 Ibid., p. 186.

20 Ibid., p. 192.

