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A Response to the Turkish Parliament's Letter Contesting the Veracity of the 1916 British Parliamentary Blue Book, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-16*¹

Any account of the 1916 British Parliamentary Blue Book, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-16*, should start from the Toynbee Papers at the British National Archives (formerly the Public Record Office) at Kew. This is because Arnold Toynbee was the compiler and editor of this parliamentary report and the Toynbee Papers at the National Archives include the complete copy of the Blue Book, information about the eyewitness accounts he collected on the Armenian Genocide when compiling the Blue Book, as well as his further correspondence with his communicants forwarding such materials.² According to the Toynbee Papers, we can make the following categorical statements:

- The Blue Book was substantially based on eyewitness accounts from Ottoman Turkey describing the mass destruction of Armenians in 1915.
- The core of these accounts were written and communicated by United States diplomats, consuls, and nationals throughout Ottoman Turkey, until the United States entered World War I in April 1917.³
- Despite United States neutrality, by October 1915, the United States Department of State in Washington D.C. leaked reports on the Armenian Genocide into the public domain through such intermediaries as the “Committee on Armenian Atrocities” and the “American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief” based in New York.⁴

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1. This position paper is a response to a letter (petition) presented to the British Houses of Parliament by the Turkish Grand National Assembly dated 28 April 2005.
 2. British National Archives (formerly Public Record Office), Toynbee Papers, FO 96, file nos. 205-12.
 3. The Blue Book relied on a number of “core accounts” which provided the fundamental basis for its thesis. Neither the authorship of these reports, nor the integrity of their intermediaries, were in question. These “core accounts” became the yard-stick of assessing other materials which might otherwise have been questioned, such as “native sources.” See James Bryce and Arnold Toynbee (Ara Sarafian ed., intro. and annotations), *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-16: Documents Presented to Viscount Grey of Fallodon by Viscount Bryce [Uncensored Edition]*, Princeton and London: Gomidas Institute, (2nd ed) 2005, p. 22.

- Arnold Toynbee corresponded with these organisations in order to collect and ensure the accuracy of each eyewitness account.⁵ He discussed some of the more problematic reports with James Bryce, his supervisor on this project.
- The information collected by Toynbee was not biased, and an examination of the relevant materials today bears this point out.

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Any examination of the Toynbee Papers points to the United States State Department and its papers at the American National Archives in Washington D.C. This is because Toynbee's informants had direct access to the State Department and its consular materials from the interior of Ottoman Turkey.

Today, the original eyewitness accounts on the Armenian Genocide leaked by the State Department can still be found at the American National Archives in Washington D.C. An examination of these materials shows that the eyewitness accounts which ended up in the British Blue Book on Armenians were communicated and reproduced with fidelity to the original records.⁶ The American National Archives also show that the materials leaked by the State Department into the public domain in 1915-16 was a fair representation of its wider body of documents on the genocide of Armenians, and the addition of further State Department records on the treatment of Ottoman Armenians would only strengthen the Armenian Genocide thesis today.

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Despite clear archival and published records attesting to the integrity of the British Parliamentary Blue Book, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-16*, as well as the veracity of the Armenian Genocide thesis itself, successive Turkish governments and their proxies have denied the Armenian Genocide by either denying the existence of material evidence related to the systematic destruction of Armenians in 1915, or trying to obfuscate the content of such archival records when forced to acknowledge them. Their *modus operandi* echoes the work of Holocaust deniers who deny pertinent records and scholarship related to the Holocaust and who argue their case through misinformation and contrived conjecture.⁷

Most significantly, the Turkish Parliament's letter denies the existence of:

- The Toynbee Papers, even though this collection has been in the public domain for decades, including the confidential key which listed all of the names withheld in the original publication.⁸
- Several facimile editions of the Blue Book with the confidential key as an appendix.⁹

4. Ara Sarafian and Eric Avedian, *British Parliamentary Debates on the Armenian Genocide 1915-1918*, Princeton and London: Gomidas Institute, 2003, Appendix II.

5. FO 96/205-07.

6. See *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-16 [Uncensored Edition]*, pp. XXX.

7. See Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust*, N.Y.: Free Press, 1993.

8. The confidential key included the names of informants whose identities could not be divulged because the informants were still in the Ottoman Empire in 1916. The main body of the Blue Book gives an explanation for withholding such names and states the existence of such a confidential key in its introduction. The confidential key was published and distributed amongst public notables in 1916, who vouched for the authenticity of the reports themselves. The confidential key is readily available today.

- An “uncensored edition” of the Blue Book, incorporating the confidential key into its main text and giving full archival citations for original reports in United States archives.¹⁰
- United States consular and diplomatic records related to Turkey 1910-1929, including the key files on Armenians 1915-16.¹¹ These files have been available in their original forms as well as on microfilm for decades.¹² They have also been frequently cited in academic works related to the Armenian Genocide.¹³
- A comprehensive documentary publication reproducing core United States documents related to the Armenian Genocide from the United States National Archives in Washington D.C., including eyewitness accounts appearing in the 1916 British Parliamentary Blue Book.¹⁴

The Turkish Parliament’s letter attempts to misinform British MPs when it states that:

- Certain researchers have only just “discovered” the confidential key to the 1916 Blue Book, and that the key proves that the eye-witnesses were unreliable.¹⁵ In actual fact, the confidential key has been readily available for decades and shows that the main eyewitness accounts underpinning the Blue Book were written by US consuls, as well as private individuals from the USA, Switzerland, Norway, Germany and Denmark. Many were United States consuls reporting to their government in Washington D.C. The attempt to block off these sources as biased because they were “Christians” is most objectionable.¹⁶
- It is also not true, as stated by Turkish Parliamentarians, that the compiler and editor of the Blue Book, Arnold Toynbee, confessed that the Blue Book was part of a contrived British propaganda effort during World War I. In actual fact, Toynbee always maintained the integrity of the Blue Book as an intellectual exercise, as well as his assessment regarding the Armenian Genocide thesis. The fact that British authorities used the Blue Book for propaganda purposes after Toynbee had finished his report had no bearing on the integrity of the report itself. Toynbee’s position on

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9. Façimile edition of *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-16* and *Key to Names of Persons and Places Withheld from the Publication in the Otiginal Edition of “The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-16”*, Beirut: G. Doniguan and Sons, 1979 (2nd edition), 1968 (3rd editon).
 10. James Bryce and Arnold Toynbee (Ara Sarafian ed., intro. and annotations), *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-16: Documents Presented to Viscount Grey of Fallodon by Viscount Bryce [Uncensored Edition]*, Princeton and London: Gomidas Institute, (2nd ed) 2005, (1st ed) 2000). Related to this volume reflecting British Parliamentary interest in the Armenian issue is: Ara Sarafian (ed.) and Eric Avebury (foreword), *British Parliamentary Debates on the Armenian Genocide 1915-1918*, Princeton and London: Gomidas Institute, 2003.
 11. The following files have long been cited in connection with the Armenian Genocide: “Race Problems”, “Natural Calamities and Disasters” and “Political”.
 12. “Race Problems” “Political” and “Natural Calamities and Disasters” files, in Internal Affairs of Turkey 1910-1925, Record Group 59, National Archives, Washington DC.
 13. Ara Sarafian (ed.and intro.), *United States Official Documents on the Armenian Genocide*, Watertown, Mass.: Armenian Review Books, 1994-95. Susan K. Blair, ed., *The Slaughterhouse Province*, New Rochelle, N.Y.: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1989; Armen Hairapetian, “Race Problems and the Armenian Genocide: The State Department Files,” *Armenian Review*, 37, no. 1-145 (Spring, 1984), pp. 41-145; Armen K. Hovannisian, “The United States Inquiry and the Armenian Question, 1917-1919. The Archival papers,” *ibid.*, pp. 146-202.

the Blue Book and the Armenian Genocide can be clearly seen in three of his later published works touching on the Armenian issue, *The Western Question in Turkey and Greece* (1921), *Acquaintances* (OUP, 1967) and *Experiences* (OUP, 1969). The Turkish Parliament simply gives a false assessment of Toynbee's position.

- “The Turks Must Go Campaign” was organised in 1917, after the publication of the Blue Book on Armenians. John Buchan, the author of “The Turks Must Go Campaign,” was also not involved with the War Propaganda Bureau until the end of 1916, after the Blue Book was printed. Furthermore, the “The Turks Must Go Campaign” did not seek to supplant modern Turks from their European and Anatolian homelands, as claimed by the Turkish letter, but sought to change the positive image of Turks in Great Britain even in 1917. This was a matter of concern because, despite being wartime enemies, Turks, as a rule, were seen with some favour amongst the British populace.
- It is also not true, as stated by Turkish Parliamentarians, that Armenians were simply deported from war zones during World War I. Ottoman Armenians were “deported” throughout Ottoman Turkey, including from towns and villages in central and western Anatolia, as well as European Turkey. Furthermore, most deportees were killed in outright massacres or through privations. Around 2,000 individual towns and villages were emptied of their Armenian population between 1915-17.
- The proceedings against individual Ottoman officials for the persecution of Armenians was initiated by Turkish authorities after the capitulation of Ottoman Turkey at the end of WWI. These trials were effectively abandoned because of Turkish *revanchism* and the ascendancy of Turkish Nationalists under Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk) after 1919. While the British had taken a number of indicted criminals to Malta, British authorities were not in a position to put them on trial. Some of their difficulties included the need to secure evidence against the accused in Turkey without the active cooperation of the new Turkish authorities (Kemalists); the lack of a legal framework to try such individuals for crimes against Armenians (after all, it was not illegal for governments to massacre their own populations at that time); as well as the lack of political will by the Allied Powers to enforce such trials. By 1921, the Allies themselves were vying against each other for influence with the new Turkish forces in Istanbul and Ankara.

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14. Ara Sarafian (comp., ed. and intro.), *United States Official Records on the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1917*, with a preface by U. S. Congressmen Pallone and Knollenberg, Princeton and London: Gomidas Institute, 2004. Also related to these American materials are the diaries of the US ambassador to Ottoman Turkey 1913-16, Henry Morgenthau (Ara Sarafian, comp. and intro.), *United States Diplomacy on the Bosphorus: The Diaries of Ambassador Morgenthau, 1913-1916*, Princeton and London: Gomidas Institute, 2004.
 15. Indeed, a month after a critical edition of the Blue Book was released at the House of Lords in April 2000, Turkish authorities organised their own event also at the House of Lords for the denial of the Blue Book as “wartime propaganda” without actually discussing the new work and its content. The Turkish meeting included the architects of the latest denialist bout in London, Justin McCarthy (University of Louisville) and Sukru Elekdag (former Turkish ambassador to the United States and currently a member of the Turkish Grand National Assembly). The event was hosted by Lord Ahmed, attended by Keith Vaz, and sponsored by Turkish business interests.
 16. For a complete list of communicants, as well as neutral, belligerent and other sources, see *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire ... [Uncensored Edition]*, pp. xix-xxii.

- Regarding securing United States documents for the proposed trial of alleged Turkish war criminals, the British could not secure such records because they were withheld by United States authorities themselves. Secretary of State Lansing was personally against these trials or any retroactive legislation to facilitate such trials. Nevertheless, the materials that were withheld from the British in 1920 are freely accessible to scholars today, and their existence can not be simply denied. In fact, much of this material has been published.
- There is no comparison between the Parliamentary Blue Book on German atrocities and the Blue Book on Armenians. The former was produced by committee and has been criticised for faults which do not apply to the Blue Book on Armenians.
- It is also not true that the Blue Book on German atrocities was withdrawn by the British Parliament in 1925.

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The Turkish State has long striven to consolidate the legacy of the Armenian Genocide by denying that the event ever took place and by evading any action that might mitigate the consequences of 1915. Instead, over the past 90 years, the Turkish state has remained belligerent and continued to erase traces of the crime committed against Armenians by destroying hundreds of ancient Armenian churches and monasteries, striking down cultural artefacts, rewriting history, changing toponyms, and more. The denial of Armenian history in modern Turkey today is part of the same calculus.

The Turkish letter to the British Houses of Parliament suggests that the present Turkish government remains on the same trajectory as its predecessors and has embarked on a forward policy to deny the Armenian Genocide, outside, as well as inside, of Turkey.

The letter presented to the British parliamentarians is demonstrably false and should raise serious questions about the integrity and judgement of Turkish Parliamentarians themselves. British parliamentarians should formally reject the Turkish letter and request its withdrawal by their Turkish counterparts.

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