

**Age of Rogues**  
**Rebels, Revolutionaries**  
**and Racketeers at the**  
**Frontiers of Empires**

**Edited by**  
**Ramazan Hakkı Öztan and Alp Yenen**

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to the British. 'Whether it is necessary to be killed, while others are still breathing is a matter of the world?'

In the words of one Armenian witness quoted in the case of the genocide, the self-protection of Armenians was not an official purpose. According to the British, however, the efforts of the British government of this period to protect the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire in the east, 'involvement, whether great and small, was not in vain'. The British members of the case called for a meeting with British officials and Armenian revolutionaries and suggested the formation of a committee to help Armenians within the Ottoman Empire and their self-protection. 'The British Government should have been more active in its efforts to protect Armenian revolutionaries'. The British, in other words, were involved in a 'direct action' against the Ottoman Empire, according to the case of the genocide in Armenia. The British, in other words, were involved in a 'direct action' against the Ottoman Empire.

It was within this atmosphere of international and imperial neglect that Armenian revolutionaries resumed their efforts to arm Armenian peasants in Sasun, and turn them against the Ottoman government, while assisting them in their disputes with sedentary and pastoralist Muslims. The massacre of Sasun Armenians by the army, and government officials' obvious partiality motivated many local Armenians to join armed bands under the leadership of revolutionary leaders such as Serob Vartanian, Andranig Ozanian, Armenak Ghazarian and others. Unlike the earlier bout of revolutionary activism in the region, however, it was the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) that drew the Sasun revolutionaries to its ranks. It is likely that local recruits turned away from the Hunchakian Party in the midst of the organisation's internal turmoil in the aftermath of the Hamidian massacres, while the ARF succeeded in establishing a clandestine traffic of arms and people across the Russian and Iranian borderlands.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>69</sup> 'The Armenian Revolution in the Ottoman Empire', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1908, 1, 1-10. The British, in other words, were involved in a 'direct action' against the Ottoman Empire.

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Armenian populations. In return, guarantees and subsidies were given to the Armenians to return to the region. The state reinforced this strategy by extending rewards, withholding privileges and occasionally relieving direct pressures. The contrast between the government's relations with non-Sasan Muslim lords is illustrative in this sense. While Murad Agha, who attempted to preserve his established relations of patronage with the Sasan Armenians, faced imprisonment, Haid Husein Agha, who enthusiastically assisted imperial efforts for pursuing centralisation and pacifying Armenians, received rewards and decorations. Moreover, the latter enjoyed de facto legal immunity for his brutal conduct against Armenians.

The official reliance on local authorities in the enforcement of their policies is connected to the second facet. The government's only means of projecting direct power and influence in the region was through the French Army. The deployment of imperial troops against the Armenian population, however, was a double-edged sword. This only did it attract unwanted international attention, but it also represented a substantial mobilisation of material and human resources, which the region lacked. In 1894, this took the form of a general massacre of Sasan Armenians' male presence, and the destruction of several villages. In 1904, it took the form of a sustained military assault and the subsequent construction of a network of military installations, which affected the military's permanent presence in the region.

The third facet of the Armenian question most clearly illustrated in Sasun relates to the Armenian revolutionary movement.

The social response of the revolutionaries among Sasan Armenians was regionalised, while some supported the revolutionaries, others remained indifferent (or according to some, participated in their repression). The process related to clash with imperial troops in 1894.

It was only within the context of pressures and atrocities from an increasingly hostile government and local Muslim notability that the Armenian peasantry started extending shelter and protection to the revolutionary bands. The revolutionaries succeeded in drawing greater support by assisting the peasants in their local disputes, delivering them modern arms and ammunition, and targeting notables and government officials. It was the revolutionaries' close engagement with the socio-ethnic conflicts of the peasants that made their call for a general rebellion in the spring of 1904 more popular than it had been in 1894.