

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

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~~Planning and Funding Dispute~~

In summer 1895, the Ottoman government found itself in a precarious position regarding the question of Armenian reforms. It had failed to pacify diplomatic pressures regarding the recent massacre of Sasun Armenians. Moreover, the Great Powers had presented the Porte with a reform plan in May. The Hunchakian Party organised a demonstration in the imperial capital at the end of September to protest the government's reluctance to implement the plan, during which several revolutionaries and policemen were killed. In October, Abdülhamid II announced his intention to implement the aforementioned reforms.⁶²

The empire-wide wave of anti-Armenian violence that followed this announcement has been the subject of numerous studies.⁶³ Between autumn 1895 and early 1897, mobs, gendarmes and armed militias killed and wounded thousands of Ottoman Armenians in pogroms and massacres. Armenian property was looted and expropriated. In the countryside, many Armenians were forced to convert to Islam.⁶⁴

When the wave of anti-Armenian violence hit the province of Bitlis in autumn 1895 shortly after the announcement of the sultan's reform plan, the tide began to turn against the Sasun Armenians once again. Resembling many other pogroms during the Hamidian massacres, a Muslim mob attacked Armenian shops and homes after the Friday prayer in Bitlis

in late October. Hundreds of Armenians were killed, while others were left destitute as a result of the attack.⁶⁶

As the news of the Sasun massacre spread to the rest of the province, the oil programme as a whole was left in a difficult position. According to the British consul, the effects of the disaster proved to the local population the necessity of a similar program in the area. Nevertheless, when peace and order had come at a price, the Muslim militia of the city called for a meeting with Ottoman officials and Armenian militia and insisted the likelihood of a similar attack on the Armenian within the mountains and their oil workers helping them left the city. The British consul advised that the authorities made no due checks on possible international agents.⁶⁷ The British oil and oil programme proceeded in a limited manner despite these problems, continuing the task of distribution to Ottoman officials the necessary oil to maintain their military activities.

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.

Under the order from of another major action in the region, however, it was the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) that drove the local revolutionaries to its ranks. It is likely that local revolutionaries moved away from the Hunchukian Party in the wake of the organization's internal turmoil in the aftermath of the Hunchukian massacre, while the ARF succeeded in establishing a shadow militia of arms and people across the Eastern and Western Anatolian.⁶⁸ At least at the local level, regional

⁶⁶ TNA, FO3, 400/102, no. 776, 7 October 1915, no. 2, 4 November 1915, the Ottoman army general threat to massacre and Armenian militia for having captured a gun in the village of Arakchik, Sasun, 1915, TNA, Foreign Office Memorandum, 12/1915, 2016, 200, 22 October 1915.

⁶⁷ TNA, FO3, 400/102, no. 81 November 1915.

⁶⁸ For evidence in such, see TNA, FO3, 400/102, no. 202, no. 8 November 1915.

⁶⁹ *Armenian Patriotic Forces Anthology*, 1918-45, 200-1.