

Evaluating policies of extermination in the 20th century



Famous yet sometimes misguided Psychologist Steve Pinker once said “ As long as your ideology identifies the main source of the world’s ills as a definable group, it opens up the world to genocide.” In this one sentence, he exposes the gist of what genocide entails, whether inspired by racial prejudice, religious extremism or government opportunism. The word genocide is self-explanatory, and the action itself is not complex. In Latin, *geno* means “ many”, and *cide* stems from the word for “ murder.” There have been countless genocides in the 20th century alone, where it is estimated that 50 million people have died, at minimum. One must also consider all of the genocides in the 20th century that are not accounted for, documented, or recognized by any nation. These pre-planned systematic processes of death were and are imagined and constructed by only the most sick and twisted political minds known to man. Each conductor of death has his own savage philosophy as to why he kills, always with different cultural influences and amounts of fiscal or political gain in mind. Yet, these reasons and tactics are eerily similar. The first large scale genocide of the 20th century occurred in 1915 inside of the Ottoman Empire, while another genocide in Cambodia perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge shocked the world just about a half a century later. These two instances of large scale murder have similarities in their inhuman natures that cannot be ignored, though they occurred under very different circumstances, the former because of a long-lasting feud in Eurasian regions and the latter was to “ purify” a South East Asian region while deranged men took control.

By the beginning of the new and moving 20th century, the world was already immersed in massive amounts of change and subsequently, death. The

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largest powers in Europe at the time were mounting armed forces in an attempt to prepare for the conflict that was about to engulf the entire world. This made it extremely easy for a group of three ignorant and extremist Muslims, led by Ahmed Riza, to infiltrate the Ottoman Empire and overthrow the newest totalitarian monarch, Sultan Abdulhamid II. Abdulhamid had only stayed in power through a common procedure, which slows the ability for the electoral process to happen and allows all members of parliament to retain their seats. Throughout his regime he directed resources to the massacres of one million Christian Ottomans, a large portion of them being Armenians (Theriault).

To give some backstory, Armenian's were typically renounced as second-class citizens in this Empire up until 1915. This was due to the differences the two cultures had such as religious beliefs, social characteristics, and cultural preferences. The Christian nation and Muslim nation have also had a long history of bloodshed, which began at the very time the Turkish race was appearing. It has been said that Turks rode through Armenia from Mongolia in search of plunder and grazing land, and they infiltrated the lands of the Western region of the Levant of Armenia in search of refuge. This caused extreme hostility between the two nations as invasions continued (Bedrosian, Hovannisian). Ahmed Riza felt this continued passionate hatred towards Armenians immensely, and, as the angry Young Turk he was, realized that the current plight of the long-lasting Armenian people was the perfect opportunity for an ultimate solution. He believed that a slow systematic series of mass murders would utterly and completely erase the 8,000-year-old Armenian culture from the face of the planet, and gain nearly

twice the amount of space for his country of single religious domination. There was obviously no room for any minority Christian population in Ahmed's vision of what he dreamed the Ottoman Empire would become. Once powerful enough, under the curtain of the War raging in Europe Ahmed and his followers had Armenian men murdered on sight. In most and many instances the first victims sought out were Armenians who bore arms, were able bodied, or were intellectual. Women, children and the elderly were ordered to walk through something similar to man's closest recreation of the fires of hell here on Earth throughout the next four years. The victims of the mass killings were forced to participate in the digging of their own graves that they shared with the hundreds of other Armenians they stood next to. There was no mercy upon any soul, and no question to any order, only death. The Ottoman Empire's next measure was to begin moving the women, children and elderly out of their ancestral homelands and villages, losing traces of their families' lineage for thousands of years. These innocent civilians were forced to march through the desert to designated kill points with little to no food, water, shoes, or any other necessities a human needs to survive, all while torturing and raping them with no empathy. One was lucky if they survived physical torture and slow death from starvation and heat (Bloxham). To try to "justify" their actions, these torturers would tell the Armenian people it was a precautionary measure, due to the destructive nature of the World War that was always said to be approaching the Middle East's gate to Russia, the Caucus Mountains. Fortunately for the Turks, the war from the west never reached them, and the only war that was waged during 1915 to 1919 was that against Armenians. Four years later, one and a half million had died while the world was horrified by images and articles in <https://assignbuster.com/evaluating-policies-of-extermination-in-the-20th-century/>

media in nations across the world, including the U. S. The Red Cross even sent aid throughout the periods of murder. Unfortunately, it was not until 1923 that the Turks were finally settled with ' the superior recognition' they thought they deserved. Even with these vast number of lives that were lost, along with the documentation of much of it, this genocide still remains unrecognized by the United States of America and the majority of the free world, with big thanks to the 1970s " denial campaign" to try to turn any blame on Armenians for the problems between the nations (Adalian, Theriault). When a large part of the world is willing to turn the other cheek on genocides like this one, there is room for others to enact the same type of violence, in hopes that it can happen without any major intervention like before.

As time continued on into the half waypoint of the 20th century and World War II came to a close, no region of the world was as unsettled as Southeast Asia. For most small conquered port nations in the region, the possibility of democratic government had never in the last two hundred years seemed possible, until the ruling European imperialist governments were slowly eradicated by different factions in each country, some independent, others funded by major Democratic or Communist countries (" A Short History"). It is quite clear that the Cambodian genocide was a direct result of this political unrest, and was instigated by racial hatred drawn by expert propaganda manufacturers whose sole purpose was to alienate any and all who were not prepared to be slaves of the state. The Khmer Rouge, also known as the Red Cambodians, carried out the genocide. Their name was fitting seeing as

though they became the most savage and gruesome Guerilla army ever in existence, next to the Viet Cong (Fletcher).

The leader of the Khmer Rouge was Pol Pot, also known as “ Brother Number One” later in life. Though he was the son of a farmer, he was educated, and obsessed with the ideologies of Marxism and Mao Za Dong. While studying in Paris in his early twenties, he grew deeply fascinated with how propaganda could be used to motion a controlled group of people who share the same racial and cultural identities to despise those of different ethnic origin (Lambert). This was obviously not an original tactic; we can see this idea executed in both the Armenian genocide and the Holocaust, fifty years prior to Cambodia. Eventually losing his scholarship in 1953, Pot returned to his home country, carrying with him his vision for an “ ethnically cleansed” communist farming society, bursting at the seams with nationalism. On his arrival, he immediately began operating with communist, and primarily jungle based, factions in the area. He was backed by the Khmer Rouge, which would eventually reach a population of 750, 000 soldiers at it’s peak, all battle hardened, resourceful, and full of misguided hatred (Lambert). As Cambodia’s neighbor to the west, Vietnam was in the middle of what was once a civil war that turned into a major international conflict between the Viet Cong, and America. The Viet Cong was a Communist Guerilla party funded by the U. S. S. R, so America stepped in and funded the population of those committed to democracy in the southern region of Vietnam. Pol grew desperate into the late fifties for an opportunity to create the same wave of civil unrest, and the Khmer Rouge continued to scheme as Prince Nordon Sihanouk came into power in Cambodia (Fletcher). This is a key difference

between the inciting factors of this and the Armenian genocide. The Armenian genocide was pushed due to hostility towards Armenians from the Turks, stemming from centuries of feuds. Pol used political tactics more than Ahmed did. His intention was to create a communist Cambodia, not infiltrate another place due to bad blood. Pol could be compared to Hitler more so than he could to Ahmed because he used the problems in politics to lure followers.

Eventually, and luckily for Pol, the U. S. overthrew the new Cambodian monarchy with “ Democratic Government” installed via a right wing military police coup. Prince Nordom retreated to the lush jungles, and sought out the Khmer Rouge. While the two shared nothing in common in terms of political beliefs, neither of them were ready to watch their country become another imperialized state. They set aside their differences respecting the fact that they both shared a much more dangerous enemy. The Prince and Pol believed Lon and his government to be nothing more than a show conducted by the U. S government, with Lon as a puppet. Throughout the four years this democracy lasted, bombing by U. S B-52’s occurred seemingly non-stop. A deadly combination of cluster bombs and napalm were used to kill 150, 000 Cambodians over this time (“ Cambodian Genocide”). Unfortunately, it is impossible to tell whether one kills a member of the Viet Cong, or a civilian, from 13, 000 feet in the sky. After five years of conflict between the reigning democratic system and Pol’s band of nationalistic communists, Lon was defeated, and basically left penniless, considering the U. S had begun backing out of the region in the years before. Once in power, Pol wasted no time in implementing his scheme of creating a

pure communist Cambodia, one free of anyone who would not serve his or her government's appointed purpose. This included anyone that was not purely Cambodian. Non-Cambodian people were immediately forced into slave-type conditions and were denied basic essentials such as food, water, proper shelter, or any civil liberties whatsoever. Executions were not done to only non-Cambodians, but also to the educated, intellectuals: Buddhists, Monks or anyone religious, police, politicians, writers, artists and activists. This is extremely similar to what happened in the Armenian genocide; anyone who had any higher thinking and more knowledge could speak out against atrocities so they were eliminated in fear that this could cause more people to go against the beliefs of the murderers (Hinton, Theriault).

The Khmer Rouge, like the Turks, did not feel patience or empathy in their actions. The elderly, the crippled, and those with disabilities were all generally killed by execution immediately since they were of "no value." One of the most drastic laws placed over this three-year period was the destruction of all family structure. Children were to be immediately taken into the custody of the government, and were not allowed to recognize family as anything significant, and spent the majority of their lives under the supervision of government officials ("Pol Pot in Cambodia"). This, of course, is very different from what Ahmed would have wanted; he would have never saved an Armenian baby if he had a say in it but he wanted to keep the structure of his culture and people. Pol still would kill if he felt it was necessary, his own people were expendable. Pol's ideology is most clearly portrayed in his own statements, "To spare you is no profit, to destroy you is no loss". To Pol, these people who were once his neighbors and peers were

nothing to him. To Pol, the year was literally “ the year zero”, and everyday the slave laborers of this new “ pure” Cambodia were told, “ What is rotten must be removed” (Fletcher). And, of course, throughout this time twenty to thirty thousand Cambodians were tortured into giving false confessions at a school-turned-jail, called Tuol Sleng (History Place). Finally on Christmas day of 1978, Vietnam invaded Cambodia, and by January 7, 1979 Pol Pot was ousted. He retreated into his former Guerilla lifestyle, leading active militias via jungle command centers except this time into one of Cambodia’s neighbors, Thailand. He would wage a 17 year-long war with the remnants of the Khmer Rouge until 1990. Internal power struggles led to his loss of control, and eight years later he would die of a heart attack while he was under house arrest (Fletcher). Pol Pot continued his vengeance until his last breath; his job was not over, though it seems as though his group’s problems made it so. Neither his or Ahmed’s plans worked out as hoped, but the Young Turk’s doings continue to go unrecognized, and influence far too many people into thinking the Armenian genocide never happened.

While each instance of these atrocities have differences between their cultural and political details, the fact of the matter is the tactics, propaganda and politics used in each instance are undoubtedly similar to a dangerous effect. It did not matter if the war was against someone else or your own people, whether it was because of bad blood or political control, these genocides happened. If one goes without proper notice and justice, how can we as a people have faith that death on these scales will not happen again in our children’s lifetimes, because if you are old enough to read this, you have already endured life on a planet that knows and does nothing to stop the

most inhumane action known to man. Comparisons and differentiations of genocides like these must be recognized so that we as a species can gain enough knowledge to end this filthy habit of mass extermination.

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