

# Operation Nemesis

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**Operation Nemesis** is the Armenian Revolutionary Federation code-name for the covert operation in the 1920s to assassinate the Turkish masterminds of the Armenian Genocide. It is named after the Greek goddess of divine retribution, *Nemesis*. The operation is also known as "The Armenian Nuremberg."

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## Background

After the end of World War I, the Ottoman military tribunal convened in Istanbul and condemned to death the principal perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide, who had been extradited to Malta by British authorities. However, the British placed no value on the sentence, and secretly released the criminals. The executioners of the Armenian people were moving freely in the streets of Berlin, Rome, Baku, Tbilisi, and other cities.

## The Verdict

At the Armenian Revolutionary Federation's 9th General Congress, which convened in Yerevan from September 27 to the end of October 1919, the issue of retribution against those responsible for the Armenian Genocide was on the agenda. Contrary to many of the Eastern Armenian delegates' vociferous objections, it was decided to deal with the reconciliation by Armenian force.

The leader of the Responsible Body for the work was Shahan Natalie, working with Grigor Merjanov. It is notable that ARF Bureau members, specifically Simon Vratsian, Ruben Ter Minasian, and Ruben Darbinian, worked to hinder Natalie's operation, but which went on any way.

## The "Black List"

A "black list" contained about 200 criminals responsible for organizing the genocide of the Armenian

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| Armenian notables deported from the Ottoman capital · Tehcir Law · Armenian casualties of deportations · Ottoman Armenian casualties · Labour battalion  |
| <b>Major relocation centers:</b><br>Bitlis · Deir ez-Zor · Diyarbakır · Erzurum · Kharput · Muş · Sivas · Trabzon  |
| <b>Revolt:</b><br>Zeytun · Van · Musa Dagh · Urfa · Shabin-Karahisar · Armenian militia  |
| <b>Foreign aid and relief:</b><br>Reactions · American Committee for Relief in the Near East   |
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people. For Shahan Natalie, the primary target was the anti-Armenian Talât Pasha, whom Shahan called "Number One." The mission to kill Talât was entrusted to Soghomon Tehlirian.

Indeed, Natalie's purpose was to turn Soghomon Tehlirian's trial into the political trial of those responsible for the Armenian Genocide. In his memoirs, Natalie revealed his orders to Tehlirian: "You blow up the skull of the Number One nation-murderer and you don't try to flee. You stand there, your foot on the corpse and surrender to the police, who will come and handcuff you."

## Successful assassinations

- Talât Pasha, one of the Ittihadist triumvirates and former prime minister, was assassinated on March 15, 1921, in Berlin by Soghomon Tehlirian. Having been arrested and put to trial, Tehlirian was released with a 'not guilty' verdict by the German Court in June 1921.
- Pipit Jivanshir Khan, former internal affairs of Azerbaijan, rabid Pan-Turanian, and organizer of Armenian massacres in Baku, was assassinated on July 18, 1921, in Constantinople, by Misak Torlakian. He was acquitted by the British forces in November of 1921.
- Said Halim Pasha, former prime minister, was assassinated on December 5, 1921, in Berlin, by Arshavir Shiragian. This operation was organized by Grigor Merjanov. Shiragian was not captured and returned to Constantinople.
- Behaeddin Shakir Bey, principal organizer and executor of the Ittihadist "Special Committe," was assassinated on April 17, 1922, in Berlin, by Aram Yerganian.
- Jemal Azmi, an anti-Armenian Ittihadist leader, was assassinated on April 17, 1922, in Berlin, by an agent code-named "T." who was aided by Aram Yerganian. Nicknamed "The Monster of Trebizond," Azmi was responsible for the drowning of 15,000 Armenians. A Turkish court-martial sentenced him to death in 1919, but the sentence was never enacted.
- Jemal Pasha, a member of the Ittihadist triumvirate and defense minister, was assassinated on July 25, 1922, in Tbilisi, by Stepan Dzaghigian and Bedros D. Boghosian along with decoys and the help of Zareh Melik-Shahnazarian of Artsakh.
- Enver Pasha, the third member of the Ittihadist triumvirate, was killed in 1922 in East Bukhara, modern Tajikistan when he was leading the Basmaji-Hrosakayin Pan-Turanian movement. It is unknown whether he was actually assassinated, but he was certainly killed by members of the Red Army.
- Also executed were several Armenian spies and traitors, who denounced their kinsmen to Turkish authorities, and were responsible for their deaths.

## The role of the Russo- British intelligence services in assassinations

After the Mudros Armistice, the British had intelligence reports indicating that they had gone to Germany, and the British High Commissioner pressured Damad Ferit Pasha and the Sublime Porte to demand from Germany to return to Turkey Talat Pasha, Enver Pasha, Jemal Pasha, Said Halim Pasha, Dr. Nazim, Bahattin Sakir and Cemal Azmi. As a result of efforts pursued personally by Sir Andrew Ryan, a former Dragoman and now a member of the British intelligence service, Germany responded to Turkey stating that it was willing to be helpful if official papers could be produced showing these persons had been found guilty, and added that the presence of these persons in Germany could not as yet be ascertained.

England was not pleased with this response, and embarked upon hunting down the Unionists with its own methods. The unionist leaders were seeking support from Muslim countries to help the Kemalist movement, that they were organizing abroad a serious opposition movement against the Allied Powers, and that they were soon intending to take refuge in Ankara. Furthermore, the exiles also dared to make the threat that they were going to incite the Pan-Turanist and Pan-Islamist movements against England, unless she signed a peace treaty favorable for Turkey. This courageous action of the unionist leaders made the British very anxious. Their intelligence service established contact with its counterpart in the Soviet Union to evaluate the situation. The unionists' plans made the Russian officials as anxious as the British. The two intelligence services collaborated and signed among them the 'death warrant of the leaders. Information concerning their physical description and whereabouts were forwarded to their men. However, it was decided that Armenian revolutionaries carry out the verdict.

One of the fathers of Arab journalism, Mustafa Amin's contention is that the British intelligence itself was behind the assassinations of exiled Young Turk leaders in the early 1920s: Talat Pasha, Jemal Pasha....Donald M. Reid, Political Assassination in Egypt, 1910-1954 *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (1982), pp. 625-651

## Position of the ARF Bureau

The ARF Bureau was against these assassinations, because having been ousted from the Democratic Republic of Armenia, it was filled with anti-Soviet sentiment and was playing Turkish-spirited politics, which this campaign of assassination hindered.

## References

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## Further reading

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- Avakian, Lindy V. (1989). *The Cross and the Crescent*. USC Press. ISBN 0-943247-06-3.

## External links

- Detailed story of Special Operation ([http://www.hyeetch.nareg.com.au/genocide/punish\\_p1.html](http://www.hyeetch.nareg.com.au/genocide/punish_p1.html))

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