

# Dr. Nâzım

By [Alp Yenen](#)

Nâzım Bey, Mehmed  
(Dr. Nazım, Doctor Nazım, Selanikli Nazım, Nâzım Bey)  
Politician, revolutionary, medical doctor

## Summary

Dr. Nazım was one of the leading members of the Committee of Union and Progress. While he is infamous for his role in the Armenian Genocide, his activities are still mostly shrouded in mystery. His rise and fall as a Young Turk revolutionary is emblematic of the transition from Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey.

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## The Rise of a Young Turk Revolutionary at the Turn of the Century

[Mehmed Nazım \(1870-1926\)](#) was born in 1872 in Salonica, the cosmopolitan center of Ottoman Macedonia. His father, Hacı Abdülhamid, a merchant who owned several shops in Salonica, died when Nazım was young, leaving him with a degree of financial independence through the family's assets.<sup>1</sup>

Nazım's political coming of age took place against the backdrop of [Sultan Abdülhamid II's \(1842-1918\)](#) despotism and heightened imperial rivalries around the fate of the Ottoman Empire. In 1889, the centennial of the French Revolution, Muslim cadets at the Imperial Military School of Medicine in Istanbul (Constantinople) secretly founded the Ottoman Union Society, the nucleus of the oppositional "Young Turk" movement. As a medical student, Nazım was among its first members. Due to the growing oppression of oppositional groups, Nazım volunteered for a study abroad program in Paris in 1893, where many leading members of the Young Turk exiles had taken refuge. In 1895, he became a founding member of the new Young Turk organisation, Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), playing active

roles in its recruitment, organization, and publication activities.<sup>2</sup> While in Paris, he was sentenced to death by the Sultan. During this time, he formed a close alliance and friendship with [Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir \(1874-1922\)](#), forming a radical faction that championed imperial centralization, international sovereignty, and cultural Turkism, while advocating constitutionalist reforms as a means to save the empire.

After 1907, Nazım increasingly embraced revolutionary methods and took charge of the restructuring of the Young Turk movement as a revolutionary organization. Returning under cover to Salonica, he initiated the merger of the Parisian and Macedonian Young Turk secret societies to launch the revolutionary struggle.<sup>3</sup> Operating clandestinely, he built a revolutionary network in Izmir (Smyrna) that included urban notables, military officials, and rural brigands.<sup>4</sup> Owing to his efforts, when army reservists from Izmir were dispatched to suppress the Young Turk revolution in Macedonia, some refused to depart, while others joined the revolution upon arriving in Salonica.<sup>5</sup> Dr. Nazım thus emerged as one of the prominent leaders of the CUP's revolutionary vanguard during the 1908 constitutional revolution.

Nazım served on the central committee of the CUP until its formal closure in 1918 and was its secretary general from 1909 to 1910, a period during which the CUP suppressed a counterrevolution and deposed the Sultan. After the outbreak of the Balkan Wars in 1912, Nazım was appointed chief physician at the Red Crescent Hospital in Salonica, where he was taken prisoner and spent eleven months in captivity in Athens. Nazım was released following the CUP's 1913 coup d'état, which established [a single-party dictatorship](#). Upon his return, Nazım focused on promoting the economic interests of Ottoman Muslim merchants, often at the expense of the non-Muslim population through policies of [exclusion and intimidation](#).

Dr. Nazım and his colleague Dr. Bahaeddin Şakir are often referred to as the *éminences grises* of the CUP, exerting considerable influence on Minister of Interior [Talat Pasha \(1874-1921\)](#) with their radical stance on centralization and Turkification.<sup>6</sup> As a leading figure of the CUP's shadow government until 1918, Nazım was involved in the shaping of demographic and nationalist policies, spreading the CUP's influence in the provinces, and coordinating student recruitments.<sup>7</sup>

## Complicity in the Armenian Genocide

During the initial phase of the First World War, Nazım was closely associated with the [Special Organization \(SO, Teşkilatı Mahsusa\)](#), the Ottoman Army's special operations force responsible for unconventional warfare, covert action, and propaganda/intelligence work. Dr.

Nazım was one of the three permanent members of its supervisory council, responsible for maintaining a connection with the CUP's central committee.<sup>8</sup>

After the Ottoman entry into the war against Russia, the SO's irregular bands were deployed as auxiliary forces on the [Caucasus front](#) for purposes of reconnaissance, hit-and-run raids, and revolutionary mobilization. While Bahaeddin Şakir coordinated the paramilitary operations against [Armenian revolutionaries](#), which were accompanied by indiscriminate atrocities against the Armenian population, Nazım is said to have recruited volunteers and coordinated the formation of irregular bands. Following the defeat of [Enver Pasha's \(1881-1922\)](#) armies in the [Battle of Sarıkamış](#), the blame was placed on Armenians, leading to the decision to forcibly displace the Armenian population under the pretext of security measures. Before the Armenian deportations began, however, the Ottoman Army disbanded the SO's irregular bands for their combat ineffectiveness, integrating them into regular units. The SO was officially dissolved and reconstituted as the Office of Eastern Affairs (Umur-i Şarkıye Dairesi), tasked with conducting foreign clandestine operations in Asia and Africa, mostly in connection with the [Ottoman call for holy war](#). While there is no doubt that similar paramilitary forces systematically massacred nearly all Armenian deportees of military age and terrorized and killed women, children, and the elderly on their death marches, how these bands were coordinated and organized is still a matter of discussion.<sup>9</sup>

Unlike his colleague Bahaeddin Şakir who left a paper trail documenting his on-the-ground involvement, there is scant research specifically tracing Dr. Nazım's complicity in the [Armenian Genocide](#) after April 1915.<sup>10</sup> Due to the secretive nature of the CUP and the disappearance of its archive—a loss for which Nazım is partly held responsible—scholars must rely on other kinds of evidence, some more reliable than others. The few authentic insights available suggest that Nazım's ideas on the demographic engineering of Anatolia were heavily inspired by the national homogenization of Greece. In a closed meeting of the Central Committee of the CUP in 1916, Nazım stated that "Anatolia is the Turkish homeland. [...] I would like to have the application of the method implemented by Greece to the Anatolian part [of the empire]."<sup>11</sup> An official who opposed the deportation orders testified in the post-war military tribunals that he received an oral message from Nazım assuring him that "this initiative," namely the removal of Armenians, "will resolve the Eastern Question."<sup>12</sup> Nazım's complicity seems to have been an open secret, as many contemporaries—friends and foes—referred to Nazım in their recollections as one of the most extremist members of the CUP, accusing him of leading the state terror inflicted on Armenians.<sup>13</sup> A British official report described him as follows:

Dr. Nazim is the Robespierre of the Young Turk Revolution, notorious as a moving spirit in the persecution of all non-Turkish elements in the Empire, and in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Turanian propaganda. In order to enforce his doctrines, he has declared that Turkey required ten years of a despotism ten times more severe than that of Abdul Hamid.<sup>14</sup>

Although clear documentation of Dr. Nazım's direct complicity is lacking, and may never be fully reconstructed, he held a seat in the central executive bodies of the CUP regime, making him guilty by close association, if not active function, in the decision-making process that led to the Armenian Genocide.

Beyond his roles within the CUP's central committee, Nazım maintained a public presence in the Ottoman capital. He served as the president of the Fenerbahçe Sports Club and was a leading member of the [Anti-Profiteering Commission](#). In the final months of the war in 1918, Dr. Nazım even held the position of the Minister of Education.

## The Fall of a Rogue Revolutionary after the First World War

Following the Ottoman [defeat](#), the CUP resigned and dissolved itself. Immediately after the [Armistice of Mudros of 30 October 1918](#), a group of the CUP's leaders, including Nazım, secretly fled the country to escape looming military tribunals that sentenced them to death in absentia. They found extralegal asylum in the new German Republic, while the Ottoman and Allied officials demanded their extradition as war criminals, albeit unsuccessfully.

In 1919, the Young Turks regrouped in Berlin and decided to establish a [pan-Islamic](#) network of Muslim activists across Europe to oppose the ongoing [peace settlement](#). Dr. Nazım was tasked with the setting up of press bureaus in The Hague and Berlin to distribute news about Turkey and the Muslim world to European newspapers. The Young Turks found supporters among Muslim anti-colonialists, German revanchists, and Russian Bolsheviks. Nazım served at the Berlin headquarters of Enver's Union of Muslim Revolutionary Societies (*İslam İhtilal Cemiyetleri İttihadı*).

After the assassination of Talat Pasha in March 1921, Dr. Nazım managed anti-Armenian propaganda during the trial of Talat's Armenian assassin. In the summer of 1921, Nazım accompanied Enver Pasha to Moscow, where they held a congress of the Union of Muslim Revolutionary Societies. Upon receiving negative news about the progress of the [Turkish War of Independence](#), they travelled to Batumi, where Enver planned his return to Turkey to regain power. In a secret meeting, Enver, Nazım, and others reestablished the CUP. However, the Turkish National Forces were able to stop the Greek advance, intercepting Enver's plans

and rendering the CUP leaders as usurpers.

After Enver joined the anti-Soviet Basmachi insurgency in Turkestan, Nazım was interrogated by the Soviet secret police and forced to leave Soviet Russia. Back in Berlin, Nazım was devastated by the assassination of his close colleagues Bahaeddin Şakir and [Jemal Azmi \(1868-1922\)](#) by Armenian agents. Fearing for his own life and promising to abandon politics, Nazım was permitted to return to Turkey.

In 1926, Nazım was arrested for conspiring to assassinate [Mustafa Kemal \(1881-1938\)](#) and for attempting to revive the CUP to usurp the government. On 26 August 1926, Dr. Nazım was executed by hanging.<sup>15</sup> While the Young Turk regime clearly paved the way for the Kemalist Republic, Nazım's fate illustrates that the CUP's secretive and oligarchic leadership could only survive by surrendering their drive for power and submitting to Mustafa Kemal's authority.

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## Notes

1. Some studies claim that Nazım was the scion of Sabbatean converts from Sephardi Judaism to Islam. Baer, Marc David: *The Dönme. Jewish converts, Muslim revolutionaries, and secular Turks*, Stanford 2010, pp. 71, 91, 95, 109, 185, 227; Şişman, Cengiz: *The burden of silence. Sabbatai Sevi and the evolution of the Ottoman-Turkish dönmes*, New York 2015, pp. 245, 249, 257, 283. However, recollections from his friends and recently discovered family papers indicate that Nazım came from a Muslim family settled in Macedonia. His paternal grandfather, Hüseyin Efendi, served as imam of the Hacı Hasan Ağa endowment mosque. For Nazım's family background, see Soysal, Funda / Yenen, Alp: *Precarious privileges: glimpses into the post-Ottoman transition through the papers of a Salonican family*, in: *Contemporary Levant* 9/2 (2024), pp. 100–102; [Beyatlı], Yahya Kemal: *Siyasî ve Edebî Portreler [Political and Literary Portraits]*, Istanbul 1968, pp. 110–120. ↑
2. Hanoğlu, M. Şükrü: *The Young Turks in opposition*, Oxford 1995, p. 74. ↑
3. Duru, Kâzım Nami: "İttihat ve Terakki" Hatıralarım [My "Union and Progress" Memoirs], Istanbul 1957, p. 16. ↑
4. Eyicil, Ahmet: *Osmanlı İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti Liderlerinden Doktor Nazım Bey, 1872-1926 [Dr. Nazım Bey, Leader of the Ottoman Committee of Union and Progress, 1872–1926]*, Eskişehir 2021, pp. 99–123. ↑
5. Hanoğlu, M. Şükrü: *Preparation for a revolution. The Young Turks, 1902-1908*, Oxford, 2001, p. 269. ↑
6. Kieser, Hans Lukas: *Talaat Pasha. Father of modern Turkey, architect of genocide*,

- Princeton 2018, pp. 55–60. ↑
7. Tekir, Süleyman: İttihatçılık. İktidar, İstanbul 2025, p. 119–173. ↑
  8. Safi, Polat: The Ottoman Special Organization – Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa. An inquiry into its operational and administrative characteristics, thesis, Bilkent University Ankara 2012, pp. 207–208; Tetik, Ahmet: Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa (Umur-ı Şarkıyye Dairesi) Tarihi I: 1914–1916 [History of the Special Organization (Office of Eastern Affairs) I: 1914–1916], İstanbul 2014, pp. 15–16. ↑
  9. Özel, Oktay: The Role of Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa (Special Organization) in the Armenian Genocide, in: Pschichholz, Christin (ed.): The First World War as a Caesura? Demographic Concepts, Population Policy, and Genocide in the Late Ottoman, Russian, and Habsburg Spheres, Berlin 2020, pp. 81–108. ↑
  10. Akçam, Taner: The Young Turks' crime against humanity. The Armenian genocide and ethnic cleansing in the Ottoman Empire, Princeton 2012. ↑
  11. Aslanmirza, Burak (ed.): İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti'nin Kızıl Konak Evrakı: Toplantı Zabıtları, Genelgeler ve Siyasi Program (1916–1917) [The Red Mansion Documents of the Committee of Union and Progress: Meeting Minutes, Circulars, and Political Program (1916–1917)], İstanbul 2021, p. 63. ↑
  12. Dadrian, Vahakn N. / Akçam, Taner (ed.): Judgment at Istanbul: The Armenian Genocide Trials, New York 2011, p. 280. ↑
  13. Dadrian, Vahakn N.: The role of Turkish physicians in the World War I genocide of Ottoman Armenians, in: Holocaust and Genocide Studies 1/2 (1986), pp. 169–92. ↑
  14. Constantinople Papers, July 14 – August 15, Political and Economic Intelligence Summary, Press Supplement, no. 2, September 25, 1918, UK Parliamentary Archive, WAK 1-1, 4. ↑
  15. A very important autobiographical source of Nazım is his testimony at the independence court in Erdinç, Erol Şadi (ed.): Osmanlı İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti Yargılamaları III: Ankara İstiklal Mahkemesi ve Siyasi Yargılama [Ottoman Committee of Union and Progress Trials III: Ankara Independence Tribunal and Political Prosecution], İstanbul 2018, pp. 269–336. ↑

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## External Links

- [\*\*The Great War: Beyond The Genocide - Armenia in WW1 | THE GREAT WAR Special , 13/06/2016 \(YouTube\) \(Video\)\*\*](#)
- [\*\*The Great War: How WW1 Created the Middle East Conflicts \(Documentary\) , 08/12/2023 \(YouTube\) \(Video\)\*\*](#)
- [\*\*The Great War: The Balkan Wars 1912-1913 \(Documentary\), 07/10/2022 \(YouTube\) \(Video\)\*\*](#)

## Metadata

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