

Genocide claims against Turkey frivolous

By Thomas Goltz

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For as long as I have been academically associated with Turkey, the Middle East and the post-Soviet Caucasus, Diaspora Armenians in California, Massachusetts, Michigan and now even Montana, have made an annual attempt to convince Congress to pass resolutions condemning Turkey for having effected a “genocide” against their forefathers in the waning days of the Ottoman Empire, while Turkish groups have, less effectively, railed against such condemnation of their ancestors.

In essence, the Armenian discourse can be summed up by the claim that the Ottoman Turkish authorities mounted a systematic policy of mass murder against a hapless population of innocents, and that up to 1.5 million Armenians thus perished from 1915 to 1918.

The Turkish position is that Armenians joined forces with Czarist Russian armies in the largely roadless Ottoman East, slaughtered Muslims in great numbers and had to be removed to more secure areas of the crumbling empire, during the course of which large numbers of Armenians died of disease, starvation and violence - about the equivalent to the number of Muslim civilians and Ottoman soldiers in retreat through the same territory.

Most American-Armenians have used their electoral influence, better known as well-financed lobby groups, to insist that U.S. lawmakers declare in their favor, thus condemning Turkey of genocide, thus labeling its citizens as the children of serial mass-murderers as bad as the Nazis. Armenian lobby groups are attempting to have non-specialists, who are prone to vote according to the perceived needs (or whims) of their constituencies, legislate that history.

And that is what in effect happened this past Wednesday, when the House Foreign Relations Committee passed Resolution 106, which among other things, will obligate all U.S. citizens to join with whomever is president to commemorate April 24 as the day of the Armenian Genocide.

Not only does this make for bad history, it's worse foreign policy.

Our NATO-member ally Turkey will of course react to this punch to the solar plexus, most likely by creating symbolic difficulties in the supply chain to U.S. forces now in Iraq, and possibly even by pulling Turkish troops out of Afghanistan and Kosovo. A long-term shift away from the West and into, say, Russia's orbit is not out of the question.

And more. If we citizens of the United States feel compelled to investigate and then label historical trauma, we might have our representatives start a little closer to home - and pass resolutions on such subjects as the slave trade, the near-eradication of Native American tribes or perhaps the conquest of northern Mexico. I won't even mention what might be "resolved" concerning our current policy in Iraq.

But all is not yet lost. For House Resolution 106 to become law, it must be presented to the full Congress, who must then vote on the committee recommendation.

Accordingly, I urge Rep. Rehberg, and Sens. Baucus and Tester, not to support this resolution when it appears on the House and Senate agendas, and to refrain from passing any similar, frivolously dangerous legislation in the future. And I urge concerned citizens of Montana to urge them do the same.

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