

ARMENIA: THE END OF THE DEBATE?

Posted on October 26, 2009 by Keghart

EMBASSY

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✘ By Gwynne Dyer, [Embassy](#), 21 October 2009

Please see Ara Papian's comments following Dyer's article.

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The most anguished protests came from the Armenian diaspora: 8 million people living mainly in the United States, France, Russia, Iran and Lebanon. There are only 3 million people living in Armenia itself, and remittances from the diaspora are twice as large as the country's entire budget, so the views of overseas Armenians matter.

Unfortunately, their views are quite different from those of the people who actually live in Armenia. For Armenians abroad, making the Turks admit that they planned and carried out a genocide is supremely important. Indeed, it has become a core part of their identity.

For most of those who are still in Armenia, getting the Turkish border re-opened is a higher priority. Their poverty and isolation are so great that a quarter of the population has emigrated since the border was closed 16 years ago, and trade with their relatively rich neighbour to the west would help to staunch the flow.

Moreover, the agreement does not require Armenia to give back the Armenian-populated parts of

Azerbaijan, its neighbour to the east. Armenia's conquest of those lands in 1992-94 was why Turkey closed the border in the first place (many Turks see the Turkic-speaking Azeris as their "little brothers"), so in practical terms Armenian President Serge Sarkisian has got a very good deal. The communities of the diaspora, however, believe the Armenian government has sold them out on the genocide issue. Their remittances are crucial to Armenia, so President Sarkisian has spent the past weeks travelling the world, trying to calm their fury. In the end, he will probably succeed, if only because they have nowhere else to go.

But can any practical consideration justify abandoning the traditional Armenian demand that Turkey admit to a policy of genocide? Yes it can, because it is probably the wrong demand to be making.

Long ago, when I was a budding historian, I got sidetracked for a while by the controversy over the massacres of 1915. I read the archival reports on British and Russian negotiations with Armenian revolutionaries after the Ottoman empire entered the First World War on the other side in early 1915. I even read the documents in the Turkish General Staff archives ordering the deportation of the Armenian population from eastern Anatolia later that year. What happened is quite clear.

The British and the Russians planned to knock the Ottoman empire out of the war quickly by simultaneous invasions of eastern Anatolia, Russia from the north and Britain by landings on Turkey's south coast. So they welcomed the approaches of Armenian nationalist groups and asked them to launch uprisings behind the Turkish lines to synchronize with the invasions. The usual half-promises about independence were made, and the Armenian groups fell for it.

The British later switched their attack to the Dardanelles in an attempt to grab Istanbul, but they never warned their Armenian allies that the south-coast invasion was off. The Russians did invade, but the Turks managed to stop them. The Armenian revolutionaries launched their uprisings as promised, and the Turks took a terrible vengeance on the whole community.

Istanbul ordered the Armenian minority to be removed from eastern Anatolia on the grounds that their presence behind the lines posed a danger to Turkish defences. Wealthy Armenians were allowed to travel south to Syria by train or ship, but for the impoverished masses it was columns marching over the mountains in the dead of winter. They faced rape and murder at the hands of their guards, there was little or no food, and many hundreds of thousands died.

If genocide just means killing a lot of people, then this certainly was one. If genocide means a policy that aims to exterminate a particular ethnic or religious group, then it wasn't. Armenians who made it alive to Syria, then also part of the Ottoman empire, were not sent to death camps. Indeed, they became the ancestors of today's huge Armenian diaspora. Armenians living elsewhere in the empire, notably in Istanbul, faced abuse but no mass killings.

It was a dreadful crime, and only recently has the public debate in Turkey even begun to acknowledge it. It was not a genocide if your standard of comparison is what happened to the

European Jews, but diaspora Armenians will find it very hard to give up their claim that it was. Nevertheless, the grown-ups are now in charge both in Armenia and in Turkey, and amazing progress is being made.

 www.wilsonforarmenia.org

The First Fruits of the Protocols

Ara Papian, Head, "Modus Vivendi" Centre, 21 October 2009

Apologists for the Armenia-Turkey protocols denied all the warnings that there would be negative effects on the Armenian Genocide recognition process, while I, along with many others, foresaw that negative consequences would manifest themselves even in those countries that have already recognized the Armenian Genocide. Unfortunately, that turned out to be the case.

Example:

Canada is one of those few countries where both the parliament (in 2002 and 2004), as well as the cabinet (in 2006) have recognized the Armenian Genocide.

Consequently, since 2004, no self-respecting member of the media would ever publish or broadcast any article or program denying the Armenian Genocide. Moreover, when, in February of 2006, as a reaction to my mentioning the Armenian Genocide as part of a farewell interview to the influential Embassy magazine, the ambassadors of Turkey and Azerbaijan complained, the editor of that periodical responded, without any intervention on my part, that, "the fact of the genocide cannot be disputed, as it is not subject to any doubts". Clear and precise.

And what do we have now? Only ten days after signing the protocols, the very same Embassy magazine (21st of October, 2009) published an article by Gwynne Dyer, where it is said that, "the Armenians back home have made a deal ... create a joint historical commission to determine what actually happened in 1915". The author's concluding remarks of the article state that, "It was not a genocide...". And this in Canada, which has recognized the Armenian Genocide. As people on the streets say, we have messed with Canada, and she will not forgive us. People do not forgive those who mess around with them, even in international relations.

And now for yet another prediction. After the protocols get ratified (God forbid), it would mean legally doubting the Armenian Genocide (please save your arguments for the Canadian courts), upon which the Canadian courts will be filled with applications against the prior governmental declarations for having "insulted honor and dignity", seeing as we have insulted the Turkish state – and, of course, Canadian citizens of Turkish descent – in a yet-to-be-proven crime (genocide), subject to discussion by some sub-commission.

Since the Canadian court system provides for monetary compensation concerning moral damages, I

would therefore like to call for an extra line in next year's state budget of the Republic of Armenia, of a few hundred million dollars (nothing less), to pay for moral damages. Ultimately, we are the ones who are going to be billed for these complaints.

The Fruits of the Armenia-Turkey Protocols

Ara Papian, Head, "Modus Vivendi" Centre, 22 October 2009

Some people do not want to understand a simple truth. As much as political theory is abstract, political practice, – policy – is concrete. That is to say, a Gospel truth is evident that one recognizes the tree from the fruit. Politics manifests itself with concrete policy. Consequently, all the particular incidents, as it were, which render the recognition of the Armenian Genocide more difficult are the most important, I would even say the most worrying, cases in point. Of course, Senators Menendez and Ensign can always bring the resolution recognizing the Armenian Genocide to the floor of the US Senate.

Thank goodness, we do not yet have the power to prevent that. However, we do not have the power to credit their honest goodwill to ourselves either.

My missive on the change in policy in the Canadian Embassy magazine had only just been sent out, when I received yet another testimony to the truth of my concerns, from Sweden. My friend of mutual ideas of many years shared with me his bitter experience from the other side of the world. The editor-in-chief of the influential Metro newspaper, Per Gunne, refuses to print any article, which mentions the Armenian Genocide because he is no longer "sure that there was genocide". Another Swedish daily, Svenska Dagbladet, which, through the well-known journalist Bitte Hammargren, now uses the media expression of "Armenian massacres", as opposed to the legal term "genocide", has adopted the same change in policy. These are not mere words, but represent policy. Policies have changed immensely lately, and they have changed after that unfortunate pair of protocols was signed.

