ARMENIAN GENOCIDE COULD HAVE BEEN PREVENTED

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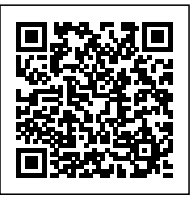

John Keusseyan, Lt. Col. USAF (Ret.), Chairman, Armenian Compatriotic Union of Urfa, Los Angeles, 10 Dec 2010

In memory of a great Armenian hero, Megerditch Yotnaghperian on the 95th anniversary of Urfa Herosamard

Why were a million-and-a-half of my ancestors slaughtered like sheep? What could we have done differently to prevent this horrific crime from happening? Why didn't our leadership foresee this coming? Did they fall asleep at the wheel? Even after experiencing the same crimes (but at much smaller scale) few years earlier: in Adana, Sassoun, Urfa and other Armenian cities where tens of thousands of innocent Armenians were butchered. These are the questions that I have been asking myself ever since I learned about these crimes against humanity.

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Fortunately, a brave Urfatsi by the name of Megerditch Yotnaghperian had the foresight that history would be repeating itself. A decade or so earlier, in 1895, Sultan Abdul Hamid (the red sultan) had massacred over 10,000 innocent Armenians in Urfa. Even though Megerditch had very little education, but he was street smart. He used to disguise himself as a Turk and mingle among Turks and Kurds and gather intelligence. He knew ahead of time that the Turkish and the Kurdish mobs would be attacking the Armenian neighborhood soon. To prevent bloodshed, Megerditch started arming the Armenians of Urfa. Under the guise of a street vendor, he used to travel to Aleppo to purchase weapons.
Megerditch received intelligence that the mobs were getting ready to attack. He had the town evacuated and organized a group of about 300 young men and women to defend the town against the mobs. In the middle of September, 1915, the Turkish mobs started attacking the Armenian section of Urfa (as predicted by Megerditch), looting and burning Armenian stores and homes. Megerditch had positioned his men in strategic locations of the town. When the mobs approached

their positions, he gave the order to fire. The Turks were surprised. They did not expect this from Armenians; because Armenians have always been an easy prey for them. After giving a dozen or so casualties, they withdrew.

The news of the Armenian uprising in Urfa was heard all the way in Istanbul. Fakhry Pasha, who was in Aleppo at the time, was ordered to go to Urfa with his Army unit and stop the uprising. Within few days, Fakhry Pasha arrived in Urfa and surrounded the town with his 6000 soldiers. He ordered the Armenians to surrender. But Armenians refused. They preferred to fight and die with dignity than surrender and be slaughtered like sheep. They defended the town for 33 days against Fakhry Pasha's 6000 strong Army. Unfortunately, after 33 days Armenians ran out of ammunition and used the last bullets to kill themselves rather than surrender to the Turks and be humiliated and then killed.

A street in old Urfa

At the conclusion of the battle of Urfa, Fakhry Pasha, after seeing the heroic fighting of the Urfatsi Armenians, asked: "What could we have done if we had half a dozen Urfas to confront with?"
If a simple man like Megerditch who had no education and no military training and limited budget, could organize and put up a heroic fight against superior Army units, outnumbered and outgunned, why didn't we organize a united front to defend all of our people? Like Fakhry Pasha said, what if we had half a dozen Urfas? Some people say: "well we were people with no leaders, because the Turks first arrested and killed all of our leaders". But this did not happen until April, 1915. The massacres had started in 1890s, the latest one being the Adana massacres which took place in 1909. What was our leadership doing all this time? Did they need a signed letter from Talaat telling them that they will deport and massacre all Armenians? My answer to those people is simple: no, we had no leaders. We had people in leadership positions but they were no leaders because they failed to do their job which was to lead, and help the people organize to defend themselves. A true leader would have vision. They would have the foresight to predict the future and take the necessary actions to confront it.

Let us learn from our past mistakes and be proactive rather than reactive. Let us help Armenia and Artsakh to become stronger economically and militarily so that they can defend themselves against the Barbarians in civilized clothing. Losing the war in Artsakh is not an option. We only have to lose once and it will be 1915 all over again.