

BARONESS CAROLINE COX: LETTER TO THE INDEPENDENT

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Dear Sir,

I have always appreciated the integrity of Robert Fisk's analysis of the genocide of the Armenians by Turkey in 1915: his well-informed argumentation has been incontrovertible and important for every genocide which is not acknowledged not only prevents healing for the survivors but is also an encouragement to potential perpetrators of other genocides.

However, I must challenge the grossly inaccurate analogy between the Armenian genocide and the recent war in the predominantly Armenian enclave of Nagorno Karabakh. The Armenians were not the aggressors: Azerbaijan initiated a self-avowed policy, 'Operation Ring', of ethnic cleansing of the Armenians who live in this historically Armenian enclave, given by Stalin to Azerbaijan.

I have visited the region 63 times since Azerbaijan carried out massacres of Armenians in Baku and Sumgait in the late 1980s and then unleashed full-scale war against the 150,000 civilians in the enclave. In July 1991, I visited Azerbaijan, with an international group of independent human rights experts, to ascertain the Azeri viewpoint. We were left in no doubt of their policy of intended ethnic cleansing of all Armenians from Karabakh - a policy subsequently publicly affirmed by successive Azeri Presidents and senior politicians. I was in Karabakh virtually every month during the height of the war; I counted 400 'Grad' missiles a day fired by Azeris on the capital city, Stepanakert; I witnessed aerial bombardment and the use of cluster bombs on civilian targets and massacres of indescribable brutality - documented irrefutably in our publication 'Ethnic Cleansing in Progress: The War in Nagorno Karabakh'.

It would be a great pity if Robert Fisk were to lose credibility of his main thesis by such an inappropriate comparison.

Caroline Cox

