STANDARD HOLLYWOOD DOUBLE-STANDARD

Posted on January 18, 2015 by Keghart



Category: Editorials

As we were about to "go to the press", Russell Crowe's "The Water Diviner" began to make negative headlines in the Armenian media mostly because of its false narrative. The execrable production, made to coincide with the centenary of the Gallipoli disaster, is replete with falsehood and propaganda.

Movie-makers--in Hollywood, California or Sydney, Australia--have the unfortunate habit of consistently tampering with the truth. They try to draw ticket buyers by making movies about the colorful lives of historical figures such as Alexander the Great, the Borgias, Napoleon, General Patton, etc., but when the same movie makers are criticized for turning the biographies into cartoons, they sheepishly say that they are in the entertainment business, not in the history business. Crowe's torturing of the truth seems to be a similar exercise.

Distortion of history isn't the only crime of mainstream film makers. While everyone--at least in the civilized world--boasts that freedom of speech is a given in our societies, film makers often partner with their governments in spreading propaganda and falsehood. They are also easily cowed by the same "democratic" governments to suppress the truth for political expedience. "Standard Hollywood Double-Standard" editorial focuses on several such high-profile cases.

Hollywood, the White House, the media world—and for all we know the universe--were agog in December when North Korea expressed its displeasure with an infantile movieland comedy concoction ("The Interview") which featured two American spies on a mission to kill North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. The killer/spies were posing as journalists.

In retaliation for the spoof, hackers supposedly loyal to North Korea stole confidential data of Sony Pictures Entertainment (the studio which produced the comedy), leaked sensitive Sony emails to the world and threatened the company with violence if it released the movie starring James Franco and Seth Rogen.

When an intimidated Sony cancelled the release of the film, President Obama accused North Korea of cyber vandalism. World-famous luminaries, such as Tony Kushner and Neil Gaiman, were in high dudgeon. So was Salman Rushdie who said so in his usual verbose way. The great thespian Rob Lowe jumped into the stage declaiming on Twitter: "Hollywood has done Neville Chamberlain proud today." Rob Lowe? Who knew?

While the hullaballoo was clawing serious time and space on the airwaves and newsprint, no one mentioned that a movie featuring assassins who pose as journalists could damage journalists and their credibility, especially these days when ISIL chops the heads of journalists suspected of being Western spies. But that's a sidebar to the story of the celluloid tsunami between the US and North Korea.

"The Interview" "crisis" continued for a week. A somber Eric Schultz, speaking on behalf of President Obama, said: "…we are a country that believes in free speech, and the right of artistic expression." An

outraged American politician accused North Korea of muzzling free speech and said: "We cannot be a society in which some dictator in some place can start imposing censorship in the U.S." A PEN petition urged North Korea to reconsider the hack attack.

And then a not-so-mysterious retaliation: the North Korean Internet went dark. Soon after, Sony announced "The Interview" would be released after all. Sony CEO Michael Lynton said North Korea had failed in its attempt to suppress free speech. Rogen tweeted: "The people have spoken! Freedom has prevailed. Sony didn't give up." His co-star Franco tweeted: "Victory!!!!!!! .The PEOPLE and the PRESIDENT have spoken."

The movie opened. Americans rushed to buy tickets. It was the patriotic thing to do. All was well with the world and democracy.

In the rush to salvage America's reputation as the land of the free and secure the bottom line of a misguided B-movie, no one pointed out that Hollywood, the White House, the media, are regularly selective on matters of free speech.

Back in the mid-'30s, at least twice, Turkey stopped the production of epic movies in Britain and in the United States. Sir Alexander Korda, one of the more famous producers of the era, bought the film rights of "Revolt in the Desert" about the adventures of Lawrence of Arabia. British star Leslie Howard was to play Lawrence. The movie was to be shot on the border between Saudi Arabia and Transjordan, with Jerusalem standing in for Damascus. But then Turkey complained to the Foreign Office about the proposed scenes of Turkish atrocities, according to "The Golden Warrior: the Legend of Lawrence of Arabia" by Lawrence James. "Korda was forced to bow to pressure from the censors of the British Board of Film Control and the Foreign Office, which were both anxious not to upset Turkey."

About the same time Hollywood's MGM bought the rights to Franz Werfel's bestselling "Forty Days of Musa Dagh". A screenplay was written and Clark Gable was to play the hero of the legendary Armenian resistance to the Turkish Army on a mountain called Musa Dagh in Antioch, now occupied by Turkey. That project was also shelved because of threats by Turkey.

In recent years, such superstars as Sylvester Stallone and Mel Gibson have announced their intention to produce "Forty Days of Musa Dagh", but in both instances, the projects have evaporated in silence. One doesn't have to be Stephen Hawking to suspect the reason for the demise of the projects. And yet there has been no outrage about Turkey curbing the freedom of speech of Americans. Rob Lowe, Tony Kushner, Neil Gaiman, Salman Rushdie, President Obama, PEN, CNN, et al have not protested. Neville Chamberlain's name hasn't been taken in vain.

It's business as usual in the West's politics vis-à-vis Turkey. Turkey can jail more journalists than other country. Turkey can deny US air force access to Turkish bases forcing the US to use distant bases when attacking ISIL. Turkey can protect ISIL butchers and buy stolen gas from them. Turkey can ignore West's trade sanctions against Iran. Turkey can tangle with Israel. Turkey can hold military

exercises with China. Turkey can demonstrate extreme Islamist tendencies. Turkey can be ruled by an authoritarian megalomaniac who attacks the West at the drop of fez. Turkey can oppress its minorities. Turkey can punish people for "insulting Turkishness" if they refer to the Genocide of Armenians. Turkey can be the biggest investor in mad Khadafy's Libya. Turkey can hail Sudan's genocidier Omar el-Bashir and twice play host to him. Turkey can interfere in European elections. Turkey can be an expressway for Afghan opium headed to Europe and for ISIL recruits headed to Syria/Iraq. Turkey can go to bed with Hamas. Turkey can sign multibillion dollar trade deals with Russia and try to scupper the West's sanctions against Russia. Turkey can invade and occupy Cyprus. Turkey can illegally blockade Armenia, Turkey can…

To paraphrase the old song about Lola: Whatever Turkey wants, Turkey gets.

Until when?

When will the West wake up and realize that its NATO partner is a hostile and rogue state par excellence?