ELOQUENT ISRAELI FRIENDS

Posted on May 1, 2015 by Keghart



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By **Rachel Elboim-Dror**, Haaretz, 1 May 2015

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"Instead of offering the Sultan money," Herzl's diplomatic agent Philip Michael Nevlinski (who also advised the Sultan) told him, "give him political support on the Armenian issue, and he'll be grateful and accept your proposal, in part at least." The Christian European countries had been critical of the murder of Armenian Christians at the hands of Muslims, and committees supporting the Armenians had been founded in various places, and Europe also offered refuge to leaders of the Armenian revolt. This situation made it very difficult for Turkey to obtain loans from European banks.

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Herzl eagerly took the advice. He felt that it was appropriate to try any means possible to hasten the establishment of a Jewish state. And so he agreed to serve as a tool of the Sultan, by trying to convince the leaders of the Armenian revolt that if they surrendered to the Sultan, he would comply with some of their demands. Herzl also tried to show the West that Turkey was in fact more humane, that it had no choice but to deal with the Armenian revolt this way, and that it aspired to a ceasefire and a political arrangement. After much effort, he also met with the Sultan on May 17, 1901.

The Sultan hoped that Herzl, a well-known journalist, would be able to alter the Ottoman Empire's negative image. And so Herzl launched an intensive campaign to fulfill the Sultan's wish, casting himself as a mediator for peace. He established ties with and held secret meetings with the Armenian rebels, in an attempt to get them to stop the violence, but they were not convinced of his sincerity, and did not trust the Sultan's promises. Herzl also made energetic attempts to this effect in diplomatic channels in Europe, which he was very familiar with.

As was his way, he did not consult with other Zionist movement leaders, and kept his activities secret. But in need of some assistance, he wrote to Max Nordau to try to recruit him for the mission as well. Nordau responded with a one-word telegram: "No." In his eagerness to obtain the charter for Palestine from the Turks, Herzl publicly declared – after the start of the yearly Zionist Congresses – that the Zionist movement expresses its admiration and gratitude to the Sultan, despite opposition from some representatives.

Herzl's chief opponent on this was Bernard Lazare, a French Jewish intellectual, leftist, well-known journalist and literary critic, who had fought prominently against the Dreyfus trial, and was a supporter of the Armenian cause. He was so incensed by Herzl's activity that he resigned from the Zionist Committee and abandoned the movement altogether in 1899. Lazare published an open letter to Herzl in which he asked: How can those who purport to represent the ancient people whose history is written in blood extend a welcoming hand to murderers, and no delegate to the Zionist Congress rises up in protest?

This drama involving Herzl – a leader who subordinated humanitarian considerations and served the

Turkish authorities for the sake of the ideal of the Jewish state – is just one illustration of the frequent clash between political goals and moral principles. Israel has repeatedly been faced with such tragic dilemmas, as evidenced in its long-standing position of not officially recognizing the Armenian genocide, as well as in other more recent decisions that reflect the tension between humanitarian values and realpolitik considerations.

Rachel Elboim-Dror is professor emeritus of history of education and culture at Hebrew University.

Would Israel tolerate calling the Holocaust a 'massacre?'

By **Israel W. Charny** and **Yair Auron**, Haaretz, 24 April 2015

There is no political or economic situation in which we Israelis – or Jews worldwide – would accept any other nation denying the Holocaust or the full scale of its killings and torture. We would be hurt, insulted, horrified. We would experience the denial as a kind of endorsement, or even repetition of, the degradation our nation suffered in the Holocaust.

The Armenian people are no different. They are hurt, insulted and horrified by the minimization of the Armenian Genocide by our State of Israel.

For many years, they looked up to Israel with great respect and a deep sense of kinship with a people who, like them, suffered a massive genocide. They admired us enormously for our amazing ability to rebuild our vibrant and thriving nation. They, themselves, are just beginning on their path of reconstruction.

Now, although many Armenians continue to admire Israel greatly – both writers of this piece have been awarded the Presidential Gold Medal in Armenia for our contributions to the memory and recognition of the Armenian Genocide – a degree of hate of Israel is mounting. How could the people of the Holocaust fail to extend full recognition to the Armenian Genocide (which, at times, is referred to as the "Armenian Holocaust," especially in Hebrew, such as in one article by an historian in Bar Ilan University Magazine and various press reports)?

Israel has had its "excuses." But would we accept such excuses from a government that denies the Holocaust was genocide?

Moreover, we, the proud people who are not to be led like lambs to humiliation, would look for ways to fight back hard and resolutely.

The history of our denial of the Armenian Genocide casts us in a light of being a manipulative, self-serving and dishonorable people. Justifiably so. It makes us cowards that to protect our once-upon-a-time relationship with Turkey and now to an increasing extent with Azerbaijan – a Muslim, Turkic-speaking state – we have sacrificed basic principle and integrity. Is that the Israel we believe ourselves to be – and want to be?

When the Knesset Education Committee met in June 2012 to consider the unanimous resolution of the Knesset to recognize the Armenian Genocide, almost everyone who spoke – including then-Knesset Chairman Reuven Rivlin – was firmly and warmly for recognition. There were two parties who were opposed. One was a spokesman for the Azerbaijan Jewish community and the other was the spokesman for our Foreign Ministry. Do you remember how America's State Department was at the head of the opposition to rescue Jews in the Holocaust and then to recognizing the new State of Israel? The atmosphere in the Education Committee was overwhelmingly in favor of recognition of the Armenian Genocide, and then suddenly the chairman of the committee, a representative of Avigdor Lieberman's Yisrael Beitenu party stood up, banged his gavel and announced, "The meeting is now adjourned. I will arrange for a vote in the future." Not surprisingly, he never arranged the vote.

For many years, the government of Israel did not even allow mention of the Armenian Genocide. The brother of one of the writers of this article, the late poet T. Carmi (Charny), was editor in the 1960s of Ariel, the respected magazine of our Foreign Ministry, of which thousands of copies were published in a number of languages, on glossy paper that was unusually expensive for those days. In a totally innocent article on the Armenian Quarter in Jerusalem, there was a passing reference to the survivors of the Armenian Genocide who had found refuge in Jerusalem – the same survivors to whom our current president, Rivlin, emotionally referred to in his address to the United Nations this year on International Holocaust Day. After all the copies of the magazine were printed and bound, this terrible infraction of the sheer mention of the Armenian Genocide led the Foreign Ministry to order the withdrawal of all the copies of the issue so that the one sinful page could be removed.

For many years, the Israeli government literally forbade mention of the Armenian Genocide in our media (until a principled Yaakov Ahimeir took the daring leap, in 1994). During those days, too, there was at least one instance in which the Israel Broadcasting Authority met for a detailed discussion on whether to show a documentary about the Armenian Genocide and voted overwhelmingly to do so, but the next morning then-Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir exercised his veto power to cancel the broadcast. (Our Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide in Jerusalem did show the film in the Cinematheque auditorium with the participation of the legendary mayor Teddy Kollek, the wife of the Russian freedom fighter Andrei Sakharov, the Armenian Patriarch and others).

Our beloved Israel has been shamefully cowardly, unethical, and cheaply self-serving (including on behalf of its highly questionable lucrative arms export businesses). Are we ready now to salvage some of our self-respect and express a full fellowship with the victims of the major genocide that preceded ours, and in fact is known to have contributed a good deal to the subsequent execution of the Holocaust?

Professors Israel Charny and Yair Auron were invited by the Armenian government to speak at the Centennial Observance of the Armenian Genocide in Yerevan, in April 2015. Both are leaders of the Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide in Jerusalem, and Auron has created the outstanding and probably sole academic program in Israel on genocide at the Open University.

Israel, the denier of another nation's holocaust

By **Yossi Sarid**, Haaretz, 24 April 2015

Today, April 24, 1915, marks the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide. But Pope Francis erred this month when he referred to it as "the first genocide of the 20th century." The first took place in German South West Africa, what is now Namibia. Tens of thousands of tribespeople were annihilated. But blacks apparently don't count as much.

The pope neglected to mention them when he cited the 1.5 million Armenians killed and called on the countries of the world to recognize the Ottoman Turks' crime against the Armenians and humanity. Still, he should be commended. It's not easy for him to take on the conservative Catholic establishment, which is only surpassed in its backwardness and corruption by the Israeli rabbinical establishment.

Will "the Jewish state" heed the Christian's call? Or will it prefer, as usual, to focus on a different pope, accusing him of ignoring the destruction during those most awful times? True, Pius XII didn't go out of his way to save Jews. But we too aren't so quick to empathize with others' suffering and rush to their aid. In its own way, Israel is also a denier of another nation's holocaust.

Dozens of countries have already answered the Armenian plea and recognized the genocide, to the dismay of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and despite his government's threats. The European Parliament just decided to break its silence too.

For what are the Armenians and their diaspora asking for? Not aid, just recognition. No one need be endangered for their sake; just show some sympathy and understanding. When eyes insist on remaining shut, wounds will keep on reopening.

But Israel hasn't been willing to forgo its monopoly on victimhood or share its exclusive right to be the persecuted. It always has its cost-benefit analyses and global interests to consider — whether with apartheid South Africa or the juntas of Argentina and Chile.

And who's going to preach to us, "the most moral" of them all? After all, official Israel also has custody of the universal conscience. As far as we're concerned, the Armenians can go jump in a lake. We don't jump first, because we're no dummies. And we'll be the last ones to resume relations with Cuba, as an arrogant American satellite.

Exactly 15 years ago today, I was invited to the Armenian Church in Jerusalem. "I've come to be with you on your remembrance day — as a human being, a citizen of the world, a Jew, an Israeli and the Israeli education minister," I said. "You have been alone for too many years. Today, for the first time, you are less alone."

Since then I've have been asked many times whether I consulted with the prime minister and the foreign minister. Why bother to ask when the answer is predictable and permission will not be

granted? And I wasn't exactly a child.

Sure enough, Prime Minister Ehud Barak hastened to distance himself from my comments, and others said the Armenian genocide must be left to the historians. And I was declared persona non grata in Turkey; to this day, Ankara isn't waiting for me.

In the wake of the 2010 Mavi Marmara episode, when Israel-Turkey relations soured, there were encouraging signs. Perhaps now — so belatedly — the injustice will at last be corrected. What's there to lose?

And this month came a new glimmer of hope with Kim Kardashian's visit. What the Jewish head hasn't accomplished the Armenian derriere would. But this hope failed too. Yes, the Knesset is sending MKs to the Armenian capital for the centennial — Likud's Anat Berko and Zionist Union's Nachman Shai — but these are backbenchers briefed by the Foreign Ministry. What difference does it make if they go or not?

It's hard to understand why Turkey refuses to be different. Recently it seemed to be softening, but now it's returning to its same old path. It's not to blame for its ancestors' sins, nor should it have to bear the historical responsibility for the Armenian Nakba. The wheel cannot be turned back, it can only be pulled out of the mire of blood and resentment, and be turned in new directions.

Yossi Sarid is an Israeli news commentator and former politician. He served as a member of the Knesset for the Alignment, Ratz and Meretz between 1974 and 2006.