

# FIGHTING AN 'UGLY' WORD

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**✘ Editorial**, 26 May 2015

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Reasonable and fair people would say Chile should return what it took illegally, but in international politics Bolivia's just demand is a nuisance. It's also linked to a word which is considered unsavory in polite society. The word is 'irredentist'. After a century of talking among themselves about the return of their lands from Turkey, Armenians are beginning to talk publicly about the issue. As a result, 'irredentist' will be flung at them by Turkey and its friends.

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Irredentism is a 'dirty' word because it has become a cousin to ultra-nationalism and racism, thanks to the steady drip, drip effect on the international public's consciousness through the collusion of many states and their media. Thus governments, establishment historians and mainstream media describe irredentism as a patchwork of old grievances, ancient feuds, ethnocentrism and fascism which "breed victim mentality" and violence. In fact, irredentism (from Italian for 'unredeemed') is a political/popular movement intended to reclaim and re-occupy lost homeland. It can also involve liberating fellow nationals who live under foreign rule. But the guardians of the status quo abuse irredentism and sometimes even equate it to the toxic revanchism ("revenge" in French) to distort a just cause to nothing more than a call for revenge.

A rare moderate voice in the wilderness of hostility to irredentism is that of scholar Thomas Abrosio who said irredentism is “an attempt by existing states to annex territories of another state that their co-nationals inhabit.” It’s an incomplete definition but at least it takes no sides.

Why are most states hostile to irredentism? Because irredentists want to change the map and perhaps the balance of various alliances. Irredentists get bad press because they challenge real politik, unjust wars and unfair treaties. Wikipedia, echoing establishment propaganda, says irredentism is often advocated by nationalists--as if nationalism was a sin.

Thus despite their just cause, Bolivians are ugly irredentists. Likewise Armenians who want back their 4,000-year-old homeland of Western Armenia. Palestinians are irredentists too. So are Cypriot Greeks who demand an end to Turkey’s illegal occupation of Northern Cyprus.

There was a time when irredentism was admired...in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century when the German principalities struggled to create a united German state, when the Italians fought Spain and Austro-Hungarian Empire for the return of traditional Italian lands, when France demanded Alsace-Lorraine (lost in the Franco-Prussian War in 1870) from Germany. When Germany, France and Italy were irredentist it was heroic to be so. When smaller, weaker countries or ethnic groups demand the return of their lands, they are ultranationalists and chauvinists and their demands historically invalid and impractical. “You can’t turn the clock backwards,” they are told. Thus it’s no accident that irredentism is uncommon among large and powerful countries: they have taken what they wanted and now don’t want any change, especially if the changes are perceived to be harmful to the interests and alliances of the “establishment” nations. When Armenians begin to make their land demands from Turkey public, they should be prepared for criticism and hostility from these usual suspects. Armenia and Armenians have already been “accused” in some quarters of “grabbing” Artsakh, eyeing Nakhichevan (from Azerbaijan) and Javakhk (from Georgia).

Armenians should make their case on historical, ethnic and juridical grounds, in addition to the depredations of the Armenian Genocide. Armenia should make its case also by pointing out that it was not a signatory to the two treaties (Kars and Moscow) and diktats which illegally gave away Armenian land (Kars, Ardahan, Nakhichevan and Artsakh) to Turkey and Azerbaijan. Armenia should also add a ‘sidebar’ to its demands by declaring that it will be forever a “failed state” because of its small size, lack of resources and its landlocked status. Meanwhile, the Diaspora should make a case that Eastern Turkey is Western Armenia and as such it’s the homeland of Diasporans far more than the Republic of Armenia. The depredations of the Genocide, of course, will be an essential part of the Diaspora case.

While the Diaspora is slowly making public its demands from Turkbeijan, Armenia for obvious reasons hasn’t been vociferous, although Kars and Ardahan, Nakhichevan and Artsakh were wrested from Armenia thanks to Soviet/Turkish conspiracy. However, Armenia has avoided an explicit and formal recognition of the existing Turkey/Armenia border. In fact, in 2013, Prosecutor General

Aghvan Hovsepian declared: "The Republic of Armenia should have its lost territories returned and the victims of the Armenian Genocide should receive material compensation..." Turkey protested by sending a *pro forma* complaint. Armenia's Heritage Party has demanded the return of Armenian lands but has shied away from being explicit.

By proving the justness of their cause Armenians may yet make irredentism a respectable word. A tough job, but someone has to do it.

What about Bolivia? Two years ago it took its case to the International Court of Justice at The Hague. La Paz is optimistic that it will get a positive verdict from the Court.

Turkey doesn't recognize the jurisdiction of the The Hague. That's why the [National Congress of Western Armenians](#) would take the Armenian Case to the European Court, if Turkey doesn't respond positively to the NCWA.

