MUTAFYAN MUST TELL TURKS 'NO'--OR BE IGNORED BY THE WORLD

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The first time I heard the name Mesrob Mutafyan was when I was living in London and he was still a bishop. I learned of Mutafyan from a Greek priest who had been in Constantinople (as the Greek Church still calls it--are you listening, Patriarch?) and was assigned to the Greek Patriarchate for seven years.

The priest and I had become friends--for reasons not worth going into here--and he was surprised that I had not heard of the Bishop. He praised Mutafyan highly for his intelligence and piety and predicted great things for him.

During one conversation (which he brought up, I suspect, to tell me the following story) he indicated that the Turks were afraid of Mutafyan because he came across as being independent and not controllable. He then told me about the time that Bishop Mutafyan had been kidnapped by the Turks--as the Priest said--to try to get him to refrain from complaining to the authorities on behalf of Armenian Church interests and, probably, to prevent Mutafyan from ever considering a higher office in Constantinople.

According to the priest, one morning about 2am, there was a heavy pounding on the door of Mutafyan's home. He answered the door, in his pajamas and wearing slippers. When he opened the door, he was grabbed by two thugs and quickly forced into an automobile with two other thugs. They rode around Constantinople for a while, with the thugs making threats on Mutafyan's life. Then, they drove out of the city and, two hour later, in the Turkish countryside, Mutafyan was thrown out of the car and left to fend for himself. They had not physically abused him.

Around 4am in the morning, with only his pajamas and slippers to protect him from the night air, and no money, Mutafyan made his way home. He reported the incident to the Turkish police. "To this day," the priest added (if such addition were necessary), "the thugs have not been found."

Most people are aware of the beating given to the now-Archbishop Mutafyan, sometime later, by a couple of Turks, on the sidewalk near his home. These thugs were never found, either.

This story I bring up to possibly explain why the now-Patriarch is playing the dummy to the Turkish ventriloquist. He knows from these events what the Turks can do. Also, he knows that his nomination to become Patriarch was opposed by the Turkish authorities (in violation of the Treaty of Lausanne) and, when he was elevated to Patriarch of the See of Constantinople, his "confirmation" was held up by the Turks (again, in violation of the Treaty of Lausanne.). And, finally when the Turks had to accept the decision of the Armenians, the title of the centuries-old Patriarchate became ***". . .of Istanbul and all Turkey."*** The Greeks, to their credit (and they deserve very little other credit) still maintain the title ". . .of Constantinople" and still are fighting for the right of Bartholomew to bear the additional tile of ***"Ecumenical Patriarch."***

It is easy for people to say, "Let's you do. . . ."

And it is possible that Mutafyan knows that the West won't give a damn about his negative views on the Armenian Genocide and will know that he is under pressure. But, as recent events have shown, and as Turkey's apologists have quoted him, no one knows (or, at least, accepts) that Mutafyan is acting under duress.

I, alas, was one of those, which explains why I have sat on this story for years.

But, no longer. I have no wish to make him a martyr by hoping that he will refuse to become an apologist for the Turks

and become a mouthpiece for Turkish denials and, then, like Hrant Dink, be murdered. But, Mutafyan must say "No." He must call on the West (at least the Western clergy) and inform them that Turkey is in violation of the Treaty of Lausanne (as regards, the Greeks, too, of course) by interfering in Church matters, by demanding that the Armenian patriarchs (and Greek, too) be Turkish citizens, and the scores of other violations by Turkey to which the world turns its blind eye.

It is not enough for the world to suspect that whenever he (and the Chief Rabbi--but, note, not the Greek Patriarch) utters the Turkish line, it is under pressure. It is possible, too, that he realizes that the future of the Armenian Church in Turkey is at stake, and a little compromise here and there won't hurt the Church. But, he errs--and badly--because at the current rate of the Turkish violations of the Treaty of Lausanne regarding religious matters of its recognized minorities (Armenian, Greek, Jewish), there will be no Armenian Church tomorrow, or next week, anyhow. That is Turkey's long-term aim.

Someone must have said: "People who make short-term compromises suffer in the long term." If not, I am saying it. Now, it may be too late for Mutafyan to tell Turks, "No more," but he should try.

Somehow, I had lived in the (now forlorn) hope that Karekin II would announce to the world--through personal letters to Heads of State, to the United Nations, to the Council of Europe, to the European Union, to the World Council of Churches, and through the various news agencies, that whenever Mutafyan utters anything other than Church-related issues (on dogma and faith) his words should be ignored. But, that, apparently, is not to happen...

In trying to be fair to the man (in keeping with the American Indian maxim. "Before you judge someone, walk in his moccasins for one day") I find that with each utterance from him, being "fair" becomes difficult.

There are enough hypocrites out there (most of them in Washington) who know that they should ignore Mutafyan, but they find it convenient to cite him as proof that it is only the nasty American Armenian Diaspora that wants to say nasty things about the 'dear and sweet' Turks.

But, what bothers Turkey (and its apologists) is that Turkey, having created the active and vocal American Armenian Diaspora, is now suffering the wrath of that Diaspora. But, I digress.

So, with this essay, I have stopped giving the benefit of the doubt to the ***Patriarch of Istanbul and all Turkey.***