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Posted on April 2, 2015 by Keghart



Category: Opinions

Bernard Nazarian, London UK, 11 April 2015

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Under the cover of WWI the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) or "Young Turk" (YT) rulers of Turkey at the time, 1908-1918, planned and executed the 1915-16 "deportations" which started with the illegal arrest, imprisonment and murder of the bulk of the Armenian intelligentsia and thinkers, political and religious leaders, writers and poets, doctors, teachers and professionals in general, in the then Ottoman/Turkish capital of Constantinople and provincial centres **on 24th April 1915** followed by disarming and slaughter of Armenian conscripts serving in the Ottoman Army followed by the deportation of the dispossessed and defenceless population (mainly women, old men and

young children) to their tortuous and violent deaths in the Syrian desert when well over one million died. Finally there is the immediate post WWI and the beginning of the Kemalist "Republican" period, 1918-23, with renewed aggression by Kemalist nationalists against the Republic of Armenia in the Caucasus as well as Cilician Armenia, which ends with the infamous total burning and destruction of the Armenian (and Greek) quarters of Smyrna in September 1923.

Of the 1913 Armenian population of just over two million (Armenian Church returns) less than 100,000 remain, almost entirely concentrated in Istanbul. Hardly any Armenians survived in Western Armenia: Hundreds of thousands were butchered outright; women and young girls after being robbed raped and violated. Many others died of starvation, exhaustion, exposure and epidemics during the forced marches or at the desert concentration camps. Some Armenians living along the periphery of the Ottoman Empire at first escaped the fate of their countrymen in the central provinces of Turkey. Tens of thousands in the east fled to Russian Armenia to lead a precarious existence as refugees (many of these died of starvation, exposure and subsequent Turkish invasions). Only the Armenians in Constantinople, the capital city, were spared deportation, due to German intervention and strategic and technical circumstances.

The destruction of Armenians in general and the 1915-23 in particular is well documented in the national archives of all the major European states, as well as the US and Canada. Hence not only the archives of Allied States (Britain, France, Italy and Russia) or neutral Swiss, Norwegian (missionaries) and US (America was neutral until 1917 and as such had diplomatic and missionary presence in the Ottoman Empire until that date) but also the **archives of Axis States allied to Turkey (Germany and Austria-Hungary)** thoroughly record in detail, and therefore authenticate the genocidal process and destruction of the Armenian people: Suffice it to say that the British, French and Russian governments issued the famous joint statement of May 1915, a month after the systematic beginning of the Genocide, calling it (the 'deportations') "**a crime against humanity and civilisation**" holding the Turkish government and individual officials personally responsible and promised to prosecute and punish them after the end of the war; the US ambassador Morgenthau telegrammed to his superiors in Washington: "The Turkish government is carrying out a **Race Extermination against the Armenian people**"! In his 1929 multi volume work about WWI Winston Churchill called what happened to Armenians **"Holocaust"**! (15-20 years before the term was used for the German crimes against the European Jewry). The crime that had no name had to wait until Rafael Lemkin the Polish-Jewish lawyer and international jurist coined it in 1940s: "Genocide: Destruction of a people in whole or in part due to ethnicity, nationality, religion, or", as he elaborated, "what happened to the Armenians in 1915 and to the Jews in 1940s"!

There is unanimous agreement amongst the overwhelming majority of independent and respectable historians, genocide specialists and international lawyers and jurists that what Turkey did to Armenians, in 1915 in particular, was genocide the facts of which were first established in the British Blue Book ("The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-16") by its tireless and

thorough author, Arnold Toynbee (and Viscount James Bryce), and published in 1916 while the Genocide was still ongoing. The Association of Genocide Scholars (including eminent Israeli and Jewish genocide scholars, Yehuda Bauer and Israel Charny), formally recognised the 1915 Armenian Genocide (2005) as have over 20 countries, including practically all European states (France, Italy, Holland, Belgium, Germany, Poland, Greece, Cyprus, Switzerland and Russia, amongst others – **with conspicuous exception of Britain!**) as well as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Venezuela… as have the European Parliament and over 45 US states. Denial of the Armenian Genocide is a crime in Switzerland, France, Slovakia, Cyprus and Greece.

Indeed in the last few years a growing number of Turkish intellectuals and principled campaigners for democracy, human rights and freedom of expression inside Turkey are recognising the Genocide despite draconic laws against such action (Turkey has the largest number of journalists and human rights campaigners in prison in the world – next to the Baku regime). The most famous Turkish writer, Nobel prize-winning Orhan Pamuk was prosecuted under the infamous 301 law, "Anti-Turkishness" in 2006-08 for criticising the official denialist position of Turkey, and Hrant Dink, the editor of the Armenian-Turkish weekly "Agos", was gunned down outside his office in January 2007 after similar and prolonged persecutions. His teenage murderer, Ogün Samast, was treated as a national hero and the real conspirators (security organs) behind the murder have never been charged or prosecuted.

The official Turkish government position, notwithstanding slight "sophistication" and change of tune in recent years, remains staunchly denialist despite all the evidence. Significantly this denialist narrative is not confined to official government statements repeated at the highest levels but permeates the entire government machinery (administration, bureaucracy, security organs and judiciary), as well as education, academia, media and society at large. This is the case despite the fact that - while the world community failed to prosecute the CUP-YT criminals to account for their deeds after the war as promised - the Istanbul Military Tribunal under the immediate post-war government in 1919 did prosecute and find the top CUP-YT leaders guilty and sentence them to death in absentia – rehabilitated later by Kemalist Turkish Republic. Thus the murderers of the Armenian nation, the CUP-YT criminal leaders, authors and organisers of the Armenian Genocide of 1915, namely Talaat, Enver, Jemal, Shakir, and others, (equivalents of Hitler, Himmler, Goebbels, Goering, Eichmann) are to this day officially celebrated in school textbooks as heroes, flowers are laid on their tombs annually, there are streets, boulevards and schools named after them while the Armenian people are actually referred to in the same text-books as "traitors that deserved what they got"!

Therefore the official Turkish state narrative remains as truly and consistently racist-ultra nationalist today as the original racist and expansionist CUP-YT ideology of Pan-Turkism and Pan-Turanism which aspired to transform the multi-ethnic and multi-faith Ottoman Empire into a "Turkey for Muslim Turks" through the genocidal destruction of all its non-Muslim nationalities and millennia old

civilisations, Armenians in particular but also Greeks, Assyrians and others. The Armenians suffered doubly because of their distinct ethnic and cultural identity (racism) as well as due to expansionist dreams of the CUP-YT s: Armenia (both Ottoman/Western and Eastern/Russian) had to be eliminated for a successful expansion to the Caucasus and further East to Central Asia and "Turan".

There is also ample evidence of the Genocide in the massive humanitarian response to the Genocide by the ordinary people of Europe, US and the Middle East without which those who had miraculously survived the deportations, pillages and murders would have perished in the Syrian refugee camps. The American and British people responded generously as did the Norwegians and others. Lebanese and Syrian people and authorities, themselves just freed from Ottoman slavery, accepted Armenians with open arms and great hospitality. The Armenian people are grateful for these and will never forget this great humanitarian gesture.

However the outcome or balance sheet of the Genocide was nothing short of catastrophic for the Armenian people. Some have compared it to the Jewish Holocaust. Or rather insist (**recalling Hitler's infamous directive to his high command on the eve of his invasion of Poland in September 1939: "kill without mercy men, women and children of the Polish race or language… who after all speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians**"!) that had Turkey, and the individual rulers responsible for the crime, been called to account the Holocaust may well have been avoided!

Yet it is beyond any doubt that arguably the Armenian losses are incomparably greater in several respects and **the wounds or consequences are continuing to this day**: Apart from the immense loss of human lives, individual dignity, property and possessions the Armenians as a nation were uprooted from their lands and to this day all of Western Armenia and huge areas of former Russian Armenia (Kars and Ardahan - important railways - and territories around the Biblical Mount Ararat) have been left to Turkey as a prize and reward for their "successful" criminal act of genocide! The financial, territorial and cultural losses suffered by the nation are incalculable – innumerable priceless libraries of manuscripts and works of art were pillaged or destroyed as were thousands of millennia old churches and cathedrals, schools and colleges. **It is important to remember that while Germany has acknowledged the Nazi crimes and has paid substantial compensation to the Jewish people and to the state of Israel since 1950s (and is continuing to do so and to prosecute Holocaust denialism on German soil) Turkey is consistently denying the crime (indeed is spending millions annually to propagate and export denialist lies), has paid no compensation, is in possession of the lands which it criminally cleansed of its original inhabitants and, armed to the teeth and having invaded or threatened practically every neighbouring state is refusing to establish diplomatic relations with Armenia and is actually blockading it (closed its border in 1993) all of which are hostile and aggressive acts of war according to international law: A true neighbour from Hell!**

As if all these were not enough Turkey is also the prime supporter of the corrupt regime in Baku in its genocidal war against the Armenians of the Republic of Nagorno Karabagh/Artsakh and by its

universally condemned persistent interference in OSCE-Minsk Group sponsored negotiations for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. The Baku regime is also blockading Armenia and spending billions of petro dollars annually on arms purchases to create instability in the entire region.

Finally, what is the British government's position regarding all this? To define it as fatuous, mean and diabolical would be the understatement of the century! Despite the generosity and sympathy for Armenia of the British people and honourable exceptions and immense friendship of individual statesmen by, amongst others, Gladstone, Rev Buxton and Viscount Bryce to our present day Baroness Caroline Cox, the official British government attitude and policies towards Armenia (except for a brief period from 1895) has been one of the main causes of the losses suffered by the Armenian people since mid-19th century to the present day. **As some authors have concluded "Armenia would have been better off without ever relying on Britain or British intervention"**. Just one or two examples should suffice to prove the point: Britain consistently propped up the brutal, utterly corrupt and bankrupt Ottoman Empire ("the sick man of Europe") in its rivalry with Russia and obsessive worries about its colonial and imperial interests in India: To this end at the Berlin Congress of 1878 (having secretly negotiated the "Cyprus Convention" with Turkey) Britain forced Russia to abandon the Armenian lands the latter had liberated at the 1877-78 Russo-Turkish war (significantly commanded by the brilliant Karabagh Armenian General Loris-Melikov) and receiving Cyprus in exchange for guaranteeing Ottoman territorial integrity! At the end of WWI when Turkey was defeated and prostrate and Britain, together with France, was in occupation of Constantinople it completely failed to disarm and dismantle the defeated Ottoman Army – allowing it to regroup under Mustafa Kemal who launched fresh deadly attacks against Armenia - or, contrary to numerous promises it had made to the Armenian people, to punish the criminals responsible for the destruction of Armenians or to assist the fledgling and struggling Armenian Republic of 1918-20 in any meaningful way. Instead it manipulated and used the latter to its last bitter end for its colonial and imperial interests in the Caucasus in alliance with the Whites, against Bolshevik Russia, and to gain favours and advantages with the Baku regime at the time, and therefore control of its oil. Later still, uniquely amongst European states, it refused to advance any aid or even a loan to the fledgling Soviet Armenian Republic struggling with over 250,000 refugees and multiple crises, despite pleadings by human rights figures and the League of Nations and agreement by other European states to provide such help.

Britain is also the only major European state which is consistently failing to recognise the Armenian Genocide and instead, wittingly or otherwise, is unashamedly supporting Turkey in its denialist, hostile and aggressive confrontation with Armenia. It does so (as does the government controlled BBC!) by treating the criminal/aggressor (unrepentant Turkey) and the victim (dismembered Armenia) as equals! By trivialising the losses and damage suffered by the latter, by advising "conciliation" between two immensely unequal sides (would it advise "conciliation" between the Nazis and their Jewish and other victims!!), contrary to all morality or ethical foreign policy, or to civilised European liberal-democratic and human rights values. And to crown it all,

while major European leaders (including, amongst others, Presidents Putin of Russia and Hollande of France and the Pope) are in Yerevan on 24th April this year to commemorate the Centenary of the Genocide and to sympathise with the Armenian people Britain is sending its highest delegation not to Yerevan but to Istanbul to celebrate Gallipoli's centenary on the same day when Gallipoli has never been commemorated on this day before but either 17th March, start of naval invasion in 1915, or 25th April, Gallipoli landings day!

Last but not least, its substantial, multi-layered and uncritical support for the Baku regime vis-à-vis the Karabagh conflict (BP is the biggest investor in Baku) is downright short-sighted as Baku is preparing a new inferno and genocidal war against the Armenian people (Armenia and Artsakh) which would have unforeseen but disastrous consequences for the whole region, not least for the billions Britain has invested in Baku.