# SECRET OPERATION ATTILA

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**Keghart.com Editorial Board**, 22 August 2012

The Armenian-Canadian community received a bracing pounce in its collective solar plexus when the "Ottawa Citizen" reported, on August 12, that the Turkish Embassy was secretly erecting a giant monument at the intersection of two major roads in Ottawa--Canada's capital--to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the slaying of Col. Attila Altikat at that location in 1982. Although the killer of the military attaché has never been identified, some believe the ASALA organization was responsible for the assassination. The statue will be unveiled on August 27.

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To penetrate the roots of the covert Turkish operation one has to go back to more than a year when Ankara announced it would launch a brand-new anti-Armenian campaign to counteract publicity related to the upcoming centenary of the Genocide. A strand of the Turkish strategy was to demonstrate Turks as victims of Armenians. Rafet Akgunay, Turkish ambassador to Canada, went to action and approached the government of Canada, the city of Ottawa, and the National Capital Commission (NCC) for permission to erect a monument in Canada's capital. The application, lobbying and permission were undertaken super hush-hush so as "to prevent possible interventions by the Armenian lobby," reported "Hurriet Daily News."

After receiving permission, Akgunay commissioned Turkish sculptor Necmettin Yagri to create the monument. Six months later, he approved Yagri's concept. It took another six months for the semi-circular steel-and-wood monument to be built. It's a huge, semi-circular structure, measuring six metres by three metres. The pieces were flown to Canada in July by the Turkish Airlines gratis and were assembled on site, under white tarp, by Turkish workers. In mid-August, when an "Ottawa Citizen" staffer photographed the assembly work, a Turkish worker photographed him in return.

Why did Ottawa approve the sneaky Turkish propaganda project is a mystery.  Another puzzle is

how the clandestine operation was kept under cover, for more than a year, when so many people were involved in its realization. Another enigma is the writing on the plaque. A week before the unveiling of the structure the Turkish Embassy and Canada's Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird persisted in stonewalling and not divulging the plaque's text. To counteract possible Armenian protests, the Turkish embassy has cagily said that the monument is "not just for Turkish victims, but all members of the diplomatic community who have met with calamity while trying to represent their nation's interests and further the cause of peace." Now, who could be against peace? Thus the monument is in honor of a Turkish diplomat while simultaneously commemorates the diplomats of 195 countries around the globe. If that's not universalism than Sultan Abdul Hamid II was no butcher. Perhaps it also honors Dag Hammarskjold, Patrice Lumumba and Julius Caesar.

Armenian-Canadians are naturally puzzled by many aspects of this furtive stunt. They are particularly shocked that the Canadian government has fallen prey to Ankara's latest propaganda gimmick in our own country. Hon. Stephen Harper's government was the first Canadian government to recognize the Genocide of Armenians, despite Turkish threats of retaliation. Mr. Harper's ethical stand, through annual proclamations on April 24 acknowledging the Genocide, has been steadfast, despite incessant high-pressure lobbying by Turkey's diplomats in our country. The prime minister has demonstrated similar principled stand on behalf of human rights around the globe and recognized the Rwanda Genocide and the Ukrainian Holodomor. He has not buckled under Chinese threats re Beijing's policy in Tibet. So why did the same Harper government yield to Turkey—a much weaker country than China and an insignificant trading partner?

Why give in to Turkish blackmail and single out Col. Attila and memorialize him in particular when countless other diplomats—including Canadian—go without lofty monuments? Why abet the high-pressure Turkish tactics?

Did the Canadian government concede to Turkish demands because of behind-the-scenes maneuvering by Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird and his cohorts? Since the days of deputy foreign minister Paul Heinbecker (his wife is Turkish) that ministry has been infested with opportunist turcophiles. In his position as foreign affairs minister Hon. Baird is responsible for the NCC.

In the past few years Ankara has also invited Canadian MPs and senators to "familiarization" junkets. Some of these wined-and- dined politicians have returned home singing Turkish Hosannas, and lobbied to rescind Canada's recognition of the Genocide.

Of course it doesn't hurt that Hon. Baird has many Turks in his Ottawa riding. There's no doubt that he was the clandestine point man in pressuring the government to give the necessary permits for the Turkish monument on Canadian soil.

Armenians are also shocked that the federal government gave the green light to the blatant Turkish ruse when in recent years Ottawa has advocated a policy of dialogue and reconciliation between the Armenian and Turkish communities. Didn't the government realize that in yielding to the Turkish

ambassador's demands Ottawa has helped sow further discord between the two communities? The decision could also become a catalyst which could spread hatred of Armenians in this country. And for what if not to advance Ankara's campaign against Armenians?

The mysterious Turkish operation, in collaboration with the Canadian government and the city of Ottawa makes one wonder about its covert nature and the statement that Armenians might prevent its realisation. As the reporter for the "Ottawa Citizen" pointed out "if the project was kept secret to prevent possible interventions by the Armenian lobby, does this not suggest there will be ongoing concern once the monument is unveiled?" The writer then wondered whether the government would "post guards 24/7." The reporter needn't worry that Armenians might destroy the monument. We are not racist Turks who go around the world defacing, destroying monuments to million martyrs.

We would like to inform the Harper government of another con game Ankara has up its sleeve. To silence Canadian proclamations on the Genocide, Turkey will soon spring Canada's internment policies of the First World War. At the time Canada interred Ukrainians, Poles, Serbs, Jews, Arabs, Assyrians, Greeks… and about 100 Turkish citizens. Turkey plans to tell Canada "how dare you criticize the internment of Armenians when Canada, in the same period, was interning Turks?" The surrealist joke is that many of the "Turks" Ankara will cite are Armenian…as citizens of Ottoman Turkey they were considered Turks. That's more chutzpah than the poor-mouthing fraudster banksters of Wall Street.

As this week Armenian organizations and lobbyists scramble for damage control we would like to mention the 800-strong Armenian "community" of Ottawa. While the group couldn't have foreseen or have prevented the monument calamity, it's a sad fact that the Armenians living in the nation's capital are disorganized and diffuse. This is their opportunity to work together for the advancement of the Armenian Cause.

The Armenian lobby should once and for all get its act together. While we still have an office in Ottawa (manned three days a week by an Armenian National Committee officer from Montreal plus a part-time assistant), we need a more solid presence in Ottawa. But the fully-manned office will not be a panacea: it will limp along, unless Armenian communities across the country support it by lobbying for local politicians. Lobbying also means supporting local politicians by contributing to their election campaigns in time and money. It's the height of irresponsibility to assume that one person in an Ottawa office can singlehandedly do an effective job in representing us in the capital when the opposition has brigades of Turkbeijani spokespeople.

Meanwhile, we need—and fast--a pan-Armenian effort to combat the recent Turkish outrage. Our organizations should get together and denounce the Turkish blackmail of Canada and demand that the plaque text be amended, if it's offensive to Armenians. We should also insist that the rumored phrase "condemn terrorism" be changed to "condemn terrorism, including state terrorism." As well,

we believe words like "Armenian terrorists" can induce harassment of innocent Armenian-Canadians. Already federal security officers have, in the past weeks, questioned a number of Montreal Armenians, and demanded their opinion re the Ankara monument. We encourage Armenians to express their outrage to Hon. Baird, with copies to the prime minister and to Hon. Jason Kenney. Armenian-Canadian organizations should also demand that Canada honor the memory of 1.5 million by erecting a monument in Ottawa. After all, the grandparents and great-grandparents of most Armenian-Canadians were slain by Turkey while the present Ankara government continues to deny what's as clear as the blood-red flag of Turkey.

Finally, the Turkish con game in Ottawa is not a solo act. As we approach the centenary of the Genocide Armenians should expect similar cynical propaganda tactics by Ankara. Armenians around the world should anticipate these stunts and scotch them before they are realized, as they tragically have in Ottawa.

Write to: Hon. John Baird at john.baird@parl.gc.ca  Please C.C. the prime minister's office at pm@pm.gc.ca  and  Hon. Jason Kenney at Jason.kenney@parl.gc.ca Write also to your local MP; after all, all politics is local.