

THE FIRST VOLLEY

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✘ Editorial, 30 January 2014

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Perhaps the first volley of the Turkish mythinformation war has already been flung...by Mustafa Akyol, author and columnist for the "Hurriyet" newspaper. Akyol wrote an article in "al-monitor.com" on Dec. 15 where he tried to justify the "deportation" of Armenians from their homeland by their Ottoman government. Of the various subterfuges and prevarications Akyol unleashed in his op-ed the most egregious is the one which Armenians can expect to hear frequently between now and April 2015. It's the one about Ottoman leadership's worries that Armenians were a nascent fifth column for a hostile Tsarist Russia.

Akyol wrote: "In the early 20th century, Armenian nationalists in alliance with imperialist Russia aimed at carving out an independent Armenia from the collapsing Ottoman Empire. Had they succeeded, they could have initiated an ethnic cleansing against the Muslims...This was the logic of the Young Turks wartime government...in response to the Armenian uprising that began earlier that year." This excuse for the "deportation" of the Armenians is the most blatant falsehood in Akyol's deplorable piece. It's no accident that it's also the most "dependable" weapon in Turkey's denialist arsenal. Fortunately for Armenians and for the historic truth, Akyol's and Turkey's tales are not difficult to smash into smithereens.

Exhibit A.

If the Young Turks "deported" Armenians because they suspected Armenians were plotting to tear apart the Ottoman Empire through clandestine cooperation with Russia, why did Ottoman authorities commit genocide also against the Assyrians and the Greeks? Sabri Atman, founder and director of the Assyrian Genocide and Research Centre, said in an interview a few weeks ago that the architects

and perpetrators of the genocide made no distinction. "They were claiming that an onion is an onion, whether it's red or white. It must be chopped," said Atman. The Turkish claim that Armenians had to be removed because they were fifth columnists is a lie.

Exhibit B.

If Armenians were conspiring to destroy the Ottoman Empire, why did 250,000 Ottoman Armenians volunteer to fight the enemies of the empire, although that same empire had slain 30,000 Armenians barely six years before and close to 300,000 two decades earlier? Soon after Turkey unleashed the genocide of Armenians, these Armenian volunteers were disarmed, taken to labor camps and eliminated by their Turkish superiors.

Exhibit C.

Historian Alan Palmer ("The Decline and Fall of the Ottoman Empire", 1992) wrote: "Neither group had links with the Russian government, as Ottoman apologists claim."

Exhibit D.

"It is a matter of historical record that the leaders of the major Armenian political party, the Dashnaktzoutiun, as early as August 1914, publicly declared their allegiance to the Ottoman State and vowed as citizens of the state to fight for the defeat of the country should the government, against all advice, decide to intervene in the war ..." ("The Key Distortions and Falsehoods in the Denial of the Armenian Genocide" by Vahakn Dadrian, Zoryan Institute, 1999).

Exhibit E.

To "prove" that Armenians were hostile to the Ottoman Empire, Turkey's propagandists say there were Armenians in the Russian army fighting Ottoman Turkey. As citizens of Russia, Armenians had to conscript in the Russian army. The Russian army also included Azeri, Georgian and Kurdish soldiers. Why doesn't Turkey accuse Azerbaijan, Georgia and the Kurds of fighting on the Russian side?

Exhibit F.

Since the Russian army occupied Eastern Armenia in the early decades of the 19th century, there was no love lost between the Armenians and the Russians. In fact, in an incredible diplomatic gaffe, Russia's foreign minister exposed Russia's malicious intentions when, in 1895, he said that Russia preferred an Armenia without Armenians.

Exhibit G.

To defend their country, Armenians in the Ottoman army fought against their brother Armenians in the Russian army.

Exhibit H.

When Minister of War Ismail Enver Pasha was defeated by the Russians in Sarikamish in early 1915, "it was Armenian soldiers who saved him from being killed or captured by the Tsarist forces" ("The Armenians: Report 32, Minority Rights Group, 1998" by David Marshall Lang and Christopher J. Walker). Moreover, Enver Pasha is on record for having "praised, in February 1915, the loyalty and bravery of the Armenian soldiers" ("Armenia: The Survivor of a Nation", London, 1980). Enver, a member of the Young Turk triumvirate (Minister of Interior Mehmed Tala'at Pasha and Minister of the Navy Ahmed Jemal Pasha) ordered the Genocide of Armenians.

Exhibit I.

Demonstrating a breathtaking talent for falsehood, Turkey's apologists say the Ottoman government "displaced" Armenians for their own safety...that the Ottomans wanted to remove Armenians from the Ottoman-Russian theatre of war. If that was the case, why did the Ottomans deport Armenians from Urfa, Marash, Ainteb, Kharpert and hundreds of other communities which were thousands of miles away from the Russian front? If the deportees' (mostly women, children and old people) welfare was of concern to Turkey, why were Armenians not allowed to take anything along on the long march to the Syrian Desert?

Exhibit J.

The fascist Young Turks had already planned the elimination of Armenians several years before the start of the war. They wanted to create a homogenous Muslim Turkish state and a pan-Turkic empire stretching from the Bosphorus to China. The Armenians were considered an obstruction to their racist designs. The Genocide had nothing to do with the alleged Armenian betrayal of the Ottomans.

Exhibit K.

There were close to 5,000 Armenian fedayeen fighters in Russian Armenia, led by Antranig, Keri, Tro and others. Apart from the small self-defense militias in Van, Urfa, Trabizon, Shabin-Karahisar, Mush, and Gemereck, there were no Armenian fighters in the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Army had 2,800,000 soldiers, in addition to Mevlevi, Kaderi, Balkan, Kurd, and Arab volunteers, "bashbozüks", released criminals and the highly-sophisticated German Asia Korps. Considering the ridiculous disparity in the number of fighters and that the Ottomans were buttressed by German officers and endowed with modern German weapons while the pitifully tiny Armenian self-defense forces relied on antiquated or home-made weapons, how can one believe that the Armenians had ambitions to "carve" the empire and create an Armenian state?

In the next 450 days and beyond, Armenians should have no difficulty debunking Turkey's boiler-plate mythology of Armenian "betrayal". The facts are clear. The facts are the enemy of denialist Turkey. However, in the truth-is-a-lie and the lie-is-the-truth world the Turkish government operates in, uninformed third parties could be duped by Ankara's creative history of the Genocide. It's incumbent upon Armenians—collectively and individually--to provide these third parties with the truth--chapter-and-verse--sans emotionalism or bitterness.

