

THINK TANKS AND SEPTIC TANKS

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✘ Editorial, 13 January 2014

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The rot set in when think tanks extended their *raison d'être* from research into advocacy. Rather than limit themselves to providing objective research data, they became glorified lobbyists. They became hired pens for various causes. Thus there are now right wing agenda promoting Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, the Cato Institute and their less numerous left wing counterparts. Although many think tanks are partisan, they claim to be independent, objective, and without ideological predisposition.

The main objective of think tanks is to influence government and public opinion. They do so by supplying "experts" to governments, by writing op-ed articles, by providing advice to politicians and to civil servants.

Enter Turkey and the Turkic Alliance of America (TAA). Mainly to neutralize American-Armenians, Turkey has established university chairs in the U.S and funded the publication of books by disreputable scholars. Meanwhile, Turkic-Americans have acted as the local arm of Turkey. Established through the efforts of the Gulen Movement, the TAA works closely with a think tank called the Rethink Institute of Washington. How closely? The TAA and Rethink have the same address, suite number, and telephone number. The "Rethink" tag is deliberate. It's intended to change the American view of Turkey.

The Rethink Institute ponderously--and perhaps with tongue in cheek--describes itself as "an independent, not-for-profit, nonpartisan research institution devoted to deepening understanding of contemporary political and cultural challenges facing communities and societies around the world in realizing peace and justice, broadly defined."

Ahem. Reading the description one would assume that its interests are global. However, the articles it publishes, the events it organizes, "research" it sponsors are on Turkic topics. It's headed by Executive Director Dr. Fevzi Bilgin, a graduate of Ankara University. Board member Dr. Rovshan Ibrahimov's email address ends with "gov.az" meaning he is an Azerbaijani government official. On the board are also Dr. Ebru Ogurlu (Turkey) and Dr. Galym Zhissbek (Kazakhstan). Others who contribute are Ihsan Dagi and Hakan Tasci of the misleadingly-named Middle East Technical University (Ankara), Cagri Erhan (Ankara University), Savas Genc (Bilgin University), Sener Akturk (Koc University), Hasan T. Arslan (Marmara University graduate), Bezen Balamir Cozkun (Bogazci University graduate), Oguz Dilek (Zirve University), and Kilik Bugra Kanat, executive director of TUSKON-US (Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists of Turkiye). In a failed attempt to "fig leaf" its identity as a Turkish front, Rethink features research fellow Vladimir Fedorenko and Michael Werz, senior fellow, Center for American Progress.

Rethink doesn't respond to queries re its funding.

Last year Rethink published a research paper titled "Revisiting the Armenian-Turkish Reconciliation" by Executive Director Bilgin and Yelena Osipova of the American University in Washington. Ostensibly intended to encourage Armenians and Turks to make peace, the paper's skewed content belied the supposed lofty intentions of the authors.

More than once the paper referred to the Genocide as "the events of 1915" and said that it's Armenians who claim there was genocide.

The paper said Armenians and Turks should "adopt more pragmatic approach to the issue and in dealing with its present repercussions, all the while being sensitive to painful historical memories." This is standard Ankara double-talk where Turkey alleges equivalency of the Genocide and Turkey's losses during WWI, as if Armenians were responsible for Turkey's defeat.

The paper insisted Azerbaijan take part in Armenian/Turkish reconciliation negotiations. It didn't explain why Baku's participation in Turkey's recognition of the Genocide is relevant.

Bilgin and Osipova then dug deep into their hostility toward Armenians and wrote: "Armenians, as an ethnic group, have lived in the Armenian Plateau for centuries, coming under the rule of all the various empires and kingdoms that have conquered the region..." In other words, according to them, there never was an Armenian state. Armenians had no kings; they just swapped one imperial master for another. And note "all the various empires". Saying "the various empires" couldn't do the trick: it was required to add the "all".

To justify the Genocide, the authors said that Ottoman Turkey believed "Armenians could switch sides and join the Russians, in case the latter invaded." No word about the centuries of Turkish persecution and massacres which could have pushed defenseless Armenians into the Russian embrace.

Regarding the unlamented Protocols, the paper blamed Armenia for their failure. It said Armenian and Turkish lobbies in the West are "in intense competition to out-spend..." thus implying that Diaspora Armenians have pockets as deep as that of the world's 17th largest economy.

Finally, the paper advised Ankara to make a formal and sincere acknowledgment of the "events of 1915" while adding that Armenians "will have to recognize that lands cannot be 'returned' and reparation cannot be paid where official documentation and insurance are absent." How foolish and irresponsible of Armenians, who while being driven to the desert, neglected to take along the deeds of their houses and businesses, and didn't keep the sales receipts of their furniture, not to mention detailed lists of family jewelry.

Which brings us to Raffi Bedrossian's article ("Two Solitudes, Two Narratives") about the Zoryan Institute, the only Diaspora Armenian think tank. Unlike many other think tanks, Zoryan is truly independent and non-partisan. Its work is respected and is acknowledged as an unbiased centre for global genocide research. While Ankara spends millions through its "think tanks" and hired "scholars" to deny the undeniable, Diaspora Armenians have just one think tank: an institute where genuine scholarly work is being done. The Zoryan Institute is the brain-child of the three Sarkissian brothers and is headed by Kourken (Greg) Sarkissian of Toronto. In an interview with Istanbul's "Agos" last August, he said: "We study the forces and factors that shape the Armenian reality worldwide."

For 30 years the Sarkissian brothers have been, by far, the largest financial contributors to the Zoryan Institute. To guarantee that the vital work the institute continues long into the future, people concerned in truth, in human rights, and in the prevention of genocide should pitch in and financially support the Zoryan Institute. Armenians have a particular moral obligation to support this lonely light in the murky Turkish night. The contact addresses are: zoryan@zoryaninstitute.org and zoryanusa@aol.com.

