TURKS & NEO-OTTOMANS

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By Vicken Gulvartian, USA, 21 September 2009

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If the key to what the Turks are seeking, namely, honor, respectability, and modernism, lies with us the Armenians then we must be ready to walk the walk.
But first, some facts:

Turkey is an Asian nation of 72 million inhabitants. It is a muslin state (not secular), inhabited by peoples of Turkic stock. 99% of Turkey's land mass is situated in the Asian continent. The country holds no natural resources, and a great percentage of the population live off the land in medieval settings. Ethnic divisions are acute, especially against a Kurdish minority of 15 million who do not speak the same language, and do not share the lexicon of unity that emanates from Ankara.

The global economic boom of the past decade has been good for Turkey, as Europe sought cheap labor to manufacture shirts and underwear, and hotel rooms on beaches serving all-you-can- drink cocktails to sun-deprived Scandinavians, and hard-drinking Brits. Much similar to countries such as say, Vietnam, 80% of Turkey's economy is based on soft industries – textile, tourism, food packing, wireless telecom and finance. Industries that foreign investors will easily move out of the country in case of political turmoil or economic instability, and there's been quite a few of those these past 20 years – coup d'états and financial meltdowns, defaults on foreign loans, and currency devaluations.

Turkey's much publicized million-strong army is well trained to suppress the Kurds, and preserve an image of a democratic (that's a joke), secular (false) , modern (more like a rural-urban hodge-podge), and European (Euro-Asian identity crisis) state. It can, more appropriately, scare neighboring minnows like Kurds, Armenians or Syrians, but has never been tested against a credible military challenge. The notion that Turkey has one of the most formidable armies in the world is yet another

myth.

Modern Turkey is the direct successor of the Ottoman Empire – the same entity that massacred 1.5 million of its own Armenian citizens, expelled million others, and forcefully converted generations of Armenians and Greeks through servitude and assimilation. An empire built on religious fanaticism, brute force, cruel taxation and a dismal human rights record. Name one thing that can be attributed to the Ottoman Turks that survives to this day as their lasting contribution to civilization. Nothing, absolutely nothing!

Leave it to the Turks to position themselves as big players on the world stage these days. Look at various regional conflicts and Turkey's self-suggested involvement as mediators, and you see no effective solutions, and no genuine contributions: Azerbaijan-Armenia, US-Iraq, Iran-Saudi Arabia, Syria-Israel. I know of no world conflict - political, social or economic- that Turks have yet been able to solve or put to rest! None. But that has not diminished from Turkey's belief in its own lies: That it has actually arrived on the world scene, without the burden of its past, or the moral responsibility of the present.

Worst yet, Turks see themselves as uniquely positioned as an "emerging economy" to confront their distracters, especially those who keep bringing up "this issue of the Armenians". In reality, they are burdened by the knowledge that any admission to crimes against humans (Genocide) would be a direct betrayal of the "principals" upon which Mustafa Kemal founded their new nation in 1923– as a shining country of a very happy and homogeneous population, at peace with its Ottoman past, and ready to take on the challenges of a modern future built on universal values of democracy. A fiction of Mustafa's imagination conceived possibly at one of his "better moments" (he eventually died of alcohol-induced cirrhosis at the age of 57). In reality, modern Turkey has not and cannot progress beyond his idea of greatness as long as it is held in place by an army that meddles in all affairs of the state, suppressing the press and the multitude of historians, authors, journalist and scholars relentlessly, meticulously and heartlessly, and assassinating some of them at intervals. The people of Turkey, on the other hand, have fear as their greatest motivation to… not talk!

Which bring us to 2009 and the current negotiations between Turkey and Armenia, and possibly the opening of the border for the first time since Armenia became independent in 1991. While Armenia must negotiate for the opening of the border as a gesture of good neighborly relations and for commercial reasons, it is continuously reminded to do so without pre-conditions of Turkish admission to the Genocide.

Under pressure from the US and occasionally Europe (led by Turkey's only true historic friend – the British) the Turkey-Armenia issue is getting to look more like a classics case of a crisis between a weaker party forcefully stripped of the only right it possesses for negotiations – the legitimacy of human rights, and the stronger party pretending to promote what's best for everyone, as long as the best serves their own grand ambitions. Enter into this mess at the eleventh-hour the mushy obama-

esque style of US mediation in disputes of the world, and the debate takes the bizarre new twist of "Let's not forget, but let's forgive", or even better yet, "Let's forget and forgive".

The key to the puzzle rests, of course, in Yerevan, where a corrupt government run by a president known for his gambling prowess not in the corridors of power, but rather in the halls of Monte Carlo runs the show. As shrewd as he thinks he may be, his counterpart is Tayyip Erdogan, himself, a risk-taker who has a string of successes in his build-up of a private financial empire worth in the billions of dollars. Mr.Sarkissian, take note!

Can the government in Yerevan be trusted? And is the Armenian acuity to eventually make a good deal out of a bad situation enough to make this a risk worth making? I don't think so. Turkey needs nothing of Armenia except for an indefinite suspension of the Genocide issue, or for at least the next 15 years until Turkey becomes, dadaaa … European. The Turks believe that the absence of a debate is the absence of the problem itself.

It is essential for Armenia to advance good relations with all its neighbors, including Turkey. This means open borders, and negotiations on all issues of interest to countries with shared borders, and that's exactly where the potential entanglement lies: What to do about the Genocide?

Do not misunderstand. My whole argument is not about what Turkey will do or must do, nor what the US can impose or must not. But rather what we, Armenians must not do, and cannot do.

What Armenia must not and cannot do is to allow the Genocide to be a topic for discussion. It is certainly a critical issue and a very vital topic… but not for discussion. Not by anyone, not anywhere, and not at anytime.

In other words, the notion of "Let's forget" is not possible, nor any suggestion that the Genocide is "a topic" that is for future historians to discuss, dispute and conclude. The Genocide is a fact, a historically documented fact. Facts are not negotiable, nor revised. Period! The message that goes to Turkey is loud and clear: There is no hope for their image as a genuinely modern country until all disputes of their past are settled. Mistakes of fathers have a tendency to stick with the permanence of an asterisk in most unlikely places. Mustafa Kemal knew that, but at the end he lacked the European-ness he desperately aspired to solve the case of the Ottomans right at the beginning.

The Republic of Armenia faces its biggest challenge so far because the very history leading to its creation and existence will be questioned at each step of the way should Armenia participate in a bilateral commission of historians that will be created to, supposedly, study the Genocide. The process is nothing more than a cover for years of empty talk in light of "new archives" that Turkey will put on the table for endless discussions with no conclusions. Open-ended talks will surely stall as Turkey will insist on the inclusion of yet another "new " (fabricated) evidence of atrocities by Armenians. The same argument that has been at the core of their strategy in denying the Genocide.

There can be only one outcome to the Turkish stance on the Genocide: Admission. That, however, is

a course that the people of Turkey might eventually elect to take. It will be a good idea for them to start where it's easiest- With the more that million Turks amongst themselves whose roots are to be found in their Armenian grandmothers who in 1915 were forcefully converted after their families were massacred during the Genocide.

Then what are we Armenians to do, while we wait for Turkey to open, modernize and be civilized by forces from inside, from places yet unknown? We are all missing the point if we make Turkey or the US the frontline of our decision to a plan of action. It is time to collect our senses, wave all politicians goodbye and work on the continuity and prosperity of Armenian entities everywhere in the world as a constant reminder to Turkey as to who may be losing the battle today, but can win the war eventually. That is the course of history, and no one understands that better than the exact same mustachioed neo-Ottomans in dapper suits I have listed in the beginning of this column.

An article in the July issue of The Economist about Turkey concludes with a notation by "a Western official" saying, " when it comes to Turkey and Armenia, Turkey wins every time". The person in question has failed to notice that we Armenians are not out to defeat Turkey. They have their own people to do that for us.