

The Cost of Denial
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Congressman Pallone, Congressman Knollenberg, Archbishop Aykazian, Archbishop Choloyan, Senator Menendez, Ambassador Markarian, Members of Congress, and Honored Guests:

Today, we honor the memory of Congressman Tom Lantos, who left us this year. One of his final acts in Congress was to support House Resolution 106, commemorating the Armenian genocide, and to send it for a vote in the House. But last year, as every year, it never reached a vote in the full House.

Again the United States surrendered to the ninety year campaign of denial by the government of Turkey. The State Department and the White House have continued the cowardly policies of every Secretary of State since Lansing who have considered it more important to placate the Turkish government than to be truthful about history.

The tactics of genocide denial are predictable, and the Turkish government has used them all. Question and minimize the statistics. Attack the motivations of the truth-teller. Blame “out of control” forces for committing the killings. Claim that the massacres don’t fit the legal definition of genocide, even if over a million people were killed. The Turkish government has three favorites:

Blame the victims. Claim that the killings were in self-defense against people who were disloyal to the Ottoman Empire during a World War. In fact, very few Armenians joined the Ottoman Empire’s enemies, and certainly none of the women and children could have. But they were murdered nevertheless.

Claim that Muslim Turks also suffered many deaths. The problem with this argument is that the deaths were in battles with European troops, not at the hands of the Armenians, who were deported like sheep into the desert.

Finally, claim that the deaths were inadvertent, due to lack of food and water, not due to intentional destruction. The falsehood of this claim is amply proven by the thousands of pages of eye-witness reports from Armenian survivors, American consular officers, missionaries, and most tellingly, in the archives of the Ottoman Empire's allies, Germany and Austria-Hungary, as well as by the records of the Ottoman Courts-Martial of 1918-1920. This was intentional mass murder by starvation. It wasn't an unfortunate by-product of a deportation.

So why can't a resolution telling the truth about the Armenian genocide pass Congress?

Here we run into two more tactics of denial:

Claim that current peace and reconciliation are more important than blaming past perpetrators for genocide. The latest version of this tactic is the Turkish government's proposal to set up an "historian's commission" with half of the members appointed by the Turkish government and half by the government of the Republic of Armenia to "study" the facts of what occurred in 1915 – 1923. The problem with this proposal is that the Armenian genocide has been thoroughly documented and studied by genocide scholars, many of whom are not Armenian, and the historical record is unambiguous. In 1997, The International Association of Genocide Scholars declared unanimously that the Turkish massacres of over one million Armenians was a crime of genocide. A "commission of historians" would only serve the interests of Turkish genocide deniers. There is no more "another side" to the truth about the Armenian genocide than there is about the Holocaust.

Most importantly, don't tell the truth because to do so would not be in current US political, economic, and military interests. The US has a huge airbase in Turkey that we need for our wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Turks have threatened to close that base, cancel purchases of American military equipment, boycott American goods, and even pass their own resolution condemning nineteenth century US government massacres of Native Americans. (A number of US Congressmen and Senators have beaten them to it and already introduced such resolutions, and those resolutions should also be passed.)

The Cost of Denial

In my studies of genocide, I have discovered that the process of every genocide has predictable stages. They aren't linear, because they usually operate simultaneously. But there is a logical order to them, because a "later" stage cannot occur without a logically "prior" stage. It is also useful to distinguish them, because they can help us see when genocide is coming and what governments can do to prevent it.

The first is **Classification**, when we classify the world into us versus them. The second is **Symbolization**, when we give names to those classifications like Jew and Aryan, Hutu and Tutsi, Turk and Armenian. Sometimes the symbols are physical, like the Nazi yellow star.

The third is **Dehumanization**, when perpetrators call their victims rats, or cockroaches, cancer, or disease; so eliminating them is actually seen as "cleansing" the society, rather than murder.

The fourth is **Organization**, when hate groups, armies, and militias organize.

The fifth is **Polarization**, when moderates are targeted who could stop the process, especially moderates from the perpetrators' group.

The sixth stage is **Preparation**, when the perpetrators are trained and armed, victims are identified, transported and concentrated.

The seventh stage is **Extermination**, what we legally define as genocide, the intentional destruction, in whole or in part, of a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group.

When I first outlined these stages in a memo I wrote in the State Department in 1996, I thought these seven stages are all there are.

Then I realized there is an eighth stage in every genocide: **Denial**. It is actually a continuation of the genocide, because it is a continuing attempt to destroy the victim group psychologically and culturally, to deny its members even the memory of the murders of their relatives.

Denial has a profoundly negative impact on everyone concerned.

Denial harms the victims and their survivors.

That is what the Turkish government today is doing to Armenians around the world. Elie Wiesel has repeatedly called Turkey's denial a double killing, as it strives to kill the memory of the event. We believe the US government should not be party to efforts to kill the memory of a historical

fact as profound and important as the genocide of the Armenians, which Hitler used as an example in his plan to exterminate the Jews.

Around the world, victims of genocide ask first for recognition of the crime committed against them. It is as essential to healing as closing an open wound. Without such healing, scars harden into hatred that cripples the victim and cries out for revenge.

Denial harms the perpetrators and their successors.

After the Ottoman Courts-Martial of 1918-1920, there were no further trials. The killers literally got away with mass murder. With blood on their hands, they returned to their work. But out of that denial grew a Turkish state that denied the existence of all non-Turks within Turkey. Kurds became "mountain Turks," Kurdish schools were closed, and people speaking Kurdish had their tongues cut out.

Studies by genocide scholars prove that the single best predictor of future genocide is denial of a past genocide coupled with impunity for its perpetrators. Genocide Deniers are three times more likely to commit genocide again than other governments. We should be on guard for Turkish attempts to suppress Kurds, which continue to this day, and recently resulted in an invasion of Iraq.

Turkish school children are taught that the Armenian genocide is a myth. Turkish writers who write the truth are prosecuted for "insulting Turkishness," even if they have won the Nobel Prize. Publishers like Hrant Dink who dare publish the truth are murdered, and their murderers are celebrated as national heroes. These are the remnants of racist ultra-nationalism, of fascism, and do not belong in a member of NATO that hopes to join the European community.

The next step that Turkey must take to become a real democracy is to acknowledge its own past. Like an alcoholic drunk on the liquor of ultra-nationalism, it must first admit its own problem before it can leave its addiction.

Why should this be so hard? Germany has done it, and has become one of the strongest democracies on earth. The current Turkish government

did not commit the Armenian genocide. Why should it not face the truth about the crimes the Ottoman Empire committed over ninety years ago?

Denial harms the bystanders

Countries that recognize the truth about the Armenian Genocide are considered enemies by Turkish successor regimes. The parliaments of many countries have affirmed the fact of the Armenian Genocide in unequivocal terms, and proposed congressional resolutions like H. Res. 106 are commemorative and non-binding. Yet the resolution faced opposition from those who fear it would undermine US relations with Turkey. It is worth noting that, notwithstanding France's Armenian Genocide legislation, France and Turkey are engaged in more bilateral trade than ever before.

We would not expect the US government to be intimidated by an unreliable ally with a deeply disturbing human rights record, graphically documented in the State Department's 2007 International Religious Freedom Report on Turkey. We would expect the United States to express its moral and intellectual views, not to compromise its own principles.

In fact, telling the truth would ultimately be good for US-Turkish relations, because they would no longer be based on diplomatic lies.

The Joint Congressional Resolution recognizing and commemorating the Armenian Genocide will honor America's extraordinary Foreign Service Officers (among them Leslie A. Davis, Jesse B. Jackson, and Oscar Heizer) who often risked their lives rescuing Armenian citizens in 1915. They and others left behind some forty thousand pages of reports, now in the National Archives, that document that what happened to the Armenian people was government-planned, systematic extermination—what Raphael Lemkin (the man who coined the word genocide) used in creating the definition.

By passing the resolution, the U.S. Congress would also pay tribute to America's first international human rights movement. The Foreign Service Officers and prominent individuals such as Theodore Roosevelt, Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, and Cleveland Dodge, who did so much to help the Armenians, exemplify America's legacy of moral leadership.

Of course, the State Department did not want Ambassador Morgenthau to tell the truth, and after he returned to the United States he never got another diplomatic assignment. But he inspired his son, Henry Morgenthau, Junior, who became FDR's Secretary of the Treasury and was a tireless advocate for rescuing Jews during the Holocaust.

Let us today commemorate those who died in the Armenian Genocide, but also Ambassador Henry Morgenthau and others who had the courage to tell the truth about it.

Let us remember Ambassador Morgenthau's words when he met with Talaat Pasha, who asked him:

"Why are you so interested in the Armenians anyway? You are a Jew, these people are Christians."

Morgenthau replied:

"You don't seem to realize that I am not here as a Jew but as the American Ambassador....I do not appeal to you in the name of any race or religion, but merely as a human being."¹

¹ Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story*, Taderon Press, 2000, p. 222.