

The Second Move in the 2011 Genocide Obfuscation Gambit?

At about this time every year the Turkish government engages in political antics, the purpose of which is to counter any incremental success Armenians have achieved in their quest for recognition of the Turkish genocide of 1.5 million Armenians. During April of 1915, under the guise of WWI, the Turkish government condemned the entire Armenian citizenry under its jurisdiction, and some of the neighboring lands, to extermination. The crime and denial of genocide isn't a game, but international relations is a contest.

In past years, major US defense contractors have pressured members of Congress urging them not to undertake any vote for genocide recognition, so as not to “offend” their Turkish customers. Also, past US Secretaries of State either individually or collectively, have pleaded a similar story to members of Congress, recommending that any recognition of genocide would anger the Turks.

The US Congress regularly reaffirmed or otherwise memorializes historical events including the near destruction of Native Americas and the Nazi Holocaust of European Jews. Official US recognition, and to a similar extent an Israeli recognition, of the genocide of the Armenians would ease the way for Armenian reparations. Turkey is becoming more confident of its role globally and in the region. It endeavors to assert influence by representing itself as a big brother to regional Muslim states. Turkey finds itself in a position from which it can simultaneously divert the attention of the Armenian diaspora while providing face-saving excuses vis-a-vis engagement with Armenia for major powers to ignore Armenian demands for genocide recognition.

Since around 2003, Armenia and Turkey have been in deliberations with the goal of establishing diplomatic relations and opening their common border. This border was unilaterally shut by Turkey in 1993 as Armenian forces were succeeding in securing the region of Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijani rule. “The Protocol on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations Between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Turkey” was officially signed and simultaneously announced in Berne, Yerevan, and Ankara on Aug. 31, 2009. On the heels of this announcement, Turkey attached preconditions to any Turkish ratification. As a result, this document is all but dead, even though the signed protocol passed legal approval by Armenia's Constitutional Court. It was rather presumptuous for Turkey to have set post-facto pre-conditions. This lack of Turkish resolve allowed the Armenian president, Serge Sargsyan the latitude to take a tougher stance on the genocide issue. On March 24, 2010, at the Armenian Genocide memorial in the Syrian desert at Der Zor, Sargsyan give a hard hitting speech against the policies of the Turkish government, calling it the last stop on the Armenian death marches. Sargsyan called Der Zor the Armenian Auschwitz. As Sun Tzu said, “Opportunities multiply as they are seized.”

On February 7, 2011 in an article published in the Turkish newspaper Sabah (http://www.sabah.com.tr/Gundem/2011/02/07/yahudi_acilimindan_sonra_ermeni_acilimi) author Duygu Güvenç wrote that Turkish Minister of State, Egemen Bağış, after attending the January 27, 2011 Holocaust Remembrance Day (first for a Turkish state minister) in Istanbul, was instructed to subsequently attend Armenian April 24th activities. Apparently only Sabah reported this, although it was picked up by many Armenian media outlets. Since Güvenç's article is still on an active web site and has not been retracted, it appears to be an official trial balloon looking for any Armenian reaction. Alternatively, it could be Turkey's first move in the 2011 genocide obfuscation gambit.

It is a challenge to suggest or predict Armenia's reaction to this Turkish ploy because moves like these are not zero-sum, nor made in isolation. There is also a lack of information from ongoing diplomatic

efforts, if they even exist, in whatever form. There are costs in making foreign policy decisions, and similarly, in not making them. Given the limited information available to us, what might an Armenian response be?

Turkish general elections are scheduled for this year. According to polls, the AKP party has been steadily gaining popularity. Currently, it enjoys a substantial lead over its nationalist contender, the CHP. AKP party leaders may feel they can take a chance with bolder genocide obfuscation tactics considering such moves are coming at a time of transforming events in the region, placing such risky foreign policy moves out of media limelight in Turkey. This is not the case with citizens of Armenia or its diaspora, who view Turkish moves differently than official Yerevan. Turkey knows this and modulates its FP moves associated with genocide denial, highlighting such nuances.

FP moves are based on extracting the maximum benefit from prevailing conditions. They are not based on right or wrong, good or bad, but rather on interests. We know the overarching Turkish interest is deferring accepting responsibility for the crime of genocide.

Armenia should immediately invite the Turkish President, Abdullah Gül, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu to attend the April 24th genocide commemoration at Armenia's Genocide Memorial at Tsitsernakaberd. Turkey should be given a specific time limit to respond or the invitation is pulled. The Turkish delegation can join the hundreds of thousands of Armenians who gather to commemorate the victims of the 1915 genocide. The Turkish delegation would be accorded the customary VIP protocol at the Genocide Museum and attend lectures by prominent scholars. If Turkey was bluffing, Armenia was not. Armenia thus forces Turkey not to attend a genocide commemoration in some obscure Armenian community out of sheer embarrassment by refusing this invitation.

There are many scenarios that can be played out. As an exercise below, a simplistic flow of events that could characterize 2011 genocide obfuscation season is suggested.

Turkey's Move	Armenia's Move	Comment
Turkish Minister Bağış attending Armenian genocide commemoration printed in Sabah		Any Armenian unconditional approval will be viewed as weakness.
	Armenia waits for an official request while asking Turks for immediate clarification of intent. This must take place by early March	An Armenian rejection will be an advantage to Turks. Armenia knows this.
Turkey delays response to Armenian request for clarification		Turkey will delay a response in an attempt to maximize condemnation of the Armenian government from its diaspora
	Armenia waits no later than late March for a Turkish response	Armenia lays plans for an enhanced genocide commemoration at Armenian Genocide Memorial and

		makes it a publicly announced intention.
Turkey responds that it is interested in attending a genocide commemoration		Turkey is still using delay tactics and announces it is talking with Armenia
	Early April 2011: Armenia formally invites highest level Turkish representatives to Genocide Memorial commemoration	Turkey is somewhat taken off guard, thanks Armenia for the invitation
Turkey responds it cannot arrange for such an entourage to visit Armenia given so little time, but is willing to send lower-level representatives to an alternate event in some diaspora communities.		Turks have no intention of attending any genocide commemorations.
	Armenia announces it called Turkey's bluff on their false intention	Turks can claim they never made an official request

If the chain of events unfold close to the above, Armenia could use the outcome, internationally, as yet another example of Turkish disingenuousness. Armenia does its best to comply with the wishes of the international community, but as with the 2009 Protocol, Turkey added pre-conditions after nearly five years of deliberations, eventually killing the agreement.

“Pretend inferiority and encourage his arrogance,” wrote Sun Tzu.

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