

Who Is Doing What To Whom in Turkey?

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

The resolution passed by the U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Relations Committee (H.R. 106) on Oct. 10, acknowledging the genocide against the Armenian people in 1915, is *ostensibly* a victory for the Armenian lobby and the Armenian people, whether at home, or in the diaspora. That is, if one views developments as through a keyhole. Seen in the broader context of current strategic realities, however—realities obviously not on the radar screen of the Congress—the vote may provide a trigger for political and military actions in the turbulent Southwest Asia region, from which neither the Turks, nor the Armenians; neither the Iraqis nor the Kurds, nor anyone else, will benefit.

The 27-21 vote for the resolution, though not binding, represents the first time that such Congressional action has been taken, although the issue has been on and off the agenda for years. Largely symbolic, the resolution calls on the United States to acknowledge that the massacres which culminated in 1915 be designated a “genocide,” that President Bush characterize it as such in his annual April 24 message, and that he “ensure that the foreign policy of the United States reflects appropriate understanding and sensitivity concerning issues related to human rights, ethnic cleansing, and genocide documented in the United States record relating to the Armenian Genocide and the consequences of the failure to realize a just resolution....”

That the killings of Armenians beginning in the late 1890s and continuing through 1915 and beyond, constitute genocide, is not the issue. (And, to paraphrase the Bard, genocide by any other name is still genocide.) The fact that it was genocide has been documented, as referenced in the resolution, and our own research.* The real issue is: Will the current crisis in Southwest Asia, with the deteriorating situation in Iraq, simultaneous political crises in Lebanon and Turkey, and Vice President Dick Cheney’s planned new war against Iran, ignite a regional explosion, which could lead even to a new world war? Will the Congressional committee’s resolution contribute to that process?

In response to the vote, Lyndon LaRouche issued a strongly-worded denunciation of Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), who threw her wholehearted support behind the resolution—despite the fact that four former secretaries of

state had written a joint letter to her, urging against it, and warning that it would gravely destabilize U.S.-Turkish relations. LaRouche declared that he held Pelosi personally accountable for the consequences of the House action. He also noted that the Islamist government would take the opportunity to flaunt its nationalist credentials by fully backing the crackdown on the PKK and the denunciation of the crazy U.S. position peddled by Pelosi.

The scene is set for a new, dramatic escalation: Just as the House committee members were casting their votes, international wires reported that Turkey had begun shelling positions of the terrorist Kurdish PKK, inside northern Iraq. On Oct. 9, the Supreme Anti-Terror Board of Turkey met under the leadership of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, to deliberate over how to meet the increasing PKK threat. The PKK had killed 15 Turkish troops over the preceding weekend in southeastern Turkey. Following the meeting, the Board issued a written statement, saying: “The institutions concerned have been given the necessary orders and instructions to take all kinds of legal, economic and political measures to end the presence of the terrorist organization in a neighboring country in the upcoming period, including if necessary a cross-border operation,” into Iraq. According to the Turkish paper *Zaman* Oct. 12, the Board meeting, which decided on the incursions, had discussed a new intelligence report, “PKK 2008,” which says that the group has its weapons in Iraq, and has been moving them closer to the Turkish border. The report stressed that it is Iraq which is the sole safe haven for the PKK at present. Furthermore, it said that the PKK, hoping to beef up recruitment, plans spectacular terror attacks inside Turkey in 2008.

On Oct. 9, following the Turkish government statement that it would move aggressively against PKK terrorists, the civilian and military authorities put the country on the highest state of mobilization, the Turkish *Daily News* reported. Defense Minister Vecdi Gönül said, “there is no need for parliamentary authorization for a hot pursuit operation” to pursue PKK terrorists, but, he added, the government should get authorization from Parliament. Chief of General Staff Gen. Buyukanit stated: “If you ask me whether it would be useful or not, my answer is yes. It will be useful.”

It is expected that the government will ask parliament for approval for a cross-border incursion. Prime Minister Erdogan, speaking to CNN Turk on Oct. 10, said this did not mean immediate action, however. “We could send the motion to parliament tomorrow,” he said, adding that there could be a vote next week. His government wants a one-year authorization for an incursion. “It does not mean that everything will happen once we have the authorization,” he said. “We want to have the authorization in hand so as to make a swift decision when it becomes necessary.”

U.S. Stonewalling

Turkey has repeatedly threatened such moves, and the United States has repeatedly opposed the idea. Turkey has

* Muriel Mirak-Weissbach, “The Armenian Genocide: True Justice Requires the End of Geopolitics,” *EIR*, May 3, 2005.



NATO

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argued, and rightly, that the U.S.A., as the occupying power in Iraq, could and should disarm the PKK terrorists there. Talks have gone on between the two allies on this issues. Referring to them, Erdogan said they “did not produce the expected results.” He told CNN Turk, “It turned out to be wasted time. They [the U.S.] say they are against the PKK. If you are against, then you should do what is necessary.”

So, Turkey will go it alone, if necessary. But it will not be a simple mop-up operation. If Turkey intervenes, then the authorities of the Kurdish Regional Government, who have been providing de facto support to the PKK, could respond. Although Turkey and Iraq recently signed a landmark agreement on cooperation in the fight against Kurdish terrorism, Baghdad balked at allowing Turkey the right for cross-border incursions, on grounds it would violate Iraq’s sovereignty. And the Kurds have threatened retaliation. Washington has also vehemently opposed any such actions by the Turkish military in Iraq. Any move against the Kurds inside Iraq would also catalyze reactions from Kurds in neighboring states, like Iran (which has run joint anti-PKK operations with Turkey) and Syria. It is known that the Cheney networks have developed capabilities inside the Kurdish separatist movements in this region, especially in Iran. One Turkish newspaper has mooted that the PKK itself is nothing but a NATO-U.S. operation, aimed at destabilizing Turkey.

If the Turkish government required any encouragement to go ahead with such plans, then the vote in the House committee provided it on a silver platter. Ankara’s response to the resolution’s vote, was immediate. A government statement said the “irresponsible” resolution would probably endanger bilateral relations. “We still hope that the House of Representatives will have enough good sense not to take this resolution further,” said the statement. If it did, this would jeopardize a strategic partnership with an ally; it would be an “irresponsi-

ble attitude,” said the statement. “It is unacceptable that the Turkish nation should be accused of a crime that it never committed in its history.” President Abdallah Gul also called the vote unacceptable.

On Oct. 11, the Turkish government recalled its ambassador for talks, for “a week or ten days,” according to the Foreign Ministry. At the same time, the Foreign Ministry summoned the U.S. Ambassador to Turkey, Ross Wilson. And, the Turkish *Daily News* reported on a series of demonstrations in the country, against U.S. Embassy and consulate buildings.

Among the measures Turkey could take, to “punish” the U.S.A. for the Congressional resolution, is the possible closure of the Incirlik base to the United States. Defense Secretary Robert Gates was quoted by AFP on Oct. 12, saying that 70% of air cargo, as well as 30% of fuel shipments and 95% of mine-resistance armored vehicles which are destined for Iraq, go through Turkey. After talks with his British counterpart Des Browne, Gates said, “The Turks have been quite clear about some of the measures they would have to take if this resolution passes,” and recalled that France had been punished after its parliament passed a similar resolution on the genocide. These measures included denying overflight rights to the French Air Force.

Israel’s Stake in U.S.-Turkish Relations

Israel is also reportedly concerned about the new strains in U.S.-Turkish relations. According to the *Jerusalem Post* of Oct. 12, Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan, who met Israeli President Shimon Peres the previous Sunday (and invited him on Gul’s behalf to visit Turkey), said that relations with Israel could also suffer. Babacan had mentioned on his visit that the perception in Turkey was that “the Jewish organizations ... and the Armenian diaspora, the Armenian lobbies, are now hand-in-hand trying to defame Turkey, and try-



U.S. Air Force/Tech. Sgt. Larry A. Simmons

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ing to condemn Turkey and the Turkish people.... So if something goes wrong in Washington, D.C., it will inevitably have some influence on relations between Turkey and the U.S., plus the relations between Turkey and Israel, as well.” Other Israelis cited the recent moves by the U.S. Anti-Defamation League, to acknowledge the genocide, saying this meant that Israel would also be held responsible for the Congressional vote.

The Israeli angle is interesting, especially since that the Turks have recently been engaged in aggressive diplomatic efforts to mediate between Israel and Syria, in hopes of sparking some sort of negotiations towards peace. On Oct. 12, Syrian President Bashar Assad, in an interview to *Al Shuruq*, a Tunisian daily, said that Turkey had, for the last six months, renewed its efforts to mediate peace talks between Syria and Israel. Assad revealed that Turkish officials have been making frequent visits between Ankara and Damascus in ongoing efforts to prepare the ground for Israel-Syria talks.

This, and other recent events, raise the question: Is there an active policy being pursued by the Cheney-led war party in Washington, to force Turkey into a series of counterproductive military and political moves? The Turks are, as said, seeking to mediate between Israel and Syria. But Cheney’s group has made clear it wants nothing to do with Syria, and refuses to allow any discussion of the Golan Heights in the so-called peace conference the White House wants to organize for November. Furthermore, Turkey recently signed a major gas deal with Iran (public enemy number one in Washington), whereby Iranian gas would travel via Turkey to European consumers. Washington made known its disapproval. Just days ago, on Oct. 10, it was announced that Tehran and Damascus had

signed a huge oil deal, whereby Iran will deliver 105 billion cubic feet of gas per year to Syria, a deal worth \$1 billion. Significantly, the gas will be delivered to Syria via Turkey. Is Turkey to be punished for these initiatives?

The Achilles’ Heel

If the members of the House committee were to remove their blinders and look at this broader picture, they might think again about how to proceed. Establishing truth about the historical record is a precondition for establishing justice, in this case, for the Armenian people. But, should their Congressional actions provide the pretext for military moves in the region of the sort indicated above, what will they have gained?

By the same token, it must be said that the official Turkish attitude to-

wards the Armenian question has made it possible for forces on a higher strategic planning level, to utilize it as a political tool. As one Turkish publication, the *Star*, wrote on Oct. 12, the problem is that Turkish officials have refused to deal with the Armenian issue rationally. Since the tragic events themselves, one Turkish government after another has solemnly declared that there was no genocide, that the Armenians who died were hapless victims of World War I, etc. Not only that, but according to a paragraph in the Turkish legal code, it is a crime to offend “Turkishness.” Any reference to the Armenian genocide is considered such an offense against Turkishness, and is punishable. Recently, the son of Hrant Dirk, an Armenian journalist who had been prosecuted for speaking of the genocide, and was assassinated by a crazed ideologue, was also condemned for similar thought crimes.

As long as this sort of mentality prevails, the issue of the Armenian genocide can be used to manipulate Turkey and its people. A sane approach to the issue, would be to bring together responsible historians from both sides, to unlock the Ottoman and other archives, and seek to find the truth about those tragic events. One important feature that such research would reveal, is the role of the British in the World War I machinations that led to the genocide. Lamentably lacking in the U.S. Congress’s resolution, is, in fact, any mention of the role of the British in the Young Turk operation which organized the massacres. Such a historical inquiry should be undertaken, as has been proposed by exceptional historicans on both sides, in the search for truth, and in the spirit of reconciliation between the Armenian and Turkish people, once and for all.