



Acknowledging The Armenian Genocide

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America has moral and strategic purposes in denouncing the massacre of 1.5 million Armenians in 1915 as a horrendous genocide perpetrated by Turks.

The facts are not in dispute. Ample documentation shows that for two years, hundreds of thousands of Armenian Christians were forcibly marched out of their towns and villages, killed, starved, and crucified until death as part of a deliberate ethnic cleansing campaign by the Young Turks government of the dying Ottoman Empire. Twenty-two countries, including those of the European Union — which Turkey aspires to join — have marked those events as genocide.

For Americans, the moral imperative is intuitive. Which Greek, Jewish, Italian, Irish, Hispanic, or black American in this kaleidoscopically diverse nation of immigrants — all touched in one way or another by discrimination — can look in the mirror and say, "It's okay with me to kill people because of their religion, ethnicity, or origin"?

In that sense, the American Congress, which occasionally rises above its partisan instincts, was right to draft the resolution condemning the Turkish massacre nine decades after the fact. The Congress should now vote it in.

The American government's strategic imperative to do so is even more compelling, regardless of the protests by Turkey and the Arab world.

Turkey lives in a region where many governments and terrorist groups are actively engaged in a variety of ethnic cleansings. These are directed especially but not exclusively at the 20 million Arab Christian minorities. Another 50 million people, including some 20 million Kurds living in Iraq, Syria, and Turkey are sitting ducks; not to mention the Druze, Yazidis, Bahais, Maronites, Christian Palestinian Arabs, and Sudanese Africans, all of whom are in the process of being killed or evicted from their places of origin right now.

These ethnic cleansings guarantee the obsolescence of American interests and Western interests in the greater Middle East.

Arab Christians of the Middle East, to cite one minority, have acted ever since the late 18th century as the cultural bridge upon which civilizing Western influences have crossed into the Arab Muslim world. Works of literature, politics, and the grand civic values of Western civilization were translated, adapted, and

implemented largely by those minorities, which thrived until the early 1950s in Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and Iraq.

Protecting what is left of those Christians and the even larger groups of other ethnicities is not charity work but is essential for preserving Western interests. Indeed, Prime Minister Erdogan of Turkey, in protesting Western pressure to own up to the massacres of Armenian Christians in 1915 threatened on Saturday to go after the Kurds in northern Iraq. Four years after the war in Iraq began, the fanatical Shiite majority government there has waged an ethnic cleansing war of its own, targeting both Sunni Muslims and Iraqi Christians. It has been savagely successful. Half of Iraq's entire Christian minorities of 2 million — who represent 5% of the 25 million Iraqis, are now out of the country altogether, refugees looking for a new home.

In Lebanon, the combination of Hezbollah and Syria have set their sight on cleansing that country of Maronite Christians and their other Western allies as a new civil war looms.

In the grand scheme of modern Middle East history, the entire concept behind the Arab and Muslim world's rejection of Israel is premised on Israel's identity as a "Jewish state." It is a rejection grounded within the notion of ethnic and religious cleansing. Now that Turkey has become an ascending democracy run by an Islamist party, it is imperative that Turkey signals its accord with the broader Western project of civil society and respect for minorities. That is why Turkey's friendship and its NATO affiliation should come second to its assumption of responsibility for past crimes against humanity. The future is a reflection and a continuation of the past.

Indeed, not only should Turkey issue its mea culpa to Armenian Christians, but move energetically to eliminate from its laws all discrimination against the Kurdish minority, their language, and full participation as Turks.

The American president, the State Department, and the Pentagon were short-sighted to oppose Congress on this Armenian issue just because we need Turkey as a transit point to Iraq. The whole idea of going to Iraq was to create long-term interests in stable, civil, multicultural societies across the greater Middle East.

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