

Armenian Genocide

April 24th is the date of the annual memorial that Armenians observe to recall the horrific massacres carried out by the Turkish Government in 1915. It was part of their policy of ethnic cleansing to remove both Greeks and Armenians because they were regarded as a threat to Ottoman dominance. The Armenian genocide might not have had Gas Chambers and Extermination Camps, but over a million and a half men, women and children were driven from their homes, and either killed outright or starved to death simply because they were Armenians.

The Turkish president and autocrat Recep Erdogan, as with his predecessors for the past 100 years, has steadfastly refused to recognize the massacre as genocide and done all he can to dissuade the rest of the world from saying so. Claiming that it was a civil war in which the Christian Armenians were trying to undermine the Muslim Turkish state, so they got what they deserved.

In 2009 at Davos in Switzerland, Erdogan had the bare-faced audacity to insult President Shimon Peres for daring to defend Israel accusing him of genocide in Gaza. Peres gently reminded him of Turkish treatment of Armenian and Kurds. Erdogan lost his temper and walked out. For years the West has appeased Turkey for political, strategic, and military reasons. Not only the USA and NATO countries but Israel too.

Israel too was reluctant to offend Turkey and chose to ignore it. In 2007 Prime Minister Olmert blocked a debate on it in the Knesset. Shimon Peres in 2008 helped prevent the Anti-Defamation League from supporting a Congressional debate on the Armenians. It was not until Erdogan's moves to break off contact with Israel and undermine it that President Rivlin ten years ago addressed the Knesset on the issue. He said, "It is my duty as a Jew and Israeli to recognize the tragedies of the Armenians and other peoples."

The World, the UN, and its farcical Human Rights Council still haven't recognized the Armenian Genocide. They seem more interested in attacking Israel's right to self-defense than in calling out genocides elsewhere.

President Trump too refused to take the matter up with Erdogan and on the contrary, said what a big fan he was of his. So, it came as a welcome surprise that this year on the anniversary of the tragedy the American President took a moral stand, officially declared it a Genocide. Something that even Barack Obama was unwilling to do.

Last week Professor Colin Shindler wrote a powerful, well-documented article in the Jewish Chronicle, giving an overview of the historical background to the Armenian Genocide and Israel's response. <https://www.thejhc.com/comment/opinion/all-jews-have-a-moral-duty-to-recognise-armenian-genocide-1.516274>

This was Biden's statement:

"Each year on this day, we remember the lives of all those who died in the Ottoman-era Armenian genocide and recommit ourselves to preventing such an atrocity from ever again occurring. Beginning on April 24, 1915, with the arrest of Armenian intellectuals and community leaders in Constantinople by Ottoman authorities, one and a half million Armenians were deported, massacred, or marched to their deaths in a campaign of extermination. We honor the victims of the Meds Yeghern so that the horrors of what happened are never lost to history. And we remember so that we remain ever-vigilant against the corrosive influence of hate in all its forms." <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/24/statement-by-president-joe-biden-on-armenian-remembrance-day/>

I can't explain why Biden chose to do this or who was behind it. My gut feeling is that he intervened to please the Iranians he so desperately wants to do a deal with at any cost. They are, after all, fighting the Turks for dominance in Syria. But I am pleased he did regardless.

There is another angle to this story. The German Army was involved. It was a close ally of Turkey during the First World War. Its military had forged close links with the Turkish Armed Forces both in armaments and advice. German Generals and officers participated and oversaw the campaign against the Armenians. It is claimed that the Germans learned from their experience that it was possible to murder millions and that they could get away with it because the rest of the world would not take any measures to intervene. This gave them the confidence to try it out with the Jews. Taking advantage of more modern industrial methods of genocide.

In 2015, German President Joachim Gauck acknowledged Germany's "co-responsibility" for the Armenian genocide, while a book published in the same year by the journalist Jürgen Gottschlich detailed the political collusion of Turkey's most important European ally in the First World War, which provided military advice and training for the Ottoman Empire throughout the Wilhelmine period. A recent article by the German filmmaker Wolfgang Landgraeber specifically reiterates earlier evidence that German companies provided the guns, and German soldiers the expert advice on how to use them, German officers also laid what Landgraeber calls the "ideological foundations" for the genocide.

We Jews are so hypersensitive because of the long history of crimes perpetrated against us and the ongoing disease of anti-Semitism and anti-Israelism that we do not pay sufficient attention to other atrocities. Religiously and morally, we are commanded to be sensitive to cruelty wherever it may be perpetrated. Despite the immense progress, there is so much evil still going on around the world. We are all of God's creatures. And while we do justify killing for self-defense, we also recognize that all life is precious, and we are all of God's children. To deny this or to fail to call it out is to deny the foundation of our religion. When we ignore evil it comes back to bite us.

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