

Armenian genocide measure is misguided

Passing judgment on Turkey without all of the facts would be a travesty of justice

By Bruce Fein
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House Speaker Nancy Pelosi believed that the Armenian genocide resolution (HR106) that passed the House Foreign Affairs Committee on Oct. 10 would be a slam dunk for her national stature and leadership. Instead, it exposed the speaker as not well-informed and a champion of parochial interests.

One week after the committee vote, Pelosi backtracked to reporters: "Whether it will come up for a floor vote or not, what the action will be remains to be seen." The speaker should block the genocide resolution because the known historical events are inconclusive at present. The Turkish government's proposal for an international fact-finding commission should be endorsed.

Before comprehensive facts are gathered by experts and without a trial, HR106 would convict the Ottoman Empire and its successor state, the Republic of Turkey, of an Armenian genocide more than 92 years ago. And the idea that members of Congress - thoroughly unschooled in American history and the Constitution and responsive to special-interest lobbies - are qualified to pronounce on the Armenian genocide controversy encroaches on the domain of the fatuous.

The House speaker compares the Armenian genocide claim to Rwanda, Darfur, or the Holocaust. But listen to author and Professor Bernard Lewis of Princeton: "The point that was being made was that the massacre of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire was the same as what happened to the Jews in Nazi Germany, and that is a downright falsehood. What happened to the Armenians was the result of a massive Armenian armed rebellion against the Turks, which began even before war broke out, and continued on a larger scale."

Armenian terrorism against the Ottoman Empire - aimed at provoking an overreaction by the sultan and European intervention - had flourished for 60 years before World War I. The Armenian patriarch was assassinated, and an attempt was made on the life of the sultan while he was leaving prayer. Ottoman Armenians saw World War I as an opportunity to carve out a separate Armenian state from the crumbling Ottoman Empire. Accordingly, they defected in the tens of thousands to fight with Russia and France, committed espionage, massacred Ottoman Muslims, and otherwise sought to obstruct the Ottoman war effort.

Capt. Emory Niles and Arthur Sutherland, on an official 1919 U.S. mission to the eastern Anatolia region of what is now Turkey, reported on Armenian war crimes or crimes against humanity: "In the entire region from Bitlis through Van to Bayezit, we were informed that the damage and destruction had been done by the Armenians, who, after

the Russians retired, remained in occupation of the country and who, when the Turkish army advanced, destroyed everything belonging to the Musulmans (Muslims). Moreover, the Armenians are accused of having committed murder, rape, arson and horrible atrocities of every description upon the Musulman population. At first, we were most incredulous of these stories, but we finally came to believe them, since the testimony was absolutely unanimous and was corroborated by material evidence."

More than 1 million Ottoman Muslims and Kurds died in eastern Anatolia from massacres or inhumane conditions of warfare. About 600,000 Armenians died in that time frame, according to historians. The vast majority of those Armenians perished in a wretchedly executed relocation order issued on April 24, 1915, as the Allies were landing at Gallipoli, and Van was falling to the Russians on the eastern front. War crimes were committed by both Armenians and Ottoman Muslims.

Persuasive evidence discredits the allegation that the Ottoman government intended to exterminate Armenians as opposed to removing them from regions notorious for anti-government activity such as espionage and sabotage. Tens of thousands were left undisturbed in Istanbul, Izmir and Aleppo. The core of the crime of genocide is a specific intent to destroy a national, ethnical, religious or racial group, as such.

Bryan Ardouny of the Armenian Assembly of America clucked in a videotaped interview for a documentary on the Armenian revolt: "We don't need to prove the genocide historically, because it has already been accepted politically." It is time for Speaker Pelosi to repudiate that cynicism, insist that historical truth matters and defer to an international commission of experts.

Bruce Fein is a resident scholar at the Turkish Coalition of America, an organization opposed to HR106.

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