

Congress and Armenia

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Efforts to rewrite the history of the events of 1915 through legislative fiat and vilify Turks are not new to the U.S. Congress. But past attempts were always contained through support in Congress and from successive presidential administrations. This time, it seems that the House of Representatives may be forced to take sides and pass unilateral judgment on a historic controversy that is as contentious as it is complex.

The truth is that the Armenian allegations of genocide pertaining to the events of 1915 have not been historically or legally substantiated. If the claim of genocide -- the highest of crimes -- can stand scrutiny and the facts are as incontestable as Armenian lobbies say, then the question must be asked as to why this issue has never been taken to international adjudication as prescribed by the U.N. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide.

Maybe more importantly, we must also ask ourselves why the Republic of Armenia is obstinately evading Turkey's offer to establish a Joint History Commission to examine together the events of 1915 through bilateral dialogue-- all the while openly supporting efforts to defame Turkey.

The fact is that, at least in the minds of some, there are gains to be made by politicizing this sad chapter in history rather than laying it to rest in a meaningful manner. This is why the matter has become intractable and this is why it can never be solved by Turkey alone.

Turkey has never been ambivalent about the tragedy that befell Armenians during World War I. Many Turks lost their lives during the mutual killings. And despite an onslaught of Armenian terror that lasted decades and took many innocent Turkish lives (including in the U.S.) Turkey has always been the one extending the olive branch. But while we search for ways to address this painful issue and develop our relations with Armenia, we cannot live in the past. Our sincere offer for dialogue and reconciliation is on the table. It is incumbent on Armenia to take the next step. We also cannot allow this issue, however painful, to dim our future.

Turkey and the U.S. have been friends, partners and allies for decades. This is a relationship that works for both our great nations and one that has weathered many a storm. It is an alliance based on common values that has continuously adapted to meet the evolving international threats and challenges. We value this partnership greatly but under current circumstances, the task of defending its importance is becoming increasingly hard.

While Turkey is working together with the U.S. to bring stability and promote lasting positive change to many troubled geographies, ranging from Afghanistan to the Balkans and from Lebanon to Iraq -- and while we are under constant attack from PKK terrorism emanating from the north of Iraq and our public opinion expects concrete results in our cooperation with the U.S. in ending the bloodshed -- it is impossible to explain how the U.S. Congress should move to take a decision that is acutely offensive and unjust to Turks.

Relations between nations, just like relations between people, are like spider webs. They can carry immense loads and withstand great pressures. But if the pressure is severely applied at just the critical point, the whole web can disintegrate. The web of mutual interests that bind our nations together dictates that we do everything we possibly can to keep it intact at a time when both sides need each other more than ever.

We are at a critical juncture in our relations. I do hope that common sense will prevail, as the alternative will not be in the interests of either the U.S. or Turkey. I therefore call upon the representatives of the U.S. people to demonstrate the statesmanship and vision needed to save the United States' time-tested partnership with Turkey from a self-inflicted shift that is likely to result from the further advancing of House Resolution 106.

In Turkey, we genuinely care about our relations with the U.S. I know many of our friends in the U.S. care for this relationship too. Let us not make a mistake that will surely strike a severe blow to a partnership we have worked so hard together to cultivate.

Mr. Erdogan is prime minister of Turkey.