

Richmond Times-Dispatch

Resolution

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The slaughter started in 1915. By the time it ended, perhaps 1.5 million died. Although Turkey persists in denying the scope and the intent of the enormities it visited upon an ancient people, it cannot erase what history remembers as the Armenian Genocide.

The House Foreign Affairs Committee recently passed a resolution recognizing the genocide as well as the Ottoman Empire's role in conducting it. The vote drew Turkey's scorn. The country recalled its ambassador and warned that the resolution could adversely affect U.S.-Turkish relations. Yesterday the Turkish parliament authorized military incursions into Iraq to combat Kurdish rebels. This does not benefit the United States.

Only days after it appeared headed for approval by the full House, the resolution's future fell into doubt. Many congressmen who had endorsed the legislation explained that while they continued to support the content they concluded that the timing was not propitious. A cynic (realist, that is) once described diplomacy as the art of lying for one's country.

Turkey sits astride two continents. West meets East in Istanbul. The country remains a friend in a region not known for its hospitality to the United States. The U.S. has supported Turkey's campaign for closer integration with the European Community. Turkey stands as one of the few Islamic countries to treat Israel with decency. Turkey and the United States need each other.

The United States should not refrain from calling things what they are. Similarly it must openly address its own substantial sins — slavery, for instance, and the butchering of the Indians. If others had committed the Trail of Tears, Americans would identify the tragedy as genocide. The U.S. also must assert to Turkey that truth is not an impediment to warm relations but a conduit for enhanced cooperation. Turkey seeks acceptance. Confronting its ghosts would help it achieve the status it deserves. Turkey now, too, has God on its side.