



## THE UNITED STATES SHOULD BE SQUEEZING TURKEY, NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND.

**By Christopher Hitchens**

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In the past century, the principal victims of genocide or attempted genocide have been, or at least have prominently included, the Armenians, the Jews, and the Kurds. During most of the month of October, events and politicians both conspired to set these three peoples at one another's throats. What is there to be learned from this fiasco for humanity?

To recapitulate: At the very suggestion that the U.S. House of Representatives might finally pass a long-proposed resolution recognizing the 1915 massacres in Armenia as a planned act of "race murder" (that was U.S. Ambassador Henry Morgenthau's term for it at a time when the word genocide had not yet been coined), the Turkish authorities redoubled their threat to invade the autonomous Kurdish-run provinces of northern Iraq. And many American Jews found themselves divided between their sympathy for the oppressed and the slaughtered and their commitment to the state interest of Israel, which maintains a strategic partnership with Turkey, and in particular with Turkey's highly politicized armed forces.

To illuminate this depressing picture, one might begin by offering a few distinctions. In 1991, in northern Iraq, where you could still see and smell the gassed and poisoned towns and villages of Kurdistan, I heard Jalal Talabani of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan say that Kurds ought to apologize to the Armenians for the role they had played as enforcers for the Ottomans during the time of the genocide. Talabani, who has often repeated that statement, is now president of Iraq. (I would regard his unforced statement as evidence in itself, by the way, in that proud peoples do not generally offer to apologize for revolting crimes that they did not, in fact, commit.) So, of course, it was upon him, both as an Iraqi and as a Kurd, that Turkish guns and missiles were trained last month.

And here, a further distinction: Many of us who are ardent supporters of Kurdish rights and aspirations have the gravest reservations about the so-called Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK. This is a Stalinist cult organization, roughly akin to a Middle Eastern Shining Path group. (Its story, and the story of its bizarre leader Abdullah Öcalan, are well told in Aliza Marcus' new book *Blood And Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence*.) The attempt of this thuggish faction to exploit the new zone of freedom in Iraqi Kurdistan is highly irresponsible and plays directly into the hands of those forces in the Turkish military who want to resurrect Kemalist chauvinism as a weapon against Prime

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DUTY TO PASS THIS  
RESOLUTION CON-  
DEMNING TURKEY  
FOR THE GENOCIDE  
OF ARMENIANS  
IN 1915...

UNLESS, OF COURSE,  
OTHER ARRANGEMENTS  
(WINK) CAN BE MADE...  
(WINK... WINK....)

SHADES  
OF DENNIS  
HASTERT...



Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government, which it sees as soft on Kurdish demands. There's a paradox here, in that the uniformed satraps who claim to defend Turkish secularism are often more reactionary than the recently re-elected and broadly Islamist Justice and Development Party. The generals vetoed a meeting earlier this year between Abdullah Gul—now president of Turkey and then foreign minister—and the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq. This alone shows that they are using the border question and the PKK as a wedge issue for domestic politics.

This is enough complexity to be going on with, but Congress and the executive branch have been handling it with appalling amateurishness. The Armenian resolution is an old story. I can remember when it was sponsored by Sen. Robert Dole and stonewalled by President Bill Clinton. What a shame that we didn't get it firmly on the record decades ago. But now a House and a White House that can barely bring themselves to utter the word Kurdish are both acting as if nothing mattered except Turkish amour-propre. And, as a consequence, the United States and its friends are being squeezed by Ankara instead of—to put it shortly—the other way around. This is disgracefully undignified.

In 2003, the Turkish authorities, who had been parasitic on American and NATO support for several decades, refused to allow our bases in Turkey to be employed for a "northern front" in the removal of Saddam Hussein unless their own forces were allowed to follow us into Iraqi Kurdistan. The Bush administration quite rightly refused this bargain. The damage done by Turkey's subsequent fit of pique was enormous—nobody ever mentions it, but if the coalition had come at Baghdad from two directions, a number of Sunni areas would have got the point (of irreversible regime change) a lot sooner than they did. The rogue PKK presence was not then a hot issue; Turkey simply wished to pre-empt the emergence of any form of Iraqi Kurdish self-government that could be an incitement or encouragement to its own huge Kurdish minority.

So, let us be clear on a few things. The European Union, to which Turkey has applied for membership with warm American support, has insisted on recognition of Kurdish language rights and political rights within Turkey. We can hardly ask for less. **If the Turks wish to continue lying officially about what happened to the Armenians, then we cannot be expected to oblige them by doing the same (and should certainly resent and repudiate any threats against ourselves or our allies that would ensue from our Congress affirming the truth).** Then there remains the question of Cyprus, where Turkey maintains an occupation force that has repeatedly been condemned by a thesaurus of U.N. resolutions ever since 1974. It is not our conduct that should be modified by Turkey's arrogance; we do a favor to the democratization and modernization of that country by insisting that it get its troops out of Cyprus, pull its forces back from the border with Iraq, face the historic truth about Armenia, and in other ways cease to act as if the Ottoman system were still in operation.

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

October 29, 2007

**Since when is it wrong to speak out against genocide?**

Dear Colleague:

As the co-chairs of the Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues, and as lead sponsors of the Armenian Genocide Resolution, we would like to convey our strong and continued support for passage of H. Res. 106, the Armenian Genocide Resolution. We would also like to thank those of you who also support its passage.

Many members of Congress have voiced their concerns regarding the timing of this resolution and the consequences should it pass the House. While we respect these opinions, we strongly believe that if we as a nation are to be a moral leader around the world we must have the courage to recognize genocide whenever and wherever it occurs. Although the events of the resolution took place more than ninety years ago, denial of its historical fact remains. And until this denial is removed, we must stand up to injustice and refuse to allow another country to impede our efforts to speak out against inhumanity.


The Turkish government has made its position known. We agree that Turkey is a strategic ally of significance to our nation and the war on terror. However, if Germany, an important ally of the U.S., were to threaten the United States for commemorating the Holocaust, would that prevent us from moving forward? We must not allow a foreign government to have a stronghold on our nation's legislative process. Our relationship with Turkey, as with any ally, should be based on mutual trust and respect, not threats and intimidation.

As the worldwide leader on human rights, the United States has an obligation to the people of Armenia and to all those who have suffered or are suffering through genocide. As co-chairs of the Caucus, we will continue to fight for recognition of the Armenian Genocide and we encourage you to do the same. We will continue our work with the Armenian community and the Office of the Speaker to ensure this resolution comes to the floor during the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress.

Over the past year our offices have collected numerous factual documents related to the Armenian Genocide. Should you need any document when talking to your constituents please feel free to contact our offices.

Sincerely,

  
FRANK PALLONE, JR.  
Member of Congress

  
JOE KNOLLENBERG  
Member of Congress