

ADL should not redefine genocide

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"The police and civilian mob came for them in the night, forcing them at gunpoint into the streets, stripping them of their property on the spot before shipping them to internment camps for expulsion. The lucky ones were put in boxcars, but most had to trudge on foot for hundreds of miles under the watchful eyes of sadistic guards that tormented their every step. The guards beat them mercilessly, shooting the stragglers, raping the women. Those with hidden jewels or money could get food, the rest starved. Death to exhaustion, disease and exposure was rampant.

Already brutalized by the ravages of a long world war that destroyed their homes and livelihoods, the captives were dragged from the towns and villages they'd known for centuries to distant lands, leaving behind a trail of misery and death.

No one knows for sure how many millions suffered the long marches, or how many died as a result. Statistics weren't kept, but the best estimate is between 500,000 and 1.1 million deaths. That's in addition to the 300,000 to 600,000 killed during the bombings. Yet these many decades later, the perpetrators still won't acknowledge that they committed genocide. And the victims still wait.

The Armenian tragedy?

No, the aforementioned atrocities occurred during the German tragedy in the aftermath of World War II, between 1945 and 1950, when at least a dozen European countries murdered, robbed, brutalized and expelled their German citizens. Every liberated country, from Holland to Romania, was culpable. Hungary deported most of its Germans by December 1945. The Czechs rounded up and expelled nearly 2 million, killing about 200,000 in the process. The Poles forced thousands of Germans out of East Prussia by boat; they ended up in internment camps in Denmark where 13,000 died, including 7,000 children.

If the German tragedy sounds eerily similar to the Armenian tragedy, it is. True, the German nation was the aggressor in World War II, but the Soviets and Eastern Europeans killed hundreds of thousands of German civilians under the (correct) assumption that they had been fifth column during the war – enemy combatants that posed a threat from within, just as the Armenians were to the Turks in World War I.

The Armenians of eastern Turkey, primarily Anatolia, allied themselves with Britain, France and Russia against the Ottoman Empire. Over 150,000 joined the Russian Army and fought against the Turks on the Caucasus Front, in the area of present day eastern Turkey and Armenia. The Anatolian Armenians openly rebelled against Ottoman rule, staged a guerilla war, then conspired with and fought alongside the Russians as the Tsarist army invaded eastern Turkey. This led to the decision by the Turkish government to quell the Armenian revolt, defeat the guerillas and, finally, expel the Armenians, thus causing the deaths of hundreds of thousands through famine, exposure, disease and murder at the hands of Turks, Kurds, and Circassians.

Yet the intent of the Turkish government was expulsion, not extermination. And only from those eastern provinces where Armenians were deemed a security threat. The other tens of thousands of Armenians who lived throughout the Ottoman Empire were left alone.

The European nations had to wait until Germany was defeated in 1945 before they could expel the German civilians among them, which they proceeded to do with a vengeance. The number of Germans killed by Eastern European countries equaled – and may have even surpassed – the number of Armenians killed by the Turks. And yet most of us today have never heard of the German tragedy because nations and humanitarian organizations are not clamoring to declare it genocide.

Nor are the Germans demanding that their unique tragedy be declared a genocide. But they could. In fact, based on the Armenian precedent, they ought to. As of now, the Germans have every right to expect the Anti-Defamation League to declare the German tragedy a genocide, just as they did for the Armenians. At a minimum, the ADL, as a human rights organization whose latest gimmick is expanding the category of genocide, is morally obligated to explain to the Germans why their 1945 to 1950 tragedy doesn't qualify as genocide, despite the glaring similarities to the Armenian tragedy, especially the hundreds of thousands killed during mass expulsions.

By their foolishness in caving in to the Armenians, thus redefining genocide, the ADL has opened a Pandora's Box, paving the way for countless victimized nations to expect the same consideration for their own historical tragedies. Even the Germans."

"The nearly century-old dispute over the Armenian tragedy of World War I had nothing to do with the Anti-Defamation League, and therefore the Jewish organization was a disinterested party, not obliged to take a public stand or even offer public comment.

His subsequent firing of Andrew Tarsy, ADL's New England Regional Director, was also the right move at the right time.

Had Mr. Foxman stiffened his resolve and stayed the course, the whole controversy, ignited and fanned in Boston, would have stayed in Boston, and gradually fizzled out on the local level. Yet Mr. Foxman, by reversing himself on both counts, has discredited his office, damaged the international reputation of the ADL, diminished the stature of the Jewish lobby, created a rift between the Israeli government and the American Jewish leadership, needlessly antagonized an important ally of both the United States and Israel, instigated an uproar in the Turkish press, embarrassed the Israeli government, jeopardized the precarious Israeli-Turkish relations, alienated the Turkish Jewish community, and bolstered extremist Moslem demagogues in the fragile Turkish democracy.

In short, Mr. Foxman, by publicly declaring the World War I Turkish aggression against the Anatolian Turkish Armenians to be "tantamount to genocide," has created a serious diplomatic rift between Israel and Turkey, the only ally that the Jewish state has in the Near East. And the only Muslim friend that Israel can turn to.

To gauge the seriousness of the fallout consider that the Turkish Foreign Minister, Abdullah Gul, summoned the Israeli Ambassador to Turkey, Pinchas Avivi, to Ankara, where he proceeded to lecture him, "It is a great disappointment for us, who gave support to the Jews for centuries ... Our bilateral relations will suffer from such a decision."

The Turkish Ambassador to Israel, Namik Tan, was recalled from vacation to Ankara for high level meetings with the Turkish Foreign Ministry. He was then dispatched to Israel where he bluntly rebuked his Israeli counterparts, "If you want to touch and hurt the hearts of the people in Turkey, this is the issue." Mr. Tan summarily dismissed the pleas from Israeli Foreign Ministry officials, who claimed they can't rein in their American Jewish brethren.

The Turkish Foreign Ministry then issued a formal protest, "We see this statement as an unfortunate one that is unjust to the Holocaust, which has no precedent, and to its victims. And we expect it to be corrected."

Silvio Ovadio, leader of the Turkish Jewish community, publicly condemned the ADL in the Turkish Press, "We have difficulty understanding the ADL's position on this matter." So did prominent Turkish Jewish businessman Jak Kamhi.

The Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Erdogan, placed an emergency call last week to Israeli President Shimon Peres, as well as Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

Mr. Foxman and the ADL then tried to placate the Turkish government by informing them that the ADL would not support the proposed Congressional resolution declaring the Armenian tragedy a genocide, but then he further insulted the Turks by publicly stating that the small Turkish Jewish community "may be at risk" if the ADL supported the resolution.

Mr. Foxman then came to Boston, rehired Mr. Tarsy, and declared that it was time to move on. There is no doubt that Mr. Tarsy took what he believed to be a principled stand by declaring the Armenian tragedy a genocide, yet the local pressure on him to do so was immense. The lightning rod in all of this was actually the not-so-camera-shy Mayor of Newton, David Cohen, who threatened to withdraw Newton from the Boston ADL's No Place For Hate program. If Newton had pulled out, other communities could've fallen like dominos, thus sealing the fate of the entire program.

By continuously steering the local ADL in a leftward direction to such feel-good non-Jewish causes as No Place For Hate, eventually some disenchanted group would start making demands that ran counter to Jewish interests. This time it was the Armenians. And despite the protests of everyone from major Jewish organizations to the Israeli government to the Turkish Jewish community, the ADL sided with the Armenians.

Mr. Foxman and Mr. Tarsy broke that one sacred determinant of any Jewish leader when confronted with a difficult choice – is it good for the Jews?

They made the wrong choice. Just ask the Israeli Foreign Ministry, which was still at work trying to clean up the diplomatic mess that the two of them created."