

## THE MIDDLE EAST AND LESSONS NOT LEARNED

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Raqqa, Tel Abyad, Deir Zor, Ras Al-Ayn, Yaacoubiye, Ghenaymiye – not so known as Aleppo or Kessab – are Syrian villages that after the Armenian Genocide in 1915 welcomed survivors and became “home away from home” for thousands of starving, fatigued, and mourning Armenians. That is until lately when once again they were chased away from their homes, forced to convert into Islam or pay a fine of USD750, and slaughtered in front of their loved ones. *History repeats itself*, a cliché but unfortunately true, at least for Armenians.

In 2015, Armenians worldwide will commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first genocide of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the Armenian Genocide. A question that has troubled Armenians since then has been: where was the world when an entire population was being annihilated and so brutally?

It is true that in 1915 the *New York Times* alone published 145 articles about the Armenian Genocide and that many diplomats recorded their eyewitness accounts. Yet, the diabolical scheme perpetrated against a Christian ethnic minority went ahead as planned.

In *America and the Age of Genocide* Samantha Power, the US Permanent Representative to the United Nations, eloquently points out how after WWI, US oil interests in the Middle East steered America away from the course it had pursued for decades. Concurrently, in *Burning Tigris* Peter Balakian argues that America’s struggle between human rights and national self-interest – a pattern that would be repeated again and again – resonates powerfully today.

A hundred years after the Armenian Genocide people *everywhere* are asking: where is the world when ISIS is committing indescribable atrocities in Iraq and Syria?

ISIS militants are not waiting for journalists and diplomats to document and broadcast their barbarity. They are doing it themselves. Just recently, they published an extensive annual report, enumerating their spoils and underscoring their ‘victories’. Daily videos of beheadings, crucifixions, and lootings flood social media.

In the face of international indecisiveness, collective paralysis, and mediocre retaliations, fear reigns supreme and Christians and Muslims equally wonder: Why are Afghani, Azeri, Belgian, British, Chechen, Dutch, Turk, Yemeni, and other nationals fighting in Iraq and Syria? Where is the Iraqi Government? Why do we not hear of the Free Syrian Army anymore? How can a terrorist group have a daily income of \$4 million? Who is

managing their bank accounts? Are they fighting against Christians? Sunnis? Shiites? Jews? Americans? Europeans? What will happen if Sharia law replaces our constitutions as well?

The fears and questions posed by people in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq echo the apprehensions and queries of many in Belgium, for example, where Sharia for Belgium has become quite a vocal party in the Parliament, the United Kingdom where a few months ago The Law Society drew up a new guidance for solicitors in England and Wales on how to write up wills in accordance with Islamic law, and Cyprus which has been described by ISIS as 'dear to our hearts' and declared as part of the Levant they strive to rule.

Rightly, the complexities and complications created by the latest developments in the region have heightened the level of not only regional but also global concern. Probably mainly because the staggering facts and bloody images are too fantastic to comprehend, too insane to explain, and too reminiscent, for example, of Sultan Abdul-Hamid's monstrous plan at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: exterminate Armenians and leave a sample for the museum. But the fact remains that today there are 10 million Armenians worldwide.

Probably, the glaring lesson countries in the Middle East should draw from the results of the latest referendum held in Scotland is that goodwill, harmony, order, peace, reconciliation, unity, and rapport are what best uphold and guarantee minority and majority groups' rights, coexistence, and prosperity. In the meantime, let us hope that historical and political analyses will prompt human beings to strive to eradicate anguish, division, fanaticism, fear, intolerance, elimination, violence, and war.