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Denial of the Armenian Genocide should concern us all

April 24, 2017 4:59am EDT



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April 24 marks the anniversary of the start of the Armenian Genocide, during which the Ottoman state murdered 1.5 million Ottoman Armenians. But while it might have begun 102 years ago, in a sense, the genocide did not end; the Turkish state established after the Ottoman state then established a position of **denial** (*the final stage of genocide*).

The Turkish state's policy of denial continues to undermine the memories of the survivors and the claims of their descendants, now scattered throughout the globe. This policy of denial is a foundation of the Turkish state and a cornerstone of its foreign policy, extending to ever-more creative and expansive international campaigns and efforts.

That only 23 countries currently officially recognize the genocide reflects Turkey's geopolitical importance. It's a crucial NATO ally and world player, and most of the international community is keen not to antagonize it. Each time a country acknowledges the Armenian genocide, Turkey is quick to retaliate, breaking diplomatic ties and tearing up trade deals while issuing harsh denunciations and threats.

One may legitimately wonder why recognizing a genocide that took place more than a century ago remains controversial. All governments are based on some history of violence, and collective amnesia; nations are understandably reluctant to face up to their violent past or acknowledge their part in crimes and injustices. It is always painful to deal with a less-than-glorious chapter of national history, whether it is done symbolically (like the US's 2009 apology to Native Americans) or materially (like German reparations and restitution for the Holocaust).

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But while the Turkish state's efforts have used various approaches over the decades, its denial of the genocide remains undiluted. Under Article 301 of Turkey's penal code, citizens and cultural representatives are regularly prosecuted for "insulting" the Turkish nation or state or bringing "shame" on the republic by mentioning the genocide, even subtly. The narrative of denial of state genocide is pursued at all costs.



A protest against genocide denial in Istanbul. EPA/Cem Turkel

It is crucial to remember that this phenomenon is far from confined to Turkey. Societies around the world witness it on a daily basis: state-sponsored genocide is repackaged as civil war, victims are recast as instigators, state violence is sold as national security, and fabrications or "alternative facts" are presented as news. If this is allowed to stand, this will not just be a post-truth world, but one without a moral compass.

Too often, the powerful are unrestricted and unaccountable for their actions, while the weak are made invisible and irrelevant. For the sake of all victims of state violence all over the world, past and present, speaking truth to power has never had greater urgency.

Author Sossie Kasbarian, Ph.D., is currently Senior Lecturer in Comparative Politics at University of Stirling (UK) and Co-editor of *Diaspora- a journal of transnational studies*. In 2019 this article was adapted for eighth-grade readers from the original, longer article which appeared online in April, 2017 to be used with Michigan Holocaust and Genocide (MHGE) lesson plan materials on the stages of genocide.

MHGE is using this adapted article for these lesson plans with the author's permission.

The original article can be found online at <https://theconversation.com/denial-of-the-armenian-genocide-should-concern-us-all-76537>