PERSISTING IN THE MISTAKES OF THE PAST

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On April 22, US President Barrack Obama published his latest 24 April statement.[1] The statement, in general, is in line with Obamas 24 April statements made in the previous years. The accusation genocide does not appear in the statement, what is used instead is the description Meds Yeghern (which means Great Calamity in Armenian). Obama, like his predecessors, has tried to maintain the balance between the demands and the narrative of the Armenian diaspora and Armenia on the one side, and the sensitivities of Turkey on the other on the controversy regarding the events of 1915.

As expected, Armenians were not satisfied with Obamas 24 April statement. This is so because they have reduced the entirety of tragedy of the 1915 events to a single word that they deem indispensable (genocide) and that they can abuse for their ulterior motives. In this respect, nothing else but the term genocide can satisfy them.

Even if it were his aim to maintain a balance, in his last statement, Obama went further than his wordings in the previous years, coming up with a statement that cannot be labeled as being balanced. In the statement issued by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs,[2] the Ministry criticized Obamas one-sided approach to historical events, drew attention to the fact that efforts to exploit the sufferings of the past for political manipulation have not brought any benefit to any one so far, and called upon the US administration to adopt an objective, prudent and constructive approach. In this respect, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs gave the appropriate response to the US administration.

However, the statement made by the Ministry did not touch upon one issue: the apparent burden felt by Obama for the election promises that he had made in the past. Seemingly in an effort to make up for the fact that he did not keep the promise that he had made to voters of Armenian descent during his presidential election campaign, Obama, without giving any consideration to Turkish views, gave excessive space to Armenian views.

Actually, the approach put forth in Obamas latest 24 April statement is not really a reflection of his personality. Rather, his statement is more a reflection of the US general stance on history. This stance must be evaluated together with the stance adopted by Russia and France.

As AVİM pointed out in the past, the fact that the President of Russia Vladimir Putin and the President of France Francois Hollande attended the 24 April events in 2015 in Armenia should come as no surprise. These two countries laid the groundwork for the emergence of the 1915 events and incited the Armenian nationalist and secessionist movement during the Ottoman period. As two countries responsible for the occurrence of the 1915 events, France and Russia, just like they had done so in the past, continue to blindly support Armenians in the dispute between Turks and Armenians. In this respect, these two countries continue to commit the misdeeds that they have committed in the past.

The same can be said for the US, which had sparked secessionist sentiments amongst Armenians by means of the Protestant missionaries that it had sent to the Ottoman Empire. American missionaries not only established schools primarily for Christians, but also provided opportunities for Christian Armenians that the Muslim population in the Ottoman Empire lacked. The missionaries broadened the world-views and knowledge of Armenians, created social disparities between the Armenian and Muslim populations, and gave rise to social divisions. In due course, the US supported and backed the secessionist activities of Armenians. The most evident example of this are the reports written by Henry Morgenthau, the American Ambassador in Istanbul, on the events of 1915. However, it has been long established that these reports are not only exaggerated and fallacious, but also a product of war-time propaganda. Nevertheless, it is still possible to see references made to Morgenthau as if he were an unbiased state representative (Obama has made reference to Morgenthau in his latest 24 April statement). The hostile tendencies of the American administration towards the Ottoman Empire were not limited to Morgenthaus reports. Through an arbitral award within the framework of the Treaty of Sèvres, the then US President Woodrow Wilson saw it fitting that a large portion of the Ottoman Empire be handed to the Armenian state that was about to be established. The Turkish War of Liberation, however, threw the Treaty of Sèvres and Wilsons arbitral award to the trash bin of history.

The bitterness emanating from the Turkish-inflicted defeat faced by the US in relation to its war-time propaganda and Wilsons arbitral award persists to this very day. In this sense, it is not surprising that this mindset left over from that time period, coupled with the disappointment experienced in the past, reflects onto the statements made by US Presidents.

However, at times, the US seems to have difficulty comprehending the fact that the Ottoman Empire, which the US abhorred in a very ideological manner, no longer exists, and in its place stands a modern country; the Republic of Turkey. The Republic of Turkey, a close friend, a strategic partner, and an ally of the US, serves as an example to its region. In this respect, espousing a one-sided narrative of history grounded in pre-existing biases and war-time propaganda, and overlooking Turkeys position on this historical dispute is contrary to a just and realistic foreign policy, which is what is expected of the US.

In his most recent statement on April 24, President Obama also makes reference to Armenia. In the statement, he reiterates the USs continued support for a democratic,

peaceful, and prosperous Armenia. However, what is overlooked is that Armenia has officially opted to be on Russias side politically, militarily, as well as economically. The most concrete example of this is Armenias decision to become a member of the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union, right before it was about to sign a comprehensive agreement with the EU. In light of this fact, attempting to still win over Armenia and subjecting Turkey (a model country in the region) to a one-sided judgment that serves to the interests of Armenia accomplishes nothing more than doing disservice to the Turkey-US friendship.

Finally, it should be mentioned that currently, the number Armenians and Turks living in the United States is about to level. In other words, the one-sided discourse on history in the Armenian communitys favor is offending a Turkish community that is becoming as numerous as the Armenian one. Graciously, the Turkish community in the United States has now begun to counter these one-sided statements, and has begun to show its reaction to such injustice in a more organized manner.[3]

[1] Statement by the President on Armenian Remembrance Day, *The White House*, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/04/22/statement-president-armenian-remembrance-day

[2] No: 98, 22 April 2016, Press Release Regarding the Statement by the U.S.President Obama on the 1915 Events, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey*, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-98_-22-april-2016_-press-release-regarding-the-statement-by-the-u_s_president-obama-on-the-1915-events.en.mfa

[3] For example, a full-page ad, making calls for a more fair approach to history, was given in Wall Street Journal ahead of 24 April: WSJde Ermeni iddialarına karşı ilan, *HaberTürk*, http://www.haberturk.com/dunya/haber/1228830-wsjde-ermeni-iddialarina-karsi-ilan

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