For some people of Armenian heritage, watching the United States abandon the Kurds to Turkey’s whims is like watching history repeat itself.

What’s happening with the Kurds now, happened on the same land with the Armenian people, more than 100 years ago, some say.

“Right now Armenians everywhere are just horrified,” said Mari Firkatian. “It’s happening all over again.”

President Donald Trump, opposing a chorus of military leaders and politicians from both sides of the aisle, decided to withdraw U.S. Troops from northern Syria, giving Turkey free reign to attack strongholds held by ethnic Kurds, who had been U.S. allies in the fight against ISIS.

A century ago, like now, according to Harry Mazadoorian, “Governments look on. The most chilling thing of all is just, in full view of the world, they proceed to kill people. It’s not some hidden genocide that was discovered later.”

“Much of the world seems paralyzed as to what to do about this,” he said.

Many Armenians, whose ancestors lived and died on the same lands the Kurds are now fighting for, see it as a repeat of the ethnic cleansing that decimated their people, Firkatian said.
Beginning in 1914, the Ottoman Empire — the precursor to the Turkish government — systematically deported and massacred as many as 1.5 million ethnic Armenians.

Turkey, though, refuses to use the term “genocide” to describe what happened to ethnic Armenians beginning in 1914.

“The Turks haven’t apologized. They were bound to perpetrate more genocide,” Firkatian said. “In a horrible way it’s kind of the fulfillment of what we’ve been saying all along. That they’re going to do it again, that this is not a behavior that has been curbed.”

Firkatian is, like nearly every person of Armenian heritage, descended from survivors of the genocide.

“It’s an inescapable part of the Armenian history,” said Mazadoorian, a lawyer from Kensington. “I think there are very few American Armenians who have not had some family connection to the genocide.”

The parallels between what Armenians say was the systematic extermination of an entire race, and what is currently happening with the Kurds, are inescapable, according to Firkatian and Mazadoorian.

“There are eerie and tragic similarities between what happened in the Armenian genocide and what’s happening now,” Mazadoorian said. “There’s a minority group that the government has identified. It almost seems to be from a very similar playbook.”

As the Turkish government says about ethnic Kurds, the Ottoman Empire said the Armenians were a threat to national security.

That was justification for arrest and detainment, mass deportation — “death marches,” Firkatian called them — concentration camps and out-and-out massacres.

Armenians, Firkatian said, have lived with the bloody history for more than 100 years. So while she was not surprised to see history repeat itself, Armenians are being confronted with it again.

“There’s a lot of repressed and unarticulated pain that Armenians have experienced,” she said. The dam is really broken, I don’t know how else to put it.”

The question of why Turkey has sought for a century to remove all non-Turkish influence comes down to extreme nationalism, as Firkatian wrote in one of her books on the subject.

She quotes İsmet İnönü, the second president of Turkey: “Our duty is to make Turks out of all the non-Turks within out Turkish country, no matter what. We will cut out and throw away any element that will oppose Turks and Turkishness.”
are an Orthodox Christian denomination.

And when the Ottoman Empire was exterminating the Armenians, the Kurds were used as irregular troops, not part of the official army but used to carry out some of the bloodiest tasks.

The Kurds have long fought for an independent state — since the Ottoman Empire was dissolved — both politically and militarily. Kurds were offered Armenian land in exchange for helping the empire.

The result, according to Firkatian, is the current situation.

“The Kurds were complicit in the genocide,” she said. “The Turks literally created this problem for themselves. They created a real headache for themselves.”