



## House International Relations Committee Passes 2 Resolutions on Armenian Genocide

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The truth easily triumphed over some of the world's most powerful political forces in a David vs. Goliath battle that took place in the chambers of the House International Relations Committee on Sept. 15.

Marshaled against the acknowledgment of the Armenian Genocide were the combined forces of the Turkish government, American lobbying firms hired by Turkey, the American Turkish Council, the Assembly of Turkish American Associations, several Jewish-American organizations, and the U.S. Department of State.

Two resolutions were simultaneously presented to the Committee last week: Res. 195, calling for the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide and urging the Republic of Turkey to acknowledge the culpability of its predecessor state, the Ottoman Empire, for the Armenian Genocide; and Res. 316, calling upon the President to ensure that the foreign policy of the United States reflects appropriate understanding and sensitivity concerning issues related to human rights, ethnic cleansing, and genocide as documented in U.S. archives on the Armenian Genocide.

Given the fact that the U.S. government has all along acknowledged the heinous crimes committed against the Armenian people, there would normally be no need for such resolutions. In addition to the thousands of contemporaneous reports and documents in the U.S. national archives, both the House and the Senate have adopted resolutions on these mass killings as early as 1916, and signed by Pres. Woodrow Wilson. In more recent years, Armenian Genocide resolutions have been adopted by the full House in 1975 and 1984. In addition, two amendments concerning the Armenian Genocide were adopted by the House in 1996 and 2004. Furthermore, Pres. Ronald Reagan issued a Presidential Proclamation on April 22, 1981, acknowledging the Armenian Genocide.

Despite all of these acknowledgments, Armenian Americans try to pass such resolutions in order to counter the continued denial of the Armenian Genocide by the Turkish government and its U.S. cronies. The attempt to counter the denialists have regrettably made these commemorative resolutions a test of political will between the unholy alliance of revisionist forces and the Armenian American community.

Since 1999, the Turkish government has engaged the services of The Livingston Group to block these congressional resolutions. The lobbying firm is led by the highly influential former Cong. Bob Livingston. However, judging from the results of the votes in the Committee in favor of both resolutions (40 to 7; and 35 to 11), it appears that the Turkish government has basically wasted the more than \$10 million it paid the Livingston Group in the past 5 years (figures based on a recent study conducted by Public Citizen). Prominent Turkish journalist Sami Kohen agreed with this negative assessment when he stated in his Sept. 16 column published in Milliyet: "We can't say that the professional lobbyists working for Turkey are very successful." Thus, it would not be surprising should the Turkish government terminate the services of the Livingston Group in the coming months, particularly since Mr. Livingston has been quite pre-occupied with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina that devastated his home state of Louisiana.

Sami Kohen also attributed the passage of both resolutions to "Turkey's incompetence in promotion - in conveying its ideas and influencing public opinion." Since Amb. Faruk Logoglu is responsible for carrying out the initiatives of his government in Washington, his abject failure to block these resolutions in Committee may cost him his job. Except for the one letter (most probably written by the lobbying firm) that Amb. Logoglu circulated to the members of the House panel, he was surprisingly inactive and ineffective.

Also ineffective were the efforts of the American Turkish Council (ATC) and the Assembly of Turkish American Associations (ATAA) in countering these two resolutions. ATC Chairman Brent Scowcroft sent a letter to Speaker Dennis Hastert on Sept. 9, warning him of dire consequences for American firms doing business with Turkey, should the resolutions be even discussed in the House. In response, the Armenian National Committee issued a press release accusing Scowcroft, a former National Security Advisor to Pres. George H.W. Bush and Gerald Ford, of "compromising his integrity in pursuit of personal business interests."

The ATAA, in its turn, issued an Action Alert to its members on Sept. 8, urging them to contact the members of the House panel and sent a letter to Cong. Henry Hyde, the Chairman of the House International Relations Committee on Sept. 14. The ATAA warned its members that "inaction on the part of the Turkish American community will compromise U.S.-Turkish relations, encourage more acts of

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harassment, violence and terrorism against people of Turkish and Turkic descent, and could potentially lead to territorial and compensation claims against the Republic of Turkey."

The ATC and ATAA are the two groups whose officials, according to an article in this month's Vanity Fair magazine, had allegedly discussed making illegal campaign contributions to Speaker Dennis Hastert, in order to block the passage of the Armenian Genocide resolution in fall 2000. The magazine said it had based its report on FBI wiretaps.

The Turks also failed to enlist the services of various American-Jewish groups to their cause. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who was in the U.S. on the eve of the House Committee vote, personally asked the leaders of the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League to lobby against the Armenian Genocide resolution. According to the Turkish press, these Jewish groups pledged their support to the Prime Minister. However, judging from their inaction on this issue, it appears that they did nothing more than paying lip service to the Turkish leader.

Another loser in this latest political tug-of-war was the U.S. State Department. In a letter addressed to Chairman Hyde on Sept. 15, Matthew A. Reynolds, the Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs, reiterated "the Administration's strong opposition" to these resolutions. Beyond writing this letter, the Bush Administration did not do anything substantial to pressure the Republican Chairman of the Committee into blocking the two resolutions. After the vote, when Adam Ereli, the Deputy Spokesman of the State Dept. was asked if the Administration would try to prevent these resolutions from reaching the House floor, he would only reiterate that the Administration did not support the adoption of these resolutions in the House Committee. The Turkish press speculated that the U.S. government's lackluster effort to counter these resolutions was due to the American anger at the Turkish Parliament's refusal to allow U.S. troops to enter Iraq from Turkey prior to the Iraqi war.

While the Bush Administration may have couched its displeasure at Turkey, Cong. Tom Lantos (D-CA), a staunch supporter of Turkey and a rabid opponent of previous Armenian Genocide resolutions, stunned everyone when he brazenly announced during the Committee meeting that he was going to vote for both resolutions in order to teach the Turks a lesson for not supporting the U.S. on the eve of the Iraqi war. Only 3 of the 50 members of the House International Relations Committee spoke against these resolutions. More than 20 others spoke in favor. It was, therefore, not surprising that the Committee overwhelmingly approved both resolutions.

The Committee's Republican Chairman, Henry Hyde, was unwavering in his support for these resolutions. He dismissed out of hand Turkish warnings that their adoption would damage U.S.-Turkish relations. He said that the resolutions "merely recognize the fact that the authorities of the Ottoman Empire deliberately slaughtered the majority of the Armenian community in their empire. Denial of that fact cannot be justified on the basis of expediency or fear that speaking the truth will do us harm."

Given the overwhelming support in Committee in favor of these resolutions and the lackluster efforts of their opponents, it is almost certain that the entire House would easily vote to acknowledge the Armenian Genocide.

Speaker Hastert should promptly bring one of these resolutions for a vote on the House floor. The duly elected representatives of the American people should not be deprived of the opportunity to express their position on this important issue. The Speaker would be also honoring his pledge of five years ago that he would allow a full floor vote on the Armenian Genocide resolution.

By allowing such a vote, Speaker Hastert would also clear his name from boastful allegations made by some Turkish officials that they have bought his opposition to the Armenian Genocide resolution by making illegal contributions to his campaign.

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