



US Officials More Worried About Turkish Feelings Than Genocide

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Armenian Americans are more insulted by the offensive attitude of the Bush administration toward the Armenian Genocide than they are by Turkey's refusal to acknowledge it. They wonder why the leaders of this great country are more worried about appeasing an unreliable foreign power than the pain and suffering of their own citizens of Armenian origin who are the descendants of the survivors of that genocide; why U.S. officials, ignoring the proven facts of the Armenian Genocide, are calling for yet another study similar to the one demanded by the Iranian President on the Holocaust; and why do they allow Turkey to bully the U.S. by meaningless threats? To gain a better insight into the mindset of the Bush administration, we would like to present excerpts from two press conferences recently held by high-ranking U.S. officials who are known for their pro-Turkish views on the Armenian Genocide:

First, the comments made by Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Bryza in response to questions from Turkish reporters on Feb. 1, 2007, prior to the arrival of Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul to Washington:

"Our position on [the congressional resolution on the Armenian Genocide] is that our policy remains of course unchanged. We don't believe that political statements or diplomatic statements are the appropriate way to resolve this issue of how to refer to these horrible events of 1915. I'm sure we all agree that what happened was a horrible tragedy. It's terrible. It's an issue that has so many sides, so many complicated angles, so many differing points of view that politicians can't do it justice by simply making a determination. What we would like to see happen is that learned people, everyday common people, professors, philosophers, historians have a chance to sit down and have a candid discussion over time for an extended period that gets at the core of what happened and allows the societies of Turkey and Armenia to reconcile themselves with their pasts and with each other. You can't do that through a political decision.

"...The Turkish government and the Armenian government have talked about historical commissions. They've talked about diplomatic discussions as well to normalize relations. Then there's the question now, since the tragic murder of Hrant Dink, about an even more intensive discussion of Article 301. It's hard for the Turkish government simply to abolish Article 301 given political realities. We understand that. But I think from our perspective it would be a wonderful step if there no longer was this issue out there of Article 301 that provides a pretext or a reason for people outside of Turkey to criticize Turkey.

"We are here as Turkey's friend. I hope Turkey considers us one of its closest friends in the world. In that spirit we want to do everything we can for what we view as Turkey's proud traditions of tolerance and of co-existence, of all sorts of ethnic and religious communities. We want the world, especially Europe, to understand what a strong record Turkey has. Article 301 still makes that difficult. It has a magnetic impact on thinking in Europe and gets everybody to focus just on that issue rather than on all of the complex history of Turkey."

Next are the comments made by Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Fried to Turkish reporters on Feb. 8, at the conclusion of Gul's visit to Washington: "...We discussed the [Armenian Genocide] resolution which has been introduced about Armenian-Turkish issues, about the Armenian, what its supporters call the Armenian Genocide. This bill does not have the support of the administration. The administration opposes this bill. We have made that clear. We are continuing to make it clear. Later today, I am going up to meet with key figures in the Congress about this bill and I expect our efforts will continue. ...I, and I suspect more senior people in the U.S. administration than I, will be discussing this. Our argument is essentially this. Such a resolution will damage U.S.-Turkish relations and for no good purpose. Such a resolution would not in fact advance Turkish-Armenian dialogue and it would not advance the process of Turkey's examination of its own past.

"I've always been of the view that democratic countries need to take a hard look at the dark spots in their own history.... Our view is that Turkey is going through a process of looking at its own history with Armenians. The killings in 1915 were horrific. They need to be looked at honestly and without taboos, but not because Americans say Turkey should look at this. It should be looked at because Turks, in the process of building a democracy and deepening a democracy, are looking at these issues for their own reasons. I think this process is going on in Turkey. It is painful. It is emotional.... So my argument to the Congress will be that this natural, painful process in Turkey needs to be allowed to unfold with encouragement and support, but not pressure from the outside. That will be my argument. Now I don't expect that everyone will accept it, but I will make the case as best I can. And it won't be just me. There will be more senior people than I making the case and pointing out that Turkish-U.S. relations should not be damaged for no good purpose. But this is obviously a very emotional issue and I believe it is in Turkey's interest for its own reasons to take steps to examine its past and to reach out to Armenians

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worldwide and to Armenia despite the fact that Turks don't like all of the things that Armenian communities say.

"...Speaker Pelosi and Foreign Minister Gul did not meet. We think that such a meeting would have been a good idea. The Speaker, let me put it this way, does not always listen to all the advice from the administration. She does represent a different political party. She is, after all, now I suppose the leader of the opposition in Congress. We do not support this resolution. We will make efforts to see that this resolution does not pass. That is an unequivocal statement of the administration's position. I hope that Turkey, without regard to this resolution, makes every effort to reach out to Armenia and Armenians and makes every effort to examine its own history. Not because of outside pressure, but because this is appropriate for Turkey's own development as a democracy. "The debate in Turkey about its history, the position of writers such as Orhan Pamuk, the position of intellectuals, the participation of Turkish scholars in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission some six years ago [Correction: "Truth" was not a part of TARC's name] is all the result not of any outside pressure. Orhan Pamuk doesn't care at all what the Americans think. It's the result of internal Turkish processes. I applaud these, and I hope that Turkey for its own reasons will do everything it can to reach out to Armenia and Armenians. Great nations are not afraid to confront the dark spots of their past. The United States had to do so and we were not our best selves, we were not true to our best traditions until we had done so. I believe the same is true of all countries. I believe the same is true, therefore, of Turkey. I hope Turkey does this not to please the United States but because of itself and this is something the United States can best influence by being a friend, not by passing resolutions. That is my view and I hope I can help convince the Congress of it."

The most reprehensible comment was the one made by Dan Fried when he said: The Armenian Genocide "resolution will damage U.S.-Turkish relations for no good purpose!" Both he and Bryza seem more concerned about catering to Turkish sensitivities than the fact that an entire nation was almost wiped out. They seem to forget that this congressional resolution has more to do with trying to reaffirm America's past acknowledgment of the Armenian Genocide than bringing pressure to bear upon Turkey. It is high time for these U.S. officials to stop playing shameless political games and start calling the genocide by its true name.

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