COMPANIES LOBBY (QUIETLY) AGAINST HOUSE RESOLUTION THAT WOULD DUB ARMENIAN KILLINGS 'GENOCIDE'

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By Stephen Singer, AP Business Writer, 13 June 2009

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The six companies have strong ties to Turkey, a key strategic ally of the U.S. in Mideast peace efforts and the fight against terrorism. None would state their position on the House resolution, but industry analysts and others said they likely lobbied against the measure to show support for Turkey, an important market for weapons and industrial products.

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"They don't want to be seen opposing a resolution that has a very evident human rights element," said Rouben Adalian, director of the Armenian National Institute, a Washington research organization. "It would put them on the side of denying history and denying genocide."
BAE Systems Inc., Goodrich Corp., Northrop Grumman Corp., Raytheon Co., United Technologies Corp. and energy producer Chevron Corp. spent $14 million to lobby Congress in the first quarter of this year. Besides the genocide resolution, the companies lobbied on Pentagon spending, climate change, taxes and more.

United Technologies, which sells Sikorsky helicopters to Turkey, says it provided information to lawmakers "that helped round out their understanding of the international trade and national security interests involved."

But businesses lobbying against the resolution are not being "good corporate citizens," said Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., its lead sponsor.

Lobbying on human rights issues comes with risks, said Gerry Keim, associate dean at Arizona State University's W.P. Carey School of Business. Several companies halted their efforts opposing

restrictions on white minority-ruled South Africa in the 1980s when anti-apartheid activists applied pressure.

"Originally, they were concerned about markets in South Africa. Then they were concerned about markets here," Keim said.

Other analysts say any public backlash against companies lobbying on the Armenia genocide resolution would be minimal because the firms serve governments, not individual consumers who could boycott their products.

The House Foreign Affairs Committee has not taken up the resolution and the Senate does not have a version. A spokeswoman for the House committee said its chairman has not decided when the resolution -- or other pending bills -- will be taken up as the House considers legislation on Pakistan, State Department funding and other matters.

Historians estimate that up to 1.5 million mostly Christian Armenians were killed by Ottoman Turks around the time of World War I. Turkey denies that the deaths were genocide, saying the number of casualties is inflated and was the consequence of civil war and unrest.

Turkey's embassy in Washington did not return calls and e-mails seeking comment.

President Barack Obama, before visiting a World War II-era concentration camp in Germany earlier this month, said the world has an obligation to stop genocide, even when it's inconvenient. His administration is working to end the genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan, he said.

While running for president, Obama promised to "recognize the Armenian Genocide" once in office, but he avoided the term during a speech in Turkey in April.

Putting the U.S. on record that the killings of Armenians 94 years ago was genocide gives credibility to the drive for international support to stop killings in Sudan, Schiff said.

But pressure on the six companies to avoid offending Turkey is intense.

Among the ventures between U.S. businesses and Turkey are a $3 billion contract from Northrop to a Turkish company to be a supplier for fighter jets. Goodrich Corp. and a Turkish firm agreed to a joint venture for maintenance and repair work on engine components. BAE Systems and a Turkish company jointly market and supply armored vehicles to the Turkish armed forces.

Chevron holds a stakes in a pipeline that crosses the country. Raytheon has agreed to sell to Turkey Stinger missile launcher systems valued at $34 million and is working to sell its missile defense systems.

Chevron said it lobbies on a range of interests, "including international issues that fall outside of a narrow energy policy focus."

Representatives of the U.S. subsidiary of London-based BAE Systems PLC and Northrop referred

questions to the Aerospace Industries Association. The trade group defended Turkey as a key U.S. ally and cited "large and growing commercial ties" between the two nations.

Raytheon and Goodrich did not respond to requests for comment.

Andrew Kzirian, executive director of the Armenian National Committee's western region in Glendale, Calif., said backers of the resolution, which has been considered before, will not quit if it fails again.

"If you don't call it out and call it for what it is, you have Darfur," he said.

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