

# THE SELLING OF THE WOODROW WILSON CENTER

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By David Boyajian, 1 October 2010

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Since then, the DC-based WWC (WilsonCenter.org) has been condemned by journalists, a Wilson family descendant, a prominent Congressman, and other Americans for:

- Violating its Congressional mandate by ignoring vital aspects of President Wilson's record.
- Accepting large contributions from unsavory corporations.
- Giving an award to the undeserving Ahmet Davutoglu, Turkey's Foreign Minister.

The WWC is a think tank-like institution created by The Woodrow Wilson Memorial Act of 1968. Congress stipulated that the WWC must commemorate Wilson's “ideals and concerns” and memorialize “his accomplishments.” One-third of its funding comes from taxpayers. Its president since 1999 is former Indiana Congressman Lee H. Hamilton.

The WWC currently has about 30 programs organized around topics or regions, such as History and Public Policy, Latin America, the Middle East, Science and Technology, Urban Studies, and the Cold War. Besides its staff of 150, the Center also invites experts, scholars, lobbyists, “corporate leaders,” “leading thinkers,” and dignitaries to discuss, research, and publish on public affairs, including “overlooked issues.”

✘ The WWC boasts that it has “a particular strength in international affairs, a reflection of President Wilson's strong advocacy of international understanding.”

In reality, Woodrow Wilson's "ideals and concerns," "accomplishments," and "advocacy of international understanding" are of little concern to the WWC. Instead, its agenda is driven mainly by money and politics.

This article aims to go into more depth about issues that have arisen since the initial exposé:

- Lee Hamilton's (and the WWC's) questionable corporate ties, particularly with BAE Systems, the main sponsor of his forthcoming gala dinner.
- Denunciations of the WWC and Hamilton that the initial exposé brought about.
- Research into Wilson's WW I era record and policies that the WWC has suspiciously rebuffed.

### **WWC's Corporate Harem**

Back in May, I was unaware that WWC President Lee Hamilton is a board member of one of the Center's top corporate donors, BAE Systems Inc. That's the American division of the largest weapons and defense firm in the world, BAE Systems plc, based in the U.K., with annual sales exceeding \$36 billion.

Lee Hamilton's 34 years as Congressman (D-IN) and his service on the CIA External Advisory Board, FBI Director's Advisory Board, 9/11 Commission, and elsewhere are cited in his biography on the WWC website.

Nowhere, however, does the WWC mention his simultaneous service to corporate America. Hamilton -- whose WWC salary exceeds \$410,000 and who qualifies for a hefty Congressional pension -- is a member of the boards of not only BAE Systems Inc. (since 2004), but also Carbon Motors (since 2008), and the Albright Stonebridge Group (since 2006).

The latter is a DC-based "global strategy firm" headed by former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright (co-chaired the so-called "Genocide Prevention Task Force" with former Defense Secretary William Cohen, whose firm represents Turkish businesses; they both refuse to acknowledge the Armenian genocide) and National Security Advisor Sandy Berger (pled guilty to stealing classified documents needed by the 9/11 Commission).

Why is the WWC silent about Hamilton's corporate memberships? Maybe because the average American knows that cozy corporate relationships are incompatible with, in this case, Hamilton's claim that his WWC is "a neutral forum for open, serious, and informed dialogue."

Even aside from Hamilton's corporate connections, can the WWC serve as a "neutral forum" for, and objectively analyze, the issues facing the American people when companies with mercenary agendas -- overseas business interests, deals with sordid foreign governments, genocide denial, Federal contracts, and more -- are helping to foot WWC's budget?

BAE, for example, has lobbied against an Armenian genocide resolution in the U.S. Congress and, like several WWC donors, is a member of the American Turkish Council. The ATC is a business group that has shamelessly labored to defeat the Armenian resolution and that FBI whistle-blower Sibel Edmonds has accused of serious wrongdoing.

No one believes that BAE, and the fifty or more other corporations that have forked over thousands to join the WWC's WilsonAlliances program, have no influence on the WWC's agenda and activities.

Companies who pony up cash not only receive "complimentary use" of WWC facilities blocks from the White House. They also get -- the WWC admits this -- "private customized meetings with staff and scholars to discuss policy issues that are specific to your business interests."

### **BAE & Other Genocide Deniers Throw a Party**

It turns out that three days before my initial report on the WWC was published, the 79 year-old Hamilton informed his staff that he will be retiring as president. Not surprisingly, the WWC's harem of mega-corporations are throwing him a going-away party.

On October 5, "a Gala will be held to celebrate the last decade at The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and to honor Lee H. Hamilton."

BAE Systems has shelled out \$250,000 to be the evening's sole "Presenting Sponsor." Did we mention that in the last three years BAE has also donated a minimum of \$100,000 to the WWC's parent, the famed Smithsonian Institution? The Smithsonian (the site of the WWC Gala) has even more unsavory corporate donors and relationships than the WWC. But we'll save that for another time.

What does \$250,000 buy BAE? President Linda Hudson (she's also Executive Director of the parent BAE's board) gets to be the event's "Presenting Chair."

\$250,000 surely also buys a lot of gratitude from attending dignitaries and WWC's salaried staff, bureaucrats, and alleged scholars.

BAE is allowed to put a "branded give-away" in the evening's "guest goodie bag." The guests may include President Obama and the First Lady, the event's "Honorary Chairs." Obama and Hamilton are good friends. Hamilton even held a private dinner at the WWC with the president-elect and their staffs several days before the inauguration.

It may be unwise for the President to chair an event in which BAE is the main sponsor.

Earlier this year, a U.S. District Court judge slapped BAE with a \$400 million criminal fine for its "deception, duplicity and knowing violations of law ... on an enormous scale."

Around the same time, BAE agreed to pay a fine of 30 million BP (about \$50 million) to the U.K.

What had the genocide-denying BAE done wrong? Among other things, BAE had bribed Saudi

officials, reportedly using slush funds, to buy jet fighters. The BBC says that the bribes were in the hundreds of millions of dollars. There were numerous other allegations of dishonest or unlawful practices by BAE in deals with Romania, South Africa, and Tanzania.

To avoid scrutiny, BAE had made illicit payments through intermediaries and front companies.

The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) said that BAE had "conspired to defraud the U.S. by impairing and impeding its lawful functions, false statements ... the Arms Export Control Act."

The DOJ also charged BAE with making "false applications for export licenses" for sensitive U.S. technology in Gripen fighter jets that the company leased to the Czech Republic and Hungary.

We should note that the DOJ says that the American division of BAE was not involved in the criminal conduct to which BAE pled guilty.

One suspects, however, that the decision not to prosecute the BAE's U.S. division may have been partly a political one. It is telling that Britain's own investigation into BAE had been "unlawfully" halted for political reasons, until the British High Court of Justice ruled that the investigation must continue.

We also know that two years ago the DOJ issued "subpoenas in the U.S. to employees of BAE Systems plc and BAE Systems Inc."

Using U.S. banking records, Chilean authorities charged that BAE had secretly funneled more than \$1 million to ex-dictator Augusto Pinochet through offshore accounts. The payments, apparently to bribe Pinochet into concluding arms deals with BAE, continued up through 2004, two years before Pinochet's death.

### **More Gala Donors**

Boeing and Chevron have also paid \$50,000 each to be "National Sponsors" of the WWC Gala. Both companies have lobbied, obviously at Turkey's urging, against the Armenian genocide resolution. Executives of both companies have also received WWC's "Corporate Citizenship Award." Coincidentally, Chevron recently acquired a lease to explore for oil in Turkish waters. It obviously pays to play ball with Turkey.

WWC Trustee Ignacio Sanchez, among others, gave \$15,000 to be a Gala "Benefactor." Sanchez just happens to work for DLA Piper, a lobbying firm that is registered with the U.S. government as a foreign agent for Turkey. He "represents national and international clients on a broad range of issues ... before Congress." DLA Piper's contract states specifically that "services shall include ... preventing the introduction, debate and passage of legislation and other U.S. government action that harms Turkey's interests and image."

The earlier exposé noted that the WWC has accepted cash contributions from several other corporations that have individually, or as part of an organization, opposed the Armenian resolution. For example, Alcoa, Bechtel, Bombardier, Coca Cola, Exxon-Mobil, Honeywell, and Lockheed-Martin

are members of the American Turkish Council or the Aerospace Industries Association, both of which have lobbied against the genocide resolution.

Given WWC's corporate love affair with Turkey, it's no wonder that in June the WWC traveled to Istanbul to give awards to Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoglu (detailed in the first exposé) and a multi-billionaire Turkish businessman. The latter's Dogus Holding conglomerate is, not surprisingly, a member of WWC's WilsonAlliances.

The award to Davutoglu was especially undeserved because it is well-known that he and Turkey have gratuitously complicated U.S., European, and U.N. policy in the region.

The WWC's explanation for the two Turkish awards? "In 2009, the Center identified Istanbul as an international city where a fundraising event of this kind would be viable." Translation: 'Show me the money.'

### **Stinging Rebukes**

Wilson's famous Fourteen Points -- for which he received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1920 -- sought "autonomous development" for all peoples under the Ottoman Turkish yoke, especially the Armenians, for whom he had a particular empathy.

After WW I, the Paris Peace Conference tapped Wilson to arbitrate the borders of Armenia on former Ottoman territory. Wilson's decision became part of the Treaty of Sevres (1920). Despite its contemporary relevance to Turkey and Armenian-Turkish relations, this body of knowledge has been all but ignored -- no doubt for political and monetary reasons -- by the WWC and its Wilson Quarterly journal. By virtually ignoring these vital aspects of Wilson's "ideals, concerns, and accomplishments," the WWC has violated The Woodrow Wilson Memorial Act.

That background suffices to better appreciate some of these recent condemnations of the WWC and Lee Hamilton:

- In two articles ("[Pawn for the Wrong President](#)," and "Presidential Legacy for Sale"), Wilson family descendant and human rights advocate Donald Wilson Bush blasted the WWC. The Center, said Bush, was "specifically chartered to preserve through their selection of programs, projects, scholars, and award recipients." That legacy included Wilson's "Arbitral Award on the Turkish – Armenian Boundary."

"What could possibly cause Lee Hamilton and his staff to kow-tow to White House pressure in this instance of Turkish diplomatic appeasement even at the cost of dishonoring Woodrow Wilson's personal wishes and thereby violating the WCC's very own mission and purpose?" Hamilton has "brought shame to the halls of one of our nation's most cherished and taxpayer supported institutions by violating its charter in favor of personal and self-serving ambitions" and "should consider leaving his post."

President Wilson would have objected to "money raising schemes specifically designed to bring home the spoils of economic gain at the expense of higher ideals."

"By placing the imprimatur of Woodrow Wilson's legacy upon Mr. Davutoglu and his successful business friend in this calloused and cavalier manner," wrote Bush, "the WWC has alienated thousands of smaller voices in favor of one large Turkish prize. In so doing, the WWC has sacrificed its legitimacy as a 'neutral forum for open, serious, and informed dialogue.'"

- In June, the chairman of the U.S. House Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia, Gary Ackerman (D-NY), wrote to Lee Hamilton. Davutoglu's foreign policy "is rife with illegality, irresponsibility, and hypocrisy." Ackerman cited Turkey's denial of the Armenian genocide, military occupation of Cyprus, and closure of the border with Armenia. Honoring Davutoglu is "absolutely inconsistent with the mission of the WWC and the ideals that animated President Wilson's administration and foreign policy."

- The American Hellenic Institute (AHI) asked the Wilson Center to not give the Turkish Foreign Minister an award. Davutoglu, said AHI, is not deserving of the honor "based upon the spirit of the award and the ideals President Woodrow Wilson championed." Turkey, it noted, has not accepted "responsibility for the genocide of Armenians, Greek and Assyrian Christians in the 20th century."

- The Armenian National Committee of America said that the award to Davutoglu "makes a mockery of President Wilson's belief in free and open inquiry." Davutoglu "has devoted his own personal energies and the resources of his Ministry to silencing discourse within Turkey and the United States on the Armenian Genocide, one of the most prominent human rights issues that Woodrow Wilson himself actively pursued," and "President Wilson was a tireless champion of Armenian rights and security." The award to Davutoglu "makes a mockery of the Wilson Center and its founding commitment to fostering scholarship commemorating 'the ideals and concerns of Woodrow Wilson.'"

- Journalist Claudia Rosett ("Turkey's Hollow Prize: Washington's Woodrow Wilson Center dishonors its own public service award") called the WWC "a global joke." With its award to Davutoglu, the Wilson Center "is willing to treat even the most flagrantly anti-American views (and deeds) as irrelevant, while collecting money around the globe. Why should Congress keep fueling this morally blank, misleading and venal exercise with millions of American tax dollars?"

### **Woodrow Wilson not Welcome**

I have recently learned of another instance of the Center's willful blindness to President Wilson's accomplishments and ideals.

Two years ago, the former Armenian Ambassador to Canada, Ara Papian, applied for one of WWC's Fellowships. An expert in history and law, Papian is fluent in English, Armenian, Russian, and Persian.

He also served in Romania and Iran, and graduated from the NATO Defense College.

Papian proposed to do "thorough and comprehensive research" into America and President Wilson's involvement with Turkey and Armenia, particularly official American reports of that era and Wilson's Arbitral Award to Armenia in 1920. Papian would explore "key materials located in U.S. national and academic collections in the greater Washington, DC" area.

His four-page application emphasized the relevance of the project to present-day "American involvement in the Middle East." A better understanding of America's historical involvement in Turkey and in other "players can be vital for American security, political and economic interests."

The WWC turned Ambassador Papian down flat without explanation.

Clearly the rejection wasn't due to any flaws in Papian's proposal, which aligned perfectly with the aims of an American institution supposedly dedicated to Wilson's ideals and record.

Then again, how would it look for the WWC, financed by companies committed to covering up the most barbaric aspects of Turkey's history, to accept Papian's proposal?

There is no doubt that WWC's corporate harem would threaten to withhold its favors if a project involving Wilson and Armenia were to be pursued. Of course, such threats could be issued only in those "private customized meetings with WWC staff and scholars to discuss policy issues that are specific to your business interests."

### **What the WWC Owes America**

The reforms needed at the WWC, listed in my first article, remain as urgent as ever:

- Wilson Center personnel, and those affiliated with it, particularly scholars, must speak out publicly against pandering to corporations and lobbying organizations.
- Those whose business or personal interests may conflict with their WWC role should resign.
- The WWC must reject all tainted corporate cash.
- The WWC should create a principled program on genocide. Recognized genocide scholars should be invited to speak at the Wilson Center and publish in the Wilson Quarterly.
- The WWC must establish a meaningful, ongoing dialogue with those persons and their descendants who have been victimized by Turkey's genocides.
- The WWC must return to its Congressional mandate by truly rededicating itself to Wilson's "ideals, concerns, and accomplishments" and by advocating against genocide and for the human rights and dignity of all people.

It is the job of the Congress, the Attorney General, the President, and the American people to ensure



that these reforms materialize.

***The author is an Armenian American freelance journalist. Many of his articles are archived at Armeniapedia.org.***

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