

TURKISH-US RELATIONS GO THROUGH THE WRINGER

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Murat Yetkin, [Hurriyet Daily News](#), 18 February 2015

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The worst recent one was Ankara recalling the Turkish ambassador to Washington, back in 2007, when an "Armenian genocide resolution" was voted through the House of Representatives' Foreign Affairs Committee. Ambassador Nabi Şensoy was sent with a confidential list of measures to be implemented if the bill was approved, (the closing of the İncirlik Air Base to U.S. flights was speculated as being among those measures). In the end, the resolution was turned down by then President George W. Bush. 

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This year, April 24 - which is taken as a symbolic anniversary for Armenians of the Ottoman Interior Minister Talat Pasha's order to deport Armenians "collaborating with the invading Russian armies" during the First World War - may be quite different from previous years.

First of all, this year is the centenary of the events, and thus has a high symbolic and emotional value for Armenians.

Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan has invited leaders from all over the world to attend a special commemoration ceremony in Yerevan on April 24, 2015, and many replied positively. Invitations from

Turkish President Tayyip Erdoğan to attend Gallipoli commemorations on the same day have not been welcomed with much enthusiasm so far. Sargsyan's answer to the move to change the Gallipoli commemoration date was to ask his parliament to annul a normalization protocol with Turkey, which was signed through Swiss mediation in 2009.

Armenia gives the utmost importance for the centenary campaign, especially targeting the U.S. Congress and the White House, and Yerevan has appointed one of the top guns in its arsenal as ambassador to Washington. Former Ambassador Tigran Sargisyan was an internationally acknowledged name who has served as prime minister and central bank governor. One of his major achievements since arriving in the U.S. capital has been to gather all Armenian groups under one lobbying activity umbrella, leaving aside all their inner disputes for 2015.

It is not possible to say the same for the Turkish side.

Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu has been quoted as warning U.S. Ambassador to Ankara John Bass, when he first visited him late in November 2014, that if the U.S. recognized the Armenian claims, Ankara would "radically review" its relations with Washington.

Turkey-U.S. relations are not enjoying their golden age nowadays anyway. There are a series of problematic issues, from their stance regarding Russia in the Ukraine crisis to differences of approach in the struggle against radical Islamist groups in Syria and Iraq, from the Syrian and Egyptian administrations to Israel.

The Israeli lobby had been Turkey's best friend for decades in countering Armenian moves in the Congress. It is not so enthusiastic anymore, due to Erdoğan's consistent slamming of Israel. Turkey does not have an ambassador in Jerusalem, Cairo, or Damascus any longer, and already did not have one in Yerevan or the Greek side of Nicosia in Cyprus.

So, Turkish Ambassador to Washington Serdar Kılıç can expect no support from the Jewish, Greek or Arabic lobbies in the Congress. He cannot even have any hopes from all members of the Turkish Caucus in the Congress. Out of 131 congressmen in the Turkey Caucus, 41 recently put their signatures under a letter to U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry alerting him to the pressure on the Zaman media group.

Overall, they made up almost half of the signatories of that letter.

The Zaman group is currently the number one target of Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's government both inside and outside Turkey. President Erdoğan has already denounced its leader Fethullah Gülen, the moderate Islamist ideologue living in Pennsylvania (his former close ally) as the greatest threat to Turkey's national security. The same Justice and Development Party (AK Parti) governments have previously almost outsourced serious Turkish activities abroad, including lobbying of Congress, through the Rumi Foundation, which is in line with Gülen.

One of leading figures of the Turkish Caucus, Gerry Connally recently cancelled an appointment

with Ambassador Kılıç without any justification. Turkish lobbying groups, which are now dropping the experienced lobbying companies that used to work for them, are in such desperation that they have started to spread the word that Connally - a Catholic of Irish descent - was always under Gülen's influence and is Jewish.

It seems that Ankara has no chance but to play the strategic card against Washington, to convince Obama that this time it can be a big gain for the White House, if not for the Turkish people.

