

**SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE**  
**Senator Thomas Umberg, Chair**  
**2021-2022 Regular Session**

AJR 27 (Nazarian)  
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ME

**SUBJECT**

Armenian, Assyrian, and Greek Genocide

**DIGEST**

This resolution commemorates the Armenian Genocide and calls upon the United States President and Congress to formally and consistently recognize the genocide.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

On April 24, 1915, under the pretext of suppressing a rebellious uprising of Armenians, the Young Turk government of the Ottoman Empire began a campaign to eradicate its Armenian subjects through massacres, starvation, torture, and forced death marches that ultimately killed over 1.5 million Armenian men, women, and children. The butchery was amply detailed in extensive newspaper coverage, contemporaneous records, and in harrowing firsthand accounts by scores of missionaries, diplomats, and survivors. Today, the atrocities inflicted on the Armenian people are widely recognized as the first modern instance of genocide – the deliberate attempt to annihilate a whole people – a term created, in part, to capture the novel horrors of those very atrocities. However, the Republic of Turkey has steadfastly denied the scale and nature of the carnage, an act that Elie Wiesel referred to as a “double killing,” as it destroys the dignity of survivors and the remembrance of the crime. Over 30 nations have formally recognized the genocide, the United States has stopped short of doing so.

This measure, which is virtually identical to several predecessors adopted by both houses of the Legislature, would, among other things, designate April 24, 2022, as “State of California Day of Commemoration of the 107th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide of 1915–1923,” and call upon the President of the United States and the United States Congress to formally and consistently reaffirm the historical truth that the atrocities committed against the Armenian people constituted genocide. It is supported by the Assyrian American Association of Southern California and opposed by the California Turkish Alliance.

## PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE LAW

This resolution:

- 1) States that Armenians have resided in Asia Minor and the Caucasus for approximately four millennia and have a long and rich history in the region. However, Turkish rulers of the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey subjected Armenians to severe and unjust persecution and brutality, including wholesale massacres beginning in the 1890s.
- 2) States that the Armenians were subjected to a systematic and premeditated genocide officially beginning on April 24, 1915, at the hands of the Young Turk government of the Ottoman Empire from 1915 to 1919, and continued at the hands of the Kemalist Movement of Turkey from 1920 to 1923, whereby over 1.5 million Armenian men, women, and children were slaughtered or marched to their deaths in an effort to annihilate the Armenian nation in the first genocide of modern times, while thousands of surviving Armenian women and children were forcibly converted to Islam, and hundreds of thousands more were subjected to ethnic cleansing during the period of the modern Republic of Turkey from 1924 to 1937.
- 3) States that in addition, hundreds of thousands of Assyrians, Greeks, and other minorities lost their lives at the hands of the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey, constituting one of the most atrocious violations of human rights in the history of the world.
- 4) States that these crimes against humanity also had the consequence of permanently removing all traces of the Armenians and other targeted people from their historic homelands of more than four millennia, and of enriching the perpetrators with the lands and other property of the victims of these crimes.
- 5) Describes the relief efforts of the Near East Relief organization, now known as the Near East Foundation, the first congressionally-sanctioned American philanthropic effort created to provide humanitarian assistance and rescue Armenians and other minorities from annihilation. Describes how Armenians went on to survive and thrive throughout the world, including in California.
- 6) Quotes statements by Adolf Hitler and Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in which they expressly recognize the nature of the atrocities committed against the Armenians. Quotes a statement of the former Turkish Interior Minister, Fethi Bey, to Parliament regarding the intent to make reparations to the Armenian people.
- 7) Describes how a Turkish military tribunal tried and sentenced to death, in absentia, the masterminds of the massacres.

- 8) States that unlike other people and governments that have admitted and denounced the abuses and crimes of predecessor regimes, and despite the Turkish government's earlier admissions and the overwhelming proof of genocidal intent, the Republic of Turkey has denied the occurrence of the crimes against humanity committed by the Ottoman and Young Turk rulers for many years and continues to do so a full century since the first crimes constituting genocide occurred. States that those denials compound the grief of the few remaining survivors and deprive the surviving Armenian nation of its individual and collective ancestral lands, property, cultural heritage, financial assets, and population growth.
- 9) States that the Republic of Turkey has escalated its international campaign of Armenian Genocide denial, maintained its blockade of Armenia, and increased its pressure on the small but growing movement in Turkey acknowledging the Armenian Genocide and seeking justice for this systematic campaign of destruction; however, those who continue to speak the truth about the Armenian Genocide continue to be silenced by violent means, and there is continued concern about the welfare of Christians in Turkey.
- 10) Describes instances in which the United States has recognized the nature of the atrocities against Armenians, including statements from Presidents Wilson, Reagan, and Obama.
- 11) States that California is home to the largest Armenian-American population in the United States, and Armenians living in California have enriched our state through their leadership and contribution in business, agriculture, academia, government, and the arts, many of whom have family members who experienced firsthand the horror and evil of the Armenian Genocide and its ongoing denial.
- 12) Declares that every person should be made aware and educated about the Armenian Genocide and other crimes against humanity. States that California has been at the forefront of encouraging and promoting a curriculum relating to human rights and genocide in order to empower future generations to prevent the recurrence of genocide.
- 13) States that April 24, 1915, is globally observed and recognized as the commencement of the Armenian Genocide; Armenians have not been provided justice for the crimes committed against them, and the Armenian people remain resolved and their spirit continues to thrive more than a century after their near-annihilation.
- 14) Designates April 24, 2022, as "State of California Day of Commemoration of the 107th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923."

- 15) Commends California's conscientious educators who teach about human rights and genocide and exhorts them to continue and enhance their efforts to educate students about the experience of the Armenians and other crimes against humanity.
- 16) Commends the Near East Relief organization's service to survivors of the Armenian Genocide and the Assyrian genocide. Pledges to work with various groups through legislation to host statewide educational and cultural events.
- 17) Declares that the Legislature deplors the persistent, ongoing efforts by any person to deny the historical fact of the Armenian Genocide.
- 18) Calls upon the President of the United States and the United States Congress to formally and consistently reaffirm the historical truth that the atrocities committed against the Armenian people constituted genocide, and to work toward equitable, constructive, stable, and durable Armenian-Turkish relations.
- 19) Instructs the Chief Clerk of the Assembly to transmit copies of the resolution to the President and Vice President of the United States, to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and to each Senator and Representative from California in the Congress of the United States.

## COMMENTS

### 1. Background on the Armenian Genocide

The Armenian people have resided in the Caucasus region of Eurasia for several millennia. In the 4th century CE, the Kingdom of Armenia was the first nation to embrace Christianity as its official religion and the Armenian people continue to strongly identify with Christianity. Today, roughly three million Armenians reside in the Republic of Armenia, which consists of a portion of the Armenians' historic homelands. A diaspora of several million more Armenians, scattered in the aftermath of the genocide, are concentrated in Russia, France, and the United States.<sup>1</sup>

For much of their history, Armenians have lived under the rule of a succession of empires.<sup>2</sup> The Ottoman Empire controlled most of the Middle East, including the historic homelands of the Armenians, from the 15th century until World War I when the Armenian Genocide unfolded.<sup>3</sup> Although religious and ethnic minorities such as the

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<sup>1</sup> *A small country but a big nation: how genocide shaped the Armenia of today* (Apr. 22, 2015) The Guardian (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/22/turkish-silence-fans-century-of-armenian-grief-over-genocide>) (as of June 9, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> CIA World Factbook, *Armenia* (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/am.html>) (as of June 9, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, "Armenians" (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Armenian-people>) (as of June 9, 2022).

Armenians were granted some autonomy, they were often subjected to disparate treatment, including higher taxes. In the latter half of the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire endured military defeats, economic contraction, and political instability, which corresponded with the rise of Turkish nationalism and growing hostility toward religious and ethnic minorities.<sup>4</sup> As Armenians pressed for political and economic reforms, they suffered reprisals in the mid-1890s by Turkish troops who rampaged through Armenian villages, ransacking an estimated one million houses and massacring hundreds of thousands<sup>5</sup> – a prologue to the coming horrors.

As the Ottoman Empire crumbled, the Committee of Union and Progress (more commonly known as the Young Turks) – a nationalist movement of junior army officers determined to modernize, strengthen, and “Turkify” the Ottoman Empire – seized power in 1908.<sup>6</sup> A troika of senior officials consolidated power over the movement: Ismail Enver, the Minister of War, Ahmed Djemal, the Minister of the Navy, and Mehmed Talaat, the Minister of the Interior, who presided over the genocide.

In 1914, the Turks entered World War I in alliance with Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. When it declared war on Turkey later that year, Russia “had invited Armenians living within Turkey to rise up against Ottoman rule, which a small minority did,” writes Samantha Power, a genocide scholar and former United States Ambassador to the United Nations.<sup>7</sup> However, “most [Armenians] expressed loyalty to Constantinople.”<sup>8</sup> Power continues:

But this did not stop Turkish leadership from using the pretext of an Armenian “revolutionary uprising” and the cover of war to eradicate the Armenian presence. Very few of those killed were plotting anything other than survival. The atrocities were carried out against women, children, and unarmed men. They were not incidental “by-products” of war but in fact resulted from carefully crafted decisions made by Turkey’s leaders.<sup>9</sup>

When Turkey joined World War I, two million Armenians lived in the Ottoman Empire. By 1922, fewer than 400,000 remained.<sup>10</sup> The rest were killed in the Armenian Genocide. According to the *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, victims of the Armenian Genocide included people killed in local massacres that began in spring 1915; others died during

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<sup>4</sup> Armenia, University of Minnesota, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (<https://cla.umn.edu/chgs/holocaust-genocide-education/resource-guides/armenia>) (as of June 9, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> Oren, *The Mass Murder They Still Deny* (May, 2007) New York Review of Books.

<sup>6</sup> Kifner, *Armenian Genocide of 1915: An Overview*, New York Times ([https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/ref/timestopics/topics\\_armeniangenocide.html?mcu\\_bz=0](https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/ref/timestopics/topics_armeniangenocide.html?mcu_bz=0)) (as of June 9, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> Power, *A Problem from Hell: America in the Age of Genocide* (2003), p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> Armenia, University of Minnesota, Holocaust and Genocide Studies.

deportations, under conditions of starvation, dehydration, exposure, and disease.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, tens of thousands of Armenian children were forcibly removed from their families and converted to Islam.<sup>12</sup>

Samantha Power writes:

Armenian men in rural areas were initially enlisted as pack animals to transport Turkish supplies to the front, but soon even this was deemed too dignified an existence for the traitorous Christians. Churches were desecrated. Armenian schools were closed, and those teachers who refused to convert to Islam were killed. All over Anatolia the authorities posted deportation orders requiring the Armenians to relocate to camps prepared in the deserts of Syria. In fact, the Turkish authorities knew that no facilities had been prepared, and more than half of the deported Armenians died on the way. 'By continuing the deportation of the orphans to their destinations during the intense cold, [Turkish Interior Minister Mehmed] Talaat wrote, we are ensuring their eternal rest.'<sup>13</sup>

It is broadly recognized that the Armenian Genocide began in earnest on April 24, 1915, when the Turkish government arrested and executed several hundred Armenian intellectuals. This resolution designates April 24, 2022, as "State of California Day of Commemoration of the 107th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923."

The author writes:

For years, there have been statements of denial of the Armenian genocide, which the Armenian people have endured since 1915. Until today, the leaders of Turkey deny that the genocide ever took place, and they continue to use rhetoric that suggests that they are unwilling to acknowledge the past by attempting to conceal the truth. Perpetrators of subsequent crimes have been emboldened by the international community's failure to confront genocide. We have seen this very unfortunate consequence unravel among our Ukrainian brothers and sisters. Leaders who violate human rights are not leaders, but tyrants. We must continue to properly recognize genocide in order to learn from them to help prevent future genocide.

## 2. Turkey's denial of the Armenian Genocide

The atrocities against the Armenian people prompted Polish-Jewish lawyer and scholar Raphael Lemkin to study the history of mass slaughter and advocate for an

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<sup>11</sup> *The Armenian Genocide (1915-16): Overview*, The Holocaust Encyclopedia (<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-armenian-genocide-1915-16-overview>) (as of June 6, 2022).

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> *A Problem from Hell: America in the Age of Genocide*, p. 2.

international framework to prevent such actions. After fleeing Nazi-occupied Poland, Lemkin coined the term “genocide” – from the Greek prefix *genos*, meaning race or tribe, and the Latin suffix, *cide*, meaning killing – as he campaigned to have targeted actions intended to destroy particular groups of people recognized as an international crime.<sup>14</sup>

Lemkin succeeded. In 1948, the newly-formed United Nations codified genocide as an independent crime. Article II of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide defines genocide as any of five enumerated acts “committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.” The enumerated acts are:

- a. Killing members of the group;
- b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.<sup>15</sup>

The International Court of Justice has stated that the 1948 Convention embodies principles that are part of general customary international law, meaning that regardless of whether states have ratified it, they are bound by this prohibition.<sup>16</sup> One-hundred fifty-two states have ratified or acceded to the treaty, including Turkey.<sup>17</sup>

Turkey rejects the overwhelming consensus that the atrocities against the Armenians constituted genocide, contending that there was no premeditated or systematic attempt to destroy the Armenian people. The Turkish government acknowledges many Armenians died at the hands of Ottoman forces but claims the number of dead is far lower than generally-accepted estimates. Further, the Turkish government characterizes the conflict as civil unrest with Armenian revolutionaries allying with Russia to defeat the Ottoman state internally.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Id.* at 42.

<sup>15</sup> United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, (<https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.shtml>) (as of June 6, 2022). That definition is “generally accepted for purposes of customary [international] law.” (*Restatement (Third) of the Foreign Relations Law of the United States* § 702 cmt. d.) It appears not only in the Genocide Convention itself, but also in numerous other international treaties. (*See, e.g.*, Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, art. 6, July 17, 1998, 2187 U.N.T.S. 90; Statute of the International Tribunal for Rwanda, art. 2 (1994); Statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, art. 4 (1993).) The offense of genocide under United States domestic law uses the same definition. (*See* 18 U.S.C. § 1091(a).)

<sup>16</sup> United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect (<https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.shtml>) (as of June 9, 2022).

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*

<sup>18</sup> *Erdogan: Turkey will ‘never accept’ genocide charges* (<http://www.dw.com/en/erdogan-turkey-will-never-accept-genocide-charges/a-19307115>) (as of June 9, 2022); *see also The Events of 1915 and the Turkish-*

In Turkey, public discourse regarding the issue has been stifled. In 2003, Turkey's Grand National Assembly passed a law requiring schools to deny that mass murder had taken place. Even raising the issue of Armenian genocide is considered to violate Article 301, which criminalizes the act of "insulting Turkishness." This law has been used to prosecute prominent figures who have called attention to the mass killings, including Turkish novelist and Nobel Laureate Orhan Pamuk and Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, who was assassinated by a radical Turkish nationalist in 2007.

Turkish-German academic Taner Akçam writes, "[i]n Turkish discourse, the following argument is commonly heard: 'If we accept the Genocide, then the claim for reparations will soon follow.' It shows that the main fear is not what we should call the event, but what comes after the event."<sup>19</sup> In this regard, the resolution notes that Turkey's crimes against humanity also had the consequence of permanently removing all traces of the Armenians and other targeted people from their historic homelands, and enriching the perpetrators with the lands and other property of the victims of these crimes. The Armenian Genocide Reparations Study Group calculated a reparations package totaling more than \$100 billion,<sup>20</sup> while some researchers have placed the damages at even higher levels.<sup>21</sup>

Under both international and domestic law, victims of genocide and mass atrocities may potentially assert claims for their personal injuries and the loss of the lives of their loved ones.<sup>22</sup> Armenian scholars also point to Germany, "which has publicly and often obsessively accepted culpability for the Holocaust, paid restitution to its victims, and released documents attesting to its guilt,"<sup>23</sup> as a model for working towards reconciliation.

Many Armenians want Turks to at least acknowledge the genocide actually happened. The Armenian Genocide Reparations Study Group's Chair, Henry C. Theriault, stated:

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*Armenian Controversy over History: An Overview*, Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs website ([http://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-events-of-1915-and-the-turkish-armenian-controversy-over-history\\_-an-overview.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-events-of-1915-and-the-turkish-armenian-controversy-over-history_-an-overview.en.mfa)) (as of June 9, 2022).

<sup>19</sup> *From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide*.

<sup>20</sup> *Resolution with Justice: Reparations for the Armenian Genocide*, Report of the Armenian Genocide Reparations Study Group (Mar. 2015) (<http://www.armeniangenocidereparations.info/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/20150331-ArmenianGenocideReparations-CompleteBooklet-FINAL.pdf>) (as of June 9, 2022).

<sup>21</sup> *Armenian Groups Are Increasingly Focused on Reparations for Genocide* (Apr. 23, 2015) New York Times (<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/24/world/europe/turkey-fear-of-reparations-possibly-in-many-billions-is-a-factor-in-armenian-genocide-denials.html>) (as of June 9, 2022).

<sup>22</sup> *Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law* (<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/RemedyAndReparation.aspx>) (as of June 9, 2022). Indeed a lawsuit against New York Life Insurance Co. resulted in a \$20 million settlement for heirs of Armenian Genocide victims. *Insurer Settles Armenian Genocide Suit* (Jan. 29, 2004) *Los Angeles Times* (<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2004-jan-29-me-genocide29-story.html>) (as of June 6, 2022).

<sup>23</sup> *The Mass Murder They Still Deny*.

“It has symbolic value, for getting the history right. The fact that many people in Turkey aren’t willing to use the word, the resistance to using it, doesn’t promote reconciliation.”<sup>24</sup>

AJR 27 denounces Turkey’s campaign of denialism and declares that the Legislature deplores the persistent, ongoing efforts by any person to deny the historical fact of the Armenian Genocide. As the International Association of Genocide Scholars noted in a letter to then-Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, “there may be differing interpretations of genocide – how and why the Armenian Genocide happened, but to deny its factual and moral reality as genocide is not to engage in scholarship but in propaganda and efforts to absolve the perpetrator, blame the victims, and erase the ethical meaning of this history.”<sup>25</sup>

### 3. The historical reality of the Armenian Genocide

Despite Turkey’s position that a lack of genuine evidence exists to support the contention that the atrocities against the Armenian people amount to genocide, the overwhelming international and academic consensus is that the Turkish government engaged in a premediated and systematic effort to exterminate the Armenian people.<sup>26</sup>

Contemporaneous evidence reveals the scale and nature of the Turkish government’s policies. Armenian survivors, American missionaries, and diplomats learned first of the massacres, mass deportations, wanton pillage, and other barbarities. The Turkish government confiscated Armenian property, leaving the population destitute and defenseless. Jesse Jackson, the United States’ representative in Aleppo, observed railway cars crammed with starving Armenian deportees; he expected none would survive.<sup>27</sup> Reverend Richard Hill reported seeing “children...dying by the hundreds” whose “frenzied mothers would...fling them...into the fields, so as not to see the[ir] dying agonies.”<sup>28</sup> Other witnesses saw entire villages driven into rivers to drown or herded

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<sup>24</sup> Resolution with Justice: Reparations for the Armenian Genocide, Report of the Armenian Genocide Reparations Study Group (Mar. 2015) (<http://www.armeniangenocidereparations.info/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/20150331-ArmenianGenocideReparations-CompleteBooklet-FINAL.pdf>) (as of June 9, 2022); *Armenian Groups Are Increasingly Focused on Reparations for Genocide* (Apr. 23, 2015) New York Times

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/24/world/europe/turkey-fear-of-reparations-possibly-in-many-billions-is-a-factor-in-armenian-genocide-denials.html>) (as of June 9, 2022).

<sup>25</sup> *A Letter from The International Association of Genocide Scholars* (Jun. 13, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> Armenia, University of Minnesota, Holocaust and Genocide Studies

(<https://cla.umn.edu/chgs/holocaust-genocide-education/resource-guides/armenia>) (as of June 9, 2022).

<sup>27</sup> *The Mass Murder They Still Deny*.

<sup>28</sup> *Id.*

into churches that were then set ablaze.<sup>29</sup> Rapes, abductions, and forced marriages of women were commonplace.<sup>30</sup>

William Shedd, a Presbyterian missionary who was expelled from Turkey, wrote about the execution of 900 villagers, mostly the elderly and young women.<sup>31</sup> He wrote U.S. Secretary of State Robert Lansing urging the United States to intervene:

I am sure there are great many thoughtful Americans who, like myself, feel that silence on the part of our Government is perilous and that for our Government to make no public protest against a crime of such magnitude perpetrated by a Government on noncombatants, the great majority of them helpless women and children, is to miss an unusual opportunity to serve humanity, if not risk grave danger of dishonor on the name of America and of lessening our right to speak for humanity and justice. I am aware, of course, that it may seem presumptuous to suggest procedure in matters of diplomacy; but the need of these multitudes is desperate, and the only hope of influence is the Government of the United States.<sup>32</sup>

The United States Ambassador to Turkey, Henry Morgenthau Sr., after receiving reports of atrocities against Armenians from U.S. consuls posted throughout the Ottoman Empire, as well as missionaries and Armenian survivors, concluded that a campaign of “race murder” was underway. Morgenthau sent the following cable to Washington:

Persecution of Armenians assuming unprecedented proportions. Reports from widely scattered districts indicate systematic attempt to uproot peaceful Armenian populations and through arbitrary arrests, terrible tortures, whole-sale expulsions and deportations from one end of the Empire to the other accompanied by frequent instance of rape, pillage, and murder, turning into massacre, to bring destruction and destitution on them. These measures are not in response to popular or fanatical demand but are purely arbitrary and directed from Constantinople in the name of military necessity, often in districts where no military operations are likely to take place.<sup>33</sup>

Morgenthau made repeated entreaties to Talaat to restrain the brutal tactics, warning that he would be held responsible after the war. Talaat dismissed these warnings and made it clear that all Armenians should be held collectively guilty for the acts of the few who revolted against Turkey. According to Morgenthau, Talaat actively boasted of

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<sup>29</sup> *Id.*

<sup>30</sup> Armenia, University of Minnesota, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (<https://cla.umn.edu/chgs/holocaust-genocide-education/resource-guides/armenia>) (as of June 9, 2022).

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*

<sup>32</sup> *A Problem from Hell: America in the Age of Genocide*, p. 12.

<sup>33</sup> *Id.* at 6.

ridging Turkey of its Armenian “problem.”<sup>34</sup> Chillingly, Talaat requested that Morgenthau ask U.S. insurance companies to furnish the Ottoman government with a list of Armenian policyholders, so that the proceeds owed to the dead would escheat to the state.<sup>35</sup>

As the horrors mounted, the plight of the Armenians was well understood by the Allied powers, which issued a declaration protesting these “crimes against humanity” and vowing to hold Turkey’s leaders “personally responsible.”<sup>36</sup> In the United States, both houses of Congress demanded a declaration of war against Turkey, in order to rescue the Armenians. Former president Teddy Roosevelt argued that “[t]he Armenian massacre was the greatest crime of the war” and “failure to act against Turkey is to condone it.”<sup>37</sup>

Likewise, the public in general was aware of the atrocities against the Armenian people, which were the subject of 145 *New York Times* stories in 1915.<sup>38</sup> These stories presented firsthand accounts by missionaries, Red Cross officials, local religious authorities, and survivors of mass executions. Some articles included statements from Talaat that made it clear the Ottoman Empire would target its Christian subjects.<sup>39</sup> *Times* correspondents warned of the unprecedented nature of the crimes against Armenians and warned of their potential extinction without intervention from neutral nations like the United States.<sup>40</sup>

But the United States did not intervene. Frustrated by the Wilson Administration’s steadfast neutrality and refusal to cast diplomatic protocol aside, Morgenthau resigned his post in 1916. Over a million Armenians had been killed during his tenure.<sup>41</sup> However, many of the United States’ leading philanthropists and clergymen joined to create the Committee on the Armenian Atrocities, which raised \$100 million for Near East relief.<sup>42</sup> This resolution commends the services delivered by Near East Relief to survivors of genocide and pledges the Legislature’s intent to work with community groups, nonprofit organizations, citizens, state personnel, and the community at large to host statewide educational and cultural events.

Following the war, Talaat fled to Germany. A Turkish tribunal found several officials guilty of crimes against humanity, convicting Talaat and several others in absentia,

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<sup>34</sup> *Id.* at 8

<sup>35</sup> *Id.*

<sup>36</sup> *The Mass Murder They Still Deny.*

<sup>37</sup> *Id.*

<sup>38</sup> Kifner, *Armenian Genocide of 1915: An Overview*, *New York Times*

([https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/ref/timestopics/topics\\_armeniangenocide.html?mcu\\_bz=0](https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/ref/timestopics/topics_armeniangenocide.html?mcu_bz=0)) (as of June 9, 2022); *A Problem from Hell: America in the Age of Genocide*, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> *Id.*; *A Problem from Hell: America in the Age of Genocide*, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> *A Problem from Hell: America in the Age of Genocide*, p. 9.

<sup>41</sup> *Id.* at 13.

<sup>42</sup> *The Mass Murder They Still Deny.*

sentencing them to death. The tribunal concluded that “[t]he disaster against the Armenians was not a local or isolated event. It was the result of a premediated decision taken by a central body; ... and the immolations and excesses which took places were based on oral and written orders issued by that central body.”<sup>43</sup> Hiding in Berlin, Talaat began writing his memoirs in an attempt to burnish his image and downplay the scale and nature of the atrocities he orchestrated. Even so, he still blamed Armenians for their own fate: “I admit that we deported many Armenians from our eastern provinces,” he wrote. Nevertheless, “the responsibility for these acts falls first of all upon the deported people themselves.”<sup>44</sup>

In 1921, Talaat was assassinated by Soghomon Tehlirian, an Armenian who had been part of a caravan of 20,000 Armenians who were forcibly removed from their homes and marched in columns into the desert. Tehlirian’s sisters were raped, his brother’s skull cleaved by an ax, and his mother shot. Struck unconscious by a blow to the head and left for dead in a field of corpses, Tehlirian believed he had been the sole survivor of the caravan.<sup>45</sup> He was later acquitted of murder, essentially on grounds of temporary insanity.<sup>46</sup> His actions drew the attention of Raphael Lemkin, the lawyer and scholar who later coined the term “genocide”.

The resolution points to two additional key pieces of evidence. First, the Republic of Turkey’s founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, admitted:

These left-overs from the former Young Turk Party, who should have been made to account for the lives of millions of our Christian subjects who were ruthlessly driven en masse, from their homes and massacred, have been restive under the Republican rule. [The Young Turks] have hitherto lived on plunder, robbery and bribery and become inimical to any idea or suggestion to enlist in useful labor and earn their living by the honest sweat of their brow.

The resolution also quotes Adolf Hitler as he, a decade later, informed his commanders that victors write the history books:

It was knowingly and lightheartedly that Genghis Kahn sent thousands of women and children to their deaths. History sees in him only the founder of a state ... The aim of war is not to reach definite lines but to annihilate the enemy physically. It is by this means that we shall obtain the vital living space that we need. *Who today still speaks of the massacre of the Armenians?*<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *A Problem from Hell: America in the Age of Genocide*, p. 13

<sup>44</sup> *Id.* at 15.

<sup>45</sup> *Id.* at pp. 3-4.

<sup>46</sup> *Id.* at 19.

<sup>47</sup> *Id.* at 23, emphasis in original.

International opinion has coalesced around the view that the atrocities inflicted on the Armenians amount to genocide. The only two countries that officially deny the genocide are Turkey and its close ally, Azerbaijan. Over 30 countries have formally recognized the genocide. Likewise, the European Parliament and the United Nations Sub-Commission on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights have recognized the Armenian Genocide. On October 29, 2019 the House of Representatives voted to recognize the Armenian Genocide. On December 12, 2019 the United States Senate voted to recognize the Armenian Genocide. In 2021, on Armenian Remembrance Day, President Joe Biden issued a statement in which he wrote that “on this day, we remember the lives of all those who died in the Ottoman era Armenian genocide and recommit ourselves to preventing such an atrocity from ever again occurring.”<sup>48</sup>

This resolution calls upon the President of the United States and the United States Congress to formally and consistently reaffirm the historical truth that the atrocities committed against the Armenian people constituted genocide, and to work toward equitable, constructive, stable, and durable Armenian-Turkish relations.

### **SUPPORT**

Assyrian American Association of Southern California

### **OPPOSITION**

California Turkish Alliance  
One individual

### **RELATED LEGISLATION**

Pending Legislation: ACR 26 (Nazarian, 2021) Commends California businesses that have considered the Republic of Turkey’s recent acts of aggression against Armenia and have chosen to suspend business dealings with the government of the Republic of Turkey. This measure is pending referral in the Assembly.

Prior Legislation:

SR 82 (Durazo, 2021) was virtually identical to this measure.

HR 21 (Nazarian, 2021) was virtually identical to this measure.

SR 31 (Borgeas, 2019) was virtually identical to this measure.

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<sup>48</sup> Statement by President Joe Biden on Armenian Remembrance Day, April 24, 2021, available at: [Statement by President Joe Biden on Armenian Remembrance Day | The White House](#) (as of June 9, 2022).

AJR 27 (Nazarian)

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AJR 16 (Rivas, Ch. 150, Stats. 2019) was virtually identical to this measure.

SR 107 (Portantino, 2018) was virtually identical to this measure.

SR 29 (Portantino, 2017) was virtually identical to this measure.

AJR 37 (Friedman, Res. Ch. 75, Stats. 2018) was virtually identical to this measure.

AJR 3 (Nazarian, Res. Ch. 56, Stats. 2017) was virtually identical to this measure.

**PRIOR VOTES:**

Assembly Floor (Ayes 68, Noes 0)

Assembly Rules Committee (Ayes 9, Noes 0)

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