

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador-Designate Marie L. Yovanovitch by
Senator Robert Menendez (#1)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
June 19, 2008**

Question:

Does the United States have military or economic interests in Turkey that influence its decision on whether to use the word “genocide,” when discussing the massacre of 1.5 million Armenians from 1915-1923?

Answer:

Turkey is a long-standing NATO ally of the United States and an important partner in promoting peace and stability in the broader Middle East, and one with which we share democratic values. We seek to maintain strong U.S.-Turkey relations, just as we seek to maintain strong U.S.-Armenian relations. We believe our partnership will deepen with Turkey as it reconciles with its own painful past and with Armenia. We are encouraging Turkey to open its border, reinstitute transportation, communication, and utility links between the two countries, and re-establish diplomatic relations. The Administration also has pressed for expanding freedom of expression in Turkey, which has helped to expand the public debate surrounding the events of 1915 and led to the amendment of Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code, under which individuals have been prosecuted for “insulting Turkishness.”

Questions for the Record Submitted to

Senator Robert Menendez (#2)

Question:

What do you believe are the effects of Turkey's state-sponsored denial of a genocide on the survivors and their descendants?

Answer:

Turkey’s difficulty in coming to terms with this dark spot in its history only adds to the pain experienced by many Armenians and Armenian-Americans. The U.S. Government acknowledges and mourns as historical fact the mass killings, ethnic cleansing, and forced deportations that devastated over 1.5 million Armenians at the end of the Ottoman Empire. The United States recognizes these events as one of the greatest tragedies of the 20th century, the “Medz Yeghern,” or Great Calamity, as many Armenians refer to it. That is why every April 24 the President honors the victims and expresses American solidarity with the Armenian people on Remembrance Day.

Senator Robert Menendez (#3)

Question:

Do you believe there can be reconciliation between Turkey and Armenia, without an acknowledgment of the genocide by Turkey?

Answer:

To achieve full reconciliation, Turkey must come to terms with its past. This will not be easy and progress so far has been slow, although there have been some signs of change, such as the outrage and ethnic solidarity that resulted from the murder of Hrant Dink, and recent changes to Article 301. The Administration will continue to work to promote understanding between Turkey and Armenia, including by encouraging the normalization of diplomatic relations between the two countries and the opening of their land border. If I am confirmed, I will continue to promote not only government-to-government discussions, but also people-to-people cultural and

economic contacts and partnerships, and other cross-border and regional initiatives. Contact begins to build trust, and trust is the necessary first step to reconciliation, facilitating Turkey's ability and willingness to examine the dark spots in its history.

Senator Robert Menendez (#4)

Question:

In a 1951 U.S. court filing with the International Court of Justice, the U.S. filing stated that, "the Turkish massacres of Armenians, the extermination of millions of Jews and Poles by the Nazis are outstanding examples of the crime of genocide." Also, on April 22, 1981 President Ronald Reagan used the term genocide to describe the Armenian Genocide, stating, in an official proclamation: "Like the genocide of the Armenians before it, and the genocide of the Cambodians which followed it - and like too many other such persecutions of too many other peoples - the lessons of the Holocaust must never be forgotten."

a. What is your understanding of the reasoning behind the change in U.S. policy today that now prohibits Executive Branch officials from using the term genocide to describe the Armenian Genocide?

Answer:

It has been President Bush's policy, as well as that of previous Presidents of both parties, not to use that term. The President's focus is on encouraging Turkish citizens to reconcile with their past and with the Armenian people. He seeks to support the painstaking progress achieved to date. A key part of that effort is to end Armenia's isolation in the region by encouraging normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey and the opening of their land border. President Bush believes that normalization can and should be achieved.

The U.S. government acknowledges and mourns the mass killings, ethnic cleansing, and forced deportations that devastated over one and a half million Armenians at the end of the Ottoman Empire. The United States recognizes these events as one of the greatest tragedies of the 20th century, the "Medz Yeghern," or Great Calamity, as many Armenians refer to it. That is why every April the President honors the victims and expresses American solidarity with the Armenian people on Remembrance Day.

Senator Robert Menendez (#5)

Question:

How can we expect Turkey to come to terms with its past when we, as Americans, are unwilling to speak honestly about the Armenian Genocide?

Answer:

The Administration has never denied the facts – over 1.5 million Armenians were murdered, starved, or deported at the end of the Ottoman Empire. This was a tragedy that we and the world must never forget, so that it is never repeated. Our focus is on encouraging the people of Turkey to reconcile with their past regarding these horrific events. We mourn this terrible chapter of history and recognize that it remains a source of great pain for the people of Armenia and of Armenian descent, and for all those who believe in the dignity and value of every human life.

Senator Robert Menendez (#6)

Question:

As the Ambassador-Designate to Armenia you are clearly mindful of the work of your predecessors in this important diplomatic post, including former Ambassador John Evans, who was fired for speaking truthfully

about the Armenian Genocide? What lessons do you draw from Ambassador Evans' experience, particularly the way in which his tenure in Yerevan and his diplomatic career were ended?

Answer:

I understand that I have a duty to faithfully represent the policy of the President. There is the same expectation for all Foreign Service Officers and executive branch officials – regardless of the subject. This is a basic tenet of a diplomatic career. At the same time, the Secretary has made it clear that there are no taboo subjects for internal discussion and that all viewpoints are respectfully heard.

Senator Robert Menendez (#7)

Question:

There were some questions about the characterization of the Armenian Genocide that you were unable to answer because you were not authorized to speak on them. Do you know of other cases where the President limits speech of Department of State employees based on his policy determinations on the characterizations of historical events?

Answer:

As part of the Executive Branch, the State Department follows the President's policies on all issues. There is the same expectation for all Foreign Service Officers and Executive Branch officials – regardless of the subject. I understand that I have a duty to faithfully represent the policy of the President. This is a basic tenet of a diplomatic career.

Senator Robert Menendez (#8)

Question:

Do you believe the 1951 United States court filing with the International Court of Justice stating, "the Turkish massacres of Armenians, the extermination of millions of Jews and Poles by the Nazis are outstanding examples of the crime of genocide" was inaccurate?

Answer:

The U.S. government acknowledges and mourns the mass killings, ethnic cleansing, and forced deportations that devastated over one and a half million Armenians at the end of the Ottoman Empire. The Administration also understands that many Americans and many Armenians believe that these horrible acts should be called "genocide." It has been President Bush's policy, as well as that of previous presidents of both parties, not to use that term.

President Bush believes that the best way to honor the victims is to remember the past, so it is never repeated, and to look to the future to promote understanding and reconciliation between the peoples and governments of Armenia and Turkey. A key part of that effort is to end Armenia's isolation in the region by encouraging normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey and the opening of their land border. The Armenian government has requested that we facilitate this process. It will not be easy nor will it likely be quick, but there are some hopeful signs. President Bush believes that normalization can and should be achieved.

Senator Robert Menendez (#9)

Question:

How does the Administration's non-use of the genocide term advance U.S. efforts to promote Armenian-Turkish reconciliation?

Answer:

The Administration has never denied the terrible events of 1915 and acknowledges the human tragedy of the mass killings and forced exile of over 1.5 million Armenians at the end of the Ottoman Empire. The Administration also understands that many Americans and many Armenians believe that these events should be called "genocide." It has been the policy of this Administration, as well as that of previous administrations of both parties, not to use that term. The President's focus is on encouraging Turkish citizens to reconcile with their past and with the Armenian people. The Administration's goal is to stimulate a candid exploration within Turkish society of these horrific events in an effort to help this reconciliation. This is not easy. It was not easy for the United States to address its own historic dark spots. We seek not to undercut voices emerging in Turkey who call for a truthful exploration of these events in pursuit of Turkey's reconciliation with its own past and with Armenia; we share their goal of opening Turkey's past through honest, if painful, self examination.

Senator Robert Menendez (#10)

Question:

The President's policies are not promoting an honest reexamination of its history, but actually intensifying Turkey's denial of the Armenian Genocide. What evidence can you identify for us today that can inspire any trust by the Senate that those words of facilitating dialogue have borne any real results?

Answer:

The Administration's goal is to stimulate a candid exploration within Turkish society of these horrific events in an effort to help this reconciliation. This is not easy. It was not easy for the United States to address its own historic dark spots.

The Administration has long pressed for expanding freedom of expression in Turkey, which has helped to expand the public debate surrounding the mass killings, forced exile, and ethnic cleansing that occurred during WWI at the end of the Ottoman Empire. After a long silence, Turkey is making progress addressing these issues. More than 100,000 Turkish citizens of all backgrounds demonstrated at the funeral of Hrant Dink, an Armenian-Turkish journalist murdered by a Turkish ultra-nationalist, and they demonstrated in support of tolerance and a candid exploration of Turkey's past.

In May 2008, the Turkish government amended Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code, under which individuals have been prosecuted for "insulting Turkishness." While the Administration would have preferred to have seen the repeal of Article 301, the amendments reduce the maximum possible sentence from three to two years and, most importantly, require the Minister of Justice to determine whether to accept the case for prosecution. The Minister's role should help to reduce significantly the number of cases brought by zealous prosecutors. The Administration will continue to encourage the Turkish authorities to continue this progress and to end legal action against citizens for expressing their views on this (and any) issue.

The U.S. Embassy in Ankara also is committed to working with the Government of Turkey on ways in which the terrible events of 1915 can be studied. As a recent example, the USG is currently laying the groundwork for an International Visitor Program that would bring archivists from the Turkish State Archives to the U.S. to look at the ways in which we do historical research. As a confidence building measure, we also have contacted Armenian archivists to participate in the program, in the hope that, upon return, the archivists from both countries could work together on a joint program that would study the atrocities.

In addition, our embassies take every opportunity in meetings with the Governments of Armenia and Turkey, and with civil society leaders from both countries, to encourage improved dialogue between them. Since 2006, the USG has provided over \$700,000 in support of initiatives to increase people-to-people connections between Armenia and Turkey, including research projects, conferences, documentary production, and exchange and partnership programs with the goal of increasing cross-border dialogue and cooperation. These programs are focused on bringing together Armenian and Turkish NGOs, think tank researchers, academics and business leaders at the grass roots level by creating opportunities for them to work together on common projects that will benefit both countries.

Senator Robert Menendez (#11)

Question:

The President opposes the recognition of the Armenian Genocide because he believes it will harm reconciliation, however, he does not take this same position with the genocide in Darfur, although it is still heartily denied by the Sudanese government. How is the Armenian Genocide any different?

Answer:

The mass murder and ethnic cleansing of over 1.5 million Armenians in 1915 is a tragedy of epic proportions for all of humanity and one that is commemorated every year in the United States so that we never forget this dark chapter in history. Many Americans believe that these events should be called “genocide.” It has been President Bush’s policy – as well as that of several previous Presidents on both sides of the aisle – not to use that term. The Administration’s focus is on encouraging people in Turkey to reconcile with their past and with the Armenian people regarding these horrific events.

Senator Robert Menendez (#12)

Question:

What will you do to help end Turkey's over 15 year-long blockade against Armenia?

Answer:

Facilitating Armenia’s regional integration by opening its border with Turkey is a priority for the United States. If confirmed, this would be one of my key priorities as Ambassador -- not only by supporting government-to-government discussions -- but by promoting people-to-people contacts and partnerships, and other cross-border and regional initiatives. Contact begins to build trust, and trust is the necessary first step to reconciliation and conflict resolution. If confirmed, I also look forward to working with my colleagues at our embassy in Ankara in this common effort. Clearly, the status quo is not helpful to anyone.

Fortunately, some progress has been achieved in recent years: there are regular charter flights between Yerevan and Istanbul and other flights to Antalya; bus connections via Georgia are numerous; and trade with Turkey through Georgia is common. However, both countries would benefit greatly from increased direct trade, connecting their electrical grids, and implementing other measures natural to neighbors.

The U.S. also supports more cross-border dialogue and cooperation between the people of Armenia and Turkey through research initiatives, conferences, and exchange programs. Our Embassies take every opportunity in meetings with the Governments of Armenia and Turkey, and with civil society leaders from both countries, to encourage improved dialogue. Since 2006, the USG has provided over \$700,000 in support of initiatives to increase people-to-people connections between Armenia and Turkey, including research projects, conferences, documentary production, and exchange and partnership programs with the goal of increasing cross-border dialogue and cooperation. These programs are focused on bringing together Armenian and Turkish NGOs, think tank researchers, academics and business leaders at the grass roots level by creating opportunities for them to work together on common projects that will benefit both countries.

Senator Robert Menendez (#13)

Question:

How does Turkey and Azerbaijan's blockade of Armenia harm U.S. interests in the region, in particular our interest to promote an East-West trade corridor and minimize the influence of Russia and Iran?

Answer:

Facilitating Armenia's regional integration is a particular priority for the United States. The USG has worked to end Armenia's isolation both by promoting reconciliation between Armenia and Turkey to reopen their land border, and by working to find a peaceful and lasting settlement to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with Azerbaijan. The USG believes regional integration is in the economic interest of all three countries and certainly in our interest. For example, U.S. investment is hampered by regional divisions. With its borders to the east and west closed, Armenia relies more than we would like on its relations with Iran. In terms of Russia's influence, Armenia's history and currently complicated relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey provide the impetus for a close relationship with Russia. In looking at the region as a whole, our strategic interests are focused on several issues: the advance of freedom and democracy; security, including counterterrorism and peaceful resolution of separatist conflicts; and energy. All would benefit greatly from good neighborly relations and regional integration of the South Caucasus.

Senator Robert Menendez (#14)

Question:

Currently, the United States assistance to Nagorno Karabakh is limited to only humanitarian assistance, however, there are serious needs for economic development, which have been ignored for over a decade. Do you support a shift from humanitarian to developmental assistance for Nagorno Karabakh to facilitate the construction of a hospital and other projects?

Answer:

Since 1998 the United States has provided roughly \$29 million in funding for projects that meet the highest priority needs, such as de-mining, health, drinking water, shelter, and infrastructure reconstruction. The Administration believes these are the most appropriate and pressing priorities, based on a very recent (December 2007) needs assessment conducted by USAID in Nagorno-Karabakh, actual humanitarian conditions on the ground, and international legal constraints arising from the unresolved nature of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Senator Robert Menendez (#15)

Question:

What restrictions, if any, are in place that prohibit communications between U.S. and Nagorno-Karabakh officials? What is the justification for such restrictions, considering that the Nagorno-Karabakh officials have been democratically elected in free and internationally-monitored elections and are the legitimate representatives of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh? Where are these restrictions codified or enumerated?

Answer:

No country, including Armenia, recognizes Nagorno-Karabakh as an independent entity. In accordance with the international legal principle of territorial integrity, Nagorno-Karabakh remains a part of Azerbaijan, and its future status is the subject of negotiations currently mediated by the OSCE's Minsk Group, of which the United States is a Co-Chair. The United States strives to remain an honest broker of these negotiations. Because of these sensitivities, our level of interaction with de facto officials from Nagorno-Karabakh is limited. State Department policy authorizes only the U.S. Co-Chair of the OSCE Minsk Group and his staff to maintain regular contact with the de facto Nagorno-Karabakh authorities and to travel on a regular basis to Nagorno-Karabakh, with other U.S. officials meeting with the de facto authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh with the permission of the U.S. Co-Chair. This policy is not codified in official State Department regulations, but is widely disseminated to all U.S. officials planning to travel to Armenia or Azerbaijan.

Senator Robert Menendez (#16)

Question:

Would you permit USAID personnel, who are not Armenian nationals, to visit Nagorno-Karabakh?

Answer:

USAID personnel, like other U.S. officials, may travel to Nagorno-Karabakh with the permission of the U.S. Co-Chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, who has the U.S. lead in mediating the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. USAID personnel have traveled to Nagorno-Karabakh in the past with the permission of the U.S. Co-Chair to implement humanitarian aid programs.

Senator Robert Menendez (#17)

Question:

Would you visit with government officials from Nagorno-Karabakh, if they requested such a meeting?

Answer:

The U.S. Co-Chair and his staff maintain regular contact with de facto officials from Nagorno-Karabakh. Under current U.S. policy, if confirmed, I would not meet with such officials unless requested to do so by the U.S. Co-Chair.

Senator Robert Menendez (#18)

Question:

U.S. assistance to Armenia has demonstrated effectiveness in promoting free market reform and is vital to democracy building in Armenia. What actions will you take to continue to facilitate a robust assistance program?

Answer:

If confirmed, I will strongly support the continued evaluation and fine-tuning of our assistance programs and will coordinate closely with the Office of the Director of Foreign Assistance, the Office of Management and Budget, and Congress to ensure that future budget requests meet USG policy goals as well as the development needs of Armenia.

Many of the USG assistance programs in Armenia have achieved measurable success, particularly in promoting economic growth. For example, in part because of USG assistance, the poverty rate in Armenia fell from 56 percent in 1999 to 30 percent in 2005 (based on IMF reporting); rural poverty fell from 48 percent to 28 percent. However, the events surrounding the flawed Presidential elections in February and its aftermath prove that there is still much work needed to foster democratic reform. In the wake of these developments, the USG is evaluating how to target our assistance programs to better achieve our policy objectives, focusing more on increasing the capacity of civil society to seek accountable and transparent governance.

Armenia was recently chosen as one of ten pilot countries for which the U.S. Government will develop a "Country Assistance Strategy" (CAS). The CAS will identify goals and priorities for U.S. assistance over a five-year period, and will cover not only the Department of State and USAID, but all other U.S. Government agencies providing assistance to Armenia. The process of developing the CAS should assist us in determining how the United States can best contribute to Armenia's economic, social and democratic development.

Senator Robert Menendez (#19)

Question:

Please explain the rationale behind the Administration decision to reduce aid to Armenia by over 50% in its FY 2009 request, while maintaining or increasing aid to every other former Soviet republic?

Answer:

The reduced request for FY 2009 does not detract from the critical importance of Armenia to U.S. interests nor does it signal a change in U.S. policy. Rather, the request level meets the country's development needs and is appropriate within the context of assistance priorities within the region and around the globe. Armenia has made real progress on reversing rural poverty; nevertheless, the government's commitment to democratic reform is not as strong as others in the region, and Armenia still struggles with rampant corruption and weak democratic institutions.

Within the FY 2009 assistance request for Eurasia, funding is prioritized to help the most reform-oriented countries in the region – Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova – by promoting economic and energy independence, helping to diversify export markets, and improving democratic governance in the face of increasing Russian economic and political pressure.