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Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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SL: Confronting American complicity in genocide

HOUSE FINALLY ENDS COMPLICITY IN ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

Worldwide there has been systematic denial of genocide and mass atrocities, including in the United States through a lack of reckoning with our [own history of genocide](#), [concentration camps](#), and slavery. This silence in the face of impunity fuels our own and the world's insecurity and undermines our ability to develop policies to defend the rights of all communities. The U.S. remains complicit in dozens of genocides and atrocities at home and around the world thanks to our silence, our failure to promote justice for impacted communities, and our military [cooperation and material support](#) for regimes that perpetrate these crimes (and that's to say nothing of the United States' failure to critically examine its own direct role in mass civilian harm in World War II, the post-9/11 wars, and beyond).

In the case of the Armenian Genocide, the U.S. government, until this week, has also remained silent. The legacy of the Armenian Genocide in 1915 lives on [transgenerationally](#) and has [shaped the identities](#) and traumas of Armenians around the world and here at home.

Between 1915-1923, the Ottoman Empire [systematically](#) massacred approximately 1.5 million Armenians in an attempt to annihilate the native Armenian population. Armenian children and families were abducted, shot, starved, mutilated, worked to death, raped, burned, hung, deported, and drowned [en masse](#). To erase traces of indigenous Armenian presence, Ottoman forces destroyed or confiscated Armenian homes, cultural and other historical properties, including changing names of sacred rivers, villages, and cities in the homelands where Armenians lived for more than [2,500 years](#). Hundreds of thousands of people were expelled from their homes and a permanent global diaspora was created as a result of the massive forced displacement, expropriation, and inability to return to their Anatolian homelands.

For over a century, the U.S. government has failed to justly recognize the atrocities committed against the Armenian people. But in a historic victory this week, activists showed that change is possible by tirelessly organizing and advocating for recognition of the genocide, centering the stories and legacies of genocide survivors, and working intersectionally with other communities to demand justice for victims.

HOW PASSAGE OF H.RES 296 HAPPENED

Much reporting on how the Armenian Genocide Resolution was passed this week has focused on members of Congress' desire to punish Turkey for its slaughter campaign and humanitarian destruction against the Kurdish community and others along the Turkish-Syrian border. While that

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context may have widened political space and provided a salient hook, it disregards the decades of work done inside and outside Congress, including world-wide mass mobilizations and [marches](#) by civil society and community leaders to seek justice for and international recognition of the Armenian Genocide. The resolution's lead sponsors include Rep. Adam Schiff, who represents one of the largest Armenian-American communities in the country, and Rep. Anna Eshoo, the only Armenian-Assyrian American in Congress. They have both been leading on this issue for decades. Long before the political crisis in Turkey escalated last month, there was bipartisan support in the House for H.Res. 296, with [141 cosponsors](#) – the majority of whom signed on in April.

This widespread congressional support is in large part thanks to Armenian activists across [the country](#) and around the world, [including in Turkey](#), who have been calling for justice and recognition for decades. The intersectionality of the advocacy movement surrounding the passage of the resolution has also been vital to its success. Organizations from across the progressive movement, including the [American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee](#), the [U.S. Campaign for Palestinian Rights](#), and the [Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network](#) recognize the need for solidarity with the Armenian people given the parallels with their own struggles for recognition and justice – just as the Armenian community [does](#). The passage of H.Res.296 this week shows what working in solidarity with frontline communities for justice for all looks like in action.

WHY DID IT TAKE SO LONG?

Despite the tireless efforts of the Armenian and other impacted communities for decades, Congress had remained silent and therefore complicit in this genocide. The United States' failure to recognize the Armenian genocide reflects the prioritization of so-called security relationships over justice, the unspoken tenet in U.S. foreign policy that allies cannot be criticized, and the corrupting influence of special interest lobbying. For example, the last time a similar resolution was proposed in the House in 2007, [Turkish lobbying efforts](#) resulted in multiple co-sponsors dropping their names from the bill. Turkey gave \$9 million over four years to the Livingston Group, led by former Congressman Bob Livingston, to deny the genocide and lobby against similar resolutions. This time around, the Turkish Ambassador to the U.S. [wrote a letter](#) to lawmakers warning them against passing the resolution.

Meanwhile, in 2007, the Bush administration refused to use the word “genocide” to prevent the souring of U.S.-Turkish relations, with then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, as well as then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi denouncing the resolution due to its potential to harm to U.S. troops stationed in Turkey. Similarly, the Obama administration refused to use the term “genocide” on every annual anniversary of the Armenian Genocide and Trump has for three years now [continued](#) this shameful tradition.

Failing to recognize the atrocities committed in 1915 as a genocide dehumanizes Armenian communities and their rightful, 104 year-long struggle for justice, reclamation of their identities, and right to exist as a people. This failure of recognition also harms Turkish democracy by giving credence to the silencing and oppression of certain communities to avoid accountability. Remaining silent makes the United States complicit in not only this genocide, but also the perpetuation of other atrocities, such as Turkey's current targeted killing campaign.

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LOOKING FORWARD

It is important to note that recognition does not equal full accountability. In the case of the Armenian Genocide and other atrocities we must demand restorative justice for the victims. The Armenian Genocide resolution is an important first step toward justice. But our efforts cannot end in recognition. The resolution, which reflects the long-overdue demands of Armenian communities impacted by the genocide, also calls for the public education and understanding of the Armenian Genocide to help combat the denial of any genocide of the past, present, or future and to end the recurrence of atrocities being committed today. The fact that the U.S. continues to [support](#) regimes involved in mass atrocities and genocide reflects the need for the U.S. government to fully commit to education about and dialogue with impacted communities. That's why robust implementation of legislation like the [Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act of 2018](#) is so important to ensure U.S. diplomats are fully equipped to identify and act on warning signs to prevent mass atrocities in the future. Without education and open dialogue about the past we cannot hope to end atrocities being committed today and prevent them in the future.

BURIED LEDES

The CIA is funding death squads [in Afghanistan](#).

In a [show of solidarity](#), **over 5,000 people from 60 different countries signed a letter in support of the protests in Chile** over income inequality and governmental inaction.

Climate Activist Greta Thunberg [continues to bring attention](#) to the climate crisis by **denying a prestigious environmental award** for her activism.

No corruption to see here... The Air Force predictably determined **military personnel staying at a Trump hotel in Scotland did not violate any laws**, but others aren't so sure and are [calling for an investigation](#).

In a [true blessing](#) to our newsfeeds' there will **no longer be any political ads on Twitter**.

On the other hand, **Facebook continues to run false political ads, but its employees are pushing back** on the company's [dishonest and corrupt advertisement practices](#).

Trump did not allow a single refugee to enter the U.S. this month in the latest tactic to completely [dismantle](#) the refugee resettlement program.

WTF? **Trump apparently makes good on his campaign promise to 'take the oil'** by proposing the U.S. commit the war crime of pillaging by [taking Syrian oil](#). (See [our action](#) on this!)

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Journalists at Deadspin [said no h*ckin way](#) to the owners who wanted their employees to only write about sports.

As the U.S. continues to perpetrate unprecedented levels of civilian harm, it's important to remember **[vicarious trauma](#) affects those working and reporting on these issues.**

And finally, **Don't Phunk With my Heart Will.i.am.** The musician, as well as other elites, chose to forget Jamal Khashoggi's murder and attend the Saudi government's PR event, [Davos in the Desert](#).