

Fighting Genocide Denial: 11 Attacks and Responses

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Attack #1: The Armenian Genocide is still the subject of historical debate.

Response: The Turkish government, using tactics similar to Holocaust deniers, seeks to create artificial controversy and confusion regarding an established historical event.

The truth, of course, is that the Armenian Genocide, like the Holocaust, is a thoroughly documented fact – it is settled history.

The International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS), the leading group of experts on the Holocaust and genocide studies, unanimously adopted a resolution during their 1997 conference in Montreal, Canada affirming that:

“[T]he mass murder of Armenians in Turkey in 1915 is a case of genocide which conforms to the statutes of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide.”

The IAGS “condemns the denial of the Armenian Genocide by the Turkish government and its official and unofficial agents and supporters.”

In a March 7, 2007 letter urging Members of House and Senate to support the adoption of the Armenian Genocide Resolution, the IAGS asserted that:

“The historical record on the Armenian Genocide is unambiguous and documented by overwhelming evidence.”

Attack #2: The Armenian massacres don't meet the definition of genocide.

Response: The Armenian Genocide clearly meets the definition established by the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide:

- ♦ **Polish jurist Raphael Lemkin**, when he coined the term genocide in 1944, cited the Turkish extermination of the Armenians and the Nazi extermination of the Jews as defining examples of what he meant by genocide.
- ♦ In 1997 the **International Association of Genocide Scholars**, an organization of the world's foremost experts on genocide, unanimously passed a formal resolution affirming the Armenian Genocide.
- ♦ **126 leading scholars of the Holocaust** including Elie Wiesel and Yehuda Bauer placed a statement in the *New York Times* in June 2000 declaring the "incontestable fact of the Armenian Genocide" and urged western democracies to acknowledge it.
- ♦ **The Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide** (Jerusalem), and the **Institute for the Study of Genocide** (NYC) have affirmed the historical fact of the Armenian Genocide, as does the **Encyclopedia of Genocide**, edited by Professor Israel Charney.
- ♦ Leading texts in the international law of genocide such as William A. Schabas's *Genocide in International Law* (Cambridge University Press, 2000) cite the Armenian Genocide as a precursor to the Holocaust and as a precedent for the law on crimes against humanity.
- ♦ An independent study facilitated by the **International Center for Transitional Justice** in 2003 concluded that the Armenian Genocide clearly meets the definition of genocide established by the Genocide Convention.

Attack #3: Congress shouldn't debate historical issues.

Response: The U.S. House of Representatives has a long and proud tradition of reaffirming America's moral stand against all genocides – past and present.

Holocaust:

The U.S. House has adopted a number of resolutions on the Holocaust. Among these was H.Res.30, adopted on January 25, 2005, which urged educators to teach the lessons of the Holocaust in order to help prevent future genocides.

Cambodian Genocide:

On November 19, 2003, the House passed H.Con.Res.83, which commemorated the Cambodian Genocide, by a vote of 420 to 1.

Darfur Genocide:

Among many pieces of legislation enacted regarding the Darfur Genocide, on July 11, 2005, the U.S. House adopted a resolution, H.Res.333, condemning the genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan.

Ukrainian Genocide:

On November 16, 2005, the U.S. House adopted a resolution, H.R.562, recognizing the Ukrainian Famine Genocide and authorizing for the creation of a monument honoring its victims.

Bosnian Genocide:

On June 27, 2005, the U.S. House adopted a resolution, H.Res.199, regarding the genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992 to 1995.

Attack #4: It's "not the right time" to pass this resolution.

Response: Nine decades after the Armenian Genocide, there are still those who say its "not the right time" to speak honestly about this crime.

This argument has been used for far too long to block a broad, bipartisan Congressional majority from voting on this long-overdue human rights measure.

When opponents of this resolution, citing any of a variety of recent developments, argue that "Now is not the right time," what they are really saying is that "It's never the right time to recognize the Armenian Genocide."

Year after year, in session after session of Congress, appeals for delays in the consideration of the Armenian Genocide Resolution have resulted in the countless deferrals and the eventual defeat of this human rights legislation.

- ♦ It's always the right time for America to take a stand against genocide.
- ♦ It's never the right time to compromise our nation's morality by outsourcing our government's policy on genocide.
- ♦ The time has come to end Turkey's gag-order and for America's leaders to speak freely about the Armenian Genocide.

Attack #5: This resolution will hurt Turkey-Armenia relations.

Response: Turkey and Armenia do not have diplomatic ties for one simple reason: Ankara has, for more than a decade, refused to normalize its relations with Yerevan, despite the Armenian government's longstanding willingness to establish bilateral ties without any preconditions.

Armenia's Foreign Minister, in a September 27, 2007 letter to Speaker Pelosi, wrote that:

“Armenia has always been ready for normal Turkey-Armenia relations. Yet, every initiative that would lead toward normalization has been rejected by Turkey. Instead, it continues to place pre-conditions. Turkey makes offers that are simply invitations for open-ended talk, without serious commitment to arriving at ordinary relations between neighbors. Even their call for a historical commission to discuss painful, historic events is not serious, given their prohibitive penal consequences for open speech and discussion and the adversarial environment Turkey has created by maintaining closed borders with Armenia.”

Attack #6: The Armenian Genocide is only an issue for Armenian Americans – not for Armenians living in Armenia.

Response: All Armenians care deeply about the recognition of the Armenian Genocide. Within Armenia, both the people and the government have spoken out forcefully in support of international recognition of this crime:

Armenia's Declaration of Independence

Armenia's Declaration of Independence, adopted on August 23, 1990, establishes that:

"The Republic of Armenia stands in support of the task of achieving international recognition of the 1915 Genocide in Ottoman Turkey and Western Armenia."

Armenia's Foreign Minister

Armenia's Foreign Minister, in a September 27, 2007 letter to Speaker Pelosi, wrote that:

"To view acknowledgement of the truth as an obstacle to political relations is cynical. A resolution that addresses matters of human rights and genocide cannot damage anyone's bilateral relations - neither yours with Turkey, nor ours."

Armenia's Ambassador to the United States

Armenia's Ambassador to the United States, Tatoul Markarian, in an April 24, 2007 speech at the Capitol Hill observance of the Armenian Genocide, stated that:

"We believe that the United States can help Turkey overcome its unreasonable stance and establish normal relations with Armenia. Moreover, the recognition of the Armenian genocide by the United States has the potential to contribute to stimulating the Turkish society to discuss this issue in a vigorous and democratic manner."

Attack #7: Turkey is showing new flexibility on the Armenian issue.

Response: The sad reality is that Turkey is actually moving farther away from an honest discussion of the Armenian Genocide, as these examples illustrate:

Article 301

Article 301 and other provisions of the newly adopted Turkish criminal code establish prison terms of up to 3 years for even the mention of the Armenian Genocide.

Hrant Dink

The prosecution, official intimidation, and brutal assassination this January of journalist Hrant Dink stand as evidence of Turkey's escalating attacks on those who speak honestly about the Armenian Genocide.

Orhan Pamuk

The prosecution of Orhan Pamuk – a Nobel Prize-winning author – demonstrates Turkey's efforts to silence even its most prominent citizens who speak about the Armenian Genocide.

Education Ministry

Turkey's Minister of Education, as a formal state policy, has required that Turkey's schoolchildren are taught to deny the Armenian Genocide.

Armenian Patriarch

The spiritual leader of the remaining Armenian community in Istanbul, Patriarch Mesrob II, faces constant death threats, intimidation, and government restrictions on religious freedom.

Attack #8: Let's wait until Armenia and Turkey conduct a joint historical commission on this issue.

Response: Turkey's self-serving offer to commission a joint study rings hollow.

Ankara, rather than honestly confronting its past, it is using this tactic to attempt to delay or derail the rising international tide of Genocide recognition.

Turkey's offer is akin to the Iranian government's recent Holocaust denial conference, a thinly veiled and profoundly offensive effort to advance a destructive political agenda by seeking to open for "debate" a long-established historical fact.

For its part, the Armenian government has responded to Turkey's offers in this regard by publicly stating that it is prepared to discuss all outstanding issues, including the Armenian Genocide, within the context of normalized relations between the two nations.

Attack #9: We shouldn't upset a reliable ally.

Response: The United States should never allow friends – or even allies – to exercise a veto over our principled opposition to all instances of genocide.

Beyond this moral imperative is the reality that Turkey has, over the past decade, steadily distanced itself from its Cold War-era role as reliable regional partner for the United States.

- ◆ **Turkey blocked a northern Coalition front against Iraq**

In 2003 Turkey blocked a northern front against Iraq, which, according to the Department of Defense, contributed to the strength of the current insurgency and the persistence of sectarian violence.

- ◆ **Turkey promotes instability in the region**

Turkey's actions contribute to greater instability in the region, to the detriment of U.S. interests. Among these are its blockade of Armenia (Europe's only closed border), and its occupation of Cyprus (a European Union country).

- ◆ **Turkey is encouraging anti-American sentiment**

Among the best selling books in Turkey is Hitler's hateful and racist *Mein Kampf*. A recent #1 film, *Valley of the Wolves*, featured a Turkish nuclear attack on Washington, DC. It's no surprise that a recent German Marshall Fund polls show that only 11% of Turks hold a positive view of the United States.

Attack #10: This resolution will lead to Turkish backlash.

Response: For more than thirty years, the Turkish government has been making hollow threats to disrupt its ties with the United States over the recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

Opponents of the Armenian Genocide Resolution are crying wolf again. Despite threats of harsh retribution, Turkey has only taken token steps against Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Argentina, and other states that have, in the past, recognized the Genocide.

The U.S. example

Between 1980 and 2006, U.S.-Turkey trade grew by 957%, despite President's Reagan's 1981 mention of the Armenian Genocide in a Presidential Proclamation, the adoption of a House resolution marking April 24th as a day of Genocide remembrance, and the passage of two amendments in the House, in 1996 and 2004, concerning the Armenian Genocide.

Between 1996 and 2006, U.S. military sales to Turkey grew by 1540% (annualized 32% growth), despite the adoption by the U.S. House of two measures on the Armenian Genocide.

In addition, Turkey's trade with individual U.S. states that have affirmed the Armenian Genocide continues to increase. For example, California, one of the largest economies in the world, annually recognizes the Armenian Genocide and yet trade increased from \$220 million in 2001 to over 300 million in 2006.

International examples

Despite Turkey's threats against France in 2001 in an unsuccessful bid to prevent the French Parliament's recognition that year of the Armenian Genocide, **trade between France and Turkey grew 22% the following year, and has grown by 131% over the past five years.**

Turkey's bilateral trade has increased significantly with other countries following their recognition of the Armenian Genocide, among them **Belgium (167%), Canada (22%), Greece (266%), Italy (109%), Lebanon (126%), and Russia (351%).**

Attack #11: This resolution will hurt U.S. interests

Response: As we saw in Rwanda during the 1990s and are witnessing today in Darfur, preventing genocide always represents a core American moral value and a vital U.S. security interest.

American morality:

Clearly condemning all instances of genocide reinforces America's moral leadership and strengthens our standing as the international leader in protecting human rights.

U.S. interests:

Leading by example, the adoption of this resolution by the U.S. House will hopefully encourage Turkey to end its denial of the Armenian Genocide. By taking this important step, Turkey would help advance a number of U.S. interests in this part of the world:

- ♦ Lowering regional tensions and promoting economic integration.
- ♦ Removing a barrier to Turkey acceptance into the European family of nations.
- ♦ Eliminating a pretext for Turkey's refusal to lift its blockade and normalize ties with Armenia.
- ♦ Fostering greater respect by Turkey for its minorities.
- ♦ Ending Turkey's international isolation as state-denier of genocide.