



## Is there any reason for Biden not to recognise the Armenian Genocide?

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The powerful chairman of the United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee Bob Menendez started to collect signatures on a bipartisan letter urging President Joe Biden to fully and formally recognise the Armenian Genocide, **reported** the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) this week.

There are a number of reasons to believe that this may be the year that the president of the United States officially recognises what happened to Armenians in 1915 during the final years of the Ottoman Empire as a genocide.

Turkey's Foreign Ministry has treated the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the U.S. Congress or past presidents as the most important diplomatic battle of all time, and for decades, spent significant resources to counter such moves.

Most non-Turkish historians that study the subject agree that the Ottoman government in 1915 carried out a systematic mass murder [redacted] of around 1.5 million ethnic Armenians, which meets

States, France, Germany, Italy, Canada and Brazil, have recognised the genocide.

Pushes for further recognition for the Armenian Genocide, as well as every other anti-Turkish government step in Western capitals, have gained popularity and traction in recent years due to Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's and his government's alienating policies in foreign affairs and anti-democratic steps at home.

The Turkish government witnessed a historic and bipartisan defeat last year when both chambers of the U.S. Congress passed resolutions on the Armenian Genocide with overwhelming majority, despite the fact that the House of Representatives were controlled by the Democrats and the Senate by Republicans.

The government of former U.S. President Donald Trump, however, refused to change its position on the matter, saying their views had not changed over the 1915 events.

Erdoğan's government, with its pro-Western and pro-democratic credentials until a few years ago, was in a strong position to push back on any attempt to this end in Washington with its soft power and many friends emphasising Turkey's strategic importance. As Erdoğan's pro-democracy credentials peeled away and an authoritarian beast came out, the president lost his friends in Washington, D.C., one by one.

Whatever problems the Turkish government had, as long as Trump was at the White House, there appeared to be nothing that could seriously harm Erdoğan's interests in Washington. Trump was stalling sanctions packages, greenlighting Erdoğan's military interventions, and trying hard to curry other favours such as getting sanction-buster Reza Zarrab released, or the indictment against state-run Halkbank dropped. As Trump lost the elections, all problems resurfaced.

Biden, during his election campaign, made a clear promise "to support a resolution recognising the Armenian Genocide". As someone who served as the vice president for eight years, he knows

Biden needs Menendez's support desperately for his foreign policy to succeed and it remains to be seen if he would dare to spend some political capital to make Erdogan happy. We have no indications whatsoever that Biden cares about Erdogan's concerns so far. What is more, the president may not be running for a second term by 2024, so whatever he decides over the recognition of Armenian Genocide during his term, it seems he is immune to concerns over voter backlash for 2024.

In more than 55 days since his inauguration and four months since he was announced as the president-elect, Biden hasn't spoken with Erdoğan, nor sent any messages. Neither Biden, nor his Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin responded to their Turkish counterparts' congratulations. This is not normal in Erdoğan's experience.

Since he became prime minister in 2003, then president in 2014, and executive president in 2018, Erdoğan has always received the royal treatment from U.S. presidents. The Turkish leader got early calls from new or re-elected presidents over decades and an early foot in the White House's door. Not this time. The fact that Biden hasn't called Erdoğan indicates that he doesn't see Erdoğan as a leader whose worries and requests should take precedence over other priorities and interests of the White House.

Erdoğan also has no friends left in Washington, D.C. to defend his government's interests. During the previous administration, which coincided with the aftermath of the failed coup attempt of 2016, Erdoğan was angry with the U.S. government for a number of reasons and did everything to offend most if not all U.S. institutions. He also bought more and more lobbyists to grease the relations instead of bolstering institutional ties. That tactic worked well with Trump, not so much so far for Biden.

The Trump administration's decision to go ahead and arm the Syrian Kurds in 2017 was also upsetting to Erdoğan because Ankara sees them as terrorists. Even today the Turkish government still calls on the U.S. government to stop partnering with the Syrian

YPG is designated a terrorist organisation by Turkey alone globally, due to alleged ties with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), an armed group that has fought for Kurdish self-rule in Turkey since the 1980s. PKK is listed as a terrorist organisation by the United States and the European Union.

Erdoğan came out on top in a constitutional referendum in 2017, which then allowed him to become an executive president in the 2018 elections. At the time, the state-of-emergency declared after the coup attempt was still in place, and Erdoğan reveled in strongly anti-American rhetoric. The Trump administration tolerated all of Erdoğan's military interventions in Syria, which ran on an "anti-imperialist" and anti-U.S. rhetoric.

Erdoğan's government also condemned the United States for not extraditing Fethullah Gülen, the leader of an Islamic movement that once was a close ally to Erdoğan. Some of Gülen's top aides and followers were caught physically around the headquarters of the coup attempt in 2016. Gülenists had the power and motives to attempt a coup, and had established connections within the Turkish government and security forces. However, despite all the smoke, Gülen himself was never connected directly to the coup.

The Erdoğan government's shipments of dozens of boxes of documents for the extradition were clumsy and lacked proof, according to U.S. officials who talked about those files over the years. What is more, Erdoğan was already marching on an authoritarian path for years, criminalising all of the opposition as terrorists, losing the image of a coup victim and turning into someone who ruthlessly instrumentalises the post-coup environment to his advantage for a witch-hunt.

Erdoğan's government jailed prominent human rights defenders, journalists and intellectuals on similar charges connecting them to Gülenists with no evidence beyond unproven theories. Indictments against opposition figures consistently lacked evidence and were filled with conspiracy theories and hearsay, therefore weakening Erdoğan's reliable and trustworthy image.

his government as well. U.S. prosecutors and judges were labeled terrorists for pursuing the Halkbank case, while other officials were sued for overseeing the coordination between the U.S. government and Syrian Kurds. Even a spokeswoman like Jen Psaki who is the current White House press secretary, was mentioned by name in various Turkish indictments for her official statements during 2013's Gezi Park protests condemning police intervention against peaceful protesters.

Erdoğan, in the last four years, used Trump as a bridge to channel ideas about how the relationship between the two countries should be, whether in Syria or about the criminal proceedings against Halkbank. Erdoğan, for the most part, was successful in getting the U.S. government to accept his conditions. People like former Ambassador James Jeffrey who became a "Special Envoy to make Erdoğan happy" rather than the envoy for Syria along with his top aide, the now-retired Col. Rich Outzen.

Turkey became poorer by a third in the last 7 years, while at the same time launching many new wars, which Outzen, [in a Twitter thread](#), described as less than risky with retrospect. It bears repeating, that these were the years when Turkey's economy tanked, the country went through a coup attempt, and institutions, including the Turkish judiciary, were demolished.

Turkey under Erdogan has become one of the most repressive places on Earth. Most of those foreign interventions were sold to the public as anti-U.S., anti-imperialist and instrumental for Erdoğan as he shaped the new authoritarian Turkey from the inside. Indeed, for Erdogan, those foreign interventions were less than risky in retrospect considering Erdogan's success at home consolidating even more power.

According to ANCA, Menendez said, "I hope the President will keep his commitment to recognize the Armenian Genocide," during the confirmation process for Deputy Secretary of State nominee Wendy Sherman last week.

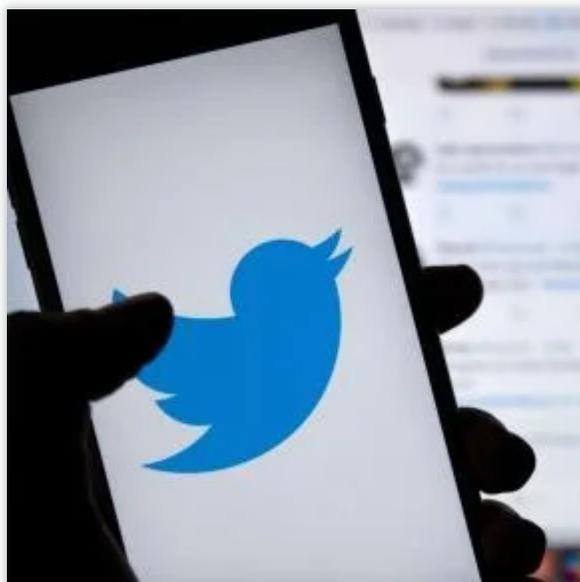
time for a U.S. President not to break with a Turkish ally like Erdoğan over recognising of the Armenian Genocide.



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