

October 17, 2007

Support Wanes in House for Genocide Vote

By [CARL HULSE](#)

WASHINGTON, Oct. 16 — Worried about antagonizing Turkish leaders, House members from both parties have begun to withdraw their support from a resolution backed by the Democratic leadership that would condemn as genocide the mass killings of Armenians nearly a century ago.

Almost a dozen lawmakers had shifted against the measure in a 24-hour period ending Tuesday night, accelerating a sudden exodus that has cast deep doubt over the measure's prospects. Some made clear that they were heeding warnings from the White House, which has called the measure dangerously provocative, and from the Turkish government, which has said House passage would prompt Turkey to reconsider its ties to the United States, including logistical support for the Iraq war.

Until Tuesday, the measure appeared on a path to House passage, with strong support from House Speaker [Nancy Pelosi](#). It was approved last week by the House Foreign Affairs Committee. But by Tuesday evening, a group of senior House Democrats had made it known that they were planning to ask the leadership to drop plans for a vote on the measure.

"Turkey obviously feels they are getting poked in the eye over something that happened a century ago and maybe this isn't a good time to be doing that," said Representative Allen Boyd, a Florida Democrat who dropped his sponsorship of the resolution on Monday night.

Others who took the same action said that, while they deplored the mass killings of Armenians by the Ottoman Empire, the modern-day consequences in the Middle East could not be overlooked.

"We simply cannot allow the grievances of the past, as real as they may be, to in any way derail our efforts to prevent further atrocities for future history books," said Representative Wally Herger, Republican of California.

Representative Mike Ross, Democrat of Arkansas, said, "I think it is a good resolution and horrible timing."

The Turkish government has lobbied heavily against the resolution, which is nonbinding and largely symbolic. But lawmakers attributed the erosion in support mainly to fears about a potential Turkish decision to deny American access to critical military facilities in that nation and its threat to move forces into northern Iraq.

"This vote came face to face with the reality on the ground in that region of the world," said Representative Rahm Emanuel of Illinois, the chairman of the House Democratic Caucus and an opponent of the resolution.

The Bush administration and top American generals have been vocal in warning that passage of the

resolution could cause great harm to the American war effort in Iraq and have put significant pressure on Republicans to abandon their support for the measure. President Bush called Ms. Pelosi on Tuesday and asked her to prevent a floor vote.

“The president and the speaker exchanged candid views on the subject and the speaker explained the strong bipartisan support in the House for the resolution,” said Brendan Daly, a spokesman for Ms. Pelosi.

The Democratic leadership was examining the exact level of that support to gauge its next step, but lawmakers and officials said it was now unclear whether the resolution could be approved, given Republican resistance and Democratic defections. “We will have to determine where everyone is,” said Representative [Steny H. Hoyer](#) of Maryland, the majority leader.

Ms. Pelosi, who has promised a vote on the resolution if it cleared the committee, said she was leaving it to its chief backers to round up votes. “I have never known a count,” she said.

Backers of the resolution, which has the fervent support of the Armenian-American community, described the shift as slight and attributed it to the intense lobbying by the Turkish government, the administration and their allies. They said they would try to change the minds of some of those who were wavering.

“This is what happens when you are up against a very sophisticated multimillion-dollar campaign,” said Representative Brad Sherman, Democrat of California, who chided the Turkish government. “Since when has it become fashionable for friends to threaten friends?”

But he acknowledged there was little margin of error for backers of the resolution, which had once boasted 225 co-sponsors. “If the vote were held today, I would not want to bet my house on the outcome,” he said.

Mr. Sherman and others noted that at the start of the war Turkey had refused to let American forces operate from its territory and that its intentions toward the northern border of Iraq clearly captured the attention of Congress.

American military officials in Iraq and in Washington said Tuesday they were concerned about possible Turkish military raids into northern Iraq against the Kurdish Workers Party, an ethnic separatist movement also known as the P.K.K.

At the moment, they said, they did not see many indications that the Turkish military was preparing for a large-scale incursion into the insurgents’ mountainous strongholds and expressed hope that diplomatic efforts under way between Iraqi and Turkish officials would ease the crisis, which was sparked by a wave of attacks in eastern Turkey that its government has blamed on the separatists.

“We see no signs that there’s anything imminent by Turkey,” said one senior military officer, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was discussing military contingency planning. “So there’s time for the diplomacy to work for a few more days, if not weeks.” But, he added, the situation could get “ugly” if Turkey sent troops across the border and they clashed with Kurdish militias or Iraqi forces.

The biggest fear, several former officials said, is that Turkish forces could push past the border and head for

Kirkuk. Such a move could force Iraq to respond and the United States to mediate between two allies, and decide whether to intervene. Such a crisis could also draw in Iran, which has also had growing problems with Kurdish groups crossing into its territory from Iraq.

In addition to the potential movement of Turkish forces, opponents of the resolution continued to point to Turkey's role as a staging area for moving American military supplies into Iraq.

"This happened a long time ago and I don't know whether it was a massacre or a genocide, that is beside the point," said Representative [John P. Murtha](#), the Pennsylvania Democrat who is urging Ms. Pelosi to keep the resolution from the floor. "The point is, we have to deal with today's world."

While the resolution enjoyed more than enough support to pass earlier this year, about two dozen lawmakers have removed their names from the official list of sponsors in recent weeks as the vote grew more likely and the reservations grew more pronounced.

"I think there was genocide in Turkey in 1915 but I am gravely concerned about the timing," said Representative Jane Harman, a California Democrat. She said she would remain a co-sponsor of the resolution but at the moment would oppose it reached the floor.

Representative Doug Lamborn, a Colorado Republican who dropped his backing on Tuesday, said: "Nothing changes the fact that mass killings and unspeakable acts of brutality occurred. However, passing this nonbinding resolution at this critical time would be a destabilizing action when the United States needs the help of its allies, including Turkey, in fighting the global war on terror."

David S. Cloud contributed reporting.

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