

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

U.S.-Turkish relations shaken by Armenian bill

The Senate Judiciary Committee approved a bill Oct. 17 setting aside April 24, 1990 to memorialize 1.5 million Armenians slain between 1915 and 1923 during waning days of the Ottoman Empire. The committee action sets the stage for severely straining U.S.-Turkish relations.

The measure, which called the slayings "genocide," was passed by an 8-6 vote by the Senate panel and will now go to the Senate floor. The resolution has angered the Turkish government, and the Bush administration is attempting to stop the measure. Turkey sees the resolution as tantamount to a comparison with the Hitler regime in Nazi Germany. The administration has summoned the U.S. ambassador from Ankara to lobby against the measure.

Turkey is the only member of NATO that borders the Soviet Union, and has been a special target of Soviet efforts to drive a wedge between it and Washington.

Senate votes down flag amendment

The Senate rejected on Oct. 19 a joint resolution proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the United States which would authorize the Congress and the states to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States. The vote of 51-48 fell substantially short of the necessary 67 votes needed for passage.

Proponents of the amendment such as Senate Minority Leader Robert Dole (R-Kan.) argued that there were many laws on the books barring destruction of such things as mailboxes, and therefore including

the flag in such bans was no significant legal step.

Oponents of the amendment, led by Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-Me.), argued that it would weaken the freedom of speech guarantees of the First Amendment. Duke University law Professor Walter Dellinger summed up this viewpoint in earlier testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee: "This potentially dangerous amendment would create an entirely unlimited exception to either one, some, none or all of the Bill of Rights; it would place this power in the hands of all future Congresses, 50 state legislatures, the government of the District of Columbia, and perhaps as many as 14,000 local governments; it would set a dangerous precedent for resorting to the amendment process for the curtailment of the rights of the unpopular in general, and for unpopular speech in particular; and it would deprive the First Amendment of much of its moral legitimacy by suggesting that speech that is deeply offensive to most of us will be suppressible, while speech deeply offensive to others must continue to be tolerated."

Bush approaches abortion issue with trepidation

President Bush is expected to veto legislation that provides federal funding for abortion to poor women who are the victims of rape and incest, a provision passed as part of a spending bill for the Departments of Health and Human Services and Labor, according to White House officials Oct. 16. Such funding has been outlawed by Congress each year since 1982.

The Senate passed the measure on Oct. 19 on a 67-31 vote, enough to override a presidential veto. But the

House, which had passed the measure on Oct. 11, did so on a 216-206 vote, far short of the votes required to override.

Bush, who has been officially opposed to abortion, tried to find "room for flexibility" in the face of the legislation, fearing, in characteristic fashion, to alienate some important element of the body politic on a controversial issue. White House officials, opponents of abortion, and Republican leaders, in a series of meetings and telephone conversations, failed to provide, according to the *Washington Post*, "any good, solid reasons" why the president should change his opposition to such funding. Although not wanting to become the brunt of attacks by pro-abortion forces, the President reportedly fears subjecting himself to the charge of "waffling" on major issues.

Bush's advisers have reportedly concluded that a compromise that would not turn into a full-scale battle with abortion rights advocates was not possible at this point.

Gramm-Rudman cuts take effect

At 11:59 p.m. on Oct. 16, the Gramm-Rudman sequestration automatically knocked out \$16 billion in the federal budget. The failure of the Congress and the White House to agree on legislation reducing the deficit to below the Gramm-Rudman targets led to the automatic sequestration.

As yet panic has not set in as the White House and the Congress intend to come up with the cuts in the next month or so, making the effect of the sequestration minimal. The nature of the process was best expressed by Rep. Leon Panetta (D-Calif.), chair-

man of the House Budget Committee: "Until both sides are willing to put everything on the table and make those tough choices [between tax increases and defense budget cuts], we're going to continue to play games."

The Gramm-Rudman legislation has come in for some heavy criticism from Sen. Ernest Hollings (D-S.C.), one of its co-sponsors. Hollings is concerned that the Social Security surplus is being included in the budget calculations, although that surplus actually represents expenditures in the future. The Hollings criticism is becoming the basis for a Democratic move to exclude the Social Security surplus from the calculation of the budget. If this occurs, demands for more austerity could lead to even more draconian measures, further gutting social and defense expenditures.

The real problem is that Gramm-Rudman determines policy through its budget "dictatorship." As Van Doom Ooms, chief economist for the House Budget Committee noted, Gramm-Rudman "is forcing policy into configurations you may not want. . . . There's tremendous pressure to write defense bills that have programs that spend out slowly because of Gramm-Rudman. The question is, are these the policies the Congress would choose if it was not forced into this situation of hitting the numbers?"

Senators linked to S&L deals face ethics probe

Sen. Phil Gramm (R-Tex.) said on "Meet the Press" on Oct. 15 that it was "inevitable" the Senate Ethics Committee would investigate five senators who intervened on behalf of a California savings institution after receiving

large campaign contributions from its owner. "I think you're going to see, as a result of the savings and loan fiasco, a real look by the Ethics Committee at members and how they were involved and what they did," said Gramm.

The five are Alan Cranston (D-Calif.), Dennis DeConcini (D-Ariz.), John McCain (R-Ariz.), John Glenn (D-Ohio), and Donald Riegle (D-Mich.). Fred Wertheimer of Common Cause, a lobby group which monitors Congress, urged investigations of the senators who met with regulators in April 1987 at the request of Charles Keating Jr., chairman of American Continental Corp., Lincoln's parent.

The axe of "corruption scandals" incorporated into recent thrift legislation, which the Justice Department has used to make S&L owners scapegoats for the collapse of the thrift industry, may now start falling on the necks of the very legislators who approved this police-state legislation.

Webster attacked by Members of Congress

CIA chief William Webster has come under fire this week from a variety of sources, including members of the congressional Intelligence Committees, who have questioned Webster's lack of knowledge about many issues the agency has to deal with, and his commitment to the job. Many political partisans also view Webster as another holdover from the disastrous Carter administration.

The most vocal critics of Webster's performance have been supporters of the Afghan resistance in the Senate and House, who hold him responsible for a failure to get U.S. arms to the guerrilla rebels last spring when

they were planning a major offensive against the Soviet-backed Kabul government. Congressmen who met with Webster in August to discuss the shortcomings of the Afghan operation found that he was not well informed on its details and unaware of many of the problems of the operation. They blamed him for placing a CIA analyst, rather than someone from the operations division of the agency, in charge of the whole operation.

Senate Intelligence Committee chairman David Boren (D-Okla.), a confidant of the CIA director, gives him "the highest possible marks." Even Boren admits, however, that Webster "has his critics as well as his supporters."

House committee: Soviets slow in cutting forces

The House Armed Services Committee issued a study on Oct. 15 that says the Soviet Union is on schedule in withdrawing forces from Eastern Europe but has made little progress on military reductions within its borders.

But even the "withdrawal" from Eastern Europe has not been carried out as Western observers expected. "Rather than withdrawing a tank division in its entirety, the motorized rifle regiment assigned to it is being transferred to a division that would remain in Eastern Europe and a tank regiment from that division withdrawn instead," the report said. The report also expressed "great uncertainty about what the Soviets will do with the equipment being removed from their forces." The study found that tanks withdrawn from Eastern Europe and slated to be destroyed or converted will likely replace older equipment in units within the Soviet Union.