

EDITORIAL: Obama fails to keep promise to avow Armenian genocide



President Barack Obama speaks to members of Congress and other guests in the Rose Garden of the White House in Washington, Tuesday, April 21, 2015, to thank those who supported a compromise that permanently changed how Medicare pays doctors. Also on Tuesday administration officials said that Obama will once again stop short of calling the 1915 massacre of Armenians a genocide, prompting anger and disappointment from those who have been pushing him to use the politically fraught term. Top administration officials discussed the decision with Armenian-American leaders.

PABLO MARTINEZ MONSIVAIS — AP Photo

It was teed up for President Barack Obama as never before.

On April 12, Pope Francis used “genocide” to describe the slaughter of 1.5 million Armenians by the Ottoman Empire a century ago.

In anticipation of Friday, the designated centennial of the Armenian genocide, Americans of varying ethnic backgrounds are imploring Obama to recognize the genocide by using that specific word.

But Obama whiffed again. White House officials told Armenian advocacy groups Tuesday the president wouldn’t use “genocide” to describe the horrific events that took place beginning in 1915 during World War I.

“We thought this would be a moment for the United States to become one of the nations on the right side of history,” Aram Hamparian, executive director of the Armenian National Committee of America, told Mark Seibel of The Bee’s

Washington Bureau.

Hamparian said that in a meeting with White House officials, he was told “regional priorities” were behind the decision not to use “genocide.” Turkey, a U.S. ally, has vehemently opposed describing the Armenian exodus and deaths as genocide.

Frankly, we are not surprised by Obama’s decision. The record shows he is reluctant to involve the United States in foreign affairs or rock the boat with countries that are friendly or strategically important to the United States.

The president’s refusal to say “Armenian genocide” is especially offensive in light of this inconvenient truth: In 2008, candidate Obama said: “The facts are undeniable. As president, I will recognize the Armenian genocide.”

Obama’s tiptoeing around the genocide reflects negatively not just on himself but on the entire United States. Our country is the world’s leader. We speak the truth. We have condemned many genocides, including the Holocaust and more recent atrocities in Cambodia, Darfur, Ukraine and Bosnia.

Yet, under Obama and President George W. Bush before him, courage has been reduced to a situational quality. How sad.

It is our view that Obama is paralyzed by a fear whipped up by the many former Beltway officials now on Turkey’s payroll.

Modern Turkey bears no responsibility for the past crimes of previous regimes. Yet Turkish officials and citizens alike are inflamed by the subject of the genocide. They insist it never happened, that some deaths occurred, but they were the natural outcome of civil war and Armenian support for the Ottoman Turks’ bitter enemy, czarist Russia, during World War I.

Few people outside Turkey buy that story. The evidence is overwhelming. The Ottoman Turks organized the massacres and deportations with great care in advance. They began the genocide with a classic move: Some 250 Armenian intellectuals — doctors, lawyers, writers, teachers — were arrested and deported from Constantinople. Almost all were later executed. And that was just the beginning of the slaughter.

Unless Obama reverses course, his legacy will be forever stained by his refusal to recognize the Armenian genocide.

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