



[Menendez's Corruption Indictment Highlights a Larger Problem in American Politics](#)

By Loretta Wolchko

New Jersey Senator Robert “Bob” Menendez has been indicted for a second time on federal bribery charges. He last found himself in court in 2017 on corruption charges but was able to walk away on account of a hung jury and the decision not to retrial. He continued his term as senator bereft of any major scandal -- that is until it was announced earlier this week that an F.B.I. search of his Edgewater home occurred last year and broke that streak. The search uncovered bribes he had accepted from Egyptian businessman Wael Hana in exchange for the senator abusing his powers in the federal government to increase U.S. aid to Egypt. The Egyptian government utilized the senator and the power he held within the federal government as a vehicle for furthering their own agenda with aid from the U.S. Menendez's actions highlight a larger problem within American politics: widespread corruption of those in power and the greed they exhibit when the metaphorical carrot is dangled in front of them.

Menendez had previously served as the Chair of the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations from 2013-2015 and remained on the committee after his tenure as Chair. Because of the senator's influence, foreign governments and intelligence saw Menendez as a potential key to get U.S. foreign policy decisions to swing in their favor. Hana seized the opportunity for both himself and the Egyptian government to reap the benefits of potentially having Menendez and his then-girlfriend in their pocket.

Shortly after the 2017 trial concluded, Menendez met his now-wife, Nadine Arslanian. When Arslanian began dating the Garden State senator, Hana proposed an arrangement: he would put Arslanian, who was then unemployed, on the payroll for his New Jersey-based startup halal meat company in exchange for U.S. military equipment sales to Egypt. Upon Hana approaching Arslanian in 2018, the U.S. had been withholding military aid from Egypt because of the government's poor adherence to human rights laws. The U.S. stated its intentions to continue doing so until the nation had improved the human rights issues occurring in the country. But with Menendez making backroom deals with Hana and his friends in the Egyptian government, this was not an obstacle for Egyptian officials. Menendez's influence in the federal government was so great that he was able to sign off on a multimillion-dollar weapons sale to Egypt.

Not only was Egypt receiving financial and militaristic support, but it is reported Menendez and his wife were sharing highly sensitive information regarding the U.S. government with Hana. The businessman would then forward the confidential intelligence to his connections in Egypt. Upon the visit of a senior Egyptian official to the U.S. to discuss his nation's failures in upholding human rights, Menendez held secret correspondence with the official to brief him on what questions would be asked. Following the meeting, Hana purchased more gold bars, two of which were found in the Menendez home during the search. In 2019, Hana's company was declared by the Egyptian government to be the sole exporter of halal-certified meat from the U.S. to Egypt. This was likely both a reward for getting the senator involved, as well as an incentive to continue the illicit partnership.

Aside from cash, the F.B.I. concluded that gold bars (with an inscribed serial number that could be traced back to Hana), a Mercedes-Benz, and exercise bikes were among some of the items used as bribes for Menendez. This kind of corruption, although not unique to the U.S., is not atypical for the country. It is not even atypical for the state of New Jersey. Fellow New Jersey politicians have noticed for years how peculiar the senator's journey through state and national politics has been. Many have turned a blind eye to Menendez's habit of advancing the careers of close friends and not hesitating to retaliate against those who did not act in congruence with him. The recent (and former) allegations against him regarding his corruption did not come as a surprise to those who questioned his waterside dinners costing tens of thousands of dollars.

One of the senator's more eyebrow-raising public decisions was to block bipartisan legislation that would strengthen laws regulating foreign influence in the federal government in 2020. This attempt at legislation came just a few months after the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee released a report stating that the chairman of Trump's 2016 presidential campaign had colluded with Russian intelligence officials during the election. The report confirmed widespread suspicions that Russia had influenced the outcome of the 2016 presidential election. Since then, corruption and scandal of this nature in U.S. politics has only intensified. More recently, allegations have come out against President Joe Biden and his son for accepting bribes from the Ukrainian government, however, these claims are predominantly unfounded.

Many U.S. politicians have called for Menendez to resign from his position, including several representatives from New Jersey. Despite his colleagues' outward disapproval, the senator has pleaded not guilty and has repeatedly refused to resign. He has reiterated his stance as recently as Thursday afternoon at a private luncheon amongst democratic senators, whereafter Pennsylvania senator John Fetterman said he is willing to work to get Menendez expelled from the Senate. Because it is still early in the development of this case, it is unknown if Menendez's strategy in his former trial will take precedence and will not face charges. Although the circumstances seem grim for the senator, he does not appear to waver yet from his stance of his innocence in the matter. Regardless, this event in U.S. politics serves as a reminder of the extensive corruption and greed that many individuals who claim to serve the people, are riddled with.