

Senator Menendez and co-defendants plead not guilty as Democrats seek to contain fallout from bribery scandal

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Democratic Senator Robert Menendez pleaded not guilty Wednesday morning, along with his wife Nadine Menendez, on charges of bribery conspiracy linked to the military dictatorship in Egypt. Meanwhile, calls mounted within his own party for Menendez, chairman of the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee, to resign from the Senate.

On Tuesday, the co-defendants of the Menendezes, three New Jersey businessmen with ties to the Egyptian regime, pleaded not guilty on the same charges. One of the three, Wael Hana, 40, was taken into custody at JFK Airport in New York City, where he was returning from Egypt, “voluntarily,” according to his lawyer.

Hana was then arraigned on the felony charges of conspiracy to commit bribery and conspiracy to commit honest services fraud. He was released on \$5 million personal bond. He surrendered his travel documents and submitted to GPS location monitoring and an 8 p.m. to 8 a.m. home curfew.

All of Hana’s shares in his company were also posted as collateral. His attorney said he would continue to operate the business, which holds a monopoly from the Egyptian government in certifying halal meat for import into that country. Hana hired Nadine Menendez for what the indictment called a “low or no-show” job, as a payoff to the senator for his aid in obtaining US military assistance and financing for the Egyptian government.

The other two businessmen, Jose Uribe, 56, of Clifton, New Jersey, and 66-year-old Fred Daibes, face the same charges as Hana. If convicted as charged, the three could face a maximum sentence of five years in prison for the bribery count, and 20 years in prison for the fraud count.

Both men are convicted fraudsters. Uribe lost his license to sell insurance in 2011 after he was convicted of stealing premiums paid to him by customers and not forwarding the money to the insurance companies. He later paid Nadine Menendez \$15,000 in return for her assistance in getting the senator to intervene with the state attorney general in the prosecution of one of Uribe’s associates. She used the money to make a down payment on a new Mercedes convertible.

Daibes was a wealthy property developer in Bergen County, New Jersey, building much of the upscale community of Edgewater, where Wael Hanna lived. He pleaded guilty last year to engineering a self-dealing loan of \$1.8 million from Mariner’s Bank, of which he was the principal owner. Remarkably, he was sentenced only to probation, although the penalty could have gone as high as 30 years. Thirteen other charges were dropped in return for the guilty plea.

There is little doubt that his political connections with Menendez played a role here. Significantly, when federal agents raided Daibes’ home last year, they discovered what they called “the fruits” of a “corrupt bribery agreement,” including gold bars worth \$100,000. The indictment handed down last week alleges that similar gold bars were found in the home of Robert and Nadine Menendez, along with \$480,000 in cash.

But it is Hanna’s connection with Menendez that has triggered the most ferocious reaction within the US national-security apparatus, since he allegedly put Menendez in contact with the Egyptian intelligence services, and Menendez passed on sensitive information to the Egyptian government about American policies towards Egypt and American

personnel sent to staff the embassy in Cairo.

After a weekend in which only one Senate Democrat, John Fetterman of Pennsylvania, responded to the initial indictment by calling on Menendez to resign, Tuesday saw more than half of the Democratic caucus do so, including the Senate majority whip, Richard Durbin, the second-ranking leader of the party.

Much of the pressure for Menendez to resign was applied by Democrats whose seats are considered vulnerable in the 2024 election. They reportedly pushed behind the scenes but waited to speak publicly until after Senator Cory Booker of New Jersey issued a statement calling on the other New Jersey senator to step down.

Booker did so with characteristic pomposity, saying that whether Menendez was innocent or guilty would be decided by a jury. He continued, “There is, however, another higher standard for public officials, one not of criminal law but of common ideals. As senators, we operate in the public trust. That trust is essential to our ability to do our work and perform our duties for our constituents.”

To describe this assembly of millionaires, representatives of big business and war criminals in such terms is par for the course for American bourgeois politics, but it bears no relation to reality. What has been revealed in the Menendez case is the sordid reality of the Democratic Party and of the entire capitalist two-party system, in which paid representatives of the financial oligarchy do what is required to defend the interests of American imperialism, no matter how reactionary the policies or how bloody the crimes.

At his weekly press conference Wednesday, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer criticized Menendez’s alleged conduct, claiming, “I was just deeply disappointed, disturbed, when I read the indictment.” He said he would wait until Thursday’s Democratic caucus, when all 51 senators meet at the Capitol, before making a decision on whether to call for Menendez to step down. Menendez is expected to address the caucus at that time.



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