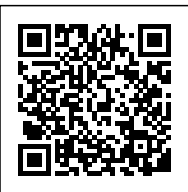


REMEMBER THE ARMENIANS

Posted on May 9, 2024 by Keghart



Category: [Opinions](#)



By **Mark Almond**, *The Critic*, 8 May 2024

The mounting casualties of the Gaza conflict have led to cries of "genocide!" from all sides. Forgetting Hamas' kidnap raid into southern Israel on 7 October 2023, pressure in Western countries to block arms sales to the IDF has grown dramatically as public concern about the human cost of war in the Strip mounts.

Less noticed by anti-arms trade campaigners in the West, and missed too by foreign enthusiasts for shipping arms to Israel, is the apparent paradox that she has steadily increased her own arms exports even whilst drawing in munitions from the USA at a rate unseen since the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

Israel's key export market at the moment is Azerbaijan, with reports of transport planes flying to Baku from Ben Gurion lighting up the web. Why is Azerbaijan so important to Israel, and against whom is the latter arming the former?

Friends and enemies

In 2020 and again in September 2023, Israeli drones and military equipment played a key role in Azerbaijan's assault on neighbouring Armenians — which resulted in the flight of all but a dozen Armenians from their ancient homeland in mountainous Karabakh.

Even before Azeri-Armenian ethnic rivalry became a symptom of impending Soviet collapse, there was a long history of violence between Christian Armenians and Muslim Azeris and its consequences are far from local. Thirty years ago, I naively assumed Armenians and Georgians, the two traditionally Christian peoples of the South Caucasus, would be allies against the surrounding Muslims. A Georgian dissident put me right: "It is true the Armenians are Christians like us and that the Azeris are Muslims. But the Armenians are Armenians."

Any assumption that Israel and Armenia, two small non-Islamic states wedged between hostile Muslim societies, must be natural allies is similarly false. Despite modern Armenian and Israeli identities being forged by massacres earlier in the 20th century, sympathy between them has been rare.

The Young Turks' slaughter of Anatolia's Armenians in 1915 was a kind of genocidal Old Testament to Hitler's New Testament of industrialised slaughter of Europe's Jews. Hitler's reputed comment, "Who remembers the Armenians today?" was a green light for the Holocaust — but 85 years on, its victims, more precisely their grandchildren, have made the uniqueness of their nation's suffering a reason to play down the other's.

Israeli and Pentagon strategists have viewed Azerbaijan as a possible northern front against Iran

For decades, the Jewish Anti-Defamation League in the USA opposed any recognition of 1915 as a genocide by Washington alongside its campaign against anti-Semitic agitation.

Secular Turkey was a rare majority Muslim society that recognised Israel. Armenia was part of the Soviet Union, whose regime sponsored the PLO, tried to use Armenian minorities in Syria and Lebanon as agents of influence, and built Yerevan's genocide memorial in 1965 in a jab at NATO-member Turkey.

Iran has taken over from the Kremlin as the main sponsor of anti-Israeli violence and propaganda, and it sees Armenia as an ally of convenience against its northern neighbour, Azerbaijan. If Iran sees Hezbollah-dominated southern Lebanon as its potential northern front against Israel, Israeli strategists (and Pentagon ones, too, for that matter) have viewed Azerbaijan as a possible northern front in any war against Iran.

Family business

Since Azerbaijan gained its independence from the Soviets in 1991 — and resumed its rule by the dominant Aliyev family, whose patriarch, Heydar, had been Brezhnev's viceroy in Baku — fear of Iranian subversion has been ever-present. Years of Soviet secularism has made its society very different from the Islamic model to the south, even amongst Iran's ethnic Azeris.

In fact, there are vastly more Azeris in north-west Iran — outnumbering Baku's by four to one — and this also poses a threat to the Aliyev regime. If the Ayatollahs' regime collapsed and Iran disintegrated into its ethnic components, then ancient Tabriz would more likely annex oil-rich Baku than the other way round.

It has suited the Aliyevs to have a pariah Iran to their south, oppressing their blood brothers whilst being unable to pose a military threat because the USA, NATO and Israel would never tolerate an Iranian push north to Baku's oil and gas fields.

As far back as 1919, Arthur Balfour noted the Western contempt for the natives' quarrels in the Caucasus. What really mattered to great powers was oil: "If they want to cut their own throats why do we not let them do it ... We will protect Batum, Baku, the railway between them, and the pipeline."

Now the pipeline runs all the way from Baku to Turkey's Mediterranean terminal at Ceyhan, from where tankers take 60 per cent of Israel's oil imports. Energy-poor Armenia has few bargaining chips, given it is wedged between Baku and the pipeline with Iran as a "friendly" neighbour to the south. Tehran has treated its Armenian Christian minority very differently from other non-Muslims.

This helps to explain why North American Christian lobbyists are so silent about the recent disasters that have befallen the world's first officially Christian society. It is not just that Armenian Christians' ritual and theology goes against the grain of US Evangelical Protestantism; until very recently, Armenia's foreign policy angered Washington and Brussels.

Unwanted, ignored

The military disasters of the last three years have pushed Armenia to distance itself from Moscow and Tehran, without necessarily finding military backing from the West. The EU Commission's President, Ursula von der Leyen, may have recently switched her cooing praise from Azerbaijan's gas exporting president, Ilham Aliyev, to Armenia's ex-civic activist, Niko Pashinyan. She offers financial aid, but she has no more divisions than the Pope, who has expressed sympathy for the exodus of Armenians from mountainous Karabakh last year.

Armenia's survival as a state and a society hangs by geopolitical threads beyond Yerevan's control. Moscow may no longer support it. If Tehran launches a war against Israel, or vice versa, Azerbaijan might be drawn in as a partner of Israel and could decide to snuff out Armenia whilst no one is looking — as they weren't last year when Karabakh was re-absorbed into Azerbaijan.

Turkey's stance is vital to the West, Russia and Iran, and it is potentially disastrous for Armenia and Israel. Despite Erdogan's anti-Israeli rhetoric, Ankara has quietly continued to trade with Israel and let Azeri energy flow through its port.

The two states of the single Turkic "brother nation" began to diverge in their policy towards Israel after Erdogan's AK Party suffered heavy losses in March's local elections.

Erdogan admitted he hadn't communicated his Gaza policy adequately. But it wasn't only the fringe Islamist parties that had attacked the President's apparent double-speak about Israel. More significantly, the victorious traditionally secular and Israel-friendly Republican People's Party (CHP) has adopted a sharply anti-Israeli tone. Responding to this domestic pressure, Erdogan last month announced export restrictions, and Turkish airlines have cancelled flights to Israel until March 2025.

Cynicism is also growing about the extended Erdogan family's businesses, which range from drone manufacture to deals with Israel. This means the President's personal brand is corroding, as both secular and fundamentalist critics reject what they decry as his "Islam in One Family". Meanwhile his foreign policy success in playing off NATO allies, regional rivals, Russia and Ukraine has backfired as inflation bites.

Azerbaijan's Ilham Aliyev has oil and gas, which enriches him and his clan — as London estate agents can testify — but he is shrewd enough to pay his police properly and to dole out benefits to the Azeri poor — of whom there are many, but who would be poorer still if like other, sillier kleptocrats, he kept everything for himself.

Future past

Aliyev is not a long-winded logocrat like so many post-Communist rulers. The BBC's Orla Guerin felt the lash of his sharp tongue when she asked him about his repression of dissidents, and he launched into a tirade about the BBC's indifference to Julian Assange's imprisonment. When Greta Thunberg was arrested by Dutch police on 6 April, Aliyev's foreign ministry issued a surreal protest reminding

the world that Azerbaijan is the COP29 President and its government is as devoted a protector of the environment as it is of the right to protest.

For all of Israel's preference for Azerbaijan over Armenia and squabbles between settlers and Armenians in Jerusalem's Old City, perhaps Armenia's role as a geopolitical football should be a warning. Armenians thought their diasporas in the USA and France would give them a trump card because their numbers and activism would have more influence than Azeri oil money. But who remembers the Kardashians today? Maybe Israelis are right to think that their diaspora will outweigh external influences which favour the Palestinians in Western capitals.

The mood music from younger voters across the West is that inherited transnational allegiances based on common religion, culture and inherited antagonisms are waning fast, as cultural memory fades. As Ukrainians have discovered, being flavour of the month in the West is no guarantee of consistent support. A north Oxford neighbour's house supports a tattered "Ukraine for ever" poster in one window and a "Palestine: Ceasefire Now!" in another. Armenia never got a meme, let alone a mass demonstration.

A fluent English speaker, Ilham Aliyev's cynical steering of the Azeri ship of state shows that he understands the West. Small states can't survive on sympathy alone. Israelis often claim to know that, too, but like Armenians they have trusted it as a bulwark. Neither the Old Testament state nor the first country to adopt the New Testament can rely on a West which has not just forgotten both, but increasingly hates being reminded of them.

Mark Almond is Director of the Crisis Research Institute, Oxford. He has been a Visiting Professor at Bilkent University, Ankara.

Comments



Hayorti – 2024-05-10 19:45:21

After reading this interesting article, I remembered entrepreneur-politician Vivek Ramaswamy, who during his campaign to be nominated Republican presidential candidate, frequently talked about Armenians and Artsakh. On the Tucker Carlson show, in an interview with Piers Morgan, in public gatherings, Mr. Ramaswamy passionately and knowledgeably criticized Azerbaijan's attacks on Armenian Artsakh and the Western media for ignoring the ethnic cleansing of Artsakh. Then I wondered whether any of the U.S. Armenian media had bothered to interview Mr. Ramaswamy or at least thank him for his class act.



Dave – 2024-05-09 20:30:53

Excellent article by Mr. Almond. Hopefully we will hear more from him.



Angela Barseghian – 2024-05-09 18:24:45

It seems the countries of the world are so divided, have lost their moral values, and characters, and reveal their true colours as nations and countries....Even when we think USA actions are so unAmerican...some rationalize them as necessary for national security or national interests...Jews always have portrayed themselves as victims of antisemitism, and yet, they are and probably have been during all times, the most racist, the most fascist, and brutal people of all...It is hard to believe, because the propaganda machine has washed the people's brains, and blinded all not to see the truth...Even now, when their fascism is out in the open for all to see, there are so many that rationalize the Genocide of Palestinians, as they rationalize or deny the Armenian Genocide.... This world has no norms, no laws, no justice for all...