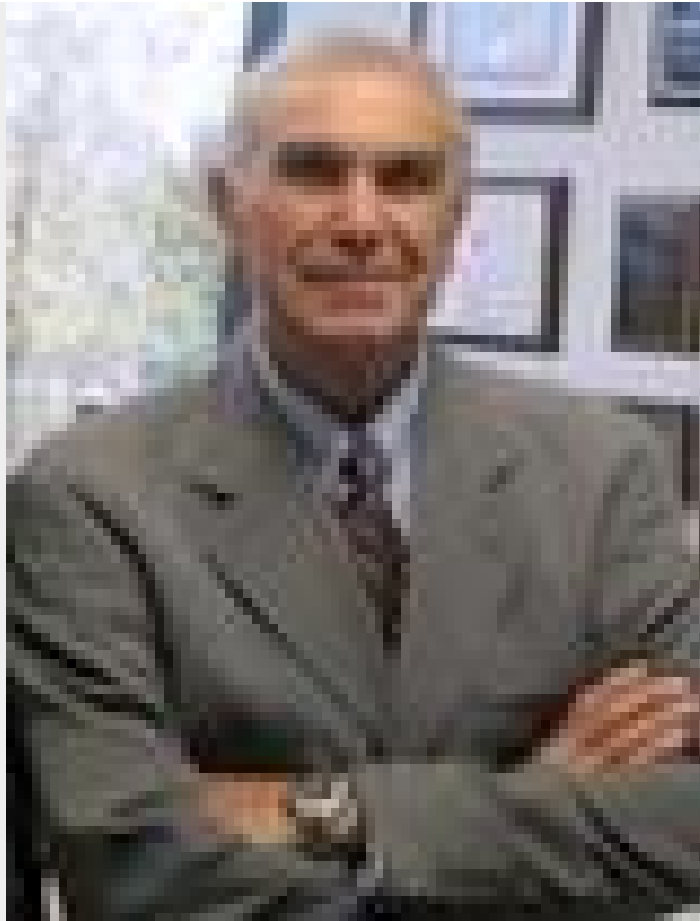


ARMENIAN UNITY ADVANCEMENT

Posted on March 11, 2011 by Keghart



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Eating the Elephant in Chewable Bites

 **Z. S. Andrew Demirdjian, Ph.D.** Los Angeles, 11 March 2011

The elusive dream of establishing a worldwide Armenian unity has been lately uppermost in the minds of many Diasporans. To a large extent the rising enthusiasm is due to the recent USC Symposium on Armenian Unity held on November 20, 2010 in Los Angeles. This successful event was organized by the Armenian Studies Institute at USC (University of Southern California) spearheaded by Dr. R.H. Dekmejian.

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Moreover, the event had a shot in the arm by the participation of our venerable activists such as Mr. Harut Sassounian, Mr. Appo Jabarian, Charles Paskerian, Mr. Donald Wilson Bush, Mr. Charles Ghailian, Ambassador John Evans, Governor George Deukmejian, and Archbishop Vatche Hosenian and a number of local and international luminary scholars with a deep interest in the Armenian unity quest gave the event a celebrity effect.

This lofty idea of transnational scope, this big dream which has been in the pipe of many deeply concerned individuals in the past has proven to be the Holy Grail of the Armenian nation for years. As such, it requires careful planning and preparation for its realization; otherwise, the whole idea may be still born by throwing the whole momentum into chaos and back into the black hole of infeasibility. We have been driving on square wheels for too long. So, let us do this methodically, systematically by following solid proven steps toward success.

By observing the mobilization of Armenians for unity around the globe, one would easily discern fragmentation of efforts is in the offing. There is hardly any coordination to midwife this long-awaited organization unifying all the scattered Armenian communities. Now and then, you hear a lone activist sounding its clarion for unity and harmony. Without any organized group effort, this lofty idea of

unity may fade away and become again an elusive dream. Therefore, we need to make capital of the success of the USC Symposium by following up with other events and programs to keep the enthusiasm alive and burgeoning into concrete steps toward organizing on a world scale.

Based on my extensive research and writing on the Jewish (including the Zionism), the Irish, the Inuit, and the African Diasporas, let me chart a framework for an organized course of action for us. The purpose of this framework is to guide us navigate through the murky waters of uniting the Armenian individuals who are born consummate leaders lacking the discipline and the flexibility of sharing the creative power of collaboration.

For the sake of proper coordination and to safeguard against failure and further fragmentation, let us consider doing the following for the elephant is in the room and eating it at once would choke us all through an unbearable indigestion. Let us prioritize the first three steps as 1, 2, 3 for the right organizational structure and strategy for carrying out the plans:

1. Think Tank: let us create a think tank center in one place or in several large centers of Armenian communities. Let us call it tentatively The Armenian Unity Initiative Center (By Initiative it is meant the power or ability to begin or to follow through energetically with a plan or task through enterprise and determination). The Center could serve as the scholarly guiding light (and not a political entity) of the whole organized effort. This is achievable and not a far off dream.

I think Harut Sassounian's proposal that we designate the Armenian Studies Institute at USC for the Armenians in the Los Angeles area has a lot of merit. Dr. R. H. Dekmejian may want to serve as the head of the Unity Initiative Center coordinating Armenian unity research and writing provided he gets additional support—and of course, our praise for his dedication! We need to get organized for this Herculean task. Several ad hoc committees should be formed: steering committee, organizing committee, election process committee, symposium and conference committee, etc. Putting the horse in front of the cart makes the community advance. Otherwise, we would be marching in place or even be drifting without any compass to please those who hold fast to the old "solo" ways of accomplishing tasks. As Dr. Simon Simonian sounded wisely at the USC Symposium by stating the warning that "We are playing solo –we shall perish unless we work together!"

2. A Circle of Scholars: let The Armenian Unity Initiative Center invite scholars to join forces with the activists, concerned Armenians interested in providing guidance through research for undertaking such an emotionally-charged task of uniting the Armenians. Special topics such as how to motivate the public to action, how to objectively delineate the size of Armenian communities within a country, how to organize a steering committee for elections, how to conduct elections, etc. should be allocated for study and recommendations made to the organizing committee and the public at large.

In addition to Armenian scholars, the community would benefit from enlisting "odars" as "friends of

Armenians" or "OBAs (Odar Born Armenians) including all those who show affinity to the Armenian Cause in words and/or in actions. Examples of "OBAs" contributing positively with their views at the USC Symposium on November 20, 2010 were Ambassador John Evans and Mr. Donald Wilson Bush who provided the attendees with moral support. I know a number of scholars at my university who genuinely sympathizes and sides objectively with the Armenians. It would have taken only an invitation to get their participation at important events organized by the Armenian community.

The Armenian community is not well organized to utilize their vast intellectual resources to its even a fraction of its capacity. Of all the ethnic groups in the U.S.A., Armenians have more college and university professors per capita than any other ethnic group including the Jewish Americans. Yet, we hardly tap into our valuable resources in terms of knowledge and experience they have. Most of our intellectuals would be more than glad to oblige if invited to contribute their expertise.

3. Empowering Young Armenians. Our ardent hope for survival is our youth –search no further! Look no further! Because the glory days of the Harut Sassounians, Appo Jabarians, Dr. Richard Dekmejian, Dr. Dikran Abrahamians monopolizing the headlines are numbered now -- Honestly, I am so glad to see our competition dwindle and fade away to give us a chance to shine for a change! Besides, this is the Kardashian sisters' era and one needs to do anything in order to get into the limelight even posing nude for "W" and the Playboy Magazines!

Back to reality: Those who attended the USC Symposium on November 20, 2010 could easily discern that the audience consisted mainly of the older generation. Our young generation was conspicuously absent from such an important event. The control of the Diaspora won't be given to the new generation on a silver platter. The old guards won't willingly relinquish power.(I know of one Armenian organization which has had the same president during its entire twenty years of existence!). We need fresh blood, new ideas, and innovations to advance the common ideology of the Armenian people.

Concurrently, our young Armenians should earn their trust by their organized efforts to serve the community's common ideology. By definition, all diasporas live on borrowed time –except that of the Jewish people on account of their teamwork, collaboration, tenacity, religion, and anti-Semitism. Armenians only share the tenacity attribute with the Jews. We need to study and emulate the successful diaspora models of the Jews, the Irish, etc.

Let us empower our new generation now before it is too late for they are already halfway in the jaws of assimilation! The Armenian Unity Initiative Center should reach out, for example to the Unified Young Armenians in Glendale, and encourage the participation of our young members in our quest for unity. With cohesiveness, we can turn the tide to survive at least a little longer until our homeland becomes stronger and self-sufficient.

4. Symposiums/Conferences. Science without enthusiasm and passion stagnates. The application of scientific concepts to a cause requires not only commitment, but also a large dosage of passion. While many speak and profess unity with sincerity, there are an equal number of them who give nothing but lip service to the idea because it is socially correct to believe in unity. The need to rouse them to action is the quantum leap toward the realization of our unity project. Therefore, conferences should focus on both motivating the public and showing them how the goals for unity of the community can be efficiently and effectively accomplished for mutual benefit. The organizing committee under the auspices of the Armenian Unity Initiative Center could periodically call for papers, presentations, etc. to inform and educate the public about the research-based procedures proposed for the Armenian unification.

5. Coordination of Effort. We already have controversy looming on the horizon. Separate movements such as the Western Armenian Congress, Western Armenian Council, the idea of a Worldwide Organization inclusive of the Republics of Armenia and Artsakh, yet another approach is to organize only the Armenians of the Diaspora (excluding the Republics of Armenia and Artsakh), is throwing the monkey wrench into the realization of the worldwide organization. Taking separate roads would give a body blow to the momentum already created toward establishing a transnational organization. It is of deep concern to see that yet another division is developing on the horizon. For the sake of universal unification to avoid fragmentation, we should now call the movement generically "a Worldwide Armenian Organization" to be later decided by the elected representatives.

Moreover, we need to see what comes out of President Serzh Sarkisian's recent proposal to amend the constitution of Armenia in order to create two parliamentary houses, one of which will allow Diaspora Armenians to be part of the legislature. It seems that the proposed upper house of the legislature which would allow the Diaspora Armenians to serve as representatives have met with enthusiasm by the public. In sum, on the road to unifying the Armenians, we should avoid the tendency to fragment our communities further by forming separate groups based on geography, place of origin, political affiliation, religion, profession, etc.

We should all commend President Sarkisian and Ms. Hranush Hagopyan for their efforts to take the Diaspora into their fold and make it part and parcel of the homeland. Particularly, Ms. Hagopyan should be thanked for her "Ari Tun" (come home) program for attempting to round up the scattered Armenians to come home to "Ararat!"

6. The Creation of a Common Ideology. It seems that without any common ideology, Armenian communities may very well become loose cannons. We need The Armenian Unity Initiative Center design templates based on empirical research for the formulation of core ideology, core mission, and core vision to guide the different communities to see what various ideas are proposed. The common ideology should represent all Armenians and not the Armenians of one country or

locality. While ideology, mission, and vision have the power to glue a nation together, they also have the divisive tendencies to drive a wedge among the various Armenian communities. The Viability of a Worldwide Armenian Organization book has an entire chapter providing examples of ideology, mission, and vision for a forum in delineating these important variables to guide the world Armenian communities in the same direction.

7. Decision Making Format. Adhering blindly to the principles of democracy would be a dangerous proposition for the Armenian communities. As David Marshall Lang has stated: "Armenians are argumentative, quarrelsome and great know-alls." Contrary to the conventional thinking, the caveat is that democracy divides through the creation of winners and losers.

Armenians hate to lose. Take for example, the principle of the majority rule which has the tendency to fragment an already divided nation or a group further. While the majority rule works fine for a large nation such as the United States, it spells disaster to the Armenian people. Therefore, scholars should formulate procedures for consensus-based decision making. In fact, they should promote consensus-based agreements, unicameral assembly and form of government for the sake of harmony. I am currently working on a model based on the radical democracy of consensus-based decision making to avoid organizational conflict and would more than gladly share it with the public.

8. Nuts and Bolts of the Diaspora Electorate Structure. We do not need to reinvent the wheel. Harut Sassounian's proposal is good enough for the time being. There are many wheels to choose from. Besides, the electoral process and procedures differ from country to country. Therefore, this will be locally decided to observe each country's electoral process. All we need to do is to ask our Armenian scholars to study and report viable ways of organizing. This is the cart to be followed; this is one of the last steps.

The old guards always stress "nuts and bolts" as a plan for accomplishing something by assuming teamwork as given. While good plans are helpful roadmaps to success, but teamwork reigns supreme. Ideally, we should have good plans as well as good teamwork. However, of the two, it is better to have good teamwork and not so good a plan. When a plan sours, witch-hunting begins. When something goes wrong, team-oriented groups try and try and try again to succeed by adopting new plans. On the other hand, when plan-oriented groups fail, they begin to fight by placing blame on others. Scapegoating psychology is the practice of singling out a member(s) of party of a group for unmerited negative treatment or blame. Scapegoating has been a major problem with our traditional political parties then and now it continues till today in the Diaspora and the Republic of Armenia. We have been driving on square wheels for too long. With the spirit of unity, we can work as one team.

9. Educating the Public. While most believe in concept that unity is good, but they lack the knowledge of the science that explains and establishes how, for example, critical mass produces power for a cohesive group.

10. . Motivating the Youth. The Armenian Unity Initiative Center could also appoint a committee or someone in charge of planning programs in which scholars could visit schools to deliver inspiring presentations to show our youth objectively how unity would be beneficial to all. Enfranchising our youth early on to get involved attitudinally, if not behaviorally, with our national quest for justice through organized effort, would yield the Armenian community an abundance of benefits.

11. Ministry of Diaspora. For every major event pertaining to the Armenian unity organizing efforts, we should invite the head of the Ministry of Diaspora to participate. In this way, we would avoid the counterpropaganda or misinformation in Armenia. Some detractors or misinformed persons in Armenia have already begun circulating the rumor that the Diaspora is organizing to counter the present administration or to change the regime in the country. When representatives from the Ministry of Diaspora are present, they hear that we organizing to be of help to both the Diaspora as well as to our homeland. In this way, Armenia's government officials would rest assured that our efforts are benign for mutual benefit and not a revolutionary movement to topple any regime.

12. Finally, Weaving a World Net. Once centers of Armenian communities have elected their representatives, we need to hold conferences and symposiums to network and coordinate efforts for achieving the common ideology.

In sum, if we approach the Herculean task of unifying the Armenians in a worldwide organization through the framework presented above, we would try to eat the elephant one bite at a time without getting choked in the process. We could follow the framework either sequentially after the crucial three steps or recursively as the need dictates.

If we share the creative power of collaboration, our chances of success would improve. As you all know, science without passion stagnates. In other words, the successful application of science requires enthusiasm and passion. So, let us passionately brave for unity systematically and as a cohesive team. By collaborating with our young Armenians, we can dare the devil and even prevail.

The devil is also within us, personified in some of our fellow Armenians who still cling tenaciously to the cave-dweller mentality. Disunity seems to have been hardwired in their genes. On the heritability of disunity, the acid test is found in the long history of disorganization of the nation. That some Armenian leaders have a cultural block against unity has become a truism for many years.

Changing culture is, though, virtually tantamount to the untying of the Gordian Knot. Therefore, the future is full of hurdles. As a cautionary step, let us follow the framework presented above to avoid the miscarriage of our ambitious plans to at last get the Armenian people united because the common denominator of success is creative collaboration. Thank you all!

The Main Steps of the Framework For the Armenian Unity Advancement

- I. Establishing a Think Tank Center(s)
- II. Forming of a Circle of Scholars
- III. Empowering Young Armenians
- IV. Organizing Symposiums and Conferences
- V. Ensuring the Coordination of Efforts
- VI. Creating a Common Ideology
- VII. Proposing a Decision Making Format
- VIII. Determining the Nuts and Bolts of Electoral Plans
- IX. Educating the Public
- X. Motivating the Youth
- XI. Inviting the Ministry of Diaspora's Participation
- XII. Weaving a World Net of Armenian Elected Reps

