

CAPITALIZING ON THE BERDZOR (LACHIN) CORRIDOR CRISIS

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Prof. Z. S. Andrew Demirdjian, Los Angeles, 31 July 2023

The Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) is currently in deep turmoil. To the chagrin of Armenians everywhere, Azerbaijan is maltreating the indigenous people of this tiny ethnic Armenian enclave. Although the West expresses a lot of concern it basically remains a callous bystander afraid to lay sanctions on the latter for compliance.

Since December 12, 2022, Azerbaijan has held the Berdzor (Lachin) Corridor under a blockade thereby cutting Artsakh's only land link with the outside world. As a result, most, if not all, of the diplomatic efforts of Armenians have been directed at getting help from other nations to get the Berdzor (Lachin) Corridor reopened so as to end a humanitarian crisis emanating from shortage of food, medicine, fuel, and other essentials of life.

Enlisting other nations' effort in reopening of the Berdzor (Lachin) Corridor is appreciated for it also opens another vital window of opportunity for the people of Artsakh. In addition to the corridor issue, it is the proper time to simultaneously work on the recognition of Artsakh's independence.

We will explore how to capitalize on the "unintended consequences (e.g., a windfall, a window of opportunity, etc.) Azerbaijan is providing by refusing to reopen the Berdzor (Lachin) Corridor for Artsakh citizens to interact with the rest of the world.

Azerbaijan's unintended consequences of blockading the Berdzor (Lachin) Corridor rest on the fact that the West has found the blockade unacceptable from a humanitarian perspectives and has asked Azerbaijan to reopen it. While President Ilham Aliyev schemed to force the people of Artsakh to succumb to his demands and to surrender, the whole action may be considered a political misfire.

To capitalize on the Berdzor (Lachin) Corridor crisis, we first need to explain how it has created a window of opportunity for Armenians to strive for the recognition of the independence of Artsakh.

Although John Locke, Adam Smith, Carl Menger and others have written extensively about "Unintended Consequences," the American sociologist Robert K. Merton popularized this sociological concept in the 20th Century.

In "The Unanticipated Consequences of Purposive Social Action" (1936), Merton tried to systematically analyze the problem of unintended consequences of deliberate acts intended to cause social change, such as President Aliyev's move to defeat Artsakh's desire for freedom.

For the sake of an overview, let us briefly get reacquainted with the sociological concept of "Unintended Consequences." There are three main categories of unintended consequences when one undertakes an act: firstly, the Unexpected Benefit, (also referred to as luck, serendipity, or a windfall), which is a positive but unplanned outcome; secondly, the Unexpected Drawback, in which we create a problem that is apart from the problem we wish to solve (it is a glitch); and thirdly, Perverse Results, while trying to solve a problem, we actually make it worse (problem aggravation).

Let us take each category of the unintended consequences and see how it applies to the blockade of the Berdzor (Lachin) Corridor.

Unexpected Benefits

In this category of unintended consequence, no second-level thinking is involved. Once we obtain the outcomes, they become direct and predictable in the future because the benefits created now often do not involve the actions of people. For example, if you dismantle a bird bath stand in your backyard, mosquitoes would disappear soon for there won't be any water for them to lay on their eggs. Every time President Aliyev makes territorial claims and incursions by nibbling away part of Armenian territory, the act makes the Armenia consider relinquishing Artsakh--a huge benefit to Azerbaijan to have Artsakh isolated. This is an example of an unintended benefit to Azerbaijan.

Unexpected Drawback

This type of unintended consequence occurs when the goal was to improve "A" and we later learn that in the process, we made "B" worse. These are also referred to as "externalities." For example, President Aliyev wanted to assert Azerbaijan's so-called territorial right in Artsakh by besieging the people of Artsakh (goal A), but the West does not find the Berdzor (Lachin) Corridor blockade to be an acceptable move on the part of Azerbaijan from humanitarian standpoint (bad outcome B).

From political perspective, the move has backfired for it is presenting more headaches, more problems to Aliyev as he tries to capture Artsakh.

Perverse Results

This type of unintended consequences happen when our goal was to improve "A" (recapture Artsakh) but we actually make "A" worse (becomes harder to get). These are often the most frustrating category of unintended consequences. For example, instead of intimidating the people of Artsakh into submission, Aliyev's siege of starvation made his act akin to a wide shot by missing the intended goal, for it has crystallized the resolve of the people of Artsakh to stand up and fight rather than surrender to his brutal demands.

The West is almost unanimous on the idea that Azerbaijan should reopen the Berdzor (Lachin) Corridor to make it possible for the Armenians of Artsakh to reconnect with the rest of the world. The West is thus amenable to help the traumatized Armenians, but Aliyev will not budge from his strategy.

Here is the window of opportunity. The West is unwilling to lay sanctions, provide arms, or send in soldiers to fight for Artsakh against Azerbaijan for fear of a political suicide at home and retaliation by Azerbaijan and the vast Turkish world, but what if the Armenian diplomats find it an opportune time to ask for another kind of help with less risk than the bold method of laying sanctions for compliance?

Instead of sanctions, ask the West for recognition of the independence of Artsakh on the principle of self-determination, on the principle of being free in one's own ancestral lands, on the unalienable set of human rights?

For example, the US policy has been, since independence in 1776, to promote in the world democracy, self-determination, and the quest for the lofty ideal of freedom. Any decision to hide behind such a policy of humanitarian consideration would be safer, less costly than laying sanctions on a country which would retaliate later. They would exonerate themselves by saying "we did it in the name of humanity."

Some of the member nations of the West may very well take the road of least resistance and accept Artsakh as a free, independent republic when there is an impasse in solving a humanitarian crisis. After all, politics is the art of the possible. Never forget that politicians are objective as well as emotional human beings with strengths and frailties. Who knows what the outcome would be? Nothing ventured, nothing is gained would be true in this instance.

After WWII, Raphael Lemkin is credited with the coining of the term "genocide" (after many Armenian massacres during WWI) and campaigning to establish the Genocide Convention, the Armenian Diaspora began to campaign for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923. Within a decade or so, Armenians succeeded to persuading Uruguay in 1962 to be the first country to recognize the Armenian massacres in the Ottoman Empire as genocide. Perseverance pays in any kind of endeavor.

As of 2023, governments and parliaments of 34 sovereign countries (of a total of 195) have formally recognized the Armenian Genocide. Three countries (i.e., Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Pakistan) still deny that there was such an Armenian Genocide.

Granted, 34 countries (17.5%) is a small quantity for over a century of Diaspora's dedicated work, but it is big in quality for we have "heavyweights" in that number: the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Russia, Italy, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, etc. In another century, we may end up with 68 countries accepting the Armenian Genocide. We need to do things now, to help our next generation continue with our quest --the Hye Tad!

In the framework of unintended consequences, Armenians have to capitalize on the Unintended Drawback of making the West find the blockade morally unacceptable. On the Perverse Results side Azerbaijan's ill treatment has solidified the people of Artsakh to stand up and fight for their rights for living freely in their ancestral lands.

Among the Western countries, for example, the French President has always shown concern about the well-being of the people of Artsakh and has always said, "I will do my best to help Artsakh." Given the deep dislike between Macron and Aliyev, given the fact that Macron's senate has voted positively for the recognition of the independence of Artsakh, all Armenians need is to do is to diplomatically ask and persuasively convince Macron to do the right thing without fear of retaliation.

All I am saying is that if we do not try our luck, nothing will happen.

Once we get one country recognize the independence of Artsakh, it would present a challenge to other nations. Hopefully, we would end up with a precipitating event to create a domino effect.

We need to pool our resources and come up with ways and means to help our beleaguered brothers and sisters succeed in staying in their ancestral lands without Aliyevs heavy yoke-- OR even without becoming the victims of Azerbaijan's ethnic cleansing frenzy through another genocide.

The "Law of Unintended Consequences" tell us that any move or act on our part to introduce a change in any situation would have "Unintended Benefit," "Unintended Drawback," and "Perverse Results." President Ilham Aliyev has kept Artsakh's 120,000 Armenians under an inhumane blockade since December 2022, depriving them of basic human essentials for survival. This barbaric act has created for himself a lot of criticism coming from the international community. Therefore, it is an opportune time to use the "Unintended Drawback" and "Perverse Results" against this wanton, wayward dictator with the killer instincts of Genghis Khan in order for us to help the people of Artsakh live in their historical and ancestral lands in peace and prosperity.

Comments



Vrej M – 2023-08-14 12:21:42

"Multiple international sources are more forceful in their condemnation of Azerbaijan...."
==Condemning is meaningless. These are politicians and politicians once in a while condemn this and that and say pretty words. Azerbaijan and Turkey are not the enemies of Europe or USA or Canada (these european style countries) and therefore, there is nothing to gain for them (them = european style countries). As an example, look at the case of Ukraine vs Russia. They are supplying a lot of weapons to Ukraine. This is bc Russia is their enemy. They want to harm Russia but also, they don't want to lose soldiers and they don't want to invite Russia to bomb their (their = european style countries) cities. Armenians seem to be always expecting that europe will do something for them. How many european countries still haven't accepted the armenian genocide? Of course, when it comes to muslim countries, they are not going to accept it. I am talking about accepting it on the grounds of historicity. How many european countries have accepted it without the armenians pressuring them for decades? All these problems would have been avoided if armenians had accepted centuries ago that it is surrounded by islamic countries, that they are living in islamic countries (Syria, Turkey, Iraq, etc). Accept it and become muslim. A lot of armenians have converted to islam in Turkey and you have the armenian diaspora trying to convert them back.



Aram Ayis – 2023-08-05 21:22:50

Respectfully I digress from the opinions expressed by Hovhannes Harutiunian and Vahakn. Prof. Demirdjian has laid the theoretical basis of cause and effect (domino phenomenon) and then the argument of how the blockade by Azerbaijan might lead to unintended consequences (in the eyes of Azerbaijan) and even backfire. Granted, it's written in a non-journalistic, close to scholarly style which might not please everybody's taste. Consequences? Multiple international sources are more forceful in their condemnation of Azerbaijan and their vocabulary too is changing. Most recent example: "Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) member Paul Gavan (Ireland) has warned that Azerbaijan seeks to ethnically cleanse the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh with the blockade." "What we are witnessing now is a deliberate attempt to ethnically cleanse the Armenian population of Nagorno Karabakh. With Tightening of Blockade, Azerbaijan presents Karabakh Armenians with a choice: surrender or starve," Gavan posted on social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter." (Armenpress) The outrage generated by the blockade might reach to a critical point that could open a new door to so far failed Armenian diplomacy. Yerevan should make a hundred-and-eighty degrees turn and argue that Azerbaijan has proven its horrific intent and it is not inclined at all to safeguard the well-being of people of Artsakh. Hence, Artsakh should have all the options including self-determination to protect itself.



Vahakn – 2023-08-05 06:03:40

I agree with Hovhannes Harutiunian. The fanciful and impractical article is wishful thinking. So many words but nothing doable. I like Demirdjian's articles, but this time he is shooting blanks.



Hovhannes Harutiunian – 2023-08-04 09:04:55

Doesn't the author understand that no country will recognize Artsakh's independence? None did so for the past 25 years. His "Unintended Consequences" argument is pure gobbledygook, sociological gibberish with no practical applications. What a weak article.



David Boyajian – 2023-08-03 22:10:37

An astute article by Dr. Demirdjian. The "Consequences" paradigm is also clearly a useful analytical tool. I believe that the blockade is, in reality, a *blockade allowed and encouraged by Russia* even if initiated by Azerbaijan, and I believe it's obvious. First, Russia is outright violating the Nov. 2020 agreement which states that Russia must protect Artsakh and keep the corridor open. That's deliberate.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2020_Nagorno-Karabakh_ceasefire_agreement. Russia has much leverage over Azerbaijan, and, no, Russia has not been "weakened" by the Ukraine war in regards to the Caucasus. Russia has been angry at PM Pashinyan since 2018 because it believes that he is turning to the West and that if Armenia turns too far, Russia will lose the Caucasus, Caspian, and beyond to NATO. This is Armenia's existential importance to Russia, something we Armenians don't acknowledge often enough. I don't know why. Russia is holding Artsakh hostage to pressure and humiliate Armenia and force it to turn 100% to Russia (and away from the West) lest Russia lose Armenia. Russia/CSTO are *openly* breaking their defense agreements with Armenia by allowing Azerbaijan to invade and occupy parts of southern Armenia. Is this not obvious? It is *all Russia's doing*, and that includes the 2020 war, which Russia permitted in order to bring about the present crises and pressure Armenia into submission. Moscow may even have told Azerbaijan and Turkey beforehand that it would turn a blind eye to their attack. Russia could easily end the blockade with one short call to Aliyev. This should be obvious. That's it in a nutshell. When Armenians do not acknowledge Russia's negative role, we do ourselves a serious disservice. Lies do not help us. They also make us look rather ridiculous. We don't need that.



Edward Demiraiakian – 2023-08-03 12:04:26

In a similar situation, Israel, country smaller than Armenia, would have bombed the Oil facilities a long time ago. Deprive the Mongols of their Oil and income, and everyone would lose interest in them. Deprive Europe of the energy resources, and they would scramble to mediate the problem. We keep begging the west to feel sorry for us, we need to reverse the situation. Armenia needs to grow a pair. It is too timid. The reason everyone helps Israel, is because Israel helps itself. America respects bravery, not timid beggars.



Harry Avnessian – 2023-08-03 10:09:41

As long as Nikol Pashinyan and his cronies are in power such tragedies will continue till Armenians realize he is total fake and toxic. Hope it won't be late.