US-ARMENIA RELATIONS: FROM HUMANITARIAN INITIATIVES TO STRATEGIC ALLIANCE

Posted on February 13, 2025 by Keghart



Category: Opinions

By Edward Tashjian, Lebanon, 12 February 2025

The relationship between Armenia and the United States has changed significantly for over a century. What started as American humanitarian aid and wary diplomatic ties has transformed into a strategic alliance. January 14, 2025— the day the *Charter on Strategic Partnership between the Republic of Armenia and the United States of America* was signed— marks a policy change, part of a long road anchored in history.

Early in the twentieth century, Armenia was a nation in crisis. The Armenian Genocide and the subsequent struggle for existence as a nation-state and a republic between 1918 and 1920 served as the basis for international intervention, though mostly on humanitarian grounds. During these pivotal times, American organizations—namely the Near East Relief—were indispensable to the Armenian orphans and refugees; they supplied food, shelter, and medical assistance. While at the time there were debates and proposals for an American mandate that might have introduced a more active military or strategic role, these notions never came to pass. Instead, American engagement stayed limited to humanitarian measures. This set the groundwork for a relationship that was both a moral commitment and a political strategy. However, relations were interrupted when the Armenian Republic was Sovietized in 1920.

Seventy years went by and following the independence of Armenia in 1991, U.S.-Armenia relations became relevant again. The legacy of early humanitarian relief changed slowly to become a pattern of diplomatic assistance and minimal military cooperation. Apart from Armenia's involvement in NATO's Partnership for Peace since 1994, projects like the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program helped Armenia to benefit from non-lethal military assistance and training. These initiatives helped to foster mutual understanding and a common interest in regional stability even though they never culminated in a full-fledged military alliance.

For Armenia, the post-Soviet era was a period to redefine its national identity and defend its independence in a demanding regional setting. On the other hand, from its vantage point, the United States saw Armenia's development as part of a broader general goal to minimize Russia's role in the Southern Caucasus. American assistance often came through diplomatic and financial initiatives meant to support institutional reforms in Armenia during the 1990s and early 2000s. Nonetheless, this gradual engagement was characterized by a careful balancing act. While the U.S. encouraged democratic values and market reforms in Armenia, it continued to maintain a level of caution, especially as it was aware of the complex security dynamics of the South Caucasus.



Thanking America for the humanitarian work following the Genocide

The Strategic Partnership Charter of 2025 must be interpreted within this context. It is not an isolated occurrence; rather, it is the logical extension of a tested relationship. By formalizing wide-based strategic cooperation including defense and security, economic development, and the backing of democratic governance, this new agreement represents a turning point in U.S.-Armenia ties. Unlike earlier stages of the relationship — largely defined by humanitarian relief and limited military cooperation— this *Charter* indicates Armenia's purposeful turn toward closer integration with Western institutions and practices. It shows a country moving onward from its past.

The *Charter*'s core focus is on increased commitment to security cooperation. The document outlines a framework to improve and modernize Armenia's defense capacity with a bilateral defense consultation structure and professional military aid training approach. This strategy shows a marked divergence from past times when Armenia's security mainly depended on Russia. Thus, the *Charter* seeks and allows the creation of a proactive security strategy targeted toward future challenges in collaboration with the United States. In this view, the agreement is not merely about **reacting** to acute and immediate dangers; it is about promoting long-term resilience against changing, and changed, regional dynamics.

Perhaps, the Charter's focus on democratic governance is its most important aspect. The modern history of Armenia is closely entwined with a struggle for democratic renewal motivated by both

internal aspirations and external pressures. The *Charter* advocates thorough changes meant to improve the judiciary, enhance law enforcement, and combat corruption. These steps should be looked at as reaffirming Armenia's will to uphold moral values of responsibility and transparency.

For historians, the evolution of U.S.-Armenia relations presents an interesting case study of historical legacy and contemporary policy — not simply as a contemporary diplomatic instrument but also as the latest chapter in a century-long story. Each phase of the relationship has been shaped by the need to balance national survival with the aspiration for sovereignty, and each has contributed to the gradual emergence of a more complex and nuanced partnership.

All things considered; U.S.-Armenian relations undergo a major change with the S*trategic Partnership Charter*. The agreement symbolizes a long and ongoing journey toward a strong, multi-dimensional partnership. It reflects progress. It is a declaration of renewed dedication to national security, economic, and democratic rebirth. Whether the new US administration under President Donald Trump will honor the *Charter* and implement its provisions remains to be seen. However, the significance of this Charter extends far beyond any single administration, as U.S.-Armenian relations have evolved over a century and will continue to do so regardless of short-term political shifts.

*****

There are no comments yet.