EASTMANIA, WESTMANIA, ARMENIA

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Part II

Keghart.com Editorial Board, 31 March 2013

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Russia and Armenia—Pluses:

1. Russia is a long-time friend of Armenia. It was the Russian army which established the foundation of modern Armenia in the early 19th century.
2. When Ataturk's armies were about to overrun Armenia, it was the Red Army which rescued the country.
3. During the Cold War Moscow guaranteed the security of Armenia. It continues to do so.
4. Armenia and Russia have close trade, cultural, military, political, and diplomatic ties.
5. Between 1.5 million to 2 million Armenians live in Russia. They're one of the largest ethnic groups. Intermarriage is common between Armenians and Russians.
6. Armenia receives about $1 billion in remittances from Armenians in Russia.
7. Russia owns many strategic business assets in Armenia. Moscow is the largest investor in Armenia. Trade turnover between the two countries is $1 billion.
8. Although Russia's geopolitical clout has diminished, it remains one of the two superpowers.

Minuses:

1. There's low-level public hostility in Russia toward Armenians and Armenia. The antagonism is not confined to racist skinheads. Some Russian authority figures and media commentators have said that Armenians aren't sufficiently grateful. The All-Russian Centre for the Study of Public Opinion revealed a few months ago that most Russians don't consider Armenia a

valuable partner in the world arena. Only 5% of the respondents said that Armenia was reliable.

2. Russia is an embattled country facing an expansionist NATO. President Vladimir Putin hasn't been able to stop Russia's slide.
3. When the Soviet Union split up, Moscow gave Azerbaijan far more military equipment than to Armenia. Baku received almost nine times more tanks than Yerevan. Some Armenians believe Moscow prefers to ally with Baku rather than with Yerevan, only if Azerbaijan were friendly.
4. For years after the Armenia/Azerbaijan War, Moscow continued to sell weapons to Azerbaijan. It didn't discourage its mignon—Belarus—from halting weapon sales to Baku, although the latter is not a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).
5. Some critics of Russian policy vis-à-vis Armenia claim Russia prefers to see a globally and regionally isolated Armenia so the country would remain dependent on Moscow.
6. Russia is Turkey's top trading partner. The current $30 billion trade between the two is expected to rise to $100 billion in the next decade. Russia is the biggest market for Turkish contractors and Turkey is Russia's top tourist destination. In 2012 Putin signed a massive trade agreement with Turkey and offered to build the $20-billion Akkuyu nuclear power plant in Mersin, Cilicia. Moscow discouraged Armenia (apparently upon the request of Turkey) from building a reactor to relieve the pressure from the ageing Medzamor. It then belatedly offered $1 billion for the construction of the proposed $5 billion power plant when the United States showed interest in the project. Putin even offered Turkey membership in the incipient Eurasian Union, but Erdogan was not interested in the doomed project.
7. Putin used strong-arm tactics to force Armenia join Russia's Customs Union. But Sarkissian stood his ground and stated that Armenia prefers the European Union to the Customs Union. To show his displeasure with "disobedient" Sarkissian, Putin cancelled his trip to Armenia and threatened to increase gas prices exported to Armenia.
8. In the past decade Russia has often ignored the interests of Armenia. Moscow's Compatriots program, which encourages the citizens of the former Soviet republics to emigrate to Russia, has been particularly hurtful to Armenia. In response to Armenia's complaint, a leading Russian diplomat callously said that the migration is an Armenian internal matter.
9. Russia, under Putin, is a one-man show. It's difficult to maintain a confident relationship with a country which is a heartbeat away from uncertainty, if not chaos. Russia remains a corrupt and undemocratic country where citizens are disillusioned but resigned to live in a backward country which depends on natural resources to stay afloat. The Russian oligarchic rule encourages similar tendencies in Armenia.
10. Shrinking Russia. Russia has 40% of the population of its closest rival, the US. Its population (140 million) is the same that it was in 1912, while in the same period America's population has increased more than three-fold. According to demographic experts, Russia's population will be 136 million in 2030 and 110 million by the end of the century. Putin's 2006 attempt (increased child benefits, longer maternity leave and cash payments of 250,000 rubles--$9,000) to mothers if they had a second child, haven't stopped the population decline. In addition, there's

> a significant flow of younger Russians out of the country. This is the reason Putin launched the Compatriots program to facilitate immigration from the Near Abroad (former Soviet Republics, including Armenia) to Russia. Most of the people leaving Armenia are headed to Russia, rather than to the US.

According to the "London Review of Books" (Dec. 6, 2012), depopulation is taking place across rural Russia. In 2010 some 36,225 villages had fewer than ten inhabitants. Since 1992, according to data from Rosstat, the state statistical agency, deaths have exceeded births by a cumulative total of 13 million, a figure far exceeding the number of immigrants.

In 1964 male life expectancy was 64.9 years and female was 73.6 years. Between 1991 and 1994, male life expectancy fell by six years, from 63.4 to 57.4; female life expectancy from 74.1 to 71. Cardiovascular disease, the country's notorious drinking culture, problems with child and adult nutrition, lack of healthcare expenditure, the impact of the shocks of the post-Soviet capitalist transformation have contributed to Russia's shrinking population statistics.

> Demography is destiny. While Russia is home to more than 150 officially recognized ethnic groups, Russia has always been the dominant group. Today they account for 81% of the population. It's almost guaranteed that Russia's open door policy to non-Russians from the former Soviet Republics will change the ethnic coloration of the country. "As languages and cultures of the peoples once absorbed by the tsarist empire become more prominent, the idea of Russianness itself will have to inhabit an ever wider range of forms and meanings," according to the 'LRB'. Last year at the Ramadan holiday, some 200,000 Muslims held a public prayer in Moscow.

The US and Armenia—Pluses:

1. It makes sense to be friendly with the top dog, the big cheese.
2. The US is the biggest market in the world. It's possible that Armenia and the US would sign a Free Trade Agreement in the next few years.
3. As the land of innovation, especially in IT and high-tech, the US can provide training, networks, and markets to Armenia's budding digital economy. (Armenia is the leader among post-Soviet countries in the number of patent applications.)
4. To complete its South Caucasus project, the US would like to see Armenia on side. It's satisfied in being a soft power in its relationship with Armenia. American spokesmen, including the country's current ambassador, have said that they appreciate Armenia's ties with Moscow, but maintain "no country can depend on only one partner."
5. There are more than a million Armenian-Americans. Their lobby punches above its weight in Washington.
6. America can be a positive force in the democratization of Armenia.
7. Armenian-Americans contribute financially and in myriad other ways to Armenia's progress.

8. American governments and institutions are a valuable source of scholarship and US universities lead educational institutions around the world.
9. Armenian youth, like the youth of most countries, find American popular culture highly attractive.
10. Armenia can't build bridges with the European Community, unless it's on friendly terms with Washington.

Minuses:

1. The US is Turkey's most important ally.
2. Washington might see Armenia no more than a convenient venue to electronically spy on Iran. Hence, the humongous Yerevan US Embassy bristling with antennae and satellite dishes.
3. Washington refuses to recognize the Genocide. It even removed its ambassador when the latter declared the slaying, by Turkey, of 1.5 million Armenians, as genocide. Its presidential candidates have promised that Washington would recognize the Genocide, but broken their word upon taking office.
4. Some countries see the US as an unreliable friend. It has abandoned former friends (Saddam, Mubarak, Pakistani rulers, etc.) when Washington decided they were of no use.
5. Washington pressured Armenia to sign the damaging Protocols with Turkey.
6. Washington has not urged Turkey to lift the blockade. According to the International Monetary Fund, the blockade costs Armenia $1 billion per annum (a quarter of Armenia's budget). The blockade has deeply hurt Armenia's economy and helped accelerate migration from the country. Many Armenians consider the blockade genocide by another name. Turkish columnist Mustafa Ozfatura wrote: "We will make sure that the number of the Armenians in Armenia becomes as much as a museum statistic as we did in Turkey. Armenians will only be found in museums."
7. Washington sells arms to Azerbaijan, and allows its allies, particularly Israel, to sell even more.
8. When Armenia's trade with Russia suffered due to Georgian customs harassment of Armenian shipping through Georgia, the US didn't ask its client, President Saakashvili, to ease up on the economically hard-pressed Armenia.
9. Washington expressed a mere "concern" when Azerbaijan rewarded Safarov, the Azeri butcher of the Armenian officer.
10. Although Azeri ceasefire violations are literally thousand times more than that of the Armenia, Washington condemns both sides with similar words, giving the impression that Armenians are equally at fault.
11. Washington wants Armenia to give Artsakh, a historic part of Armenia to Azerbaijan, although such a transfer would condemn Armenia to permanent insecurity, if not death sentence.
12. When Turkish officers continue to guide murderous Jihadis to kill Aleppo Armenians, to burn their institutions and drive them out of Syria, America, the godfather of the Syrian conflict, doesn't condemn Turkish/Jihadist depredations.

13. The US cut the Millennium Challenge grant which was supposed to help pave the roads outside Yerevan. Washington gives about $40 million a year to Armenia, compared to $1 billion to Georgia.
14. Last year, when Jihadists killed the US ambassador in Benghazi, the US put its embassies on high alert, including the humongous one in Yerevan, although Armenia is a Christian country and there are no Jihadists there. Such insensitivity is hard to accept.
15. Some in the US State Department consider Armenia a nuisance between US-friendly Turkey and Azerbaijan. They condemn Armenia's trade with Iran, although Washington doesn't apply pressure on Ankara to stop trading with Tehran. The Turkey/Iran trade is far larger than the one between Armenia and Iran. Recently the Germans found Turkey had sold to Iran some 1,000 items which have nuclear application.
16. Armenia's existence is less important to the US than it is to Russia. US Ambassador John Heffern injudicious and derogatory statement that Armenia "was a long to nowhere" might have inadvertently exposed US State Department's attitude toward Armenia.

The above list of Russian and United States pluses and minuses regarding their relations with Armenia isn't comprehensive. It also evolves. For example, recently Moscow helped install Bidzina Ivanishvili as prime minister of Georgia and, according to rumor, is plotting with Azeri billionaires Soyun Sadikhov and Vagit Alekperov (president of Lucoil) to replace Ilham Aliyev with a pro-Russia Azeri leader. If the rumors are true and Moscow is successful, Armenia could find itself isolated and with fewer options regarding Russia.

The pluses and minuses also have different weights. The size and the complexity of the list make the management of Armenian foreign policy toward the two geopolitical giants and the EU particularly challenging. Armenia needs wise and nimble master "chess players" who have a panoptical vision of the region and can assess the weight of the ever-changing pluses and the minuses, and act accordingly. It's not a job for the novice.

Part I

Armenia Tries Multi-Vector Foreign Policy