HARNESSING THE DIASPORA FOR AN EMERGENCY

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Although the "power of morale" is a vital asset, a relatively few pundits have dared to indicate that war with Azerbaijan is imminent and high morale alone is not sufficient to win wars in the 21st century.

During the Artsakh Liberation War of 1994, the Armenian soldiers fought with guts and grit the Azerbaijani army which was beefed up by thousands of jihadists and mercenaries. As for the Armenian army, there were fewer than 100 Monte Melkonian-style fighters from the Diaspora. Although the Diaspora responded to the call financially, it failed to provide volunteer manpower adequately. According to some reliable sources, only 89 volunteers responded to the call. For a Diaspora of 7 to 8 million that number is a drop in the bucket.

Among the patriotic Diasporans who volunteered to help Artsakh were Shahe Ajemian and Garo Kahkedjian who formed a small unit and called it the Crusaders. This fighting unit participated in many hard military operations such as in Martakert, Karvajar, and Shahumian in 1993. Kahkedjian lost his life at the liberation of Martakert on June, 26, 1993. He has been a hero for many Artsakh

Armenians.

Weapons of engagement have changed since the 1990s. The enemy's military might has also changed drastically. Let us not bask in the glory of past victories by throwing caution to the wind, but prepare ourselves to face a stiffer challenger this time around.

Since the 1990s, as we all know, nearly half of the able-bodied Armenians have left Armenia and Artstakh in search of greener pastures. On short notice, only a limited number of them would return to take up arms or be of assistance in civilian capacity for fear they would lose their jobs, businesses, etc. In a protracted war, Armenia and Artstakh would need money to finance the war and manpower required for work or military service to continue fighting the enemy. Various Diaspora organizations will raise the money, but providing Diasporans to participate in the military activities of the homeland is a moot question, especially when the Diasporans have not prepared to face a certain national crisis, such as a war.

Modern warfare has changed since the 1990s with the introduction of sophisticated, cyber-based technology weapons. What can Armenia/Artsakh do in a renewed armed conflict with Azerbaijan? The right answer would be harnessing the Diaspora in advance. How can the fragmented Diaspora organizations promptly provide "preplanned" help through management by objectives rather than through management by crisis?

Here is one plausible answer: There are two main prerequisites for harnessing the Diaspora's preplanned help in the event of an emergency (e.g., war) or a natural disaster (e.g., earthquake): One is the formation of a transnational-based Diaspora supra structure. Harut Sassounian (publisher of “The California Courier”), Appo Jabarian (publisher of “USA Armenian Magazine”), and I have extensively spoken and written about the necessity of forming an umbrella Diaspora-wide entity wherein democratically-elected officers would represent the Armenian communities around the world. In addition to other vital community-based projects, the suggested supra structure would devise contingency plans at its fingertips in the event of a national emergency.

To help the homeland in the event of a crisis, such as a war, the Armenian Diaspora has to be organized into a transnational basis to serve as an educating, motivating and guiding organizational force ready to act in a moment's notice. Forming a transnational diaspora is a political project, which requires mobilizing human capital and other essential resources.

The second prerequisite is to establish a computer-based repository of reserve volunteer database as to who would be willing to offer assistance in an emergency, say war. To “operationalize” this idea of reserve volunteers, the Diaspora-based world supra structure will survey the Armenian community members in various countries and ask them to fill out a form of how they could be of assistance to the homeland. Here is a simplified, but an exemplary draft of a template of the survey form shown in Figure 1:

How does a Diaspora-wide supra structure work through the tough decisions about "when and how"

to engage during a national crisis? Natural disasters and wars are often fast and unpredictable. Besides, the Azerbaijani daily violations of the cease fire agreement at the line of contact may very well provoke Armenians to strike back or even engage in a preemptive move. Such an act of self-defense may reignite the armed conflict.

Figure 1

A Sample Survey Instrument to Gather Data Regarding Reserve Diaspora Armenians Volunteering to Be of Assistance to Homeland in the Event of an Emergency or a Natural Disaster



Without contingency plans, the Armenian Diaspora would be unable to deliver assistance on time. In the event of war, the enemy will not give us the opportunity to get ready. Additionally, without preparedness, the safety of our volunteers would be compromised. Before sending volunteers, we need online to assess the program sites, give them an orientation if necessary, and develop explicit safety guidelines for our volunteers to follow in case of an emergency even though they will be trained by professionals. These are matters that could be decided after the formation of a Diaspora-wide supra structure.

To continue with the survey method of gathering data, let us briefly state that the transnational Armenian Diaspora representatives in each country across the world will gather all the survey results and enter them into a computer-based data system under the name of Armenian Volunteer Service Database. When an emergency strikes such as Artsakh comes under attack, and assuming Artsakh calls for twenty nurses, in no time the Diaspora headquarters would access the Volunteer Service Database and locate 20 nurses from countries close by. These volunteers are immediately notified to get ready to travel to Artsakh.

Had the Diaspora been better organized in 1994, we would have helped our homeland's war needs better and more promptly. We might have liberated Getashen province and the rest of Shahumian province where there were 21,000 Armenians living in 16 Armenian villages waiting for our protection.

This is not to deny that the Diaspora provided help during the Artsakh Liberation War. While the Diaspora sent a few of its members to fight in the war against Azerbaijan, it did provide substantial aid to Armenian refugees and stepped up its lobbying efforts on behalf of Yerevan's position to help the Karabakh people's bid for self-determination. For a while, the conflict itself helped unite the Diaspora organizations that had been feuding with one another. Armenians who stayed in their adopted countries helped immensely to fund arms transfer to the battle zone. Most importantly, the Armenian Diaspora groups lobbied US Congress in order to stop foreign aid to Azerbaijan by the passage of the Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act.

There have been several unsuccessful attempts to revive the mass-connection between Armenia and its Diaspora in terms of re-establishing the rightful place of the Diaspora as an equal partner in

the creation of democracy and prosperity in Armenia. Out of shortsightedness, President Levon Der Petrosian abolished dual citizenship for the Diaspora as a measure to stop them from getting involved in the local politics--while most countries around the globe are encouraging their diasporas to become part of the homeland with open arms.

An equally important event when it comes to efforts towards lifting the Diaspora to its rightful and equal place with homeland Armenia is being discussed once in a while. Most likely it will be the California Armenians who may deal with the idea of harnessing and reviving links between Armenia and its wider Diaspora. Effective leaders are needed to attract fellow Armenians to participate in turning the "Serving Armenia/Artsakh Volunteers" idea into a reality.

How to realize a standby volunteers system? For the sake of a forum, I “operationalized” the idea by giving a very simple and achievable example. When a crisis erupts, different organizations will have different ideas thus creating delay and disparity as to how best to respond. Without contingency plans, the Diaspora will fumble in a situational crisis by failing to respond en mass by missing the leverage obtained from the power in numbers.

The proposed project should not be construed for the formation of a militia with arms, ammunition, uniforms, ready for speedy mobilization. Central to the project is the organization, for ready reference, of those who have shown interest in helping the homeland in an emergency whether for combat or for civil protection purposes. Each volunteer's entry into the system will become part of a larger group which has expressed its patriotism.

Now that we have the momentum of the commemoration of the centennial of the Armenian Genocide, let us not wait another 100 years to get organized in numbers. The Armenian Diaspora organized on a transnational basis into an umbrella, supra structure would be better equipped to respond to an emergency call from the homeland. Isn't this an idea worth exploring or worth investing in? If you responded yes, then time is of the essence for preparing if a natural disaster strikes or war breaks out with our hostile neighbors.

There is nothing more vital to our nation's future, to our homeland economy, to our homeland security than the formation of a Diaspora-wide supra structure that in many ways assists the coalition of Armenia, Artsakh, and the Diaspora. This symbiotic union, this show of solidarity with contingency plans for crisis management will become the source of strength and the envy of our adversaries --because from strength comes security.