A MIXED BAG OF ADVICE

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One thing Armenia hasn't been short of since September's debacle has been advice. There has been good advice, misguided advice, and a mixed bag. A January article "What Armenia should learn from Israel" in the Austrian *the realist* by Konstantin Ghazaryan belongs to the last group.

Armenia-born Ghazaryan, a recent arrival to Austria, is the CEO of Austrian-Armenian Forum, is active in the Austrian People's Party, is chairman of Action Community, has co-founded the on-line *the platform*, and is teaching assistant at the University of Salzburg where he is a student. As well, he writes political op-eds. He is a welcome addition to the community of Armenian diaspora writers. His article cited Israel as an exemplar for Armenia's recovery. The op-ed is informative when Ghazaryan discusses the pillars of Israeli success: strong military, eradication of corruption, attracting diaspora Jews, and practising *realpolitik*. The article provides a near-complete account of Armenia's shortcomings (military unpreparedness, corruption, disastrous educational system, the mentality in the business culture, and jingo). The article falters when he compares Armenia and its diaspora with Israel and its diaspora.

Because many of Ghazaryan's assertions about Israel are repeated *ad nausea* by many Armenians, it is worthwhile to go through Ghazaryan's take.

1. Ghazaryan says Armenian and Israeli societies are similar. The facts contradict his assertion. Armenia is 99 percent Armenian and is made up of Armenians who have been on the land for millennia plus descendants of Armenians who survived the Genocide and the group which repatriated to Armenia in the '40s. Israel is an immigrant society with Jews from every corner of the world plus Palestinians who make up 20 percent of the population. Armenia has been in the shadow of Russia for nearly two centuries. Israel is an exclave of the West. Armenians don't have anything like the biblical mythology which helps glue Israelis together. Armenians haven't invented a Jehovah. Armenians don't have a Messianic complex of being God's Chosen assigned to illuminate the world. Until the collapse of the U.S.S.R, Armenia was economically, politically, and militarily sheltered society. Israel, in harm's way militarily since day one, is democratic (for Jews). Armenia has just begun testing democracy. Israel has the Mediterranean and Red Sea (Elath) coasts for maritime access to the world. Landlocked and blockaded by Turkbeijan, Armenia has unreliable neighbour Georgia and Western pariah Iran. Apart from Turks, Armenians have not been the object of hatred similar to Jews. Armenians aspire for affinity with the West. Israel is part of the West. There are other significant differences between the two countries.
2. Ghazaryan says "today Armenia is standing more or less where Israel stood in 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973—namely before existential crisis." That's a self-indulgent "more or less." In 1948, Arab and Israeli armies were equal in number but Israel was able to add 100,000 reservists. The

Israeli army was commanded by hundred of officers who had served in the British army. The Israelis were supported by an unknown number of diaspora Jews who had seen action in WWII. It's often said that five Arab countries attacked Israel. But Lebanon sent token 1,000 soldiers who withdrew after a minor skirmish. The Jordanian forces were commanded by British officers and colonial major domo Sir John Glubb Pasha who had the British priorities in mind rather than Palestinian interests. Iraqi forces were hardly trained. Corrupt King Farouk's army was a paper tiger. Syria, which had just become independent, was experiencing birth pangs. On the eve of the war, the CIA and Britain's MI6 asserted the Arabs would lose.

3. It's hard to comprehend why Ghazaryan believes Armenia is now where Israel was in 1956. That year, Israel, along with France and Britain attacked Egypt and occupied the Sinai. Israel withdrew because President Dwight Eisenhower ordered the three aggressors to go home. Unlike Armenia last year, no hostile forces got close to Israel in 1956.
4. Israel was again stronger than the combined Arab forces in 1967. Knowing that, Egypt's Gamal Abdul Nasser was reluctant to wage war but was forced to make bellicose noises because he believed Israel was about to attack Syria. It's because Egypt was weak that Nasser agreed to President Lyndon Johnson's invitation for peace talks. While Nasser relaxed thinking war had been averted, Israel made a surprise attack destroying Egypt's air force. Sir Glubb Pasha, who had commanded the Jordanian army in the first half of the '50s, said: "Everyone who had any military experience in the Middle East during the last twenty years was fully aware that the Egyptian army had not the faintest chance against the Israelis."
5. In the first days of the October War in 1973, the Arabs gained ground because Israel was caught by surprise. It recovered quickly (thanks to Henry Kissinger's 'air bridge' which emptied the U.S. arsenal in Germany to supply Israel with arms). Its troops again reached the Suez Canal. Another reason why Israel in 1973 and Armenia now are not in the same spot is this: Israel built nuclear bombs in the '60s which could raze Cairo and Damascus had the Arab armies become an existential threat.
6. Ghazaryan disappoints by repeating the tired "turning the desert into garden" Zionist myth. Accordingly, Palestinians were Bedouins living in the desert when the Zionists arrived from Europe and converted the scrubland into garden. Palestine was not a backwater before the illegal immigration of European Jews. It had schools and hospitals, and Palestinians exported the famous Jaffa oranges to Europe. Palestinian businessmen participated in trade shows (Kyiv is one such instance) and journeyed as far as the Philippines to import oyster shells used in manufacturing Holy Land souvenirs. Long before the arrival of the Zionists, Armenians of Jerusalem had a printing press, photo studios, and a co-ed school.
7. Underlying his admiration of Israel, Ghazaryan reveals insouciance about the injustices his paragon has inflicted upon Palestinians. Blinded by Brave New Israel, he is indifferent to the fact that Israel has stolen Arab Palestine. In this respect, Armenia is the reverse of Israel: Turkey occupies 90 percent of historic Armenia, not to mention Cilicia. If anyone, it's the Palestinians who are similar to the Armenians.

8. Ghazaryan assumes the Armenian diaspora can and should imitate the Jewish diaspora. He writes: "What fundamentally connect the two countries are the large diasporas... however, while Israel derives maximum benefit from this large lobby network, there is much potential for the Armenian diaspora." Comparisons are invidious and in this case also wrong-headed. The two diasporas are so different that unearthing credible similarities is a Herculean task. If the Armenian diaspora attempted to be successful like the Jewish diaspora it would explode like the proverbial frog which wanted to become big like a cow. The Jewish diaspora is in many times stronger and wealthier than the Armenian diaspora. The Jewish diaspora is more than 2,000 year old and thus is well established in a variety of Western societies long before Armenians had invented their alphabet. Rome's Jewish diaspora existed before the birth of Christ. Jewish religious practices and "clannishness" drew the ire of Cicero, Seneca, Juvenal, and Tacitus. Emperor Trajan was accused of being surrounded by "unholy Jews." Jews have been players in the West far longer than the birth of most of the European states. Armenians, except for the Iranian-Armenians of Nor Chugha and Calouste Gulbenkian, are novices in the big league of diasporan commercial success. Jews are among the first white people to settle in the Americas. It's said that a Jewish physician and a mapmaker travelled with Christopher Columbus on his first voyage to the New World.

It was the Jewish diaspora that created Israel through its wealth and influence in Europe and in the Americas. The Jewish diaspora, in most instances, is wealthier than the "indigenous" people (American, British, Canadian, and French) among whom they live. Rather than list all the areas diaspora Jews dominate in the West, here's a look at two areas: politics and economy. The

Rothschilds helped finance many European wars starting in the 18th century. They enabled Britain to purchase shares in the Suez Canal Company. The most successful 19th century British prime minister was Benjamin Disraeli. Today, there are 23 MPs and 10 peers who are Jewish. Four-hundred-and-twelve British Jews have received the Commander of the Order of the British Empire. Jewish Dominic Raab is the acting prime minister of Britain. There's the powerful All-Party Britain-Israel Parliamentary Group, Friends of Israel political group, and the Israel Britain Alliance among others. Two of the biggest supermarket chains (Tesco and Sainsbury's) are Jewish-owned. The Marks & Spencer department store chain is also Jewish-owned. There are 300,000 Jews in Britain compared to 18,000 Armenians.

The picture in France, where there are 450,000 Jews, is similar to that of Britain. Armenian sources say there are 400,000 French-Armenians but the majority are so assimilated that their only Armenian connection is the "ian" and DNA. Leon Gambetta, president of France in the 19th century, was Jewish.

In the 20th century there were four Jewish prime ministers of France (Leon Blum, Pierre Mendes France, Rene Meyer, and Michel Debre) plus three foreign ministers (Maurice Schumann, Jack Lang, and Bernard Kouchner). Ex-President Nicholas Sarkozy is Jewish.

In business: Isaac and Daniel Carasso (founders of Danone), Andre Citroen (founder of Citroen auto company), Marcel Dassault (aerospace and military aircraft), Gerard Louis-Dreyfus (industrialist), the Rothschilds, and the head of the world's biggest PR company are Jewish. Three 20th century Italian presidents (Alessandro Fortis, Sidney Sonnino, and Luigi Luzzati) were Jewish.

It's in the U.S. where the Jewish diaspora has made the strongest impact on the creation and survival of Israel. In the Civil War, Judah Benjamin was the Confederate Secretary of State. Although American Jews number around 7.5 million (2.5 percent of the population) many Americans overestimate their number because of the ubiquity of the Jews. Jews in America are the most organized, most dynamic, and most influential group. Twenty-eight members of the U.S. Congress are Jewish with nine in the Senate. The heavyweights of the former (Adam Schiff, Debbie Wasserman Schultz) and the latter (Dianne Feinstein, Bernie Sanders, and Charles Schumer) are Jewish. Nine key members of President Joe Biden's inner circle (Secretary of State, Director of CIA, Director of National Intelligence, Attorney General, Secretary of Homeland Security, Secretary of the Treasury, White House Chief of Staff, Deputy Secretary of State, Secretary of Political Affairs, Office of Science & Technology Policy) are Jewish.

It's estimated by *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* (Oct. 2015) that (a conservative figure and not adjusted to inflation) U.S. direct aid to Israel since 1948 is about $138 billion. This doesn't include indirect aid, loan guarantees, emergency aid, training, scholarships, forgiven debts, armaments, etc. It also doesn't include tax-deduction for donations to Israel. U.S. assistance to Armenia is $2 billion since 1991. U.S. Jewish organizations send about $1 billion a year to Israel. The Armenia Fund has send $100 million to Armenia in the past decade, not counting the emergency funds raised during the September invasion.

The richer Jewish diaspora (9 million) is 50 percent larger and richer than the Armenian diaspora of 6 million. Being new immigrants to the West, Armenians are not as well established as Jews. Ghazaryan is partly justified in his admiration on how Israel has attracted and settled diaspora Jews. He regrets Armenia hasn't followed a similar policy. Until independence, Armenia had no authority to decide immigration. Post-independence, it had too many problems to attract anyone. There was also no affluent diaspora or a $138 billion U.S. windfall to settle newcomers. We haven't forgotten Armenia's corrupt business environment which discouraged diaspora investment. Another incentive for Jews to immigrate to Israel is anti-Semitism and Arab hostility. Since 1948, 800,000 Oriental Jews have settled in Israel.

The above differences are the tip of the iceberg when comparing Armenia and its diaspora with Israel and its diaspora. Armenia desperately needs diasporan repatriation. But rather than try to duplicate what Israel and its super-rich diaspora have done, we should devise our own mission and program on how to make the Armenian diaspora more effective.

Comments

Hovanes Boyadjian – 2021-02-04 12:15:52
Another excellent article from Keghart.

Tsakoug – 2021-02-04 11:54:37
Fully agree with this editorial and am tired of the recommendation that we be like the great deceivers of the universe!

Vatche P. – 2021-02-04 06:16:34
Great editorial! I trust Ghazaryan has seen or been sent a copy of this article...