STAND BY ARMENIA NOW AND FOREVER: BABIES -- OR BUST?

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Although the percentage of the world's people living outside of their birth countries has remained fairly steady for many countries in recent decades, this is not true of the Republic of Armenia. Along with many Western and Eastern European nations, the current diminution of Armenia's population comes from two main sources: relentless immigration and woefully low fertility rate (1.70 against the standard range of 2.11). In other blunt words, more people are dying and less babies are being born. The result: In a few decades, high risk of ethnic suicide or self-genocide for Armenia is running out of Armenians.

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This gives rise to a critical problem. What to do? Solution: more babies and more immigration into Armenia. The internally-based methods would involve the increase of babies while the externally-based strategies would entail relocation of the Armenian Diaspora to Armenia. Many diasporans, however, would not want to give up their comfortable lifestyle in their foreign adopted countries to come and live in Armenia. So, that leaves us only internally propelled expansion of the population by focusing on increasing babies.

Despite the increase in world population, some countries, some rulers, have always had problems in increasing their own population. So, the problem is not an Armenian exceptionalism. To illustrate, let

us take two historical instances in which population issues had to be solved.

After the capture of Miletus (the Greek city in Southwestern portion of Anatolia's mainland) by the Persians forces of Darius I, the Carian king Mausolus was content to hold his realm in the name of the Achaemenids ruling as a Persian satrap, or provincial governor. In around 499 B.C., Mausolus embarked on an ambitious program of Hellenization. He decided to make Halicarnassus the coastal city, about 40 miles south of Miletus, his new capital and the showpiece of his modernization program. Since Halicarnassus had a sparse population, all the inhabitants of several smaller towns were compelled to relocate to it, increasing its population over fivefold. To ensure that no residents returned to their former homes, the king set up police posts or watchtowers in the old settlements. Forced relocations to increase or decrease the population of a place is rare nowadays, but it does happen once in a while.

When Moslems are pressed for an explanation as to why Prophet Mohammad was polygamous, the apologists would say that his wife Khadija died and left him with his children. He was over 55 years old at the time and had to take care of his children as a single parent for four or five years. The faithful point out that even his enemies state that he was a virtuous man despite the fact that he took his best friend's (Abu Baker's) daughter at the age of nine for his wife. Legend has it that when the Prophet was asked as what he liked most in life, he replied: Women, perfume, and praying.

Of course, polygamy was practiced long before the arrival of Prophet Mohammad since women were considered chattel, the property of men. Among many other talents, Mohammad was a shrewd strategist; out of political reasons of spreading his religion quickly and widely, he allowed men to marry up to four wives in this way to increase the population of the faithful in a short period of time. As a consequence, Islam, like the Mormon faith, would have a better chance of growth. Within a few years of the Prophet's death, his followers created the largest empire the world had ever known and today Islam has become the second largest religion in the world.

The survival and growth of an ethnic group depends on its population trend (whether it is increasing or declining). In today's world, force or dogma cannot make a couple procreate more children. Such measures as banning the sale of contraceptives would not be acceptable by the people because it would rob them of their choice and prerogative to have or not to have more children. What is required is the right persuasion to appeal to them to make the change and bear more children. In the science of persuasive communications, three appeals are normally used as indicated in Figure 1: Ethos, pathos, and logos.

Given Aristotle's triangular framework, let us see what some of other countries have used mechanisms to achieve an increase in their populations, especially through conceiving more babies. Also, we need to suggest ways for Armenia to experiment with some techniques to eventually increase their declining population.

Aristotle's Rhetorical Triangle

Ethos: Persuasive communication should be delivered by a credible, likable and trustworthy person to express real concern about, say, the Armenian condition and heritage. A nationally known person such as a statesman, a well-liked athlete (e.g., Artur Abraham), or an artist (e.g., Charles Aznavour) and the like should be used to appeal to the people to have them increase their number of children. The use of ethos (the credibility and trustworthiness of a speaker) as an appeal in persuasive communications has been quite well established, otherwise the audience would shun the messenger and pay little or no attention to the message.

Pathos: Here the appeal is to emotions and values of the couple in a society to have more children. Denmark has used sexy TV ads to stimulate the public to have more babies. In 2014, with Denmark's birthrate at a 27-year low, an ad campaign asked Danes to 'get to work". In the ad a voluptuous, sultry blonde, dressed in a killer negligee, bracing a naughty smile, says: " It releases endorphins in the brain and creates desire for sex. It is how we get children." A travel agency called Spies Travel state in the ad campaign: We want "...Danes to book a romantic city holiday and Do It For Denmark." If a woman could prove that she conceived a child on a trip that she and her husband booked through Spies Travel, "...he company will give you three years' baby stuff."

Singapore has been aggressively trying to reverse its low birth rate problem with the help of "mints." In 2012, the Singapore authorities partnered with mint-peddlers Mentos ("The Freshmaker") to put together a "National Night," a campaign meant to encourage Singaporean couples to make their sense of "patriotism explode" and in this way help the nation increase its 0.78 children per woman birth rate. One of their ad campaigns titled "Lie Back and Think of Singapore" claimed: "I'm a patriotic husband, you're my patriotic wife, let's do our civic duty and manufacture life."

In fact, Singapore has not stopped using ad campaigns alone. The Urban Redevelopment authority has placed a limit on the number of small one-bedroom flats that can be built in an effort to curb the singleton lifestyle and to encourage couples to shack up and make babies. In terms of expenditures, Singapore spends around $1.3 billion annually on trying to convince its people to get busy on making babies, including offering $15,000 parental packages for each child, tax incentives, and extended maternity leave.

Nazi Germany has given out medals for patriotism for being a responsible citizen by giving birth to Aryan babies. Lebensborn German association was established in 1935. Lebensborn means literally the fountain of life. It was an SS-initiated, state-supported, registered association in Nazi Germany with the express goal of raising the birth rate of "Aryan" children. Lebensborn was later expanded into several occupied European countries with Germanic populations during the WWII. German women who had participated in this program were honored by bestowing upon them a Third Reich "Mother's Cross", an official cross of honor of the German state in recognition for their civic duty. In the age of very low fertility, this state-sponsored policy to increase the birthrate made a comeback.

South Korea's "Lights Out" program is government's other more creative measures to appeal to the emotions of the people. In addition to the cash gifts and incentives offered to staff who have more than one child, in 2010, the south Korean government decided to "turn off the lights" in its offices at 7 p.m. on the third Wednesday of every month. This practice is dubbed as "Family Day" to help staff get dedicated to childbirth and upbringing. The officials who have organized this program for making more babies, maintain that every little bit helps.

In an effort to appeal to the emotions of couples, robot babies are created to save the day. To counter a stagnating economy and a seriously low birthrate --so low that in 1000 years, a demographer claims, the Japanese will be extinct. According to critics, the Japanese government has not done enough to address its low birth rate. Therefore, in 2010, engineering students at the University of Tsukuba invented Yotaro which is a baby simulator robot that mimics a real baby: He cries, coos, sneezes, suffers that relentless drippy nose that are familiar to any parent. The robot giggles when tickled, and is calmed by his rattle. Those students who had created this baby are hoping that if he can spark some measure of parental emotion in the people who see him, maybe they will consider making a real baby. The effect of Yotaro on real babies has not been published yet.

Logos: Of the three, logos is one of the most effective appeals to be used. France has offered monetary incentives to encourage couples to have more offspring, USA has given tax breaks for families with small or large members of $1,000 a year, and at one time Australia offered free land to increase its population under the "Populate or Perish" program. The Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh has also offered monetary, housing, and farm animal incentives for those who would marry and have children.

While demographers warn ageing populations and decreasing birthrates mean that Europe is dying, Italy is leading the way. It has the lowest birthrate in Europe. Against the backdrop of increasing scarcity of good jobs and rocketing prices, procreating has become a luxury many Italians cannot afford. Appeals to patriotism are one means of encouragement, money is another effective method. Natalist plans in effect today in Europe include tax incentives, state-subsidized child care, and onetime and ongoing cash payments. The Netherlands, for example, gives every couple a kinderbijslag, a child support of an average of about $1,300 per child per year to age 13, and less thereafter.

Children are the dying breed. As the birthrate in most countries drops well below the "replacement rate" of 2.11 children born to every woman, the declining population will first be felt in the playgrounds. This is exactly what Mayor Rocco Falivena noticed happening in his town of Laviano whose streets were deserted: There were no locals, no tourists, and most importantly, no children playing anywhere. Laviano is an enchanting hamlet nestled in the picturesque mountains of the Campania region in Italy.

In 2003, Falivena announced that he would be paying about $15,000 to every woman local or immigrant, married or single, who would give birth to and rear a child in the town. There were some indications that Falivena's baby bonus program was succeeding. Close to 50 mothers became eligible to get the bonus!

South Korea's birth rate has fallen to one of the lowest in the developed world; it is at a low of 1.2 children per woman in 2010. That is even lower than China, with its aggressive one child policy at 1.6. Recently financial difficulties are more to be blamed for the slowdown in baby production. South Korean parents have a major concern regarding the ability to pay for their children's care and education. Therefore, the government is promising to slice the tuition fees into half for state-run childcare and is actively trying to weaken the perception that a college degree is essential for success in Korea.

Russia's population has been dwindling since the 1999s on account of low birth rate and high death rate. Apparently high alcoholism rate may be a factor in that death rate. As a result, in 2007, the government declared September 12 National Day of Conception, hoping to give couples the day off from work to do their civic duty which would result in a baby. Women who gave birth on Russia's National Day (June 12), could win refrigerators, money, and even cars. Russia's campaign "Have a Baby, Win a Fridge" seems to be working. In 2012, Russia's birth rate was set to match and possibly surpass that of the United States. During the presidential campaign in 2011, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin promised to spend L33 billion to boost Russia's birthrate by 30 percent over the next five years.

While most countries have been using the carrot approach, Romania chose to resort to the stick: "No babies? Higher taxes!" In the 1960, Romania was approaching zero population growth. This was a vexing prospect for a Communist state that subscribed to the Marxist principle that economic health of a nation lay in a robust labor class. As a result, starting in 1966, the government took some drastic and negative measures.

Although Romania had tax and monetary incentives to encourage citizens to have children, the government also punished people for not having children. Courts made divorce exceedingly difficult. As a result, in 1967, only 28 divorces were allowed, a whapping decrease from the 26,000 the year before. Also, police were stationed in hospitals to make sure that no illegal abortions were performed, and legal importation of birth control was stopped. Oddly enough, the policy worked, at least in the short term. The baby bounce was very significant--from 273,687 babies in 1966 to 527,764 in 1967.

During Nicolae Ceausescu regime in 1980s, Romania again faced a declining birth rate and was forced to institute even more draconian measures to improve the birth rate. Women were subjected to monthly gynecological exams to detect pregnancies in their earliest stage and to ensure that the pregnancies were not interrupted. Of all the nations wanting to increase their population, none resorted to draconian measures than Romania.

In the final analysis, some doubt if natalist policies have much of an effect on birthrate, let alone on population. Those who expected a panacea have been disappointed. However, most studies show an uptick in the birthrate in countries that implemented some pro-child programs. The most comprehensive study to date conducted in 1997, by analyzing 22 countries discovered that a 25 percent increase in child-related subsidies to couples had resulted in an average of 0.07 more births per woman. For those couintries that are dying, any increment in the birthrate would be welcomed since the alternative spells disaster for the nation.

If your population is falling, one logical way to build it up again is to encourage people to have more babies through the persuasive communication strategies of ethos, pathos, and logos. As for Armenia, either emulate one or more policies used by different countries covered above or create a fairly new policy of its own.

Emulation of Old Policies: For example, Armenia can emulate Germany's old state policy to increase the birthrate through social recognition (giving out medals). This method would be appropriate for Armenia since it won't cost the state too much money. One of the ministries could organize a yearly event to honor, to recognize those Armenian couples who have opted to have more than two children. This event could be enriched by also distributing a yearly book with the photos of the couples who happened to have answered the state's call for cooperation to increase the local population. If the social recognition does not move the couples to procreate, then add some cash, paid maternity leave, paid vacation for the family, etc. When it comes to incentives, sky is the limit.

Creation of New Policies: I would suggest two for the sake of brevity. One is for the Armenian Diaspora to come up with an "Armenia Baby Boom Fund" telethon to raise money on a yearly basis to finance selected programs to increase the birthrate. The other method would be to find enlist a second or surrogate "Godfather or Godmother" who would serve as sponsor of the child by making a donation of a certain amount to a family who opted to add one or more children to their existing two children. The Godfather or the Godmother would also be willing to help with the expense of schooling of the additional children of the family. Brainstorming would yield other workable ideas.

A village consists of nuclear families, a group of related families. Several villages make up a clan; several clans, a tribe; several tribes make a nation; several nations make an empire. None of these human units would survive too long without a healthy birthrate. According to Benito Mussolini, "The fate of nations is intimately bound up with their powers of reproduction. All nations and all empires first felt decadence gnawing at them when their birth rate fell off." We should also add economic woes to "decadence" in order to hold also governments responsible for not providing a robust economic ecology to support a viable level of birthrate for their people to grow.

Improving the birthrate of Armenia is "mission critical". If we do not stand by Armenia now and forever, if we do not increase the birthrate, if we continue to have more deaths than births in Armenia, we would always miss the opportunity of forming a self-sustaining population until we

succumb to extinction. We collectively should never disregard the obvious fact that there is power in numbers --both for survival and growth. So, let us challenge Armenia, Artsakh, and the Diaspora to create a favorable environment and to come up with social and monetary incentives aimed at encouraging our child- bearing-age Armenians to "Do it One More Time for Our Eternal Masis!"