

THE SURVIVAL OF ARMENIA: DANGERS AND OPPORTUNITIES

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By David Boyajian, Massachusetts, 19 December 2014

This article is an edited version of a presentation given by the author before Massachusetts Armenian Americans in December 2014.—Ed.

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Source: [Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection](#)

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Take Artsakh's war against Azerbaijan. Armenians defeated a country three times larger with more than twice the population.

Armenians took nearly all of pre-independence Artsakh plus historically Armenian land from the Iranian border to just 25 miles east of Lake Sevan. That's about 4,000 square miles and includes water resources vital to Artsakh and Armenia. The two are now geographically reattached.

Their borders with Azerbaijan are actually shorter and, therefore, more easily defended than before the war.

A critical highway from northern Artsakh to Lake Sevan is under construction.

Imagine, instead, if Armenians had lost not only Artsakh but also part of Armenia. Indeed, in 1993, Turkey planned to invade Armenia during an attempted coup against Russian President Boris Yeltsin by Ruslan Khasbulatov, a Chechen who was Speaker of the Russian Parliament.

True, the war's cost in life, limb, and dislocation has been terrible. Armenians in those years did not

have enough heat for their homes and food for their families. Many still don't. But they have endured, with remarkable courage.

For over 20 years, Azerbaijan and Turkey have blockaded Armenia, hoping it would cave in. But Armenians haven't.

Turkey's blockade has actually kept destructive Turkish economic, criminal, cultural, and even demographic penetration largely out of a developing Armenia-- a real threat since the Turkish economy and population are, respectively, over 50 and 30 times larger than Armenia's.

Despite having the region's smallest populations and GNPs, Armenia and Artsakh have the strongest, best trained military in the Caucasus. This is despite Azerbaijan's huge weapon purchases from Russia and Israel.

All this and more demonstrate the physical and spiritual resilience of the people of Armenia, Artsakh, and even the Diaspora. This gives us inspiration and hope for the future. Yet, Armenians do live in an inhospitable region.

Western Objectives

Armenia and Artsakh are landlocked, blockaded, and in a state of war.

Azerbaijan has sizeable deposits of oil and gas in the Caspian Sea. It exports these through large Western-backed (e.g. Chevron and British Petroleum) pipelines that cross Georgia and Turkey. Fortunately, these pipelines pass close to northern Artsakh and are vulnerable to attack. Nearly 40% of Israel's oil imports come from Baku.

Across the Caspian lie four Turkic-speaking Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. The first two have large oil and gas deposits.

The U.S., Europe, NATO, and Turkey--"the West" for short--have two key objectives in Russia's traditional sphere of influence--the Caucasus, Caspian, and Central Asia.

First, export the region's oil and gas to Europe, and wean it off Russian fuel so that Russia cannot hold Europe hostage. The U.S. and Europe also aim to build energy pipelines from Central Asia, particularly Turkmenistan, under the Caspian Sea, to Azerbaijan and eventually Europe.

Objective two: Absorb Georgia, Azerbaijan, and even Armenia into NATO, reign over the Caspian, and eventually assimilate Central Asian nations now dominated by Russia and China.

The West has partially achieved its objectives. Major pipelines from Baku have been built, more are planned, Georgia and Azerbaijan have NATO aspirations, and a decade ago the U.S. created a small naval fleet in Baku called the Caspian Guard Initiative.

In effect, the West's plans are now the same as Turkey's: Pan-Turkism, a coalition of Turkic-speaking countries from Turkey through Azerbaijan and into Central Asia.

Moscow's objectives are, of course, directly opposite to Washington's.

Russian Objectives

First, Russia wants oil and gas pipelines to pass through its own territory so it can control who buys those fuels and at what price.

Second, Russia wants to keep Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Central Asia out of NATO. Russia fears that NATO will encircle and ultimately destroy it.

Distrustful of genocidal Turkey, in conflict with Azerbaijan over Artsakh, and a Russian ally, only Armenia stands in the way of the West's objectives.

With Armenia as an ally, Russia has a toehold in the Caucasus, something it lacks with Georgia and Azerbaijan. If Russia loses Armenia, however, the West will dominate the Caucasus up to the Caspian Sea and perhaps beyond.

Artsakh also stands in the way. The U.S. desires a solution to the Artsakh issue because it would bring about the opening of Azerbaijan's and, probably, Turkey's borders with Armenia. Open Armenian borders would greatly facilitate NATO's penetrating the Caucasus since the only entry point now is beleaguered Georgia.

For the same reason, Russia is inclined against an Artsakh solution at this time.

What does all this mean for Armenia?

Armenian Centrality

- Because Armenia is Russia's ally, Western officials and media rarely publicly mention Armenia's geopolitical importance. We know, however, that Armenia is pivotal to Washington's and Moscow's objectives. Armenia and Artsakh's location give them bargaining power. Using that power requires great skill and an incorruptible dedication to the nation.
- The U.S., Europe, and NATO are implicitly throwing their considerable weight behind Pan-Turkism. This means that Turkey is more dangerous than ever. Even if Turkey were to open the border, acknowledge the Armenian Genocide, and pay reparations, Pan-Turkism will remain a danger.
- Armenia is walking a tightrope. On the one hand, Armenia has excellent relations with the West and NATO. However, Armenia certainly cannot look to pro-Turkish Washington and NATO for security. On the other hand, Armenia does not fully trust Russian security guarantees. But at least Russia knows that Armenians block NATO-backed Pan-Turkism. Thus, Armenia continues to balance between the West and Russia, while maintaining positive relations with Georgia and Iran (the latter, though Shia Muslim like Azerbaijan, opposes Azeri designs on Iran).
- Armenia also faces several interrelated internal challenges: the economy, emigration, corruption, the oligarchs, absence of the rule of law, a discredited judiciary, and the lack of fair

elections. But there are possibilities and encouraging signs internally and externally.

Possibilities and Encouraging Signs

1. Though Russia will vehemently fight it, Armenia must wean itself off near-total dependence on Russian natural gas and import much more Iranian gas. Armenia must avoid becoming a Russian puppet lest Russia take it for granted, which has actually been happening for years. Witness massive Russian weapons sales to Azerbaijan as well as the alarming growth of Russian-Turkish relations.
1. It is encouraging that opposition Armenian political organizations are now in a loose coalition engaging in mass protests. This is but one of several healthy signs that the populace is working for positive change.
1. Armenia must grow its power internally, particularly its economy, and particularly given the current economic downturn. Without a robust economy, no country can be truly independent and afford a potent military. Oligarchical power must be broken and the rule of law enforced so that Armenians can establish businesses without unreasonable interference. Otherwise, Armenia will also not attract enough outside investment, including from Diasporans. With a stronger economy, the outflow of people from Armenia will slow or stop.
1. A country without a sufficiently high birthrate will not have a population capable of sustaining a healthy economy or a capable military. Diasporans have already established Armenian maternity and family clinics. Perhaps they can create other incentives for families in Armenia and Artsakh to have more children.
1. Diasporan organizations must push the Armenian government for closer relations and more consultation. Though Diasporans have directed billions of dollars and other aid to Armenia, the latter's leaders often keep them at arm's length. That must change. Most countries would love to have such an active Diaspora. The Armenian Diaspora is undervalued and underutilized. It must speak more forcefully, more often, and with a united voice. Armenia's Minister of Diasporan Affairs should be a Diasporan.
1. The Diaspora must insist that Armenian ambassadors, embassies, and consulates maintain closer contact with Diasporans and actually perform work, rather than act like they are on vacation. Diasporan organizations should reject officials, such as the current ambassador to the U.S., suspected of corruption back home.
1. Despite Azeri threats to shoot down planes, Artsakh's spectacular new airport must open to tourist and commercial traffic. The overland route of several hours is too long and inconvenient. Artsakh needs hundreds of thousands more visitors and business persons to arrive by air.

1. Artsakh and the Diaspora must together create a more robust campaign that makes the case in media and government for Artsakh's rights and independence.
1. More Diasporans should be encouraged to vacation in Armenia and Artsakh, establish second homes, and even consider permanent relocation. This would pump money into their economies, slow down depopulation, and save Diasporans who may otherwise assimilate abroad.

Let us be sure to pass on to future generations an Armenia, Artsakh, and Diaspora that are stronger than what we have inherited.

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