
THE ARMENIAN LOBBY AND U.S. FOREIGN POLICY¹

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“American ethnic communities also strive to influence U.S. foreign policy, with the Jewish, Greek, and Armenian lobbies standing out as the most effectively organized.”

Zbigniew Brzezinski²

Reading about America³, learning about the people who live in America, and studying in America, I have been trying to figure out what the phenomenon of American success is, and where the philosophy of American dream lies.

America is a superpower—the one that is able to reframe the world order and reshape the global policy. We believe the basis of that phenomenon—at least one of the bases—to be ethnic groups and their interests. The research lets us conclude that America is a multi-ethnic country, a state of immigrants, and its progress or regress depends on the ethnic groups’ advantages or disadvantages, respectively. Hence, the American success can only last in the context of its ethnic groups’ advantages, and vice versa. The American failure can only reach in the context of its ethnic groups’ disadvantages, and vice versa. What we believe is that America needs to preserve the interests of its ethnic people. Those ethnic people, in their turn, must protect and advocate America’s interests. Thus, one of the paramount criteria of success for both American foreign policy and ethnic groups’ overseas policy must be their mutual interests. Success of America is—and can only be—its ethnic groups. And failure of America can only be caused by ethnic groups.

Discussing the issue of American foreign policy and the role of ethnic groups in shaping U.S. politics, we have chosen to place emphasis on the interests of Armenian-Americans, as a successful ethnic group, on the

¹ A similar topic was discussed in the paper (entitled “Does America Need an Ethnic Lobby: the Armenians’ far-term pledges and today’s international challenges for U.S. foreign policy”) for the class of “Global and Regional Security Issues” at the Fletcher School of Law & Diplomacy at Tufts University, Greater Boston, MA, Fall 2009.

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³ In this paper, by “America,” I mean the United States.

Armenian lobby, and on answering the following questions: (a) Does America need an ethnic lobby?; (b) Is the Armenian lobby as powerful as it seems to be?; (c) What can Armenia and the Armenian community offer the U.S. to shape its foreign policy in favor of Armenia's interests?

The term "Armenian lobby" (or "Armenia lobby") is used to determine the coalition of all special interest groups (advocacy groups) and individuals who seek to influence U.S. foreign policy in support of Armenia, the Armenians, and their interests. The Armenian lobby, and namely the Armenian-American one, has a worldwide fame. Recent years have shown that this is not a myth. This is a reality that scholars, strategists, and politicians face every day, every month, and every year. In his distinguished book "The Grand Chessboard: American primacy and its geo-strategic imperative," Dr. Brzezinski has noted that the Armenian lobby strives "to influence U.S. foreign policy" and stands out "as the most effectively organized."⁴ The Armenian (Armenian-American) lobby is credited with considerable success in persuading American legislators to favor Armenian interests. One of the examples to that achievement can be the Armenian Genocide Resolution of U.S. House of Representatives,⁵ passed by U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs. This achievement came true because "[a]cross the country, the Armenian-Americans have been lobbying politicians, and publicizing their view of the massacres as genocide—a suggestion [that Turkey] and most Turks reject."⁶ To the question "What has won [the Armenians, that represent only 1,5 million of America's 300 population] such influence over the US Congress—and perhaps [US] foreign policy?," Dr. Svante Cornell, of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute at John Hopkins University, replies that "[p]art of the question lies in the organization and determination of Armenian-American lobby groups."⁷

The Armenian National Committee of America (A.N.C.A) and the Armenian Assembly of America (A.A.A.) are among the most powerful.⁸

⁴ See **Zbigniew Brzezinski**, *The Grand Chessboard: American primacy and its geostrategic imperatives*, Basic Books, New York, 1997, p. 28.

About 10 years later, Dr. Brzezinski again mentioned 3 ethnic lobbies—Jewish-American, Cuban-American, and (again) Armenian-American—to be considered "the most effective in their assertiveness." (See Zbigniew Brzezinski, A Dangerous Exemption, *Foreign Policy*, July/August 2006, 63.)

⁵ The mentioned Resolution was passed by the House's Foreign Affairs Committee, and written by Adam Schiff, a Democrat Congressman from California—home to America's largest Armenian Diaspora (Spyurq). By the way, Mr. Adam Schiff is a member of Armenian Caucus. See Armenian Caucus, *109th Congress Membership List* (accessed Nov 21, 2009: at http://www.anca.org/hill_staff/armenian_caucus.php.)

⁶ **Laura Smith-Spark**, *Armenian Sway Over US Lawmakers*, BBC News, 12 Oct, 2007 (accessed 21 Nov, 2009: at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7040344.stm>).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ See Amb. Rouben Shougarian's lecture outline, "Ethnic Lobbying in Washington. Armenian Advocacy Groups: myth or reality," Slide #3, Nov 3, 2009 (for TSP F'09 at the Fletcher School at Tufts.)

There are some other ethnic-Armenian advocacy and interest groups involved in lobbying or para-lobbying activities on individual level of its member. Thus, for instance, the traditional interest groups, such as, the Armenian General Benevolent Union (A.G.B.U.), the Knights of Vartan (of men) and the Daughters of Vartan (of women), the Armenian Youth Organization (A.Y.O.-Y.O.A.R.F.) and some new groups, like the Armenian American Political Action Committee (A.A.P.A.C. or ARMENPAC), the U.S.–Armenia Public Affairs Committee (U.S.A.P.A.C.), do not take part in lobbying activities (perhaps, except for U.S.A.P.A.C.), but some of their members have an active role in advocating Armenian interests and promoting American ones.⁹ Besides, there are some individuals and families who do a lot to advocate Armenian interests in the U.S. and to shape American politics *for* Armenia. People like Alex Manoogian, Kirk Kerkorian, Albert Boyajian, Gerard Cafesjian, Ross Vartian, Paul Kerkorian, and families like the Hovnanians, the Mugar are among them.¹⁰

The Armenian lobby power and influence in the U.S. became more apparent after Section 907.¹¹ As I have mentioned above, the Armenian-American lobby had achieved some considerable success in persuading American legislators (in favor of Armenia's interests). The editor at Center for International Studies at MIT puts it right:

[s]uch achievements include roughly \$90 million annual aid for the state of Armenia, maintenance of Section 907 of the Freedom of Support Act which blocks aid to Armenia's rival Azerbaijan, the stalling of an arms deal with Turkey, and increased support for official US governmental recognition of the Armenian genocide of 1915-1921.¹²

Azerbaijani oil and geopolitical, or better to say supra-regional, interests “convinced” some world-wide interest groups, British and

⁹ About those interest and/or advocacy groups *check out* their official web sites at <http://www.anca.org>, <http://www.aaainc.org>, <http://www.agbu.org>, <http://www.kofv.org>, <http://www.ayf.org>, <http://www.usa-pac.org>, and so forth.

¹⁰ *New Armenian-American lobby*, Life in Armenia, Dec 13, 2006 (accessed Nov 21, 2009: at <http://www.cilicia.com/2006/12/new-american-armenian-lobby.html>.)

By the way:

[i]n 1972, two Armenian-American professors at George Washington University hatched the idea of a new lobby that would incorporate other already-existing Armenian organizations [like A.N.C.A., A.G.B.U., etc.] These scholars, together with Armenian attorneys from Boston, approached two Armenian-American businessmen, Stephen Mugar and Hirair Hovnanian, who agreed to financially back the plan [of establishing the Armenian Assembly.] (See Heather Gregg, *Divided They Conquer: the success of Armenian ethnic lobbies in the United States*, Working paper #13, Aug 2002/The Rosemarie Rogers Working Paper Series, Center for International Studies, MIT, p. 11.)

¹¹ See Position Papers, Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act at <http://www.anca.org> (accessed Nov 22, 2009.)

¹² Abstract to *Divided They Conquer: the success of Armenian ethnic lobbies in the U.S.*, Allacademic Research (accessed Nov 21, 2009: at http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/0/6/5/6/4/p65642_index.html.)

American oil companies, and *even* the famed Jewish or pro-Israel lobby¹³ to advocate official Baku interests in the U.S. Congress. However, their aspirations did not achieve any result. The Armenian lobby advised that its interests were resistant, could marry American interests, and the lobby is ready to strike back and go forward. This victory was a sort of message to the other interest groups, ethnic advocacy organizations and, in particular, U.S. Government that the Armenian lobby is a *reality* and its interest can have an impact upon shaping particular directions in U.S. foreign policy.

The Armenian lobby interests do not always coincide with those of Armenia. At first sight, this seems to be abnormal but, in my view, it is normal, even paranormal because an ethnic lobby is a birth of Diaspora and it aims to advocate national interests. As to the purpose of state, it is to advocate state interests. Despite that inconsistency, Armenia and Spyurq mostly agree about the objectives to be advocated and interests to be promoted. The Armenian lobby, both in America and overseas, has focussed on the “*anti*”-style policy for many years. The notion of the Armenian lobby was *against* the genocide-denial policy by modern Turkey and *against* the Turkish taboo.¹⁴ Obviously, the core of today’s lobby agenda was—and now is—the recognition of Armenian Genocide of 1915. Today there are other issues on the agenda, such as the status and security of Nagorno-Karabakh Republic and American aid to the state of Armenia.¹⁵ From my viewpoint, it

¹³ The Jewish or Israel lobby is famed for its long history, power, and influence in U.S. foreign policy-making.

About the Israel and pro-Israel lobby and its power see John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Waltz, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2007, Edward Tivnan, *The Lobby: Jewish political power and American foreign policy*, Simon and Shuster, New York, 1987, Michael Thomas, *American Policy Toward Israel: the power and limits of beliefs*, LSE International Studies, Routledge, London/New York, 2005, Paul Findley, *Pro-Israel Lobby in: Khalil Marrar, The Arab Lobby and US Foreign Policy: the two-state solution*, Routledge, London/New York, pp. 24-25, *They Dare to Speak Out: people and institutions confront Israel’s lobby*, Lawrence Hill & Co., 1985, etc.

¹⁴ It was interesting to me to know that Armenian missionaries started to send Armenian students to America in 1840; mostly to study theology. Later, they started to send some of the students to study in universities like Yale and Princeton. The number of Armenian students who left Turkey for America and stayed there in the year 1890 was 70. The first group thus settled in America is the most educated; however they were also raised with hate for the Turks. Though small in number, this elite group of Armenians was very effective in creating anti-Turkish sentiments in America. (See Senol Kantarci, *Money Spent by the Armenian Lobby in America*, Dec 3, 2007, translated and summarized by Fatma Sarikaya, Infor-Turc.Org (accessed Nov 23, 2009: at <http://www.info-turc.org/article2225.html>.)

¹⁵ From *Round Table discussion* conducted by Ambassador R. Shougarian for the Tavitian Scholars at Fletcher, Tufts University, 11/20/2009. See also Heather Gregg, *Divided They Conquer: the success of Armenian ethnic lobbies in the United States*, Working paper #13, Aug 2002/The Rosemarie Rogers Working Paper Series, Center for International Studies, MIT, pp. 11, 12, and 19-26.

is *not* enough. Even if it was enough yesterday, it is not so today. Armenia is challenged to cross the threshold of completely new region (especially after the Armenian-Turkish pending reconciliation). Hence, Armenia needs to be fully integrated in this region. There are some programs launched in the region from which Armenia is excluded.¹⁶ I believe Armenia to be one of the anchors of the region, and this does not seem to be a dream. I consider it visible. All Armenia needs is a consistent and commensurate advocacy and promotion. Armenia can be a crossroad of interests of the players involved in the region, and the U.S. is the one who might promote Armenia's interests in this dimension. Therefore, the Armenian lobby can have its impact on this ambitious undertaking and on the policy-making of the U.S in that region.

To the question whether Armenia and the Armenian community have anything to offer the U.S., I would give an affirmative answer. There is an opinion that, traditionally, the only power of ethnic groups is, the so-called, "electioneering."¹⁷ In this paper, I argue this opinion, as I believe that there are some other issues (advocacy of American interests, regional support, etc.) that can help ethnic interests meet pan-American interests.

The state of Armenia is very important for the Caucasus, especially for South Caucasus. Both the Caucasus and South Caucasus are is very important for the U.S. in its geopolitical aspirations toward Central Asia.¹⁸ After the horror of 9/11, America is facing new challenges both in the Middle East and Central Asia. And to overcome those challenges, America also needs to have its strong position in the region, namely, in South Caucasus/Black Sea region. Georgia is running pro-Western, or better to say, pro-U.S. policy in the region. Turkey, as well as Azerbaijan, despite having good relations with Russia, has shown to the West that their interests coincide with the Western ones and that they cannot confront with U.S. interests.

¹⁶ The Armenian-American lobby groups, especially A.N.C.A. and, sometimes, A.A.A., are trying to be active in solving that sort of problems. Namely, they are calling for Armenia to be included in the pipeline projects (*see* Heather Gregg's said working paper, pp. 25-27.)

¹⁷ *See* H.R. Mahood, *Interest Groups in American National Politics: an overview*, Prentice Hall, USA, NJ 07458, 2000, p. 55.

¹⁸ As John Hamre, the President and CEO of Center for Strategic and International Studies, sets forth, "The success of U.S. international engagement in the early twenty-first century will be conditioned largely by the United States' relations with Eurasia—the world's central arena of world affairs." (*see* Forward to Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Geostategic Triad: living with China, Europe, and Russia*, CSIS Press, CSIS, Washington, D.C., p. IX.) About U.S. global affairs and Central Asia (and Eurasia) *see also* Fareed Zakaria, *The Post-American World*, W.W. Norton and Company, NY, 2009, pp. 42-43, 49-77, Zbigniew Brzezinski and Brent Scowcroft, *America and the World: conversations in the future of American foreign policy (moderated by David Ignatius)*, New American Foundation, Basic books, NY, pp. 182-186, Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: militant Islam, oil and fundamentalism in Central Asia*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, pp. 143-156, 170-182.

As to Armenia, it is within American interests to have Armenia close to the U.S. Armenia, itself, needs to be not far from the U.S., too. Although Armenia is a strategic partner of Russia and has common interests with its near neighbor Iran, it also shares very strong interests with the U.S. First, Armenia seeks to have the Karabakh issue solved, and it is aware that the U.S. influence on Turkey and Azerbaijan can have an impact on the resolution of that issue. Secondly, Armenia pursues common interests with its Western near neighbor—Turkey.

Armenia sees it right that the U.S. is the one who can persuade Turkey in its move toward the reconciliation with Armenia.¹⁹

As one can see, the interests of both America and Armenia in this region are *reciprocal* enough, and it seems to be obvious that those mutual interests are going to last long.

America can get something *not only* from Armenia *but also* from the Armenians. There are a number of Armenians in the Caucasus (Georgia, North Caucasus, etc.) and in Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Iran, etc.), so Armenia can consolidate the Armenians to advocate American interests in those regions.²⁰

Besides, Armenia can be very important for America's Mideast and Europe policies. To put it differently, Armenia can be a kind of crossroad for the Middle East and Europe.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict resolution and the Middle East peace process are very important both for the U.S. and the region.²¹ On that occasion, U.S. foreign policy-makers can try to consolidate the strength of Armenian communities in the Middle East. They might seek to have the Armenian support, especially with regard to the status of Jerusalem.

The truth is that one of the four historical sectors of the Old City of Jerusalem is the Armenian Quarter with its Armenian residents. There is nothing new that the status of Jerusalem is one of the most complicated questions in the conflict and peace process, so the Armenians can have a huge support for those interested in that conflict resolution.

In conclusion, we would like to try to answer those questions raised above:

¹⁹ The recent political activities both in Turkey and Armenia concerning the reconciliation between the two states, and the key role of the U.S. in that process have proven that U.S. foreign policy seeks to be very active in the region. (See Mark Landler and Sebnem Arsu, After Hitch, Turkey and Armenia Normalize Ties, *The New York Times*, published: Oct 10, 2009.)

²⁰ The Armenian Diaspora in Iran is rather successful, and it is quite distinguished in the Iranian society, so the Armenians can assume a serious position in advocating and promoting American interests in Iran.

²¹ See Henry Kissinger, *Does America Need a Foreign Policy?: toward a diplomacy for the twenty-first century*, Free Press, London, 2002, pp. 302-312, 164-196.

(a) *Does America need an ethnic lobby?* The answer is “Yes.” America does need an ethnic lobby, as it is a country of emigrants, a new homeland of dozens of ethnic groups, so America is to respect its ethnic groups’ interests. America needs to have its policy mostly shaped in favor of those groups’ interests.

(b) *Is the Armenian lobby as powerful as it seems to be? We think the Armenian lobby not to be so powerful as it could have been, but today it is more powerful than one has ever imagined.*

(c) *What can Armenia and the Armenian community offer the U.S. to shape its foreign policy in favor of Armenia’s interests?* The objective of the Armenian lobby does not reflect the challenges that Armenia’s interests will be facing tomorrow. What I think is that the agenda of the Armenian lobby is to be renewed. It should take into consideration the fact that the world is on the threshold of a new order. The pledges that the Armenians took long time ago do not coincide with the challenges that U.S. foreign policy and global security are facing today. I believe the Armenian lobby must be more flexible, so that it could offer something that is appropriate to what the international community, as well as the U.S. society, is confronted with.

ԱՐՏՅՈՍ ՍԵՂՈՎՅԱՆ – Հայկական լոբբին և ԱՄՆ արտաքին քաղաքականությունը – Հոդվածում ներկայացվում է ամերիկահայերի և հայկական լոբբիի հասարակաքաղաքական գործունեության ու ԱՄՆ արտաքին քաղաքականության հարաբերակցությունը:

Հեղինակը կողմնակից է այն տեսակետին, որ հայաստանյան և ամերիկյան շահերը կարող են համընկնել, եթե Հայաստանը ԱՄՆ-ի արտաքին քաղաքականության մեջ ծանրակշիռ դեր ստանձնի, իսկ ԱՄՆ-ն կշարունակի Հայաստանի մերձակա տարածաշրջաններում համաշխարհային առաջնորդության քաղաքականությունը: Նա համոզված է, որ Հայաստանն ու հայությունը, գտնվելով Արևմուտք - Արևելք, Սև ծով - Կասպից ծով, Մերձավոր Արևելք - Կենտրոնական Ասիա, ԱՄՆ - ՌԴ, Չինաստան - Իրան, քրիստոնեություն - իսլամ խաչմերուկների կենտրոնում, կարող են ճկուն դիվանագիտության, նախաձեռնողական արտաքին քաղաքականության և Սփյուռքի մասնակցության շնորհիվ դառնալ Հարավային Կովկաս - Սև ծով տարածաշրջանի հիմնական դերակատարներից մեկը:

Հեղինակը կարծում է, որ Հայաստանի ու հայերի դերը աշխարհաքաղաքական համատեքստում կարևորվում է նաև Երուսաղեմում Հայկական թաղամասի առկայությամբ:

АРТЁМ СЕДРАКЯН – Армянское лобби и внешняя политика США. – Соединённые Штаты. – многоэтничное государство, страна эмигрантов, следовательно, их прогресс и регресс так или иначе связаны с прогрессом и регрессом этнических групп. В статье рассмотрено, как соотносятся между собой общественно-политическая деятельность армянской общины, армянского лобби и внешняя политика США.

Распространено мнение, что интересы Армении и США совпадут, если РА сможет предложить американцам нечто, а те продолжат в соседних с Арменией регионах свою политику глобального превосходства. Находясь на перекрестках Восток – Запад, Чёрное море – Каспийское море, Ближний Восток – Центральная Азия, США – РФ, Китай – Иран, христианство – ислам, Армения способна с помощью гибкой дипломатии, инициативной внешней политики и диаспоры стать важным игроком в южно-кавказском и черноморском регионах. Кроме того, геополитическая роль Армении и армян повышается наличием в Иерусалиме Армянского квартала.