

How can we rebuild Armenia and Artsakh?

Few people in the modern world have experienced the degree of persecution and hardship as the Armenians. In the 20th century, the Jewish people experienced a genocide and displacement on a mass scale similar to the Armenian people. Like the Jewish nation of Israel, Armenia is surrounded by countries that would like to see their race wiped from the face of the Earth. Unlike Israel, Armenia has been unable to develop the defensive tools to protect itself from attacks. Without the development of a strong military, economy, and united cause, Armenians will perpetually be vulnerable to those who seek to extinguish their race and destroy their ancestral homeland.

In present-day, the second-world country of Armenia faces many challenges and issues such as poverty, unemployment, lack of military strength, and lack of diplomacy which have prevented Armenia from prospering. The recent conflict also exposed a lack of training, organization, planning, and strategy which resulted in the loss of lives and land. How can we solve these issues?

The first step for Armenia and Artsakh is to build a stronger economy and become more self-sustaining nations. Currently, Armenia is too reliant on Russia for its military protection, arms sales, and utilities. “Russia continues to deliver more than 80 percent of the natural gas used by Armenia and is the sole supplier of fuel to the Metsamor nuclear power plant, which produces more than one-third of the country’s electricity” (Kogan).

Currently, Armenia and Artsakh both struggle with poverty. According to the *Asian Development Bank*, in 2018, 23.5% of the population in Armenia was living below the national poverty line of \$2.40 USD per day. Comparatively, the United States’ poverty rate was only 11.8% in 2018 (Semega et al.). Armenia’s poverty rate was almost double the United States’ in

2018. In 2019, an alarming 21.6% of the population in Artsakh was living under the national poverty line (Ajmani). Armenia is rich with resources such as “iron, zinc, aluminum, copper, molybdenum, gold, lead, silver, and antimony” (Atitwa). Armenia should utilize these natural resources and partner with other nations to stimulate the Armenian economy. Armenia would need to reinvest its financial gains from the exploitation of these natural resources to provide quality education and skill development for its citizens to further strengthen the infrastructure of its economy.

Armenia needs to develop diplomatic relationships with other nations to establish alliances with countries besides Russia. In this time of need, Armenia should be able to turn to its allies for assistance. However, during the Artsakh-Azerbaijan conflict, Russia did very little to curb Azerbaijan aggression or provide aid to Armenia. Instead, Russia hid behind the fact that Azerbaijan didn't invade the Armenian national border as a reason to stand still and not aid the Armenian people in Artsakh. In the end, Russia only helped broker the surrender to Azerbaijan and placed troops on the borders of the countries for five years. Armenia needs to use this five year period to obtain additional allies before Russia leaves the border and hostilities resume.

The obvious ally to seek is the United States; however, the United States has traditionally ignored the plight of the Armenian people and failed to even acknowledge the Armenian genocide due to political reasons. These reasons usually center around the United States' relationship with Turkey. Turkey is a NATO member and allows the United States use of military bases within its borders; therefore, the United States overlooks past crimes and current aggression in favor of maintaining their relationship with Turkey which is vital to the United States' military positioning in regards to Russia and the Middle East. The United States even

annually sends “\$153 million from the American taxpayer in the form of foreign aid to Turkey and approximately \$14 million to Azerbaijan” (Wax).

Armenia needs to develop strategic military bases that are desirous to Russia and the United States. With these countries more invested in Armenia, they would intervene to a greater degree should any future conflicts break out.

An admission into NATO would likely end an alliance with Russia but may provide better security and protection for Armenia particularly in future conflicts with NATO members like Turkey.

An alliance with the United States on the grounds that Armenia is on the frontline against extremist Islamic expansion would allow Armenia to receive foreign aid to bolster their economic and defensive growth. About a decade ago, Georgia was involved in a strenuous war against Russia which resulted in a detrimental aftermath on Georgia’s land and economy. After the war, Georgia faced a massive economic decline. In order to assist Georgia after their war, the U.S. “injected over \$4 billion into Georgia’s economy to support postwar stabilization efforts” (Ohanyan). The war between Georgia and Russia is similar to the war that occurred between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Israel should be a natural ally to Armenia based on a similar history of genocide. Unfortunately, Israel imports oil from Azerbaijan and supplies Azerbaijan with weapons (Wax). Armenia should not be deterred by the support Israel gives to Azerbaijan. Weapons sales is after all a business; therefore, Armenia should seek to obtain the same weapons from Israel to defend itself. Part of the reason Israel has been so secure throughout the years is because of their military power. Israel has spent billions of dollars on military defense and is always prepared for war. Armenia should invest its funds to develop its army into an advanced army with modern

military equipment. In particular, Armenia needs to modernize its air defense systems. Armenia's current system is an older version designed to shoot down jets and bombers, not to target small, slow-flying drones. This "enabled Azerbaijan to dominate the skies over the front lines and effectively target Armenian ground forces" (Iddon).

Armenia currently has a two year mandatory draft for its citizens. In light of recent aggressions it should consider expanding to a longer period of service time and increase in allowable age for service (Mejlumyan). Armenia needs to send military personnel to learn tactics from premier military schools such as the United States War College. With most of the Armenian population spread throughout the world, the Armenian nation should implore the diaspora to form a militia that could train and respond to Armenia in times of conflict (Mejlumyan). Armenia should also develop a capable intelligence agency such as the CIA or Mossad to obtain information in advance of potential threats and attacks. Eventually, the development of a nuclear weapons program would serve as the ultimate deterrent for future wars as the threat of mutual destruction often stops conflicts before they start.

The recent conflict showed that Armenians worldwide care deeply for their homeland. They displayed their concern through worldwide protests, aid packages, and financial donations in millions of dollars sent for the war effort. However, the conflict also showed a lack of organization and accounting for how these donations were spent. The government should continue to seek donations from the diaspora for further aid; however, they must do so with full transparency for their citizens and all who donate.

Despite the worldwide protests, the nations of the world had a very underwhelming response to the conflict. This may have been due to the global COVID-19 pandemic or the leadership void within the United States during the 2020 election. Either way, it showed that the

nations of the world did not care enough on their own to intervene. As such, the diaspora needs to rise to high positions of prominence and power within other nations where they can influence policy. This is not necessarily just for Armenia's benefit but for the ability to intervene when human rights are trampled or atrocities are being committed.

Lastly, Armenia needs to continue its pursuit of global recognition of the Armenian genocide. Part of Israel's advantage in forming their nation was the worldwide knowledge of Germany's atrocities in the Holocaust and that nation's shame for their part in those crimes. Germany provided financial restitution to the survivors and their descendants as well as the political support and backing throughout the years. Meanwhile, Turkey has never acknowledged the Armenian Genocide and labels these deaths as casualties of World War I instead of the systematic eradication of the Armenian population. In recent years, some progress has been made on the world stage by the likes of Attorney Amal Clooney in the world court; however, the United States in particular has yet to officially recognize the Armenian genocide. Once the Armenian genocide has complete international recognition, future aggressions by Turkey or Turkish backed Azerbaijan can only be labeled as a continuation of this terrible government policy of racial extermination.

As it is with most things in life, there is no simple solution to the problems facing Armenia and Artsakh rebuilding. Only a concentrated, consistent, and united effort by Armenians worldwide with assistance from their allies can provide for future security and safety for Armenia and Artsakh.

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