

**“Interest-based Analysis of the  
Protocol-Related Armenia-Diaspora Rift”**

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## 1. Introduction and Purpose

Following the Armenia-Turkey protocols that were signed in October 2009, the rift between Armenians and Diasporan Armenians seemed to grow wider.<sup>1</sup> President Serge Sarkisian made the following statement on October 10, 2009 in an address to all Armenians:

“And let no one ignore the fact that, contrary to any slogans, the Armenian nation is united in its goals and is strong with its sons and daughters. And let no one try to split Armenia and our brothers and sisters in the Diaspora in presenting their concern over the future of Armenia as an attempt to impose something on the Republic Armenia.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2009)

Yet this statement does not accurately describe the reality. There are Armenians both in the Diaspora and in Armenia who are supportive of the protocols. There are also Armenians who are not only opposed to the protocols but also against any efforts to normalize relations with Turkey. Protest rallies, demonstrations and conferences have been organized in both Armenia and in the Diaspora on the topic. The reactions have ranged from emotional debate to outright fury and in some cases, with no reaction at all. Meanwhile, Armenia’s former Foreign Minister, Vartan Oskanian, recently stated in a press conference, “Diaspora and Armenia have never been so distant from each other.” (Civilitas Foundation, 2009) On the other hand, Armenians in the Diaspora have also explained that the protocols would create distrust and alienate their relations (Hakobyan, 2010).

The Armenian nation – which includes all Armenians living in the Diaspora and in Armenia – is currently divided in its perspectives and positions on the protocols. There is a need to allow for all concerned stakeholders to listen to each other and understand the different perspectives. At this rate, there is a rift in the relationship between Armenia and its Diaspora and it comes at an utterly crucial moment in the nation’s history.

How can we begin to identify what is causing the rift in the relationship between Armenia and its Diaspora? What is underlying the disagreement over the protocols

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<sup>1</sup> In the ICAR Newsletter in November 2009, my colleague at George Mason University, Margarita Tadevosyan and I co-authored an article explaining there are rifts over the protocols between Armenia and the Diaspora which are based on different issues and concerns. This paper aims to continue from the conversation in this editorial. The editorial can be accessed at: [http://icar.gmu.edu/Newsletters/v4\\_1\\_ICARNewsletterFeb10.pdf](http://icar.gmu.edu/Newsletters/v4_1_ICARNewsletterFeb10.pdf)

Moreover, I would also like to express my appreciation to Phil Gamaghelyan as well for his comments on this article and our discussions on the topic of Armenia-Diaspora relations.

between the Diaspora and Armenia? And what steps can be taken to increase mutual understanding amongst all parties involved? The purpose of this paper is to dig beneath the statements of the reactions from Armenia and its Diaspora and to begin to understand what are the interests underneath their explicitly stated positions. It proposes the need to have a dialogue with all concerned stakeholders to ensure that the rift between Armenia and its Diaspora does not grow wider.

The rift in the Armenia-Diaspora relationship has become apparent already in a few ways. First, the All Armenia Fund held its annual telethon in November 2009 and fundraised close to \$16 million USD this year, which is equivalent to half of the amount of funds raised in the year 2008. Certainly, the global economic crisis has had an impact on many peoples' ability to provide financial support to the Fund. However, one must wonder to what extent the Armenia-Turkey protocols this past year had an impact on significantly decreasing the funds from the previous year. Second, hundreds and thousands of Diasporan Armenians have been attendance in protests held since October 2009 (Aghajanian, 2009), often times expressing outrage and disapproval of the Armenian administration's efforts to push for the protocols. Moreover, the comments and discussions Diasporan Armenian are having at these protests or in alternative social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter and blogs are showing the disconnect that Diasporans have with Armenia.

## **2. Interests vs. Positions**

Given the current rift between Armenia and its Diaspora, there is a need to identify and distinguish between the parties' interests and positions to begin to understand the relationship. Is there a significant difference between the interests of Armenians in the Diaspora and in Armenia? If so, what are they and are the interests incompatible? The purpose of this paper is not to provide answers to these questions but to propose that we need to be distinguishing the parties' interests (vs. positions) and asking these questions in the first place.

A seminal work in the field of conflict resolution is *Getting to Yes* (1991) by Roger Fisher, William Ury and Bruce Patton. They provide a framework for conducting interest-based negotiation in order to gain optimal outcomes for all parties involved. The framework emphasizes the need to distinguish positions and interests. According

to *Getting to Yes*, one's position in a negotiation is *what* someone wants to achieve and the interest is *why* someone wants to achieve it. "Your position is something you have decided upon. Your interests are what caused you to so decide." (Fisher et al, 42) As parties continue to stress their position – which Fisher et. al refer to as positional bargaining - they ultimately realize they have conflicting positions with the other side. However, when the parties involved are able to define their underlying interests and communicate them, there is a greater possibility that a solution can be reached to satisfy both parties' interests.

For example, consider the disagreement between Sarkis and Lilit, two siblings who both want the last apricot on the kitchen table. The elder sibling, Sarkis, explains he deserves the apricot, as he is the oldest. Lilit also wants the apricot and is frustrated because her older brother always gets everything he wants and she is always left with nothing. The two argue over the apricot and their mother comes in and cuts the small apricot in the middle and gives each of them half of the apricot.

In this case, neither Lilit nor Sarkis are satisfied with the compromise solution. Lilit wanted the apricot so she could have the seed, crack it and eat the inside of the seed. When her mother cut the entire apricot in half, her brother also got half of the seed, which upset her further. Sarkis, on the other hand, wanted to eat the apricot and would have thrown the seed away. He, too, was unsatisfied with getting only half of the apricot.

Consider the alternative scenario on the apricot story between Lilit and Sarkis and how they could have used the approach from *Getting to Yes* to get a better outcome. When Lilit and Sarkis both realize they want the apricot, Lilit asks her brother why she wants the apricot and Sarkis responds that he would like to eat the apricot. Lilit explains that she would like to have the apricot seed when he is done eating it. They agree and both Lilit and Sarkis' interests are satisfied.<sup>2</sup>

By remaining focused on positions, it can only lead to dissatisfactory outcomes. When bargaining over positions, a compromise solution is proposed, or in other cases one party dominates and takes all. These are win-lose scenarios when at least one party, if not both, will "win" and the other will "lose." *Getting to Yes* explains that by digging

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<sup>2</sup> The apricot story is an adaptation of the Orange parable from *Getting to Yes* (1991).

beneath our positions and looking at our underlying interests there are ways to find more creative “win-win” options in a negotiation that satisfies all parties.

Moreover, when parties stay focused on their positions, the relations between the parties are also effected. If Party A continues to dominate and push Party B to consistently make concessions, then Party B will eventually become frustrated and sever the relationship. Or if Party A and Party B always make compromises with each other, both parties will ultimately remain unsatisfied.

Thus, parties in disagreement with each other need to move away from emphasizing their own positions. Considering the rift in the relationship between Armenia and the Diaspora, it is a timely moment in this relationship to begin to move away from positions and begin to focus on interests. The parties involved need to be asking, what are the interests underlying each position? Once the parties involved identify their interests, then it is possible to begin to have a conversation or dialogue with each party about their interests. Only when Armenia and the Diaspora begin to communicate with each other – whether it is through actions, funding priorities, organizations, press releases and etc. – based on their interests, then the rift emerging between the two parties will no longer be an issue of concern.

### **3. Parties and their Interests**

Given this overview of the difference between interests and positions, this section will seek to apply the framework to the relationship between Armenia and the Diaspora. However, prior to delving into this component of the analysis, there is a need to recognize the complex nature of both parties involved -- Armenia and its Diaspora. With all of the numerous constituencies and organizations that comprise each, this analysis will be limited to only a specific dimension of the Armenia-Diaspora relationship. The application of this framework will be applied the relationship between Armenia and its Diaspora based in the United States. Considering the Armenian American community is one of the most active groups within the Diaspora, it would be appropriate to begin with this group as its relationship with Armenia could be affected if the rift between these two parties continues to grow wider.

Yet another issue emerges when discussing the context of the relationship between the Armenia and the US-based Diaspora. Who represents the Armenian-

American Diaspora? Who represents Armenia? These are rather contentious questions that have emerged following the signing of the protocols in October 2009. However, the aim of this paper is not to contribute to this topic. Recognizing the monumental task of incorporating the viewpoint of all parties involved, this analysis will be limited to focusing on a few key stakeholders both in the Armenian-American Diaspora and in Armenia. Looking to the future, the paper does seek to begin laying the groundwork for having an in-depth and inclusive interest-based analysis and dialogue with all involved parties.

#### **4. Interest-based Analysis: Parties' Positions and Interests**

##### **a. Reaction from organizations in the Armenian American Diaspora**

By August 31, 2009, when efforts toward Armenia-Turkey rapprochement became publicly known, the Armenian-American organizations issued their statements in response. How did the Armenian-American organizations respond to the protocols? How can we look at their statements and dig beneath their stated positions and understand the underlying interests? Based on those organizations that issued statements regarding the Armenia-Turkey protocols, the following section will consider their responses and provide an overview of their positions and underlying interests.

- **Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA)<sup>3</sup>**

*What is the ANCA's Position?* The ANCA explicitly states, "Say No to protocols." *What are the underlying Interests?* "For us, as Armenian Americans, the protocols represent our last hurdle to U.S. recognition of the Armenian Genocide," (Hamparian, The Armenian Weekly, 2010) explains ANCA Executive Director Aram Hamparian in an article published on January 17, 2010 in the Armenian Weekly. The protocols, as Hamparian explains, is considered to be the biggest threat to the Armenian Americans' advocacy efforts to achieve US recognition and ultimately, Turkish recognition of the Armenian Genocide. In other words, the most important reason why ANCA supporters disagree with the protocols is because it is a direct threat to recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

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<sup>3</sup> The Armenian Youth Federation, Armenian Relief Society, Hamazgayin and Homenetmen are all umbrella organizations of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF). Considering the ARF's position does not differ tremendously with the ANCA, the following analysis aims to at least be representative of the ARF and the ANCA's positions.

When one considers and refers to other ANCA websites and resources, this continues to be the most important issue raised in their disagreement with the protocols. The ANCA established a website and campaign entirely devoted to “Stop The Protocols” available at <http://www.StopTheProtocols.com>. It provides more insightful information about the Armenian-Americans’ underlying interests. In a document entitled, “Protocols explained,” (ANCA) they highlight the 20 reasons why they disagree with the protocols. Out of the 20 points raised within the document, 13 of the comments were directly related to the Armenian Genocide. For example, consider the following excerpts:

*Phrase within the protocols regarding “good neighborly relations”*

The Protocols opening clause explain that the parties involved intend to establish “good neighborly relations.” ANCA’s response: “Good neighborly relations cannot exist as long as Turkey remains hostile toward Armenia, including, most notably, through its long-standing denial of both truth and justice for the Armenian (ANCA)Genocide.” (ANCA)

*Phrase within the protocols related to importance of maintaining an*

*”atmosphere of trust and confidence between the two countries.”* ANCA’s response: “This provision incorrectly suggests that the two parties are equally responsible for the long-standing breach in trust and confidence. Turkey cannot earn the trust or the confidence of the Armenian people as long as it continues its denial of both truth and justice for the Armenian Genocide.” (ANCA)

The Protocols are also considered to be a threat to issues related to Nagorno-Karabakh. Certainly, there were numerous points raised within the Protocols about this issue. However, simply considering the number of times the document had been highlighted with issues about how it was problematic on the subject of the Armenian Genocide, it becomes apparent that this is the most important reason why the ANCA finds the protocols dangerous.

- **Armenian Assembly of America, Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) and Knights of Vartan<sup>4</sup>**

The Armenian Assembly of America, Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) and Knights of Vartan collaborated and issued one joint statement in response to the Armenia-Turkey protocols and have expressed their support for the process.

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<sup>4</sup> Based on the fact that these organizations issued one joint statement and do not significantly vary from each other in their support for the protocols, this section will combine the analysis of their position and interests into one section as well.

*What is their Position? Support for the Armenia-Turkey Protocols. What are their underlying interests?* According to the “Joint Statement of Major Armenian-American Institutions Welcoming the President of the Republic of Armenia” (Armenian Assembly of America, Inc., 2009), the Assembly, AGBU and Knights of Vartan supported the process to normalize relations with Turkey. The statement explains, “Turkey has now publicly committed to establish normal relations without preconditions, and the process has yielded remarkable progress.” (Armenian Assembly of America, Inc., 2009)

The joint statement then proceeds to express cautiousness with regards to Turkey’s commitment to the protocols without preconditions. “The explicit fact that Turkey has publicly agreed to normalize relations without preconditions is an important step forward and has seemingly been overlooked during the emotional debate that has followed since the August announcement.” As a result of what they consider to be progress from the Turkish side, they believe it is important to welcome the opportunity and take the chance to change the status quo in the relationship between these historically antagonistic neighbors.

The statement expresses concern over Turkey’s insistence on Armenian concessions over Nagorno Karabakh and to cease the call for Armenian Genocide recognition. The issue of the Armenian Genocide appears a total of 4 times in the statement, while Nagorno Karabakh appears only twice.

## **b. Reactions from within Armenia**

### **• The “Opposition” Bloc**

Representing the opposition alliance of political parties, Ter Petrosian has been speaking out on behalf of the Armenian National Congress (HAK) and their position on the protocols.<sup>5</sup> Within Ter Petrosian’s speeches, HAK’s press releases and conferences, it became apparent that Ter Petrosian was initially willing to cooperate with Sarkisian and potentially to support the efforts toward rapprochement.

It began in April 2009, when the HAK issued a press release calling for the Armenian government to share details about its road map for Armenia-Turkey rapprochement immediately. (HETQ Online, 2009) Groups within the HAK expressed

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<sup>5</sup> The HAK is an alliance of many of the oppositional political parties that formed an alliance following the February 2008 presidential elections.

their strong disapproval with the protocols, namely Raffi Hovhannisian's Heritage Party (*Zharangutyun*), Social Democrat Hinchakian Party and the ARF-Dashnaksutyun. (Danielyan, Armenia Liberty, 2009) Meanwhile Ter Petrosian continued to express a rather positive reaction to the Armenia-Turkey protocols and even criticized those who stood in opposition to Sarkisian's rapprochement efforts with Turkey. According to RFE/RL Armenia Liberty, "Ter-Petrosian hinted at his readiness to recognize Sarkisian's legitimacy, strongly contested by the HAK, in a November 11 speech delivered at a high-level meeting of his opposition alliance." (Stepanian, Armenia Liberty, 2009)

More recently in February 2009, Ter Petrosian denounced Sarkisian's policy with Turkey explaining that Armenia would be forced to make greater concessions to Azerbaijan on the Nagorno Karabakh issue. (RFE/RL, 2010) In previous speeches, Ter Petrosian and other HAK leaders have often blamed the Sarkisian administration's willingness to make concessions to Azerbaijan over Nagorno Karabakh. With this recent shift in their stance towards the protocols, Ter Petrosian and the HAK are once again raising the issue that Turkey continues to place preconditions on the settlement of Nagorno Karabakh and that Sarkisian is willing to "put Karabakh up for sale." (Martirosian, 2010)

*What is the HAK's position?* While some HAK leaders were against the protocols from the beginning, Ter Petrosian was actually supportive until recently. Now, the HAK's position is in opposition to the protocols. *What are the interests underlying their position?* Tracing the speeches and press releases of the HAK, the primary concern seems to be that Armenia would have to make serious concessions to Azerbaijan over Nagorno Karabakh in order to establish relations with Turkey. Ter Petrosian has raised concern about the issue of international genocide recognition in his speeches as well. However, the concern about Armenia's concessions on the issue of Nagorno Karabakh emerges more frequently in the HAK leaders' speeches and this seems to be the underlying reason as to why the HAK stands opposed to the protocols.

- **ARF-Dashnaksutyun in Armenia (ARF-D)**

*What is the position of the ARF-D?* Opposed to the protocols as they explain they are against the national interests. *What are the interests underlying their position?* The Armenian Revolutionary Federation Dashnaksutyun (ARF-D) has been adamantly

opposed to the protocols ever since the presidents of Armenia and Turkey began discussing the potential thawing in relations in April 2009. On October 12, 2009, they issued a “Declaration on the Occasion of the Signing of the Armenia-Turkey Protocols” which outlined the reasons why the party stood against the protocols. In sum, the ARF-D expressed their opposition to the protocols because a) the relations with Turkey cannot question the Armenian Genocide happened; b) the dispute over the border between Armenia and Turkey; c) and that the resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict cannot be a precondition. (Armenian Revolutionary Federation-Dashnaktsutyun, 2009) Given these concerns, the ARF-D has threatened to seek regime change if Sarkisian allows for the Armenian Parliament to ratify the protocols unconditionally. (Stepanian, Armenia Liberty, 2010) Thus, they find these conditions within the protocols so problematic that they would take such measures to ensure their needs are satisfied.

#### • **Sarkisian and the Armenian Government**

President Serge Sarkisian and Foreign Minister David Nalbandian have been leading the protocols process between Armenia and Turkey, though they have reservations. In recent months, as Turkey has been consistently linking the protocols with the resolution of the conflict with Azerbaijan over Nagorno Karabakh, both leaders have threatened that Armenia will back out of the protocols if they continue to insist on these preconditions. (Israelian, Armenia Liberty, 2010)

*What are their underlying interests?* President Sarkisian has issued statements on several occasions to express his readiness and willingness to push for Armenian-Turkish rapprochement. Most notably, in a Wall Street Journal article published in July 2008, entitled “We are Ready to Talk to Turkey”, the president wrote “The time has come for a fresh effort to break this deadlock, a situation that helps no one and hurts many. As president of Armenia, I take this opportunity to propose a fresh start – a new phase of dialogue with the government and people of Turkey, with the goal of normalizing relations and opening our common border.”

According to his statement, he believes that only through dialogue will Armenia and Turkey be able to establish relations and look to the future. He explains that Armenia could have even greater development and opportunities when the border with Turkey is opened. Ultimately, it would lead to increased trade and economic

opportunities for Armenia. Finally, he explains that through a historical commission Armenia and Turkey can tackle the complex issues between them. Representing the Armenian government, Sarkisian and Nalbandian are essentially stating that they believe the only way to future economic and peaceful development in Armenia is by establishing relations with its neighbor. According to this reasoning, they believe Armenian-Turkish relations are in the interest of the Armenian nation and will lead to prosperity and peace.

## **5. Intervention and Conclusion**

This analysis aimed to accomplish two goals: a) to provide an overview of the concepts of interests and positions and how they are they are distinguished in the field of conflict resolution and b) to apply this distinction to the case of Armenia and Diaspora. Yet there are still many stakeholders in Armenia and the Diaspora who have not been included in this analysis. What efforts can be taken to ensure a more broadly inclusive interest-based analysis to engage all parties and stakeholders interested in Armenia-Turkey protocols process?

One possible route would be to engage all interested stakeholders from Armenia and the Diaspora in a multi-party dialogue. More specifically, the dialogue would allow for organizational representatives and leaders from Armenia and the Diaspora to convene, exchange ideas and share their concerns over the protocols. Within the initial phase of this project, the leaders would be introduced to the interest-based negotiation methodology and conflict resolution to ensure all participants are familiar with the terminology and language. After being introduced to interest-based negotiation skills, the participants would then be able to engage with each other directly in dialogue sessions, presenting their core concerns and interests. Ultimately, participants would also be tasked with identifying and proposing projects, conferences and discussions to be implemented thereafter, which would help convene a dialogue between the communities. The objectives of the dialogue project would include: 1) Establish an environment to help foster relationships between leaders in Armenia and the Diaspora; 2) Encourage mutual understanding between the leaders of Armenia and the Diaspora, even on the most contentious topics; and 3) Create a sustainable platform in which the parties can continue to engage with each other.

This type of project that focuses relationships between individuals and aims to combat the misunderstandings and stereotypes of each other is what Norbert Ropers refers to as a *human-relations dialogue*. (Ropers, 2004) One component of the dialogue would be on substantive issues and differing opinions that exist among the participants. However, the focus would be at the relational level. In other words, participants involved may not be able to come to an agreement with each other on the substantive issues, but they will be able to have mutual understanding and respect amongst each other.

Within the context of these dialogue workshops, the participants will be able to engage in conversations about their interests and understand the others' interests as well. It is only through these efforts when Armenians in the Diaspora and in Armenia begin to really listen to each other and communicate the reasons why they support or stand against the protocols. Engaging both sides in dialogue and connecting leaders from Armenia and the Diaspora will allow us to find ways to unify the Armenian nation even with our differences.

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