

The U.S. Congress and the Contingent Influence of Diaspora Lobbies: Lessons from U.S. Policy Toward Armenia and Azerbaijan

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Introduction

U.S. foreign policy can be viewed through the lens of local U.S. politics, even if that lens occasionally distorts a more detached and “realist” analysis. The group-based perspectives of Smith (2000) and Shain (1999) describe instances of diaspora lobbies influencing policies that have seemed inconsistent with U.S. national interests. Scholars have wondered whether, in an increasingly multicultural nation, U.S. foreign policy will reflect consistent national interests or become intermittently captured by ethnic groupings in the United States (Ruggie 1997; Shain 1994; Clough 1994).

Consider congressional policymaking concerning Armenia, Azerbaijan and the disputed enclave Nagorno-Karabakh since the mid-1990s. With congressional reactions to the Armenian and Azeri lobbies, we highlight factors that prove critical to the political influence of diaspora groups in the United States. Others have highlighted the political power (or lack of power) of several diaspora groups, including citizens with loyalties to Mexico, Cuba, Israel, and Greece (Haney & Vanderbush 1999; Kilson 1992; Arthur 1991; Scourby 1984). The lessons found in the Armenian and Azeri cases extend beyond the Caspian Sea, revealing the contingent nature of diaspora influences in Congress and on U.S. foreign policy.

Can a nation of immigrants have a unified foreign policy? Pluralists have worried that immigrant communities may view themselves as alien participants in the American democratic process with allegiances maintained abroad (Smith 2000; Teles 1998). This is an old concern that recurs with each new wave of

immigrants (DeConde 1992). Recalling the U.S. Civil Rights movement, observers noted the role that ethnic interest groups play in domestic politics (Schneider 1979). However, few believed such a tendency existed in American foreign politics, especially when the U.S. national interest seemed fairly easy to divine during the Cold War (Kissinger 2001).

With the end of the Cold War, pluralists purported increasing influence of diaspora interest groups. The breakup of the Soviet Union overturned the U.S. role in the international system and also created fledgling states whose relationship to the U.S. was historically groundless (Alterman 1997). While some research has been done on the effects of diasporas, the growing number of states, combined with trends toward globalization, should awaken interest in how local diaspora communities can influence U.S. foreign policy.

We argue that the Armenian lobby has been influential with respect to U.S. foreign policy toward Azerbaijan, and we show how their strength as a lobby has manifested itself on Capitol Hill. We detail why the Armenian diaspora lobby maintained a successful record on most of their important issues, and we conclude with a discussion of the conditions under which the Armenian lobby lost influence over U.S. foreign policy toward Azerbaijan. While our focus remains on the Armenian community, our goal is to identify elements of the link between local politics and U.S. foreign policy that may generalize to other communities (Haney & Vanderbush 1999).

The Armenian-American Lobby

Uncommon Grounds, a breakfast spot in Watertown, Massachusetts, is the kind of haunt that attracts members of Congress who want to hear what people are talking about “back home.” U.S. foreign policy is rarely raised in most cafes and coffeehouses, so there is little incentive for members of Congress to pay close attention to international affairs. But with frequent references to faraway politics in Yerevan and Baku, the crowd at Uncommon Grounds is different.

Armenian-Americans densely populate Watertown, and Father Dajad Davidian holds court over coffee. Talk turns to politics, to the Armenian economy, to the legacy of the Armenian genocide, and to the merits of Congressman Michael Capuano, first elected in 1998 to represent the Massachusetts 8th congressional district.

The interest that legislators show in foreign policy often springs from local wells of support within politically active diaspora communities. Foreign policy scholars working at Harvard University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, and other Boston-area institutions populate Congressman Capuano’s district. Membership in groups such as Greenpeace and Amnesty Interna-

tional is especially high. Yet Congressman Capuano primarily hears about just one foreign policy issue: Armenia.

The local Armenian lobby is well organized. Father Davidian, a retired senior pastor at Saint James Armenian Church in Watertown, is well known to Jon Lenicheck. As Congressman Capuano's liaison to Watertown, Lenicheck identifies Father Davidian as "a statesman for Armenians in the United States," and while neither Capuano nor Lenicheck are Armenian, both know and care about the diaspora community (author interview, January 8, 2002). Approximately 5,000 of the 33,000 people living in Watertown identify themselves as Armenian, and politicians would ignore them at their own political peril. Nationwide, 323,701 citizens identify themselves as Armenian-Americans, though Armenian lobbying groups put the number closer to 1.5 million (2000 U.S. Census). After Congressman Capuano took office in January 1999, his first overseas trip came in August of that year. He went to Armenia.

Upon returning from Armenia, freshman Congressman Capuano co-sponsored House Resolution 398, commemorating the victims of the Armenian Genocide. On the House floor, he admonished Turkey, which he said continues to "deny the crimes committed against the Armenian people [and to] block the flow of humanitarian aid and commerce to Armenia" (*Congressional Record* 2000: H2177). As a former mayor of Somerville, Massachusetts, who was elected on his promise to improve local schools, Capuano's newfound interest in U.S. foreign policy may have surprised some observers in Yerevan. It was entirely expected in Watertown. Almost a half-century earlier, Thomas (Tip) O'Neill – also serving his first term in Congress and also representing Watertown – took to the floor of the House of Representatives praising Armenians, who had thrived despite what "ruthless Communists" had done "to eradicate [their] spirit of independence and freedom" (*Congressional Record* 1954:H2769).

Many Armenian families came to the United States in the early 1900s and after World War I, first fleeing genocide in Anatolia and later escaping cultural suppression under the Soviet regime. While estimates vary, as many as 1.5 million Armenians were either killed or starved to death between 1915 and 1923 (Masih & Krikorian 1999: xxv; Gilbert 1994:167). A brief uprising against the Bolsheviks by the Dashnak party in February 1921 sent pro-democracy and nationalist movements either deep underground or into the embrace of a growing Armenian diaspora in Syria, Lebanon, France, and, especially, the United States.

Beginning with the Woodrow Wilson administration, Armenian Americans became vocal supporters of democratization in the Caspian Sea region and ardent practitioners of democratic politics in their new communities. There was no similar culture of democracy inculcated within the tiny gatherings of immi-

grants from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, or Turkmenistan, so in the competitive world of U.S. politics, Armenian voices were naturally more likely to be heard.

A Massachusetts Home

Early Armenian immigrants settled in Rhode Island, New York, and California, but it was within the Watertown community that seeds of political activism were most successfully planted. The Massachusetts 8th congressional district has an impressive lineage of politicians who got their start in the kitchens and coffee houses of Boston's ethnic neighborhoods. Fresh from his World War II tour of duty in the Navy, a young John F. Kennedy represented Watertown in the House of Representatives, and he proved finely attuned to Armenian issues throughout his years in the U.S. Senate and the White House.

Tip O'Neill succeeded Kennedy, rose through the Democratic Party leadership and served ten years as the Speaker of the House. For O'Neill, Armenian issues – and especially recognition of the Armenian Genocide – were quintessentially “local” concerns. Fiercely anti-Soviet, Armenian political activists in the district sometimes toyed with supporting the Republican Party; so the Armenian community received special attention to keep them on O'Neill's team.

On May 3, 1975, O'Neill became the first recipient of the Armenian Church of America's “Friend of the Armenian People” award given on behalf of 200,000 Eastern Diocese parishioners. Before and after becoming the House Speaker, O'Neill routinely introduced legislation marking April 24 as a day of remembrance for victims of the Armenian Genocide. In the Senate, Kansas Republican Robert Dole introduced identical legislation year after year. (After Hampar Kelikian, an Armenian-American doctor, helped Dole recover from serious wounds he suffered in World War II, the Kansas Republican had made a personal crusade out of helping Armenians.)

Many Watertown Armenians speak explicitly of the U.S. as a “host” country, and their allegiance to the homeland remains strong. One contributor to the *Armenian International Magazine* wrote in 1998, “We in the Armenian diaspora have a unique opportunity to exercise our dual allegiance to our host country and to Armenia. We should take advantage of our rights as citizens of the host country to gain its support of Armenia” (Smith 2000:14). This raises potential problems for U.S. foreign policy toward any “home” country, because it is not often clear when the political interests of a diaspora are at odds with the long-term interests of the United States.

Immigrant communities like Polish Americans in North Chicago and Armenian Americans in Watertown are, in a sense, lucky to have been represented by people who went on to hold powerful institutional positions. U.S. policy toward Armenia

may not have been as favorable had Armenians settled someplace else in the early 1900s. It is not the total number of expatriates in the United States that matters as much as the concentration within a handful of key districts. This is as true for Armenian Americans in Glendale and Fresno, California, and Waretown, Massachusetts, as it is for Ukrainian-Americans in Toledo, Ohio, and Cuban-Americans in Miami, Florida.

An Armenian Caucus in Congress

One of the first marks of a politically successful diaspora community is the creation of a “congressional caucus” chaired by a member of Congress (Hammond 1998). These caucuses are not formal legislative committees, but they do help shape policies in the interests of diaspora communities. By 1998 there were 173 congressional caucuses. Many of these reflected economic concerns (such as the Automotive caucus, the Bearing caucus, and the Boating caucus) or domestic policy interests (the Children’s caucus, the Friends of Families caucus, the Social Security caucus). Considering that more than 150 countries currently receive direct U.S. foreign assistance, the number of diaspora caucuses is relatively small, but includes, among others, caucuses for the Irish, Greek, Albanian, Nigerian, Sri Lankan, and Ukrainian diaspora communities. The Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues was created in 1995.

Membership in the Armenian Caucus, like memberships in most issue-specific caucuses, is strongly related to the characteristics of a member’s congressional district. Fifty-four percent of Armenian-Americans live in California, so it is no surprise that California is well represented in the Congressional Armenian Caucus with 27 of 107 members. Membership in the caucus was, according to aid Jon Lenicheck, a “no brainer” for Congressman Michael Capuano when he entered the House in January 1999. With 28,393 Armenian-Americans living in Massachusetts, every member of the Massachusetts House delegation belongs to the caucus.

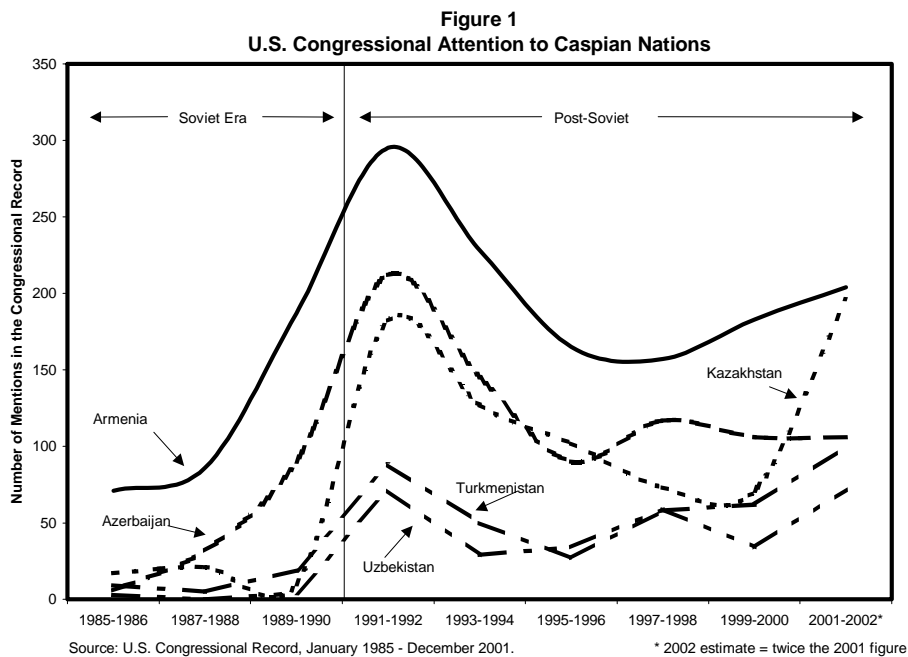
Eighty percent of the Congressional Armenian Caucus members come from just nine states, and those states hold 84 percent of the Armenians in the U.S. Since the diaspora is present in just a handful of states, and with no significant Azerbaijani presence in the U.S., one would not be surprised that Section 907 has never figured in the local politics of Idaho, where the Census reports just 37 Armenian-Americans. Idaho, however, is home to 37 more Armenian-Americans than the total number reported living in five other states *combined*.

Among Caspian nations, Armenia has long held a special place in the minds of members of Congress. Part of this has been luck – because not every diasporan community concentrates in a district that spawns a U.S. President and a Speaker of the House. Armenian-Americans were also more likely than

those who remained in Armenia to embrace democratic values and to shun the Soviet Union, both of which served Armenian-Americans well in the Cold War era. As for a presence in Congress, no other Caspian nation has come close to Armenia.

Figure 1 shows the number of times that a member of Congress rose to talk about Armenia on the House or Senate floor. During the 98th Congress (1985-86), Armenia was mentioned 71 times, which was twice as many as all of the other Caspian nations were combined. “Turkmenistan,” by comparison, was mentioned just seven times in five years (January 1985 through December 1989).

While Azerbaijan did receive some attention, it was almost always in the context of conflicts with Armenia. These other Caspian nations had little representation in Congress because there was not much reason for legislators to care about the links between their home districts and these far off lands. Until U.S. petroleum companies rushed into the Caspian region after the Soviet collapse, there were no effective groups lobbying Congress on behalf of anyone but the Armenians.



As with membership in the Congressional Armenian Caucus, participation in House floor debates about Armenia is almost perfectly correlated with the number of Armenians in a legislator’s home district. An examination of the *Congressional Record* finds several “extension of remarks” comments inserted into the record in support of Armenia. In 2001, a total of 6,897 words were inserted praising Armenia, while just 147 words were submitted praising Azerbaijan. The words on behalf of Armenia were inserted by representatives from just seven states, which combined hold 82 percent of the Armenians in America.

(The states were California, New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Michigan, Maryland and Virginia.)

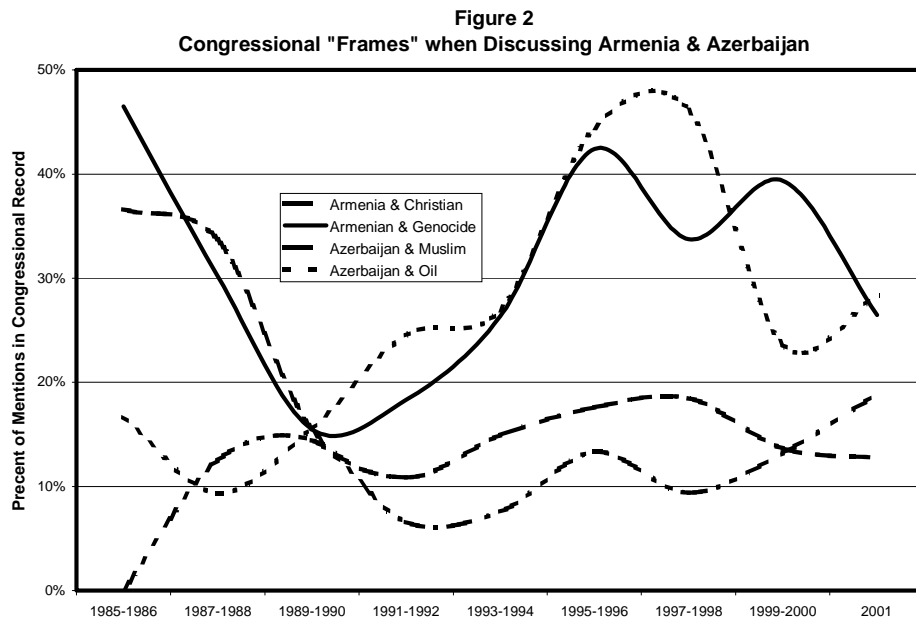
The Image of the Caspian in Congress

Before the September 11, 2001, attacks, the fact that Armenia was a Christian country surrounded by predominantly Muslim populations was rarely mentioned in Congress. Legislators talked about the Armenian Genocide, yet talk of the Genocide rarely included mention of Armenia’s Christian background. If Azerbaijan’s predominant religion was cited it all, it was often pointed to as a reason that the United States should support Azerbaijan, not Armenia. Supporters of lifting Section 907 liked to raise the specter that Azerbaijan, secularized by decades of Soviet rule, could fall into the pattern of its fundamentalist neighbor, Iran, without US assistance. Figure 2 shows the percentage of times that “Armenian” and “Christian” were mentioned in the same speech in Congress. Similar word combinations are shown for “Genocide,” “Azerbaijan” and “Oil.”

Over the last decade, talk of Azerbaijan’s oil reserves has dominated conversation on Capitol Hill, while the religious cleavage that feels so important to both diaspora communities barely registered among members of Congress. Because congressional discussions about Armenia have long been framed around the Genocide, Armenia is more likely to be seen as a nation long victimized by its neighbors. Section 907 would seem to be a sympathetic gesture.

Policy Outputs of Attention to Armenian Issues

From the 1910s through the early 1990s, Armenian lobbies in Washington worked for an over-arching goal: formal rec-



Source: U.S. Congressional Record, January 1985 - December 2001.

ognition of the Genocide, and along with it the implicit condemnation of Turkey. Time and again, these efforts failed. In 1990, for example, Senator Robert Dole of Kansas had nearly shepherded legislation through Congress that would have defined the massacre of hundreds of thousands of Armenians by the Ottoman Empire as genocide. But Turkey, a NATO ally and successor to the Ottoman Empire, raised strong objections, and the first Bush White House forced Dole to drop the issue. Ankara has consistently refused to recognize the massacres as genocide, insisting that they were the unfortunate by-products of war (Power 2002). The combined opposition of Turkey and the White House led a dozen senators to drop their support for the legislation. Two attempts by Dole to force an end to a weeklong filibuster by Sen. Robert C. Byrd fell far short of the necessary 60 votes (1990 *CQ Almanac*: 807-8).

Although Senator Dole's resolution failed, the debate contributed to a widespread sentiment on Capitol Hill that the Armenians had long been victimized and that the United States had not done enough to help them. Those feelings stretched as far back as the massacres themselves. The feelings were even stronger within the diaspora community. Armenian-Americans shared a collective sense of victimization, which had only been hardened by their inability to win worldwide recognition of what they believed without question was a genocide. "I think if the genocide issue were to be taken care of, the air would go out of their tires politically. That is THE issue for them," said Rep. Joe Knollenberg, R-Mich., co-chair of the Congressional Armenian Caucus (author interview, December 19, 2001).

Those years of lobbying in Washington helped produce a mood of regret over what Armenians suffered. With the fall of the Soviet Union, Armenia-Americans were well positioned to influence U.S. foreign policy, both with respect to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and U.S. foreign aid in the Caspian Sea region.

U.S. foreign aid is a useful proxy to demonstrate how strong a diaspora community is in Congress, and Table 1 reports the total per capita aid to countries in the Caspian Sea region throughout the 1990s. Among all 151 nations receiving some aid during the decade, Azerbaijan ranked 104th. Armenia came in 18th for the decade, despite receiving nothing until 1992, a year after independence.

Lobbying on behalf of Armenia had a noticeable impact on U.S. foreign assistance to the former Soviet Republic. In 1999, the last year for which we have comprehensive records, Armenia received \$74.3 million in U.S. foreign assistance. That was more than the combined total of all U.S. foreign assistance given to 43 other nations that also received American dollars in 1999. With a population of 3.8 million, U.S. foreign assistance to Armenia was \$19.96 per man, woman and child in the country in 1999.

DIASPORA LOBBIES

That amounts to \$229 per person who was identified as an Armenian American in the 2000 U.S. census. In contrast, Azerbaijan, even with strong support from petroleum companies, brought in \$3.63 per person in U.S. foreign aid in 1999.

While Armenia did very well in terms of U.S. foreign assistance when compared with most of its Caspian Sea neighbors, Armenia's per capita assistance in 1999 also ranked in the top ten of all nations, according to the 2001 USAID Loans and Grants "green book." The top ten per capita recipient nations in 1999 were Israel, Jordan, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Egypt, West Bank/Gaza, Macedonia, Armenia, Cyprus, Georgia, and Honduras.

Table 1:
Total Per Capita US Foreign Assistance (\$/Nation's Population)
Caspian Sea Nations 1990-1999

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	Decade Average
Armenia			677	2066	2559	1486	1976	463	2023	1996	1325
Georgia			259	1562	682	729	375	037	1501	1873	702
Turkey	865	1463	899	1138	692	825	578	317	013	008	680
Kyrgyz Republic			239	1448	980	567	381	119	392	888	501
Turkmenistan				785	648	123	632	069	107	241	261
Tajikistan			186	265	830	149	059	182	195	428	229
Russia				117	911	231	118	044	093	468	198
Kazakhstan				030	627	246	187	064	200	321	167
Median, all nations receiving US Assistance	090	128	233	209	216	182	114	082	129	177	156
Azerbaijan					277	127	072	027	312	363	118
Afghanistan	077	115	101	204	012	063	075	135		086	087
Uzbekistan				005	109	050	048	020	062	140	044

Source: USAID Loans & Grants Greenbook, 2001

Regardless of the money spent on foreign assistance, U.S. policy toward Azerbaijan has been dominated since 1992 by the discussion over Section 907 of the 1992 Freedom Support Act. This Section had the effect of favoring newly independent and Christian Armenia in its territorial conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh with the newly independent, but Islamic, Azerbaijan (Croissant 1998: Chapter 4). Under Section 907, Congress directed that U.S. foreign assistance (with some exceptions) "may not be provided to the Government of Azerbaijan until the President determines, and so reports to the Congress, that the Government of Azerbaijan is taking demonstrable steps to cease all blockades and other offensive uses of force against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh" (U.S. Public Law 102-511).

This one-paragraph provision came as part of a massive aid bill for the former Soviet Union, and Congress and the Bush

Administration were far more concerned about ensuring that aid flowed to the fledgling government of Russian president Boris Yeltsin. Section 907 was little more than a footnote (1992 *CQ Almanac*: 523-32). After the 1992 presidential election, Armenia's congressional supporters maintained the ban despite President William Clinton's objections.

News about Section 907 was front-page material for *The Armenian Weekly* and other outlets in the Armenian-American community, but few other Americans heard about it. Likewise, when Congress created Section 907 in 1992, few lawmakers paid attention. Most lawmakers knew little about the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan or much about the other former Soviet Republics only then beginning to break free of Moscow's domination. Legislators who followed the events in the Caspian Sea region were largely inclined to support Armenia's cause, since they hailed from states with significant Armenian-American populations. Armenian-American groups also counted on the power of Senate Minority Leader Robert Dole.

With 907 in place, all Armenian-American groups had to do was "play defense rather than offense," as Aram Hamparian put it. (Hamparian is with the Armenian National Committee of America.) James Lindsay noted in the *Brookings Review*, "The broader political factors that influence an ethnic lobby's effectiveness begin with whether it wants to preserve or overturn the status quo. Preserving it is far easier – a lobby prevails if it wins at any step of the political process" (Lindsay 2002: 37-40). The Armenian-American lobby became skilled at cultivating gatekeepers, such as Dole and later Sen. Mitch McConnell, R-KY, who could help block efforts to overturn Section 907 at critical points in the legislative process.

Those gatekeepers became more important in the mid-1990s as energy companies sought to undo the law. Oil companies became interested in the oil reserves in and around Azerbaijan just as Section 907 was signed into law. The political balance in Washington began to shift after Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev signed "the deal of the century" in September 1994 with several U.S. oil companies, including Amoco, Unocal, and Penzoil collectively holding the largest stake (40 percent) in a consortium to develop his country's oil and gas resources. As C. Frederick Starr of Johns Hopkins told an interviewer, "They secured their stakes in the region. Having done so, both the companies and the countries turned their attention to influencing Washington and other governments to protect their projects" (Stone 1999: 684-5). One of the companies' initial moves was to establish an Azerbaijan-American Chamber of Commerce, which also served to lobby Congress on Baku's behalf (Greenberger & Rogers 1995).

Competition between the energy companies and the Armenian-American lobby heated up after a cease-fire took effect

between Azerbaijan and Armenia in May 1994. Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh emerged as military victors, holding not only that disputed region, but also some surrounding provinces. Russia played the dominant role in brokering a settlement, as legislators on Capitol Hill remained largely oblivious (Croissant 1998). Nonetheless, taking advantage of Congress's continuing perception of Armenia as victimized because of Turkey's backing of Azerbaijan, Armenia's supporters on Capitol Hill sought to convince other lawmakers that Armenia was still the weaker party in the dispute. Legislators argued that retention of Section 907, even after the cease-fire, was necessary to bring Azerbaijan to the bargaining table to stop a regional economic blockade against Armenia.

Former Sen. Spencer Abraham, R-Mich., now President George W. Bush's Energy Secretary, articulated this defense of Section 907 on the Senate floor in 1999:

This is not the only time in this century that the people of Armenia have been victims of actions by military forces beyond their control. The treatment is simply unacceptable. I am not saying there are not arguments of sympathy toward all parties in this region, but the U.S. government made the right step when we instituted Section 907, that we expressed an appropriate level of sympathy, as well as support, and appropriately so, for the people of Armenia. It would be a tragic mistake for us today to reverse course and to set in motion what, in effect, would be a repeal of Section 907 (*Congressional Record*, 1999: S7871).

Not coincidentally, Senator Abraham's home state of Michigan has the 4th highest concentration of Armenian-Americans in the U.S., behind California, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts. Yet as the new Secretary of Energy, Abraham has come out strongly for an oil pipeline project from Azerbaijan to Turkey – skirting Armenia. President George W. Bush's May 2001 *National Energy Policy* report, the product of Vice President Cheney's semi-secretive working group, highlights Azerbaijan's 20 billion barrel offshore energy reserves in the Caspian Sea. Neither Armenia nor Nagorno-Karabakh is mentioned in the report, for as Senator Abraham became Secretary Abraham, his constituency changed.

Still, before September 11, U.S. energy companies were hampered by not being able to claim any local constituencies on their behalf. The specter of the 1996 elections also made it difficult for oil companies to diminish the scope of Section 907. Most crucially, Dole was expected to become the Republican presidential nominee in 1996, forcing both the Republican-led

Congress and the Democratic White House to do all they could do to avoid the political hot potato. Indeed, one of Dole's GOP primary opponents, Sen. Phil Gramm of Texas, went to great lengths to try and portray himself as the true champion of Armenian-Americans. For its part, the Clinton White House chose to reach out to Azerbaijan in other ways, issuing an invitation to Aliyev to visit the United States, but not until 1997, well after the 1996 elections.

An overwhelming 1996 House floor vote in favor of an amendment cutting off aid to Turkey unless it lifted its economic blockade of Armenia served as a demonstration to opponents of Section 907 that a frontal challenge on the House floor would be suicidal. In the future, more successful challenges would take place in the Senate, where there was no Armenian Congressional Caucus and where the voting and fundraising power of Armenian-American groups was more diluted.

Reasons for Policy Successes

While the Armenian-American community of Watertown is a dynamic force in its own congressional district, those local successes do not lead inexorably to success in Washington. Why has the larger Armenian-American lobby been intermittently effective in shaping U.S. foreign policy? Some point to a large political action committee run by the Armenian National Committee. Indeed, the political action committee (PAC) has been very active at the national and – especially – the state and local level. Others note that Armenian-Americans have gained prominence in business; they are entrepreneurial, and along with Indian Americans and Jewish Americans, Armenian Americans are far more likely than many other diaspora communities to foster the education of doctors and lawyers.

Both of these factors – money and professional connections – play an important part in successful lobbying. Still, U.S. policy toward Armenia has not been salient enough to attract much attention from non-Armenians. Presumably, most diaspora communities in the U.S., if properly organized and funded, can influence U.S. foreign policy when the issues at hand do not overtly contradict other American national interests.

Influential diaspora communities are typically (1) well organized at the local level where political activists learn the arts of local politics, (2) geographically concentrated, and (3) active voters. There are dozens of diaspora communities in the United States, and they tend to be geographically concentrated, sometimes in unexpected places such as the large Hmong population in Appleton, Wisconsin, or the growing Mongolian community in Boulder, Colorado. Yet few of these geographically concentrated communities have much influence in Washington, DC – let alone in Madison and Denver.

U.S. policy toward oil-rich Azerbaijan is a case in point. Before the territorial controversy over Nagorno-Karabakh, the Armenian-American diaspora was organized through lobbies. The Armenian Caucus (only members of the House of Representatives can belong) proved pivotal maintaining support for Section 907 through the late 1990s. Lobbies for both Armenia and Azerbaijan have been very active in Washington since the early 1990s, though the Azeri lobby was for most that time a shell working on behalf of U.S. petroleum companies (Herzig 1999: Chapter 4). Until January 11, 2002 – when Section 907 was overridden in the wake of the war in Afghanistan.

Local Activism

Foreign policy, except in times of war, is not important to most members of Congress; and there is often little competition among legislators for seats on the House or Senate committees that oversee foreign affairs. Political careers are usually made on committees that handle important regulatory issues (such as House Commerce or Senate Finance). Reelection incentives steer members to committees that distribute money for special projects (such as House and Senate Appropriations or the transportation and infrastructure committees). Usually, investing one's time in foreign policy brings a bad return back home because the constituents sitting around neighborhood haunts like Uncommon Grounds are more likely to be talking about education, roads, jobs, and clean water. Focusing on foreign policy is a political liability for members of Congress – except in communities with a politically active diaspora.

Several diaspora communities have had a marked influence on U.S. foreign policy in a variety of congressional districts. Support in Congress for the Marshall plan was strongest in districts populated by Polish, Hungarian, and Czechoslovakian expatriates. Outside of Poland, the largest pro-Solidarity rallies in the world were held in north Chicago, Illinois, in Representative Daniel Rostenkowski's heavily Polish congressional district. At the time of those rallies in the late 1980s, Rostenkowski's district had the fourth highest density of Polish Americans in the country; and Rostenkowski chaired the powerful House Ways and Means Committee which oversaw U.S. trade policy. Rostenkowski had the institutional power to spearhead a change in U.S. policy toward Poland. To Rostenkowski, the solidarity movement was in north Chicago – not in Poland. Similarly, for nearly every foreign policy issue confronting members of Congress interest comes from *local* activists, as amplified by interest groups and campaign contributions.

Competitive Interest Groups

In the decades leading up to the enactment of Section 907, two Armenian-American groups had established offices in Wash-

ington to lobby the government on issues of concern to the community, particularly attempts to recognize the Genocide. Their efforts had been spurred by the 1988 earthquake and by a 1988 decision in which the Armenian majority in Nagorno-Karabakh of Azerbaijan had called for independence from Baku. Most diaspora communities (Israel and Cuba, for example) have just one national interest group, but competition between two Armenian groups intensified contacts with legislators (Gregg 2001).

One of those lobbying groups, the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), traces its roots to 1918 and the American Committee for the Independence of Armenia, a group that resolutely urged a hard line against Moscow after Russia forcibly incorporated Armenia into the Soviet Union in the 1920s. In 1972, several prominent Armenian-Americans formed a new group, the Armenian Assembly of America (AAA), which was less dominated by anti-Soviet ideology and more willing to look for ways of cooperating with Moscow to help Armenia.

The Assembly's less confrontational attitude toward Moscow allowed it to gain a foothold in Yerevan after the earthquake, where it helped distribute money from the Armenian diaspora to victims. Those ties grew as Armenia moved toward independence, with the Assembly serving as the main link between Yerevan and wealthy expatriates. Today, the Assembly is so close to Yerevan that it boasts an office on the first floor of the Armenian Foreign Ministry (author interviews, Hrair Hovnanian, December 21, 2001 and Aram Hamparian, December 26, 2001).

The Assembly had also been designed from the beginning as an elite organization designed to mobilize the Armenian-American community and its financial resources for national policy objectives with a "top-down" perspective. ANCA, on the other hand, was and remains largely a grassroots organization; despite its long history, it wasn't until 1983 that it opened an office in Washington, and it still tends to look at issues from a "bottom-up perspective."

The policy differences between the two groups largely became moot after Armenia gained its independence following the breakup of the Soviet Union. Both groups focused on issues of widespread interest to Armenian-Americans, from enacting and retaining Section 907 to recognition of the Genocide. And rather than weakening the community, many lawmakers and aides believe that having two lobbying groups has actually benefited Armenian-Americans.

As Heather Gregg noted in the fall 2001 issue of *Precis*, "competition between these two lobby groups has led to hyper-mobilization of this ethnic group's resources; their different approaches to lobbying have mobilized more Armenians and allies than one organization alone. The two lobbying groups have doubled outreach projects and resources on Armenian issues,

magnifying the Armenian presence in the U.S.” (Gregg 2001: 17-21). Competition between the two national lobbying groups also heightened political fundraising efforts, as both tried to out raise the other.

Campaign Contributions

The 1996 election—the first truly post-Cold War election—was a watershed for diaspora lobbies. With Congress and the White House no longer sharing a united view that foreign policy should be organized around the central principle of fighting communism, lawmakers were free to pay more attention to ethnic groups such as Indian-Americans, Cuban-Americans and Armenian-Americans. At the same time, the post-Watergate reforms, which had diminished the power of political parties and the congressional leadership, meant that lawmakers sought out the fundraising opportunities offered by such well-off ethnic groups.

As former House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Lee Hamilton, D-Indiana, said: Armenian-Americans “established such a reputation for giving political contributions, that candidates would come to them seeking support. They became a stopping point for many congressional candidates” (author interview, Dec. 26, 2001).

“As an organized community, the Armenians have few peers. As a source of campaign funding help, they are clearly one of the most prodigious,” New Jersey Democrat Robert Torricelli told *Congressional Quarterly*. Indeed, it hardly seemed a coincidence that some of the closest supporters of Armenian-Americans interests – Senators Torricelli, Gramm, and McConnell – served as heads of their parties’ campaign fundraising arms (Doherty 1994).

During his term as chairman of the Senate Appropriations subcommittee that doles out foreign aid, Senator McConnell increased funds for Armenia every year, often well above what the Clinton Administration requested, providing about \$500 million for a country of little more than three million people. Although there were fewer than 1,000 Armenian-Americans in Kentucky, Armenian-Americans raised nearly \$200,000 for McConnell and the Republican Party in Kentucky. Considerably more money flowed to the National Republican Senatorial Committee, which McConnell headed (Dobbs 2001). McConnell enjoyed a particularly close relationship with Hrair Hovnanian, the founder and longtime head of the Armenian Assembly. Hovnanian, a major New Jersey builder, cites his ties in the real estate community and his long-time efforts to cultivate a relationship with McConnell and other congressional leaders as keys to the community’s success (author interviews, November 2001).

Constraints on Diaspora Influence

In January 2002, President George W. Bush approved an order that largely undid Section 907, handing the Armenian lobby their most significant setback in a decade. Around the tables at Uncommon Grounds in Watertown there remains conviction that the waiver of Section 907 is a temporary matter. Some of the regulars argue that supporting a Muslim country over a Christian country would never be in the United States' long-term interests. This sentiment ignores the newfound prominence of Section 907 in the minds of U.S. legislators and the importance of other Caspian Sea nations in the fight against terrorism.

Under most circumstances a diaspora's strong influence over U.S. foreign policy survives public scrutiny if the policy is not clearly in America's best interests. Sentimentality and guilt about the Genocide could not overcome political realities of needing Azerbaijan as a partner in the War against Afghanistan. Policy toward the Caspian is no longer a purely "local" issue for a handful of legislators from Watertown, Glendale, and Fresno. In light of the war against terrorism and U.S. interests in supporting a moderate Azerbaijani government, the Armenian lobbying community finds itself on especially uncommon ground.

How did support for Section 907 unravel? Unable to mount a full-fledged challenge against Section 907 in the late 1990s, House members sympathetic to Azerbaijan, such as then Appropriations Committee Chairman Bob Livingston, R-La., and Rep. Charlie Wilson, then ranking Democrat on the panel's foreign aid subcommittee, used their committees and subcommittees to nibble away at the edges of Section 907. They began by allowing Baku to participate in distributing humanitarian assistance and in democracy promotion programs. Congressman Livingston's interests in Azerbaijan probably had little to do with his concerns for international equity. He represented an "oil state," and he was one of the oil industry's strongest supporters in Washington. Oil was discovered in Louisiana in 1901, "followed by the huge Baton Rouge refinery that became the training ground for generations of top oil executives" (Barone, Cohen, & Ujifusa 2000: 659).

With the 1996 presidential election over and Dole out of office, the White House could once again pay attention to oil in the Caspian region. Azerbaijani President Aliyev's visit to Washington in 1997 marked the beginning of a new chapter in Azerbaijan's relationship with the United States.

Before coming to the United States, Aliyev had agreed to support an American effort to build multiple oil and gas pipelines out of the Caspian Sea region—including one to Turkey through Georgia—providing an alternative to the existing Soviet-built route to Russia. U.S. officials saw the new pipeline as a national security imperative, preventing Moscow from dominating its former republics through its control of the energy re-

sources. After Aliyev's commitment, energy companies had a new and powerful weapon in their lobbying arsenal and an increasingly assertive White House as their ally (Morgan & Ottaway 1998).

In 1997, the State Department issued a report estimating that oil deposits in the Caspian Sea were twice as large as previously estimated. "The Caspian Region could become the most important new player in world markets over the next decade," the report said. It also called for the United States to provide trade financing, saying that foreign competitors "benefit significantly from unrestricted political and financial support from their governments" (Doherty 1997).

Lawmakers acted quickly to address the oil companies' core interests. In 1997 and 1998, Congress approved legislation that allowed Azerbaijan to receive assistance from the Overseas Private Investment Corporation and the Trade Development Agency. Such trade financing was considered essential to building the proposed pipeline. The law continued to ban economic aid, but given Azerbaijan's energy wealth, Baku never hoped to win such assistance in any case. But the restrictions did prevent U.S. officials from fully participating in providing technical assistance to Baku, such as how to construct new commercial and tax codes. It also hampered military cooperation programs between the two countries.

Azerbaijani officials, locked in an authoritarian political culture, found it difficult to explain to their public why the U.S. Congress could adopt a stance at odds with the White House's official desire for closer ties. Furthermore, "There [was] no cohesive Azeri diaspora in the United States. Azeri interests [were] represented by the Azerbaijan Embassy in Washington, staffed by diplomats with little skill in lobbying in the chaotic American political scene" (Longworth 1998). Azeri officials repeatedly referred to U.S. policy – and the U.S. political system – as "incomprehensible."

In the Winter 2000 edition of *Azerbaijan International*, Agshin Mehdiyev, head of the foreign ministry's department charged with relations with the United States, said that "To the average person, the U.S. government, the Congress and all other governmental and non-governmental structures are all the same – one entity. They don't differentiate between the branches of the U.S. government. They can't understand how it is that the U.S. government supports Azerbaijan while Congress votes against us. It's too complicated for the average person" (Mehdiyev 2000).

Key members of the Azerbaijani government publicly blamed the existence and persistence of Section 907 on "corruption" in America and the deep pockets of Armenian-Americans. Husein Baghirov, the Azerbaijani Minister of Trade, complained that, "We cannot understand who governs America. Who is

managing America? I'm not sure that small lobbies belonging to small minorities can shape the foreign policy of this great country. I'm a fairly educated man, and to me this incomprehensible" (Baghirov 2000). Azerbaijan's Ambassador to the United States, Hafiz Pashayev, wrote in 2000 that, "It is incomprehensible to us that the selfish, short-sighted interests of small ethnic groups can drive U.S. foreign policy, especially when such decisions run counter to America's long-term interests in the region" (Pashayev 2000).

What Secretary Baghirov and Ambassador Pashayev failed to grasp is that geographically concentrated diaspora communities *can* exert disproportionate influence when America's short-term national interests are not plainly in danger. Indeed, the task for Azerbaijan and other countries with diaspora communities in the U.S. is to follow – not repudiate – the example set by the Armenian diaspora. The U.S. Congress responds to local constituencies, not foreign dignitaries.

Azerbaijan was counting on oil company lobbyists – not on Azeri expatriates – to undo Section 907. After trade financing restrictions were lifted, many lawmakers and White House and congressional aides concluded that the oil companies' real concerns had been met and that they were simply going through the motions of lobbying on Section 907 in order to please Baku. Indeed, since these restrictions seemed to carry little if any real domestic cost, many lawmakers were more than happy to support what appeared to be a "no-cost" means of pleasing the highly mobilized Armenian-American lobby. Those results were evident in a 1998 House vote, where an attempt to overturn Section 907 was defeated 231-182. The Senate, unwilling to risk the issue in an election year, did not even take up legislation that would have granted a presidential waiver.

After bungling efforts in the early 1990s, and to make its case that lifting the restrictions was in the United States' national interest, Azerbaijan began turning to leading Americans with impeccable national security credentials. Amoco hired former national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski; Texaco hired Richard Armitage. And in 1999, Azerbaijan retained two foreign policy heavyweights: former Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger and former Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker, R-TN, when it signed a lobbying deal with Baker, Donelson, Bearman, & Caldwell. Other former Reagan and Bush administration officials from former Defense Secretary Dick Cheney to former Secretaries of State Al Haig and James Baker also weighed in on behalf of Baku.

These efforts won Azerbaijan a new hearing on Capitol Hill, particularly among Republican conservatives. It didn't hurt that these appeals coincided with a time of tension with Moscow over issues from Kosovo to the expansion of NATO. Republican lawmakers saw action to help Azerbaijan and punish Armenia as

part of a broader scheme to prevent Russia from trying to reestablish its control of its former Republics.

Following the intervention of Republican heavyweight lobbyists, Congressional voting on Section 907 began to split largely along partisan lines. In the 1998 House vote, 131 Republicans supported Baku's efforts to lift the restrictions, and only 88 opposed it. On the other hand, 142 Democrats supported retaining Section 907, and only 51 called for eliminating it. A similar pattern unfolded in the Senate the next year with nearly 3 out of every four Democrats in favor of retaining the restrictions while two out of three Republicans supported lifting them.

One symbol of this new view was Sen. Sam Brownback, Republican of Kansas and Senator Dole's successor from the state. It was a sign of diminished congressional interest in foreign policy that Brownback, a freshman senator, was given the chairmanship of the Foreign Relations Committee's Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs Subcommittee. Despite his junior status, Brownback was not shy about advancing his causes, which often involved efforts to check both Russia and Iran by supporting legislation to block missile sales between the two countries.

To Brownback, assistance to Azerbaijan and the other former Soviet Republics in the Caucasus and Central Asia was a clear national security imperative; without U.S. aid, he argued, these newly independent countries, and their vast energy wealth, were in danger of once again falling under the sway of either Iran or Russia. "They desperately want to get out of the way of being under the thumb of Russia and don't want to get under the thumb of Iran," Brownback said of Baku. Harkening to a historical model for regional cooperation, Brownback called for "Silk Road" legislation which would tie the region together economically through communications and transportation links. Retaining Section 907, he argued, was a clear impediment to such a vision (Pomper 1998).

In 1999, the Senate Foreign Relations committee endorsed Brownback's vision on a party-line vote of 10-8, and lawmakers braced for a crucial showdown on Section 907 on the Senate floor. But his attempts foundered there, partly because of international developments. Azerbaijan had won support in 1997 and 1998 elections by endorsing a peace plan backed by the Organization for Security and Cooperation and eventually rejected by Armenia. But it lost this diplomatic advantage the following year by rebuffing a new OSCE peace plan backed by Armenia and the government in Nagorno-Karabakh. That allowed supporters of retaining Section 907 to argue that it needed to be maintained to induce Azerbaijan to come to the bargaining table. Azerbaijan's refusal of the peace offer also deterred what oil

company officials and many congressional aides argued would be the most successful strategy for overturning Section 907.

George W. Bush's election seemed to augur well for those opposed to aid restrictions on Azerbaijan. Not only was Bush himself a former oil executive, but also his cabinet was stocked with people who shared the worldview of the oil companies: from Vice President Cheney to Deputy Secretary of State Armitage. And in his confirmation hearings, Secretary of State Colin Powell made clear that he wanted to review all existing U.S. sanctions to see if they conformed with America's national interests.

Within months of taking office, an energy task force Cheney headed pointed to Azerbaijan as a key source for future oil and gas development. With oil prices rising, it seemed a propitious time to push for lifting any restrictions that prevented development of overseas energy resources. As Rep. Peter King, R-N.Y., a supporter of lifting Section 907, argued: "With the energy crunch in place, it would be insane to keep these restrictions" (Pomper 2001a: 1173).

As a potential prelude, Bush and Powell decided to intervene in the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan in a more direct manner than any previous U.S. administration. Powell invited the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan, Robert Kocharian and Heydar Aliyev, to Key West, Florida in April 2001 for peace talks, followed by meetings with Bush at the White House. That effort fell through, however. Although Aliyev and Kocharian were able to sketch the outlines of a potential settlement, they concluded that they would not be able to sell the deal to their respective publics. A follow-up meeting planned for June was put off.

At the same time, the prospects of getting Congress to lift Section 907 appeared to dim. Overwhelming congressional support for retaining existing U.S. sanctions on Iran and Libya signaled that lawmakers were still more interested in paying attention to the concerns of ethnic groups (in this case, Jewish-Americans) than to pleadings from the White House or the oil companies.

Then came the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Suddenly, U.S. foreign policy, which had lacked an overarching rationale for the last decade, had a new focus: anti-terrorism. Senator McConnell made clear that he would apply the new "Bush Doctrine" to foreign aid: "All of the legislation has to be viewed through the prism of the situation we find ourselves in," McConnell said on September 19, 2001. "We need to reward those countries that cooperate with us in fighting terrorism and punish those countries that don't" (Pomper 2001b: 2191).

McConnell did not intend for the attacks to provide an excuse for the administration or Azerbaijan's supporters to lift Section 907. Indeed, he continued to fight against lifting the restrictions, arguing that "there's no relationship whatsoever" be-

tween lifting the sanctions and building an anti-terrorist coalition. But Baku, determined to take advantage of the new thinking of the Bush Administration, offered use of its airspace and military bases to serve as a potential air bridge to U.S. forces in Afghanistan and Central Asia. And Brownback made clear that he would use Azerbaijan's arguments as a new and forceful argument in the congressional debates.

Behind the scenes, both sides pressed their arguments with the Bush Administration. Brownback lobbied administration officials to either take advantage of their existing authority to waive the restrictions or for Bush to call on Congress to provide him with new authority to waive Section 907 permanently. On Oct 1, 29 members of the Congressional Armenian Caucus wrote to Powell asking him to maintain Section 907. Armitage and other administration officials began taking soundings on Capitol Hill about the political reaction to lifting Section 907. Although McConnell publicly predicted that a floor debate would "split the Senate down the middle," the administration and the Armenian-American group soon came to the conclusion that the political winds had shifted, forcing groups like the Armenian Assembly to take a different approach. The final blow came to the Armenian-American groups when Powell urged Congress to grant Bush a waiver to lift the sanctions, pointing to Azerbaijan's help in the anti-terrorism campaign, including granting the United States overflight rights, the use of its air bases, and intelligence support. Hoping to contain the damage, Hovnanian worked closely with McConnell to craft a number of limitations to Brownback's proposed waiver as part of the fiscal 2002 Foreign Operations Appropriations bill.

Under the modified Brownback amendment, Section 907 could be waived through the end of 2002 if President Bush made the following certifications. If he wished to continue the waiver after that date, the following certifications about Section 907 would have to be renewed on an annual basis:

- It is necessary to support counter-terrorism;
- It is necessary in order to ensure operational readiness for the U.S. armed forces and those of our coalition partners;
- It is important for Azerbaijan's border security; and
- It will not undermine or hamper the Minsk Group peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan or be used for offensive purposes against Armenia.

To soften the blow to Armenia, the Senate also agreed to support a separate McConnell amendment granting Armenia military assistance for the first time, including \$4 million in military aid and \$600,000 for International Military Education Training assistance to Armenia.

While the Armenian Assembly and the Senate were satisfied with these changes, ANCA and the Armenian Caucus were not. In particular they complained that although the legislation prevented U.S. aid from being used against Armenia, it did not block Azerbaijan from using such assistance against Nagorno-Karabakh. The administration finally agreed to a formula that prevented U.S. assistance from being used in such a way without inadvertently granting Karabakh any *de facto* recognition as an independent entity. And lawmakers such as Caucus co-chairman Joe Knollenberg, R-MI, vowed that they would revisit the waiver as part of the fiscal 2003 budget cycle.

Even supporters acknowledged that they would have a hard time reinstating the restrictions once they had been lifted. Massachusetts Senator John Kerry, who wrote the original restrictions, said Congress had to acknowledge that the war on terrorism had fundamentally changed Congress's view of Azerbaijan, "Obviously I am sensitive to the change," Kerry said. "But I completely understand the circumstances in which we find ourselves" (Pomper 2001c: 2558).

Lessons for Diaspora Groups

Leaving aside questions about whether diaspora communities are "good" or "bad" for U.S. foreign policy, there are several aspects of the Armenian case that may deepen one's understanding of the contingent influence of diaspora groups.

One simple lesson is often overlooked: to succeed in the U.S. political system, one needs to shed the institutional prejudices of the "home country" and embrace U.S. politics at the local level. Expatriates from countries that have near-dictatorial powers vested in the executive branch seem to have an especially difficult time grasping how Congress and local politics influences foreign policy. When Azeri dignitaries, for example, say that U.S. foreign policy is "incomprehensible," the problem begins with their inability to see politics through the lens of U.S. cultures and institutions.

Diaspora communities that are geographically concentrated have a great advantage over same-sized but dispersed communities. With geographic concentration comes the potential to turn numbers into local political power. Panamanian expatriates in Brooklyn, New York, for example, have yet-untapped potential to influence U.S. trade politics through their member of Congress, Democrat Edolphus Towns, who serves as the ranking member on the House Subcommittee on Trade and Consumer Protection. Yet that diaspora community remains unorganized, still largely under the impression that – as in Panama – real power rests in the executive branch. In contrast, the Sri Lankan diaspora, geographically concentrated in a few New Jersey congressional districts, is active in local politics, mobilizes voters, has its own congressional caucus, and has had a continuing

and strong influence over U.S. foreign policy toward the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

Local political activism is merely a subset of resources that politicians need to run for office. Money is another, and while diaspora communities may decry the role of money in U.S. campaigns, that fact is that political parties do not fund local campaigns. Providing resources, such as activists, voters – and money – are prices one pays for admission to local political establishments. The two national Armenian lobbies are renowned for their abilities to raise money, as are Israeli and Cuban diaspora lobbies, among others.

There is an element of luck in the making of successful lobbying campaigns. Armenians were lucky to have been geographically concentrated in a district from which John F. Kennedy and Thomas P. O'Neill emerged. They were lucky again in securing Robert Dole as a lifetime ally well before he ran for public office. Eventually, diaspora communities develop their own politicians – at the local level (such as Massachusetts State Representative Peter Koutoujian), at the state level (former California Governor George Deukmejian), and the national level.

Finally, the influence of diaspora communities is attenuated when clear national priorities conflict with the interests of expatriate groups. The Cold War long structured the terms of the debate in Washington, giving diaspora communities that had fought against the Soviets extra influence. The end of the Cold War left a vacuum, a lack of an organizing principle around which U.S. foreign policy decisions could be made. Into that vacuum, the interests of well-organized diaspora communities held sway.

Today, as U.S. policymakers shift through alternative ways of structuring foreign policy priorities (most likely around combating terrorism or promoting free trade) different diaspora communities will be helped or hurt. To the extent that trade liberalization becomes a motivating principle, anti-Castro Cuban groups will see their lobbying efforts consistently undermined by new appeals to the “national interest.” And to the extent that engaging Turkey and Azerbaijan in an anti-terrorism campaign is maintained as a national goal, Armenian-Americans will have lost their special place as influential behind-the-scenes brokers of U.S. foreign policy near the Caspian Sea.

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We describe how Members of Congress react to diaspora communities generally, and we discuss the conditions under which diaspora interests may become salient on Capitol Hill.Â @inproceedings{King2004TheUC, title={The U.S. Congress and the Contingent Influence of Diaspora Lobbies: Lessons from U.S. Policy Toward Armenia and Azerbaijan}, author={David King and Miles A. Pomper}, year={2004} }. David King, Miles A. Pomper. We examine links between local diaspora communities and U.S. foreign policy by exploring the history and contingent power of Armenian-Americans in the United States.