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THE U.S. SOFT POWER TOWARDS ARMENIA UNDER GEORGE BUSH'S PRESIDENCY (1989–1992)

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ABSTRACT

The collapse of the Soviet Union marked a pivotal moment for the former 15 Soviet states. The 15 newly independent states faced a myriad of challenges, including economic, political, geopolitical and social. Before the collapse, the Soviet Union acted as a single state and a single integrated economy, and the newly independent countries were not separate, self-sufficient republics. Therefore, the United States used its soft power policy back then by supporting those states through assistance programs, preventing the potential revival of the Soviet Union and the collapse of their economic and political systems. Armenia was one of the beneficiaries of the US assistance even before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, in the form of humanitarian assistance during the devastating Spitak earthquake. Following the dissolution of the USSR, the US assistance played a crucial role for the newly independent Armenia. This article examines the soft power of the 41st U.S. President George H. W. Bush's administration towards Armenia during the post-Soviet transition. In particular, the following issues are analyzed: George H. W. Bush administration's foreign aid to Armenia, his personal goodwill towards Armenians during the devastating Spitak earthquake, his support for the establishment of a democratic regime and a liberal

economy in Armenia, and the establishment of legal basis for the relations between Armenia and the United States.

Keywords: USA, President George H. W. Bush, US foreign aid, Spitak earthquake, collapse of the USSR.

Prologue

The collapse of the USSR and the end of the Cold War were a global geopolitical upheaval, as a result of which the United States established its hegemonic role throughout the world. In essence, Washington got rid of its number one competitor and adversary, the USSR, but the unipolar world posed its own challenges. The United States was not particularly prepared to work directly with the newly independent Soviet states, since it did not have the appropriate experience and specialists who could work in 15 separate states as ambassadors, diplomats, military attachés, etc. At the same time, another problem for the US was the proliferation of the Soviet nuclear arsenal. It was unacceptable for the United States that, after the collapse of the USSR, for example, Kazakhstan, Belarus or Ukraine would become states with nuclear weapons and the United States had to work with these states to transfer nuclear warheads to Russia. This, undoubtedly, was time-consuming work, but it was of vital importance for the newly emerging security architecture of the United States and Europe.

The economically devastated newly independent states, first of all, needed food, financial allocations, humanitarian aid and also assistance in other spheres. Studying the US foreign policy of this period, one can get a clear insight of the US soft power capabilities, its strategies, as well as the process of deployment. The dissolution of the Soviet Union meant the formation of 15 newly independent states. The US needed to work with all of them, establish relations and deepen bilateral contacts, and in many cases also take into account the stances of the new capitals. It was a fact that the energy resources of the former USSR countries were also of interest to the United States, including, for example, Azerbaijani oil and Turkmen gas, to which the US had never had access.

Given these challenges, the United States' priority after the collapse of the USSR was to provide direct financial assistance to the newly independent countries. Before the collapse, the Soviet Union was a single state, and it is clear that it operated as a single integrated economy, and the Soviet countries could not be separate, self-sufficient republics. Given the Soviet model of state and economic management, these countries operated as highly dependent units. Therefore, in such conditions, it was of key importance for the United States to reduce the interdependence of these countries as much as possible, preventing not only their final economic collapse, but also the possible revival of the Soviet Union, especially when Washington saw coup attempts against Gorbachev and the aspirations of some political circles to return to communism.

On the other hand, during the collapse of the USSR, the United States rightfully positioned itself as the sole superpower and world leader of the newly created unipolar world order. Accordingly, there was a need to establish a liberal model of state governance in the newly independent states through the use of soft power, which was established in all countries of the Western bloc. The key components of this model were the spread and establishment of a free market economy and democratic values, which the United States was also trying to entrench in the former Soviet countries. Therefore, back then, it was necessary to provide financial allocations and assistance to the newly independent countries so that these countries would give impetus to the transition to a democratic model of governance in their own countries and the formation and development of a market economy.

The Bush Administration's Foreign Aid to Armenia

George Bush got elected as President of the United States in November 1988 and took office in January 1989. Thus, on December 7, 1988, when the earthquake occurred, Vice President Bush was already President-elect, and there was a smooth power transition by President Ronald Reagan, together with all the achievements and challenges.

On the evening of December 25, 1991, US President George Bush announced in his Christmas speech: “The United States recognizes the

independence of Ukraine, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Belarus and Kyrgyzstan. All these states that have made specific commitments to us. We will move quickly to establish diplomatic relations with these countries and build new ties to them. We will sponsor membership in the United Nations for those not already members [1].”

Unlike the rest of the USSR states, before the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the imminent collapse of the USSR was becoming evident, the United States began providing financial and humanitarian assistance to Armenia. Armenia became the first and only “success story” of the US-USSR warming relations. The reason, obviously, was the devastating Spitak earthquake of 1988, which took the lives of more than 25,000 people and left hundreds of thousands homeless. Armenia was facing a humanitarian disaster, while the collapsing Soviet Union needed foreign assistance to overcome the situation, since its own resources were insufficient.

On December 6, 1988, hours before the Spitak earthquake, the leader of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev, left for his working visit to New York for the first time in order to participate in the regular session of the UN General Assembly. On December 7, high-level negotiations were scheduled between the leaders of the USSR and the USA, Reagan and Gorbachev. Naturally, Vice President George Bush, who was already the president-elect of the USA, also participated in the meetings between Gorbachev and Reagan, which allowed him to immediately take over the management of one of the most complex challenges of foreign policy. On December 7, at 13:00, a working lunch was scheduled, which began at 13:40 on Governors Island in New York (21:40 Yerevan time) [2]. At the beginning of the lunch, Gorbachev, in the presence of journalists, said that a powerful earthquake had occurred in Armenia. The next day, December 8, Gorbachev decided to cut short his visit and return to the USSR after learning of the true extent of the disaster. That same morning, President Reagan called him to express his condolences for the disaster, offering to provide assistance [3].

For the United States, however, it was particularly difficult to adopt the right approach in providing aid to the Soviet Union during this period, because, as President Bush noted during his meeting with Czechoslovak President Vaclav Havel on February 21, 1990, “Soviet Union is a proud

superpower and now more proud because it is crumbling. Above all, I am thinking about humanitarian assistance - food stuff and grain that you have in reserve and which could be used for Armenia to support Gorbachev.” In response to Bush’s assertion, Havel added that “the problem of pride could be overcome by having the aid private [4]”.

In this situation, the United States did everything to quickly organize assistance to the earthquake victims. Under the leadership of President Reagan, representatives of the USAID Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance and the State Department arrived in Armenia on the first American relief flight. To help the Armenians, six traumatologists, a search team, and other specialists arrived in the earthquake zone, bringing with them search team support equipment, as well as other cargo. In addition, six Pentagon planes brought humanitarian aid to Armenia, which included “tents and plastic sheeting, water jugs, cots, blankets, hand tools, and rescue gear [5].” As Bush noted in one of his speeches, “It’s a sad truth that nothing forces us to recognize our common humanity more swiftly than a natural disaster” [6].

The Spitak Earthquake, American Aid and Jeb Bush's Visit to Armenia

Although George H. W. Bush had not yet assumed the office of US President, he sincerely wanted to be personally involved in providing relief to the victims of the terrible earthquake. Therefore, days after the earthquake, on Christmas Eve, the son of US President-elect George H. W. Bush, Jeb P. Bush, after consultation with his father, decided to visit earthquake-stricken Armenia and personally deliver the aid. Arriving in Armenia, he announced that they had brought “40 tons of cargo: medical equipment, medicines, toys, and baby food, which were collected throughout America by the charity organization “America Cares”. Thousands of people participated in this noble initiative. We were in the air when Christmas was celebrated on Earth. I would very much like everyone in Armenia to feel that holiday, to see that millions of Americans also sympathize with the Armenians [7].”

During their visit Jeb and George P. Bush departed for Spitak right from the airport. After witnessing the ruins of Spitak, they traveled to the village of Karadzor, which was almost half destroyed. In the afternoon, the American guests returned to Yerevan. The next day, Jeb and George P. Bush visited Yerevan's 3rd Children's Clinical Hospital, where there were 600 children. Jeb and George P. Bush went from ward to ward, meeting with wounded and sick children. In the evening, they visited the residence of the Catholicos of All Armenians, Vazgen I. And on December 26, Jeb and George P. Bush returned to the United States. The assistance provided by the United States to Armenia during the Spitak earthquake was the first major assistance provided by the United States to the Soviet Union since World War II, and the visit made by Jeb and George P. Bush was warmly received in the USSR, positively impacting USSR-US relations.

The Bush Administration's Assistance to the Newly Independent Countries of the USSR, Including Armenia

The collapse of the USSR created a new situation in international relations, and the United States had to act as quickly as possible to establish diplomatic relations with the newly independent states and shape directions of cooperation. The use of soft power in general, as well as financial assistance in particular, is one of the most important tools for implementing foreign policy, through which states solve a number of foreign policy issues and challenges facing them.

US assistance programs essentially pursued three main goals: to promote the transition from authoritarianism to democracy (perhaps the most important goal), to promote the establishment of free market economies, and to strengthen security by controlling the spread of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. Another goal was to provide humanitarian assistance, which was important for the newly independent states, especially for Armenia in the early 1990-s, when food shortages were acute [9], given the devastating consequences of the earthquake and the blockade imposed by Azerbaijan and Turkey.

To achieve all these goals, the Bush administration had to act swiftly. By mid-1992, Washington had embassies in all the newly independent republics of the USSR and had begun the process of accrediting ambassadors and sending diplomats. In 1991, Washington launched its program of assistance to the newly independent states, which was aimed at providing food and medical supplies to help Russia and Armenia overcome the first, most difficult year of independence [10].

Given the importance of the issue, the Bush administration proposed to hold an international conference in the United States in 1992, involving all potential donor countries and interested international and non-governmental organizations, in order to carry out the work more effectively. On January 22 and 23, the Bush administration convened a conference entitled “International Conference on Humanitarian Assistance to the Former USSR”, which was attended by the foreign ministers of 47 potential donor countries and representatives of 7 international organizations, to discuss the plan of action and coordination of assistance to the Soviet Union. The conference focused mainly on five areas: food, medical supplies, energy, temporary shelter, and technical assistance. Working groups were formed to draw up a plan of action and determine further steps in each of these priority areas. In his opening remarks, President George Bush announced additional US aid of \$645 million, of which about \$620 million was provided within the US budget for 1993 fiscal year [11].

Interestingly, President Bush in his opening remarks while giving a detailed account of the situation in the former USSR, also referred to Armenia: “Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosyan, who was previously imprisoned for his ideas, is leading a major national movement to transform the economic model and liberate his people from political persecution [12].”

Moreover, during this conference, an announcement was made about providing humanitarian aid to the USSR, within the framework of the so-called “Provide Hope” initiative. The operation was launched on February 10, during which Military Airlift Command aircraft delivered emergency food and medical supplies to the countries of the former USSR, including Armenia [13].

Still, President Bush understood that something more than mere humanitarian aid was needed to achieve US goals, which is why the Bush administration initiated the “Freedom Support Act”, which already included humanitarian and economic assistance to the newly independent states. The act was adopted quite fast, since the US understood that losing time was unacceptable, and providing assistance to Russia was more important. For this very reason and thanks to the active efforts of the Armenian community in the US, Section 907 of the “Freedom Support Act” was adopted, although it was controversial for the Bush administration. However, the provision of assistance to Russia and other states in order to form a democratic regime and a market economy was a more prioritised issue for the Bush administration. On top of that, there was the issue of transferring the nuclear arsenal located in the USSR countries to Russia, which, as already mentioned, was of vital importance for Washington.

The “Freedom Support Act” was passed by the US Senate in July 1992 and by the House of Representatives in August of the same year. On October 24, 1992, the bill was signed into law by US President George H. W. Bush [14]. The Section 907 of the “Freedom Support Act” effectively prohibited the provision of any US aid to Azerbaijan: “The United States assistance under this or any other Act (other than assistance under title V of this Act) 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 [15].” Section 907, sponsored by Democratic Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts, passed by a 14–4 vote. From the moment President Bush signed it into law, it entered into force and became an obstacle to US-Azerbaijani relations, remaining in force for about 10 years. Thus, during those years, Azerbaijan became the only CIS state that did not receive direct assistance from the US government. Naturally, numerous attempts were made both through diplomatic channels and by lobbyists, but Armenian lobbyists managed to keep the section in force. Section 907 did not reserve any right for the US President to overturn this provision [16].

Through the “Freedom Support Act”, the United States began providing assistance to the countries of the former Soviet Union, including technical, humanitarian, and most importantly, financial assistance. To date, over \$6 billion has been provided to Georgia since 1992, and over \$3 billion to Armenia [17].

In fact, to evaluate the assistance provided to the Republic of Armenia during the Bush administration, it is necessary to consider exclusively the US budget and additional allocations within the fiscal 1992 and 1993 years as for the 1991 fiscal year the Bush administration could not provide direct assistance, since the USSR still formally existed, and the 1991 budget was approved back in 1990. At the same time, taking into account that Bush was defeated in the 1992 elections and transferred power to Bill Clinton in January 1993, the budget allocations adopted during the Bush administration continued until the end of the 1993 fiscal year.

Accordingly, in the 1992 fiscal year, the U.S. government provided a total of \$74.97 million in assistance to Armenia, of which \$14.02 million was in the framework of the “Freedom Support Act”. In 1993, the total assistance provided by the U.S. government was \$172.41 million, of which \$27.52 million was under the “Freedom Support Act” [18].

This assistance provided by the United States was very important for the newly independent states, and the United States was the leading country assisting Armenia. Relative to its population, Armenia was one of the leading recipients of aid. It is worth noting that Armenia and Georgia were among the five Eurasian countries that received more than \$1 billion in aid during the 1992–2010 fiscal years, the other three being Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan. During the 1992–2010 fiscal years, US aid to Eurasia amounted to 16% and included the “Freedom Support Act”, Food Assistance (US Department of Agriculture), the Peace Corps, and security assistance.

Armenia consistently ranked among the top recipients of US aid per capita [19]. In addition, the United States was among the 74 countries that responded to the Spitak earthquake disaster and provided immediate humanitarian assistance to the Armenian people. In the following years, the USAID Earthquake Zone Recovery Program helped 7,000 earthquake-

stricken families (or about 30,000 people) from temporary shelters to obtain permanent housing. In addition, displaced residents were able to move out of more than 100 public buildings, including schools, kindergartens, and museums, which were returned to public use. After Armenia gained independence, USAID programs from 1992 to 1998 focused on humanitarian assistance, with an emphasis on food, fuel, medicine, and clothing to help Armenia overcome the post-earthquake, post-war, and post-Soviet economic collapse [20].

Among the aid and soft power tools received from the United States during those years, one can also consider the arrival of Peace Corps volunteers to Armenia. The first Peace Corps volunteers arrived in Armenia in the winter of 1992, during one of the most difficult periods for the newly independent republic. Armenia faced food, electricity, and heating shortages during that harsh winter, and the country was still in the midst of a difficult period of recovery from the devastation of the 1988 earthquake, along with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the war with Azerbaijan. However, despite all these difficulties, the first Peace Corps volunteers remained in Armenia and served their communities, which welcomed them with warmth. Since then, nearly 1,100 volunteers have served in the Peace Corps Armenia program. Since 1992, the Peace Corps has fostered peace and friendship in Armenia, while promoting education, the youth, the environment, civil society, and economic development, as well as health. Peace Corps volunteers have also introduced Armenians to American culture, as well as shared Armenian culture in the United States [21].

Apart from volunteers, following the devastating 1988 Spitak earthquake, the United States National Academy of Sciences sent a team of scientists and engineers to the then Soviet Armenia to assess the consequences of the earthquake and provide technical assistance accordingly. The team also included two Armenian-Americans: Mihran Agabian of the University of Southern California and Armen Der Kiureghian of the University of California, Berkeley (“UC”), both professors of seismic engineering.

The idea of establishing an American-style university in Armenia arose during a conversation between Der Kiureghian and Yuri Sargsyan, the

rector of Yerevan Polytechnic University. Agbabian and Der Kiureghian pursued this idea, and the then Executive Vice President of the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), Mrs. Louise Manoukian-Simon, responded positively to the idea and promised to finance the creation of such a university. It is noteworthy that on the day of the independence referendum, September 21, 1991, the American University of Armenia began its activities, thanks to the joint efforts of the Armenian and US governments, the Armenian General Benevolent Union, and the University of California [22].

It was during this period that the contractual and legal basis of US-Armenian relations was formed. During those years, a number of treaties and agreements were signed to put bilateral relations on a more solid foundation. The agreements include: “Agreement Between the Government of the Republic of Armenia and the Government of the United States of America on trade relations” (entered into force on April 7, 1992), “Agreement Between the Government of the Republic of Armenia and the Government of the United States of America on investment incentive” (entered into force on April 2, 1992), “Agreement Between the Government of the Republic of Armenia and the Government of the United States of America concerning the reciprocal encouragement and protection of investment” (signed on September 23, 1992, but entered into force in 1996), “Agreement Between the Government of the Republic of Armenia and the Government of the United States of America concerning the program of the Peace Corps in Armenia” (entered into force on September 24, 1992), “Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Armenia and the Government of the United States of America on Facilitating the Control of Humanitarian and Technical Economic Assistance” (entered into force on December 15, 1992), “Agreement between the National Seismic Protection Service of the Republic of Armenia (NSPS) and the United States Geological Survey (USGS) on the Establishment of an Observation Station of the IRIS Global Seismographic Network in Armenia” (entered into force on August 11, 1992), “Agreement between the National Seismic Protection Service under the Government of the Republic of Armenia and the United

States Geological Survey on Cooperation in the Field of Earthquake Hazard Reduction” (entered into force on August 11, 1992)¹.

Thus, right after the collapse of the USSR, a number of agreements were signed between the Republic of Armenia and the United States, forming the contractual and legal basis of the relations between the Republic of Armenia and the United States. Parallely, the United States continued to provide assistance in various forms to the Republic of Armenia to ensure a smooth transition to democracy and a liberal economy.

Conclusion

Taking into account all the above mentioned, it can be stated that the foundations of US-Armenian political and economic relations were laid during the presidency of the 41st US President George H. W. Bush. The soft power pursued towards the Soviet states during the presidency of the 41st US President H. W. Bush played a key role in ensuring the post-Soviet transition of the newly independent Armenia. The devastating Spitak earthquake of 1988 gave impetus to the US to send humanitarian aid to the Soviet Union, which became the first major aid provided by the United States to the Soviet Union since World War II. This was a turning point in the US-Armenian relations. Moreover, the son and grandson of President-elect Bush arrived in Armenia within the framework of providing assistance to the victims of the earthquake. This act of goodwill became the basis for later warm relations between Armenia and the United States.

US assistance to Armenia included not only immediate first aid, but also a long-term assistance commitment in the form of the “Freedom Support Act”, which promoted the country's democratic development and the establishment of a market economy model, and thanks to the Section 907 of the “Freedom Support Act”, Azerbaijan was deprived of assistance and investments provided by the US government for about 10 years. The

¹ The documents are available in the Armenian Legal Information System. URL: <https://www.arlis.am/>

US efforts were aimed at establishing a democratic order in the country, preventing the prospects of a return to authoritarianism. During the Bush administration, numerous agreements were signed between Armenia and the United States to establish and deepen US-Armenian cooperation. Armenia became a participant in a number of programs implemented by the US, which provided significant assistance to the newly independent Armenia in the social, educational, economic, and healthcare sectors.

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«МЯГКАЯ СИЛА» США В ОТНОШЕНИИ АРМЕНИИ В ПЕРИОД ПРЕЗИДЕНТСТВА ДЖОРДЖА БУША (1989–1992)

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АННОТАЦИЯ

Распад Советского Союза стал поворотным моментом для пятнадцати бывших советских республик. 15 новых независимых государств столкнулись с множеством проблем, включая экономические, политические, геополитические и

социальные. До распада Советский Союз действовал как единое государство и единая интегрированная экономика, а новые независимые страны не были отдельными самодостаточными республиками. Поэтому Соединенные Штаты использовали свою политику мягкой силы тогда, поддерживая эти государства через программы помощи, предотвращающие потенциальное возрождение Советского Союза и крах их экономических и политических систем. Армения была одним из получателей американской помощи еще до распада Советского Союза – в виде гуманитарной поддержки после разрушительного землетрясения в Спитаке. После распада СССР помощь США сыграла решающую роль для новой независимой Армении. Данная статья посвящена политике «мягкой силы» администрации 41-го президента США Джорджа Буша в отношении Армении в период постсоветского перехода. В частности, рассматриваются внешняя помощь Армении со стороны администрации Буша-старшего, его личная доброжелательность к армянам во время разрушительного Спитакского землетрясения, его поддержка в формировании демократического режима и либеральной экономики в Армении, а также установление договорно-правовых отношений между Арменией и США.

Ключевые слова: США, президент Джордж Г.У. Буш, иностранная помощь США, землетрясение в Спитаке, распад СССР.