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Armenia and Israel, the Middle East's last Judeo-Christian nations

On opposite ends of the geopolitical playing field

Print

COMMENTARY

By Sam Brownback - - *Monday, October 2, 2023*

OPINION:

Many American Christians have probably never heard of the small nation of Armenia, but this country of 3 million people holds tremendous spiritual significance for the global church.

In A.D. 301, Armenia became the first nation to embrace Christianity (even before the Roman Empire). The gospel was originally brought to the Armenian people by the Apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew in the first century. In addition, Mount Ararat, the focal point of Armenian culture and spirituality, is the place where Noah's Ark landed after the flood in Genesis.

Apart from Israel, it is probably the most biblically significant nation in the world.

The similarities between Armenia and Israel do not stop there. For one, they are both Judeo-Christian democracies in a sea of Muslim authoritarian states. Armenia gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 and has made a concerted effort in recent years to align itself more closely with the Western world despite Russia's best efforts to stop it from doing so.

Like Israel, the central defining characteristic of Armenia is its faith. Through centuries of war and hardship, the Armenian Church is the glue that has held Armenian society together.

Sadly, like Israelis, Armenians are no strangers to mass murder. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the Ottoman Empire (modern Turkey) waged a campaign against the

empire's Christians in which 1.5 million Armenians were slaughtered. The events, which are widely seen by scholars as the first genocide of the 20th century, are often referred to as "the forgotten genocide."

Hitler, while devising his Final Solution for the Jewish people, invoked those mass murders, stating, "Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians."

While both the Armenian and Israeli people were eventually able to establish modern nation-states, the historic centers of their civilizations lie outside their current borders. The biblical heart of Israel, Judea, falls within the Palestinian West Bank. Artsakh, in many ways considered the cultural capital of Armenia, is being religiously cleansed of its Armenian Christians by Azerbaijan.

And while both nations look longingly on their ancient lands, they are also preoccupied with defending their immediate borders from hostile neighbors. Israel is forced to contend with Hamas in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, Hezbollah to the north, and Bashar Assad's Syria. Armenia, on the other hand, is sandwiched between Turkey and Azerbaijan. Both countries deny that Armenians were subject to genocide and refuse to open their borders to Armenian transit. This means that the vast majority of the landlocked Armenian border is also under a blockade.

Despite their similarities, Armenia and Israel find themselves on opposite ends of the geopolitical playing field. Israel, in order to balance against Iranian influence in the region, has developed close ties with Azerbaijan, the country committing ethnic and religious cleansing against the Armenians of Artsakh. Similarly, Armenia has developed ties with Iran, a nation openly committed to Israel's destruction, in an attempt to balance against its own existential threats, Turkey and Azerbaijan. The sad reality is that the region's only two Judeo-Christian nations have developed a horrible relationship, driven by the need to survive in a region dominated by hostile Muslim states.

But there is hope. Because of the two nations' shared values and history, the gap can be overcome given the proper security structure in the region. If Armenia had the security backing of the region's greatest power, the United States, it could begin to wean itself off its dependence on Iran. Similarly, the United States is

the only nation influential enough to convince Israel to lessen its dependence on Azerbaijan.

It is a tragedy to see these two nations, sister nations, divided and torn apart by the existential threats of the region. The United States is the only nation capable of uniting the Middle East's last two democratic Judeo-Christian nations.

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