

INFLUENCING AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY: A CASE ON ETHNIC VERSUS NATIONAL INTERESTS

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Ethnicity is an influential element in contemporary American domestic politics, and, one would argue, in foreign politics as well. Some powerful ethnic interest groups – Jewish, Greek, Armenian etc. – have gained a lot of influence in American domestic affairs and increasingly tried to exert more and more influence on the foreign policies, which deal with their country or place of origin.

The issue of ethnic interest groups' influence incorporates broad range of topics on the domestic determinants of the policymaking, including the nature of the domestic political system and state–society relations, the role of the public opinion and societal groups, and even the importance of ideas and perceptions in policymaking process. What are the policy impacts of public opinion and societal groups? How do domestic structures provide grounds for the activities of various interest groups? How and by which mechanisms do various interest groups and public opinion influence the policymaking process? What is the relationship between elites and public in U.S. political system and who follows whom? All these larger questions constitute the research agenda of this article.

The purpose of the present article is to evaluate the role of the domestic ethnic interest groups on foreign policy–making, based on the example of the role of the Armenian lobby in the formulation of the U.S. foreign policy towards Azerbaijan from early 1990s till present. To achieve this end, to what extent and by which mechanisms and strategies the ethnic lobbies, the Armenian interest groups in this case, have influenced the U.S. foreign policies will be identified. This article suggests that although ethnic groups may exert significant influence on foreign policy, ethnic lobbying does not determine policy decisions and outcomes and can easily be sacrificed when broader national interests are at stake. Likewise, it will be showed that the activity of the Armenian interest groups has had a significant influence on U.S. policies, but the Armenian ethnic lobby was not the determining factor in U.S. policies toward Azerbaijan and its influence was limited by the existence of obvious national interests.

To prove this thesis, first, the particularities of the U.S. political system and how it provides grounds for the activities of various interest groups will be analyzed. Then the mechanisms and strategies by which ethnic interests exert pressure on and influence the American policymaking process will be discussed. Finally, a case study will be presented and the major developments in the history of the U.S.–Azerbaijan relations will be outlined, which have relevance to the subject matter of the present article, i.e. to the activity of the ethnic Armenian interest groups in America.

The Extent of Ethnic Groups' Influence: The U.S. Domestic Political Structure and State–Society Relations

This section is aimed to show that "the American political system not only permits, rather it actively promotes ethnic group activism" (1). Therefore, in order to understand the role ethnic interest groups in general, and Armenian

interest groups in particular, play in American domestic and foreign politics, it is necessary to analyze the U.S. domestic structure.

From its beginning, U.S. society has been a multicultural society of people with different origins and backgrounds. Therefore, it is natural that in a number of cases these ethnic groups sought to influence American policies toward their country or place of origin. However, as Smith writes, "it is not only the social character of America as a nation of immigrants that makes for the prominent role ethnic actors play in foreign policy deliberations; it is also the structure of American democracy that allows ethnic communities, and much wider range of civic interest groups in general, access to policymaking."⁽²⁾ As it will be seen below, the factors that allow various interest groups, including ethnic ones, to influence the U.S. policymaking lie namely on the nature of the wider state–society relations and the country's political and party organization.

It is generally accepted that the U.S. has a largely decentralized policy–making structure. The U.S. founding fathers have built the U.S. political system based on the principle of 'checks and balances'. This democratic principle provided separate branches of government with powers to oversee the actions of the other, thus preventing any one from becoming too powerful. This principle of 'checks and balances' enshrined in the U.S. Constitution provides large freedom of action for the activity of various interest groups. Watanabe illustrates the sources of untidiness in U.S. foreign policy making process in the following lines:

"While unquestionably lodging the political authority for the governance of foreign affairs in the president and Congress, acting either apart or together, the actual demarcation of many responsibilities is left unclear. ...In the effort to resolve imprecision and irregularity in the division of foreign affairs powers, the courts, especially the Supreme Court, have been noticeably silent. ...The courts' reluctance to act has thrown these disputes into political rather than judicial arena. In this context, the activities of organized interests, such as ethnic groups...may be as decisive in defining the distribution of foreign policymaking responsibilities as would be a large body of court judgements."⁽³⁾

Another factor that greatly enforces the role of social forces in American foreign policymaking is the specific system of political party organization. As Smith indicates, "[b]ecause the Congress and the President can be of the same mind or the same party, it is conceivable that the institutional struggle built into politics by the Constitution might not occur and thus, the government would enjoy relative autonomy in the face of social pressures."⁽⁴⁾ Therefore, the party system has been built, in which the public officials are not named by the party but nominated through primaries, whose results are decided by local electorates. "The consequence of such party discipline, – Smith writes, – is that in practice public officials may well be as responsive to their constituents as to their party leadership"⁽⁵⁾. Moreover, Smith notes that given that the Congress is also a decentralized entity, even civic interests operating on a small social base may find their concerns being reflected in legislation ⁽⁶⁾. Thus, the U.S. is usually characterized as a typical "weak state" because of its federalist structure, the system of checks and balances between Congress and administration, and the extensive network of group representation ⁽⁷⁾.

As seen from the discussion above, the U.S. is a society–dominated domestic structure in which public opinion and the societal groups play an important role in formulation of domestic and foreign policies. Muller and Risse–Kappen

illustrate the importance of public opinion in society-dominated domestic structures in the following lines:

"...public opinion becomes a resource which competing elite factions try to mobilize for their purposes. Public opinion defines broader or more limited boundaries on the range of options available to the political system, depending on the degree and the specificity of the public consensus."(8)

However, this high degree of responsiveness to the public aspirations among U.S. policymakers does not exclude the possibility of elite manipulation of public opinion. We cannot forget that elite, especially the ruling elite has large material resources in its disposal and access to media, which is one of the most powerful instruments in shaping the public opinion. Moreover, in a number of cases low level of knowledge about certain issues among public make it easier for the elites to manipulate with the public opinion. Therefore, the question of interaction between public opinion and elites is case and situation specific. However, the false dilemma of which one is more important, elites or public and whether it is public that follows elite or vice versa can be easily resolved if we abstain from erroneous approach of conceiving of both elites and public as distinct unitary actors. Domestic elites, as a rule, consist of opposing groups struggling for power and use the public and its aspirations to achieve their goals. Likewise, the public while may hold similar stance in fundamental policy issues, is, in many cases, divided on specific issues.

But what is more important is that viewing elites and public as relatively distinct and unitary actors lead to ignoring an important causal role that interest groups play in influencing and even shaping both elite and public opinion. This has long been a point ignored by scholars. As Skidmore and Hudson write: "Previous efforts to build domestic-centered theories of foreign policy behavior have...suffered from inattention to the significant causal role of societal groups"(9). Everts also observes that "[e]specially in the American case, the study of public opinion as mass opinion has tended to overlook the role of parties and interest groups in shaping and mediating the connection between mass opinion and foreign policy."(10) Risse-Kappen suggests distinguishing at least between (a) mass public opinion, (b) the attentive public, which has a general interest in politics, and (c) issue publics, which are particularly attentive to specific questions (11). In this case, the ethnic (including Armenian) interest groups in the third category as groups particularly interested in the foreign policies, conducted toward their kith and kin can be placed.

The similar approach can be applied not only to the public but also to the elites, viewing them as non-unitary actors, which, certainly, may manipulate the public opinion, but which, at the same time, may be influenced and even manipulated by various interests, including ethnic groups. As Smith rightly notes, "American politics is typically the politics of organized interests – not only of the "power elite" (12). However, in most of the cases, the interest groups and elites both use each other's support and resources for their own, and at the same time, mutual benefits. In this regard Congress' high responsiveness towards the demands of its local constituents, including ethnic interest groups, makes it especially attractive to various interest groups. As Watanabe writes:

"Ethnic organizations rely upon the responsiveness and legitimate policymaking authority of Congress to promote specific policy propositions. Congress, to a great extent, relies upon the mobilization of nongovernmental opinion, such as that which emanates from informed ethnic activists, in order to perform effectively and to promote its enhanced foreign policymaking role."(13)

Watanabe also characterizes public opinion as "a notoriously slippery concept, which is largely a manifestation of the selective determinations of policymakers as to what is indeed representative"(14). This evaluation is correct, but only in part, since it implies that policymakers are free to decide what constitutes a public opinion, which is not the case in many instances. Moreover, as seen from the discussion above, interest groups play not lesser and, in certain instances, greater role in shaping public opinion than do policymakers, which themselves operate within the constraints of limited alternatives conditioned by this public opinion.

The Mechanisms and Strategies of Ethnic Group Influence:

Appeal to Mutual Interests

Having discussed the wider political structures, which provide the framework for the policymaking and ethnic groups interaction we can turn now to the examination of various strategies that allow certain ethnic lobbies be more effective than others operating within the same domestic political structures. As Watanabe writes, "the ultimate measure of ethnic influence is the extent to which ethnic groups are successful in persuading officials to take authoritative actions supportive of their positions"(15). There can be discerned a lot of factors, which make the ethnic interest groups efficient and promote their ability to influence the policymakers' decisions. In this article, the ones that are considered the most important will be referred.

Smith distinguishes three general ways in which interest (including ethnic) groups bring pressure to bear on the political establishment: (a) through the vote, (b) by campaign finance contributions, and (c) by an organizational body (16). In the U.S., similarly to many other democratic societies, small number of votes may make a big difference. If to consider that ethnic groups, if well organized, are usually very vocal about their problems, especially during the election period, as well as given the fact that their participation level in elections, as a rule, is much higher than the average, then it becomes clear how even a small ethnic community can gain a critical influence in U.S. policymaking (17). Through contributing money to the campaigns of candidates for the presidency and the Congress, ethnic activists have another valuable source of access to decision-makers (18). As Watanabe notes, "[o]rganizational requirements and the demands of the advocacy process place a premium on information processing and communication skills that require substantial outlays of money"(19).

However, money and votes can be effective if ethnic interests possess a well-established organizational body, which channels these popular forms of influence in specific directions targeted at specific issue areas. As Smith indicates, ethnic organizations 1) ensure the organizational unity of the ethnic community, 2) form and supervise alliances with other social forces and 3) advocate policy propositions and monitor the behavior of the government officials responsible for formulating and implementing policy (20). Policymakers often view ethnic interest groups and organizations as representatives of the larger ethnic communities and, therefore, prefer to cooperate with them in order to get ethnic community's support during elections. Thus, as Watanabe points, "[I]n addition to serving as the primary conduits for interaction with the policymaking structure, organizations are the primary contact points for policymakers seeking advice, information, or a reading of ethnic community attitudes"(21).

Congress as the most responsive branch of government, which, as discussed above, is due to its decentralized nature, the absence of strong party discipline, and most importantly, the role of primaries in congressional elections

is "a more likely source of access to decision making for ethnic lobbies"(22). Ethnic activists understand that it is far more difficult to gain access to the President and effectively influence his policies than it is to lobby members of Congress, where the threshold of entry is far lower and a much closer working relationship can be established (23). In this regard it is worthwhile to mention the congressional caucuses, which are the "entit[ies] composed of interested members of congress who work together to further causes related to a special interest group" (24). The congressional caucuses, which represent ethnic interests, work closely with these ethnic groups in promoting ethnic interests. It is interesting to note that the Congressional Caucus on Armenian Issues created back in 1995 consists of 126 members as of January 2003 (25) and is presently the largest caucus in the U.S. Congress (26), followed by the Hellenic Caucus counting 117 members (27) with which it has close cooperative relationships.

Another significant function performed by the ethnic interest groups and organizations, as we saw above, is advocating policy propositions and monitoring. Ethnic organizations perform the roles of surveillance and keeping their membership and the larger ethnic community abreast of developments in the government and throughout those areas of the world deemed critical (28). At the same time ethnic interest groups and organizations engage in what Watanabe terms an "educative role" by providing ideas and usable data to policymakers. In fact, "the actual wording of many resolutions and legislative proposals directly bears the mark of some ethnic organizations"(29). And here we come to the importance of information providing in influencing policymaking process. Information is communicated by ethnic groups and individuals in a variety of ways: through letters, telegrams, speeches, reports and documents, newsletters, hearing testimony, telephone calls, meetings, demonstrations, and other formal and informal devices (30).

Recently, with rise of Internet, web-based campaigns, such as launching "action alerts", which inform ethnic community members about certain issues and urge to act either by sending Web-faxes or e-mails, have become very popular. A recent interesting example for the effectiveness of such web-based campaigns was the American government decision to exclude the Armenian nationals residing in the U.S. from a list of men required under the new anti-terrorism program to undergo special registration at the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). In November 2002 the INS and Justice Department designated a list of 18, mostly the Middle Eastern countries that are considered high risks for terrorism, whose male nationals over 16 residing in U.S. had to undergo special registration under the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEES). A month later on December 13 the INS added Armenia, along with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, to the NSEES list, a notice was published in a Federal Register on December 16, 2002. This move provoked a "furious round of lobbying" (31) by the government of Armenia, which was the only post-Soviet country in the list, but most importantly, by the Armenian interest groups. Within the first 24 hours of issues the action alert launched by the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), -one of the largest Armenian interest group in the U.S., - over 10,000 web faxes were sent to the President Bush expressing the Armenian American community's profound opposition to this action. "The ANCA, along with a broad-based coalition of Armenian American groups, worked to resolve this issue with senior Administration officials, Armenian Americans with close ties to the White House, the Congressional Armenian Caucus, and key foreign policy figures"(32). These high-level contacts and grassroots level campaign made the U.S. government to change its decision and to drop Armenia from the INS list in a matter of two days. The notice from the Justice Department published on December 18 said that it is "only adding Pakistan and Saudi Arabia" and it had "incorrectly listed Armenia as a designated country"(33). It is worthwhile to quote the chairwoman of ANCA's

Fresno (California) chapter Hygo Ohannessian who said "You don't know how glad I am that the Armenian community responded quickly on this because now the Bush administration knows Armenians will react to anything negative being said or done towards Armenia"(34).

As we saw above, well-established organization and financial and information resources are essential elements of efficient ethnic group lobbying. However, these factors, although necessary, are not enough. Rogers, who refers to Martin Weil, gives a similar to that of Smith's three criteria necessary for an ethnic interest to influence U.S. foreign policy: (1) an electoral threat, (2) a lobbying apparatus, and (3) a successful appeal to the symbols of American nationhood (35). The first two criteria basically correspond to Smith's first and third measures, respectively, which we discussed above.

The third criterion is also an interesting one deserving separate attention. It implies that the ethnic groups, in order to influence favorably the policymakers' perceptions and make them receptive and sensitive to their ethnic concerns, must formulate (if not to adapt) their demands and policies in terms of the broader national interests and according to the existing public and elite preferences. Watanabe recognizes the importance of this factor when he writes that "ethnic groups must consciously formulate their communications and build their cases in such a way as to stress the compatibility between their positions and the overall public interest". (36) Examples of ethnic interest groups' using of the existing public and elite discourses are abundant. Thus, one recent example is the "action alert" launched by the ANCA urging Armenian community members to ask the U.S. postal service to issue a stamp commemorating the so-called alleged Armenian genocide (37). The first sentence of the sample letter provided by ANCA in its web-site says: "As an American who values the vital role of our nation in advancing justice and human rights around the world, I am writing to urge the creation of a postage stamp on the American response to the Armenian Genocide."(38) Here, the attempt to link the values of the American society and the historical events of which U.S. postal service officials know little about is obvious. Another sample letter for the protest campaign against the above-mentioned Armenia's inclusion to the NSEES list appealed to the national interests: "Armenia...continues its staunch support for U.S. led efforts [against terrorism]... As an Armenian American, I urge you to continue your cooperation with Armenia in the war against terrorism and remove that country from any list falsely linking its citizens to crimes against our nation." (39)

Thus, a necessary element for the successful ethnic lobby influence to the policymaking process, along with strong organization and rich resources, is the ability of the ethnic interest groups to formulate their demands and policies in terms of broader public and national interests. Here the perceptions of the policymakers play a crucial role determining the policymakers' responsiveness and sensitivity to the ethnic interests. This responsiveness and sensitivity of the policymakers towards ethnic interests is conditioned by the degree these interests are considered to be compatible with the broader national and public interests. Therefore, ethnic interests are likely to influence the policymaking process if they overlap with, or at least, are not viewed as contrary to the national interests.

A Case Study: The Impact of the Armenian Lobby on the U.S. Policy Formulation towards Azerbaijan

Initially the U.S.–Azerbaijan relations were largely asymmetrical with Azerbaijan aspiring towards more cooperation with the U.S. in both political and economic fields and the U.S. being somewhat incoherent towards enhancing its

relations with Azerbaijan. There can be discerned two most important factors that had the strongest impact on the U.S. foreign policy towards Azerbaijan during the initial years, i.e. in 1991–1994:

- 1) The U.S. initially lacked consistent foreign policy towards Azerbaijan, and the Caucasus region as a whole due to the low level of awareness about the region and its problems;
- 2) The absence of clearly formulated policies and interests coupled with low level of awareness about the region both among policymakers and broad public made the U.S. foreign policy towards Azerbaijan highly vulnerable to the pressures of the ethnic, primarily Armenian, interest groups, especially during the initial years.

Apart from broad support for democracy in the successor states of the former Soviet Union and peaceful resolution of conflicts, the United States did not seem to have a specific policy for the Caucasus. (40) The oil companies were much more interested in Azerbaijan than the U.S. government, which tended to see the Newly Independent States as a Russian sphere of influence. (41)

On the other hand, Azerbaijan's foreign policy was from the very beginning strongly oriented towards the U.S. This foreign policy orientation was adopted based on two basic considerations:

- 1) Azerbaijan saw the U.S. as a balancing power against Russia, which was seen, especially during the first years of independence, as a potential threat to the security, political independence and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, mainly, given Russia's active support for the Armenian government and the separatists during the Karabakh conflict.
- 2) Azerbaijan also viewed the U.S. as an important business partner and sought to attract the American investments to the exploitation of its oil resources in the Caspian Sea.

During the first years of independence Azerbaijan, similarly to other former Soviet republics, have undergone severe economic regression caused by the disruption of Soviet–time economic links. However, the situation was further exacerbated by existence of ethnic and territorial conflict with neighboring Armenia over Mountainous (Nagorno) Karabakh, a province of Azerbaijan with Armenian majority (42). The United States has been actively engaged in international efforts to find a peaceful solution to the Mountainous Karabakh conflict. It has played one of the leading roles in the Minsk Group, which was created in 1992 by the Organization (then called Conference) for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to encourage a peaceful, negotiated resolution to the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia. In early 1997, the U.S. heightened its role by becoming a co–chair, along with Russia and France, of the Minsk Group.

Conflict with Armenia has had a deep impact on the U.S.–Azerbaijan relations and it would not be an exaggeration to say that the whole history of the bilateral relations between the two countries has been obfuscated by the activity of the ethnic Armenian lobby in the USA, which became an influential force in U.S. domestic politics by 1990s. As Smith indicates, "the end of the Cold War has allowed other [previously inactive or less active] ethnic communities a new role in American foreign policy. Thus Armenian Americans gained critical influence on U.S. policy in the Caucasus by virtue of the creation in 1991 for the first time of an Armenian Republic"(43).

Armenian interest groups especially succeeded in influencing the decisions on the U.S. foreign aid allocation to Azerbaijan and Armenia. In the fall of 1992 the U.S. Congress passed the Freedom Support Act (FSA) to facilitate

economic and humanitarian aid to the former republics of the Soviet Union, aimed at helping democratization processes and fostering economic growth. However, a month after its adoption, on October 24, 1992 the Congress pushed by the Armenian lobby introduced a highly controversial amendment to the FSA, most commonly referred as Section 907, which banned direct American government assistance to the government of Azerbaijan. Given the untidiness of the U.S. policy towards Azerbaijan, low level of awareness about the country and in the absence of other interest groups, which could oppose Armenian lobby, the Congress responded in a highly sensitive way to the ethnic Armenian demands. As John J. Maresca, the first U.S. mediator for the Mountainous Karabakh conflict writes:

"there was very limited effort to influence Congressional thinking, or to indicate that the U.S government was actively seeking an impartial role in the solution to this conflict. Congress was left to the influence of lobbyists and as a result Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act, banning direct aid to the Azerbaijan government, was passed. Congress was simply ignorant of the issue at the time and of the implications of their actions. This early failure to inform and influence Congressional thinking imposes a responsibility on the present Administration to rectify and correct the results of that failure". (44)

Adoption of the Section 907 was undoubtedly one of the most significant victories of the Armenian interest groups in the U.S. The Azerbaijanian government, which could get 50–60 million of aid annually, was deprived from this assistance and Azerbaijan was the only former Soviet Union country to be sanctioned in such a way. In contrast, the U.S. foreign aid to Armenia gradually increased and reached 95 million dollars in 1997 making Armenia the second largest recipient of the U.S. foreign aid after Israel calculated on per capita basis (45). Since then the Armenian lobby has managed to keep this high level of U.S. government aid. In January 2003 the U.S. Senate approved an Omnibus Appropriations Bill for fiscal year 2003, which provided 90 million dollars in assistance for Armenia and an additional 5 million dollars "to address ongoing humanitarian needs in Nagorno Karabakh."(46)

However, for Azerbaijan the moral side of Section 907, its distorted logic and wording were much more important than its financial side. The Azerbaijanian officials repeatedly complained that Azerbaijan being a victim of aggression was identified by Section 907 as an aggressor. Section 907 read: "United States assistance under this or any other Act may not be provided to the Government of Azerbaijan until the [U.S.] 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."(47) By Section 907 the Armenian lobby managed not only to restrict significantly the American government aid to Azerbaijan, but also effectively succeeded to create a negative image of Azerbaijan by assuming that it has played an offensive role in the conflict over Mountainous Karabakh. Furthermore, another strategic victory of the Armenian lobby was the way the Section 907 referred to Mountainous Karabakh region as an entity apart from Azerbaijan saying that Azerbaijan was using "offensive uses of force against...Nagorno–Karabakh", i.e. a territory internationally recognized (including by the U.S.) as part of Azerbaijan. The irony of the Section 907 was that "Armenian American lobbyists managed to exclude Azerbaijan from receiving aid intended to support newly independent former Soviet states, despite the fact that the Armenian government was highly authoritarian, that it was an aggressor state, and that it was friendly with Iran and Russia, the two rivals of the United States in the region."(48)

The Azerbaijanian officials, as well as many independent American observers, have repeatedly criticized the U.S.

government, and especially the Congress, for relinquishing its policies in the Caucasus to the hands of the ethnic Armenian interest groups. Azerbaijanian government dismissed the Armenian claims on blockade, arguing that it simply has exercised its legitimate right to defense by ceasing all economic relations and refusing to cooperate in joint projects with the nation with which it considered itself in a state of war. Also, Azerbaijanian officials noted that Azerbaijan is not the only country with which Armenia borders with, and therefore, it cannot actually blockade Armenia. Section 907 was vehemently criticized by a number of U.S. high-ranking officials too. Thus, in words of John J. Maresca, the first U.S. mediator for the Mountainous Karabakh conflict:

"Section 907 assumes that Azerbaijan has played an offensive role in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. The wording of the restrictive clause refers to what it calls Azerbaijan's "offensive uses of force against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh." But clearly Azerbaijan is not conducting offensive uses of force against anyone. On the contrary, it is Azerbaijan, whose territories have been occupied, resulting in the suffering of hundreds of thousands of internal refugees. Azerbaijan has been on the defensive now for at least six years. Section 907 is, therefore, deeply unjustified and unfair and based entirely on faulty assumptions."(49)

Thus, at the beginning there emerged an unbalanced relationship between Azerbaijan and the United States with the former aspiring greater cooperation and the latter being undecided and largely influenced by domestic ethnic interest groups. As Smith writes, "beholden to the Armenian American lobby, U.S. policy in the Caucasus was long rigid and shortsighted."(50)

However, the analysis of the U.S.-Azerbaijan relations suggests that the role of the Armenian lobby has been gradually decreasing as American elite and public awareness about Azerbaijan increased and as the American business and security interests have been increasingly tied to Azerbaijan. The U.S. strategic and business interests in Azerbaijan and in the Caucasus region as a whole significantly increased with the signing in 1994 of a contract between the Azerbaijanian government and the leading American and other Western oil companies on the exploitation of the Azeri oil fields in the Caspian Sea. Also beginning from 1994, after cease-fire was achieved between Azerbaijan and Armenia, there was a concern that the sanctions would impede political and economic cooperation as well as delivery of humanitarian aid. The erosion of Section 907 prohibitions has been more serious since 1997, partly because many did not want the United States to appear to be biased in favor of Armenia while playing a role in the Minsk Group that oversees the peace talks, and, perhaps more importantly, because U.S. economic interests in Azerbaijan have grown with the exploitation of oil resources by U.S. firms (51). Both the Bush (father) and the Clinton administrations have repeatedly criticized the Congress for its sanctions against Azerbaijan, arguing that these sanctions ran contrary to the U.S. strategic interests in the region. Thus, in words of John Herbst, the State Department's deputy coordinator for the former Soviet states under Clinton administration, congressional efforts to reward Armenia and punish Azerbaijan were foiling U.S. foreign policy efforts in the region (52). However, in the absence of urgency, the president administration did not want to antagonize the Armenian American community by exercising its legitimate power and waiving the provision by the executive decision. Instead the White House tried to repeal Section 907 from within the Congress, but with little success because of intense opposition from the Armenian lobby. Smith gives an example of one of these efforts in the following sentence:

"In a press release of September 18, 1998 the Armenian National Committee of America saluted its victory the day

before in the House (by a vote of 231 to 182) over efforts to repeal Section 907, a measure backed not only by the Clinton administration (in the person of Madeleine Albright, who launched a vigorous critique of the Armenian lobby), but also by fourteen oil companies with interests in Caspian Sea (and so in Azerbaijan), an impressive assembly of Jewish organizations (concerned to solidify Israel's relations with Turkey), and a segment of Republican leadership in the House including the head of the Appropriations Committee."(53)

Nevertheless, under the pressure from the White House and efforts of the pro-Azeri disposed Turkish and Jewish lobbying, as well as oil companies' efforts, the Congress gradually allowed for a few exemptions to Section 907. Subsequent legislation has allowed U.S. assistance in key areas, including programs that support democracy, humanitarian assistance, education and confidence-building measures between countries of south Caucasus.

September 11 attacks and subsequent war on terrorism have created new prospects for enhancing U.S.–Azerbaijan relations. In view of Azerbaijan's important geostrategic location at the gates of Europe to the Middle East and to the Central Asia and given Azerbaijan's support of the U.S. in war against terrorism (e.g. by allowing U.S. jets flying to Central Asia to use its airspace and ground facilities), calls for lifting the U.S. ban on aid to Azerbaijan became more vocal both on part of the Azerbaijanian government and the Bush Administration. On December 19 the House of Representatives and on December 20 the Senate by the majority of votes approved the bill authorizing the President to "waive the restriction of assistance for Azerbaijan if the President determines that it is in the national security interest of the United States to do so."(54) President Bush used this authorization on January 25, 2002 by effectively waiving the Section 907.

It is no doubt that new realities after September 11 terrorist attacks have played a significant role in presidential waiver of the Section 907. However, these new realities after 9/11 were more triggers rather than underlying factors for waiving discriminatory sanctions against Azerbaijan. It would be more correct to view the presidential waiver of the Section 907 as a continuation of the previous White House policies. In this sense, it is more probable that after 9/11, given the increased geostrategic importance of Azerbaijan and already strong American business interests in the country, the Bush administration simply used favorable moment to get rid of long-lasting impediment in the U.S.–Azerbaijan relations. By this time Azerbaijan managed to tie the American business interests closely to the country, established good contacts with other interest groups in the U.S. (e.g. the Jewish and Turkish lobbies in the Congress), the public and elite awareness about Azerbaijan and about the situation in the Caucasus region has greatly improved in comparison to early 1990s and, consequently, the American political establishment came to better realize the national interests associated with Azerbaijan. Ethnic Armenian interests became increasingly viewed as a serious impediment for enhancing the U.S. strategic interests in Azerbaijan and in the Caucasus region. "We have long wanted to do things in U.S.–Azerbaijan relations that Section 907 effectively prevents... – the U.S. ambassador to Azerbaijan Ross Wilson commented after the waiver of the U.S. ban on aid to Azerbaijan – The cost to the United States of our inability to do some of those things is now somewhat higher than the cost was before, because of September 11."(55)

Another significant change in U.S. policy towards Azerbaijan after September 11 terrorist attacks was that the official Washington became more vocal in demonstratively supporting Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. It has to be noted that the United States have officially recognized Azerbaijan's territorial integrity when establishing bilateral diplomatic

relations, when voting for the four UN Security Council resolutions adopted with regard to the Karabakh conflict back in 1993, which reaffirmed territorial integrity of Azerbaijan (56), and also in a number of bilateral and multilateral official meetings. However, the official Washington was always somewhat hesitant, especially before September 11 attacks, in the formulation of its support for Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. The most interesting example of this is the abstention of the United States from voting on Azerbaijan's territorial integrity on December 15, 1999 at the UN's 54th General Assembly session. During discussions of the UN resolution on cooperation between UN and OSCE at the 54th General Assembly session, a provision on Mountainous Karabakh was introduced to the section on conflicts, which, in its turn, brought about the issue of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. The provision on recognition of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan was approved by the majority of votes. However, many Western countries, including the United States, abstained from voting implying that the question of territorial integrity of Azerbaijan was still a matter of consideration for them (57). Due to the increased importance given to Azerbaijan after September 11 attacks, the official Washington have made a number of statements supporting Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. The official position that the "United States supports territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and holds that the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh is a matter of negotiation between the parties in the Minsk Process"(58) was increasingly voiced by a number of high-ranking officials in a more explicit and unambiguous terms than before. The U.S. Ambassador to Ross Wilson was quoted to saying on January 14, 2002 that the "goal of the U.S. government is to restore territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and stability in the region"(59). On June 14, 2002 a State Department spokesman said that Washington "does not recognize the so-called government... of Nagorno-Karabakh...[The United States] supports the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan... and we believe that a political resolution to the conflict there must be achieved."(60)

Thus, after September 11 attacks the U.S. policy towards Azerbaijan became more guided by 'national interests' and less so by ethnic groups' interests. However, Armenian interest groups continue to enjoy a significant influence in U.S. policymaking decisions with regard to Armenia and Azerbaijan. It is important to note that mainly because of Armenian lobbying the Section 907 was not repealed but simply was suspended by the presidential decision. In January 2003 President Bush extended the waiver of Section 907 for another year. The text of the presidential determination on Section 907 signed on January 17, 2003 certified that the waiver extension was "necessary to support United States efforts to counter international terrorism", "necessary to support the operational readiness of United States Armed Forces or coalition partners to counter international terrorism", and "is important to Azerbaijan's border security (61)

In sum, the U.S.-Azerbaijan relations have gone through a process of constant improvement, which had a gradual character. Increasing economic and political ties between the two countries produced interests, which ran contrary to the Armenian ethnic interests. Thus, the role of ethnic Armenian interest groups' influence on U.S. policy formulation towards Azerbaijan has gradually decreased, in comparison to early 1990s, as the U.S.' broader national, namely business and security, interests became increasingly tied to Azerbaijan and as the importance of these interests came to be realized by the U.S. policymakers.

Conclusion

This article was an attempt to show that although ethnic interest groups can exert a considerable influence on

foreign policy, especially in such democratic and society-dominated domestic political systems as that of the United States, the ethnic interests cannot surpass the national interests, which are obvious and the importance of which are realized by the policymakers. Even in such "weak" society-dominated states as the U.S., which is highly responsive to the societal pressures, superior organization and rich financial and information resources are not sufficient to secure the success of ethnic demands. Since ethnic groups operate in a multicultural environment with a variety of interests and given the fact that their successful activity depends largely on their ability to generate support and to diminish the opposition from other groups, the ethnic interest groups always try to appeal to the broader public and national interests. Likewise, since the ultimate measure of success of ethnic lobbying rests in influencing the policymaker's decisions, the ethnic demands and policies must be compatible with the realities that these policymakers operate, the realities in which there are contending public and elite preferences, which together synthesize to a broader policy consensus called the 'national interest'. Thus, as Watanabe directly points, "[p]ositions supported by ethnic groups seldom flourish in the absence of strong and reliable indications that their views represent reasonable interpretations of the national interest"(62).

In case of the U.S.–Azerbaijan relations the emergence of new interests, primarily business and security-related in nature, gradually tied the American 'national interests' to Azerbaijan and, consequently, diminished the role and importance of the Armenian lobby in influencing the U.S. policy formulation towards Azerbaijan. That is not to say that the role of Armenian lobby will gradually disappear as the U.S.–Azerbaijan relations improve further. And certainly, it was not only Azerbaijan who improved its relations with the U.S., the U.S.–Armenian relations during this period enhanced as well. The point is that with the improvement of the U.S.–Azerbaijan relations the Armenian interest groups will not be able to influence the U.S. policy formulation towards Azerbaijan so easily as they did in early 1990s. The Armenian interest groups still can, and probably will, have a significant impact on U.S. policies towards Azerbaijan, but since the issues associated with the U.S. national interests in its relations with Azerbaijan have increased, the opportunities for Armenian lobby influence have correspondingly narrowed.

1. Tony Smith, *Foreign Attachments: The Power of Ethnic Groups in the Making of American Foreign Policy*, (Harvard University Press, 2000), 101
2. *ibid.*, 86
3. Paul Y. Watanabe, *Ethnic Groups, Congress, and American Foreign Policy: The Politics of the Turkish Arms Embargo*, (Greenwood Press, 1984), 26–27
4. Smith, 88
5. *ibid.*
6. *ibid.*
7. Harald Muller and Thomas Risse-Kappen, "From the Outside in and from the Inside Out: International Relations, Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy", in *The Limits of State Autonomy: Societal Groups and Foreign Policy Formulation*, David Skidmore and Valerie Hudson, eds., (Westview Press, 1993), 34
8. *ibid.*, 41
9. David Skidmore and Valerie M. Hudson, "Establishing the Limits of State Autonomy: Contending Approaches to the Study of State–Society Relations and Foreign Policy–Making", in *The Limits of State Autonomy: Societal Groups*

- and Foreign Policy Formulation*, David Skidmore and Valerie M. Hudson, eds., (Westview Press, 1993), 1
10. Philip P. Everts, "Introduction" in *Public Opinion and the International Use of Force* (2001), ed. Philip P. Everts and Pierangelo Isernia, 8
11. Thomas Risse-Kappen, "Public Opinion, Domestic Structure, and Foreign Policy in Liberal Democracies", *World Politics* 43, (1991), 482
12. Smith, 94
13. Watanabe, 41
14. *ibid.*, 50
15. *ibid.*, 48
16. Smith, 94
17. In this regard, Smith provides a good example on how Jewish New Yorkers, which constitute 9% of the population of New York, gain significant influence and also notes that they tend to vote at twice the levels of the state average. See, Smith, 99
18. *ibid.*, 101
19. Watanabe, 68
20. Smith, 109
21. Watanabe, 71
22. Smith, 99
23. Watanabe, 122
24. Website of the Bangladesh Congressional Caucus, <http://bangladeshunited.alochona.org/bangladeshunited/Caucus.html>
25. Washington State Democrat James McDermott was the most recent to join the Armenian Caucus in late January 2003. According to the PanArmenian news agency, he came to such decision "having viewed a special ANCA screening of "Ararat" film of Atom Egoyan at last year-end, narrating about the Armenian Genocide in Ottoman Turkey".
- "Representative James McDermott Joins Congressional Armenian Caucus", PanArmenian news agency, January 25, 2003.
26. "Armenian Caucus Membership Grows to 125", Website of the Armenian Assembly of America, <http://www.aaainc.org/press/11-01-02.htm>;
27. "Congressional Hellenic Caucus", Website of the American Hellenic Council, <http://www.americanhellenic.org/network/modules.php?name=Caucus>
28. Watanabe, 72
29. *ibid.*, 62
30. *ibid.*
31. Alan Cooperman, "Armenians in U.S. Not on INS List", *The Washington Post*, December 18, 2002, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A4407-2002Dec17.html>
32. Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) Press Release, December 16, 2002, <http://www.anca.org/anca/pressrel.asp?prID=274>
33. Washington File, EUR315 12/18/2002, "INS Revised Notice: Armenia Not Included in Registration System", <http://www.usemb.ee/wf/eur315.htm>
34. ANCA Press Release, December 20, 2002, <http://www.ancfresno.org/html/press/pr122002.html>

35. Elizabeth S. Rogers, "The Conflicting Roles of American Ethnic and Business Interests in the U.S. Economic Sanctions Policy: The Case of South Africa", in *The Limits of State Autonomy: Societal Groups and Foreign Policy Formulation*, David Skidmore and Valerie M. Hudson, eds., 191
36. Watanabe, 59
37. The word "alleged" is used here, because the author believes that it is historians', and not ethnic groups' or politicians' job to determine the fact of presence or absence of genocide in the Ottoman Empire during World War I.
38. "Help "Stamp" Out Genocide Denial", ANCA Action Alerts, <http://www.anca.org/anca/actionalerts.asp?aalD=12>
39. "Protest Bush Administration Regulation Requiring Registration of Armenian citizens" ANCA Action Alerts, <http://www.anca.org/anca/actionalerts.asp?aalD=60>
40. Manuel Mindreau, *U.S. Foreign Policy Toward the Conflict Between Armenia and Azerbaijan*, p. 9; <http://www.docentes.up.edu.pe/Mmindreau/docs/U.S.%20Foreign%20Policy%20-%20Armenia%20and%20Azerbaijan.PDF>
41. John J. Maresca "U.S. Ban on Aid to Azerbaijan (Section 907), *Azerbaijan International*, Winter 1998 (6.4), http://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/64_folder/64_articles/64_maresca.html
42. According to the last pre-conflict population census held in 1989, 75% of the then Mountainous Karabakh Autonomous Region was Armenian and approximately 25% – was Azeri. As a result of Azerbaijan's de-facto military defeat and the policies of ethnic cleansing, currently no Azeris live in Mountainous Karabakh and surrounding regions of Azerbaijan.
- Albeit in most of the international documents in English Mountainous (sometimes also referred as Upland) Karabakh is referred to as Nagorno-Karabakh, which is the Russian version of the name for the region, in this paper the conformity of such reference is sacrificed to a more correct and appropriate English translation – Mountainous Karabakh.
43. Smith, 69. As a minor detail, it has to be noted that the Republic of Armenia established in 1991 was not the first Armenian republic per se. All South Caucasus countries, Armenia included, had a brief period of independence in 1918–1920 (Georgia – 1921) having established their own republics.
44. Maresca, *op. cit.* http://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/64_folder/64_articles/64_maresca.html
45. see: Emil Danielyan, "Armenia's Foreign Policy: Balancing Between East and West", *Prism*, Volume 4, Issue 2, January 23, 1998, http://russia.jamestown.org/pubs/view/pri_004_002_003.htm; Web Site of the Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, <http://www.house.gov/pelosi/armenia.htm>
46. "U.S. Senate Approved Aid to Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh", PanArmenian news agency, January 27, 2003
47. Freedom Support Act, Section 907 (102nd Congress, 2nd Session, Public Law 102-511)
48. Smith, 70 referring to Carrol J. Doherty, "Armenia's Special Relationship with U.S. is Showing," *Congressional Quarterly*, 5/31/97 and *Washington Post*, 8/1/96
49. Maresca, *op. cit.* http://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/64_folder/64_articles/64_maresca.html
50. Smith, 78
51. Curt Tarnoff, "The Former Soviet Union and U.S. Foreign Assistance", *Congressional Research Service (CRS) Issue Brief for Congress*, Order Code IB95077, January 7, 2002, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/crs/IB95077.pdf>
52. K.P. Foley, "Congress Complicating Caucasus Conflicts, Official Suggests", *RFE/RL, Weekday Magazine*, <http://www.rferl.org/nca/features/1996/07/F.RU.96073116315555.html>
53. Smith, 14
54. Tim Waal, "Bush Administration Uses Economic Levers To Encourage Anti-Terrorism Cooperation" *Eurasia*

Insight 10/22/2001, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav102201c.shtml>

55. *ibid.*

56. *These UN SC Resolutions are Resolution 822 (30 April 1993), Resolution 853 (29 July 1993), Resolution 874 (14 October 1993), Resolution 884 (12 November 1993). For full text of these resolutions see: <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/or/13508.htm>*

57. *For details on the territorial integrity question that aroused at the 54th General Assembly session see, Elkhan Shahinoglu "West Uncertain Over Azerbaijan's Territorial Integrity", http://www.geocities.com/fanthom_2000/archives/Archive9.html*

58. *U.S. Department of State Web site, "The United States and Nagorno-Karabakh", <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/fs/13502.htm>*

59. *PRIMA News Agency[406-2002-01-15-Azer] "United States stands for restoration of territorial integrity of Azerbaijan", <http://www.prima-news.ru/eng/news/news/2002/1/15/17551.html>*

60. *"U.S. Aid to Disputed Region", The Washington Post, June 19, 2002, cited in the web site of the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.nkr.am/eng/news/digest.html> (last accessed on January 2, 2003).*

61. *Text of the Presidential Determination on Section 907, The White House Office of the Press Secretary January 17, 2003, Presidential Determination No. 2003-12*

Presidential Determination No. 2003-12

62. *Watanabe, 60*

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