Armenians have lived in captivity for six centuries, with the next-door neighbor always an enemy. Similarly, on two historic occasions, when independence arrived in the 20th century, Armenia remained in a state of siege, always surrounded by enemies. That mindset has contributed to the development of a defensive mentality, always on the lookout for any potential existential threats.

But little heed has been paid to the enemy within because more often than not, the internal threat has been as destructive as the ones outside the borders, rendering Armenia helpless. Before delving into history, one can see many such examples in today's Armenia when Armenians have caused more damage than a foreign enemy.

The country has been independent for a quarter century. We may boast as much as we wish that the Armenian people have struggled for that independence. But the truth is that independence was thrust on Armenia as a consequence of the collapse of the Soviet Empire. Understandably, people in Armenia were not ready to embrace independence and manage a free country.

When it was part of the Soviet Union, Armenia's economy was based on a command system and was integrated into a huge economy, where raw materials were shipped from one end of the empire to the other, as did manufactured products. Therefore, being severed from a large economic unit did not allow Armenia to create or sustain its own manufacturing base. A case in point was the rubber factory and the complex of the chemical plants associated with it.

Therefore, upon independence, the new planners adopted a simplistic economic formula, where one size fits all, and they privatized the manufacturing base of the country without any further stipulations to preserve and operate medium- or small-sized manufacturing plants. In that scheme, being in the right place at the right time meant that overnight, factory managers became owners. Instead of running those operations well, they began dismantling the factories and selling them as scrap metal in Iran and Turkey and pocketing the revenue, after which they abandoned the country. Today's economic woes are the direct outcome of that mentality. If Armenia is struggling with a poor economy, we should not look beyond the borders to find the culprits.
Once a country's economy begins on this type of wrong footing, it is extremely difficult to course correct unless there is a real intention or appetite to remedy the situation. Sadly, this has not happened yet.

It is a shame that in 25 years, the country has not been able to develop a middle class to sustain the economy and to bring some stability in society. Small or medium business owners are the victims of the tax collector, whose duty is to tax businesses exorbitantly, extort bribes, and share them with their superiors on the upper levels of the government.

It is rumored that in a poor country like Armenia, the net worth of one of the sons of former President Robert Kocharian is $10 billion. The figure may not be accurate but the system is there for the government people to exploit and rob the country, and enjoy obnoxiously opulent lifestyles despite 60 percent of the population living below the poverty line.

Unemployment is rampant in Armenia. But why don't we witness any revolt by the ranks of the unemployed? Because they leave. The unemployed people move to Russia, Kazakhstan or a European country and thus the crisis of unemployment is solved magically, at the expense of the depopulation of the country. And a member of parliament from the ruling Republican Party justifies this outcome by saying, Of course, people will gravitate to wherever there are employment opportunities. Rather than trying to correct the situation and stopping the hemorrhage, the ruling party comfortably watches the country's population dwindle.

The diaspora minister calls for foreign investments, especially from overseas Armenians, while so many investors have been robbed, beaten or killed. That prospect is not much of an incentive for any potential investors.

A scandal also broke during the brief war with Azerbaijan, where Armenian soldiers faced the enemy with inferior weapons without bullets and tanks without fuel; the procurements had been diverted to fatten the pockets of the army brass. As a result, the minister of defense was sacked.

The death of every Armenian soldier killed by Azeri fire is met with a sense of fury and revenge. But what is there to say when Armenian soldiers are beaten or killed by their superiors? Or else, their families are extorted for bribes to ensure their safety in the barracks? What motivation would be there for a young soldier to defend a country which promises only misery for him?

In a country where the earthquake zone still needs investments to save 3,000 families from spending another bitterly cold winter in domiks, the oligarchs enjoy a lavish lifestyle without suffering from pangs of a guilty conscience.

History is replete with cases where Armenians have caused more damage to the country and their countrymen than their enemies.

The first and last Armenian Empire of Tigranes II collapsed because his son colluded with the invading Roman army. In 1375 the Cilician Armenian Kingdom was overrun by Mamluks and King Leo Lousignan V was taken prisoner by Egypt because his kingdom was weakened by internecine struggles of the princes and principalities.
Armenians lost the city of Kars in 1918 despite having received huge amounts of ammunition, food supplies and material and despite General Andraniks pleas, because Eastern Armenians, caught in a sense of regional patriotism, refused to fight for a piece of land in Western Armenia.

All is not lost yet in Armenia; there is still a saving grace. Avetis Aharonian pondering in front of the statue of Moses in Italy, said that Moses saved the Jewish people in spite of the will of the people. It may sound ironic, but that is one of the riddles of history.

While the ruling party is entrenched in Armenia and plans to control it for the foreseeable future, many global thinkers have been helping Armenia to survive and thrive: Eduardo Eurnekian has built in Yerevan one of the most modern airports in the region, with the proviso that he should run the airport. Ruben Vardanyan has built an international, global magnet school in Dilijan, at a cost of $115 million, and the school is run without government interference. The Cafesjian Family Foundation has converted the Cascade in Yerevan into a world-class art showcase with a sculpture garden and museums without government participation. Sam Simonians Tumo Center is a cyber paradise for future computer designers and it is run without the participation or control of the government.

By contrast, government-run enterprises are hotbeds of bribery and corruption, without any regard for the outcome, if the public suffers at the end.

Armenians demonstrating global thinking have shown that there is a way to save Armenia from Armenians and shine a path of hope for the future.