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Nagorno-Karabakh, The Death of a Rebel Republic

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The fatal mistake was that Armenian politicians did not follow the changes in international policies. They relied on Russia to moderate the conflict and stop it from escalating. But Russia under Putin was different from Russia under Yeltsin. Armenians especially relied on Russia to stop direct Turkish intervention in the South Caucasus. This would guarantee the balance-of-power between Armenia and Azerbaijan, they thought. They were mistaken.

On mid-day of September 19, Azerbaijani military launched a massive and unprovoked attack on all directions of the frontline with Armenian forces in the rebel, unrecognized republic of Nagorno-Karabakh. Turkish and Israeli-made drones attacked Karabakhi air-defences, Israel-made LORA ballistic missiles were fired against artillery positions, and afterwards Azeri forces advanced to cut-off the roads deep inside Karabakh, isolating towns and villages. After one day of intense fighting, the Karabakhi leadership agreed to an unconditional surrender, an agreement mediated by the Russian “peacekeepers” deployed in the region.

This massive Azeri military aggression was long in the making. Since December 12, 2022, Azerbaijan imposed a siege on Nagorno-Karabakh, by blocking the only road linking the region to Armenia and therefore the outside world. This blockade was at first orchestrated by “environmental activists”, who were in fact government agents. As the Russian “peacekeeping” forces did not intervene according to their mandate which included ensuring the safe functioning of the Lachin corridor, Azerbaijan tightened the siege until completely cutting off the region from the outside world. As a result, the region and its 120 thousand inhabitants were living in conditions of near starvation, lacking medicine for the sick and the wounded, and fuel for heating, ambulances, or military vehicles.

Then, Azerbaijan once again started importing arms from Israel, usually a prelude for major military escalation. According to one report, since March Israel delivered 11 Ilyushin-76 cargo full of weapons to Azerbaijan, five of them in the first half of September, each flight has a capacity of 40-tons. In early September, Azerbaijan also started massing troops around Karabakh and on the border with Armenia since.

The war was first announced, and then executed according to the script. Ilham Aliyev always wanted war, and not a negotiated peace.

The Coming of Cold, Long Winter

The nights are cold in the mountains of Karabakh, the Armenian Artsakh. When our numerous enemies came to the gate, our friends went missing.

It is difficult to understand Azerbaijani aggressivity without taking into consideration Turkey and massive Turkish military support. Turkish President Erdogan did not hide his support to the

Azerbaijani aggression, just like in 2020 Turkish soldiers took direct part in the war back then. If one considers that for thirty years Turkey continues to impose a blockade on Armenia, one gets the impression that Turkey did not forgive the Armenians for surviving a genocide it perpetrated during the First World War.

The Russian “peacekeepers” looked the other way when the Azeri soldier attacked. The Russian leadership even went as far as ordering its propagandists to blame Armenia – instead of Azerbaijan – for the last hostilities initiated by Azerbaijan. Friends like this, there is no need for enemies.

The European Union – that structure that does not know its head from its feet – enabled Azerbaijan by increasing its imports of oil and gas last year. In July 2022, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen went to Baku to increase gas imports, as the EU looked for alternatives to Russian gas. The EU pumped even more petrodollars to Azerbaijan, and while discussing “the full range of our relation and cooperation” von der Leyen did not raise a single precondition to stop the potential ethnic cleansing of Karabakh Armenians. To punish Putin for the invasion of Ukraine, the EU financed Azerbaijan and the extermination of Nagorno-Karabakh was only a collateral damage of realpolitik.

After long hesitation, the American President Joe Biden qualified the 1915 Ottoman atrocities against the Armenians as “genocide”. This happened in 2022, so it is still vivid in all memories. While he had ample time and opportunity to warn Ilham Aliyev with sanctions and stop the ethnic cleansing of Karabakh. He did not.

Genocide? Yes. But “never again” does not extend to the Armenians, it seems.

International Politics Today and Everyday

Armenians have many qualities, but statesmanship is not amongst them. They mistook making speeches with patriotic slogans with politics. For decades Armenian activism was seeking “justice”, as if justice is possible after genocide. Armenians were seeking recognition and received words instead of playing politics according to its rules and developing real influence.

The fatal mistake was that Armenian politicians did not follow the changes in international policies. They relied on Russia to moderate the conflict and stop it from escalating. But Russia under Putin was different from Russia under Yeltsin. Armenians especially relied on Russia to stop direct Turkish intervention in the South Caucasus. This would guarantee the balance-of-power between Armenia and Azerbaijan, they thought. They were mistaken. When Azerbaijan launched its massive attack in 2020, Turkish military intervened, while Russia stayed idle for 44-days, long enough for Karabakh forces and the Armenian army to be decimated.

Yet what is the most painful is to see the on-going incapacity of the Armenian political elite. Since the 2018 “Velvet Revolution”, Armenian politics is polarized between the supporters of the new “revolutionary” rulers, and the partisans of the old order. Back in 2020, this infighting already made the political class unable to see the coming storm. After the war and the defeat, there was a new opportunity to call for national unity, to agree to a minimum platform to work together to save Nagorno-Karabakh, or what was left of it.

Not every politician is a statesman. The political class in Yerevan – power and opposition – seem too busy with their personalized infighting to notice that they are losing a homeland.

Small states, small nations only mistake once, a single defeated could be fatal. When one looks at the Armenian history, one would think that there is no place for a single error, that a single defeat could be fatal.

When Azerbaijan attacked the wounded eagle of Artsakh the 19th of September, even Armenia was not there to help.

Now, the entire population of Karabakh are hostages in the hands of the Azerbaijani military, while Azerbaijan's ruler Ilham Aliyev is announcing their forced "integration". To this thought, images of concentration camps come to my mind.

Rest in peace mountain warrior, your courage and stubborn patriotism was not enough to defend your existence.

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