A YEAR FROM NOW

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By Dikran Abrahamian MD, Ontario, 3 January 2022

Armenians feel betrayed by Russia following the recent Artsakh war. Continuous Azeri incursions on sovereign RoA lands and Russia's aloof stance add fuel on already negatively charged emotions. It is only natural for many regular citizens, politicians, activists and intellectuals to think of alternatives to secure the safety and territorial integrity of the country. Pundits have proposed some form of political affiliation or an alliance with the west. It merits to look at the feasibility of these proposals considering the unfolding global rivalries, developments in US, energy crunch in Europe and Israel's existential apprehensions.

On the 10th of the month Presidents Biden and Putin will meet face to face in Geneva to hammer out a deal. Putin insists that Ukraine is a red line that NATO should not cross. He threatens to unleash menacing counter measures if the west tries to arm Ukraine or welcome it into NATO. Biden and Europe on the other hand threaten sanctions with "massive consequences" surpassing what already were previously applied. Eight thousand kms east of Kiev another conflict is brewing surrounding the status of Taiwan. Beijing insists that the island country is part of its mainland, whereas US, while recognizing the principle of one China, has for decades *de facto* supported Taipei in its resistance against Beijing. These tensions already have had an impact. Previous agreements of disarmament may not hold water anymore. Despite claims by Russia, China, Britain, U.S. and France that no one can win a nuclear war, new types of hypersonic weapons of mass destruction are in the making.

While there is serious doubt that these confrontations might not get resolved anytime soon, an ominous development is afoot in US. The mid-term elections are right at the corner. Electoral indicators point to both houses of the congress to change hands; the Republican party led by Trump is making significant gains to lay grounds for 2024 presidential election. The implications nationally for US and the globe might be grave. Irrespective of who gets elected as president, a house of representatives and a senate controlled by a vengeful Trumpian Republican Party will not accept anything less than installing a president of its own liking. Civil strife might follow, and US might be consumed by putting its house in order, and relegate global humanitarian concerns, human rights, regional conflicts to a secondary level. Isolationism, as noted during Trump's administration with the slogan "America first" may be the order of the day.

East of the Atlantic Europe experiences gas energy shortage. To assert himself Putin might threaten to confound matters further by manipulating supplies as he has done in the past. Europe, partly but heavily dependent on Russian gas, might face stark choices if it follows US insistence on not implementing Nord Stream 2 project designed to provide much needed energy source from Russia to Europe.

Back home, while RoA is still a hostage to international machinations, for the most part "normalization" of Turkey-Armenia relations dominates the internal discussions. Extensive elaboration on it is beyond the scope of this short essay. Gleaned from Secretary Blinken's

encounter with his Turkish counterpart on this subject, suffice to say that US is as keen as Ankara and Moscow in promoting this project. It is more than likely that this fourth attempt to "normalize" relations between Turkey and RoA will meet fierce resistance from most Armenians globally, simply because "unconditional" is not in Ankara's lexicon. Even prior to starting the talks, Ankara made it known that Armenian demands related to the Genocide should be halted. What else is to come? Recognition of present borders as final? Artsakh's status favourable to Azerbaijan? A "corridor" through Syunik?

The Russian military force is here to stay in Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabagh) for at least five years. Furthermore, the defence pact with Russia is in force through 2044 with a military base right in RoA. Within the above outlined international context and the presence of Russian forces, a few questions beg answers.

1. Surely, the pundits have analyzed Putin's proposal of a treaty with NATO members and the demand that the west, specially NATO not seek any further expansion in whatever is left of *former Soviet space*. Of course, that proposal is a non-stater for the west, but it reflects Russia's ruling oligarchic mindset. RoA falls in that sphere. Do the pundits really think that the west will stick its neck for a coin-sized country which has nothing to offer, except a north-south route connecting the Indian subcontinent to Europe?
2. UK is a major partner in shaping western global policies. It also is a major economic and political partner of Azerbaijan. Why would UK be interested in changing course?
3. France is still reeling from the aftermath of revelations that it covered up its role prior to and during the Rwanda Genocide by turning a blind eye. The French are not eager at all to put boots on ground in yet another conflict zone. Proclamations, visits and expressions of solidarity aside, none of the French presidential candidates would venture more than extending humanitarian and reconstruction aid to RoA. Would they?
4. Germany is partially at the mercy of Russia, similarly Europe by extension, related to gas supplies. It must factor in this crucial element in any foreign policy it adopts. Why would Germany risk its own interest for a country with which it barely has any significant relations and interests?
5. Israel's existential preoccupations and policies have always been factored in global concerns of the west as a block. Israel over years has cultivated an almost impregnable foothold in Azerbaijan which may serve it as a launching pad against Iran. Why would Israel forfeit that coveted position for the benefit of a neighbour which can offer nothing strategic unless it confronts Russia, which has been protective of Israel's existential priorities?

It is the author's belief that neither Europe nor US will have the inclination to forge a political alliance with RoA unless direct confrontation with Russia is factored in. Such a move risks precipitating another war in southern Caucasus with possible further loss of Armenian lands. Despite the appeal of such an alliance, time and energy will be better served if Armenians re-calibrate their capabilities,

explore constructive solutions to truly reform and strengthen the national institutions, expand multi-vector diplomacy, mobilize the citizenry for self-defence and arouse the dormant vast potential of Diaspora communities. With such motivation and readiness to confront new challenges ahead and possible reconfiguration of geopolitical forces in the region, the question of alliances might be revisited. A year from now the landscape can be different; new opportunities might present to break the vicious cycle of constant anxiety about safety and security.

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Keghart.org: ***This article was penned before the events in Kazakhstan***

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