ARE THE KURDS OUR ALLIES?

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The speeches were 30-minute long, though they did not limit the time. They were expansive and were published in "Kurdistan Times". In them I stressed that the Armenian and Kurdish causes are interrelated and that we are the legitimate owners of our 6 vilayets, and that our relationship was delineated by the Sevres Treaty, therefore our relationship is to be governed by mutual recognition of each other's rights and mutual respect. That we have lived together for millennia, and we have no plans to abandon our Western Armenia. That we are ready to develop neighborly, friendly relations with Kurds and Kurdistan.

The speeches were televised, even by the Belgian TV, and were followed by a TV interview and by their Turkish-language "Ozgur Politika".

KEGHART: The core of your thesis is that eventually Kurds will control/rule Western Armenia. By aligning with them now Armenians can gain back some of the Western Armenian lands Turkey will have to cede to the Kurds. How can Armenians become credible allies to the Kurds?

HA: In surveying the geopolitical realities of the last two decades, it becomes obvious that some 30 million Kurds, who are sitting on two precious liquids, oil and water (Tigris and Euphrates), will sooner or later get full control of their land. This might be in form of independence or interdependence. Federation or confederation with present day Turkey are options. This land is designated to span entire Anatolia including our Western Armenia (See their maps). Which means loss of our fatherland for millennia. As to your question of "How can Armenians be credible to the Kurds" is the subject of a great mental and psychological transformation in our thinking. We do not have to kow-tow to the Kurds. The need of cooperation is delineated by mutual interests. They have great respect and admiration for Armenians, especially after military victories in Nagorno-Karabakh. They know that their way to prosperity and societal development passes through Armenians. It is our duty to demand their loyalty. In fact, it is an emotional issue to talk about such sentimental values in the political arena. In politics there are only interests, not feelings. We have to master this concept.

KEGHART: Are there obstacles to Armenians in the Diaspora which would prevent them from building political/social/cultural bridges with the Kurds?

HA: Yes, there are! For one, they look down upon the Kurds and belittle them. Two, they have bitter memories from the Genocide era inherited from the survivors. Third, Western Armenia is not of importance to them except in rhetoric. For many the concept has lost its importance because it demands sacrifices. People are not ready to give-up their physical and material comforts to go and

toil the land of their ancestors. Visiting graves and khatchkars as tourists gives them solace and absolves them of guilt. People are comfortable where they are, and are not eager to roll-up their sleeves and do the job. Things will be different when one looks at the community's situation in Syria now.

KEGHART: With Armenia back tightly in the Russian grip, do you think Armenia has the freedom to make foreign affairs decisions such as approaching the Kurds in Kurdistan or their politicians in Brussels?

HA: Armenia is indeed in Russia's lap. It is not capable of conducting a sound foreign policy which serves the interest of Eastern Armenia. They are corrupt to the core, and a major cause for emigration of the regular people, and the highly educated cadre of Armenian society. This gang of oligarchs have no interests in preserving Armenia, and fighting for its rights. See what they did with the signed protocol with Turkey. It is a joke! We are under a false impression that Armenia cares about the Diasporan Armenians. Armenia couldn't care less about us, let alone adopt the struggle for Western Armenia. Even Echmiadzin has been infested with corruption. Spiritual and emotional attachment between us has eroded severely; we are left to ourselves.

No, I don't think the Armenian government has the Kurds in mind, except their own Kurdish inhabitants. Having said that, I must also say that there is a strong people-to-people interaction, especially with Dersim (Tunceli) and Diyarbakir (Dikranagerd).

KEGHART: You've mentioned that Armenians, going back to the 1840s, have cooperated with the Kurds against the Ottomans. You mentioned Malkhas and Garo Sasouni who attempted to establish cooperative relations with the Kurds...and ARF's signing of the Khoyboon Treaty with the Kurds. These must be news to many Armenians. Can you please elaborate?

HA: In 1927 a treaty of collaboration and military cooperation was signed between the warring factions of the Kurdish forces and ARF. The battleground was the Araratian Planes. The ARF also took the initiative to establish avenues of collaboration with the Kurds against Turkish central government. Malkhas was delegated to establish contact with a warring tribe, who demanded from the ARF to provide him with an ammunition factory.

Garo Sasouni, a prominent Tashnag, was the god of the Kurds, because of his interest in them and their cause. His book "Kurdish Nationalistic Movements and Armeno-Kurdish relations" is a classic study of the subject, and is translated into Turkish by Kurds. True, Armenians know little about these issues.

KEGHART: In recent years the Kurds have made friendly gestures...they've recognized the Genocide in their Manifesto, asked forgiveness from the Armenians, returned Sourp Giragos in Diyarbekir. Do you expect further friendly gestures or confidence-building measures from them?

HA: Yes, I do. Their mindset and gestures are just the beginning of a large scale return of real state

ownership to whomever can produce a written document of ownership. At least that is the situation in Diyarbakir. To have us there serves not only our, but also their interests. They want us there desperately!

KEGHART: The approach you advise Armenians should adopt is two-pronged. Become allies of the Kurds and revive the Sevres Treaty, President Woodrow Wilson's map. Should we combine our efforts re Sevres with the Kurds?

HA: We have to stick to the provisions of articles 88-93 which deals with Armenia, and delineates our borders with Turkey. Articles 62-64 does the same for the Kurds. President Wilson drew a map accepted by the League of Nations. Why invent the wheel? We can start a consensual political love fest with the Kurds anytime, in fact it has already started in Dersim with song and dance festivals staged by ordinary folk from Armenia.

KEGHART: You've written that it's imperative to assemble an entity consisting of world-famous Armenian and non-Armenian lawyers and experts in international law, to revive the Sevres Treaty and President Wilson's map. The Europe-based National Congress of Western Armenians (NCWA) is doing just that. As well, senior members of the organization have made frequent trips to Western Armenia to meet "lost" or "hidden" Armenians and sympathetic Turks and Kurds. Are you aware of the NCWA. If yes, do you see a role for them in the strategy you're advocating?

AH: No, I am not aware of this organization. Bless be their efforts, if they have the same goal as Sevres. Of course I'll work with them! We have to learn from our shameful fiasco of Aharonian-Nubar Pasha debacle in presenting Armenia before the League of Nations in 1920. Hopefully we have matured some.

KEGHART: Since Kurdish society is disunited, what should be the Armenian approach to various groups so no one is antagonized?

AH: Exploitation through neutrality!

KEGHART: When you travel in Armenia and in Artsakh, you notice how depopulated they are, meanwhile emigration from Armenia continues unabated. If Armenians are given lands west of Ararat, how would we populate them? Even if some Armenians settle there, wouldn't they be a minority governing a non-Armenian majority?

AH: This is a common question and a false argument constantly raised by post Genocidal Armenians who have finally settled in different parts of the world and are largely comfortable in their cantons, and have created their mini-dukedoms, as if it were their fatherland. In the immediate aftermath of the Genocide, Diasporan Armenians had no identity conflicts, they were Armenians in addition to being Marashtsi, Vanetsi, Ayntabtsi or Kharpertsi. Despite all the security, prosperity, and freedom which we enjoyed in certain countries, the fear of imminent danger and fear lingered in our souls, in less politically stable countries. We developed double-pronged personalities: one Armenian, and

one that of the host country; a rather pathological reality. It is obvious, and doesn't need explanations. We lost our national compass. The "White Massacre" set in and took its toll, which continues, as we speak. A hundred-year alienation from ones roots, alienates affection to the land, and that's what has happened to us. Our commitment to our land is casual. We love our land by proxy. Don't rock the boat is the order of the day.

The sorry situation in Armenia adds insult to injury. Emigration of Armenians from Eastern Armenia is not because of weak patriotism, but because of the actions and the inactions of the corrupt government which is sucking people's blood; that of the poor and the average citizen.

Given the right circumstances Armenians will never leave their land for which their fathers have fought and died. Never underestimate people's power. It is the leadership which is rotten. The vacuum created by the absence of decent leadership in Armenia and the Diaspora, has been filled by equally corrupt institutional church, which has nothing to offer the nation except illusive afterlife. It has not a thing to do with Christianity. Today's demographic and sectarian realities indicate that religion does not dictate your race. Contrary to church's opposing view, the latter wins. For us it is the Hamshins, and the close to a million Islamized Armenians who form the nucleus. What is lacking is absence of leadership both here and Armenia. Armenia with both its sections is not on our radar screen. One wouldn't reject ownership of his property because it stands empty. Let's be realistic, there is no detailed road map to get us there, but if we don't claim our rights, Western Armenia will be lost forever. We have yet to unleash the potential genius and the tremendous resources of the Armenian Empire of Diaspora (AED). We should stop negotiating against ourselves!

KEGHART: How can Armenians prevent the inevitable Turkish attempts to sabotage an Armeno-Kurdish friendship?

AH: This is a tactical problem. Circumstances and realities on the ground would dictate action. One of our mistakes is that we want to put everything in a neat tidy box. Politics could not be played that way!

KEGHART: What would stop Kurds from betraying Armenians once they have achieved their goals and created a political entity called Kurdistan in Western Armenia?

AH: That is a hypothetical question. We cannot have iron-clad guarantees of any kind. We are a smart people; we should be able to avoid the landmines.

KEGHART: There are no concrete and visible efforts by Armenian organizations or the RoA which demand from Turkey land return as compensation for the Genocide. Perhaps the lack of a national plan has encouraged individuals--Armenian filmmakers, writers, artists or musicians--to venture into Western Armenia and collaborate with Turks or representatives of the Turkish government. Whether instigated by TARC or not, would the latter approach backfire despite the good intentions of the Armenians?

AH: People-to-people contacts are always useful, even if they are orchestrated by governments. Ping-pong diplomacy worked with China, soccer diplomacy did not with Turkey.