

GRANTING AUTONOMY TO ARTSAKH: A TROJAN HORSE TACTIC

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By Prof. Z. S. Andrew Demirdjian, Los Angeles, 25 July 2022

In retrospect, no matter from which angle one would look at it, Armenia was forced to capitulate almost unconditionally to sign the lopsided, so-called peace agreement on November 9, 2020. In the aftermath of the 44-Day War with Azerbaijan, unfortunately the fate of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) was not settled yet after experiencing painful war casualties of 3, 800 soldiers, thousands of displaced persons, and the loss of significant portion of Armenian territories to the belligerent Azerbaijan, which unprovoked wantonly waged total war and deployed illegal weapons on one of its indigenous ethnic groups wanting to be independent in their ancestral land while the "moral" Western nations stood by the sideline as passive spectators.

One thing is obvious, though: President Ilham Aliyev will not relent until he tries all avenues to reoccupy the whole of Artsakh. His refrain has been: "Karabakh is ours: Karabakh is Azerbaijan!" And he rules out the necessity of any talks on Karabakh settlement. However, sooner or later he would sit at the negotiating table to offer his incentive(s) for a peaceful settlement before he would unleash his allied army to take "Karabakh" by force.

In fact, negotiations are underway between President Ilham Aliyev and PM Nikol Pashinyan, mediated by Charles Michel, the president of European Council whose ancestors can be traced to Khazar Turks.

As a bargaining chip for the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) to give up their quest for independence and to accept to live as part of Azerbaijan, President Aliyev may very well offer again political autonomy "of the highest kind" to settle the conflict temporarily.

This picture shows the procession in Stepanakert, the capital of the Republic of Artsakh, on May 9, 2017. It was to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the liberation of Shushi. Hopefully, Armenia, Artsakh, and the Diaspora will soon find ways and means to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the independence of Artsakh. The flag represents the rainbows of hope and solidarity. When united, the trio stands a great chance to succeed.

While the offer of autonomy may sound advantageous, it can harbor a concealed weapon behind the back of the government which grants it. Therefore, a caveat for pitfalls is in order. In this article, an attempt will be made to briefly evaluate the ill consequences of accepting such a Trojan horse offer.

Since autonomy has many shades of meaning, let us dissect the word "autonomy" as used in politics. When a group wants to govern itself or when a person opts to make independent decisions, they are looking for autonomy. This concept reflects the benign political sense of the word -- a group's right to self-government or self-rule. In practice, however, it might be a wolf in the sheep's clothing depending on the intentions of the grantor.

Autonomy works for some countries such as the USA, Canada, etc. where the ethnicity of the people

of the autonomous provinces (or states) is the same historically, linguistically, and culturally. There is relatively less competition and conflict for the simple reason that the autonomous provinces within the framework of the national government share the same diverse ethnicity, religion, history, and all the other cultural heritage aspects. They are all dispersed in the melting pot heading toward eventual homogeneity.

Thus, the provinces of the federalist government are homogeneous in containing a kaleidoscope of ethnic people rather than the concentration of one ethnic group in certain provinces such as the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh do in their highland enclave. The main difference among the province populations is only in the area of economy and not in geography.

When the national government, like Azerbaijan where distinct indigenous ethnic groups are concentrated in specific geographical areas of their ancestral lands, such as the Armenians in Artsakh, the Lezgins in northern Azerbaijan, the Talysh people in the south of Azerbaijan, and the Avars in the northwest, and so on, the tendency of the government would be to convert them into the dominant religion, force assimilate them into the ruling class society to homogenize the diverse societies from a multicultural country into a homogeneous one. The main purpose of the act is to allay their fear of losing control to the indigenous people, or to lose part of their occupied territories to their rightful owners.

As you know, ideas have changed the world; ideas can also help advance the embattled and beleaguered Armenians of Artsakh. Consequently, here are some caveats to keep in mind when considering accepting an autonomous status from Azerbaijan. Autonomy resonates with freedom, but it has some irreversible pitfalls coming from the cunning President Aliyev.

One pitfall is that after granting autonomy, a few years later, the national government (e.g., Azerbaijan) may hold a referendum on the decision and change the constitution to outlaw or to revoke the existence of any autonomous ethnic group in the sovereignty of Azerbaijan. Who is going to stop that internal decision or plan from happening? Yes, of course, the Europeans friends of Armenia?!

A second pitfall is that when Azerbaijan gets in armed conflict with one of the allies of Armenia, say with Russia, Armenians of Artsakh cannot refuse to fight against Russia. When autonomy is granted, Armenians have to agree to protect the sovereignty of Azerbaijan; otherwise, they will be treated as traitors and the end result is ethnic cleansing of some sort as it happened in Turkey during WWI, known as the Armenian Genocide based on trumpeted up reasons and outrageous excuses.

A third pitfall involves the most likely action to be taken by Azerbaijan against the people of Artsakh. Recent and distant history tells us that when a conqueror of a nation tries to homogenize the indigenous people for the assurance of its perpetuity in power and control, it tends to resort to assimilation schemes. In the event, the indigenous people resist assimilation and strive to keep their cultural heritage alive, the government resorts to ethnic cleansing, which is a more umbrella term to

refer to efforts to ethnically homogenize a geographical area through forceful displacement, mass killings or both. When the Armenians of Artsakh, stood up for independence from Azerbaijan, pogroms ensued, killing thousands and thousands of innocent Armenian people in Baku, in Sumgait, and other cities.

Artsakh Armenians may face another pitfall. If the Armenians of Artsakh accept autonomy, within a few years, the government will send in new settlers with lavish government subsidies to compete with the ethnic Armenians--just as the Georgian government has been doing to Javakh. Economically, they would starve the province, with job discrimination, and other hardships; most would flee to Armenia, Russia, etc. and put an end to Artsakh's autonomy.

The fifth pitfall would be to destroy the ethnic concentration of Artsakh Armenians in their ancestral enclave. The offer of autonomy to the Artsakh Armenians would be a dangerous proposition, nothing but a trap in disguise to be avoided. Most Armenians know that very well. Once Artsakh accepts to be part of Azerbaijan, under the pretext of democracy, Azerbaijan will start to settle other ethnic people to dilute the concentration of the Armenians in their millennia-old ancestral lands. Once Artsakh becomes a minority or devoid of Armenians, it would have the same fate as Nakhitechvan --not even Armenian historical graves remain there. Armenia, Artsakh, and the Diaspora should proactively find ways to circumvent any offer for conflict settlement that is less than an a free, independent, and sovereign Republic of Artsakh or be ready for armed conflict.

Finally, the sixth pitfall has to do with the existential status of the people of Artsakh. If the economic starvation scheme of Artsakh does not work satisfactorily as discussed above, the government would not hesitate to find a lame excuse to engage in pogroms, mass killings, genocide, and all the heinous methods of ethnic cleansing measures. When Azerbaijan comes to deal with Armenia and Artsakh in a hostile manner, independent genocide watch organizations have always warned the world community that Azerbaijan had become genocidal against the Armenians.

There is an enduring concept in psychology called the "theory of self-determination," which is different than its current meaning in politics as a democratic principle of determining an ethnic group's destiny through liberty and independence. However, in both instances they share the same concept of freedom.

In psychology, the theory of self-determination posits that we human beings have three innate needs: autonomy/independence, relatedness, and competence. We want to achieve mastery in what we do; we want to belong; have control over our own lives; and be our true selves. All of these needs, in fact, mean that we want to be independent. President Aliyev and the rest of the world community should understand the people of Artsakh are not asking something extraordinary, unrelated to politics or to basic human needs as postulated in the psychology of self-determination.

Many people consider autonomy and independence as being synonymous. The similarity between the two terms comes with the idea of freedom. Both highlight the ability to make one's decisions and

choices. However, there is a critical difference as well to note: Autonomy is the state of being self-governed. On the other hand, independence is the state of not being dependent on another for decision making. The concept of independence implies a rejection of the rules, regulations, and laws of another government, but this is not the case in autonomy wherein limitations are set by the federal or national government. This is the key difference between autonomy and independence.

The people of Artsakh are set on independence, while President Aliyev is sticking to his guns that Karabakh belongs to Azerbaijan. This unyielding attitude puts Artsakh and Azerbaijan on a collision course. While autonomy might sound the right thing to have for the Armenians of Artsakh, especially to the ears of non-Armenian observers such as to Charles Michel, the President of European Council and the present peace mediator, it would not amount to anything less than a deadly trap in disguise. Armenia, Artsakh, and the Diaspora should creatively find other means to save Artsakh from Azerbaijan's wide open jaw.

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There are no comments yet.