NAGORNO-KARABAKH STALEMATE: A POSITIVE SUM PLAN FOR PEACE

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Category: Opinions

By Prof. Z. S. Andrew Demirdjian, Los Angeles

"When conflict becomes a win-lose contest
in our minds, we immediately try to win."
Thomas Crum

Note: This article was written on August 3, 2020, right before the disastrous war with the allied forces of Turkey and Azerbaijan on September 27, 2020. For some reason, it was not submitted for publication. Since it contains some strategies for compromising the demands of both sides for the sake of peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan, it is worth reading it now when the Diaspora's concern is heightened. The proposed ideas may give Armenia some bargaining chips as alternative incentives to Azerbaijan to give up the insistence on the Nakhitechvan-Azerbaijan corridor through the Syunik province and also accept Artsakh's independence.

Azerbaijan flexed its military muscles during the so-called "Four-Day War" in April of 2016 for several reasons: One reason was to show off its newly acquired weaponry to intimidate Armenia into submission of its will to give up Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh); secondly, to distract its people from dissatisfaction with the economy; and thirdly, to discourage any of its minorities, such as the Lezgins and the Talish, from the ambition of becoming independent by being encouraged by the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) example of being liberated from the rule of Azerbaijan. There seems to be no end to Azerbaijan's military masquerade as being a super power in the South Caucus. Unfortunately, the pretentious act is causing human lives on both sides.

Armenia and Azerbaijan are both adamant about their demands for a peaceful settlement. Such a posture renders the pursuit of peace elusive. Azerbaijan seeks the restoration of its territorial integrity. In other words, Azerbaijan will accept nothing less than the complete return of NK region and the seven adjacent districts despite the fact that they had lost the Karabakh War in 1994; thus, the spoils go to the victor (it is an international law since the days of the Romans).

What is more, Azerbaijan advocates for its internally displaced persons to return to their homelands *before* negotiating the final status of the Nagorno-Karabakh which must be within Azerbaijan's sovereignty. Supposedly, Baku would be later ready to grant NK as a region of Azerbaijan the highest degree of self-rule. This boils down to what the Madrid Principle for peace has been proposed to push down the throat of the Armenians a complete loss, but fortunately Armenians find it rightfully lopsided.

Armenia, on the other hand, wants just the opposite --to maintain NK independent on the self-determination principle and also based on NK being a historical Armenian territory with its predominantly Armenian population with their own unique culture and lifestyle. As for the seven districts around NK, Armenia wants to keep them for buffer zone for the national security of the people. For a peaceful settlement of the conflict, they would consider to give up five of the seven districts provided Azerbaijan accepts the independence of NK and guarantees its people's safety

and security. Many people would consider Armenia's conditional concessions to be generously fair except Azerbaijani hardliners.

So, what do we have on the plate for peace? Nothing, so far. No margin of flexibility from Azerbaijan's side --take all and give nothing in return. We have a deadlock, an impasse, a big stalemate, an issue abysmally deep in emotions on both side and a war of attrition causing both sides loss of human lives.

How long will the carnage continue, how many villages will be destroyed, how long the environment will be blasted, how many soldiers will perish until common sense sets in and it is realized that without compromise peace would be unattainable. In this article, I would like to propose a plan for peace in an attempt to put an end to hostilities between two nations who worked together once for years to advance Azerbaijan that it is today.

As a person who would like to see the return of amity between the Azerbaijani people and the Armenians and the end of tearing each other apart, I would like to propose a peace plan. The idea for peace is based on the Law, or The Principle of Positive Sum Plan.

The Principle of Positive Sum Plan for peace is predicated on the idea of avoiding a collision course in which both sides would lose when the two nations are following a Zero-Sum Game, a situation in which it is impossible for one party to advance its position without the other party suffering a corresponding loss (For example: If one side gets the entire pie, that means the other side gets the crums, namely zero).

On the other hand, The Principle of the Positive Sum Plan is like in game theory, a term that refers to situations in which the total of gains and losses is greater than zero. Positive sum occurs when resources are somehow increased and an approach is formulated in which the desires and needs of all concerned are rather satisfied to avoid armed conflict between the two contenders to a territory. Armenia's pathway to peace has always been based on the principle that no conflict has been ever settled peacefully without compromise.

By avoiding win-lose, or zero-sum situation in this conflict, here are the steps of a plan for possible peace fostering based on the Principle of Positive Sum Plan:

Step One: Let us suppose Armenia will return five of the seven districts (i.e., Lachin, Qubaldli, Zangilan, Jabravil, Kalbajar as well as part of Agdam and Fizuli) under its control to Azerbaijan with the exception of the ones that serve as the umbilical cord of NK with Armenia, namely Lachin and Kalbajar districts, which tie NK to Armenia. At the first round of negotiations, Armenia should ask to keep Lachin, Kalbajar and Qubaldli districts, holding Qubaldli as a final bargaining chip, but never to give up Lachin and Kalbajar.

Step Two: Moreover, Armenia will allow Azerbaijan the ability to ship its current or future new gas and oil pipelines through Armenia to achieve efficiency of moving its products to Turkey, Romania,

Iraq, Iran, and Europe. Instead of roundabout way going through Georgia, a rather straight line to Turkey would yield lucrative benefits. In this way, Azerbaijan would reduce its costs of transportation and will boost its economy as a result of shorter pipeline. Details of this idea are covered below in the discussion section.

Step Three: Armenia will also be amenable to the normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan and opening up the border for mutual movement and sustainable development.

Step Four: Armenia may make the above three concessions in good faith for everlasting peace guaranteeing the safety and security of its people. We should never forget that these seven districts were liberated Armenian lands by the blood of our brave soldiers. Armenians will concede most of them for the sake of peace.

Step Five: In return to Armenia's concessions, Azerbaijan is to recognize the sovereignty of NK by accepting legitimate justifications.

Step Six: Additionally, Armenia should ask Azerbaijan to return to NK the eastern parts of Martakert and Martuni districts which are currently under Azerbaijani control, including the whole of Shaumian, Getsashen district which had over 20 Armenian settlements.

For changing attitudes and behavior, there is a great need to emphasize legitimacy for Armenia's decisions to prefer an independent NK. Briefly, the more Armenia can establish some legitimate reason or justification for the decision Azerbaijan to make, the more likely one is to bring about an agreement. The accord should not be based on fear of the consequences of a "no", but rather because Azerbaijan believes a "yes" is right in this case.

To invoke legitmacy, Armenians must seek precedent for a solution, showing what is wanted has been agreed to before by the other party in a previous conflict such as the difference between Georgia and Armenia over the province of Lori in the early 1900s. Georgia, by and large, accepted Armenia's argument that Lori historically belonged to Armenia and that most of the villages in Lori were inhabited by Armenians who wanted to join Armenia. In the same vein, Armenia should argue that NK has been an Armenian territory and that most of the people there want to remain independent for various cultural reasons. Invoking legitimacy is crucial for overcoming emotional, subjective resistance for imperialism.

Discussion: We should bear in mind that what we are presenting here are ideas for a forum, for mulling over, for stimulating further or better ideas by extending what is being proposed. Also, what is being proposed is based on the assumption that Armenia is ready and willing to offer the lease with a gratuitous permission to pass over state land. Without assumptions, of course, no realization of any plans can be achieved.

The scenario of Armenia's giving up the five of the seven districts to Azerbaijan is self-explanatory. Allowing Azerbaijan to route its current or future gas and oil pipeline through Armenia needs some

clarification. Armenia would give 100-year renewable lease to Azerbaijan for the extension of any proposed pipeline. The line should be overland, of certain size, and without or with minimum scarring of Armenia's landscape. Moreover, Armenian engineers and workers should be employed for the construction, repair, and maintenance of the line that extends through the boundaries of Armenia.

A preliminary feasibility study, which includes cost-benefit analysis, would show that a staggering amount of money will be saved by Azerbaijan and its foreign partners in going to Turkey in a straight line instead of an angle or zigzag by going north first from the Deniz Gas fields, then switching to southward after leaving Georgia just like the Baku-Tiflisi-Cyphan pipeline does. The rough results of the cost-benefit analysis would show at least millions of dollars of savings per month.

For an example, let us take the Baku-Tiflis-Cyphan pipeline. The line comes straight from Baku, goes upward to Tiflis and then downward; in that area, the pipeline forms three triangles, three hemps, until it gets to the center of Eastern Turkey. A rough estimation based on geometric calculation by eliminating the kink, the triangle in the line, has indicated that for every five miles, Azerbaijan would gain one mile if the pipeline were to go straight through Armenia. Therefore, for every 1,000 km, Azerbaijan would save 200 km of pipeline (i.e., a total of 600 km). This will be a great savings for Azerbaijani and its partner's current or future extensions of gas or oil pipelines when the three hemps are eliminated in the line in preference to the straight line going through Armenia.

Most likely, Azerbaijan will refuse the plan, but Armenia will be on record to have made a workable peace plan in which both sides win as opposed to zero-sum game results of only one side will win at the cost of the loss of the other by resorting to war to settle differences. By compromising, both sides would put an end to insults, injuries, and injustice treatments of each side.

After many a collision courses, even after a 100 years' war, Armenia and Azerbaijan will have to accept the Principle of the Positive Sum Plan. No matter what happens, The Law or The Principle of Positive Sum Plan will prevail. Otherwise, both sides would experience losses for continuing with the conflict of trying to push one's will on the other, insisting to get all without giving in to allow the other get something in return. Politicians play the game to keep themselves in office, away from the battlefield, but the people of both countries lose tranquility and peace and utter silently: Enough is Enough, especially the mothers of the fallen soldiers!

The NK conflict resolution attempts have reached a stalemate. It has gotten to a point in the struggle where neither side is capable of winning or willing to give in. Hopefully, the proposed solution will finally get both sides past the stalemate and look forward to peace and prosperity for their own people by compromising for the sake of achieving a peaceful resolution of the NK conflict, which has dragged on for over three eventful decades.

To garner international support, Azerbaijani propaganda machinery resorts to deception, disinformation, and distortion of facts of what is really happening between them and Armenia. The

military adventures of Azerbaijan testify to the contention that they want to take NK by force. Such a position has caused a staggering death count on both sides. President Ilham Aliyev constantly threatens Armenia to regain NK with military force by saying "might is right" and bragging about Azerbaijan's military prowess. He also claims that the territory of Armenia, in fact, belongs to Azerbaijan and it should return to its rightful owner. Such belligerent and bellicose rhetoric is counterproductive when we all are doing our best to find a peaceful solution for the conflict. Let us hope he will change his attitude toward this festering conflict.

It behooves Azerbaijan to accept the solution presented in this article for the alternative is war which would aggravate the peace process further. Let us not forget to remind the Azerbaijani politicians that Armenia may reverse its strategy of remaining defensive and resort to an offensive posture. As recently the Armenian Defense Minister, Mr. David Tonoyan, declared that the Armenian military will be shifting its strategy from a defensive posture to an offensive one. This means, unequivocally, that Armenia will be leaving open the possibility of attacking beyond its borders in case heightened hostilities continue.

While Azerbaijani Turks hate the Armenians, the vast majority of that country's ethnic minorities' sympathies lie with the Armenians. During the 1994 Karabakh Liberation War, Lezgins and the Kurds refused to fight against the Armenians for Armenians were fighting for something noble, for independence, for freedom of which they have been deprived due to forced assimilation of Azerbaijani government policy.

Armenia and Azerbaijan should mind the Principle of Positive Sum Plan if they both really want to achieve peace. When two individuals or two groups want something from each other, and when one or both refuse to compromise to give in, a stalemate sets in. As a result, there won't be a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

On the other hand, when one or both sides to a conflict compromise or give in to getting 100 percent of what each side demands, the inevitability of the Law, the Principle of Positive Sum Plan will always prevail as it has throughout history with all other conflicts. So, the sooner the two sides compromise, the sooner would stop the human loss on both sides, and the sooner the two neighboring countries would begin to enjoy normalized relations for social, political, and economic development. Azerbaijanis will kiss Armenians and say: you shrewd, loveable gavours! And Armenians will hug the Azerbaijanis and say: you affable modern day Tatars! The end of NK conflict and long live genuine friendship! As for me, Mr. Aliyev, please let me see Baku without a visa.

There are no comments yet.