

SAVING STEPANAKERT FROM A POTENTIAL SIEGE

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By Prof. Z. S. Andrew Demirdjian, Los Angeles, 21 May 2022

The lull between wars is the ideal time to strategize especially when a nation (Republic of Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh) faces genocidal enemies. The capture of Shushi created a virtual siege over densely-populated Stepanakert, the capital of Artsakh. The enemy is too close for comfort; it is perched on a hilltop half a dozen of kilometers from the heart of Artsakh; it is within a short striking distance to terrorize Stepanakert's population into a quick submission.

Artsakh is also homeland to all Armenians. Therefore, Armenia, Artsakh, and the Diaspora must find immediate ways to counter the imminent "siege". We ought to make sure our generals are not lounging around this time. A new generation of patriotic commissioned officers should handle national security affairs out of love of country and not for personal gain.

Siege of cities or land masses is as old as civilization is. A siege is the military blockade of a city or a fortress with the obvious intent of conquering through attrition or a well-planned assault. The word siege derives from Latin *sedere*, meaning to sit.

Siege warfare is a form of constant, low-intensity conflict characterized by one party holding a strong, static defensive position. Such a situation gives rise to negotiations between combatants to resolve the conflict diplomatically. The art of conducting and resisting sieges is called *siege warfare*, *siegecraft*, or *poliocetics*.

What we have in Artsakh is a virtual and psychological siege felt and perceived by the inhabitants of Stepanakert. We are not talking about an actual military siege of a walled city by an enemy army surrounding it and waiting the city to break down and surrender to the enemy. A potential siege is existing in possibility, but not in actuality.

The enemy is right there breathing over Stepanakert's neck, perched on a hilltop overlooking the seat of the government, which houses all the important archives and cultural artifacts. Moreover, most of the population of Artsakh live and work in Stepanakert.

Some might say our generals are already thinking of ways to protect the people of Artsakh. I have my own doubts when it comes to the same generals who began to lose the war to Azerbaijan in the fourth day of a 44-Day War in 2020. We were facing an enemy more powerful than we were in 1994 and yet our generals used to brag about their prowess to beat the enemy to a pulp.



The city lights in the foreground are those of Stepanakert which is overlooked by the lights from the hilltop of Shushi (in the background). The photo demonstrates Shushi's commanding position over Stepanakert.

Let's talk about Artsakh strategies that would be considered military management by objectives rather than by crisis. Here is what President Ilham Aliyev advised Armenians at an international conference on April 29, 2022 in Baku: "Put an end to their territorial claims from Azerbaijan and Turkey...It is important that the Armenian government...fully understand this and stop trying to take revenge once and for all...It is unproductive, because it will be more painful for Armenia than before...Armenians must put down all illusions." When the clouds promise rain, what do we do? Grab an umbrella for protection. When war is blowing in the wind, what should Armenia, Artsakh, and the Diaspora do? #@%^*. I agree with you.

Here are ideas that may give us an edge over the enemy:

I. Most importantly, we have to look the problem in the face, to make sure Artsakh has commanders dedicated to the country and determined to achieve victory through various contingency strategies. As in sports, winning or losing a game also depends on the coach's competence. Winning in war is

also largely dependent on the generals who have had their forces trained, strategized attacks in advance, and outwitted the enemy on the battlefield. Armenians cannot win a war with about 1,500 cases of treason, involving over six hundred individuals betraying their country during the 44-Day War.

II. Many safe shelters must be built in and around Stepanakert to ease the fear of its residents. Their fear is justified: they were subjected to indiscriminate shelling during the 44-Day War.

III. Since people will not live in fear, Artsakh must find ways to stop people from leaving the country due to imminent danger of war. Perhaps relocating the capital city to another area, far from Shushi may alleviate the problem. Also, it will save government documents from being destroyed in case of an attack on Stepanakert. History is full of capital city location changes. There is also another reason to move the capital: Azerbaijani authorities have vowed to arrest and prosecute Artsakh's president Arayik Harutyunyan for his missile strike on Gyanja during the Second Karabakh War.

IV. To keep Stepanakert as the capital would require fortification by a wall which in terms of defense would have no meaning but in terms of occupying a territory, would have a significant importance. While walls do not deter drones from attacking, they would make it difficult for the enemy infantry to enter Armenian territory. An enemy cannot occupy a territory unless its soldiers enter and occupy a territory.

V. Pre-emptive measures. Artsakh should resort to preemptive strike or go to war. Preventive wars and preemptive strikes are military, diplomatic, and strategic endeavors directed at an enemy one expects to grow so strong that any delay would cause defeat. It is also used to preempt an enemy's ability to attack in the future.

VI. The enemy is too close for comfort. Armenia must station some of its forces at Goris or another nearby town to strike Shushi from the back just in case Artsakh Defense Forces begin to lose ground while defending their capital. Advance planning would make the difference between winning or losing a war.

VII. Drones should be programmed in advance to strike targets in the enemy territory as soon as military conflict erupts. Artsakh has to be the first to attack. Speed and accuracy are essential in today's high tech warfare. Therefore, it is imperative that Artsakh add attack drones to its arsenal. The Second Artsakh War of 2020 is considered to be the first high tech war of the 21st century. Winning a war no longer depends on the size of one's army but rather on the possession and deployment of modern UVS (unmanned vehicle systems).

VIII. What is at stake for Stepanakert? Once the enemy captures such an important city, the rest of the country would surrender. Strategies to protect Stepanakert must be planned long before the truce expires on Nov. 9, 2025. A weak Artsakh would have no choice or chips to trade but accept concessions demanded by President Aliyev.

IX. Berdzor corridor (Lachin) must be protected at all cost. Its protection should be ensured by both sides: Armenia and Artsakh. Another plan should be devised to make sure in case of continued conflict Armenian and Artsakh forces can make use of the Vardenis to Martakert highway for the defense against attacks from the north and west of Artsakh.

X. Contingency approach to strategy planning must be followed religiously for a massive defense system and for preemptive attacks since the seven regions are taken by Azerbaijan, Artsakh is surrounded by enemy occupied-territory now.

Leaders in the public as well as military sectors must anticipate disruptive events to mitigate loss. Contingency plans reduce the adverse impact of extreme events during war. Contingency plans are road maps to counter unusual enemy advances such as the use of suicide attacks. Comprehensive emergency strategy planning delivers peace-of-mind and mitigates future losses.

We need to find ways and means to stop the megalomaniac of the South Caucasus from usurping more Armenian lands. Armenian generals should strategize to prevent a repeat of the bombardment of Stepanakert. To succeed, we need patriotic generals to match Artsakh's mountains to fulfill the mission to retain our lands. Instead of wasting precious time on the conspiracy theory of the engineered defeat by the Pashinyan government, we should make sure his administration is working on winning the next war through preemptive strike so as to prevent the genocidal enemy army from attacking Artsakh.

While most Armenians cannot afford to donate large sums of money for the purchase of expensive drones, the collective donation of a few hundred dollars by small groups can enable the purchase of anti-drone laser weapons. We need people who would undertake the mission of organizing such groups to raise the funds for the purchase of high-tech weapons.

Comments



Bedros Kojian – 2022-05-30 18:04:05

I am sorry I read this a couple days ago, it may be late but this is my comment. I don't want to hurt Professor Demirdjian's feelings, but this article really surprised me. I am sorry to tell that this is a fantasy, unrealistic and farfetched. In short, we do not have the funds, the man power and time. In addition, our enemies, please note enemies not enemy, are significantly richer, have much more and far better weapons, bigger Army, and I doubt that they will sit back, watch until we achieve Dr. Demirdjian's fantasy, let us attack and take over Shushi. I want to confess that I have my fantasy too and it is far better, and I dare say even feasible. We invent a strong long lasting sleeping powder/solution, use multiple drones to spray/shower over Azerbaijani posts. Then once they fall asleep, our Army advances takes the locations, imprisons their soldiers and exchange. We already manufacture drones, therefore all we must do is develop the sleeping powder/solution. Good luck to us.



Vahe Hayrikian – 2022-05-26 19:17:54

Excellent idea for survival but the fate of Artsakh is now under negotiation and does the Armenian Government have any apprehension? This is what we have with Pashinyan failed policy!



Roubik – 2022-05-26 01:14:10

The last 44 days war imposed on Artsakh was illegal and unacceptable. Azerbaijan must withdraw its forces from Artsakh territories and Shushi and many other occupied territories must be returned to Armenian homeland. Turks are invading and occupying people in the historical Armenian territories . Artsakh Nakhichevan and Western Armenian territories are all unlawfully occupied by Turks . Armenian people must not accept Turkish or Azeri rule over any Armenian territory and work with Russia and friendly powers to enforce a united nation resolution to return these territories to Armenian homeland. In the meantime all Armenian people globally must financially contribute to building a strong modern armed forces for defence of Armenian homeland



Mesrob – 2022-05-25 19:08:04

Prof. Andrew Demirdjian should be commended for writing this series of articles on Armenia's/Artsakh's strategy choices. I wish the people in charge of Armenia's and Artskh's defenses made note of the advice Demirdjian offers. But then again, too many in positions of authority in Armenia are know-it-alls who helped bring about the disaster of 2020. They have now become doormats of Tukey, starting with the so-called head of the government.