WANTONNESS OF WAGING TOTAL WAR

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Just as there are rules in sports, there are rules of engagement in warfare which constitute orders that soldiers are given about what they can and cannot do. For example, soldiers are instructed not to kill unarmed civilians of the enemy or shoot a wounded man or use a banned substance. Otherwise, these actions would be a breach of the rules of engagement.

There are two major types of war: limited war and total war. In a limited war the two sides focus on destroying the army, weapons, and military reserves of the opposite side. In total war the military command tries to crush the army, weapons, and military reserves of the enemy--plus it attempts to destroy civilians, their homes, infrastructure, economy, and cultural artifacts of the adversary. It includes committing genocide. Thus, in a total war, one side or both sides try to annihilate the enemy's country to prevent it from rising from the ashes to present the victor with future challenges.

Furthermore, total war is mainly characterized by the lack of distinction between fighting lawful combatants and civilians. In total war, there is also no limit on the type of weapons used and biological, chemical, nuclear, and other weapons of mass destruction may be unleashed.

Central to total war is the principle that the best way to win a war is to ensure that the adversary cannot mount a second attack when its large portions of population are slaughtered, houses burned down, fields destroyed, cities razed to the ground, where neither human nor material resources are left for an uprising.

A relatively recent example of total war was the Second World War. The targeting of non-combatants and non-combatant property, the general disregard for collateral damage, and the unrestricted aims of the belligerents marked total war on an unprecedented scale over several continents.

On Sunday, Sept 27, 2020, Azerbaijan launched a sneak attack on the Republic of Artsakh, Baku also used banned weapons. The attack lasted 44 days. Then a vague truce was brokered by Russia and was signed by Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia. The truce was lopsided for Artsakh had lost its buffer zone of seven Azerbaijani regions, swathes of Artsakh's territory, and several key cities, especially Shushi and a historical site of Tigranakert. Was this a fair war? Did Azerbaijan really win the war in a decent way or resorted to the wantonness of total war strategy?

To appraise the war objectively we will take a close look at the characteristics of total war. An on-line educational study program with its seven characteristics of total war will be used here against which to evaluate as to which side, Azerbaijan or Artsakh or both, has waged a total war on the other:

1. "Participants in total war are seeking the unconditional surrender".

Most likely Azerbaijan had that in mind, for it attacked Artsakh unprovoked and the 9-point truce agreement, which was signed on Nov. 9, 2020, has the trappings of an unconditional surrender of the

Artsakh forces. Despite three truces, Azerbaijan continued with its onslaught against the Artsakh forces as well as its citizens with the likely aim to force the former to surrender.

2. "Participants mobilize their economy for maximum war protection. (factories make war supplies and the government does not tolerate strikes.)

Compared to the Republic of Artsakh, Azerbaijan has a multi-million dollar weapons industry for local need and for export. Despite stockpiling weapons for over 30 years, Azerbaijan was helped by Turkish Special Forces, several generals, Syrian and Libyan mercenaries, ISIS jihadists, and Israeli weapon experts. Azerbaijan's arsenal was beefed up by Russia, Turkey, Belarus, and Israel.

3. "Participants in total war expect citizens to contribute to war effort".

This is a common practice. Perhaps, both sides had patriotic citizens who were willing and ready to participate in the war. However, one thing is for certain: under the guise of Azerbaijani war against Artsakh, it was Turkey that waged the war and won it. Thus, Turkey is actually the winner of the war, and not Azerbaijan. Turkey and Israel should be held responsible for being accomplices in the total war against the people of Artsakh.

4. "Participants consider all citizens of enemy countries to be legitimate targets".

Backed by multiplicity of video evidence, neutral sources have reported that the Azerbaijani forces shelled and bombed civilian neighborhoods and infrastructure, notably of Stepanakert, the capital of the Republic of Artsakh. They even bombed religious sites such as the Holy Savior Armenian Cathedral of Shushi.

Bombing was also directed at Dikranakert city, an archaeological site of a city that was founded in the 1st-century B.C. Azerbaijani forces not only beheaded and skinned alive Armenian soldiers, but they also mutilated unarmed civilians.

The Artsakh Defense Forces bombed Azerbaijan's second largest city, Ganja, in retaliation for the shelling of Stepanakert and as a warning not to continue the barrage of assaults on Artsakh cities and civilians.

To encourage his soldiers to engage in heinous intimidation tactics, President Ilham Aliyev has regularly decorated his soldiers with medals and lavish cash rewards for committing atrocities against the Armenians on and off the battlefield.

Because of Azerbaijani's tendency towards wantonness of cruelty, Genocide Watch (an international independent organization) first issued the alert and said it was "due to Azerbaijan's aggression against Artsakh, usually called by its Soviet name, Nagorno-Karabakh."

5. "Participants don't tolerate dissent (don't allow people to oppose the war)".

During the 44-day war, three ceasefires were signed in Moscow, Paris, and Washington, D.C. However, Azerbaijan disregarded all of them.

President Aliyev's dictatorship is well known. Many of dissenters and journalists who are critical of his regime are locked up without due process.

6. "Participants in total war employ censorship and propaganda to boost or maintain morale".

Azerbaijan boastfully produced many videos in which their killer drones were pulverizing the military weapons and posts of the Artsakh Defense Forces. Videos also demonstrated civilian areas being bombed.

Moreover, to keep up the morale of the Azerbaijani soldiers, the Azerbaijani Defense Department refused to make public its war casualties. Censorship seems to be a way of life in Azerbaijan. The Artsakh Defense Forces announced casualty statistics on a daily basis.

7. "Participants in total war are willing to use any means necessary to win (even if it violates the rules of war)."

Unequivocally, this war policy was carried out by Azerbaijani military forces since they used cluster bombs, loitering munitions, and phosphorus gas to cite a few, which are banned by the International Humanitarian Law.

In addition to Azerbaijan's large and well-equipped army, Baku used Turkey's Special Forces, several generals and lethal weapons; Syrian and Libyan mercenaries; ISIS jihadists; Pakistani Islamist volunteers; and Israeli weapon experts against the tiny Republic of Artsakh with a small population of 150,000 indigenous people (as compared to Azerbaijan's 10 million people).

For weeks, civilian areas were continually targeted with tanks, helicopters, drones, heavy artillery, multiple-launch rocket systems, including Smirch, and cluster bombs, which are all in contravention of international law.

Considering the above, it's obvious the invasion of Artsakh meets all the requirements for total war. Azerbaijan definitely waged a total war on the Artsakh forces and unarmed civilians while the Artsakh forces adhered to limited war for their defense. Thus, Azerbaijan should be held responsible for the damage it caused to Artsakh in the 44-day war.

Humanity has tried but failed to outlaw injustices in warfare. Then as now, especially after the WWII, many civic organizations were established to judge cases, but are helpless in enforcing their decisions. Thus, the criminals of total war go unpunished.

While the International Humanitarian Law helped curb total war by making the deliberate targeting of civilians illegal, it lacked the power to enforce punishment against perpetrators who target civilians and destroy their homes. In sports, fines are levied against players who violate the rules, but

Aliyev's deliberate and unprovoked attacks have gone unpunished.

Devastated Armenians around the world want the international community to punish Azerbaijan for war crimes. That is fine, but a better idea would be to ask the international community to reward the victims of Artsakh by recognizing it as a free, independent and sovereign state. In this way, the victims will be rightly rewarded, and the perpetrators of the total war, namely Azerbaijan and Turkey, will be indirectly punished for committing war crimes.

Armenians should regroup, get ready and try to regain the territories lost in the war by being better equipped and by depending on themselves rather than expecting others to do the job for them.

One of the major advantages of defeat is its service as a wake-up call to mobilize intelligently for the future. Armenians are known to be resilient. Resiliency means when they are defeated they never give up the battle. There's always tomorrow.

There are no comments yet.