WEAPONIZING SIEGE STARVATION TO SUBDUE ARTSAKH

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Category: Editorials

By Prof. Z. S. Andrew Demirdjian, Guest Editorial, Los Angeles, 10 February 2023

"Siege starvation... a war crime of societal torture".
Tom Dannenbaum

Despite the November 9th (2020) trilateral ceasefire agreement (signed by Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia), Azerbaijan has been violating the spirit of the treaty. President Ilham Aliyev has been attempting different ways to intimidate, or even force the people of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) into inhuman deprivations to subdue them by submitting to his will by laying on them a weapon called "siege starvation".

Ever since Russia has been occupied with the Ukraine war, Azerbaijan has gone on a spree of nibbling away swathes of Armenian territory by killing soldiers and civilians without provocation. The tidal wave now has stopped at blockading the Berdzor (Lachin) Corridor to isolate the people of Artsakh into submission or ethnic cleansing. Almost two months have gone by, the siege continues.

The situation now is very serious. According to the independent Genocide Watch organization the genocide threat level facing Artsakh Armenians has gone beyond the "dehumanization" stage and into the final stages of "persecution" and "denial".

While "war crime of societal torture" is taking place, the Western nations, Russian peacekeeping force, and even the Armenian Diaspora lethargy, if not indifference or apathy, continues at the expense of the plight of 120, 000 indigenous people of the Republic of Artsakh.

Moral imperative dictates that the international community collectively attempt to stop Azerbaijan's cruel tactics to enforce its will on the stranded people of Artsakh. After all, a blockade is where one army tries to cut off supplies to another one, but in this case the civilians are targeted by Azerbaijan --a criminal act against humanity.

Weaponization is the practice of using non-conventional weapons to harm or even to kill people. In this strategy, the belligerent resorts to other indirect methods to inflict harm and even death to an adversary.

Implicit in the strategy of siege starvation is the practice of warfare by weaponizing the essentials of life (food, water, medicine, and shelter) by encircling or cutting off of a defended and populated targeted civilian locality. The purpose is to elicit the capitulation of the besieged people and thereby avoid the necessity of capturing the area by assault.

The Berdzor (Lachin) Corridor is the umbilical cord of Artsakh joining it to Armenia for the essentials and necessities of life. The people of Artsakh are rightfully calling it the "Road for Life".

The severity of the situation stems from the fact that there is a marked difference between the essentials for life and the necessities of life. "Essential" is something without which we cannot do,

and "necessary" is something which is important but we can do without it.

Over 120,000 natives of Artsakh have historically depended on Armenia for their standard of living and as a portal to reach the rest of the world. For example, 400 tons of food and other essentials were transported from Armenia to Artsakh almost on a daily basis.

Furthermore, most of the arable land for growing crops has come under the control of Azerbaijan. Before the 44-Day War, the Republic of Artsakh consisted of 12,000 square kilometers. Now, it has dwindled to a mere 3,000 square kilometers, which are of rugged mountain terrain hardly suitable for growing cereal crops.

Without food flowing from Armenia through the Berdzor Corridor, austere days of hunger, or even of famine, are ahead for Artsakhtsi people.

On December 12, 2022, a few hundred Azerbaijanis military personnel in civilian clothes, pretending to be environmentalists, blockaded the Berdzor Corridor to isolate the people of Artsakh from the rest of the world on the pretext of protecting the environment.

Over 120,000 people of Artsakh, including 30,000 children, lost the freedom of connecting to Armenia and the logistics of importing essentials of life was suddenly interrupted. Those who need immediate medical attention cannot go to Armenia, for example, for surgery. This way, Artsakh has become an island in the hostile sea of Azerbaijan.

Due to the 44-Day War consequences, Artsakh finds itself short of medical supplies, fuel for heating and cooking, food, and other essentials for life.

To complicate matters, Azerbaijan turned off the gas lines from Armenia to Artsakh for days. As a result, the children were deprived of basic education when schools closed for lack of fuel to heat the classrooms.

The Azeri strategy is nothing but an attempt at weaponizing winter as well for the submission of the people of Artsakh. The intent may very well also be the ethnic cleansing of the Armenian population of Artsakh.

Throughout history, humans have used various strategies as weapons. One of the earliest weapons was siege starvation. For centuries, this was accepted as a way to wage war with the enemy until 2019 when weaponizing food, water, shelter, winter, etc., were considered illegal weapons to be used to settle armed conflicts or to conquer other countries. In 2019, 123 states, parties to the International Criminal Court, approved an amendment incorporating the war crime of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare in non-international armed conflicts.

The new provision proves to be the first step towards closing a major humanitarian gap in the International Criminal Court system.

Prior to the amendment, the Rome Statute had criminalized the employment of non-conventional

weapon practice (e.g., weaponizing siege starvation) only in international armed conflicts, which happens less frequently than war between two countries.

This means Azerbaijan's weaponizing siege starvation, weaponizing winter, or other weaponizing strategy used against the people of Artsakh is illegal as far as the International Criminal Court is concerned because of their 2019 amendment to the Rome Statute.

Azerbaijan will most likely be found guilty. But who will enforce the penalty is another issue. President Ilham Aliyev knows full well that nobody will penalize him for his war crimes.

Silence of the international community lionizes a dictator into a tyrant. And thus, he gets away with murder. Aliyev is no longer a dictator. He has graduated to become a tyrant, who rules his subjects through fear and torture. Fair-minded, righteous international communities should do two things immediately: Sanction Azerbaijani tyrant for his illegal and criminal treatment of the besieged people of Artsakh and recognize the independence of the Republic of Artsakh.

Here is a feasible idea as a defense against siege starvation:

Plant war survival gardens for vegetables including fruit trees. The people of Artsakh should grow urban "Gardens for Peace" or "Survival Gardens" for growing fruits and vegetables for the struggle against the genocidal acts of Azerbaijan when it attempts to harm the unarmed civilians of Artsakh by blockading, for example, the Berdzor Corridor.



The people of Artsakh can cultivate urban community gardens like the above.

The only way to translate this idea into a practical reality in a short period of time is to get the disengaged Armenian Diaspora involved in it.

Seeds, for example, should be provided by the Diaspora for immediate vegetable planting. Concurrently, the fruit trees can be propagated and planted by the community-oriented Armenia Tree Project organization (even though the yield of the latter will take time). This great organization is ready to plant trees in Artsakh.

The idea of urban Gardens for Peace will not only ensure an adequate food supply for civilians, but it will also feed the troops during war. In this way, Artsakh would be able to counter Azerbaijan's attempts at weaponizing food and other essentials of life.

Aliyev knows how to perpetuate his dictatorship: fan Azeri hatred toward anything Armenian and

rekindle his nomadic people's instinct to kill and plunder Armenians wherever they happen to be... in Artsakh or in Budapest, Hungary.

Too many times Armenians have been disappointed in the Western powers who have failed to come to their rescue despite the latter's promises to return Armenia's favors.

Armenians of Artsakh have been savagely treated, but none of the Western powers have come to materially help them. Even the 2,000 Russian peace keeping soldiers are acting like tourists or spectators when Azerbaijan is attacking the Armenians.

It is time to learn to rely on self. Rebuilding the Artsakh Defense Armed Forces is crucial if we want them to keep their sovereignty. Ruben Vardanyan, the new State Minister of Artsakh, recently echoed the resolve of the brave people by stating: "We have chosen to fight."

How or with what? The Armenian Diaspora (nearly 6 million) can buy the latest attack drones required to pulverize the entire Azerbaijani Defense Forces. Where is the Armenian Diaspora's leadership when the ship of Artsakh is sinking? Once Artsakh is lost, it would have the same fate as Nakhichevan. That is impossible to regain.

Where is the global Armenians' sense of urgency to save the 120,000 beleaguered people from Azerbaijan's treacherous cat-and-mouse game?

In addition to fortifying themselves with modern weapons financed by the Armenian Diaspora, the Republic of Artsakh should distribute land to all Armenians for both Gardens for Peace and for staying/settling in Artsakh.

Comments

Harout Bronozian – 2023-02-15 04:06:59
Armenia, by signing the quadrilateral document in Prague on October 6, 2022, and with the blessing of France and the EU, recognized Artsakh as part of Azerbaijan. That is why Nikol Pashinyan is doing nothing against Azerbaijan to remove the blockade, since he considers Artsakh as part of Azerbaijan. On the other hand Pashinyan is blaming Russia for not doing anything. But Russia's hands are tied after Prague. The purpose of the Russian peacekeeping forces in Artsakh was to delay the decision on the final status of Artsakh. That does not apply anymore. With the Prague agreement, the Artsakh issue becomes an internal problem for Azerbaijan to do whatever it wants. The only solution is the removal of Pashinyan from power or total control of Artsakh by Azerbaijan in my opinion. Below is the statement of the Prague meeting.
https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/10/07/statement-following-quadrilateral-meeting-between-president-aliyev-prime-minister-pashinyan-president-macron-and-president-michel-6-october-2022/

Tavo – 2023-02-10 13:50:56
Russia is enforcing this blockade on Azerbaijan's behalf in order for Moscow to scare and subjugate Armenia. Russia could easily kick the Azeris off the corridor in one hour and order Azerbaijan to restore all power to Artsakh. Why we Armenians continue to put the blame ONLY on Azerbaijan is a mystery. See this fine article: "Sergei Lavrov Justifies Azerbaijan's War against Armenia":
https://mirrorspectator.com/2023/02/09/sergei-lavrov-justifies-azerbaijans-war-against-armenia/