

# THE ARTSAKH QUESTION AND THE STATEHOOD OF ARMENIA

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**By Harut Der-Tavitian, Los Angeles, 6 December 2020**

"The seeming debate over the packaged, phased and other options I am sure is just a veil to prolong the settlement process and to maintain the current situation, the status quo for as long as possible. I anticipate with pain what a terrible threat it poses to the existence of both Karabakh and Armenia. Today, similar to the times preceding the Treaties of Batum and Alexandropol, we are probably missing the last chance for a favorable solution to the Karabakh issue and for Armenia to prosper. And for that we will all answer to our people" (Excerpt from the speech of President Levon Ter-Petrosyan at the enlarged Session of the Security Council of Armenia, January 8, 1998.)

Those who reduce discussions from solutions to personal insults do disservice and damage the endeavor and purpose of finding ways out of the crisis. Those who ignore the realities on the ground and strive for maximalist solutions pave the way for future disasters. Demagogic outbursts do not solve problems. Instead, they cause destruction. By focusing on the details and diverting our focus from the big picture, they lead us to new disasters.

The debates in the press and in public in 1988 unfortunately faded during the 20 years of Kocharyan-Sargsyan rule. The issue of Artsakh, instead of being discussed as an important factor in strengthening the statehood of Armenia, turned into an opportunity to seize power and accumulate wealth through mudslinging. This led us to today's crisis. Dismissing the faults and crimes of the past thirty years inhibits our ability to see effective ways out of today's crisis.

In this regard, let us try to clarify some facts, starting with the above quote of Ter-Petrosyan.

- One week after the victory of Sardarabad, we signed the humiliating Treaty of Batum on June 4, 1918, which limited Armenia's area to a mere 4,400 sq. miles.
- Two-and-a-half years after the declaration of independence on May 28, 1918, we signed the infamous Treaty of Alexandropol on December 2, 1920.

Why did we sign to the disastrous treaties? Hovhannes Kajaznuni, the first prime minister of the first Republic of Armenia, said: "It is an undeniable truth that the situation in Armenia has been extremely difficult and our working conditions have been exceptionally unfavorable. But it is undeniable, at least to me, that in addition to this, there was our own inability and incompetence to run our state affairs. If it is true that to govern means to predict, then we have simply been useless governors, because we have not had at all that ability to predict. We have always been wrong in our accounts and we have always had surprises. Surprises since we did not know how to forecast. That was our biggest weakness. Then we did not have a clear and definite consciousness of what to do. Thus, we did not have a guiding principle and a lasting, consistent system. We acted at the spur of the moment. We hesitated and fell sideways, half-blindly touching the ground under our feet. We have not recognized and often overestimated our capacity, we have not realized the magnitude of the difficulties, we have ignored the opposing forces and we have been negligent to the dangers that

threaten us. We were rash where extreme caution was needed and indecisive when we should have been prompt. We have not been able to distinguish the state from the party and we have introduced party mentality in the running of the state affairs. We were not statesmen."

We share this quote to show the timeliness of Kajaznuni's statement. The words of the statesman were discredited as "the delusions of a mad old man" instead of being used to educate impartial and unimpeded minds and patriotic generations. His request was ignored: "Please, be a little patient and try to approach the issues with an unhindered mindset, something that is not so easy for people who live a partisan life and think in a partisan manner." Why? Because, as he states in his report to his partisan friends, "You love the tool more than the work."

The history of the Diaspora and in Armenia (since independence) proves that if our nation's different factions had loved the work more than the tool, we would have been spared a lot of crises rather than suffered due to lost opportunities, fratricidal crimes, the church split, etc. Instead, we would have had a more united and constructive community, a more prosperous Armenia and Diaspora, and a stronger statehood.

Unfortunately, the atmosphere described by Kajaznuni prevails today. State interests are sacrificed for party interests and as a nation we all suffer. The need an unselfish and impartial approach, which we have always emphasized in our articles, is absent from public discussions where the mob mentality rules. It was with this approach in mind that we penned our article entitled "Sardarabad and Batum, Kelbajar and ..." published in "Massis" weekly on May 15, 1993, where we wrote: "If those who descended from the heights of Sardarabad to the depths of Batum have learned their lessons from history, they must be cautious in their expressions instead of inciting passions with demagogy. They should support the current government so that together, as a nation, we can prevent the recurrence of Batum. That will enable us

to stay on the heights of Kelbajar. That will enable us to continue the Victory March of our modern-day liberation struggle." Alas!

It is also worth quoting Commander Vazgen Sargsyan's words. "I am afraid of the indifference in our society to possible military-political complications. You need to sober up; there are serious surprises ahead. I am afraid of the opposition's hatred of the army. It is necessary to sober up. This is also the army that protects you and your children. I am afraid of the dwindling attention of the authorities to army building. It is necessary to sober up; the war is not over yet. Finally, I am afraid of all those who are not afraid - indifferent, adventurous, all feasible "saviors of the people."

What we're left with after Nov. 10, 2020 is less than what we had when on February 20, 1988 the leadership of the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Region (NKAO) submitted an application to transfer the territory from Azerbaijan to Armenia. Since then we have witnessed a series of dazzling developments: the collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of the constituent republics, including Armenia; the outbreak of the First Artsakh War, which after the initial disappointments, was

crowned with a glorious victory with the liberation of the seven territories surrounding the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region, and the independence of Artsakh. The international community did not accept our achievements and demanded the return of those territories to Azerbaijan. We, intoxicated by our successes, began to speak out about the liberation of Nakhichevan, Javakhk, and even Western Armenia. When those who gave us victory advocated sobriety, we labeled them traitors, forced one to resign and assassinated the other. We excluded Artsakh from the negotiating table, sold Armenia in a "property for debt" deal and looted the rest. In the face of the enemy's preparations for war, we built private castles and neglected to arm the army as the guarantor of our victory and collective security. We entrusted our defense to those to whom we sold Armenia, despite the fact that they also were demanding us to return the territories. And the premonition of the victor came true. Instead of "not an inch", we lost our achievements of the first half of the '90s and more. The fear of Com. Sargsyan also came true: "The Armenian people have achieved a national feat in the last seven to eight years, and it will be extremely painful and fatal if we suddenly lose what has been achieved through bloodshed and struggle due to misunderstandings, mistrust and disunity."

We chose the title "The Artsakh Question and the Statehood of Armenia" to emphasize once again the inseparability of the two. We emphasize that the Artsakh issue should not be exploited to seize power in Armenia, which in turn harms the strengthening of Armenia's statehood. Where have we come from the national heroic achievements of the '90s? Regretfully, the drubbing of Batum after the victory of

Sardarabad and the subjugation of December 2 after the declaration of independence on May 28 were repeated. With regards to the Artsakh issue, we have retreated from an independent republic to the "Volsky version". With regards to the statehood of Armenia, we are currently engaged in the search for traitors.

But we are not pessimistic.

(To be continued)

**There are no comments yet.**