NATIONAL ORIENTATION, REDUX

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By Harut Der-Tavitian, Los Angeles, 18 December 2020

This article is the continuation of "The Artsakh Question and the Statehood of Armenia" which, together with our article "Cacophony and Tranquility" covered internal factors. But before proceeding, we consider it necessary to reprint excerpts from an article, "National Orientation", we published on Sept. 23, 1995 upon the 4th anniversary of Armenia's independence. It was to draw attention once again to vital data that are prerequisites of building a solid statehood and second, we, unfortunately, repeated our mistakes and a rare historical moment to strengthen our statehood escaped from our grip. The subhead explained the article's thesis: "Management of our destiny is not a matter of chance, but of choice. It is not given but is won and preserved by blood and sweat."

1. In our last 300 years, many times we tried to attain independence through the assistance of foreign powers. We knocked the doors of European and other powers. The result was that every time they responded, they did so solely for their interest, and not to help us.
2. Moreover, they used us to advance their interests, and every time we came out of those experiments bleeding. We developed the false conviction that our salvation must come from outside, so with that mindset we looked for saviours.
3. Despite suffering losses and despite the “Iron Ladle” advice of Khrimian Hayrik, we did not wake up. We suffered the greatest loss, losing more than half of our population to the Genocide and were displaced from over 90% of our historic lands. Again, we did not drastically reconsider our course and continued to be a toy in the hands of foreign powers.
4. Let us not be carried away by vain and unrealistic promises and hopes, wherever these come from. Let us not seek justice from the right nor from the left, and consequently, let us not spit in the face of that justice, disappointed and wounded. But let us realize that justice is directly related to our strength. If we attain that power, we can demand and attain our rights. If we don’t, our demands will sound ridiculous; we will become miserable and be despised from the right and the left.
5. Our liberation struggle of the last century has deviated or was deviated from its purpose and we suffered the heaviest losses in our millennia-old history. Our generation is destined for that rare historical moment: to correct the mistakes of the past and to open a new era in our history. Let us act commensurate with that consciousness.

Forty days have passed since Nov. 10. We are still busy looking for traitors rather than have serious discussions about the reasons for our defeat and finding nationally beneficial solutions. We are busy in the race to give in to foreign powers the little that was left for us rather than seek internal solidarity to strengthen our positions. This shows that our political leaders are still guided by their personal and partisan interests which have never been beneficial to our nation. By acting in this manner, they are ruining our house from the inside, ignoring a vital fact that the exterior is built on the inner foundation and the more dilapidated the interior, the more miserable the exterior becomes.

It is unfortunate that national and state interests are still being viewed through personal and partisan prism. In the words of Hovhannes Kajaznuni, first PM of the first Republic of Armenia, the tool is loved more than work. The Diaspora has suffered and continues to suffer from this disease. The same has happened and is still happening in Armenia since independence. Driven by personal and party interests, advocates of statesmanship are being attacked through distortion and defamation campaigns, thus humiliating their message. It is this mindset that led May 28, 1918 to the impoverishment of December 2, 1920. It is this mindset that brought September 21, 1991 and the successful Artsakh Liberation War to today's humiliation.

Don't we see where this continued infighting leads us? It leads to demoralization, depression, despair, and eventually to emigration. It leads to the discrediting of the idea of democracy; decline in self-confidence and eventually to internal or external tyranny. And once again the independent state of Armenia turns from reality into a dream.

At sunrise on Aug. 1, 2013, after climbing Mount Ararat and symbolically "burying" the pictures of my paternal grandparents who had fallen victim to the Genocide and were deprived of graves, we visited Van, Akhtamar, Kars, and Ani, our lost homeland. Then we crossed to Armenia, our independent homeland and climbed Mount Aragats. Upon returning to Los Angeles, we published our reflections in the Sept. 7, 2013 issue of "Masses" weekly in an article entitled "What to Do", with the subtitle "So that reality should not turn into a dream". There we mentioned: "I feel obliged to share with my readers certain national concerns that weigh heavier than my feelings of having climbed Mount Ararat." We pointed out the alarming situation in Armenia, stating that "its magnitude should concern every heartbroken Armenian to advocate for nationwide public and unselfish discussions to seek solutions and remedies." We ended our article with: "The fate of the jailed Ararat and Western Armenia should make us heedful to take immediate practical steps so that the current reality of Armenia should not turn into a dream."

There is no doubt that the blow we received recently is terrible, but not fatal if we wake up and finally pursue our state interests. If we act by Charent's message. That will automatically create internal solidarity, which in turn will have a positive impact on our external endeavours.

To somewhat alleviate our pain caused by the loss, let's consider the following reevaluation and draw a new starting line for our struggle.

- At the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Region-NKAR, with about 4,200 sq. km. and a population of 160,000; 80 percent of whom were Armenian and the remaining 20 percent Azeris. The latter mostly lived in Shushi and made up 90% of the city's population. NKAR did not have a border connection to Armenia. Now we are left with about 2,500 sq. km. without mainly Shushi and Hadrut, but connected to Armenia.
- Karabakh is now more Russian territory than Azerbaijani territory. This is more to our advantage than to Azerbaijan's.

- Azerbaijan has lost a lot of its sovereignty to Russia, Turkey and the terrorists who have gained a foothold there. In this sense, we are better off than Azerbaijan, unless we worsen our situation by internal squabbling.
- Azerbaijan's autocratic regime is fragile; its minorities are restless, and the devaluation of petroleum and its price will soon result in economic and political upheaval. These points should push us not to destabilize our internal situation and with mutual understanding develop our country and be ready to benefit from the coming misfortunes of Azerbaijan.
- The OSCE, France and the United States which were left out of the trilateral agreement, are trying to "gain entry" to counterbalance the Russian advantage and return the settlement process to the confines of OSCE. We should do our utmost to gain from such a move.
- The war revealed that its driving force was not Azerbaijan, but Turkey, in the person of Erdogan who for several years has embarked on an adventurous campaign to divert the attention of its population from fermenting internal unrest. This can not last long and will eventually explode. Russia and Iran are on the lookout for such an explosion and so should we.

Having the above in mind, we see that the situation is not so hopeless, if tranquil and sober minds prevail and if we pursue our national interests. Unfortunately, what we are seeing so far is worrying. Instead of calling for vigilance, passions are provoked. Instead of rational dialogue, demagoguery prevails. Instead of dignified approaches, a rat race is encouraged. The following example says it all. Artsvik Minasyan, a member of the Supreme Body of ARF Armenia addressed the "My Step" deputies of the Parliament with these words: "A significant portion of the deputies will feel the danger that they will appear in the dustbin of history and need to choose a dignified path. The only way out is to come out of their faction while retaining their mandates and to vote for Vazgen Manukyan. If they had some plans, like getting a high salary, etc., they would get more if today they decide to defend the homeland." What does this mean? Minasyan's party, that could barely secure 4 percent of the votes during the democratic elections in 2018, is now addressing those deputies who were elected by majority vote, to choose a "dignified path" so as not to appear in the "dustbin of history", and while "retaining their mandates" join Manukyan's faction at a "higher salary."

The Minasyans of Armenia are not sure that with fair elections they can get a "mandate" and for that reason they want the deputies of "My Step" bloc not to give it up but bring it with them and serve new masters at a higher salary. According to the Minasyans, this would be "dignified approach," that is to sell your convictions for material gain. And by doing so, you would "defend your homeland." Unbelievable, but true. Our people saw who appeared in the "dustbin of history" when they organized Oct. 27, the subsequent rat race, and 20 years of dictatorship.

The "traitor" labeled by the Minasyans 22 years ago, is now in esteem, for having anticipated the events and offered possible solutions for it. Instead of sobering up, the Minasyans continue to make noise, and under the guise as "defender of the homeland" endanger its existence. This time history

must not be allowed to repeat itself. Let's sober up as a nation and not to not end up in the "dustbin of history".

While we are worried; we are not pessimistic. We are worried, because the pain caused by the calamity temporarily obscures the ability of our people to see the real causes. Worried, because some leaders, rather than enlightening the masses by making the correct diagnosis and suggesting suitable outcomes, they incite passions, and stir the muddy waters to catch their fish. We are worried, because through exploiting the current situation, those who for 20 years plundered and weekend Armenia might deal another heavy blow to our statehood, as they did on Oct. 27. We are worried, because the prerequisites of building a strong and dignified state of Armenia, democracy and rule of law might give way to authoritarianism and corruption, as it happened during the rule of Kocharyan and Sargsyan.

We are not pessimistic because we know we shall overcome this disaster too. We simply regret that every time a historic occasion comes our way to achieve one of our unfulfilled dreams, rather than congregate and tackle it with unified strength, inner squabbles ruin our house and hinder our progress.

We are not pessimistic because in view of the losses we suffered, we see a rising momentum among wide sectors of our population, especially the youth that realize the destructive nature and consequences of such a mentality.

We are not pessimistic because we believe we have the prerequisites of building a bright future: exercising rational judgment and not destructive mob mentality, upholding the national interest and not partisan quibbles, promoting democratic principles and not authoritarianism, advocating rule of law and not corruption or nepotism.

It is imperative to choose the first path to manage our own destiny and achieve our dreams.

Comments



Bob Okhikian – 2020-12-23 19:11:43
If we are not united we can't achieve anything. We have an example to follow. The Hebrews are like us and look how successful they are. Let us learn from them to become like them strong and independent. Just a suggestion! Zohrab