



DOUBLE STANDARD AND SELECTIVE SENSITIVITY

Posted on July 29, 2010 by Keghart


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 Keghart.com Team Editorial, 26 July 2010 

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The attack on the relevance of the Kosovo decision on other independence movements was led, in less than 24 hours after the court's decision, by The Times (London) newspaper—a major voice of Western capitalist interests. The newspaper thundered that the Kosovo case was unique because “Kosovo's vote for independence stemmed from clear injustice and mistreatment...Kosovo's declaration of independence... reflected exhaustion at the abortive efforts to achieve a negotiated agreement on the province's status.” The newspaper editorial assiduously avoided to mention that Kosovo is an anti-Serbian Western ally and that it was the Western armies which were instrumental in slicing off Kosovo from Serbia.

Count the falsehoods of The Times. The newspaper ignored that Artsakh's wish for independence also stems from clear injustice and mistreatment by the Azeris. It also ignored that Artsakh Armenians and the government of Armenia have also exhausted efforts to achieve a negotiated agreement on the territory's status. To exacerbate its hypocrisy, the London newspaper, the mouthpiece of the late and unlamented British Empire had the gall to claim “Western support for Kosovo's independence underlines the sensitivity of free nations to demands for self-determination.” It seems that Artsakh is not entitled to such noble concerns.

Call it selective sensitivity.

Call it double standard.

Call it the shameless debunking of the wise proverb “What's good for the goose is good for the gander.”

Bruce Jones of the Washington-based think tank Brookings Institute pontificated that the formulation of the international court is restricted and does not affect any general principles. “We must in this case draw a clear dividing line between, on the one hand, international law and on the other the principles of international politics,” said Jones, adding that the court's decision will not have any tangible political consequence, unless, we guess, it's in the interest of Western nations--led by

the United States and the oil lobby.

Peter Semneby, the European Union representative for the South Caucasus region, joined the nay saying chorus by claiming that The Hague court's decision applied to a unique issue. Said Semneby, "The international court's ruling on Kosovo has no impact on other situations, particularly on Abkhazia, and South Ossetian problems. I consider if it has an impact, it will be inconsiderable. These issues are different despite the comparison made with each other."

A more honest reason for the difficulties Artsakh would face to gain legitimacy for its independence was offered by Alexandr Rahr, a German political scientist. He said, "In real politics, the countries see as a major priority not the international law, but the stability of the region...No country seeks to recognize the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh ." Mikhail Remizov, a Russian observer of the Caucasus, echoed Rahr by saying, "In a large degree, this was a political decision, but not legal."

There you have it. International law takes back seat to international politics. Since 69 countries (most of them coerced by the US) recognize Kosovo, it's O.K. to declare Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence legal. No country, not even Armenia recognizes Artsakh's independence, while two other breakaway Caucasian statelets—Abkhazia and South Ossetia are recognized by Russia, Nicaragua, and Nauru in the South Pacific.

Reflecting on Artsakh's chances to garner international backing for its independence, other observers said that the supporters of Kosovo's independence had much more powerful political lobby than the potential supporters of the claims of independence of Artsakh.

To drive the point that Artsakh's chances for recognition of its independences were nil, Amanda Paul (Today's Zaman, July 25) wrote: "...Without the backing of the US, they have nothing. It is political clout rather than international law that counts, and the chances that the US will ever recognize Nagorno-Karabakh , South Ossetia or Abkhazia must be zero or thereabouts."

Most commentators, who rejected that the Kosovo decision set a precedent for Artsakh and other independence movements, didn't even bother to remark on the concepts of self-determination versus the principle of territorial integrity. They hinted or insisted that politics takes priority over legality.

The voice of pro-Artsakh independence was far muted to the point of being irrelevant in real politik. Ara Papiian of Armenia-based think-tank Modus Vivendi repeated that the law of self-determination is included in the UN Charter as one of the aims of that organization. Well-meaning Michael Kambeck, secretary general of European Friends of Armenia, had supportive words for Artsakh but his observations have no currency in the international corridors or power. He said, "Everybody who has ever been to Karabakh knows that the people there have been traumatized, they only trust themselves. They would all rather defend their security with arms than trust anyone to govern them. The conflicting parties and international players involved need to reflect these de facto and the de jure aspects in their actions." True but of no consequence.

On Friday July 30 evening in Stepanagerd and other cities in Artsakh, Armenians will hold rallies in support of the UN International Court of Justice's resolution on Kosovo and to appeal to the international community to recognize the independence of Artsakh. The public gatherings are worthwhile, but they will not sway the U.S. and Co.

By their very nature, states are inclined against secessionists wherever they may be. States rightly believe that if they approve of secessionists elsewhere, they would be hard put to reject domestic separatist movements. Every country—from China to Canada to Cyprus--disapproves of separatism for this very reason. If Spain said 'yes' to separatism beyond her shores, then Madrid would not be able to oppose Basque or Catalanian independence. Belgium is in the same boat because of Flemish separatism. Turkey welcomed the Kosovo decision because Ankara considers Kosovar-Albanians their historic Moslem brothers and because the decision opens the door to Turkish-occupied Northern Cyprus to declare its independence. Apparently, Turkey doesn't fear that the decision could impact its own separatist Kurds because militarist Ankara believes it can indefinitely suppress its Kurdish "minority" of 12 to 15 million.

Where does all this leave Stepanagerd and Yerevan?

It's an impossible dream for Armenians to emerge with strong enough lobby to obtain the international court's green light similar to the one Kosovo was granted. Since the interminable negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan are going nowhere, and since Baku keeps making bellicose statements on a regular basis, the Artsakh issue might not have a political solution, unless the Great Powers, through the Minsk Group, force an agreement upon the antagonists. The other possibility is war. While war would be disastrous for both sides, Ilham Aliyev, president of Azerbaijan, might be forced to attack Armenia and Artsakh to make good on his frequent threats. If Azerbaijan declares war, Armenians can't expect Russian help/intervention, unless Armenian forces face imminent collapse.

If Azerbaijan declares war, the Kosovo precedence, the legality of Artsakh independence, international law, et al, will become irrelevant, pending the outcome of such a war. That said, it would be a blunder for Yerevan to recognize the independence of Artsakh. Such a declaration would be considered casus belli by Azerbaijan and other countries, and most probably precipitate war.

However, war might be averted if a report by sources familiar with the top-secret negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan is factual. According to these sources, Armenia has already agreed to withdraw its forces from regions surrounding Artsakh proper and that Armenia and Azerbaijan are now focused on the timing of the withdrawal of Armenian troops and the manner in which Armenian troops will be withdrawn. Supposedly, Artsakh will have a temporary status and its safekeeping will be ensured by an international peacekeeping force pending the final status of Artsakh to be decided by a referendum which will include the votes of Azeris. Artsakh citizens, who will participate in

Friday's rally, will certainly reject such an agreement.

