


ENERGIZING THE ARTSAKH (NAGORNO-KARABAKH) ARGUMENT

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 **Editorial**, 10 May 2016

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The above doublethink by the author of “The Great Gatsby” is his most popular quote although its cognitive dissonance is jarring. How much of the tortuous and tortured thinking was a result of his alcoholism and mental illness should make an interesting topic for a Ph.D. thesis. Meanwhile, sagacious diplomats around the world seem to live by the American novelist's tendentious pensee. To wit: they simultaneously believe in the concept of a state's territorial rights while claiming to honor the contradictory principle of respect for a people's right to self-determination.

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Which concept should the world respect when deciding the fate of the unrecognized Armenian republic? So far, the world has generally given precedence to Azerbaijan's “territorial rights” argument.

Global diplomatic ethics being what they are, it's no surprise that consistency and integrity take back seat to self-interest in the tension between the two concepts. Thus when it was in the interest of the Western powers to dismantle Yugoslavia, they were for self-determination for the various nations which comprised that republic. Russia, which opposed self-determination for the Yugoslav nations recently advocated self-determination in eastern Ukraine. Meanwhile Moscow opposes self-

determination movements in Northern Caucasus. Similar inconsistencies abound in global diplomacy (Turkish occupation of northern Cyprus, the separation of southern Sudan from Khartoum, East Timor, etc.).

States give short shrift to self-determination mostly because many of them have separatist, secessionist, autonomist movements. From Albania (the Northern Epirus minority) to the United Kingdom (Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland) to France (Corsica), states feel threatened by minority groups which demand some sort of self-determination. When Canada faces separatism in Quebec, Ottawa will not support separatists in Spain, France, or in the Caucasus.

Since the Armenian espousal of self-determination for Artsakh has failed to get traction, Yerevan/Stepanagert need a new game plan which will advance a more persuasive rationale for self-determination.

But first Armenians should put aside the argument that they have been in Artsakh for millennia. Recent history (Persian, Russian, and Soviet Azeri rule of Artsakh) has more weight at the UN than our 1,500-year-old churches. As ineffective is the argument that Stalin illegally granted Armenian lands (Artsakh/Nakhichevan) to Azerbaijan. Historian Rouben Galichian's sensible argument ("The Invention of History, Clash of Histories in the South Caucasus") that the decision of one of the world's cruellest dictators should not become the basis of international negotiations has fallen on deaf ears. Let's also not waste time pushing the argument that Azerbaijan is a recent fabrication. Many states are...from Israel to Jordan to the Gulf States and practically all the African states. There are no buyers of that argument.

A new blueprint for advancing the self-determination principle is eloquently supplied by Dr. Armen Mazmanyanyan, director of the Apella Institute and its Centre for Constitutional Studies. Dr. Mazmanyanyan argues that Azerbaijan is interested in territorial integrity but without the people who inhabit it. Azerbaijan's April attack demonstrated that Baku is intent at eliminating Artsakh Armenians. The Azeri army's use of weapons of mass destruction, the shelling of settlements, the threat to shell Stepanagert, the slaying of elderly civilians in their homes, and the ISIS-style killing of soldiers are evidence that Baku is intent at ethnic cleansing in Artsakh—a repeat of the genocide Azerbaijan's older brother committed a century ago.

Azerbaijan's state policy of anti-Armenian racism is another reason why Armenians can't trust Azeri rule over Armenian lands and people. All day long, on Azeri media and in schools, Baku spouts anti-Armenian propaganda. Meanwhile Azeri columnists spread calumny about Armenians.

The case of Lieut. Ramil Safarov, the Azeri axe-man who killed an Armenian officer in Hungary during a NATO military gathering, is another reason not to trust Baku. When the killer of Lieut. Gurgen Margaryan, was prematurely released by the Hungary (the release was lubricated by Azeri purchase of Hungarian government bonds) in 2012, the murderer was welcomed in Baku as a hero. No less than Azerbaijan's president welcomed the coward. The axe murderer was granted the title

of National Hero, promoted from to major, given a house, a car...why Baku has been tardy in making a movie about Safarov is a mystery. Perhaps Azeri officials are negotiating with Ben "Batman" Affleck who now shells for the Turkish Airlines.

Upon his "triumphal" return to Azerbaijan, the murderer, who had killed the Armenian officer while the latter was asleep, said: "My job is to kill Armenians. As long as they live, they will suffer...If there were more Armenians I would have killed them all. However, this was the first and I didn't have time to prepare more punctually to commit this action."

As if the rewarding Safarov wasn't sufficient barbarity, a few weeks ago Aliyev personally gave an award to the Azeri soldier who, during the early April Azeri attack, had decapitated Kyaram Sloyan, the Yezidi soldier in the Armenian army.

Despite Safarov's crime and his obscene crowing, the international community hardly condemned Azerbaijan for its scandalous celebration of Safarov's brutality. The world also didn't condemn Aliyev for honouring the Azeri soldier who beheaded Sloyan. So how can Armenians trust the goodwill of states which are now telling Armenians that everything will be fine if Armenians allow Azeris to rule over them?

When Armenians of Artsakh say they can't trust Azeri rule, they have a lucid exhibit next door in Nakhichevan. That Armenian region was heavily inhabited by Armenians when Stalin handed it to Baku. Seventy years later—supposedly under the even-handed umbrella of Big Brother Moscow—there were no Armenians left in Nakhichevan: they had been pushed out by the Comrade Azeris. This is further proof of the maniacal Azeri hatred of Armenians. Although there are no Armenians left in Nakhichevan, several years ago Baku authorities went on a paroxysm of destruction and shattered thousands of Armenian graves, some from the Middle Ages. How can any reasonable person maintain that ethnic harmony can prevail in Artsakh if Baku is handed the stamp-sized Armenian republic?

The same argument applies to the Azeri territories occupied by the Armenians. An independent Artsakh would be at the mercy of Azeri guns if the seven areas are handed to Baku. Suicide is not an acceptable national policy. Israel, which has occupied the Golan Heights since 1967, advances the same argument for holding on to the heights. Tel Aviv cites UN Security Council Resolution (Nov. 22, 1967) which calls for "secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force" for every state.

Armenian diplomats, political scientists, and international lawyers have their job cut out for them. They should use these and other relevant arguments to buttress the thesis that Artsakh self-determination is the only viable solution to the conflict. Raffi K. Hovannissian, the first foreign minister of present-day Armenia and a former presidential candidate writes, "Azerbaijan's belligerent conduct, a hell-bent design developed over the years to wipe out not only Karabakh but Armenia in toto, renders a negotiated settlement no longer possible, and it is imperatively time for the

international community to take a stance in equivalent application of international law and, yes, in pursuit of guaranteeing strategic security interests" ([Foreign Policy Journal, May 6, 2016](#)).

Finally, error-prone, dim-witted Baby Aliyev unintentionally betrayed secret Turbeijan intentions when he said that not only Artsakh and Zankezur belong to Azerbaijan but also all of Armenia because "Armenia was part of 'ancient' Azerbaijan". In other words, the grey wolf will not be content with Artsakh. Next on the vulpine menu is Yerevan. Aliyev's statement is the clincher. It's the nail in the coffin in the concept of the so-called Azeri territorial integrity in Artsakh.

