BLUNDERS OF AN INTELLIGENT MAN

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Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) is the Harvard of Russia. It's the alma mater of the largest number of Russian *Forbes* magazine list members and representatives of the Russian political elite. Sergei Lavrov, Russia's foreign minister; Irina Bekova, ex-director-general of UNESCO; and historian Sergo Mikoyan are graduates of MGIMO. So is President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan who after receiving his PhD in history and international relations lectured at his alma mater for four years. He later became first vice-president of SOCAR (Azerbaijan State Petroleum Company). This is by way of saying that although his looks, body language, and lumbering walk may suggest his I.Q might be close to that of room temperature, Aliyev is not an imbecile. That being the case, it's difficult to understand his two recent huge blunders which endanger his and Azerbaijan's future.

His demand for Armenia's unconditional surrender was a sound military goal if his aim was the annihilation of Armenia or its conquest. But Aliyev knows Moscow would not allow the destruction of Armenia or its absorption into Azerbaijan. As well, his land grab doesn't make sense because it guarantees the conflict's perpetuity. Aliyev's greed is not only hugely humiliating to Armenians but gives a first-class incentive to Armenia to turn the tables at the earliest opportunity.

Aliyev's intelligence didn't interfere with his bloodlust. Thus, he didn't stop—let alone arrest--his troops who were beheading POWs. He watched with glee as the country he ruled turned into a Hieronymus Bosch painting come to life.

If a nation's first wish is to live in amity with its neighbor, it should not try to erode that nation's self-respect. The greater a people's degradation at the hands of their enemy the deeper and more lasting will be the resentment and stronger its eventual reaction. Azerbaijan will run out of oil in less than twenty years. Without oil, Azerbaijan is another Bangladesh, according to an American professor/political analyst. And unlike, say, Saudi Arabia, Azerbaijan hasn't invested in new technologies to guarantee its economic future when the oil wells dry up. The reduced revenues and growing population will curtail Azerbaijan's "defense" budget.

It's widely accepted by historians and politicians that the Second World War was the sequel to the First World War. The harsh terms of the Treaty of Versailles (imposed upon a downsized Germany by the victorious Allies) led to the Second World War a mere nineteen years later. Germans, not just their government, saw the treaty as unfair and extremely harsh. Thus, when a former painter from Austria promised the recovery of everything Germany had lost, they lined up to support him.

Of all the people who should have been restrained about Azerbaijan recent land grab, Aliyev should have been the first. In his sixty or so years, he must have learned a few essential facts about Armenians: Armenians have survived for thousands of years despite the toughest man-made calamities (arena of competing empires, the Battle of Manazgerd which opened Armenia's gates to the Seljuk Turks, the disappearance of the Armenian and Cilician kingdoms, the mass settlement in

the early 17th century to Iran, the Hamidian Massacres, the Armenian Genocide) and nature's heavy club (earthquakes). He surely knows that seven million Diaspora Armenians are inordinately attached to their homeland. He should have known Armenians would not accept Azeri occupation of their lands. And down the road it will be the tenacious Armenians who will decide when the shooting will start.

Aliyev's next blunder was providing Erdogan the red carpet so that NATO-trained Turkish generals, technicians, and experts in modern warfare could march to Baku and precipitate the firing of Azerbaijan's defense minister, if not the foreign minister. Now Turkish troops are also in Artsakh. Aliyev has yet to grasp that President Recep Erdogan's Pan-Turkish fantasy or a resurrected Ottoman Empire can easily make Azerbaijan a province of Turkey and Aliyev a gofer for Erdogan. The highway which will connect Azerbaijan to Nakhichevan through southern Armenia is more important to Turkey than to Azerbaijan. It's the first link in Erdogan's fantasy of a Pan-Turkic Empire. Finally, if Turkey takes over Azerbaijan, America will not demand that it withdraw because Turkey's presence would mean reduction in Russian influence in the region. "One nation, two states" indeed.

Aliyev, an intelligent man who has recently behaved like an imbecile, doesn't realize that Armenia is Azerbaijan's shield against Turkish expansionism. No matter how cunningly Erdogan sugarcoats the medicine, Aliyev would lose his position and Azerbaijan its sovereignty to Turkey if Aliyev goes along Erdogan's Pan-Turkic Empire dream. Aliyev will become a figurehead taking his orders from Ankara. Eventually, there will be an uprising by Azeri nationalists and the minorities to drive out Erdogan's henchmen, and Aliyev along with them.

People who remember the Pan-Arab movement of the late '50s might remember the unification (1958) of Syria with much bigger and stronger Egypt with Gamal Abdul Nasser as president of the new country—United Arab Republic (UAR). To make sure the new country would not be perceived as created by the political elites of both countries, plebiscites were held and both peoples backed unification. Cairo became the capital of UAR and the Egyptian currency became that of UAR. The new country—which was hoped to encourage other Arab states to join—lasted barely three years because the asymmetrical relationship made Syrians feel marginalized in their own country. The Syrian military, businessmen, and citizens bridled that decisions were being made in Cairo, and Syrians often had to travel to Egypt's capital to get things done.

The similarities between the Cairo/Damascus pairing with Ankara/Baku are remarkable. If Prof. Aliyev doesn't want to lose his country to Turkey, he better start easing out the Turkish military from Artsakh and Azerbaijan. For before he can say "*bir, eekee, euch*," Erdogan might—with Azeri Pan-Turanists—ease out Aliyev and declare Azerbaijan united to Turkey.

Comments

Zohrab Dishakjian – 2021-01-25 23:49:08
Good observation Mr. T.....

Minas T. – 2021-01-05 19:10:07
I agree with the analysis in the editorial. We should never underestimate our enemy, as some of the Armenian leaders did, and see where it got them. However, I think in the long run this will prove to be a pyrrhic victory. For one thing, it brought the Russians back to Azeri lands and I don't believe that they are planning to leave any time soon - be sure of that. And the alliance between Turkey and Azerbaijan will prove to be a blunder as the article suggests. Too many examples where such "alliances" between two unequal partners proved disastrous. Armenia will survive this setback. If history has taught us anything, it is that in times of crises Armenians will come back together and support each other. The best thing we can do now is put all our efforts not in building a military infrastructure, which will sap a lot of our resources, but rather develop a strong economic base and wait for the right moment. As they say, revenge is a dish better served cold!

Vahakn – 2021-01-05 17:19:53
On Dec. 28, the New Cold War (NewColdWar.org) on-line publication ran an article which said the Erdogan-controlled Turkish media has published a map titled "Five States, One Nation". The map includes Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, plus parts of northern Caucasus, Crimea, one-third of Russia, parts of China, and Iran, Iraq, and Syria.