NIKOL PASHINYAN: PRIME MINISTER OF THE DISENFRANCHISED

Posted on December 6, 2020 by Keghart



Category: Opinions

By Gohar Kantarchian, Toronto, 4 December 2020

Following massive casualties and territorial losses in the Second Artsakh (Karabakh) War, a question arises about the role of Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his administration in this embarrassing outcome. Recently, Pashinyan stated that the negotiations under the OSCE Minsk Group had hit a deadlock long ago, so at some point war was inevitable.

Nevertheless, formal, and underlying triggers of this war and reasons for the Armenian defeat remain to be analyzed in the months and years to come. No matter what the outcome, it would not absolve Pashinyan and his team from being accountable for bad governance and failed diplomacy to prevent the genocidal Turkish-Azeri war or stop it with a less unfavourable outcome.

So, what made Pashinyan fail? Where and why did he make so many mistakes?

Pashinyan has a background in opposition journalism and political activism. His ability to mobilize and electrify crowds is undeniable. He was at the helm of the protests against tampered electoral results in 2008 that culminated in police brutality and the killing of ten protesters on March 1.

Ten years later, in 2018, he captured public anger and frustration with the corrupt rule of Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan to dethrone him. Sargsyan, who was Armenia's president for two consecutive terms, refashioned Armenia's constitution to declare Armenia a parliamentary democracy so that he could secure continuity of his power legitimately as prime minister.

Pashinyan's 'My Step' party then recorded a sweeping victory in general elections in 2018 on the promise of building a liberal pro-Western democracy, uprooting corruption and bringing justice to the families of victims of the March 1, 2008 police brutality.

It was then that the former President Robert Kocharyan, an overly unpopular figure for his murderous record, was taken into custody for months, with no progress in his criminal case. Was criminal prosecution of Kocharyan alone sufficient to put Pashinyan on a wrong footing with Russia's Putin, Kocharyan's long-time ally and friend?

For the Kremlin Pashinyan and his team had been the embodiment of the so-called 'color revolutions' that had earlier shook the post-Soviet republics of Georgia and Ukraine. The Kremlin propaganda comfortably labelled many of the Pashinyan's team members as 'Soros bred' politicians to imply a brood of inexperienced youngsters brainwashed by Western ideologies that contradicted Eastern values and conservatism. In fairness, many on Pashinyan's team jumped into the public administration bandwagon from the charity sector--mostly funded by foreign governments and Western pro-democracy sponsors--and had little to no practical experience in public administration. They also lacked the wisdom that comes with experience.



As a result, in his two-and-a-half years as head of state, Pashinyan's programmatic achievements remained nominal, if not non-existent. While opening of economic competition gave hope to entrepreneurs, the enthusiasm was quickly wiped out as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In fairness, Pashinyan's regime secured improvements in general welfare of the citizenry yet did not undertake systemic changes to eliminate corruption. Pashinyan's controversial monthly bonus payments to public service employees were further criticized by his political opponents and interpreted as hidden and legitimized acts of corruption.

In this backdrop of systemic failures to implement in-house reforms, Pashinyan relied on what he has proven to be extremely good at--propaganda that appealed to common people and especially the most disenfranchised citizenry. A populist leader, he has relentlessly proven his extraordinary competence in establishing direct connection with the electorate, including through social media platforms. Following the end of the war, Pashinyan went live on Facebook and initiated live Facebook shows which he entitled "Conversations with Citizens". The main goal was to persuade the citizenry that the defeat in the war happened through no fault of his own but rather was the result of failures and corruption of his predecessors, who did not invest in the army modernization.

However, it would be an understatement to say that Pashinyan failed in diplomacy only. He polarized his opponents internally and loosened his ties with Russia. He seems to have underestimated the risk of the Russo-Turkish proxy war in the frozen conflict zone in Artsakh and overestimated military readiness of the Armenian army to fight drone warfare.

During the war, Pashinyan demonstrated no trust in his team and army generals in so much that he delegated his wife to act as his personal adjutant at generals' confidential meetings in violation of the martial law. The combat operation was a mess under his weak and questionable leadership, while his messages to the population lacked clarity and for that reason were alarming.

In the past, hard-headedness, vaulting ambition and manipulation had helped Pashinyan survive as a dissident politician, fighter and revolutionary. Yet, these same qualities, combined with his overestimation of his self-worth and self-righteousness did not let him become the statesman who could lead Armenia and Artsakh into prosperity and not into war.

Pashinyan's political career is in sunset years. Ironically, his political tenure in the coming months depends on the will of Putin with whom he boasts of conversing at least a dozen times daily after the war.

It seems that the glorious days of Pashinyan's revolution are long gone and the result is destruction and devastation.

There are no comments yet.