MATTHEW BRYZA'S PLANS FOR ARTSAKH: FORMULA FOR DISASTER FOR ARMENIANS

Posted on August 20, 2009 by Keghart

Category: Opinions

By Harut Sassounian, Publisher, The California Courier, 20 August 2009

Matthew Bryza, the U.S. mediator for Artsakh (Karabagh), discussed in great detail for the first time the critical issues dealing with the behind the scene negotiations on resolving that conflict.
Mr. Bryza is the U.S. Co-Chair of the Minsk Group and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs. He delivered a speech on the Artsakh conflict at the International Center for Human Rights in Tsakhkadzor, Armenia, on August 7. Mr. Bryza's lengthy presentation, followed by an extensive question and answer period (19 pages), was transcribed by NEWS.am Armenian news agency.

By Harut Sassounian, Publisher, The California Courier, 20 August 2009

Matthew Bryza, the U.S. mediator for Artsakh (Karabagh), discussed in great detail for the first time the critical issues dealing with the behind the scene negotiations on resolving that conflict.
Mr. Bryza is the U.S. Co-Chair of the Minsk Group and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs. He delivered a speech on the Artsakh conflict at the International Center for Human Rights in Tsakhkadzor, Armenia, on August 7. Mr. Bryza's lengthy presentation, followed by an extensive question and answer period (19 pages), was transcribed by NEWS.am Armenian news agency.

While Mr. Bryza has regularly met with members of the media during his frequent visits to Armenia and Azerbaijan, often recanting in Yerevan what he reportedly said in Baku, he has never before disclosed the details of the settlement being negotiated between the presidents of the two conflicting countries and the three Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group, composed of France, Russia, and the United States.
The Armenian public certainly appreciates Mr. Bryza's willingness to discuss the terms of a future agreement on the Artsakh conflict. Nevertheless, one wonders why was Mr. Bryza in such a talkative mood? Was he preparing the Armenian public for the painful compromises that are to be made or was he trying to impress his Washington superiors with his negotiating skills, as he is being considered for an ambassadorial post in Baku?

Mr. Bryza began his remarks by stating that the negotiations for the settlement of the Artsakh conflict are based on the three fundamental principles of the Helsinki Final Act: Self-determination, territorial integrity, and non-use of force.

Claiming that the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan "right now are on the verge of a breakthrough," an assertion he has made many times before, Mr. Bryza proceeded to disclose a highly controversial roadmap of the agreement currently under consideration. Mr. Bryza stated that Artsakh would preserve its current status for an "interim period." Armenians would then turn over to Azerbaijan most of the "seven territories" surrounding Artsakh. After the Azeri refugees who left

Artsakh during the war return to their homes, a referendum would be held to determine the final status of Artsakh.

During the question and answer period, Mr. Bryza stated that the Minsk Group Co-Chairs were disappointed that during their July 17 meeting in Moscow, Presidents Sargsyan and Aliyev did not come to an agreement "on several of the final elements of the basic principles," despite the fact that, during their January meeting in Zurich, they had "agreed on the basic concepts." He said he expected an agreement in September "on the last few elements of the basic principles that remain not yet agreed."

When asked if Azerbaijan was making any compromises, Mr. Bryza pointed out Baku's increasingly accommodating position on the Lachin Corridor which links Artsakh to Armenia, its concern for the security of Artsakh Armenians and their need to run their own affairs. Mr. Bryza further claimed that "Azerbaijan had to give up quite a bit from a position where it was in the beginning when it said it will never talk about self-determination. And, of course, to bring Azerbaijan to that point, Armenia had to give something up as well…. So, both sides are making compromises."

Mr. Bryza defended the non-recognition of Artsakh by the United States, by pointing out that the government of Armenia has not recognized it either. He said that the reason Armenia does not recognize Artsakh's independence is that "it knows that if it does that, the chances to negotiate a peaceful settlement finish."

In response to a complaint from the audience that Artsakh was left out of the negotiations, Mr. Bryza blamed its absence on the Kocharian government. "Until 1998, Karabakh Armenians were formally part of the negotiations, when it was the former government of Armenia who decided to change that situation. It was not the Co-Chairs who made the decision -- that was the government of Armenia," he said. Mr. Bryza did not mention the fact that Azerbaijan had rejected Artsakh's inclusion in the talks.

Responding to another question, Mr. Bryza made the surprising disclosure that the international peacekeeping troops to be stationed in or around Artsakh would not be armed, simply because they would not be able to compel the two sides not to fight, if they are intent on going to war against each other. He stated that "the Co-Chairs have to be smart and skillful enough to put at place a settlement in which the international peacekeepers will be primarily observers."

Mr. Bryza candidly told his Armenian audience not to trust the international peacekeepers to secure the peace in Artsakh. He also stated that a "legally binding" referendum to determine the status of Artsakh would be held in several years, after the original Azerbaijani inhabitants, who before the war constituted 20% of the territory's population, would return to Artsakh.

Mr. Bryza concluded by urging Armenians to accept "a compromise settlement now," warning that "a decade ago, Armenia was in a much stronger negotiation position!"

The terms of the possible settlement, as outlined by Mr. Bryza, is a disaster waiting to happen to Armenians. They are supposed to first turn over to Azerbaijan practically all of the territories surrounding Artsakh. Then the former Azeri inhabitants of Artsakh are to return, after which a referendum would be held on the status of Artsakh, under the watchful eyes of UNARMED international peacekeepers. If Azerbaijan, at a future date, uses its massive petrodollars to acquire sophisticated weaponry and invade Artsakh, particularly after Armenians have given up the buffer zones they are currently holding, the population of Artsakh risks being completely destroyed.

From the Armenian point of view, the only acceptable solution to the Artsakh conflict would be to either maintain the status quo or to agree to a package deal that would require Azerbaijan's recognition of Artsakh's independence and the establishment of a demilitarized zone on the Azeri side of the border, before giving up a single inch of land or allowing the return of a single Azeri refugee!