OF SHEPHERDS AND SPIES

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Norick Markosian, Los Angeles, 29 April 2013

During a recent soccer match in Iran, between a club from Tehran and a club from Tabriz (the capital of the province of Azerbayjan in Iran), a Tehrani fan waved an Armenian flag. If you read the comments made by people on facebook, following the match, you will learn that Iranian-Azeri sentiments toward Armenians are not different from that of their cousins in Turkey and Azerbaijan. Most of the comments are in Turkish and some are in Farsi. They show an incredible degree of hate for Armenians and love for Turkey and Azerbaijan. On the other hand Iranians, in general, call for unity, and consider Armenians their brothers.

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In providing the above introduction, I would like to emphasize that leasing grazing lands in Syunik to Iranian- Azeris, regardless of its financial benefits, will gravely endanger Armenia's national security. I believe it is not in the best interest of the Iranian government either for Armenia to lose its independence, and become an easy target for the pan-Turkish aspirations of Turkey and Azerbaijan. It is unthinkable to assume that Iran will allow Azeris to have free and close contact with their cousins in Azerbaijan. But they also have their own motives for allowing Iranian "Azeris" to flock to Armenia and be "closer" to their distant relatives.

I cannot believe that the "shepherds", who will come to Armenia, are in reality going to graze their sheep. Nor do I believe there will be many ethnic Iranian-Azeris among them. Iranians' dissatisfaction and abhorrence for the treaties of Gulistan and Turkmenchay are important factors here.

Just a couple of months ago, an Iranian senior official announced that the statue of limitations on the aforementioned treaties will expire at the end of 2013, and Iranians will be well within their rights to demand the return of Baku to Iran, as historical Iranian territory. We would be naive if we think that Russia and Turkey will not make their own moves to counterbalance the Iranians. That is where our national security will be endangered.

Only time will tell if the "shepherds" were really shepherds, or they were Iranian agents stationed in Syunik to run reconnaissance missions against Azerbaijan.