

# REFLECTIONS ON EVENTS IN AND AROUND ARMENIA

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By Vartan Oskanian, Former Foreign Minister of Republic of Armenia, [Facebook](#), 10 April 2024

### **What has happened**

— The anatomy of today's calamity and nightmare is as glaringly evident as a high-resolution MRI scan of the human body. Error upon error by Nikol Pashinyan has cascaded into war and the first partial loss of Nagorno Karabakh. Subsequent missteps have culminated in the complete loss of Nagorno Karabakh and the eventual mass expulsion of its populace, while still ongoing blunders have thrust Armenia into the crucible of sacrifice. Following the 44-day war, rather than acknowledging his missteps and endeavoring to rectify them, the choice was made to delve deeper into the rabbit hole of justifying these errors. This has manifested either in stubbornly doubling down on mistakes or in shifting blame onto other parties.

### **The main culprit**

— Effective leadership in Armenia requires a minimum level of proficiency in diplomatic and military-political acumen, skills that Pashinyan has consistently lacked. His educational background and lack of military service do not align with these critical areas, and aside from a few parliamentary visits abroad, his experience in such matters during his time in opposition remains minimal. Adding to this deficiency is Pashinyan's tendency to overestimate his understanding, leading to a false sense of expertise that inevitably results in failure.

— Upon assuming power, Pashinyan displayed uncertainty and inconsistency regarding the Nagorno Karabakh issue and other foreign policy matters. He had no clue about what to do. He failed to seek counsel from experienced advisors, choosing instead to believe that ambiguity equated to direction. His eventual approach, attempting to please all involved parties, only served to escalate tensions and ignite conflict, ultimately playing into Azerbaijan's hands. His rhetoric and tongue have become his and Armenia's worst enemies. It seemed to him that his street smarts and shrewdness, which served him well as a journalist and opposition politician, would translate equally well into his role as prime minister.

— Pashinyan's decision-making has been marked by irrationality. First, a rational leader should be free from personal biases and cognitive illusions. Pashinyan's deep animosity and hatred towards his predecessors and few external powers have clouded his judgment. Also his history as a journalist indicates a tendency to distort facts for personal and political gain, a habit that persisted into his political career, undermining his ability to make sound decisions.

— Moreover, a rational decision-maker must discern between nuanced concepts, a skill Pashinyan sorely lacks. The consequences of conflating belief with evidence, probability with randomness, or correlation with causation can be dire, as

evidenced by Pashinyan's track record of poor decisions and their subsequent outcomes.

—Now that his personal security and prime minister's chair have collapsed into one, his level of rationality has hit rock bottom. He and his cohorts are solely focused on maintaining power, with their decisions driven by this singular goal. The rest of the nation can only hope that what benefits him and his personal security coincides with the interests of the Armenian people, though history suggests this is rarely the case.

—In summary, Pashinyan's deficiencies in diplomatic and military-political knowledge, combined with his lack of coherent strategy and irrational decision-making, have led Armenia into its current predicament. Armenia is a one-man show, and that one man must be held responsible for the failures and losses.

### **Armenia's turn on a dime**

— Armenia's abrupt pivot towards the West, cutting all ties with Russia, is miscalculated and nonsensical. It is hard to explain and is uncalled for. At a minimum, there are more subtle ways to do it.

—Observing the childlike enthusiasm exhibited by the Prime Minister's associates regarding the visit of the NATO secretary-general, Pashinyan's latest trip to Brussels and the favorable overtures extended by Western powers prompt me to question the maturity of today's "elite." It appears they may lack a sense of historical perspective, memory, and foresight. There's a sense of grandiosity, as if Armenia's integration in or even association with Western civilization is on the verge of a groundbreaking launch, under their wise and enthusiastic stewardship.

—During my tenure alone as Foreign Minister from 1998 to 2008, Armenia hosted three different NATO general secretaries. In 2004, we even hosted NATO military exercises on Armenian soil, with Turkey's participation. Short of being a formal applicant to the Alliance, our relations with NATO were exceptionally deep, all while maintaining our strategic alliance with Russia and our leadership role within the CSTO. At that time, Nagorno-Karabakh enjoyed stability, and concerns about Armenia's territorial integrity were virtually nonexistent. The same can be said about Armenia's relations with other European and transatlantic structures.

### **East-West intricate dance**

—The objectives of the West in our region are fourfold: excluding Russia, isolating Iran, ensuring the uninterrupted flow of Azeri oil and gas and, sure, helping Armenia. To achieve these, they need and are pushing for Armenia and Azerbaijan to sign a peace agreement and will exert every effort to make it happen.

—On the other hand, Russia's objectives are to uphold its presence and influence, maintain Iran's relevance in the region, and Russia is not enthusiastic about a peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan under Western pressure and auspices.

—The Western powers will deftly dangle a carrot before Armenia, enticing it with promises of enhanced security measures and the promise of financial aid. These offerings are intended to soften the blow of the painful losses and necessary compromises that Armenia must endure. Meanwhile, they will also engage with Azerbaijan, perhaps brandishing a stick, in an effort to temper its demands on Armenia.

—Indeed, the West has its work cut out for it. It must temper Azeri demands, encourage Pashinyan to partially accept Azeri demands, while simultaneously strengthening Pashinyan domestically to maintain his leadership position.

—The intricate dance between these global players remains a spectacle to behold, with the outcome hanging precariously in the balance. Only time holds the key to unraveling this complex geopolitical puzzle. Yet, it is difficult to fathom that Pashinyan alone possesses the finesse and strategic acumen to deftly navigate these treacherous waters for the betterment of Armenia.

—Our situation bears an eerie resemblance to Ukraine's. We underwent a first phase akin to Ukrainization when we lost Nagorno Karabakh, and now we stand on the brink of entering a second phase with the potential loss of significant portions of Armenian territory. The 44-day war was avoidable, just as was the Ukraine war. Unfortunately, both countries were led by individuals at the helm who had no clue about diplomacy and international politics.

### **What to do**

—FIRST, Armenia needs prudent, competent, courageous, and rational leadership. Today's leadership doesn't fit this bill. SECOND, we need to stop acting under the fear of the threat of war. Our guidance must be our national interest. We need to understand that international politics is a process in which national interests are adjusted but not compromised. The concept of national interest presupposes neither a naturally harmonious, peaceful world nor the inevitability of war as a consequence of the pursuit by all nations of their national interests. Quite to the contrary, it assumes continuous adjustment of conflicting interests by diplomatic action. Thus, the THIRD must be that we define and adjust our national interest by striking the right balance between the new realities on the ground and around us without conceding our fundamental rights or altering the sources of our identity and weakening the pillars of our statehood. FOURTH, we need to reset our geopolitical thinking by renewing our existing strategic alliances on new understandings and at the same time reinforcing our partnerships and cooperation with all global power centers. FIFTH, we must achieve internal unity and cohesion.

### **Epilogue**

— There was a time when Armenia had a handle on things. Diplomacy was our weapon of choice. We had allies in our corner, backing us up, and adversaries who

respected our boundaries.

—But fast forward to today, our foreign policy is tangled, with alliances crumbling and adversaries breathing down our necks like a hungry pack of wolves. It's like we're navigating through a dense fog with no compass and a busted GPS. We're lost in a maze of conflicting interests and shifting allegiances, stumbling around like blindfolded bulls in our own china shop, causing ourselves untold damage and suffering. The level of incompetence of this current leadership is truly staggering.

—We find ourselves trapped in a relentless cycle that, with the current leadership, seems impossible to escape. Russia and Iran harbor no trust in Pashinyan's leadership. Turkey and Azerbaijan remain skeptical of his words. Though the West may show some faith, it's not due to his credibility but rather due to the absence of better alternatives to achieve their goals and is sort of a marriage of convenience.

## Comments



**Angela Barseghian** – 2024-05-02 16:45:31

Having followed this author and former politician, one cannot help but notice that he has accomplished nothing during the long years of his service. NOTHING. While I agree that Pashinian is no better than, Oskanian, the fact remains, that Armenia is dealing with foreign powers, such as Turkey, Azerbaijan and Russia, who are not interested in mere territories here and there...These neighbours are interested in destroying the Armenian nation and eliminating Armenia. Let us not kid ourselves... Instead of throwing dirt from one incompetent and corrupt "leader" to the other, one needs to ask Oskanian, why didn't they prepare Armenia for this day? Was it impossible to see it coming? Was it difficult to guess based on the multiple genocides and the history of Armenians? A small nation we were many decades ago, and we are even smaller nation today. So, under the circumstances, how does Armenia survive against Russia, Turkey and Azerbaijan? No answer from Oskanian, then, and no answer from Oskanian today. I am not a defender of Pashinian, but I do not appreciate people not addressing the real issues of Armenia today, and instead, they are concentrating on one person, and demanding his resignation as a solution...Pashinian may be an incompetent, illiterate politician, but Armenia has larger issues than that...the huge challenge of fascist Russia, Turkey and Azerbaijan...who will not leave Armenia alone as long as they are dictatorial, imperialist states...



**Vahne** - 2024-04-29 18:48:33

IT WAS ABOUT KEEPING KARABAKH ARMENIAN A few months after his September 1997 press conference, president Levon Ter Petrosyan published put his stand for negotiated settlement to settle the Karabakh issue in an article and titled "War or peace? Time to get serious", on November 1, 1997 In it, he wrote that it is not about giving or not giving Karabakh. It is about keeping Karabakh Armenian for the next 3000 years and beyond. He also noted that the reaction to his conference "did not go beyond cursing, attributions, labels, and distortions. No proposal was made, not alternative plan was presented and not valid counterargument was presented." The power brokers of the day, Robert Kocharyan, Serzh Sargsyan, Vazken Sarkissian, Vartan Oskanian, had him resign from office after a few months. Subsequently Robert Kocharyan, Serzh Sargsyan in that order took over the helm of the country and Vartan Oskanian became Robert Kocharyan's FM. They held on to power until April 23, 2018 when Serzh Sargsyan as the newly elected PM abruptly resigned on April 23,2018 and recused himself from the inevitable unfolding of the Karabagh issue. Karabakh now is completely depopulated of its native Armenians. It boggles the mind that Vartan Oskanian, also an architect of failed diplomacy that resulted in the complete depopulation of Artsakh of its over 3000 years native population, has the audacity to make the claims he has