

PERPLEXING MILITARY/POLITICAL STRATEGY

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 **Keghart.com Board Editorial**, 13 June 2011

When a state, which is growing in military might by the day, keeps threatening its hard-pressed neighbor on a regular basis, what does the threatened state do, especially when the threatened party is perceived, by some, to be militarily stronger than its bellicose neighbor? Most people would assume the state at the receiving end of the constant threats would take military action—while it still has the military advantage--to discourage its neighbor from turning menacing words into action. 

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And when that belligerent state regularly shoots at the threatened state's soldiers, who are in defensive positions, and even slays farmers tilling the fields, what does the harassed state(s) do?

Armenians know the above are not academic scenarios or questions. For instance, between May 8 and 14 the Azerbaijani forces violated the Artsakh/Azerbaijan ceasefire protocol around 450 times. According to the Artsakh Armed Forces, in that one week Azeri soldiers fired 1,700 times in the direction of Artsakh forces. Since ceasefire was signed in 1994, instances of Armenian or Artsakh forces acting aggressively against Azeri forces have been few and far between while the Azeris have made a habit of attacking the Armenians—army and civilians.

One could attribute the Yerevan/Stepanagerd "restraint" on a plan to compile a dossier against Azerbaijan-- a file that can be presented to the United Nations or to other international agencies, to demonstrate that Azerbaijan is not interested in peace with its Armenian neighbors. If such is the case, how thick should such a dossier be to make a credible case to international bodies? And as importantly, why assume that dossier-compiling is part of the Armenian strategy when Yerevan and Stepanagerd have been singularly lackadaisical in this aspect of their political campaign against Azerbaijan?

Frankly, we are perplexed. Confused by the inexplicable silence on the part of Yerevan and Stepanagerd, we are left asking, "What—if any—plans do the two Armenian capitals have to scotch the almost-daily Azeri aggression?" How many Armenian soldiers and citizens have to be killed

before Yerevan and Stepanagerd decide that Baku has crossed the line?

A few weeks ago Richard Giragosian of the Regional Studies Center was quoted in PanARMENIAN.Net, saying that the resumption of hostilities seems illogical because Baku “knows it will lose.” Giragosian went on to say, “Azeris will need eight to ten years to reach the level of Armenian armed forces, despite ongoing purchases of armament, which will produce no result in clumsy hands.” This is certainly music to Armenian ears, but what if Mr. Giragosian is unduly optimistic about the strength of Armenian military forces, especially in an impoverished country which is being depopulated—due to emigration--at an alarming rate.

Mr. Giragosian's optimism sounds hollow, specially his allegation that the Azeri army is poorly trained and will remain so for another decade or so. With sophisticated weapon imports from at least 17 countries, training by Turkish and Israeli military advisors, advanced Israeli anti-missile capabilities and security systems, the Azeris, with their bigger army, mercenaries hired through petrodollars and support from highly-motivated Afghan, Pakistani and Chechen Islamist fighters would become a serious threat to Armenians long before Mr. Giragosian's sunny forecast.

We certainly are not advocating that Armenia and Artsakh attack Azerbaijan. However, the Armenian side should publicize the almost-daily Azeri aggression. Photos of the Armenian victims, of widows and orphans, of damaged buildings and infrastructure should be circulated to the international media. The Republic of Armenia foreign minister should make the rounds of major capitals and present a graphic image of Azeri mischief. World public opinion should become familiar with the endless Azeri threats and attacks. If following such an information campaign still Baku persists in ignoring the ceasefire, then Armenian and Artsakh armed forces should retaliate. It should be a limited but convincing retaliation. It should be tough enough to persuade Baku to pull back its snipers and other peace-disturbing elements.

It's the least Yerevan and Stepanagerd should do. After all, their first duty is the security of their citizens. If, as security specialists say, Azeri forces are weaker than the Armenian forces, Baku would come to its senses and stop its violations of the ceasefire. If it's stronger, all indications are that it would get even stronger tomorrow.

