

PLANNING ARTSAKH CIVIL PROTECTION

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Z. S. Andrew Demirdjian, Ph.D., Los Angeles, 25 June 2016

A combination of events in recent years has brought to the fore the issue of civil defense or protection for Artsakh. Azerbaijan's constant violation of the 1994 ceasefire and the vulnerability of the Armenian villages along the line of contact are causing consternation to the Armenian people everywhere. Since the Four-Day War of April 2-5, civil defense has been the object of much concern, speculation, and controversy. There has been much talk of an upcoming full-court war as a result of Azeri aggression. A lot of resentment has been expressed toward the Armenian government's complacency and lack of intelligence and vigilance, but nothing on the lack of civil protection planning of the government or the civil authorities.

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Proof of Azerbaijan's barbaric actions during the Four-Day War was the mutilated seniors journalists found in Talish after its recapture from Azeri forces. Similar incidents indicate that there was lack of planned civil defense and vigilance for villages along the border--despite the threat of war for years.

As a result of the Four-Day War it became obvious that neither the government nor the municipal authorities had a civil defense contingency plan for the safety and protection of the villagers.

In April and in May a number of senior army officers were arrested or fired for a variety of offenses including corruption and incompetence. Such a development has compelled me to advocate a civil defense plan for the Armenian border villages. The April incursion won't be the last one.

Civil protection encompasses all civil measures and means available for the protection and survival of the population and their property, and for the safeguarding of the nation's patrimony in case of an armed conflict. It also aims to assist persons and to protect national treasures in case of disaster, catastrophe, and damage.

The government of Artsakh and communities at all levels should plan for the survival of our people in the event of war or other emergencies. But the survival of individuals also will depend upon the preparation each person makes. Persons ready to take the right action before and following an attack will increase their chances of survival. I suggest the following twelve steps for the survival of Armenians in Armenia and in Artsakh in case of an Azeri attack:

- 1: Know the warning signal and have a battery-powered radio. Border villages should be provided with sirens or a warning arrangement based on telephone, horns, or bells.
- 2: Know where the shelter is and how to take shelter. The municipal authorities should provide shelters in advance of emergency. It is important for each head of household to provide the family with a shelter. Shelters should have beds (bunks, folding beds, and cots), bedding, toilet, tables, chairs, kitchen ware, etc. Books, paper, pencils, playing cards, chess, etc. should be available.
- 3: Know how to evacuate women and children. Plans should be made to know in advance how to evacuate and reach the shelters in a time. Shelter can be a basement, bunker, or a building with thick concrete block walls designed to protect evacuees.
- 4: Know where to get your arms for self-defense. Arms for self-defense could be kept at each house or at a centralized and supervised place. In the event of an attack, some men may want to join the soldiers in fighting. Therefore, they have to be well trained to handle weapons given to them for self-defense.

5: Know how to contact Stepanagerd when shelling begins. Each community must know how and whom it should contact at designated centers to inform and warn of armed hostilities. When the government becomes informed of an attack, it would be in a better position to send enforcement at a short notice.

6: Know how to prevent and fight fires. Homes and shelters should be equipped with hoses and fire extinguishers. Household heads should be able to put out a small fire quickly. While saving lives comes first, protecting homes are also important especially during the cold winter months.

7: Before evacuating, villagers must turn off the gas line to their houses in order to prevent and fight fires. The same knowledge will reduce fires caused by enemy explosions. Villagers cannot rely on the city fire department brigade to arrive instantly.

8: Have a week's emergency supplies. Attacks may last days or weeks. Those in shelter need supplies (food, water, battery-powered radio, first aid kit) and where necessary, medical supplies. In winter, heavy clothing would be necessary, especially for women and children. Extra changes of clothing should be considered, particularly stockings and underwear.

9: Know first aid and home nursing. If an emergency occurs, the care of the injured or seriously ill becomes a tremendous task for the organized health services which attend to wounded soldiers. Doctors and nurses may not be readily available. Therefore, the survival of the injured or sick members of the community may become the responsibility of the local villagers. The main objectives of training individuals in first aid and home nursing are to preserve life, minimize the effect of injury or illness, and to relieve suffering or distress.

10: Know emergency cleanliness. To avoid diseases those at the shelters should remain clean. Cleanliness requires water which should be rationed and used only for essential purposes. If the border community has had enough warning time before the enemy attack, they should fill all buckets and pans with water. Also, the problems of garbage and human waste disposal should be solved when the onslaught occurs. For an emergency toilet, human waste could be put in waterproof plastic bags and placed in garbage pails.

11: It is important that every village have a municipal plan for a war emergency. And it is just as important that each head of household know that plan. Over the years, the provincial and municipal governments have been steadily developing plans for the protection of the population and the continuity of essential services in wartime. For example, these plans include traffic arrangements to reception centers and medical facilities in nearby communities. There must be close cooperation between the villagers and the municipal authorities responsible for the protection of the border area people.

12: Each individual should have a plan for his family. If the individual knows what is contained in the first eleven steps, and if he knows his municipal plan for a war emergency, he should now make his personal and family survival plan. The success of his plan will depend on how many of the suggested recommendations he will carry out.

When warning devices sound and the local broadcast station confirm an attack on his village has been detected, he must take immediate protective action. After recognizing the signal, he should turn on the radio or television and listen for instructions. Then, evacuate his family as quickly and dash to the designated shelter. A workable survival plan will include all of the preparations he can make in advance to meet those problems. The key word in the preceding sentence is "in advance."

The municipal authorities should prepare a booklet to provide citizens with essential information on which people will base their plans.

The individual villager must plan to take protective action when warned of an attack and take shelter against the enemy's shelling. Also, the individual should make sure that all members of his family know his plan and what to do when the time comes. The best way to arrive at a workable plan which will be remembered by an individual's family is to practice it.

The Italian journalist, Simone Zoppellaro, Armenia correspondent and contributor for "Osservatorio Bacani e Caucaso" ("Balkan and Caucasus Observatory") said after his visit to Artsakh: "I visited the village of Talish, which has become a ghost town after the April raids; the entire population is displaced; schools destroyed; homes destroyed; many dead, wounded, injured." He added that he was impressed by the trenches because they reminded him of the horrors in Europe during WWI. "We still have today, a hundred years after the First World War, and trenches in which young people, day after day, burn their lives and face death. And all this is a really forgotten war," said Zoppellaro.

