

CALAMITY FORETOLD AND IGNORED

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By Jirair Tutunjian, Toronto, Ontario, 11 December 2020

A four-act tragedy featuring the Professor, Two Crooks, the Novice, and the Armenian People.

Act I:

Armenians had finally wrested their land, called Artsakh, from Azerbaijan and established a buffer zone around it. They were ecstatic: they had been victors for the first time in a long while. They had lost Western Armenia...Kars...Ardahan...Mount Ararat...Nakhichevan in the previous century but now they had retrieved Artsakh, held captive for 70 years by Soviet Azerbaijan. Armenian soldiers were now sitting on the commanding Artsakh heights and looking down at the Azeri foe. Armenians say if Azerbaijan became aggressive, Armenians would march to Baku. The threat is repeated in the next twenty-five years.

President Levon Ter-Petrossian of Armenia doesn't agree with the popular consensus. The former professor advises Armenia to give up the conquered lands and devise a modus vivendi with Azerbaijan. Most Armenians say: "What was the point of the sacrifice—the five-year war? Besides, it's our land." The ex-professor says a permanent Armenian military dominance is untenable: with a population three times that of Armenia and oil fields gushing petrodollars 24/7, it's a matter of time before Azerbaijan would be strong enough to attack. Meanwhile, Armenians are drunk with heady tales of heroism, ingenuity, and brilliance during the Artsakh War. They believe the same qualities would assure victory if Azerbaijan was rash enough to attack. Ter-Petrossian fails to make his case. He is forced to resign. He is called "traitor" and worse. He would spend most of the next 20 years in a political gulag.

Act II:

Robert Kocharyan becomes president. A hero of the Artsakh War, he sees the numbers which indicate time is against Armenians. There are interminable but fruitless negotiations with Baku. Kocharyan knows if he agrees with the Ter-Petrossian prognosis, he would be gone too. He keeps silent and focuses on amassing wealth to become Armenia's top oligarch. He is succeeded by his once-upon-a-time comrade-in-arms Serge Sargsyan.

The second verse same as the first: Sargsyan sees the looming Azerbaijani threat but says nothing for the same reason his pal Kocharyan had kept silent. He too decides to fill his coffers while carrying on pointless negotiations with Baku. Azerbaijan splurges huge sums to strengthen its military. Its military budget equals that of Armenia's national budget. Kocharyan and Sargsyan purchase armaments but with their modest budgets their shopping is limited despite Russian discounts. Kocharyan and Sargsyan assure the public--in Armenia and in the diaspora--that the situation is under control. Some find comfort in the belief that if Azerbaijan attacks, Armenia could blow up the Mingasevir Reservoir (larger than any European reservoir) and could turn Azerbaijan into

a disaster area. Armenian missiles can also turn Baku oil fields into Armageddon. These assurances harden public's position re concessions.

Azerbaijan launches a mini-war in 2016. Although the four-day war ends in a draw, Armenians and public retain their "not an inch of our land" posture. Some Armenians wonder how a state can have an effective army when the government is corrupt and is led by an oligarch who reportedly wears \$10,000 suits. People are happy with the facelift downtown Yerevan has received. "Why, it looks like a European city," they say.

ACT III:

Sargsyan's rampant corruption causes his downfall as reformist Nikol Pashinyan and his novice supporters take over. Pashinyan is eager to "clean" the army and to strengthen it but he can't in two years overcome twenty years of neglect and corruption. He returns to the negotiating table but muscle-bound Azerbaijan is in no mood for give-and-take. President Ilham Aliiev of Azerbaijan demands all of Artsakh and the territories around it. Moreover, Pashinyan is distracted by political quarrels, test of will with superior court judges, and in investigating corruption. As well, he is hamstrung by inexperienced people who hold senior positions in his government: they had helped him topple Sargsyan. Critics accuse him of conducting a vendetta against his predecessors. Armenia's (meaning Pashinyan's) relations with Russia (meaning President Vladimir Putin) deteriorate due to Pashinyan's courtship of the West and reluctance to recognize Crimea as part of Russia. Putin is fuming his friend Kocharyan is in prison. But "Economist" magazine, the unofficial organ of global capitalism, loves Pashinyan and picks Armenia "Country of the Year" in 2018.

Armenian/Azerbaijani pretend-negotiations continue. Aliyev is inflexible. He makes the inane claim that Armenia is Western Azerbaijan. In July 2020, Baku again tests the waters with a skirmish in northwest Armenia. Armenia wins the round. Aliiev fires his foreign minister who had led the negotiations. Aliiev says since negotiations have led nowhere, war is the answer. Turkey and Azerbaijan hold maneuvers and make war plans.

Act IV:

On Sept. 27, Turkbeijan forces attack Artsakh. Despite the heroism of its fighters, Armenia retreats because of the enemy's superiority in numbers and in firepower. A key weapon of the Turkbeijan forces is the deadly Israeli and Turkish drones. Pashinyan rejects a ceasefire arranged by Russia because of its harsh terms. Armenia sends volunteers to the front but restricts veterans. Armenia is fighting with one hand tied at its back. People wonder why. The war continues. Armenian losses pile up. Pashinyan is forced to sign a humiliating ceasefire that spells capitulation. Armenians lose a large chunk of Artsakh and the buffer zone. The Lachin corridor comes under Russian control. Pashinyan agrees to the construction of a strategic—across Armenia-- highway to connect Azerbaijan to its exclave Nakhichevan. Sixteen parties demand Pashinyan's resignation. A mob attacks the National Assembly. President Armen Sarkissian demands Pashinyan's resignation. So does Armenian

Revolutionary Federation, which stated it was calling for the resignation "in the name of the Diaspora." Johnny-come-lately Catholicos Karekin II, who was silent during the long years of the Kocharyan and Sargsyan corrupt regimes, also calls for Pashinyan's resignation. Several members of the cabinet resign. An army of "experts" pontificates on how Armenia can come out of the political, military, economic, and psychological funk. Kocharyan chides the war was the result of Pashinyan's inexplicable changing of the legal basis for the existence of the Artsakh Republic from the right to self-determination to territorial integrity. Meanwhile, rethread politico Vazgen Manukyan, who wants to lead Armenia, inexplicably says: "We could have prevented the war. We could have won the war. We could have ended the war earlier and with minor losses." Could've, should've, would've.

Greek Chorus: "Noah's story proves ironic. When the Ark landed on the Mountains of Ararat and the patriarch emerged, the land was peaceful. For the next 6,000 years it would often be wracked by tragedy."

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Comments



H – 2020-12-15 23:54:44

Your excellent narrative in four parts of disastrous events starting with Mr Levon Der Petrosian, ending with Mr. Pashinyan, would have been thoroughly entertaining had the ending scenario of Armenian losses were on Azeri, Turkish side. Very creative. Thank you.



Arsen Gülistanyan – 2020-12-14 05:05:03

All very well documented and told. Congratulations Mr. Tutunjian!



Editor – 2020-12-14 02:47:36

Mr. Hagopian, Re your comment that the editorial failed to mention Pashinyan's error to move away from Russia... please see the following from the editorial: "Armenia's (meaning Pashinyan's) relations with Russia (meaning President Vladimir Putin) deteriorated due to Pashinyan's courtship of the West ..."--Editor.



Art Hagopian – 2020-12-13 19:12:34

Quite an entertaining scenario of bloody events. Fails to mention that Pashinyan became a dictator and his colossal error was to move away from Russia. Putin therefore burned him. The only salvation was Putin's ultimatum to Aliyev (according to the New York Times) that stopped the total loss of Artsakh. Kocharian and Sarkissian made money but were Putin's friends. Aliyev would never dare to attack in their time the way he did this time.



Mihran Toumajan – 2020-12-13 13:08:09

Jirair Tutunjian: Your 4-part tragedy is tragically brilliant. Your column is the one that I look forward to reading, first and foremost, in Keghart.