A POET'S LAMENT

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Category: Opinions

By Prof. Alan Whitehorn, Kingston ON, 14 November 2023

Spinning World

The world seems to be spinning out of control.
Too many aggressive dictators,
an over-abundance of extremist ideologies,
too many ever so swift to use excessive violence
at the expense of civilians.
We should have done much better
for future generations.
We should have done much better.

Wars' Children

Besieged,
deprived of adequate food and water,
and fuel supplies cut off.
Then,
attacked by modern weapons from the air,
followed by forced migrations of many thousands.
Whether it is Karabakh Armenians in the South Caucasus
or Gaza's Palestinians in the Middle East,
the results are essentially the same.
Grandmothers mourn the needless death of too many children.
Meanwhile,
the world watches,
but does far too little.
Shame on all of us.

Path Ahead?

For many years,
I advocated the return of the occupied lands
surrounding Karabakh.
This was not a popular proposal
amongst most in the Armenian Diaspora.
I also favoured frank in-person talks
with senior Azerbaijani officials,
even though their soldiers
had committed atrocities and tortured
Armenian military and civilian prisoners.

Even amidst the Aliyev dictatorship's
crushing of civil rights and democracy,
I knew civil dialogue must continue,
across the tense, conflict-prone border.
To some Armenians,
it appeared a colossal waste of time.
To others,
it seemed negotiating unwisely with the despotic enemy.
To those in the military,
it was insufficient attention
to critical security matters.
However,
I did advocate for urgent military reforms,
including modernization and increased roles for women.
Several years ago
I was cautiously optimistic.
Today,
I am profoundly pessimistic.
Perhaps,
a future dynamic mix is needed,
involving meaningful and peaceful dialogue,
improved diplomatic negotiations,
and urgent military preparations.
This I do know:
We urgently need a better tomorrow.
Most others have selected different routes.
But I have chosen this uncertain and rocky path.
For better or worse,
it is a challenging journey to which I have opted.
I am armed only with my pen, passport and helmet.
We will see what tomorrow brings
and which I will need.

Shrinking Armenia

From the heroic times of Tigran the Great,
when Armenia stretched from the Mediterranean Sea
to the Black and Caspian Seas,
the territory of Armenia has continued to shrink.
Gone is Western Armenia,

succumbing to the Ottoman Turk
during the 1915 Genocide.
Karabakh was arbitrarily handed over by Lenin and Stalin,
and given to Soviet Azerbaijan in the 1920s.
Artsakh Armenians bravely fought for independence in the 1990s,
only to be crushed militarily by Azerbaijan in the 2020s.
Today, ominously,
the southern Armenian region of Syunik
is coveted by the rapacious Aliyev dynastic dictatorship.
Will land-locked Armenia continue to shrink still even more?
Will it become merely a tiny, isolated city-state of Yerevan?
What has Hayastan become and why?
It was, after all, the first state to embrace Christianity
and held such historic and military promise.
Where is that once substantial expanse of land?
Biblical Mount Ararat is not even ours.
Damaged khachkars, along with vandalized churches and monasteries,
show the faint outlines of where historic Armenia once was.
But for how much longer?
How soon will they be maliciously bulldozed and crushed into oblivion?
Too many of us are already scattered
and dispersed in the global diaspora,
eventually succumbing to assimilation.
I mourn for my incredible Armenia.
It was once an impressive expanse of land.
But no more.
Alas, no more.
Mostly only memories remain of its historic greatness
and ancient artifacts in foreign museums.

Midnight

Sometimes the darkness of midnight
comes too soon in the day.
I need to find a candle
to light the way.

Alan Whitehorn is a professor emeritus of political science, editor of the Armenian Genocide: The Essential Reference Guide and the author of the recently published bilingual book Karabakh Diary: Poems From the Diaspora.

There are no comments yet.