WINDS OF WAR

Posted on October 24, 2010 by Keghart

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Category: Opinions

By **Keghart.com Editorial Board ,** 26 October 2010

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It's no secret that Azerbaijan is investing huge amounts of money to strengthen its military. In mid-October President Ilham Aliyev stated that his country's military expenditure will total $3 billion in 2011. Armenia's military expenditures was about $360 million--one-ninth of Baku's military budget. Although Armenia most probably receives special military aid from Moscow, the disparity in military expenditures between Yerevan and Baku are too jarring not to be concerned.
In recent years Baku has bought weapons from 18 nations--from Ukraine to Israel. Azeri soldiers have also received training from Turkish and Israeli officers. The latter have also upgraded Baku's intelligence and electronic warfare capabilities. It's a well-known fact that Israel has one of the most sophisticated military-electronic infrastructures.

Azerbaijan itself has a burgeoning military industry, which manufactures weapons and delivery systems. Perhaps because of the bloody nose it received 16 years ago, Baku wants to be 200% certain that it would win the war before attacking Armenia-Artsakh.

So far, Armenia has avoided being drawn into an unnecessary war with its noisy and sword-brandishing neighbour in the east. But on the other side of the coin there's another important question: Why hasn't Azerbaijan engaged in a full-scale war with Armenia-Artsakh? Is Baku all bark and no bite?

Here are 9 reasons for Baku's "self-control":

1. Turkey, for its own reasons (and there are many of those reasons), has told Azerbaijan not to blunder into war against Armenia-Artsakh.

2. Russia, for its own reasons (and there are many of those, too), has told Azerbaijan not to start a war with Armenia-Artsakh.

3. Global petroleum corporations, which have invested billions of dollars in the extraction, refinement, and transport of Azeri oil, have cautioned Baku that they are not prepared to see their investments end up in smoke as a result of an Armenian/Azeri war. After all, Baku's oilfields are a mere 200 kms, as the bird flies, from Artsakh's easterly border.

4. The United States, for its own multiple reasons, has told Azerbaijan not to jump into a reckless adventure.

5. Recently Russia and Armenia signed a military pact. It will prolong the presence of Russian troops stationed in Armenia for a substantial period. The troops will have not only "functions stemming from the interests of the Russian Federation," but also "protect Armenia's security together with Armenian Army units." It also commits Russia to supplying its regional ally with "modern and compatible weaponry and special military hardware."

6. More than ever before, international public opinion is important in warfare. Gaining the hearts and minds of the public and the media is vital. No matter how justified, the aggressor invariably gets tarred by the war-mongering tag and is denounced at international forums such as the United Nations. Azerbaijan, through its constant provocations of Armenia-Artsakh might be hoping that Yerevan-Stepanagerd might take the bait and attack.

7. Azerbaijan might believe that it can win the war hands down, but realizes the cost (the destruction of its petroleum industry--the country's economic mainstay) too high a price to pay. The resulting economic crisis might create social and political upheaval which could topple Sultan Aliyev and his cronies. After all, what's paramount in the minds of the Azeri ruling clique is maintaining power.

8. In recent months there have been credible reports that if the United States and Israel invade Iran, they would use Azerbaijan as launching pad for their attack from the north. Aliyev might be hoping that during that massive international military assault, his invasion of Armenia would go relatively unnoticed or be considered an inevitable adjustment of borders in a relatively remote region.

9. Azerbaijan is hoping that emigration from Armenia will bleed the country to a point where Yerevan would have no option but to agree to Baku's conditions.

One can indulge in punditry, in entrails-reading, until the cows come home. A nervous Armenian can even speculate that there might be a secret Russian-Turkish-Azeri military pact which would be activated when Azeris attack Armenia. After all, it would not be the first time that Armenians have had that high and dry feeling of being abandoned by so-called friends.

Time will tell whether any of the above scenarios is valid. But credible or not, Armenia has one choice: to prepare for an Azeri war--militarily, economically, and socially. Baku will continue to put pressure on Yerevan. A few months ago, a highly-placed Azeri minister fantasized the disappearance of Armenia within a decade. He was not the first in our long history to have nursed such day-dreams about our fate. But just because previous attempts at eliminating Armenia and

Armenians have failed, there's no reason to assume that future attacks on Armenia would also magically fall short. And let's remember that from 1375 to 1918 there was no state called Armenia.