
War or Elections?

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Mr. Aliev is still busy solving the second problem

Prior to the meeting between the Armenian and Azeri presidents, the official Baku has launched an unprecedented campaign on the international arena and inside its own country, with the aim of creating an impression that it is seriously preparing for new a war against Karabakh.

This month's `digests' from the Armenian-Azerbaijani contact-line published by the Azerbaijani information agencies are enough for creating the impression that battles are going on there day and night, people are dying and weapon emplacements are being silenced; that's to say, the parties have actually found themselves in a military confrontation.

However, it is also well-known that no incident was observed as a result of the OSCE monitoring conducted on the Armenian-Azerbaijani contact-line (the section bordering on Aghdam) on May 7.

Along with all this, the official Baku has been recently toughening its approaches and making attempts to impose conditions not only upon Armenia but also upon the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group.

Especially great activeness is demonstrated by Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov who has become specialized in this area. Instead of expressing attitudes towards the document on the table, he is all the time busy making willful interpretations on their contents, in an attempt to impose ultimatums on Armenia.

What has caused Azerbaijan to assume a menacing stance when the parties assured the international community long ago that they are ready for the peaceful settlement of the conflict and, as a result of long-term negotiations, have already reached a certain agreement not only for the maintenance of peace but also for some of the principles of the future peace treaty? However, prior to the meeting of the two countries' presidents, all this turns out to be of no importance for Azerbaijan, since Araz Azimov believes that the underlying principle of the Prague Process is the settlement of the conflict based upon Azerbaijan's territorial integrity.

We believe presenting this kind of invented approach as a precondition for peaceful settlement is nothing more than a way leading the negotiations to a deadlock. Having adopted this course, Azerbaijan has recently started to create an impression on the international arena that it has serious intentions for resuming the military operations. One of the first questions addressed to a foreign diplomat or political scientist visiting Azerbaijan concerns the prospect of a new possible Armenian-Azerbaijani war.

However, the responses made by the representatives of different countries cannot obviously inspire Azerbaijan with enthusiasm. Thus, Johannes Rau, a well-known German expert, found that `Considering the energy security issues, the European Union has the utmost concerns over the possibility of resuming

the war in Karabakh, since there are some communication lines located at distance of 20 kilometers from the conflict zone.'

The Russian experts demonstrate a more restrained attitude towards such 'tricks' intended to arouse anxiety among the international community and hence - create a 'motivation' of making pressure upon Armenia. For instance, Alan Kasaev, 'Ria Novosti' agency's chief expert on CIS and Baltic countries, is sure that 'There will be no war in Karabakh in the near future, at least in the course of the coming five years.'

It's more than clear that prior to the Serge Sargsyan-Ilham Aliev meeting, the official Baku has great desires to inspire the international community and especially Armenia with the idea that it is stronger and fully prepared for the war and can no longer remain patient; therefore, two options are left: either war or ceding territories to Azerbaijan through negotiations. However, such propaganda tools are unlikely to make a serious impression on the highly-experienced diplomats of the OSCE Minsk Group, let alone Armenia; especially considering that Ilham Aliev cannot seriously think about resuming the military operations before presidential election to be held on October 15.

We believe that the 'boyishness' of the Azeri diplomats and the country's state propaganda is fully within the logic of the process of preparing for the upcoming presidential campaign.

Not having attained serious results in the Karabakh peace talks but having great desires to be re-elected, the Azerbaijani president must be able to gain control over the revanchist moods from the very start and prevent his political rivals from doing the same before the February 15 voting.
