
Forward To The Past: Russia, Turkey, And Armenia's Faith

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The recent race of strategic realignments reflects a real crisis in the world order and risks a dangerous recurrence of history. Suffice the testimony of nearly all global and regional actors, which have quickly shifted their gears and ushered in a new cycle of reassessment of interests and, to that end, a diversification of policy priorities and political partnerships.

It matters little whether this geopolitical scramble was directly triggered by the Russian-Georgian conflagration and the derivative collapse of standing paradigms for the Caucasus, or whether it crowned latently simmering scenarios in the halls of international power. The fact is that the great game--for strategic resources, control over communications and routes of transit, and long-term leverage--is on again with renewed vigor, self-serving partisanship, and duplicitous entanglement.

One of the signals of this unbrave new world is the apparent reciprocal rediscovery of Russia and Turkey. Whatever its motivations and manifestations, Turkey's play behind the back of its transatlantic bulwark and Russia's dealings at the expense of its "strategic ally" raise the specter of history's return, recalling the days more than 85 years ago when Bolshevik Russia and Nationalist Turkey, not contenting themselves with the legacy of the great Genocide and National Dispossession of 1915, partitioned the Armenian homeland in Molotov-Ribbentrop fashion and to its fatal future detriment.

Mountainous Karabagh, or Artsakh in Armenian, was one of the territorial victims of this 1921 plot of the pariahs, as it was placed under Soviet Azerbaijani suzerainty together with Nakhichevan. The latter province of the historical Armenian patrimony was subsequently cleansed of its Armenian plurality and even of its Armenian cultural heritage, the most contemporary evidence of which was the Azerbaijani Republic's (a Council of Europe member-state) total, Taliban-style annihilation in December 2005 of the medieval cemetery and thousands of Armenian cross-stones at Jugha.

Mountainous Karabagh, by way of exception, was able to turn the tide on a past of genocide, dispossession, occupation and partition, as it defended its identity, integrity, and territory against foreign aggression and in 1991 declared its liberty, decolonization, and sovereignty--long before Kosovo, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia became current--in compliance with the Montevideo standards of conventional international law and with the controlling domestic legislation of the Soviet Union.

Subsequent international practice on the recognition of Kosovo, and later of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, demonstrates that in this world there exists no real rule of law--applied evenly across the board--but rather the rule of vital interests that are conveniently couched under the selectively-interpreted guise of international legal principles of choice and of exclusivist distinctions of fact which, in fact, make no difference.

It's time to face the farce.

That goes for Moscow and Ankara too. Judging from the contemporary pronouncements of their high-level officials, they still don't get it.

And if they are driven by need for a strategic new compact, then at least their partners on the world stage should reshift their gears and calculate their policy alternatives accordingly. Iran, the United States and its European allies might find here an objective intersection of their concerns.

Russia and Turkey must never again find unity of purpose at the expense of Armenia and the Armenian people. The track record of genocide, exile, death camps and gulags is enough for all of history.

These two important countries, as partners both real and potential, must respect the Armenian nation's tragic history, its sovereign integrity and modern regional role, and Mountainous Karabagh's lawfully-gained freedom and independence.

Football diplomacy is fine, but Turkey can assume the desired new level of global leadership and local legitimacy only by dealing with Armenia from a "platform" of good faith and reconciliation through truth; lifting its illegal blockade of the Republic and opening the frontier which it unilaterally closed, instead of using it as a bargaining tool; establishing diplomatic relations without preconditions and working through that relationship to build mutual confidence and give resolution to the many watershed issues dividing the two neighbors; accepting and atoning, in the brilliant example of postwar Germany, for the first genocide of the 20th century and the national dispossession that attended it; committing to rebuild, restore, and then celebrate the Armenian national heritage from Mt. Ararat and the medieval capital city of Ani to the vast array of churches, monasteries, schools, academies, fortresses, and other cultural treasures of the ancestral Armenian homelands; initiating and bringing to fruition a comprehensive program to guarantee the right of secure voluntary return for the progeny and descendants of the dispossessed to their places and properties of provenance; providing full civil, human, and religious rights to the Armenian community of Turkey, including completely doing away with the infamous Article 301 which has served for so long as an instrument of fear, suppression, and even death with regard to those courageous citizens of good conscience who dare to proclaim the historical fact of genocide; and finally exercising greater circumspection in voicing incongruous and unfounded allegations of "occupation" in the context of Mountainous Karabagh's David-and-Goliath struggle for life and justice, lest someone remind it about more appropriate and more proximate applications of that term.

As for Russia, true strategic allies consult honestly with each other and coordinate their policies pursuant to their common interests; they do not address one another by negotiating adverse protocols with third parties at each other's back, they do not posture against each other in public or in private, and they do not try to intimidate, arm-twist, or otherwise pressure each other via the press clubs and newspapers of the world. Russia as well must deal with Armenia in good faith, recognizing the full depth and breadth of its national sovereignty and the horizontal nature of their post-Soviet rapport, its right to seek and realize a balanced, robust, and integral foreign policy, as well as the non-negotiability--for any reason, including the sourcing and supervision of Azerbaijani oil--of Mountainous Karabagh's liberty, security, and self-determination.

Official Yerevan, of course, must also step up to undertake its share of responsibility for creating a region of peace and shared stability, mutual respect and open borders, domestic democracy and international cooperation.

An ancient civilization with a new state, Armenia's national interests in the new era can best be served by achieving in short order a republic run by the rule of law and due process, an abiding respect for fundamental freedoms, good governance, and fair elections. These, sadly, have not been the case to date.

Armenia requires the real deal, and forthwith. But history as witness, it can and will no longer play the fool...or the victim.
