

Perpetual War or Perpetual Peace?

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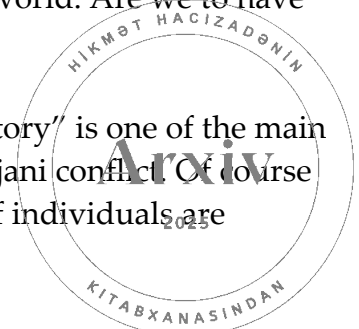
"And how is the Karabakh conflict?" a famous Pakistani journalist asked me at a seminar in a small German town. "Just the same, the conflict continues, there's no peace, no war," I replied. "How interesting," he said with a smile. "The break-up of the USSR began with this conflict. Now the USSR no longer exists and the conflict is still continuing..."

Yes, on the whole things are pretty much the same. But we can notice some changes which are unfortunately changes for the worse. What I have in mind is Azerbaijani public opinion on the Karabakh issue, which could be described as close to despair. "It's impossible to fight, Russia is behind Armenia, while the West is stubbornly demanding a peace settlement to secure its investments in Azerbaijani oil. Negotiations, with all possible mediators, have been going on for years and lead to nothing. Oil diplomacy (our oil in return for Western support on the Karabakh issue) has brought no results. People's diplomacy, sponsored by the West, has also failed..." So there is a growing feeling in society that Azerbaijan is betrayed and besieged on all sides. Society is close to a frustration which has begun to be expressed in uncontrolled hatred and its desperate manifestations very similar to what is happening in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

"And we understand this despair and hatred," well-known Armenian journalist Mark Grigorian told me several years ago at a conference in Tbilisi. "First it was you who were victorious for a long time (it seems he meant the Armenian-Turkish conflicts of the last thousand years) and we it was us who hated you. Now we have defeated you and you are hating us..."

I didn't have an answer to this piercing observation, I just felt despair. What is the solution here? If, inshallah, we manage to defeat them, then they will hate us again and we will carry on destroying each other till the end of the world. Are we to have perpetual war?

It seems that the question "who, in the end, finally won in history" is one of the main questions, if not the prime question, in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. Of course the issues of protecting the rights of national minorities and of individuals are



important and so is the role of the super-powers. But “who, in the end, finally won...?” is still more important for us...

But of course there will be no final victory here, only perpetual despair and hatred and it is time we all understood this. And generally whichever of the opposing sides “won” a certain round in this millenium-long dispute failed to understand this. Today Armenia has won and it now wants to “cooperate” with us, hoping that cooperation will heal the wounds of defeat. But it is not working: “There can be no cooperation with the occupiers of our land,” even new head of state Ilham Aliiev said recently and his words reflect public opinion in Azerbaijan.

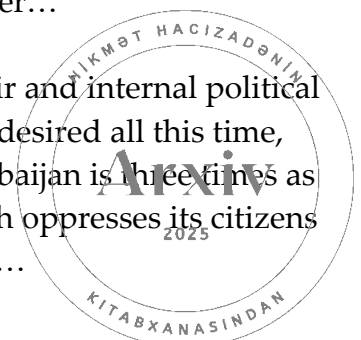
As long as this problem is unsolved no road can lead us to peace. Even if well-intentioned international powers force peace on us, our hatred will only be driven deep inside us and could flare up again.

Our mentality, our view of the world and history, have to change. We have to understand that all these “noble historical victories” were nothing but the pillage and violent eviction of neighbours in the era of a battle *of all against all* for limited resources -- and that now these resources over which we destroyed each other have lost whatever value they once had.

Our confrontational mentality can't be changed by "third forces" or written constitutions and ratified European conventions on human rights. It can change only as a result of honest and free discussion conducted by citizens of a free country. So I believe that for *perpetual war* to be replaced by *perpetual peace* our countries should become democratic. Or as Kant wrote in his "Perpetual Peace": "*The Civil Constitution of Every State (that wants perpetual peace) Should Be Republican*".

Before beginning negotiations (negotiations with international mediators, bilateral negotiations or negotiations within the framework of people's diplomacy), the parties ought to pay attention to themselves! The parties ought to become republics, free and diverse discussions have to begin in their societies about anything and everything that is of concern to their citizens. The societies have to find the civic courage in themselves to throw off their historical ghosts and discuss the problem of perpetual war and perpetual peace. And if the international community wants to help our countries establish Perpetual Peace, it should stop spending money on senseless "joint projects and research" and help our countries become honest and open, help them become democratic. Democracies do not fight one another...

As for Azerbaijan, which is sunk in its internal political despair and internal political apathy, then I have to forecast that Karabakh, which we have desired all this time, won't return until we build a democratic society. Even if Azerbaijan is three times as strong as Armenia, the world won't allow a government which oppresses its citizens to extend its inhuman rule to the Armenian national minority...



I don't intend to forget about the influence of third forces or the role of superpowers in fanning the conflict but I believe that first we have to get to grips with ourselves and then it will be clearer what we should do about third forces...

Earlier this year I met Mark Grigorian again in Durban, South Africa, at the Third Assembly of the Word Movement for Democracy. Mark had had to leave his country and move to London because he was being persecuted in Armenia for his journalistic work. I was also reluctant to leave the fairytale beauty of Durban to go home to a country which, after the presidential elections at the end of 2003, had suffered a massive crackdown on opposition activists and protestors.

It occurred to me later that, without agreeing to do so, neither of us uttered a word about the Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict. Mark showed me the wounds left by the exploding grenade which had left 32 pieces of shrapnel in his body which pro-government forces had thrown at him. I told him about torture in our prisons which our citizens who protested against mass vote-rigging in the presidential elections endured.

No desire emerged to destroy one another, even in argument. The desire emerged to help one another...

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