

SOUTHERN CAUCASUS. THE PROJECTION OF HARMONY AND REGIONAL SECURITY

(a view on the complex security of the Southern Caucasus)

Levon Shirinyan

Armenian State Pedagogical University after Kh. Abovyan

“... prediction of future – is a projection of present”.

Hanna Arendt

After the bipolar world disappeared, much was changed on the planet Earth in its global sense. Were changed the system of international relations, the role of superpowers in the world structure, the logics of the behavior of international organizations etc. One thing became clear: the extremely armed nuclear states, aware of the perspective of assured destruction leaned toward the search for consensus, and it is possible to suppose that such a strategy would become more flexible and concise. In this aspect the international security significantly encourages and makes us feel confident for the peace on the earth. Still in 1983 M. Mandelbaum, describing the “nuclear wall” between the super powers, wrote that the difference between the past wars and the global nuclear conflicts is the difference between the destruction and disappearance, between the end of the period and the end of the human civilization.¹

But the course of events after the Cold War showed also that the current and future confrontation between the superpowers had “entered” into the traditionally conflicting regions. On the strategic map of the world were registered “wandering” sparkles of antagonism, sometimes showing strong outbursts (Balkans, Near East, Afganistan etc.). This practice became a “special feature” of the establishment of new world order. So, while the security in the world was victorious from the international point of view, in territorial sense it became more fragile. Here the lower part of the security had descended essentially and with the effect of boomerang hit the international security.

The crux of the problem found out its special manifestation in the zone of influence of the disintegrated USSR and its former territory which mostly comprises that of the vast Russian empire. Such peculiarity was conditioned mostly by the unobjective and “strange” approach of the West; in the system of traditionally practiced values the West regards the right of self-determination of nations as a priority (thus, legitimate), which it applied to the former federal *republics* (but not to the nations), including the dwarf-like empires who created ethnocracy under the mask of “national states” (Azerbaijan, Georgia etc.), therefore fully refusing to support the indigenous peoples in their struggle for survival (Armenians of Artsakh, Lesgins, Talish, Abkhazians, Ossetians etc.), which could be regarded as a witness to the colonialism and classical imperialism like in “the

¹ Mandelbaum 1983: 3.

old good days". In this sense it should be mentioned with sorrow that Russia himself did no step forward.

The great disappointment of the mentioned and other nations in the West and its declared values was natural since the West itself was perforced to took the bait of the despised country which it used to unjustly regard as the "evil empire" for decades. From the West nothing was expected. Therefore it was not surprising that from the former empire were inherited "hot spots" which comprise vast territories. Among them (most protruding) was Aysr-Caucasus (viewed from Yerevan and Teheran), Transcaucasia (viewed from Moscow), Southern Caucasus (viewed from Paris and Beijing).

Again was established the fact that the "security of the world" is a testimony of increased confrontation between the state and its regional components. In this case was changed not only the presentation but also the format of suggested solutions, traditionally the same as in former imperial period, since the chattering of great nations in regard to self-determination continues until today and, at the same time they speak of the territorial integrity of multiethnic states headed by titular nations, and thereby opening doors for the intervention of internal forces of such states in the settlement of conflicts.

However, the true security of the world oversaturated with the weapons of mass destruction and ethnic antagonism demands other solutions – the harmonious synthesis of national interests of peoples (countries), which in our case means denial of *imperiomania*. And sometimes also the adjustment of historical injustice which secures from the repetition of similar injustice in the future.

As a mini model could be taken Aysr-Caucasus (in Armenian, henceforth Southern Caucasus) which is generally accepted as an integrated whole with the Northern Caucasus.² This stereotype being one-sided, does not reflect the deepness of strategic realities since this region comprises a single unit including several components – Northern and Southern Caucasus inhabited by Kurdish (Turkish) ethnic elements, Central Armenia on the territory of modern Turkey, and Northern Iran (Iranian Azerbaijan). Here the Southern Caucasus has a *linking-separating* functions. Hence, a true diagnostics of the situation in the Southern Caucasus is necessary, and in order to secure the long-lasting stability here the *synthesis* of interests of countries and peoples included in this structure is expected to be done, the development of the existing culture (elements of civilization), by which the stability of the Northern Caucasus (the Russian Khazar triangle), as well as the neighboring territories of Iran and Turkey depends.

So, for the stability and security of the Southern Caucasus is necessary:

a) To recognize the "geopolitical fact" of the region, that is the independence of "self-declared" states which were splitted from the dwarf empires and which are endowed with all features of independent state.

Thus, in the petition of the People's Assembly of Abkhazia addressed to Russia (October 18, 2006), regarding the decision to recognize the independence is said: "Abkhazia possesses with all necessary and integral attributes of independent state

² See, for example, Gajiev 2001: 292.

accepted by international community. Its establishment and functioning corresponds to all provisions of democratic, legal and social state on the basis of separation of representative democracy and power". If in the quoted passage the unbiased expert changes "Abkhazia" into "Southern Ossetia", "Artsakh – Mountainous Karabagh", then the same text would more convincingly express political realities in the "self-proclaimed" young state formations than in the dwarf empires. Facts are evident!... In this situation it is not even important (from the point of view of the state formation) what kind of decisive role had fall on the Russian "humanitarian intervention" in order to save Ossetian people from the "humanitarian catastrophe" organized by Georgia and, as an immediate result – the recognition of Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia by Russian federation.

b) Comprehension of historical aspect of instability of multiethnic Southern Caucasus. Arkadiy Volskij, one of the "viceroys" of Transcaucasia correctly states that after the disintegration of the USSR the geopolitical realities in Transcaucasia "basically remained the same as in the XIX century".³ But be Volskij more consistent, he could admit that at the time of the disintegration of the USSR the region was already a tangled mess of "frozen" antagonism which essentially originated as a result of mutual agreement of *self-proclaimed Kemalist and Bolshevik governments* and their wide cooperation.

As a prototype of the "Ribbentrop-Molotov pact" this unprecedented deal was carried out through the "businesslike" letter of Mustafa Kemal addressed to Vladimir Lenin (April 26 1920) in regard to the treaty of Alexandropol in the frames of the preliminary agreement of Karabekir with the Bolsheviks.⁴ This personage who was regarded as a "Europeanized" one in the Young Turkish circles, wrote in particular: "If the Soviet forces are determined to begin military operations against Georgia, or by means of diplomatic measures, due to their influence to compel Georgia to enter the Union and expel Englishmen from the Caucasus, then the Turkish government shall undertake military actions against imperialistic Armenia and is obliged to force the Republic of Azerbaijan to enter into the Union of Soviet republics".⁵ The development of these events were finalized by the Russian-Turkish treaty of "Friendship and brotherhood" in March 16, 1921, which took its strategic and final form at the end of 1921 and remained unchanged until the disintegration of the USSR.⁶

After the genocide of April 24, 1915, the deal was done with regard to the amputation of Eastern Armenia and at the expense of territories and culture of other indigenous peoples of Southern Caucasus, sell-off the shrines of their civilizations in favor of Azeri-Turks (Turks-Tatars) and Georgians.

The disintegration of the USSR, naturally, according to Andrey Sakharov, played a role of detonator for the liberatory movement of peoples being under the heels of "small

³ Volskij 1992.

⁴ Mango 1999: 357.

⁵ Archive of the Foreign policy of the USSR, f.132 – section of Turkey, f.3, inv.2, file.1, pp. 11; see also Mango 1999: 278.

⁶ Feygin 1998: 134-155.

empires” (Armenians of Artsakh, Lesgins, Talish, Abkhazians). Exercising their natural right on self-determination and strictly adhering to the corresponding legislature of the USSR, also following the experience of the former Soviet republics, as well as invigorated by the values of western democracy, these peoples declared their independence on their own territory (mostly truncated during the Soviet period). It is essential that they defended their sacred rights through armed struggle against colonizers. But, to their surprise, they lacked sympathy both from “older” and “young” democracies, thus deprived of any assist.

c) To rethink and evaluate cultural-civilizational uniqueness of the region and secure its safe development on equal conditions. In such circumstances it is necessary to take into account the ethnic identity of these nations – Armenians of Artsakh, Abkhazians, Ossetians, and the originality of the culture of “self-proclaimed” but only partially recognized or completely unrecognized states, historical traditions of the national-liberatory struggle and statehood, existing and former superiority in relation to their colonizers, their will expressed during the liberatory struggle and high national self-consciousness, etc.

In the context of the abovementioned two circumstances should be in place.

a) The apparent ethnocultural, ethnopsychological incompatibility of “unrecognized”, “partially recognized”, “self-proclaimed” states with the titular nations of dwarf empires. The Altaic people – the *shia*-Muslim Turkish newcomers who until today are trying to determine their ethnogenesis, and indigenous Indo-European Christian Armenians and Armenians of Artsakh as well, the followers of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox church, Orthodox Caucasian Georgians who are close to the Northern Caucasian Adyghe linguistic group, Abkhazians with the developed ethnic psychology and ethnic culture but who possess with different political culture, Ossetians of Indo-European origins (the descendants the well-known Alans) as well.

b) The experience of centuries-old struggle, particularly during the first decades of the Soviet period, for their identity and independence.

In March 31, 1921 was proclaimed the *independent* Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia, which had kept its status until December 1930 when the Abkhazian SSR was incorporated into the Georgian SSR on the *contractual* basis. From that time until 1950s took place Kartvelization of Abkhazia and its indigenous population. But the pressure of historical circumstances could not reconcile Abkhazian people with its colonial status. Aware of the danger to be permanently expelled from the homeland (according to experts, the total number of Abkhazians had decreased to about 17% of the former population), Abkhazian intellectuals and the communist party elite applied to the central government in Moscow pleading to secede Abkhazia from Georgia and attach it to Russia (in 1931, 1957, 1965, 1978 and 1989). In order to reach full independence from Georgia during “perestroyka” and “glasnost” they had tried to restore the status which existed

before 1931 – contractual relations with Georgia. These attempts had culminated in the war initiated by Georgian nationalists, the results of which are well-known.⁷

The Georgian-Ossetian confrontation goes back to 1917-1921 when the Menshevik government of the Georgian People's Republic made an attempt to oppress the rebellious Ossetians. This event was preserved in the historical memory of Ossetians as a failed attempt of genocide. The resistance of south Ossetians against Georgia continued until 1921, and in April 1922 Southern Ossetia was included into Soviet Georgia as Southern-Ossetian autonomous region. Ossetians were also inspired by the reforms of M.Gorbachev and in November 10, 1989, they made an attempt to create autonomous republic within Georgia but were refused. The Georgian parliament canceled the autonomous region of Southern Ossetia in December 11, 1990. With this act the titular nation of Georgia demonstrated that it had made use of the "Perestroika" but is eager to deprive of the same its centuries-old neighbor. In the Southern Ossetian policy Georgia recalled the policy of the Menshevik Georgia and declared Dvaletia in Shida-Kartli, restoring the territory of Samachablo.⁸

The Georgian "Blitzkrieg" of August 8, 2008 seriously endangered the very existence of Ossetians in Southern Ossetia. The Russian "humanitarian invasion" and the recognition of the independence of Southern Ossetia demonstrated the extreme danger connected with the ambitions of empires, even dwarf ones.

The so-called "disputed question" of Artsakh originated at the beginning of 1918, hand in hand with the Ottoman-Turkish desire to create an "*Eastern-Caucasian Turkish*" state of "Caucasian Tatars", "Azeri-Turks", "Transcaucasian Turks" in Azerbaijan, and was exacerbated after the Treaty of Batumi (June 4, 1918) when Artsakh along with the Armenians of Baku suffered heavy blow in the course of the Ottoman army proceeding towards the oil deposits.⁹

However, the durative struggle of Artsakh, the eagle's nest of Armenian revolution, the birthplace of prominent Soviet marshals, generals, and statesmen culminated in the results which we have today.

Due to intolerance, imperialistic chauvinism of the "elite" of dwarf empires which declared themselves as fanatical adepts of European values, along with their imperial ambitions, today the region is divided and disintegrated and had turned into the source of instability, the poisonous bows of which are oriented towards all directions.

If the targets formulated during the existence of the USSR would survive intact and the "self-proclaimed" states thus are going to return to their former owners (colonizers) then:

⁷ Zverev 1996: 41-43.

⁸ Kabisov 1997: 156.

⁹ Like in the independent Republic of Armenia, during the Soviet period much was written about the struggle of Armenians of Karabagh, and it is familiar to scholars. It is also known about the oil factor and ominous role of Bolsheviks, the gravediggers of Russian empire regarding the problem of Artsakh; among the numerous studies dealing with this question we shall highlight the article written by A.Zverev (1996: 10-14). See also Shirinyan 2010.

1. Dwarf empires should try to carry out ethnic cleansing and destroy all traces of the independence of liberated nations which ultimately should lead to genocide or "humanitarian catastrophe", which could be prevented only through "humanitarian invasion" (like the Georgian Blitzkrieg and Russian countermeasures in 2008).

2. This should lead to the increasing of the role of Turkey in Southern Caucasus and final ousting of Russia from the region; the western policy might suffer a devastating and irreversible blow on the European south-east. Another comeback of Russia, even at the expense of peoples relying on him (mostly Armenians, like in 1920-1921) is excluded. The Turkish practice of demographic explosion, assimilation and genocide should fix unprecedented success.

Therefore, it is necessary to:

1. Come to terms and recognize the current but natural geopolitical realities in the Southern Caucasus.

2. Recognize the independence of "self-proclaimed", "unrecognized", "partly recognized", but de-facto existing states – Artsakh, Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia; and envisage the same status for Adjara.

3. Restore the status of the independent protectorate of Nakhijevan – the ancient Armenian region. This Armenian county of the Russian empire during the first years of the Soviet period was transformed into pan-Turanian bridge which connects the Ottoman and Azerbaijani Turks, claims upon which first appeared at the Batumi conference of May 20, 1918, when Usubbekov, the member of the Muslim National Council demanded to hand over Nakhijevan to Azerbaijan in order to "establish direct eternal contacts with Turkey".¹⁰ After that, with the consistency which is typical for Turkish military-political traditions (the Alexandropol treaty of December 3, 1920, Article 2, Moscow treaty of March 16, 1921, Article 3, Treaty of Kars of October 13, 1921, Article 5), the region of Nakhijevan, a part of the Republic of Armenia was seceded and put under the Azerbaijani protectorate, due to the active assistance of Bolsheviks. [See Moscow treaty of March 16, 1921, Article 3: – "Both contracting parties agree that the region of Nakhijevan ... become an autonomous territory under the protectorate of Azerbaijan, provided that Azerbaijan should not cede this protectorate to any third country". Treaty of Kars of October 13, 1921, Article 5: – "The government of Turkey and the governments of Soviet Armenia and Azerbaijan agree that ... the region of Nakhijevan should become an autonomous region under the protectorate of Azerbaijan"]. But Soviet Russia canceled the Article 3 of the Dro-Legrans treaty of December 2, 1920 (Yerevan agreement), also dealing with Nakhijevan. During the Soviet period the *protectorate* already cleansed from the indigenous population became an integral *part* of Azerbaijan, thus the imperative demand of the Moscow and Kars treaties were violated.

Azerbaijan, representing itself as a unitary state, regards that the protectorate handed to him is a final decision. Azerbaijan should be compelled to perform the requirements of international law.

¹⁰ Avetisyan 1994: 116.

1. In order to prevent the expulsion of indigenous peoples of dwarf empires living in their national habitat – Armenians, Lesgins, Talish and others, or their cultural assimilation, and for the preservation of cultural diversity in the region it is necessary to grant them *cultural autonomy*. Here it would be in place to recall the suggestion of Austrian Marxist Otto Bauer, namely the principle of “exterritorial development”: should be installed such structures “which could secure autonomy for different cultures without new territorial borders”¹¹. [By the way, the idea of cultural autonomy once was popular among Georgian intellectuals, particularly the Mensheviks].

2. The fair solution to the problem could be opened through the installation of consociative model of democratism which should combat the final entrenchment of ethnocracies in the dwarf empires hidden under the curtain of democracy. Such tactics can pave the way to security, stability, true integration and economic prosperity in Southern Caucasus.

Thus, the “*united states in the Southern Caucasus*” could become reproduction of the “*united states of Europe*”, “*South-Caucasian union* – a replica to the “*European union*”. In order to implement this idea the harmony of political interests is needed.

In this conditions in the dustbin of history should be thrown dwarf empires created by Soviet period and the military-political tradition of Turkification as well.

After all, today nobody thinks of expulsion or assimilation of the “small” principalities of Lichtenstein, Monaco, or San-Marino.

It is highly probable that Southern Caucasus is able to adopt the principles of European structure and European values. Russia, in its turn, could possess with cemented zone of security, pulsation of peace on its southern gateways.

Bibliography

1. Avetisyan H. 1994. Brest-Litovsk. How Kars, Ardahan and Batum were deprived by Turkey, Yerevan.
2. Feygin M. 1998. Transcaucasian knot, *Novij mir*, N 9, p. 134-155.
3. Gajiev K. 2001. Geopolitics of the Caucasus, Moscow, (in Russian).
4. Kabisov Al. 1997. Conflicts in Southern Ossetia and the value of the experience of Alanian autonomy for the solution of conflicts in Transcaucasia, in *Ethnopolitical conflicts in Transcaucasia. Their roots and means of solution*, Maryland (in Russian).
5. Mandelbaum M. 1983. *The Bomb, Dread and Eternity*, International Security, Cambridge/Mass., Vol.5. N 2.
6. Mango A. 1999. *Atatürk*, London.
7. Shirinyan L.K., *Armenian military power during the last phase of World war I*, Yerevan, 2010.

¹¹ Ethnic and regional conflicts in Eurasia. Book 3. International experience of the solution of ethnic conflicts (ed. by B.Koppiters, E.Remackle, A.Zverev), Moscow. 1997, p. 13.

8. Volskij A. 1992. Geopolitical reality in Transcaucasia, Moskovskiye vedomosti, October 4, 1992 (in Russian).
9. Zverev A. 1996. Ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus, 1988-1994 in Disputed borders in the Caucasus (ed. B.Koppiters), Moscow (in Russian).

Translated from the Armenian by Aram Kosyan