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**Strategic Gaps in Armenian Political Consciousness
or
Axioms of the Geopolitical Existence of Armenia**

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The present article will discuss the basic component of Armenians' political consciousness - its strategic consciousness, i.e., on the one hand, a clear vision of the essential threats to the national security of Armenia in a medium and long-term perspective, and on the other hand – an intellectual, moral and psychological readiness to collectively resist those threats. The strategic consciousness of a potential or actual state-forming ethno-national entity can include such concepts as "strategic thought", "strategic thinking", "strategic memory", and "strategic responsibility".

The other major components of Armenian political consciousness are its legal consciousness (the knowledge of the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Armenia and the ability to put them into practice) and economic consciousness (the knowledge of the economics of Armenia, of the region and of the world at large, as well as the ability to apply them effectively). They are derived from strategic consciousness and are superstructural, hence are not considered here.

The degree of development of the strategic consciousness of any potential or actual state-forming ethno-national entity depends on a number of reasons and circumstances, first of all:

- the maturity and efficiency of its national security system;
- the independence and institutionalization of professional thought in matters regarding national security;
- the well-preparedness of the political elite in matters regarding national security;
- the feeling of responsibility of the political elite before the nation;
- the nation's consolidation in ethnic, religious, language and social aspects;
- the timely identification of special operations of informational, ideological and psychological warfare on the given entity from the hostile countries and/or the interested powers, and application of adequate counter-measures for their

neutralization, taking into consideration their duration, intensity and sophistication.

Unfortunately, on all six above-mentioned parameters, a certain backwardness of national strategic consciousness is manifest among the Armenian public. Thus, the Armenian professional school of national security thought is just starting to make its first steps, being in a significant financial and intellectual dependence on Western and, to a lesser degree, Russian centers of thought on foreign policy and security. The preparedness of the Armenian political elite on the same questions is extremely weak, and its feeling of responsibility before the nation is woeful. The Armenian nation is fragmented in terms of its church, religion and language. In post-Soviet Armenia the recent socio-economic polarization has reached an inadmissible level, unfortunately offsetting the national unity and solidarity acquired during the Artsakh (Karabakh) movement.

Moreover, in addition to hostile Turkey and Azerbaijan, there are certain other powers with long-term strategic interests in the region, and, accordingly, with incessant, well-orchestrated and subtle misinformation, propaganda and psychological warfare activity, the purpose of which is the derailment and diversion of Armenian strategic thought and consciousness. Inefficient identification of these influences coupled with weak countermeasures from the Armenian state and Diaspora structures frequently result in successful manipulation of the strategic consciousness of Armenians. One example of a classical ideological diversion will suffice to illustrate this situation: it became possible to introduce into the political consciousness of Armenians a pejorative differentiation between "Karabakhtsi" (people of Karabakh origin) and "Hayastantsi" (people of Hayastan/Republic of Armenia origin) with a series of the most potentially dangerous consequences.

Considering the existing threats, the system of national security of Armenia is, generally speaking, immature and ineffective. Thus, fourteen years after proclaiming independence, a Doctrine of National Security has not yet been developed; the nominally existing Council of National Security has no apparatus of its own and simply does not function; some major fronts of national security are completely abandoned, including strategic analysis, information policy (or, in old terminology, the realm of ideology and propaganda), large-scale religious-sectarian intervention, the fight against corruption, the development of political ("applied") Armenian Studies and the future of fundamental Armenian Studies.

As a result of historical upheavals as well as subjective and objective influences, certain grave functional voids exist in Armenian strategic consciousness. The strategic realities, which should have been perceived by the absolute majority of Armenians as axioms of the geopolitical existence of Armenia, are being ignored both by the significant part of the Armenian people and, more regrettably, by a significant part of the political elite across partisan lines. The underdevelopment of strategic thinking of the Armenian political elite precludes its favorable differentiation from the strategic consciousness of the Armenian masses.

Although one part of Armenian society – a few political parties, socially active groups, and reputable individuals – can adequately perceive some of the below-mentioned unchallengeable strategic truths, the problems of their pan-Armenian acknowledgement and concomitant building of a united national policy around them is nevertheless not being solved in this way. The power of the axiom is in its being accepted by everyone, and, moreover, its acceptance without reservations. The disorder and vacillations among the Armenians start exactly when the disputes stir up around fundamental and simple truths. Let us illustrate this with just one comparison.

It would be impossible, for example, to imagine any significant part of the American society, let alone political parties and the ruling elite, which would not perceive al Qaeda as a serious threat to the security of the United States in 2005. Naturally, there are no disputes around this elementary conviction, and the forces of society, which Americans have in abundance, are not being wasted. But in Armenian society there are many people, some political parties and several newspapers, numerous representatives of big business and even high-ranking officials, who cannot understand much more obvious and fatal threats to the security of Armenia that emanate from the two neighboring allied states – Azerbaijan and Turkey. Many have been spending years conducting frivolous discussions about the possibility of an Armenian-Turkish friendship in the present, while some people are even embracing such fantasies in an attempt at modern day geopolitical alchemy.

Below follows a more detailed description of the fundamental strategic realities, which are being ignored by the masses and a part of political elite of Armenians.

1. The criticality of the geostrategic situation and the impossibility to pacify Azerbaijan through territorial concessions

The criticality of the geostrategic situation of "to be or not to be", in which Armenia has found itself during the post-Soviet period, is being ignored or, at best, underestimated. In other words, the probability of total destruction of Armenia as a result

of possible success of the aggression, methodically planned and carefully prepared by Azerbaijan (with direct or indirect collaboration of Turkey) is being ignored. Simultaneously, the impossibility to appease Azerbaijan and its supporter Turkey by means of territorial concessions is being dismissed as well.

The purpose of eliminating Armenia as a geopolitical entity is not concealed by the Azerbaijani strategists; they even indicate the approximate timeframe (from 25 to 30 years) when, according to their calculations, "there will be no Armenian state in the South Caucasus". This plan has been repeatedly expressed, in particular, by the Azerbaijani Defense Ministry spokesman Col. R. Melikov; similar statements have been made by Defense Minister Gen. Safar Abiyev and other officials. Let us recall the powerful diplomatic attack on Teheran undertaken by Tel Aviv after similar statements made by the president of Iran toward Israel. Unfortunately, Armenian diplomacy in general fails to react to such threats periodically launched from Baku.

The plan of destroying Armenia is not a "super secret", and can be simply represented as an elementary tactical operation, like a chess combination of "mate in three moves": **Step 1** – the Azerbaijani aggression toward and occupation of Artsakh and the surrounding liberated territories; **Step 2** – the subsequent invasion of Siunik, the last remaining bastion separating the two Turkic allies (the weak communications with the central regions of Armenia, the absence of the protective "walls" of Artsakh and any defense depth, the use of modern artillery systems as well as the psychological trauma from the fall of Artsakh would reduce the defensibility of Siunik to nearly zero), which would result in the encirclement of the remainder of Armenia in a Turkish-Azerbaijani ring, its transformation into a ghetto, a kind of Transcaucasian Swaziland; **Step 3** – the liquidation of Armenia even if not by military means, then through the economic, political and psychological pressure from Turkey and Azerbaijan. Thus being deprived of any prospects for sustainable development and losing its role as potential shelter for the millions of Armenians scattered throughout the world, with the geometrically increased mass emigration, Armenia would weaken to a degree of being absorbed and divided by Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

The immediate execution of this Turkish-Azerbaijani plan of destruction of Armenia is assigned to Azerbaijan. Proceeding from present international realities, Turkey will remain in the shadows, providing logistical support to Azerbaijani aggression in the form of propaganda, diplomatic lobbying, financial, informational and intelligence assistance, as well as by military advisers and "volunteers".

In the beginning of the 1990s the Armenians managed to neutralize this plan, albeit at a formidable cost; this provided Armenia with the time and opportunity to

strengthen its statehood, that is – for radical self-organization. Unfortunately, in many respects these opportunities have been missed, in particular in the sphere of creation of effective system of national security and the improvement of governance.

A clear comprehension of the geopolitical situation would have mobilized the considerable human, ideological and financial resources at the disposal of the Armenians, as well as the inexhaustible national will to rule out the above-mentioned fatal probability via the building of a strong state, which would be respected both inside and outside Armenia, a state, which would be capable of conducting independent policy in the vital issues of its national security. Instead, Armenians have to put up continuously with a low level of governance, total corruptness of the officialdom, the malfunctioning of the legal system and, particularly, the failure of the judicial system, the perpetuation of the caste of oligarchs and higher officials who consider themselves and behave above the law, the clan system (including its provincial variations), the denial of the national culture and values, and finally – the ignoring of national and, consequently, one’s own security.

2. On the strategically favorable historical moment

The current stability inside and around Armenia is not eternal; regardless of intentions or desires, it may worsen due to numerous internal, regional and global reasons.

On the local level, the growth of the Armenian economy together with the deep concurrent stalemate in the political system is potentially fraught with political and social upheavals as well as continuing emigration of many honest young professionals, who cannot realize their potential within either corrupt state bodies, or oligarchic business-structures, which are profiting out of monopolization of entire spheres of the Armenian economy. The lack of qualified professionals, which is already felt in almost all spheres of the Armenian state, would inevitably cause stagnation of the economy, science and education.

On the regional level, the stability could be obliterated by the aforementioned Azerbaijani aggression. In this respect it should be added that for Aliev’s clan the war may be the only means to remain in power, since the dissatisfaction of the Azerbaijani masses has the potential of growing ever stronger. It is dictated by several factors. First, irrespective of the amount of oil pumped out of the Caspian Sea, it will not suffice to radically improve the social-economic standing of the populace, since, compared to the rare successful examples of oil-rich states (Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, UAE),

the amounts of Azeri oil reserves relative to its population is not that big. Second, the system of the government and its corresponding military and civil services are thoroughly corrupt, precluding even nominally just and honest sharing of oil profits. Third, against the background of mounting social inequality and the contrast between the haves and the have-nots, the impossibility of benefiting from oil wealth will bring about further disenchantment among the populace, increasing the revolutionary attitudes of the Azerbaijani society. But a “victorious war” might strengthen Aliev’s grip on power for a long time.

The region may blow up because of other developments as well, the most serious of which are as follows: the probable worsening of the US-Iranian tensions devolving into some form of war, the probable deterioration of the situation in Javakhk leading to the possible outbreak of a military conflict (below this question is discussed in detail), and the probable escalation of Kurdish military resistance in Turkey all could have serious impact on the regional security.

On the global level, the political and economic instability is not decreasing, but, to the contrary, is on the sharp rise. The possible and even anticipated international crises with negative consequences to the world political system include, but are not limited to, the possible international financial crisis and correlating crisis of the globalized economy; the terrorist operations of Islamic extremists in Western countries with mass casualties; the Chinese “reconquista”, i.e., the invasion of China into Taiwan with an automatic dragging of the US into the war against China; the extremist Wahhabist revolution in Saudi Arabia; the forced withdrawal of US troops from Iraq; the use of nuclear bomb by North Korea or against that country.

A powerful destabilizing effect on the world political system could alternately come about by huge natural disasters, capable of detonating the already existing global, regional or local economic and political tinderboxes.

Taken together, it can be concluded that **current internal and external political stability in the Transcaucasian region and, especially in Armenia, is temporary.** Ignoring this circumstance has the consequence that the Armenians fail to maximally use the current strategically favorable historical period. It is just in this day and time that Armenians should be getting ready for all future complications and scenarios; it is today that we should register a breakthrough in the national self-organization, first of all, in the stalled state-building process in Armenia. The failed performance of the important state bodies of Armenia, their weakness, the prevailing corruption and un-professionalism all of which engender distrust and hopelessness in the citizenry towards the very idea of Armenian statehood will have to be acknowledged (by the way, on October 27 of this

year almost an identical view was expressed by RA Defense Minister Serj Sargsian during his official visit to the US).

The more prepared Armenia is for the inescapable “X” day, i.e., for the temporary imminent collapse of the regional or international political systems as a result of one or more factors mentioned above, the more it shall gain as a nation and the nation-state and the lesser losses it shall suffer. Had Armenia been more ready in 1988, it would have won more and lost less. This relates, in principal, to all nations and states. But in the case of Armenia, every potential day “X” can be seen as a question of life and death.

On a personal level, ignoring all these strategic threats, undoubtedly, functions as psychological self-defense. The “strategic amnesia” allows an Armenian to think and work for the benefit of his family, rather than jutting into the “unnecessary” thoughts about the difficult past, present and future of his nation and fatherland. This same collective amnesia allows Armenian state bodies to function in accustomed regime of slackness, irresponsibility and lack of discipline, as opposed to that necessary level of organization, which is necessitated by the strategic vision of the threats and rational search for their minimization and neutralization.

The pan-Armenian grief over the Genocide that is commemorated on April 24 each year has yet to transform into a “strategic memory”, that is, an in-depth analysis of the consequences and possible ways out from the geopolitical situation of Armenia and the Armenians.

3. On strategic value of the territory for the security and development of Armenia

Land has always been and remains the most precious strategic resource. But Armenian masses as well as considerable part of their political elite ignore or underestimate the significance of the territory for the present and future of Armenia.

Armenian masses lack clear understanding regarding the most fundamental strategic element of the post-Soviet existence of Armenia – its territory.

Contemporary Armenia is not the Republic of Armenia only, but also the Republic of Mountainous Karabakh (Artsakh) together with the liberated lands. **Contemporary Armenia is the territory under the control of the Armenian armed forces.** For more than a decade Armenia has comprised the territory of 42 thousand square kilometers, which is comparable with the territories of Switzerland (41,3 thousand sq. km.) and the Netherlands (41,2 thousand sq. km.). This is a simple strategic fact, the international legal recognition of which should be attained in the future. The

reverse side of this military and economic reality is that Armenia would be incapable of physically surviving on the territory of 29,8 thousand square kilometers (i.e., the former Armenian SSR) without Artsakh and the liberated lands. The reason for this is once again the Turkish-Azerbaijani alliance, which is founded on common strategic interests and therefore enjoys the characteristics of longevity and endurance.

Ethnic groups that live in mature states perfectly understand the significance of the territory and revere every bit of it. The same appreciation reigned in the ancient Armenian state: the Code of Honor of the Armenian military in the 4-5th centuries AD provided that the soldier “shall not allow any, not even the smallest patch, of the Armenian Homeland to be taken over by others”¹. Unfortunately, this is not currently the case with the Armenian nation, which lost 90% of its historic lands, a nation, which because of this has found itself on the brink of extermination and been forced to fight wars of survival in the beginning and at the end of the 20th century. The underestimation of the importance of territory, particularly of liberated lands, by many Armenians, their continuous discussions and declarations on the necessity of territorial concessions to Azerbaijan, the state, which does not hide its true aspirations to destroy all Armenia – are all not as much of strategic illiteracy, as the special form of psychic disease, namely, the aforementioned “strategic amnesia”.

It is only the Armenian state that can successfully treat this illness, contracted through the course of the recent centuries of statelessness, by cultivating from the school age the love towards the Armenian Homeland and explaining the meaning of every square inch of that land for the secure and prosperous development of Armenia.

Armenian patriotism is a politically realistic feeling of loyalty to the Armenian nation and the physical territory, namely, to Armenia, in three time dimensions: in her historic, present and aspirational boundaries (in the first and last cases these boundaries coincide with the Armenian Highland). True Armenian patriotism is, first and foremost, a feeling of an attachment to the territory itself.

4. On the unfinished phase of the national-liberation movement, the totality of war, culture of resistance and strategy of self-defense

¹ See A. Aivazian, *The Code of Honor of the Armenian Military, 4-5th centuries*. Yerevan, Matenadaran: “Artagers,” 2000, p. 8-9; the Russian version of this study appeared in *Golos Armenii*, February 1, 2001.

The unfinished phase of the national-liberation struggle of the Armenian people is completely disregarded. The international community does not recognize Artsakh and the liberated lands, Azerbaijan continues to gear up for resumption of war, increasing the combat-readiness of its army as well as its military spending, which by 2006 will surpass 650 million US dollars (official military spending of Armenia for 2006 is planned to be 163 million US dollars).

There is an impression that in the middle of the national-liberation movement the newly formed “elite” of Armenia forgot about the external vulnerability of the country and rushed headlong into never-ending period of “primary accumulation of capital”, which results, inter alia, in the weakening of the state, the dispossession of the populace and erosion of national unity in the face of external threats. The similar situation throughout post-Soviet space can serve neither as an explanation, nor as an exoneration for such behavior, since Armenia’s geostrategic risk far surpasses such analogs.

As for now, Azerbaijan, together with Turkey, is engaged in full-fledged ideological and psychological war against Armenia, which again, does not receive adequate responses either from the Armenian state, or from the Diaspora structures.

The lack of *resistance culture* to external and internal threats of the national existence (or the prevalence of *non-resistance culture*) among Armenians effectively exacerbates this situation. **The correct strategy of national self-defense begins not from actual warring on the battlefield, but from their deterrence or victorious predetermination through preemptive operations on the organizational, ideological, psychological and other fronts.** Contemporary strategic thought has cemented this truth in the doctrines of “total war” and “preventive strikes”.

Two other factors come into play here. The Turkish and Azerbaijani “historians” with the help of their allies and paid stooges wage overseas a permanent campaign of falsification and defamation of Armenian history and culture of all epochs and periods, with the tacit complicity of higher academic circles and even the state establishment of Armenia. At the same time, the masses in Armenia endure deprived and humiliating social situation. Against such background, the underdeveloped resistance culture in Armenian society makes the restoration of historically trampled national self-respect, an important pillar for the nation-building in Armenia, an even more of a difficult task.

It is no less important that the prevailing culture of non-resistance and time-serving brings up a new generation, for which this hyper-conformism is a norm of life and behavior. Will this generation be able to show proper resistance to the enemy on the battleground, if necessary, by sacrificing life for the Homeland?

5. The transience of “international security guarantees”

There is a widespread lack of awareness about the absolute unreliability of “international security guarantees”, particularly, in the form of international peacekeeping forces. During the last decades, these forces demonstrated their ineffectiveness in many “hot spots” of the world (Lebanon, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Rwanda, Sierra-Leone).

Even more important is the fact that the Armenian-Turkish/Azerbaijani conflict, being the product not only of history, but also of opposing strategic interests of the parties, has the potential for extreme longevity. This is further supported by the conflict’s 150 years of history. The strategic interests of Azerbaijan and Turkey dictate, in particular, establishing an immediate land corridor between them, i.e., the occupation of Artsakh and Siunik; banishing the issue of the Armenian Genocide into oblivion; tearing away Iran’s northern Turkic-speaking provinces; and weakening Russia’s role in the Caucasus. The achievement of these common goals would require nothing less than the annihilation of Armenia.

The territorial concessions to Azerbaijan and the deployment of international peacekeeping forces could be only a short-lived settlement for this conflict. The peacekeepers, sooner or later, will have to leave the region. Considering the inequality in power and resources, the Turkish-Azerbaijani side will try to solve their issues through military force at the first opportunity. **In such a situation one of the prerequisites for the long-term security of Armenia will be the preservation of the minimally required strategic territorial buffer and depth, currently under Armenian control. The most reliable guarantee of Armenia’s security is strong Armenian state.**

6. On the strategic importance of Javakhk

The preservation of Armenian Javakhk and its vital importance for strategic security of Armenia is being ignored. The de-Armenization of Javakhk has potentially disastrous consequences for Armenia.

First, Armenia’s northern border, currently reliable thanks to Javakhk’s Armenian demography, will become no less dangerous than the Armenian-Turkish border. Fortifying the northern border and stationing troops there will require huge resources from the Armenian budget. We must also take into account the plans for

resettling into the region with Meskhetian Turks, promoted by Turkey and supported by the European structures, which, if realized, will automatically invite a blockade of Armenia from the north.

Second, Armenian-populated Javakhk with its natural loyalty to the interests of Armenia and attachment to their Armenian roots is a factor that seriously restrains Tbilisi from officially strengthening its strategic partnership with Turkey and Azerbaijan. In the absence of this factor, the Georgian policy would take on an openly anti-Armenian orientation.

Third, we must not forget about Georgian appetites with regard to the northern Armenian region of Lori: in the past whenever political conditions were favorable, Georgian aspirations were realized in the form of aggression and occupation of Lori (first, at the end of 1918, then again at the end of 1920 and the beginning of 1921).

Fourth, the expulsion of Armenians from Javakhk will mean the further reduction of Armenian-populated territory in the historical homeland of Armenians – the Armenian Highland. In the context of Turkish-Azerbaijani designs aimed at elimination of Armenia such developments will become simply another logical step and the extension of genocidal policies.

Finally, in the current conditions of national demographic crisis, we cannot afford to lose even a single Armenian village. It is worth noting that threat of ethnic cleansing is hanging over more than 140 Armenian towns and villages in Javakhk and adjoining areas.

It is time to recognize the political problem of Javakhk, and to start working in an effective and coordinated manner to solve the accumulated problems. The widespread violations of human rights and freedoms of the Armenian population by the Georgian central government must be stopped. Playing down the gravity of the situation by Yerevan for internal and external political reasons or with the hope that if it is ignored it will go away, will only contribute to the further deterioration of the conditions in Javakhk and rising tension as Javakhtsis (in Armenia, Javakhk and abroad) recognize that the deterioration has crossed the point of no return. And if military conflict erupts there, Armenia will be dragged into it one way or another (with all negative consequences for Armenia) under the growing pressure from hundreds of thousands of natives of Javakhk (citizens of Armenia as well as those who live abroad) and the patriotic part of the society, including the veterans of Artsakh Liberation War, who have made sacrifices to protect Armenians' right to exist on their native lands.

CONCLUSION

The cultivation of a healthy awareness of strategic issues among Armenians is an immediate task, demanding a clear articulation of government policies. This requires, at a minimum, the following:

First, the Armenia's policies in the sphere of national security must be systematized, with supporting evidence and explanations, and presented to the Armenian people in unambiguous strategic terms, and not in diplomatically correct, equivocal verbiage. In the issues of national security and general military policy, the Armenian government must be frank and honest with its people, because under current grave geopolitical conditions the survival of Armenia will depend on the effective participation of every citizen of Armenia and as much of the Armenian diaspora as possible. The preparation and adoption of a National Security Doctrine in the near future and its thorough presentation to the public would be step in the right direction.

Second, a governmental informational-political campaign should be prepared and implemented to foster in the Armenian population political awareness, social attitudes and analytic concepts as the absolute strategic value of territory; the absolute strategic value of national language, history and culture; to mentally prepare them for a long-term opposition to the Turkish-Azerbaijani blockade and the possible eruption of a new war with Azerbaijan as well as the necessity of defending national dignity inside and outside Armenia by all means necessary.

Third, the unequivocal recognition by the Armenian government of political problems in Javakhk and an offer to the Georgian government, to help solve the problems in the region within the norms of international law, with the aim of reducing tensions in Javakhk.

Finally, a consistent formation of an independent Armenian school of strategic thought, as a primary pillar of national security for the Armenian state, will contribute to the development of strategic consciousness of Armenians. To achieve this goal, the competent state-sponsored think tanks for strategic studies should be established; their activities should be focused on providing the information and analysis necessary for policy formation to the President, the Government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the military and security services. Only in and around such centers will it be possible to prepare scholars and analysts with the skills, methods, knowledge and resources necessary for Armenia's national strategy and security.