



## Middle East & Caucasus, the new "Game of Nations," and the Karabakh problem



**By Ivan IVEKOVIC**

*Ivan IVEKOVIC had previously a double career, as diplomat of the S.F.R. of Yugoslavia, and university lecturer. He served as ambassador to the U.R. of Tanzania, director of the West-European Department in the M.F.A. and ambassador to the A.R. of Egypt. Since 1992, he is professor of Comparative Politics at the American University in Cairo, Egypt. In 2001 he authored a book "The Political Economy of Ethnonational Mobilization: Ethnic and Regional Conflicts in Yugoslavia and Transcaucasia," Ravenna: Longo editore.*

Since the disintegration of the USSR, after nearly two centuries of isolation from their Middle Eastern neighbors, the former Soviet republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia became once again part of what is known today as the Greater Middle East. It is a geopolitical laboratory in which external players, primary Russia and the United States, try, using political, military and economic muscles, to assert their competing interests. Newly independent countries of the Southern Caucasus and of former Soviet Central Asia, as well as the countries of the classical, or Lesser Middle East, became the arena in which this new "Game of Nations," reminiscent of Russo-British rivalries of the 19th century, is actually unfolding. Of course, state-actors belonging to that region have their own agendas, which, as in the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan, or in the cases of Georgia and its breakaway provinces, clash with each other. Turkey and Iran have also their separate regional agendas. And, actually chaotic developments in neighboring Iraq and Afghanistan (extending also to Pakistan) are part of the larger picture, as well the Israeli-Palestinian stalemate. In this situation of generalized regional crises, the support or enmity of great external actors, is essential. Fluid alliances were shaped during the last decade: on one side, the US-sponsored axis of Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey (with extension to Israel in the Middle East, and to Ukraine and Moldova, within the GUAM group, in Eastern Europe); on the other side are Russian privileged relations with Armenia and Iran (with Syria as recent recruit).

An important role in the shaping of the US-sponsored alliance is played by the pipeline route that by-passes both Russia and Iran (and Armenia), and connects Caspian oil and gas wells to Turkey via Georgia. But this could change if Turkish trade interests with Russia (and Iran) prevail. If on the other hand a compromise solution for the Karabakh conflict is found, Armenia could liberate itself from Russian sponsorship.

If the next American administration departs from the actual confrontational stance with Tehran, Iranian foreign policy could change radically, etc. Iran could play a positive role in the internal stabilization of Baghdad's and Kabul's regimes. Because of its geographical location and the fact that it is a major oil exporter, it cannot be excluded from future security arrangements in the Gulf.

The situation in Central Asia is equally fluid. Ruling elites of that region are trying to play balancing games between contradictory interests of Russia, USA and China. They are all internally vulnerable. Sudden regime changes could bring-in new foreign policy alignments.

There are many "ifs" that could be discussed, but for the Armenians and Azerbaijanis the only really burning issue is the fate of Karabakh. As long as this frozen conflict is not solved by mutual consent (unavoidably a compromise), Armenian economic perspectives will remain bleak. Instead of being an isolated local player as it is now, Armenia could become a hinge state between East and West (the shortest route between Turkey and Azerbaijan), and North and South. It would be also in Baku's interest. There are many speculations pointing at a possible formula, which would be part of a much larger, internationally-sponsored package. The package, which was already on the floor in 1986 when Levon Ter-Petrossian was forced to resign, is once again aired by various think-tanks. In the meantime, however, the international configuration of forces has evolved. The actual system of regional alliances is challenged both from within and outside. There is perhaps a possibility for untested openings. Whatever it might be, the new package is supposed to include: territorial concessions from both sides; a formula for the status of Karabakh; strong international guarantees that will bind,

not only great external players, but regional actors as well; the controversial issue of the Armenian genocide; the end of the blockade imposed on Armenia by Azerbaijan and Turkey; the opening of new oil and gas transit routes. Bilateral problems opposing Georgia and its foreign allies to Russia should be addressed also within a larger regional stability re-arrangement.

As for myself, I am not taking sides or advocating any particular formula. But having in mind that any sort of compromise is still in advance opposed by intransigent nationalistic circles, both in Armenia and in Azerbaijan, I think that it is important to open a debate on these issues.

### **The Nagorno Karabakh Issue: A View from Outside**

Both Armenia and Azerbaijan are hostages of the Nagorno Karabakh problem. Without its settlement, in one way or another, Armenia could not get out of its actual regional isolation, which is the condition sine qua non for its better future. Its economy cannot rely indefinitely on the financial injections of its Diaspora, which, with the ongoing global economic crisis, will decrease already this year. Subsidized prices that Armenia actually pays for Russian gas could not be maintained eternally; besides, Russian gas transit route could be cut in the case of a renewed Russo-Georgian conflict. Although the Armenians of Artsakh cannot survive without Armenia, Armenia itself would fare much better without the costly burden of Karabakh. Landlocked as it is, it has to get out of the blockade to which it is actually subjected. As an Armenian friend, a banker, told me in Yerevan ♦ "if the government wants to open to our population the perspective of better life, it has to open the country to our immediate neighbors." Those neighbors are - Azerbaijan and Turkey.

Azerbaijan is in a better position, thanks to its oil and gas revenues, although, similarly to Russia, it is already feeling the pinch of depressed oil prices. Economically, it does not need this part of its "national territory," but it cannot give it away, and recognize N.K. ♦s would-be "independence," its de facto annexation by Armenia. More sensitive is the future of adjacent Azeri districts that were and are still occupied by the Armenians. While Yerevan and Stepanakert could claim that the majority population of N.K. has democratically opted for "national self-determination," the districts outside, from which the local Azeri population has been also expelled, are illegally occupied territories, which are kept in reserve as future bargaining chips. But besides these issues, Azerbaijan is certainly interested to gain direct access to its exclave of Nakhichevan and to open the energy export routes to and transiting Armenia.

I had the opportunity last October to visit Armenia and to travel to Stepanakert. It was a short visit, similar to the one I made two years before to Azerbaijan, including Nakhichevan. I retained from the October visit to N.K. two contradictory observations: (1) no N.K. Armenian is ready to accept the return to any kind of Azerbaijani "sovereignty" over their region; all of them see their future in association with Armenia; some officials believe that some "strategically important" occupied districts, outside the N.K. territory, should not be returned to Azerbaijan; (2) all Armenia is facing the problem of depopulation ♦ perhaps as much as one million Armenians have left the country since independence ♦ but the demographic losses of N.K., not counting expelled Azeris and Kurds, are dramatic; among these emigrants are some politicians who found a more comfortable life in Yerevan; many N.K. commoners are still struggling to get out, because they lost faith in promised improvements. Life is

definitely difficult for those who remained in N.K. With the subsidies coming from the Diaspora and Yerevan, which will likely decrease, they cannot expect anything better. Something has to change.

Last November, when the presidents of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia, met in Moscow, and issued an unprecedented joint declaration, it seemed that a step was made in the right direction. Most important was their common commitment to seek a political solution to the bilateral Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, through negotiations, mediated by the OSCE Minsk Group. The Minsk Group, co-chaired by the ambassadors of France, Russia and the United States, has submitted in the past a number of suggestions, a whole package with alternative solutions and time-tables, which could be negotiated and filtered again. While I am writing these lines, the three co-chairs are touring the region. After calls to Baku and Yerevan, they are due to go to N.K. "The two sides" - as EU's Commissioner responsible for external relations and European Neighborhood Policy, Ms. Ferrero-Waldner, put it - "should find a compromise in accord with the principle of territorial integrity and the right of nations to self-determination" (Pan Armenia.Net, 19/01/2009). Those are contradictory principles, but it does not mean that a compromise is impossible.

The main problem is to find a formula for the future status of Karabakh that would be acceptable to the Karabakh Armenian population, to Yerevan, and to the Azerbaijanis (both government and refugees). It seems to me, as an uncommitted outsider, that the main hurdle on the way to such a compromise is semantic. The Azeris are insisting on "sovereignty" and "territorial integrity;" the Karabakhis on their "self-determination" and "independence" (associated with Armenia, which Yerevan, paradoxically, has not recognized). Perhaps a "special status" hybrid formula, linking N.K. both to Armenia and Azerbaijan, could be worked out. Or something similar to the Hong Kong formula of "one country ♦ two systems," or, the Aaland Islands ♦ formula (Finland and Sweden are members of the Minsk Group). If accepted, Karabakh could be promoted into a free-trade territory, to the benefit of its own population, and of both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Besides, with such an arrangement, Armenia would open itself to the transit of Caspian oil and gas toward external markets. Once the formula for the future status of N.K. is agreed, even if it is supposed to be "transitional" (some of the transitional/temporary solutions in international relations proved durable), other issues, some of them very complicated and other rather technical, could be ironed out during the forthcoming process of OSCE-mediated negotiations. That is the task of diplomats, but the meetings of the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan (the next one is likely to take place at Davos, Switzerland, on the margins of the World Economic Forum in February) could contribute to a breakthrough.

The Armenian-Azeri problem cannot be reduced to its bilateral dimension only: it is also regional and much more. The involvement of the OSCE proves that it is also European. It is regional, because it is not the only one in the Southern Caucasus (remember the August Russo-Georgian war, and the later Russian recognition of the "independence" of South Ossetia and Abkhazia). It is also linked to the Middle East (Armenia maintains cooperative relations with Iran, while Turkey, which is member of the Minsk Group, sides with Azerbaijan). Important is the fact that the Moscow Accord was immediately backed by the United States (co-chair of the Minsk Group) and the European Union. Washington, otherwise very much involved into the affairs of the Southern Caucasus, has certainly its own reasons for such an endorsement, and this will not change with the Obama administration. However, its regional policy could become less antagonistic toward Russia and Iran.

I do not expect that all the problems enumerated above could be solved with the Azeri-Armenian peace, but part of the same package should be the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations, a process that was already initiated and seems on the right track. The normalization of the relations between Yerevan/Stepanakert and Baku would also permit the inclusion of Armenia into regional development projects that until now by-passed its territory. The Nabucco East-West transit corridor is one of the energy projects that was revived during the recent Russo-Ukrainian gas dispute. One of its tracks could run through Armenia. But to be successful, it has to take-in also Turkmen gas. A useful addition would be Iranian gas. Perhaps such a package could open the way for a general reshuffle of geopolitical cards in the broader Caucasus region, but it is too early to speculate.

## **From Belligerent to Multi-ethnic Democracy**

*Domestic Politics in Unrecognized States after the Ceasefires*

*Kimitaka MATSUZATO. Born in 1960. Doctor of Law (University of Tokio, 1996). Docent (1991) and Professor(2000-)- Center for Slavonic Studies, University of Hokkaido; Specialises in Politics and History of CIS countries,. Since 2003 conducts research on unrecognised states. Conducted a field research in the NKR , April 2005. Latest publication- A Collection: Transdnestria in macroregional context of the Black Sea coast ( Sapporo, 2008)*

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" In 2005, when I was working in the NKR, I was struck bi its ability to build democracy of high standard in the hardest conditions of international non-recognition and constant threat of war. I wish for Karabakhis to never forget that just by that and only that (democracy) they can win the respect and recognition of the world"  
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**By Kimitaka MATSUZATO**

The collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia generated a number of unrecognized states. While the international community forcibly liquidated those having emerged in the former Yugoslavia, four unrecognized states in the former Soviet Union ♦ the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR), Abkhazia, Transnistria or the Pridnestr Moldovan Republic (PMR), and South Ossetia ♦ have survived to this day. As an unexpected result of the military conflict in August 2008, two of them ♦ South Ossetia and Abkhazia ♦ received their long-awaited recognition by Russia.

The armed conflict around South Ossetia in August 2008 revived public interest in

unrecognized states. It is, to an extent, understandable that researchers have paid much more attention to international aspects of the issue than to its domestic implications. Yet several researches have focused on the domestic politics of these states, a harbinger of which was Charles King (2001).<sup>1</sup> Although their studies would seem to be more balanced, empirical, less politicized than those focused on international aspects of the issue, their admirable attempts to compare the domestic politics of unrecognized states appear sketchy. This essay tries to elucidate the logic of political development in the NKR, Abkhazia, and the PMR after the ceasefires.<sup>2</sup>

I identify this logic of development as follows. The painful civil wars, from which the unrecognized states were born, left strong social and psychological aftereffects. On the one hand, these wars were crystallized in the people's mind as an experience of a primitive, belligerent democracy. This is not to say, for example, that the Abkhazian government during its evacuation to Gudauta (when Sukhum was occupied by Georgian troops) was morally pure and solely based on popular self-sacrifice. As is the case with any war, perhaps, admirable heroism and self-sacrifice coexisted with atrocities, nepotism, and economic speculation. What I appreciate here is the fact that the population remembers the war as a time of primordial justice, constant references to which proved to be indispensable in the making (remaking) of post-war democracy. This might also be common for any large-scale war in history.<sup>3</sup> With this qualification, I call the de facto democracy during the wars "belligerent democracy."

On the other hand, however, the addiction to wartime heroism made it difficult for the populations to adapt themselves to normal civil democracy and a market economy freed from state capitalism in hostilities. They could hardly understand that braveness in battlefield was one thing, but civilian courageousness necessary for democracy was another. Moreover, after a decade of politicized season, civil war, and blockade, people became tired. They preferred to delegate power to heroes of the independence war, such as Samvel Babayan, Vladislav Ardzinba, and Igor Smirnov. Cronies and relatives of these leaders exploited this situation, concentrated wealth and power in their hands, while the founding fathers of the states fell from power one by one. When negative tendencies went beyond a threshold, a new massive mobilization for redemocratization took place.

The more total and cruel the war was, the stronger and more harmful its aftereffects became. This implies, on the other hand, that the threshold from patience to protest of the population might be lowered, if the aftereffects were more harmful. Since the Karabakh War was most total among the three civil wars, its aftereffects were extremely significant, generating something akin to a "federation of field commanders" in Chechnya (Khalidov 2006a, 14); the former commanders monopolized the politics and economies of the NKR. Because of this indisputable evil, however, a change of the ruling group came earlier in the NKR, in 1999-2000, than in Transnistria and Abkhazia. The hostilities and victims were relatively limited in Transnistria, which therefore did not suffer from Karabakh-style militarism, though inertia of the war, all the same, prevented the PMR from shifting to a market economy. Partly because of this limited harm of the war's aftereffects, the PMR has remained the only unrecognized state that continues to be ruled by the leader since the early 1990s, Igor Smirnov. Abkhazia lies between Karabakh and Transnistria in terms of war aftermath. In this republic, the change of government took place in 2004.<sup>4</sup>

When the opposition tried to protest against negative phenomena in the post-war period, they largely had two options of appealing to the population. The first was the recovery of the

founding ideals of the state, return to belligerent democracy. Since the aftereffects of the war were most significant in Karabakh, this discourse of "return" emerged there most typically.

Both supporters of and protestors against the former commanders' "dictatorship" came from the veterans of the Karabakh War. The protestors raised the slogan: "Don't surrender the freedom acquired at the cost of blood." It was not by chance that the oppositions in the NKR and Abkhazia named their parties by the concept of "return" or "recovery": Movement-88 in the NKR and Aitaira (Rebirth) in Abkhazia, whereas in the PMR, the opposition named itself Obnovlenie (Innovation).

The slogans for return to belligerent democracy proved to be effective only temporarily. After realizing the Bagapsh administration in 2004, Aitaira in Abkhazia, as a public organization, faded out.<sup>5</sup> Having achieved impressive success in the local elections in the NKR in 2004, a result of which Movement-88 gained the mayoralty of the state capital of Stepanakert (note that the NKR is the only state in South Caucasus, be it de jure or de facto, in which the mayor of the state capital is elected, but not appointed by the president), this party was completely defeated in the parliamentary elections in 2005 and practically split on the eve of the presidential elections in 2007.

The second option for redemocratization, appealing for multinationalism, proved to be more enduring than the attempts to return to belligerent democracy, though the mono-ethnic NKR cannot adopt this strategy. Having benefited more than the others from the idea of returning to belligerent democracy, the NKR lacks the conditions for multi-ethnic state building, since the harshness of the Karabakh War did not leave the non-Armenian population in its territory. Up to a certain moment, Karabakh leaders even tried to persuade the Azerbaijanis not to leave the republic if they were ready to be obedient citizens of the Armenian Karabakh state, let alone other traditional populations, such as the Greeks and Russians, for whom various privileges were promised.

All these measures failed and 95 percent of the present NKR population is Armenian, which creates tremendous predicaments not only for its international recognition, but also state building.<sup>6</sup>

The PMR has the longest, most consistent tradition of multi-ethnic state building. Previous studies have admitted that the Transnistrian conflict was not ethnic based, but one caused by "politicized regionalism" (Kolstø and Malgin. 1998; Roper 2004). The PMR did not create IDPs (internally displaced persons), in contrast to the NKR and Abkhazia. From the very beginning of the separation movement, Transnistrian leaders endeavored to distinguish left-bank Moldovans from their compatriots on the right bank. In right-bank Moldova during the late 1980s and early 1990s, rampant pan-Romanian nationalism resulted in the denial of the very existence of the Moldovan nation and language. Therefore, it was not difficult for Transnistrian leaders to describe the newly born polity as the last bastion of not only the Russophone and Ukrainophone populations, but also Moldovans. When the left-bank Moldovans participated in the armed resistance against Moldovan troops, in solidarity with ethnic Russians and Ukrainians, the result of the civil war was predetermined.

In 1998, the Abkhazian authorities began to follow the Transnistrian scenario by calling the former Mingrelian population of Gal District, the southeast extreme of Abkhazia bordered with Georgia, to return from the refugee camps of Georgia to their native land. The next stage of the multinational state building in Abkhazia was the victory of Sergei Bagapsh, supported by the Gal Mingrelians, in the presidential election in 2004. President Bagapsh continued this strategy to win the parliamentary elections in 2007, by proposing to raise the portion of

deputies with Armenian and Slavic origins.

## The Karabakh stand-off after Ossetia



**By Emil SANAMYAN**

*Emil SANAMYAN is Washington Bureau chief for the Armenian Reporter [www.reporter.am](http://www.reporter.am), a weekly newspaper with editors and reporters in Armenia and U.S. He also contributes to a range of U.S., European and Russian publications. Prior to his current position, Sanamyan was research associate at the Armenian Assembly of America in Washington from 2000 to 2006 and from 1998 to 2000 - assistant to Nagorno Karabakh Republic's Representative in U.S. A native of Baku, Sanamyan was raised there and in Moscow. Following emigration to U.S., he earned a bachelor's degree from University of Arizona and did graduate work at George Washington University. Sanamyan is married and has a daughter.*

Last August, rapid escalation of the conflict between Georgia and Russia-backed South Ossetia to a full-blown war caused hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries within a matter of days.

These developments had an immediate impact on the Armenian-Azerbaijani stand-off. Like Azerbaijan, Georgia sought to avenge grievances of the early 1990s through new round of violence. But the war only brought fresh humiliation and losses to Georgia. This certainly became a cold shower for revanchists in Azerbaijan.

The collapse of oil prices since then has introduced new constrains to Azerbaijan's aggressive posture.

But Armenia (the Republic of Armenia and the Nagorno Karabakh Republic) cannot grow complacent and rely on Azeri leader's rational cost-benefit calculations.

The Ossetia experience teaches a number of lessons. Chief among them is that countries that have deep-seated grievances and are well armed will at some point let their aggression out. Azerbaijan is both these things and Armenia must prepare for a likely escalation much more thoroughly and publicly.

At the same time, Armenia needs to do more to decrease the likelihood of war and diminish effects of potential fighting, including by prudently engaging with great powers and regional players in conditions of post-Ossetia status quo.

## **Dangerous mix of ethnic hatred and deadly weapons**

In spite of all of its efforts to project a European image, the Georgian government in the end resorted to war, launching a massive indiscriminate bombardment of South Ossetia. On the other hand, the Azeri ruling family is no longer inclined to project democratic facades. Azerbaijani policies towards ethnic Armenians are akin to Nazi treatment of the Jews. Ilham Aliyev and his officials have for years openly threatened to attack Armenia. Considering the extremist nature of anti-Armenian rhetoric and policies, Aliyev or, to borrow from the words of the Russian president, another "lunatic" Azerbaijani leader may feel the "need to shed [Armenian] blood" overwhelm fears of retaliation. In a military parade last June, Azerbaijan showcased the recently acquired weapons systems designed to reach farther and cause more harm than Georgia ever could. These systems include the SS-21 Tochka ballistic missiles with up to a 120 kilometer range - putting key targets in Yerevan and anywhere else in Armenia within striking distance ♦ and the Smerch multiple-launch ballistic missiles that could devastate Stepanakert, Vanadzor and, if deployed in Nakhichevan, Yerevan and many other Armenian towns within a 70 kilometer range.

Together with combat aircraft and improved real-time reconnaissance through the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and satellite imagery, Azerbaijan ♦s newly-acquired military capabilities put mostly ground-based Armenian defenses under greater strain. Moreover, this combination of capabilities and stated intent creates an immediate present danger to Armenian lives and must be appreciated more seriously.

## **Advance crisis preparations are necessary**

Most Armenians live in a blissful ignorance of threats their homeland and their lives are facing. Even among professional individuals whose job it is to protect Armenia and neutralize its enemies, one frequently hears that Azerbaijan either "doesn ♦t have the balls," "doesn ♦t have the army," "won ♦t risk losing oil," or that "the United States and Russia won ♦t stand for it."

The Armenian government needs to realize the nature of the threat and answer a number of questions.

What has been done to prevent hundreds, if not thousands of civilians from losing their lives in the first hours of the war? Is there a system of early warning and evacuation of civilians in place to limit the casualties as far as possible?

Has the Armenian government made it clear to Azerbaijan that it would pay a disproportionate price for targeting Armenian population centers? How has that been demonstrated?

What can be done to restrict the flow of weapon systems to Azerbaijan? Like Georgia, Azerbaijan gets most of its weapons, including the more deadly ones, from Ukraine, and to a lesser extent from Turkey and Israel. What has Armenia done to make these countries less eager suppliers to Azerbaijan?

Crisis requires more than planning for security and military operations. Considering the rapid nature of warfare demonstrated in Ossetia and the role public opinion plays in shaping policy, crisis management preparations must include a strong public relations component. What is being done in that regard?

### **The "peace process" must focus on war prevention**

The central focus of Armenia's foreign policy should not be the endless search for "mutually acceptable" principles of settlement with Azerbaijan. Rather it should be on measures to prevent an escalation of the conflict that could be devastating to both Armenia and Azerbaijan.

But mediators' proposals currently offered are vague enough that if implemented would make hostilities more rather than less likely.

Exchanging territories under Armenian control for promises of Azerbaijan's restraint in combination with some kind of international security guarantees without a clear and unambiguous resolution of the Armenian-Azerbaijan dispute carries deadly risks. Any viable peace agreement must clearly establish a new border between the two countries and a transparent process of demilitarization.

Azerbaijan does not appear ready for such a resolution at this time. In addition to repeatedly rejecting confidence building measures, Azerbaijan has in recent years engaged in provocations and testing of Armenian positions along the Line of Contact (LoC). Last December, for the first time in over a decade mediators have made a practical proposal for an end to sniping along the LoC. It remains to be seen if this proposal is going to be implemented.

Other measures to strengthen the cease-fire could include an expansion of the unarmed international monitoring mission; enforcement of the 1995 agreement on preventing cease-fire violations; Azerbaijani pull-out from some of the no-man's lands it occupied in recent years dangerously nearing Armenian defense lines; and development of an agreement on the peaceful settlement of the conflict that would include specific disarmament and confidence-building clauses.

As Russia's retired Ambassador Vladimir Kazimirov has warned repeatedly, a campaign for peace is urgently needed to prevent a fresh cycle of violence.

### **Reliance on foreign peacekeepers is risky**

Combat capabilities of the Armenian Armed Forces along with the territories they currently hold form two basic foundations of Armenian security.

The alliance with Russia and partnerships in the West that Armenia has developed since independence provide the second layer of security.

This combination has been the "secret formula" behind the almost 15-year cease-fire implemented without foreign peacekeepers.

Transferring immediate security obligations and with them territory to a third party even to

an ally like Russia or a Western-led international organization ♦ does not guarantee improved security and is fraught with dangers as was seen most recently in Ossetia and Sudan and in Croatia and Rwanda in the 1990s.

Armenia already experienced Soviet "peacekeeping" when security forces were deployed to protect the Armenian and Azerbaijani populations in the late 1980s. These forces repeatedly failed to prevent attacks on ethnic Armenian civilians around Azerbaijan. By 1991, on orders from Moscow, they went as far as to help Azerbaijan expel Armenian populations from parts of Karabakh.

The reality is that peacekeepers serve the interests of governments that dispatch them and are more concerned about their own security than a foreign population they are meant to protect. The new regional status quo must be appreciated

After years of contradictory policies and often disinterested attitude toward the Caucasus, Russia is back defending its interests. Russia has shown that like the United States in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq it can establish new facts on the ground, even if only in its own immediate neighborhood.

To be sure, the Obama Administration promises to retain a global leadership role for the United States. But even American strategic planners openly accept that a multi-polar (or possibly non-polar) world system is likely to emerge in the next decade.

In Armenia ♦'s region, Turkey is no longer behaving as an American ally. All of Iran ♦'s neighbors ♦ including two that are occupied by U.S. ♦ have refused to engage in anti-Iranian policies. Azerbaijan has abandoned all talk of joining NATO. The last U.S. air base in Central Asia may soon be closed.

U.S. influence has suffered a serious blow as a result of the Georgia crisis. One of the main lessons of Ossetia war is that Russia can conduct destructive military operations against a U.S. ally in the Caucasus, and U.S. is severely limited in its ability to constrain Russia. The return of Russian regional hegemony has brought more clarity and stability to the Caucasus. At the same time, U.S. and Europe will continue to play an important role restricting Russian influence.

As an ally of Russia and a Western partner, Armenia should find opportunities to benefit from this new regional status quo.

*The contour of the Line of Contact (LoC) shown is somewhat incorrect. Specifically both Stepanakert and Ganje are several kilometers further away from LoC than shown on map.*



1 Distance to Yerevan from closest point in Nakhichevan, approx. 44 km.

2 Distance to Yerevan from closest point in Azerbaijan (Kedabek district, past Sevan near occupied Artsvashen), approx. 84 km.

3 Distance to Line of Contact in Karabakh from Baku, approx. 210 km.

4 Distance to Line of Contact from Gyanja, the 2nd largest city north of Karabakh, approx. 40 km.

5 Distance to Line of Contact from Stepanakert, approx. 32 km.

6 Distance to Baku-Ceyhan pipeline, along Kura river in northwestern corner of Azerbaijan, to Armenian border, approx. 12 km.

7 Distance to Baku-Ceyhan pipeline, near the highway between Yevlakh and Goranboy, from Line of Contact, approx. 20 km.

Dotted line: Baku-Ceyhan pipeline. Armenian Reporter map by Grigor Beglaryan.

**Artsakh 2008 ♦ Progress or ?**



**By Nick WAGNER**

*Nick WAGNER is from the United States, was born and raised in Northern California by the children of parents from Western Armenia, and the German Region of the former Austro-Hungry Empire in present day north-eastern Serbia. He chose to live in Artsakh due to its healthy, peaceful and beautiful environment -- and its people. His English conversation and Tai Chi Chuan classes enhance the life-style he appreciates in Artsakh. The encroachment of the negative aspects of globalization, though, is a concern for him.*

In the early 1970s when I was teaching an eighth-grade class in the United States, I wrote an article entitled Panacea or Pacifier. The content dealt with a proposed change to the public school district where I was teaching. The change, when the program was adopted meant more federal money for schools of this district. The Panacea turned out to be more of a Pacifier laden with the usual balance of negatives.

What has happened to Artsakh in 2008: have the changes been beneficial for all or simply for many a pacifier? Do the citizens of this beautiful country, only recognized by the Republic of Armenia, feel that there have been benefits for them, for the environment, for the students of the schools, universities, and institutes, for the country? To be truthful, this writer is not sure based on his previous experiences prior to an initial journey to both Armenia and Artsakh in 2000, living in Yerevan from 2001 through 2006, and residing in Stepanakert for most of 2008.

A story is relevant at this time. It will be based on the Panacea or Pacifier article and deals with the questions asked about the proposed change, which was to benefit the children attending the schools of a California school district. I was a basketball coach for the 8th grade boys team at the time. All of the players, especially the main five who played the most, were only interested in obtaining personal glory they wanted to control the ball, to not pass it to other team members, outsmart the other team players, and make more baskets than anyone else. Well, these five young men were also individuals who I knew in my classes rather than work in a cooperative way for the team. These young men had different levels of ability both as students and ball players and demonstrated those skills in ways which brought them more difficulties than they desired. One of them, who attended a class in which I invited members of the community to come and speak about what he needed to obtain his job as a police officer in terms of education and experience, found himself handcuffed as part of the presentation by this officer. The officer was speaking about one of his responsibilities he forgot about the young man who interrupted and said, Please uncuff me. Before the

officer could respond, a member of the class said, ♦ There isn't any problem; he has been handcuffed before by police officers. He is used to it! ♦ Of course, the young man, a basketball player, was upset. He didn't wish to see the humor.

Well, what does this story have to do with Artsakh and its progress in 2008. Simply, the relationship is one of control and an opinion based on handcuffing and uncuffing being aspects of control whether one wishes them present or not. You may say that this is a ridiculous, and perhaps You are correct.

During my sojourn in Stepanakert, Artsakh, beginning in April 2008, I experienced many changes similar to the vast number in Yerevan, Armenia, beginning in the spring of 2003. An increase in the number of automobiles, new businesses with European and American products, restaurants with international cuisine, a change in school curriculums; remodeling, destruction and construction of buildings; repair of streets, curbs, sidewalks and the installation of yellow trash cans on many streets; an increase in the price of basics like food, clothing, household goods, fuel for cars, home heating and cooking; electricity, water, telephone, internet, and even in the price of pay-toilets.

These same things I have observed in Stepanakert prior to and since April 2008. Since last April, the increases, sometimes very subtle, continue. I wonder what the future will bring with changing price benchmarks. Will the citizens here see the changes as progress or as a subtle form of control? Will the students who attend and graduate from the schools, universities, and institutes feel that the changes are for their benefit and will enable them in 2009 and beyond to secure meaningful employment to enable them to marry, raise a family, and be effective employees and citizens and cooperatively help Artsakh to grow more? I do hope so, yet wonder at the same time. How do many shop owners feel an unhealthy balance between the foot traffic into their stores and the sales revenue? How do the underemployed or unemployed react when the prices for basics continue to rise when their salaries remain stable?

The increase in automobiles in the cities of all sizes and rural areas of the United States, especially Los Angeles from the 1950s onward, brought a change of life style. People could travel longer distances to obtain an income to their children and themselves with clothes, school materials piano, ballet, swimming, karate, Tai Chi Chuan lessons, and other educational programs for their future. Dinner table conversations centered around the work day. ♦ What did You do today, ♦ asked Dad and Mom after they shared their day's activities with their frustrations and successes. Maybe, there were humorous stories they and their children were asked, ♦ What did You do in school today? ♦ Then and now I have heard students here say, ♦ Nothing, it was the same as it usually is. ♦ When I speak today about what happened in my classrooms these past 8- or 9-months, I remember my students enjoying the challenges of needing to use English to express a thought or feeling and even laughing because they had the opportunity to interact cooperatively with the other students in class by creating an understanding regarding the changes they experience, they enjoy and dislike, and giving reasons for their opinions.

When children are provided with the means to be creative as those were with the turtle in the photograph taken in May 2008, they experience a growth in their sense of wonder and an encouragement to again take creative risks. Children, like adults, need opportunities to share

their thoughts via discussion. When they are told, their education is like a bank account it is only as fruitful as the deposit. If citizens are not asked for input and to be involved in cooperative ventures, which is their right in a democracy, then these individuals, perhaps like some parents, may feel that involvement in the system is fruitless.

Oh, yes, I hear the comments: This is a growing democracy; it will take many years before. It takes time to effect change. We don't have the money to do this or that. This isn't France, Germany, England, the United States or Japan. To compare us to these countries is inappropriate because we have difference customs and heritage. To take risks in light of these customs and heritage, invites handcuffs. Education in which students of any age interact with each other to create understanding and relevance, laugh, cry, and make mistakes, which are part of the process. Government in which its citizens have meaningful involvement brings more growth.

It is this writer's sincere hope that the changes with the today's benchmark will include the means for more productive employment opportunities, education curriculum, teaching, and assessment methods, more concern for the environment as demonstrated by the Protect the Nature Foundation of Artsakh, continued assistance and empowering by numerous other organizations including the International Committee of the Red Cross, the HALO Mountainous Karabakh Trust's Doctors, Teachers and Assistants, The Museum of the Missing Soldiers of the War of Liberation, The Museum dedicated to the brave men and women who perished in the War of Liberation, and Grandmas like Araxya Babo of Aveteranots and Grandpas who only wish a peaceful existence for their children and their children, and all those other organizations and individuals who work for the continued growth of Artsakh and deserve commendations for their 2008 activities.

Change implies risk would this be appropriate for the production of jingili hatz? Would adding grated carrots, diced apples, fresh beans, or other vegetables and fruits enhance the flavor and nutritional value of this distinctive Artsakyan production? Would The Artsakh State Museum of Culture and History fulfill its role for Artsakyans and visitors by having a larger facility in which to house and present its collection of Artsakyan artifacts? The staff of this museum continue to provide an excellent service.

So, Progress or ? Panacea or Pacifier probably a bit of both within the context that it takes time to effect change -- and that mistakes are considered important and to be praised as part of the educational-growth- collaborative process, that there needs to be some uncertainty as a balance to the good times and things currently available, that more opportunities be created to bring enhanced meaningful cooperative participation in the growth of a sound economy (President Obama realizes that employment opportunities are needed to revive a failed economy). Part of this equation, which has begun for Artsakyans, includes meaningful citizen participation especially for women in government, environmental protection, and improving the educational system for our children, children's children and their grandchildren. Hopefully, 2009 will provide more opportunity and growth.

