

Armenia-Iran relations and their implications for Nagorno-Karabakh.

Alberto Priego Ph.D

Armenia and the Islamic Republic of Iran maintain a deep relation from the collapse of the Soviet Union. Although is not a natural relation, the rivalry between Iran and Turkey and its implications for Azerbaijan, caused this “*strategic alliance*” between Yerevan and Tehran. From 1991 up today, Iran has tried to undermine the independence of Azerbaijan in different ways. For instance, repressing the Azeri minority living in Northern Iran, obstructing Western pipeline projects, violating the Azerbaijani airspace or supporting Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

The Armenian-Iran cooperation is a very striking issue taking into account that Armenia is a Christian country and Iran is a Muslim one. Indeed Azeri population follows the same Faith than Iran, the Shiite one. There is some explanation to this strange situation.

First of all, we cannot forget that Azerbaijan, following the kemalist model, is a European country which supports all the Western initiative in the region, let’s say, the Partnership for Peace, the BTC or the GUAM (before GUUAM). The Islamic Republic of Iran considers the United States as the Big Satan and Israel the little Satan. For this reason, the pro-western foreign policy implemented by Azerbaijan from 1991, has complicated the always difficult Azerbaijani-Iranian relation.

Secondly, everybody knows that Azeris are ethnically a Turkic people. Besides, During the first period of independence 1918-1921 Azerbaijan became one of the most important Pan-turkic supporters. Later, especially during the Elchibey period, Baku rejected the Islamic model proposed by the Khomeinism and, by the contrary, they adopted the Kemalist one, more secularized and closer to the Western World.

Thirdly, the Turkmenchay Treaty divided Azerbaijan in two areas. The North one belonged to the Tsarist Empire and the South one became part of the Persian Empire. For this reason, nowadays there is a big population of Azeris living in Northern Iran, especially in Tabriz. This “minority”, around 20 millions, exercised a big pressure on Tehran in order not be assimilated as Persians. They want to maintain their traditions, their languages, their culture etc... Nevertheless, Tehran considers that this population could be a threat for the regime, taking into account that Azeris participated in most of Revolutions occurred in Iran. For instance, we can stress The Tobacco Revolt, The Constitutional Revolution or The Islamic Revolution of Khomeini.

These three issues are the main arguments of Tehran to undermine the independence and the development of the Republic of Azerbaijan. One of most important issues for Azerbaijan is the enclave of Nagorno Karabakh. This mountain has seen the most important intellectual (i.e Abdulbagi Zulalov, Mir Movsu Nawab or Jabbar Kayaghdy) be born, especially Shusha, which is considered the cradle of the modern culture of Azerbaijan.

Thus, The Islamic Republic of Iran has supported Armenia in the following ways.

Firstly, Tehran has supplied weapons to Armenia in order to help the *Karabachis*, (Armenian population from Nagorno Karabakh) in their fight against the Azeri population living in the enclave.

Secondly, the Islamic Republic of Iran is the only energy supplier of Armenia. When Azerbaijan and Turkey isolated Armenia, Iran sent aid to them allowing them to survive. During the war (1992-1994) Armenia was provided with gas cilinder, kerosene stoves and from from the Islamic republic of Iran. Armenia survived to the Turkic blockage thanks to the Iranian aid. For this reason, We can say that Iran is not a neutral mediator in the conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Thirdly, during the Soviet period the Caucasus worked as a system. Armenia hold most of the industries, Azerbaijan supplied the energy and Georgia was a tourist and agriculture center. When the Soviet Union fell down, the economic relations of the Caucasus changed dramatically. Georgia suffered a terrible economic crisis, Azerbaijan started to export oil and gas and Armenia established a close relation with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Nowadays, Iran is the third trading partner of Armenia only after Russia and Germany. Iran tries to weak Azerbaijan streghthening Armenia with economic aid and cooperation.

Fourthly, Azerbaijan is one of the most important oil producer of the World. Besides, Azerbaijan does not belong the OPEC and this fact makes it more attractive for foreign investors. Azerbaijan is one of the most important Iran's competitor in the energy field. For this reason, the Islamic Republic of Iran keeps some disputes with Azerbaijan for the control of oil fields in the Caspian Sea.

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