

The Clash of Empires and Armenia Then the Battle of Sardarapat

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**Panoramic Background for the Projection of the Armenian film
SARDARAPAT Déjà Vu by Tigran Khzmalian
London, May 29, 2009**

The Clash of Empires and Armenia then the Battle of Sardarapat
is a broad bird's-eye-view of the fragmentation of Historical Armenia.,
a kind of "reader's digest" of our turbulent history, but also the untiring
struggle for survival and self determination of our people.
Sardarapat Battle exemplified that tenacity right after our
'daring to survive' the genocide of 1915...

Battles are won or lost irrespective of the wars whether they are won or lost. Hence the saying: 'The battle was won but the war was lost'. In fact it is a rare historical event when and where the war and its decisive battle are both won, or lost for that matter.

Back in 1770s, the American colonies won the final battle and the war of their independence against the British colonial rule. Britain and the USA have never lost their 'special relationship', practically since then.

In WW2, Nazism lost the decisive battles and the world war. The crushing of Nazism certainly was a great victory for anti-racism the world over.

Despite its enormous military power, the most awesome the world has ever seen, the USA lost most of the battles and the genocidal war it pursued in Vietnam (as it was reported and unanimously condemned in the final verdict of the first Russell Tribunal on Vietnam, of 1967, long six years before Vietnam became a united country). The Vietnamese were struggling for independence for ca 2000 years. US imperialism abysmally failed to take the Vietnamese 'back to the Stone Age'. It certainly was a great victory for self-determination and national independence against imperialist domination the world over.

The Soviet Union, the historic first internationalist union of states with socialist agenda, won most of the battles of its survival in a world capitalist system for over 70 years. But it lost the 'cold war', having emulated the worst of archaic bureaucratic despotism that nourished a military industrial complex, the life-blood of colonial imperialist empires.

The so-called 'coalition armies' of the neo liberal Globalisation won the battle but lost the war in Iraq, albeit the plunder of the country's 'black gold', oil, continues non abated.

NATO forces--another synonym for the same but enlarged 'coalition armies'--are still unable to claim winning battles let alone the war in Afghanistan. Decades before this

entanglement, the Red Army, allured in the web, lost the battle in this same land, now the land of Poppy's for the Global market of vice.

During WW1, Armenians too acted as 'cannon fodder', counting ca 600,000 strong. Thus, both the Central Powers and the Entente, each counted ca 300 000 strong Armenian recruits. The Entente won the decisive battles and the world war. Bishop Harold Buxton assessed the human cost. He wrote: **"In the First World War, the Armenians lost as many lives as did the whole British Empire"**.

The Armenian recruits of the Ottoman army, were mostly perished not only as cannon fodder, but were herded into *amele tabourou*=labour battalions, eventually to be forced to dig their own mass graves, months before the WW1 was on. Meanwhile the soldiers' families, the elderly, women and children, counting more than a million and a half, living in their ancestral homes in the so called Turkish Armenia, were wiped off their land, months before and soon after the beginning of WW1, in an act of Genocide the world had not witnessed until then.

The American Ambassador in the Ottoman Turkey of the day, Henry Morgenthau, described the Young Turk state terror as a witness: **"I am confident that the whole history of the human race contains no such terrible episode as this. The massacres and persecution of the past seem almost insignificant when compared with the sufferings of the Armenians in 1915."**

One of the great poets of all time, the Nobel 1971 laureate Pablo Neruda, had grasped well the tragic life of a conquered people trying to survive in their own land. He wrote: **"For centuries, Turkish invaders massacred the Armenians or made them their slaves. Every rock on the plateaus, every tile in the monasteries has a drop of Armenian blood."**

In a masterpiece of a poem titled *An Evening Promenade= Akşam Gesintisi*, written soon after he was released, in 1950, from prison, Neruda's Turkish comrade, Nazim Hikmet, posthumous Nobel laureate of 2002, remembered his Armenian friend whose father was butchered **"in the Kurdish mountains."** Hikmet versified his rage against such crimes as man's inhumanity to man, calling it, **"this black shame brought on the Turkish people."** = *bu karayı sürenleri Türk halkının alınina*. Kemalist Turkey had kept its greatest poet, N. Hikmet, incarcerated for 13 years in total.

The original inhabitants in their ancestral lands being wiped off, Western or Turkish Armenia, and parts of Eastern or Russian Armenia, became part of the Kemalist Republic of Turkey, in 1923.

In WW1, Armenians as conscripts in the armies of empires were not fighting for self-determination or independence. They nevertheless had 'promises' from the masters of the empires for an illusive freedom. Entente powers won the decisive battles and the war. Armenians lost most of Armenia and more than half of its entire people, along with the disruption of their cultural heritage and the plunder of their property.

Oh, yes, there was a battle or two won by the Armenians. The Armenian volunteers in the Entente forces, named as Armenian or Eastern Legion, were assembled in Cyprus

following the 1916, October 27 agreement signed in London by Mark Sykes of Great Britain, George Picot of France and Boghos Nubar, President of the Armenian Delegation. Sykes and Picot promised Nubar Pasha that the Eastern Legion will eventually take Armenian Cilicia out of the Ottoman Empire, and the French protectorate of the region will give Armenians self-rule therein. Lo and behold, to reach that 'promised land' the Armenian Legion, already counting 5000 strong, had to fight in Palestine! They did and won the Battle of Arara, in September 19, 1918, liberating Palestine. The Armenian Legion was soon deployed in Cilicia too. They won the battle and liberated Cilicia in November-December, 1918, but lost it, yet again, as Armenian Cilicia, in 1920.

As Palestine became the protectorate of the British Empire, the Balfour Declaration eventually paved its way to become a colonial Zionist state-- Israel. Similarly, the liberated Cilician Armenia, started as a French protectorate, was handed over by the French, with no regard to their signed promise, to the resurgent Kemalist forces, while the Armenian Legion was disbanded in August 1920.

Having lost its independence for many centuries, Armenia was the battleground for the clashing empires. Despite the millennial upheavals, most of the Armenians lived in their ancestral homelands and some in the Diaspora. A schematic chronology might help to sketch the fragmentation of Historical Armenia, originally covering ca 300,000 sq. km., into Eastern and Western Armenia, later also referred to as Turkish, Persian and Russian Armenia. On a fraction of the latter, in 1918, the first ever Republic of Armenia was established, initially covering ca 10,000 sq. km. The second, the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic, emerged in 1920, already covering ca. 30,000 sq. km. It lasted seven decades of a challenging but culturally prosperous existence. Its valiant contribution to the destruction of Nazism was out of all proportion to its overall population and resources, counting over 300,000 perished Armenian soldiers. After the melting away of the USSR, the third, an independent Armenian Republic came into being in 1991, having first embarked, then chained itself to 'free market' economy, just like its neighbour, the Republic of Turkey. All the three Armenian Republics cover the same so called Russian Armenia, No wonder a historian's cogent claim that to date only Russian Armenia has survived the clash of Empires.

***AD 387** -- Eastern Armenia, known as Armenia Maggiore, ca 4/5 of the historical Armenian homeland, was grabbed by the Persian Empire, hence Persian Armenia. The remaining 1/5, Western Armenia, also known as Armenia Minore, was held by the Roman Empire.

***405** – The creation of the Armenian Alphabet by Mesrop Mashtots, graced the battle for Armenian cultural and political independence with a vital and everlasting impetus. The translation into Armenian of the Aramaic and Greek Scriptures of the Christian faith began immediately. A century earlier, in 301, Christianity had already become, the state religion of Armenia.

***451, May 26** – Battle of Avarayr, also called Vardanants. Rebellious Armenians led by Vardan Mamikonian, battled against the Persian imperial army. Armenia lost the battle but won the war. Armenians kept their cultural and religious independence, despite the overwhelming pagan Persian Empire and the Christian Roman Empire. The latter was soon replaced by Byzantium.

- ***640** – Arab Moslem invasion of Armenia. Armenia eventually loses the battles but wins the signing of the Peace Concordia, in 652.
- ***706** – Armenia, Georgia and Aghvank become known as the **Armenistan** Viceroy under the Arab khalifate.
- ***762** – Religious and social struggle of the Paulicians against the Khalifate policing tyranny.
- ***762** – Vaspurakan Armenians against the Khalifate rule.
- ***830** – Religious, social and egalitarian struggles of the Tondrikites against both the Khalifate and the oppression of the Armenian medieval landlords and despots, including the religious hierarchy.
- ***885** – The resurgence of the Bakratouni kingdom of Ani, after numerous battles and wars being won against the Byzantium and the Khalifate.
- ***1045** – The Bakratouni Kingdom lost the decisive battle, the war and its capital Ani, the city of ‘Thousand and One Churches’, the jewel in the crown of the Bakratounis of renaissance propriety.
- ***1048** – The Seljuk invasion followed by devastations of Armenia.
- ***1210** – Liberation movements led by Zakarian brothers unite the Armenian and Georgian forces in the Caucasus, pushing the Seljuks into the depths of the Persian-Khorasan province.
- ***1187** – Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, also known as ‘La Petite Armenie’.
- ***1221** -- Mongol invasion of Armenia. Liberation struggles against Seljuks and Mongols continue.
- ***1275** – Mamlouks of Egypt invade Armenian Cilicia.
- ***1375** -- Fall of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia to the Egyptian Sultan.
- ***1387** – Liberation struggles kindle against the Lengtimur and Ottoman invaders. Lengtimur invaders were eventually crushed in Mush and Sassoon.
- ***1453** – Fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans. The Ottomans eventually conquer Greece, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Crimea and Armenia.
- ***1535** – Peace treaty between Ottoman and Sefian-Persian Empire. Eastern Armenia kept under the Persian rule while Western Armenia was kept under the Ottoman rule, hence Turkish Armenia. The Peace treaty notwithstanding, the Ottomans invade Eastern Armenia, Georgia and Aderpatakan.
- ***1635** – Ottoman-Persian Peace Treaty. Persia regains Eastern Armenia.
- ***1722-1728** – The establishment of a free and independent Armenian rule in Karabagh & Syunik, in Persian Armenia.
- ***1804-1813** and again **1826-1828** – War between Persian and Russian Empires.
- ***1828** – The Turkmenchia Peace Agreement between Russia and Persia. Eastern Armenia ceded to the Russian Empire, hence the term ‘Russian Armenia’.
- ***1828-1829** – Russian-Ottoman war in the Balkans and Crimea, while Karin (Erzerum), Babert, Kars, Akhalkalak, Akhaltskha, Bayazit and Alashkert were all ceded to Russia.
- ***1860, May 24** – Western Armenians in Constantinople publish their ‘National Constitution’. It was a momentous event in the life of Western or Turkish Armenia.
- ***1862** – Rebellion in Zeitun
- ***1872** – The founding of a secret society in Van, named as the ‘Unity for Liberation’ = *Miyoutyoun / Prkoutyoun*.
- ***1875** – New waves of rebellion in Zeitun, guarding its independence until 1878.
- ***1977-1978** -- Russian-Ottoman War. Russia regains Kars and Erzerum.
- ***1878** – Treaty of St Stefano. Article 16: Reforms to be carried by the Ottomans in the Armenian provinces under Russian supervision.

***1878** -- Congress of Berlin, superseding Treaty of St Stefano. Article 61: Reforms to be carried in the provinces where Armenians live, under European supervision.

***1885** – In Marseilles, France, the formation of Armenakan Party.

***1885** – In Van, the founding of Armenakan Organisation

***1887** – In Geneva, Switzerland, the founding of the Social Democrat Henschakist Party.

***1890** – In Tiflis, Georgia, the founding of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation Dashnak Party.

***1894-1896** – At Sassun, Van, Zeitun and Diarbekir. The massacre of 300,000 Armenians, 3000 villages were burned and **“tens of thousands were forced to flee their native land into all corners of the earth...”**

***1902, July 4** – In Brussels, the opening of the International Congress of Armenophiles.

***1907** –The Young Turk Congress is held in Paris.

***1909, April** -- Adana massacres in Cilicia. 30,000 Armenians were literally butchered. The Adana tragedy was indeed the ‘maiden performance’ of the Ittihadist Young Turks relishing in the prospects of their racist Pan-Turanic vision. Adana became **“a veritable inferno.”**

***1914, August 3** – The beginning of WW1.

***1914, August 6** -- Secret agreement between Turkey and Germany. Caucasus (including Eastern/Russian Armenia) promised to Turkey.

***1915, April 24** -- In Istanbul, around 300 Armenian intellectuals, of all professions, were all arrested and deported, and soon, nearly all of them butchered. Until mid May, the Armenian civic population was practically depleted of its intellectuals: 196 writers, 575 musicians, 336 doctors, 176 teachers and college professors, 160 lawyers, 62 architects, 64 actors...all arrested, deported, disappeared for good...

***1915, May 2** – The Triple Entente (Great Britain, Russian, France) warn the Young Turks that: **“In view of these new crimes of Turkey against humanity and civilization, the Allied Governments announce publicly... to the Sublime Porte that they will hold personally responsible for these crimes all members of the Ottoman Government, as well as those of their agents who are implicated in such massacres.”**

***1915, June 15** -- Twenty prominent members of the Armenian Social Democratic Henschakist Party were hanged in Bayazit Square in Istanbul. The Henschakist stood in opposition to the Ittihadists. That was a mortal sin! The culminating act of the genocidal scheme was thus set into motion. Nearly the entire Armenian population of Western/Turkish Armenia was ordered out, southward towards the deserts of Northern Syria. Vandalism, rape, extortion, sadistic torture, starvation, murder raids and all ad infinitum. The rest is...the scream of humanity at its most infernal.

***1916** – Russian army regained Erzerum, Mush, Bitlis, Mamakhatun,, Trebizon, Babil and Yezinkan.

***1917, February 27, then October 25**– Russian Revolutions. End of Tzarism.

***1917, April** – Conference of Russian Social-Democratic Workers Party. It contained resolutions pertaining to: Self Determination of Armenians; Creation of an Independent State in the whole Eastern and Western Armenia.

***1917, May 2-11** – In Yerevan. Western Armenians’ First Congress, presided by General Andranik, with 59 delegates and ca 400 participants.

***1917, November** – In Tiflis, the founding of the Communist Party of Armenia. Persecuted in the Georgian and Armenian Republics of 1918. Survivors eliminated during the Stalinist purges of 1930s.

***1917, December 5** – Armistice of Yerzinka, between Ottoman Turkey and the Revolutionary Commissars of the Caucasus.

***1917, December 29** – Council of The People's Commissar of Soviet Russia's Decree of 'Turkish Armenia', declaring: Self Determination of Armenians; Formation of an Armenian Militia; Return of Refugees; Creation of Administrative Boards in the Provinces; Withdrawal of the Caucasian army, counting ca 500 thousand strong, from Ardahan, Batum and Kars. The withdrawal resulted in dire consequences for the Armenians, making it impossible the attainment of the aims of the Decree. The withdrawal item of the Decree was courageously criticised by the great revolutionaries Stepan Shaumian and Vahan Terian, but blatantly supported by Stalin. As the poet Terian was himself tasked to prepare the draft for the Decree, his original manuscript testifies to his criticism of that item. So does Shaumian's article of 1917, December 20, warning that **"a sudden withdrawal of Russian troops will create an extremely painful situation in the Turkish Armenia."**

***1918, February** – Breaking the agreement of the Armistice of Yerzinka of 1917, the Turkish army attacks and conquers Yerzinka, Karin, Sareghamish and Kars. On that occasion, Enver, one of the triumvirate top organisers of the Genocide of the Armenians in 1915, still acting as a Minister on military affairs, issued an instruction on February 27, 1918, to the commanders of the Turkish military units, directing them to the following: **"Today, owing to lucky circumstances His Majesty the Emperor ordered to exterminate the whole Armenian nation"**. The plan was to continue with the genocidal policies in the Eastern provinces of Armenia too, so named Russian Armenia.

***1918, March 3** – Brest Litovsk Peace Treaty, between Germany and Soviet Russia. The boundaries of Transcaucasia ceded to Turkey as before the Russian-Turkish war of 1917/18.

***1918, May 15** – The Ottoman Turkish army invaded and occupied Alexandropole, then moved towards Gharakilis.

***1918, May 21** – The Turkish army attacked and occupied the Sardarapat train station.

***1918, May 22** – The start of counter attack of the Armenian forces from Igdir, Korpalu in Etchmiatzin, Durdughul (Armavir), Yerzinka, Maku, Khnous, Mush and Zeitun.

***1918, May 28** – Declared the first Republic of Armenia.

***1918, May 29** – Turkish forces retreated towards Alexandropole.

Thus the Armenian liberation forces secured their final victory with the active support of all political parties, artisans, peasants, intellectuals, artists and writers, religious and professional military leaders. They won the battle of Sardarapat, but, alas, after loosing most of the Russian occupied Armenia too.

***1918, June 4** – Signing of the Batum Convention by the governments of the Ottoman Empire and the first Republic of Armenia. The Armenian party had already consented to agree to the Turkish proposal to found an Armenian Republic in the remaining provinces of Russian Armenia (covering ca 10,000 sq. km.) as a buffer state securing the total disengagement of Armenia and Armenians with the revolutionary Soviet Russia. It had 14 articles, agreeing, among others, the following: Turkey assures military aid to Armenia; No anti-Turkey military activity in Armenia; All Armenian forces engaged in revolutionary activity in Baku, should be disbanded and brought back to Armenia; Turkey to have the right to secure the presence of its military commissars in Armenia, to facilitate the freedom of its military transports wherever it decides. On the same date, Turkey signed an agreement with Georgia, assuring Turkey's repossession of Kars, Artahan, Batum, Ardvin, Akhalkalak and Akhaltskhah.

***1918, October 30** – The Mudros Armistice. The end of the First World War. The defeat of Ottoman Turkey brought also to an end the legality of the Batum Convention.

***1918, December** – Turkish army forced out of Transcaucasia.

***1920, August 10** – Treaty of Sevres. Turkey acknowledged the Republic of Armenia as a “Free and Independent State”. The final demarcation of the boundaries left to the USA (later: The Wilsonian B).

***1920, November 8** – The Pan-Turanic racism of the Young Turks was still alive and kicking among the Kemalist elite. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kemalist Turkey, Ahmed Mukhtar Pasha, despatched the following instruction to Karabekir Pasha, the commander of the Eastern Army:

“Armenia is situated on one very extensive Moslem territory, therefore it must be annihilated both politically and physically.”

***1920, November 29** – Declared the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic-- the 2nd Republic of Armenia.

***1920, Dec 2** – Treaty of Alexandropole, between Karabekir of Turkey and Khatisian, the representative of the superseded Dashnak government of the first Republic of Armenia. It claimed: Armenia to cover yet again only 10,000 sq. km.; Armenian armed forces to have maximum 1500 soldiers with 8 canons and 20 machine guns; Armenians to abdicate the Treaty of Sevres...

***1921, February 13** – ‘February Uprising’: An adventurous uprising of the Dashnaks against the government of Soviet Armenia, claiming allegiance to the illegal Treaty of Alexandropole. Lasting nearly two months, the fratricidal adventure claimed not only 20 thousand Armenian deaths (mostly Communists and Dashnaks) but re-established in Yerevan, on February 18, the old guards of the first Armenian Republic.

***1921, March 16 – Treaty of Moscow.** The late Gersam Aharonian, one of the most prominent Liberal Democrat politicians of the Armenian Diaspora, was right to conclude about this treaty, signed by Soviet Raussia and Kemalist Turkey, saying: **“As a result of the political immaturity of the Leaders of the February Uprising [...] the Turks secured a fait accompli”**. And that “fait accompli” was to be ratified in Kars on Oct. 13, 1921, with the added signatures of the representatives of Soviet Armenia, Soviet Georgia, and, lo and behold, Soviet Azerbaijan.

***1921, April 2** – Soviet Armenia restored, after the defeat of the tragic ‘February Uprising’.

***1921, October 1** – In Constantinople/Istanbul, the founding of the Armenian Liberal Democratic Ramkavar Party.

***1922, November 20 – 1923, July 24** – The Treaty of Lausanne. It undid the Treaty of Sevres.

Addendum

***1991, September 21** – Declared the 3rd Republic of Armenia.

***1992, May 9** – The Battle for Shushi, in Karabagh. The Karabagh Armenians finally won both the battle and the war of their independence. Hence the consolidation of the Republic of Mountainous Karabagh of 1921, September 1, was heroically accomplished, albeit with enormous sacrifices.
