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Why Artsakh Still Matters to American Anarchism

Nicky Reid

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The news broke like a fever last Monday night. A deal had been signed by Armenia and Azerbaijan to end the bloody month long war in Nagorno-Karabakh which had claimed the lives of thousands on both sides. This is a good thing right? How could any peace be bad? But something felt all wrong about this one. Armenia's Prime Minister announced the deal on Facebook before adding that said deal was "unbelievably painful for me and our people." The response of those Armenian people back in Yerevan was equally pained but somewhat less somber. They rioted and stormed the buildings of their government peacemakers, demanding their resignation for treason. That's because this was not a peace deal made between equal sides on an even playing ground. It was a hostage situation with one side, Azerbaijan's side, armed to the teeth and openly backed by some of the most powerful and merciless militaries in the world, who helped that nasty little gas station threaten the impoverished Armenians to concede to the demands of their tormentors on nothing short of the pains of genocide.

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The Nagorno-Karabakh region had already been affectively ethnically cleansed. It's ethnic Armenian population cut in two with 90,000 of their 150,000 citizens in exile as refugees back in mainland Armenia. Shushi, the region's second largest city, had just been captured and a Second Armenian Genocide seemed terrifyingly imminent. What's more, a major player in this bloody conflict was oddly absent from the deal. The Armenian Government was poorly represented along with the Russians who had failed miserably to defend their allies. The viciously racist regime of Azerbaijan was there with their neo-Ottoman Turkish puppet masters. But what of the Republic of Artsakh? The autonomous nation they were supposedly fighting over. They were nowhere to be found. Apparently their opinion on their own fate was irrelevant to the masters of the universe, even though it was their republic being ransacked and sold off to foreign "peacekeepers."

Most Americans had never heard the words Nagorno-Karabakh before late September. Even fewer have heard of it's proper name, Artsakh. But the mountainous dark garden, as it's Russo-Azeri name alludes to, is an ethnic Armenian exclave which has struggled gallantly to maintain their autonomy from the Ottomans and their Turkic ancestors for centuries. Like many nations in the volatile Southern Caucuses, Artsakh is a mountain stronghold that breeds warriors. It had been its own autonomous republic within the Azerbaijani autonomous republic in the Soviet Union, but had been divided from the nearby Armenian autonomous republic by none other than Joseph Stalin in the 1920's in what was rumored to be a strange attempt to curry favor with the recently de-Ottoman-ized Turkish Republic, who had just murdered 1.5 million ethnic Armenians less than a decade earlier. This cruel gift clearly failed to impress, as by the early 1960's Turkey was fully in league with NATO and helping America to spark the Cuban Missile Crisis by letting them park their nuclear-tipped Jupiter Missiles in their territory and aimed at Ivan's head. This cat and mouse game between the

far east? If Turkey had to contain sultanates and confederations of Alevi, Kurds, Maoists, and Shiites? If America had to do war with sovereign citizens in New Hampshire, Mormon Fundamentalists in Arizona, and Black Nationalists in Mississippi who all formed pacts with the people we kill on the other side of the world? If all Black and Brown lives mattered or else? If Artsakh has taught us anything it is that false nationalist unity is the last thing we need in an age of division. What we need is swarm solidarity.

....And all the sultan's horses and all the czar's men couldn't put globalism back together again....

Think About it, dearest motherfuckers. It could be a beautiful crisis.

Russians, the Turks, and the Americans would come to define both Armenia and Artsakh's fate.

With the fall of the Soviet Union, the people of Nagorno-Karabakh took to the streets peacefully and voted to return to Mother Armenia. Azerbaijan responded with a brutal 6 year long war that would claim the lives of tens of thousands and lead to atrocities committed by both sides. The Russians mostly just sat on their hands as the Soviet Union continued to unravel. A ceasefire was finally brokered by the Minsk Group, a ménage of malevolent meddlers consisting of France, Russia, and the United States, and the proverbial can was kicked down the road. In the meantime, the rag-tag Armenians who had fought the militarily superior Azerbaijani's to a stand still decided to take matters in their own hands. Sick of leaving their fate up to everyone but themselves, they chose to secede from the UN recognized borders of Azerbaijan and declare independence as the Republic of Artsakh. Even Armenia failed to recognize the will of their own people, but they did continue to occupy 7 districts of Azerbaijan to keep their ethnic brethren from being completely cut off from the outside world like the Gaza Strip. The two remained close to the point of even sharing Presidents over the years. Never the less, conflicts continued to spark along those contentious borders, but nothing like what erupted this fall.

Contrary to what many would have you believe, the latest Nagorno-Karabakh war was far from spontaneous. It was barely even a war. It could be more accurately described as a siege laid by Azerbaijan at the behest of its sponsors in Turkey, the US, and Israel for two distinct geopolitical reasons. The despotic Turkish regime of Recep Erdogan sought to continue its blood spattered campaign of Ottoman revanchism which has killed thousands from Libya to Idlib. Meanwhile, their NATO handlers back in Washington along with their partners in crime in Jerusalem quietly sought to sow discord among the populace of Armenia and Azerbaijan's southern neighbors in Iran, a sanction/Covid weak-

ened nation which including large populations of both Azeris and Armenians. The siege began in late September, but all indications point to it being planned months if not years in advance. Under the Trump Administration, Azerbaijan's US military aid exploded from \$3 million in 2017 to a whopping \$100 million by 2019. These are the tools used by Baku to ethnically cleanse Artsakh in 2020, along with Turkish drones and Israeli cluster bombs, not to mention US/Turkish trained Syrian jihadists.

This wasn't a war. It was a well choreographed massacre. Whole villages were hollowed out. Ancient churches were bombed. Prisoners were tortured and journalists were targeted. It was a Yankee funded campaign to strip a proud nation of its autonomy, and that's why this tragedy should matter to anarchists, even western anarchists like me. Artsakh wasn't punished for simply being Armenian. They were punished, including by their supposed allies, for having the gall to define their own sovereignty outside of the confines of northern colonialist constructs like the UN. A Stalinist dunce like Azerbaijan's Sultan Ilham Aliyev was able to parade around with his jihad to restore his nation's UN recognized borders while he launched a second Armenian Genocide because his totalitarian farce of a government is granted more legitimacy than the democratic will of the people of Artsakh, who now find themselves held hostage by the white saviors of another UN Peacekeeping mission. These words make me sick because they have nothing to do with peace. An occupied nation can never be at peace. Is Gaza at peace? How about the Warsaw Ghetto? Fuck your statist peace. It is a stench in the nostrils of free people everywhere.

I took this crime personally because I am a Panarchist. A school of anarchist thought that embraces localism as a far more democratic and far less imperialistic alternative to globalist internationalism. It is my belief that secession is a basic god given human right afforded to all people, and that all people have the right to voluntarily establish their own nations anywhere as long as that right is afforded to all people. Under this understanding, Stepanakert

would have as much right to declare its independence from Artsakh as Artsakh has to declare independence from Azerbaijan and Azerbaijan does from Russia. Tyranny thrives on size. The more massive a system is, be it a monarchy or a liberal democracy, the less truly democratic it becomes. Which leads me to the other reason Artsakh should still matter to Americans. Artsakh is our future, for better or worse.

The Soviet Union was never the mythic "Evil Empire" dreamed up by the CIA and their friends in Hollywood. But it was a superpower built on the foundation of a popular if misguided revolution and torn asunder by a monolithic gulag-warfare state. Does that sound familiar? In the final days of the Soviet Union, this massive benevolent society began to burst at the seams with divisions of every kind imaginable- territorial, cultural, religious, linguistic, economic.... In the end it didn't simply collapse, it disintegrated into 15 sovereign states and dozens of unofficial ones. This became a massive crisis, but from an anti-statist point of view it could have just as easily become an opportunity. The only truly egalitarian societies that have ever thrived have been small autonomous movements sparked in times of great crisis- Paris, Catalonia, Chiapas, Rojava, CHOP.... These are the revolutions fought without pogroms, the ones that, for however short a period of time, managed to replace tyranny, not with more tyranny, but with hope and mutual aid.

This is how we save Artsakh. This is how we save Palestine and Yemen and Kurdistan. This is how we save ourselves. We create a million Artsakh's until their are too many embers for the massive tyrants to stomp out. We become a storm of Artsakh's, disintegrating the cowards of America, Turkey, Israel, and Russia in a vat of caustic chemical voluntarism. We stop trying to be the answer for everyone and create true solidarity by being the answer for ourselves and no one else. Armenia's reliance on massive Russia betrayed them. Can you imagine if instead they could rely on Donetsk, Luhansk, Chechnya, Dagestan, and roaming tribes of Cossacks in Russia's wild and mineral rich Siberian