

Ten Years On; UN Resolutions Still Not Implemented

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By Elin Suleymanov

Ten years ago, on April 30, 1993 then newly independent Republic of Azerbaijan won a major recognition of its case by the international community.

On that date, the UN Security Council finally passed first of a number of resolutions calling for withdrawal of Armenian troops and return of the displaced population.

Achieving this recognition of what initially would seem so obvious to anyone who would bother to look at a map of the region had been an uphill struggle for Azerbaijani diplomats and came at a very heavy price. While the true racist and extremist nature of Armenia's aggression against Azerbaijan clearly manifested itself already in February of 1992 during the large-scale massacre of Khojaly, it was the annexation of the Azerbaijani region of Kalbajar in early April that eventually led to the adopting Resolution # 822. Three subsequent UN Security Council resolutions (#853,874,84) followed further captures of regions in Azerbaijan by Armenian forces emboldened by their impunity. None of these resolutions has been implemented, not can the United Nations to be said to pursue any meaningful action to enforce them.

By spring of 1993, the citizens of Azerbaijan, have seen their share of massacres, devastation and waves of forceful displacements as a result of ethnic cleansing by the Russian-backed Armenian forces. Perhaps somewhat naively the Azerbaijanis, whose new Republic was less than two years old and the domestic political formula for stability was yet to be found following the years of the Moscow-imposed curfew, still did not recognize the conflict as a full-scale war. The inability to see that well-prepared Armenians meant an all out war and large-scale land grab is among the reasons why Azerbaijanis were so shocked by the brutality of their neighbors and late in setting up an organized resistance. Even as hostilities had continued for some time, many were still reluctant to comprehend that Azerbaijan was not facing what then a convenient word "conflict" implied but an ideologically driven ethnic expansion and systematic Armenian war effort.

Meantime in Kalbajar, some lucky folks in managed to jump on last overcrowded helicopters under the fire, while others set out on a desperate and for many a deadly walk across the showy mountains of Murov. American writer Thomas Goltz, who witnessed the exodus of first hand and left Kalbajar on one of the last helicopters, offers an emotional account of this tragedy in his book "Azerbaijan Diary" and even describes

a family walking all the way through the mountains without realizing that the children they carried in their arms had already died from cold. Mr. Goltz's chapter on Kalbajar is a story of exile, humiliation, chaos on the Azerbaijani side and reluctance of most to hear about the tragedy. In another tragic twist, one of the desperate pleas ignored by virtually all was the one issued by the Ronayi Kurdish center on behalf of Kalbajar's Kurdish community. Just as the Armenian forces were killing and sending to exile the Azerbaijani Kurds among other inhabitants of Kalbajar, the Kurdish organizations throughout the world and their supporters found it to be more convenient to look the other way.

Murov is a beautiful mountain, whether one looks at it from a window of own home in Kalbajar or a refugee settlement on the other side of the range. One sees it differently though, for refugees it is a graveyard of those, who did not survive the escape and a symbol of their displacement. In the words of an old refugee man: "I used to see Murov from the other side." Ten years after leaving home, returning to the other side of Murov remains an unfulfilled dream despite all of the UN resolutions.

Geographic names are always about more than just a location. In the Caucasus with its ancient history and limited real estate, almost every name has some emotions and memories, both good and bad, attached to it. Over the last decade, however, the geography of western Azerbaijan has become overwhelmingly associated with pain, exile, suffering and blood. Mixed with earlier memories of the places, these emotions become inescapable part of our lives.

I was reminded of that in an unlikely place. Some time ago, driving along the Grand Canyon in Arizona I fell in love with the place immediately. Strangely enough, I also felt very much at home and nostalgic. Later a realization came that the edges of the Canyon, its reddish rocks and cliffs brought back my childhood memories of Kalbajar's mountains. And I remembered the cliffs and rocks, the morning when one can walk through the mountains, deep river canyons, remote lonely villages of shepherds and springs of Isti - Su, a weird tasting mineral water, which would cure everything except one's soul. I remembered collecting small rocks of all colors with traces of various metals and being scared to death riding a horse along the narrow path in the mountains. There, at the edge of Grand Canyon in Arizona, I understood the tears and sadness in the eyes of the refugees from Kalbajar because I felt as a refugee myself.

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