

Anti-terrorism, “Realpolitik” and Human Rights:

*The Dilemma of Armenia’s Participation in
International Coalitions*



Apparently Armenia has its own place in the struggle against terrorism. Since our country has taken certain positions concerning anti-terrorism policy, Armenia’s direct participation in international coalitions, particularly the one in and around Iraq, is an awkward issue to ponder. One thing is obvious enough: whether 2, 30, 50 or even hundreds of troops are going to be deployed is not important - this step is a signal.

The initiative is comprehensible:

Armenia doesn’t want to take part in the war in Iraq; Armenia wishes to participate only in reconstruction activities in Iraq and is ready to send doctors and deminers. In fact this step is merely humanitarian and assistance in character. This certainty can, and should be, presented to both the Armenian and international communities as well as to the Iraqi Armenians. Indeed, we have a large community in Iraq and Armenia should and does have a right to help. A well-framed message on this can in fact be correctly perceived.

Armenia will proclaim about its admission or, at least, desire to be admitted to the “club” by participation in Iraqi developments, and being a member means constantly receiving your piece of the pie, otherwise you’re out of the game.

“Becoming a part” means getting experience: – first, self-assessment, later, practice. Armenian doctors and deminers will have a chance to work, side by side, with arguably the best professionals in the world. They can acquire cutting-edge experience and put it to use after returning to Armenia. Each participant will come back with his own story; and stories can bring flashes of inspiration. Armenia, which has a large Diaspora in Iraq, should constantly have firsthand and reliable information of its own. However, very often, even the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs needs to search for “hot” information about our compatriots and frequently relies on sources from other countries.

The initiative is not comprehensible:

It’s useless to talk about post-war reconstruction since the war – the real war – is still being waged with no end in sight. To participate in post-war reconstruction activities during hostilities seems illogical (cotradictio in adjecto).

Targets of the threat are:

- Armenian Diaspora (around 20,000 Armenians live in Iraq; 100 thousands live in other Arab countries);
- The group to be deployed in Iraq;
- The whole territory of Armenia.

This arrangement becomes a serious exam for our country as it can lead to a deadlock.

In comparison with other minorities living in Iraq, the Armenian Diaspora is an open target failing to enjoy any natural means of self-defense due to its dispersed nature. So what are our

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expectations to contrast with exposing both Iraqi Armenians and Armenia to danger? In what value system do we perceive ourselves that allows us to take the initiative towards acquiring (self-) assertion in that very system?

The participation of Armenia could be quite a headache for the United States itself. It is doubtful that there was serious pressure put on this issue by the US. But tiny Armenia, with its small interests, is striving to enter the big game for the sake of something that is vague in reality.

Diaspora: If Armenia is unable to take positive actions for its Diaspora, then it should at least avoid creating threats for Armenians in the various Diasporas. The issue has to be discussed in the context of the Armenia-Diaspora relationship – it is not simply and only about sports events and cultural programs or telethons, and the Diaspora is not simply comprised of the wealthy in Los Angeles. When the state receives support from the Diaspora, aimed at the implementation of various projects, it should also take certain responsibilities for that Diaspora. Today the Armenian Diasporas of Iran, Syria, Lebanon and other countries of the region are in need of support from Armenia. Iraqi Armenians who recently immigrated to Armenia rumor that there is a desire of Iraqi Armenians to return to the motherland a minute earlier.

Armenians have a unique precedent of coexistence with the Arab world, and only serious grounds can expose this relationship to danger.

Geopolitics: Such policies and decisions are not made simply for today. These decisions are more future-oriented that pose serious questions for Armenia - how this country envisions its place and role, and also its way, in the world. In this context the questions should not be posed so simply to result in “yes” or “no” replies, since it’s evident that politics doesn’t tolerate extremes.

Realpolitik: Is Armenia really interested in taking this step? Subsequent to the recent elections in the US, certain doors have been closed for both Armenia and the Armenian lobby (assuredly, it can be also stated vice versa and shown through numerous examples). Maybe this initiative is, in all probability, aimed at becoming a way to open the closed doors?

Preparing Public Opinion:

The public opinion in Armenia hasn’t been prepared for this decision and, ... none is going to prepare.

The paper is elaborated based on the opinions passed by the participants of the discussion on “Anti-terrorism, Real politics and Human Rights: The Alternative of Armenia’s Participation in International Coalitions” held in November 12, 2004, in the International Center for Human Development. The participants of the round-table were freelance analysts, government officials, members of the media and representatives of international institutions.