

Armenian Democracy Needs a Resilient Defense System



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Time and the To-Do List

When Ilham Aliyev inherited the power from his father, he publicly spoke of the need for more time, and took a break from the negotiations around Artsakh conflict. He needed time to consolidate the power, to understand the essence of the negotiations, to internalize the process and to strengthen his positions. Time showed that he used this time to harden his positions, to arm, to war, to stifle civil society and to establish dictatorship.

Time is an important resource: you can speed it up or slow it down. Post-revolutionary Armenia also should be able to manage time properly. After change of government, and especially after a revolution, time is needed to consolidate power. If Ilham Aliyev was using time to consolidate dictatorship, Armenia needs time to consolidate democracy. Democracy is power characterized with more complex system of checks and balances, and with a diversity of compositional tissues. Time allows democracy to grant a state with flexibility which helps it maintain stability and predictability regardless of change of government and external challenges. We have a chance to build such Armenia today. Internal resources – media, civil society, parliament and government, education, market, army – all, are gradually consolidated by using various combinations of “adding and subtracting” towards this end.

However, the external world has its own watch and can try to speed up, hurry, take advantage of a situation, suppress or support. In such a situation the primary mission of Armenia’s foreign affairs is to manage time in a way that will allow it to develop analogous internal balance necessary for resilience to external challenges. It is necessary to approach negotiations on Artsakh conflict, which is our major external challenge, from this perspective: Armenia should start the next negotiation phase only when fully democratic governance will have been established. Rushing can be detrimental in this case. It may escalate the conflict and even backlash against Armenia’s commitment to democracy. Those responsible for the foreign affairs of Armenia should communicate this message not only to the three Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, but also to Azerbaijan: “If Azerbaijan wants to reach an agreement on peace, it should know that for Armenia such an agreement is possible only when there is internal consensus.”

Security

Perhaps for every country security is number one issue. The primary security issue of Armenia is Artsakh conflict. The Four-Day War proved that the cease-fire agreement and efforts of the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group cannot fully serve as guarantees against resuming military actions. This means that continuous improvement of the defense system is an urgent imperative. Therefore, to ensure security we need to use the time available to us as intensively and effectively as possible, rather than dawdle.

The April War showed clearly that the conflict cannot be resolved through military actions. After the war both Armenia and Azerbaijan have purchased more strategic arms. Perhaps the most valuable lesson learnt from the April War both for the conflicting parties and the world is the following: military solution of the conflict leads to a zero-sum game. Thus, Armenia has no alternative to developing its armed forces, and the latter’s combat readiness, which will protect its democracy. And this should be happen only under civilian control and in line with contemporary issues, challenges and opportunities. However, ensuring security is not possible only by strengthening the armed forces. Similar reforms are necessary within the other components of security.



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Economy

Many democracies have quite high levels of security and armed forces equipped with state-of-art military technologies. Military spending in the United States is even larger than the total sum of military spending of the seven countries ranking the next highest spenders in terms of military budgets. The imperative of the reality we have is clear: yes, in the modern world democracy, its achievements and market relations need to be defended. Even when security needs are addressed in the best possible way, when considerable public resources are directed towards developing and maintaining the armed forces, the burden of these resources can be lightened significantly if the country's economy is strong.

The imperative of ensuring security is obvious. However, the economy should grow at rates higher than the military needs of ensuring security. And if resources directed at satisfying security needs are largely dependent on external factors, the key to ensuring economic growth is in one's own hands. Two global financial and economic crises in the last decade and their negative impact on Armenia's economy, increased military needs prompted by the April War have resulted in negative dynamics. And it is crucial to change this as soon as possible.

Economic growth is vital, and economic reforms and solid achievements are not simply necessary, but pressing. It may sound strange, but it is exactly here that democracy may conflict with prioritization and urgency of economic growth and the relevant reforms. If in terms of security and foreign affairs (including negotiations) it is necessary to secure public consensus in order to shape flexibility and resilience, using similar consensus-based methods for economic reforms may lead to detrimental waste of time. To conclude, economic reforms may be painful and may conflict with political interests, populism and unrealistic expectations of people.

Guarantee for exiting the negotiation deadlock

We cannot hesitate regarding economic growth, as we cannot hesitate regarding formation of a robust security system. The risk of war is still there, which does not mean though that the united response of the nation, the consciousness of public unity for self-defence is necessary only as a resource to withstand the calamities and challenges of war. On the contrary, we need to use this opportunity, the time that has been granted to us, to expand this resource. Moreover, only formation of a robust security system can help transform the zero-sum game of the negotiations. **Restraining the desire for military solution of the conflict is the guarantee of effective negotiations**, and this depends on the existence of a strong security system and armed forces.

The policy brief is elaborated based on the opinions passed by the participants of the discussion "The Level of Readiness and Resilience of the Republic of Armenia; Situation in Azerbaijan and Security Concerns", which took place on 2 February, 2019.

