

Land Reparation – Statics and Dynamics

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by David Davidian

Many individuals conclude that geopolitical change cannot occur without resorting to violence, power, or force. This leads many to mentally and politically disengage from actively entertaining involvement in the political or democratic process. After all, what can an individual or group expect to accomplish? This viewpoint assumes a constant static geopolitical stage.

In reality, when one looks at a map of the world from only a century ago, we find profound changes, some made through force, and others through negotiation. Many of these changes, such as frontier modifications and the creation of new states, occurred during times of dynamic geopolitics, be they wars or other destabilizing events such as the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

The extermination of the European Jews and Armenians could only have taken place during times of dramatic dynamic change. The fight for Nagorno-Karabakh could only have taken place during the chaos of the late 1980s and early 1990s – not today. The creation of Israel would never happen today, but could when it did and was a culmination of a long process of forethought and demands.

While this may seem obvious to some, what is not so obvious is the effort expended in preparing (or even exacerbating conditions) for times of dynamic change. Too often characteristics of dynamic change are mistakenly imposed upon a static situation and a stalemate is concluded. This latter condition leads to political complacency.

A generation ago when the ever-present subject of reparations for the Turkish genocide of the Armenians was discussed within Armenians circles or in academic settings, dynamics such as what constitute historic borders or discussing the applicability the Treaty of Sevres were common.

The Sevres Treaty was negotiated between the Ottoman Empire and Allies at the end of World War I. It eventually granted Armenia about 110,000 sq km of land (versus today's Republic of Armenia: about 30,000 sq km) based on demarcations by US President Woodrow Wilson. However, this treaty was never adopted and was superseded by the less favorable Treaty of Lausanne.

While the Sevres document is a strong reference in any land reparations settlement, to base reparation efforts today on this document would involve re-negotiating the end of WWI between: “The British Empire, France, Italy and Japan, These Powers being described in the present Treaty as the Principal Allied Powers; Armenia, Belgium, Greece, The Hedjaz, Poland, Portugal, Roumania, the Serb-Croat-Slovene State and Czecho-Slovakia, These Powers constituting, with the Principal Powers mentioned above, the Allied Powers, of the one part; and Turkey, of the other part;”
(see: wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Peace_Treaty_of_Sèvres)

Therefore, the chances of re-legitimizing this treaty is effectively zero, despite the fact that it was a just resolution to many issues that continue to haunt us today including the war in Iraq.

A generation ago we might have heard Armenians say, “I don't want my grandmother's house in Kharpert!”, or “How are we going to force the Turks to give reparations?” These responses are not surprising considering they are based on the fallacy of imposing a dynamic upon a static geopolitical environment and making conclusions.

It is not one's family home in Kharpert that is the issue. It is the ability of Armenians to prosper on Armenian land that was taken away from the Armenians by genocide and the expropriation of their land and property. The ability of Armenia to live, prosper and determine their own future is what Armenians demand.

Today's Armenia is not the culmination of a natural evolutionary process, but is the geopolitical repository for the survivors of that genocide. This is today's condition. Today's conditions can only be addressed by today's realities. Gone are the assumption that another 80,000 sq km will be awarded to Armenians simply by having a just case. There are no shortages of just cases.

Land reparations, as part of a comprehensive agreement between Turkey and Armenia would include land between Armenia and the Black Sea placed under Armenian sovereignty. Armenia could then build an economy not subject to the whims and blackmail of its neighbors. Any land awarded Armenia would also rightfully include its inhabitants. This indigenous population would be offered Armenian citizenship. For Armenians, the concept of multi-ethnic Armenian citizens must be reconciled with before any land reparations can even go forward.

Movement on such a demand will only take place when it is in the greater interest of the Turkish state to provide reparations rather than to deny genocide. Clearly it is in the immediate interest of Turkey for Armenian demands to degenerate into a nondescript apology. In addition, Armenia is not going to war with Turkey for land reparations. This is the static condition.

However, any positive outcome of a developing dynamic geopolitical situation is at least predicated on a reasonable Armenian demand. That is, a clear demand be stated. Without a demand the chance of failure is virtually guaranteed. For a reasonable demand, see: www.regionalkinetics.com

It is beyond the scope of this article to describe dynamic scenarios, however consider the following simplistic dynamic: Iraq disintegrates into a Sunni, Shia administrative regions and a Kurdistan. Any Kurdistan will be taken as an existential threat to the Turkish State (it should be noted that a static condition rarely slips into a dynamic one without external interests modulating events). Turkey engages in heavy repression of its Kurdish population.

Israel, having strategic interests in the emerging Kurdistan finds itself at odds with Turkey and decides Kurdistan is more important than a wavering Turkey and uses its influence against Turkish interests. Syria is at odds with Turkey because its Kurdish population becomes radicalized. Syria subsequently demands the return of Alexandretta province (given to Turkey by the French in 1938 as a bribe not to enter WWII on the side of Germany – another event that could not happen today) and an Israeli quid pro quo supports this as Syria gives up its demand for Golan.

Azerbaijan uses this regional instability and starts making claims against Iran's northern Azerbaijani-populated regions, but still refrains against attacking Nagorno-Karabakh because Russia is attempting to influence events in Georgia as centrifugal forces try to dismember Georgia. Armenians have already made clear demands on a swath of land between itself and the Black Sea. Russia supports Armenian demands using them to further strangle Georgia. Iran sees this as a trade route to the Black Sea, as does Kurdistan. Turkey is petrified that it may lose all its eastern regions and determines that it is better to concede to Armenia land reparation demands and have any border with Armenia than to have an entire Kurdistan to its east.

While this is a simplistic scenario, who in 1910 would have thought that starting in less than 5 years half of the world's Armenian population would be murdered and survivors would be left a starving mass. Who in 1985 would have thought that in less than 10 years the aggressive Azerbaijani treatment of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh would come to an end?

There will be no benefit from change without participation in its process.

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