



THE KARABAKH WAR IN A VOLATILE REGION: THE LESSONS OF DEFEAT IN THE CYBERSPACE

*By Lieutenant-General (Ret.) Hayk S. Kotanjian,
Doctor of Political Science (Academy of Public Administration under the RF President),
Counterterrorism Fellow (US National Defense University),
Professor (Strategic Security Studies - RA, RF, USA),
President Emeritus of the Political Science Association of Armenia*

Reflecting on the lessons of the genocidal, jihadist military aggression of Turkey and Azerbaijan against the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic and the Republic of Armenia, strategic analysts of the security institutions and processes continue to monitor the dynamics of the peace-war around Karabakh in the context of the world order transformation. Russian President Vladimir Putin at the session of the Russian Security Council of March 26, 2021, emphasizing the exceptional role of cybersecurity, pointed out the strategic priority of the development of the cyberspace resources management system. In general, this coincides with the assessments of the special significance of this security sector, voiced recently by the US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping¹.

The emphases in the conclusions of the heads of the world's great powers, help to draw the first lessons from the defeat of the Armenian Armed Forces in the cyberspace during the 2020 Karabakh war. Today, there is every reason to claim that the failure of the fight against the enemy UAVs in Armenia started in 2018 with the abolition by the new Armenian authorities of the Cyberspace Resources Management Center of the Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense Research University, Ministry of Defense, Republic of Armenia (INSS Head Benyamin Poghosyan). One of the reasons for this failure is the promotion of populist amateurs to the office of the Secretary of the Security Council of the Republic of Armenia who do not possess system knowledge in the field of defense policy and the art of its application in ensuring the national and international security of the state².

Back in the summer of 2018, following the statutory mission of strategic consulting of the top leadership of the state, the Head of the National Defense Research University, Ministry of Defense, Republic of Armenia, invited the new Secretary of the Security Council to the INSS to present him the role of the Cyberspace Resources Management Center. A group of young analysts led by the head of the Center Arman Grigoryan, research fellow of the Center Karen Galoyan and expert in the field of cyber technologies Gevorg Sarukhanyan organized a special discussion to promote the following R&D elaborations into the working portfolio of the Security Council:

- The draft review of the RA National Security Strategy, taking into account the challenges and threats associated with the innovative management of cyberspace resources;
- The draft RA Cybersecurity Strategy;
- The draft RA public CIO system for the Cyberspace Resources Management.

In order to assist in the expected innovative mission of the RA Security Council to develop the defense and security policy of the Armenian state, a group of young talented analysts working under my academic supervision elaborated on the advantages of modern academic and applied strategic research tools that underlie the process of taking security decisions. Defense security policy strategic gaming was demonstrated as an innovative method of brainstorming, as well as the method of applying mathematical modeling and expert assessments through scenario building for national security decision drafting at national scale.

It is important to note that the applied methodological tools were periodically updated and reviewed as a result of our fellowships and discussions at: the CSTO Academic and Expert Council (the General Secretaries - Lieutenant-General, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Nikolai Bordyuzha and Colonel-General Yuri Khachaturov); the College of Cyberspace Resources Management and the Institute for National Strategic Studies, NDU, USA (the head of the US Project on Artificial Intelligence, Dr. James Keagle); the Harvard program "Cybersecurity: the Intersection of Technology and Politics" John F. Kennedy School of Government (Lieutenant General, Professor Tad Oelstrom) and MGIMO University of the Russian Foreign Ministry (Doctors-Professors Alexander Nikitin and Oksana Gaman-Golutvina).

The three strategic security drafts were provided jointly with their implementation roadmaps prepared by the analysts of the RA Ministry of Defense in cooperation with the chief specialists of the ministries and departments of the RA defense and security community involved in the RA defense system modernization program “AZG-BANAK” (Nation-Army). However, the drafts, despite their obvious relevance to the security of Armenia, were not comprehended by the Secretary of the Security Council, RA due to his professional incompetence. As a result, the Draft Review of the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Armenia, the Draft Cybersecurity Strategy of the Republic of Armenia, and the Draft Cyberspace Resources Management System were groundlessly rejected by the Security Council.

Thus, back in 2018, when the Turkish-Azerbaijani aggression against the NKR and RA was distantly approaching, the intellectual failure of the leadership of the RA Security Council in organizing an effective fight in cyberspace led to a lack of understanding of the significance for the innovative development of the Armenian defense and security system of the elaborations by the talented PhDs of INSS, recognized by the world's leading centers for strategic studies. As a result, the implementation of the unique R&D products of the Cyberspace Resources Management Center, INSS, MOD, RA was discontinued, and the Center itself was abolished. The young talented researchers of cyberspace security, who periodically underwent trainings at the world's famous think tanks and who have been ready to continue serving their Homeland, were dismissed.

At the same time, Moscow, Washington, and Yerevan lost a particularly important academic and expert platform for international security “synchronization of watches” on the issues of cyberspace resources management strategy, which was traditionally provided at the international strategic forums of the INSS, MOD, RA³.

At present, responding the requests from my colleagues seeking ways to revive the Armenian Army, I invite their attention to the necessity to reconsider the strategy and roadmap for the modernization of the “AZG-BANAK” (Nation-Army) defense system, developed under the academic expert leadership of the INSS, MOD, RA, one of the system-forming axes of which had been the programs for managing the cyberspace resources. As previously noted, this program of systematic modernization of the power of the Armenian state, based on the lessons of the 2016 war, was developed upon the basis of the field studies by the INSS, MOD, RA in Israel and Switzerland.

It may seem that this interagency elaboration, carried out in 2016-2018 in cooperation with the chief specialists from all ministries and departments of the defense and security community of Armenia, should have formed the basis for the activities of the new Security Council of the Republic of Armenia. However, this did not happen because the Security Council has started to function since 2018 under the pressure of populist influence groups which, contrary to the security interests of Armenia, consider the “AZG-BANAK” program a militaristic document.

Thus, the RA Security Council deprived Armenia of the national program of modernization of the defense and security system, based on the interagency-territorial activities of the national state aimed at the innovative development of the total might of the Republic of Armenia with the

engagement of cyber security resources, which was one of the reasons for the defeat of the Armenian Army in the cyberspace.

Returning to the peace crafting challenges within the scope of global actors' interests in the volatile regions surrounding Armenia we can emphasize the importance of the OSCE Minsk Group on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a unique consensus platform for US-Russia strategic stability dialogue. The monitoring of the dynamics of regional security after the departure of Donald Trump's populist administration and the official inauguration of Joe Biden as US President, indicated the urgency of the strategic dialogue with the Russian Federation after they confirmed the status of Russia as an opponent of America.⁴ It is important to note that under the current international security realities, US think-tanks pointed out that "unlike the previous Republican administration, the current democratic one seriously intends to interact more with Moscow on the issues of strategic stability".⁵

In this regard, analysts at the Carnegie Center, reflecting the opinion of the democratic establishment, emphasized the importance of using multilateral platforms to establish US-Russian dialogue on strategic stability.⁶ Among these platforms, the platform of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs on the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict- before Turkey and Azerbaijan unleashed military-terrorist aggression in Karabakh - stood out by the continuous consensus between the Russian Federation, the United States and France.⁷

The consensus among the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs was as well confirmed by a joint Statement of the presidents of the Co-Chair countries – Russia, the US and France to end the war unleashed in autumn of 2020 against the Armenian population of Artsakh and Armenia by the Azerbaijani-Turkish coalition with the involvement of jihadists.⁸ The three-time declaration of a truce under the auspices of the authorities of the Russian Federation, the United States and France is evidence of the further maintenance of consensus between Russia, America and France at the final stage of hostilities.⁹

The consensus within the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs platform continued with the support of Washington and Paris to deploy Russian peacekeeping forces in Karabakh and the willingness to continue the work of the OSCE Minsk Group. The plenipotentiary representatives of all three states have recently spoken about the expediency of using the Karabakh platform to promote, along with the Karabakh settlement, the dialogue on strategic stability on a global scale.¹⁰

¹ Заседание Совета Безопасности, 26 марта 2021.
<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/65231>

America's Place in Cyberspace: The Biden Administration's Cyber Strategy Takes Shape. Council for Foreign Policy, March 11, 2021.
<https://www.cfr.org/blog/americas-place-cyberspace-biden-administrations-cyber-strategy-takes-shape>

Опубликована книга с высказываниями Си Цзиньпина о наращивании мощи Китая в киберпространстве. Пекин, 21 января 2021.

http://russian.china.org.cn/china/txt/2021-01/21/content_77140952.htm

² Hayk Kotanjian: Lessons-learned of Power Transition Mistakes in the Context of a Changing World Order.

<https://armedia.am/eng/news/83917/hayk-kotanjian-lessons-learned-of-power-transition-mistakes-in-the-context-of-a-changing-world-order.html>

³ Importance of engaging renowned Diaspora-Armenians in establishment of Cyber Resources Management System in Armenia - Hayk Kotanjian.

<https://armenpress.am/eng/news/905754/importance-of-engaging-renowned-diaspora-armenians-in-establishment-of-cyber-resources-management-system.html>

Challenges Annual Forum 2015 is launched in Yerevan.

<https://www.aravot-en.am/2015/10/07/172360/>

Armenia's balanced foreign policy as a strategic opportunity to create a platform for establishing a dialogue between Russia and the US.

<http://www.diplomat.am/dir/publications/1/3-1-0-490>

⁴ Remarks by President Biden on America's Place in the World. Washington, White House, FEBRUARY 04, 2021. Speeches and Remarks. –

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/02/04/remarks-by-president-biden-on-americas-place-in-the-world/>

⁵ Dmitrti Trenin. Dealing With Biden's America. Carnegie Moscow Center, 08. 02, 2021 –

<https://carnegie.ru/commentary/83829>

Д.Тренин. После первой речи. Что сулит России внешнеполитическая программа Байдена. Гибридная война России и Запада. Московский центр Карнеги. Москва-Вашингтон, 12 февраля 2021 г. –

<https://carnegie.ru/commentary/83859>

⁶ Dmitrti Trenin, Thomas Graham. How to Safely Manage U.S.-Russian Great-Power Competition. Carnegie Moscow Center, 11. 12, 2020 –

<https://carnegie.ru/commentary/83432>

Т. Грехем и Д. Тренин. Как направить соперничество между США и Россией в безопасное русло. Гибридная война России и Запада. Москва-Вашингтон, 23 декабря 2020 г. –

<https://carnegie.ru/commentary/83495>

⁷ Г. Котанджян. МГ ОБСЕ — платформа консенсуса РФ, США и Франции в сдерживании войны. Москва, ИА REGNUM, 9 ноября 2016 г. –

<https://regnum.ru/news/polit/2207408.html>

⁸ Заявление президентов России, США и Франции по Нагорному Карабаху. Москва, вебсайт Президента РФ, 1 октября 2020 г. –

<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64133>

⁹ Nagorno-Karabakh: Armenia and Azerbaijan agree to ceasefire. London, The Guardian, 10 of October 2020 –

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/10/nagorno-karabakh-armenia-and-azerbaijan-agree-to-ceasefire>

Armenia, Azerbaijan agree to new ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Paris, France Press, 17 of October 2020 –

<https://www.france24.com/en/asia-pacific/20201017-armenia-azerbaijan-agree-to-new-ceasefire-in-nagorno-karabakh-conflict>

Armenia and Azerbaijan Reach New Cease-Fire for Nagorno-Karabakh, Then Report Violations. The New York Times, 27 of October 2020 –

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/17/world/europe/armenia-azerbaijan-truce-nagorno-karabakh.html>

¹⁰ Энтони Блинкен: «Решение должно гарантировать безопасность Нагорного Карабаха и исключить вспышку новой войны». Вашингтон, Радио Азатютюн, 22 января 2021 г. –

<https://rus.azatutyun.am/a/31063973.html>

Blinken Backs U.S. 'Security Assistance' To Armenia.

<https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31063706.html>

Макрон выступил за диалог с Россией в интересах мировой стабильности. Москва-Париж, ИЗВЕСТИЯ.iz, 4 февраля 2021 г. –

<https://iz.ru/1120846/2021-02-04/makron-vystupil-za-dialog-s-rossiei-v-interesakh-mirovoi-stabilnosti>

Руденко: «Тройка» Минской группы ОБСЕ должна продолжить работу по Карабаху. Москва, EADaily, 10 февраля 2021 г. –

<https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2021/02/10/rudenko-troyka-minskoy-gruppy-obse-dolzha-prodolzhit-rabotu-po-karabahu>