



A VALE BLOODY AND BEAUTIFUL

THE COLONIAL LIBERATION OF EREBOR

For two centuries, the Continent of Erebor had been subjected to a policy of colonization by the Greater States of Khazad-Dum. During the period of colonization, Erebor was inhabited by four large civilizations and a few smaller civilizations which spawned the length and breadth of the continent. While there had been instances of skirmishes and battles among them in the past, the colonial oppression had collectivised them in the fight for their independence from tyranny. After a struggle which lasted decades, the continent of Erebor attained freedom from their colonial masters.

The heads of the four larger civilizations of Erebor decided that it would be the best for their collective security if they came together and formed a federation. While all the civilizations were distinct in their own right, three of them shared similar cultural traits, while the civilization of the Vale of Avalon ['Avalon'] had a distinct cultural identity and a different historic past. The head of the Avalon civilization had expressed slight discomfort at the thought of a common federation. She had stated that the brutal past they had shared and the cultural differences with the other three would put their civilization in a precarious position. There were pockets of population across Avalon that shared this sentiment. The head of State of Avalon preferred to stay independent from both Sulox and Galon. However, during the period of interaction, Sulox occupied Galon, the eastern part of Avalon. Following Sulox's annexation of Galon, collective security concerns and the strategic cover that the Misty Mountains of Avalon provided, the remaining territory of Avalon was persuaded to join the other three civilization and into being a part of the federation. Avalon was promised an autonomous status with territorial identity and autonomy and a safe space across the federation for cultural practices. The Federal Republic of Ragnarök ['Ragnarök'] was thus formed with Avalon enjoying special autonomous status and a separate Government that would govern all of Avalon's internal policy-making and interaction with the other states of Ragnarök.

BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT IN AVALON

The background to the conflict initiates from the period of Independence of Erebor from colonial rule. Erebor was divided into two parts – with one comprising of the Federal Republic of Ragnarök and the territory of Avalon enjoying special autonomous status and the other being State of Sulox which comprised of all the smaller civilizations of Erebor and Galon, the eastern part of Avalon. Sulox contends that part of the territory of Avalon in Ragnarök is a disputed territory and that the integration of Avalon into Ragnarök was against the will of the Avalonians. A few pockets



of Avalon prefer to affiliate with Sulox considering closer cultural and identity ties and what they believe is a shared historic trajectory. They, along with Sulox believed that the integration of Avalon into Ragnarök will be a threat to the existence and furtherance of their distinct identity and that they will face repression from Ragnarök. Further, the Suloxians believe that the means via which the territory of Avalon was merged into Ragnarök raises concerns. Sulox has always been a cross-border threat to Ragnarök by constantly initiating border attacks and skirmishes against Ragnarök. Throughout the course of the post-independence period, Sulox and Ragnarök have shared a hostile history.

Ragnarök's territorial claims to Avalon are framed in the language of their Constitution, with constant references to Avalon's treaty of accession to Ragnarök and its finality, the participation and compliance of Avalon in Ragnarök's election processes and the special territorial status they enjoy. Sulox and pockets of Avalon which support its independence view Ragnarök's relationship to Avalon as a post-colonial constitutional military occupation – and a form of control practised through constant subversion and almost disappearance of fundamental rights in Avalon. They have stated that authoritarian control is maintained and recreated through various legal mechanisms that have institutionalized and legalized such an occupation in the eyes of Ragnarök's law. Sulox has internationally gone on to say that the preventive detention and special legislations not having any prosecution provisions is another example of regimes of authority within Avalon. Ragnarök has always maintained that the entire territory of Avalon was, is and will always be an integral part of the territory of Ragnarök, an internal policy matter and that the majority of Avalon actually wants to be a part of Ragnarök.

AVALON AND THE CIVIL SOCIETY DISSIDENTS

Avalon lies in the valley of the Misty Mountains and is known internationally for its picturesque and serene location amongst the Misty Mountains. The area is also equipped with extremely fertile land which has made Avalon one of the leading fruit exporters in the world. The constitutional arrangement between Avalon and Ragnarök worked well for all of the stakeholders in the initial couple of decades after Ragnarök was formed. Avalon managed its own governance while maintaining ties with Ragnarök Government.

However, in the last few years, the Government of Ragnarök had started constantly intervening in the territory of Avalon as border threats with Sulox have loomed large. The Government of Ragnarök initiated large scale military deployment in Avalon against the will of the Avalon Government while citing reasons along the lines of national security of Ragnarök, protection of



terror threats from Sulox and containing the anti-national elements in Avalon. As the land area of the Erebor continent became subject to an increased number of border skirmishes on the eastern front of Avalon, Ragnarök gradually started eroding the special autonomous status by taking unilateral actions in terms of the military presence, and by introducing legislations which gave an open hand to the military against “anti-national” interests and cross-border terrorists. The Armed Forces Superior Control Act (‘AFSCA’) gave the military an open hand to carry out anti-terror operations and shoot individuals if there was a cause to suspect that the individual(s) is involved in a “terror” activity. Ragnarök stated that their “army requires a free-hand to carry out anti-terror operations due to the dangers at stake and considering how it is a disturbed area.” Prosecution against personnel could only be initiated after receiving a sanction from the government of Ragnarök, a rarity. The massive militarization backed with the special legislations also started having an everyday impact on the life of the Avalonians, with instances of individuals from Avalon being tortured and strip-searched, detained on unsubstantiated charges and rounded up for preventive detention in anticipation of any security threat.

The constant and gradual dilution of autonomy and the invasiveness of Ragnarök in Avalon’s internal affairs over a period of time led to disruption of civil society in Avalon. Large swathes of population raised concerns regarding Ragnarök’s unilateral actions - shifting popular sentiment against the special autonomous status and the inclusion of Avalon as a part of Ragnarök. There were demands for integration into Sulox as well as for an independent Avalon. Ragnarök assumed stricter control over the various regions in Avalon and social media surveillance was bolstered to prevent the rising of the tide. Futile of their efforts, social media movements erupted with activists and citizens alike sharing stories regarding the convoluted narratives of excessive militarization, enforced disappearances, illegal detainment, internationally banned crowd-control mechanisms, everyday struggles against surveillance and the invasiveness of the armed forces in the Vale of Avalon.

THE ENSUING CONFLICT IN AVALON

The Avalon Civil Society Consortium (“ACSC”), a coalition of various civil society groups who had politically organized during the period of these protests, had gained popular legitimacy in the Avalon elections and were the ruling party in Avalon. They expressed concerns about the “invasive and arbitrary imposition of draconian legislations upon the people of Avalon.” While expressing concern about the distrust of the Government of Ragnarök towards Avalon and its elected Government, they stated that the people of Avalon are the primary stakeholders in the issues



plaguing their land, and such use of excessive force and restrictions on the freedom of expression in traditional and social media is not in accordance with the Constitutional arrangement between Ragnarök and Avalon. The protests in Avalon had taken a new turn and protestors were now coming out in numbers wearing black masks to protest about their dissatisfaction with Ragnarök's actions. There were instances of clashes between the protestors and Ragnarök's military forces.

The socio-political situation in Avalon had started worsening day-by-day. Ragnarök responded to the protests by communicating to the ACSC to not extend their mandate of governance, and to comply with Ragnarök in light of concerns of national security as well as the unity and integrity of Ragnarök. The ACSC however continued to place before Ragnarök their stance that the conditions Ragnarök was imposing on the people of Avalon was in contravention of their Constitutional arrangement of the autonomy granted to Avalon. They also stated that they would keep actively dissenting and pushing forward to ensure positive and peaceful political change for Avalon. This would either include reinstating in essence and action the arrangement agreed upon entirely and Ragnarök demilitarizing the zone or either by the way of seeking independence from Ragnarök.

Ragnarök in retaliation to what they conceived as a threat, carried out mass arrests, detained political leaders of the ACSC, censored media, and imposed a ban on the Avalon Peoples Forum, an NGO that had been providing a platform to give a voice to victims and survivors of the atrocities that had been carried out by Ragnarök. The group was further charged with the act of sedition and the individuals who ran the APF were booked under preventive detention laws. Ragnarök retorted by stating that they are in favour of a mutual solution but only if civil society and protest groups and ACSC stopped their outright demands for independence. Their statement read that "it is unacceptable that Avalon thinks that a special autonomous status gives them the right to talk outrightly about independence from Ragnarök. Such a stance amounts to treason against Ragnarök and it is imperative that order be maintained until things calm down. It is also important for the unity and integrity of Ragnarök the that military strength in Avalon be maintained as at the end of the day it is for the people of Avalon that we take these steps."

ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND THE ASSASSINATION

The last few decades of conflict within Avalon had caused a major impact on the industrial and material development of Avalon as well as the lives of the people who were stuck between the constant crossfire. The Commune, an international organization that worked on matters pertaining to health and development, released a report which stated that the militarization of Avalon, exchange of fire between parties to the conflict, land resettlement and the large-scale use of land-



mines and IEDs has caused massive environmental degradation to the region of Avalon. Most of its fertile soil patches had been destroyed and become barren. The lack of access to resources for some regions of Avalon had set in other problems related to malnutrition, starvation and suffering.

The sensitive nature of the situation was also affecting Ragnarök's international standing, with international institutions and human rights organisations having condemned the acts of Ragnarök's military in Avalon. The socio-political scenario had also given rise to extreme factions within Avalon - smaller independence movement groups which wanted to carry out a guerrilla war from the Misty Mountains and seek independence from Ragnarök. They operated independently and did not approve of the peaceful means of the ACSC. They had already carried out smaller strikes with groups of fighters on isolated military barracks.

The Front for Avalon Liberation was the largest operating group among these and was involved in the assassination of Ms. Anastasia, the Secretary of State for Ragnarök. While Ms. Anastasia was on a diplomatic trip to Avalon to meet certain representatives from border states and the ACSC, the motorcade travelling towards the meeting place was ambushed by fighters from the Front for Avalon Liberation. A new batch of fighters dropped Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) on multiple cars in the convoy, which resulted in the death of Ms. Anastasia and other security personnel who were a part of the convoy. Having taken responsibility for the incident, the Front for Avalon Liberation released a statement wherein they stated that while they respected the legitimacy of the ACSC, the solution to the Avalon conflict cannot be allowed to drag on at the risk of losing so many more lives. They further stated that this attack was in response to the over-militarization of the region and the end of the promised status to the region.

CONSENSUS FOR MEDIATION

The ACSC, expecting Ragnarök to respond for the assassination of their Secretary of State, had immediately established dialogue in order to avoid further confrontation and condemned the violent means used by the Front for Avalon Liberation. What had once been a place of pure beauty had been reduced to a battlefield with hostility all around. The ACSC wanted a solution that would include the Avalonian's as primary stakeholders, and not just considerations about the geopolitical importance of Avalon.

In a letter to Ragnarök about the situation till now and the way ahead, the ACSC stated that a "resolution to the socio-political situation in Avalon should entail a commitment to ending the cycles of violence, accountability for past and current human rights violations and abuses



committed by all parties and redress for victims. The only way such a resolution can be reached is by meaningful dialogue that includes the people of Avalon as primary stakeholders. We have lost too many of our kin and near and dear ones. The people of Avalon are tired, and have constantly tried to pursue their demands for justice peacefully. It is about time that there be a ceasefire agreement drawn between Avalon and Ragnarök and that the bloodshed, violence and mayhem be stopped, while political dialogue be initiated and a favourable outcome be negotiated upon. ” The ACSC has also communicated to Ragnarök that the extremist factions have agreed to do away with violent means of conflict resolution. The ACSC had enter into a dialogue with the extremist factions - that Avalon required a political solution, as constant warfare had driven its area, economy and people to shambles. The factions have thus agreed to do away with arms and will not be a detriment to the outcome of the dialogue between Ragnarök and the ACSC.

Ragnarök, seeing no plausible end to the exchange of hostilities and the cycles of violence that had erupted in Avalon, also considered going ahead with a dialogue as to the future on Avalon and how the conflict can be deescalated and normalcy re-established. Ragnarök had also lost a number of battalions to guerrilla attacks as well as people in imminent positions of governance. The report of The Commune had set a common consensus for both parties to consider the conflict holistically, and the toll it had taken on man, nature and on the harmony once shared between the two. Ragnarök in response, has agreed to have a mediation session with the ACSC.

The Avalon Civil Society Consortium will be represented by a two-person delegation comprising of Ms. Poseidon, Party head of the ACSC and President of Avalon and Mx. Aegon, the Minister of State for Justice and Civil Liberties of Avalon. Ragnarök will be represented by Mr. Garcia, the President of Ragnarök and Mr. Tyrion, Ragnarök’s Chief of Defence Staff. The individuals representing the parties have the full authority to settle the final terms of the negotiation which in turn would be binding on both parties.