



CENTER OF ANALYSIS
OF INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS



WHY ARE THERE NO AZERBAIJANIS IN THE MODERN TERRITORIES OF ARMENIA?

This report was jointly prepared by the
Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center)
and the Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM).



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Cover Image: The destroyed Azerbaijani village of Sariyaqub
in modern territories of Armenia after the expulsion of local Azerbaijanis.

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Authors:

Dr. Jurgen KLAUS

Dr. Klaus holds a postgraduate degree from London School of Economics and Political Science in Government Studies; Director, Economy first Limited London, a Media Representation Company. Specialized in Strategic Communications and Media Relations with a focus on International Relations and Public Diplomacy; frequent guest lecturer at university (most recently Hacettepe University Ankara).

Dr. Vasif HUSEYNOV

Dr. Huseynov, head of department at the AIR Center, focuses on the EU – Azerbaijan relations and the international security in the South Caucasus.

Ms. Hazel ÇAĞAN ELBİR

"Hazel Çağan Elbir has been working as an Analyst at Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM) since 2012. In 2013, she received her master's degree from the Department of International Relations at Middle East Technical University (METU), Ankara with the title "Armenian Terrorism and the Turkish Press (1973-1984)".

Dr. Deena SALEH ŞAHİN

Dr. Saleh Şahin is an economist and researcher, holding a Ph.D. in Economics from Istanbul University (2023). Currently serving as an Assistant Economic Researcher at EquityRT in Istanbul, she has previously held positions as a research assistant and writer at various organizations, including Politics Today and BILGESAM. Dr. Şahin is also a visiting lecturer, teaching courses in economics at Piri Reis University and Ibn Haldun University.

Mr. Nurad MAMMADOV

Mr. Mammadov is an advisor in the Center of Analysis of International Relations. His analyses cover the post-Soviet region, mainly the Russian Federation.

Ms. Mima CVOROVIC

Ms. Čvorović is a Montenegrin lawyer with a Master of Law degree from the University of Montenegro, specializing in Criminal Law. She began her legal studies in 2015, earning her bachelor's degree in 2020 and completing her Master's in 2023.



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Mirza Ibrahimov 8, Baku, AZ1100, Azerbaijan,
Phone: (+994 12) 596-82-39, (+994 12) 596-82-41,
E-mail: info@aircenter.az www.aircenter.az

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Introduction

Today there are no Azerbaijanis residing in the territories of Republic of Armenia. The history of these territories was however different. The predominantly monoethnic composition of modern Armenia is the result of systematic ethnic cleansing, forced deportations, and widespread violence against the Azerbaijani population of the country that have spanned over a century. These actions were not isolated incidents but were orchestrated through the efforts of state authorities and military forces, aiming to uproot the Azerbaijani population from their historical homeland. Beginning in the early 20th century and continuing into the late Soviet era, this brutal process included massacres, genocidal acts, and other gross violations of human rights, culminating in the complete expulsion of Azerbaijanis from Armenia by 1991.

The violent expulsion of Azerbaijanis from Armenia can be traced back to multiple waves of persecution. Particularly significant periods of ethnic cleansing occurred in 1905-1906, 1918-1921, 1948-1953, and 1987-1991, during which Azerbaijanis were targeted based on their ethnicity. This was a process directly orchestrated by the leaders of Armenia who organized systematic efforts to drive out the Azerbaijani population through force and intimidation. Additionally, Soviet policies under Joseph Stalin further exacerbated the situation in the mid-20th century, with the transfer of Azerbaijani-majority regions like Zangezur to Armenia in 1921 and the deportation of tens of thousands of Azerbaijanis from Armenia in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

The latter half of the 20th century saw the continuation and intensification of these efforts, particularly during the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The Armenian SSR, between 1987 and 1991, initiated another wave of ethnic cleansing, leading to the mass displacement of Azerbaijanis from their ancestral lands. This period marked one of the darkest chapters in the history of Azerbaijani-Armenian relations, with Azerbaijanis being subjected to violence, harassment, and the destruction of their cultural heritage.

The consequences of these actions are still visible today, with Azerbaijan's historical and cultural sites in present-day Armenia being largely destroyed or neglected. Mosques, cemeteries, and other symbols of Azerbaijani heritage have been systematically erased, while the names of places with Azerbaijani origins have been altered. Furthermore, Armenia continues to publicly celebrate individuals involved in the ethnic cleansing of Azerbaijanis, reinforcing a national narrative that justifies these crimes.

This tragic legacy of injustice has fostered a sense of impunity among Armenia's leadership, encouraging them to assert territorial claims and engage in further acts of aggression against Azerbaijan. The use of military force, the occupation of internationally recognized Azerbaijani lands, and the perpetration of further crimes against humanity are all rooted in this historical context of ethnic cleansing and racial discrimination. Despite the international recognition of these events, the calls of the Azerbaijani community deported from Armenia, institutionalized as the Western Azerbaijani Community, for justice remain unanswered, and the return of Azerbaijanis to their former homes in Armenia remains an aspiration that faces significant political and security challenges.

This historical backdrop sheds light on why there are no Azerbaijanis in the modern territories of Armenia. The region's demographic landscape has been irrevocably altered by decades of state-sponsored violence and ethnic cleansing, leaving behind a legacy of exclusion, loss, and unresolved grievances.

Historical overview

The demographic landscape of the region today now known as Republic of Armenia has undergone dramatic transformations over the centuries, significantly altering its ethnic composition. The origins of these changes can be traced to decisions made during the Russian Empire's expansion in the Caucasus. On October 1, 1797, by decree of the Russian Tsar, the Armenian meliks of Iran and the Armenian population under their jurisdiction were granted Russian citizenship, and a decision was made to resettle them along the Caucasus Line. This move was part of a broader strategy to consolidate Russian influence in the region.

The Russian-Persian War, which concluded on February 10, 1828, with the Treaty of Turkmenchay, resulted in the incorporation of the Iravan and Nakhchivan Khanates into the Russian Empire. The subsequent establishment of the "Armenian Region" by Tsar Nicholas I on March 20, 1828, formalized these territories as part of Russia, setting the stage for future demographic changes. The decree of Nicholas I stated: "On the basis of the agreement concluded with Iran, I order that the Iravan and Nakhchivan Khanates, now part of Russia, be named as the "Armenian Region."

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the region was characterized by a significant Azerbaijani presence. Statistical records from the Caucasian Calendar reveal that Azerbaijanis often outnumbered Armenians in various districts of what is now Armenia¹. For example, in 1886, the Zangezour district of the Elizavetpol province contained 326 villages, with 149 (45.7 percent) Azerbaijani, 91 (27.9 percent) Kurdish, and 81 (24.8 percent) Armenian.² In 1889, the Azerbaijani population in the Zangezour district surpassed the Armenian population by nearly one and a half thousand people³. Similarly, in the Iravan province in 1891⁴,

1 Атахан Пашаев, 2018. Что это было: Геноцид или депортация? Available at: <http://milliarxiv.gov.az/az/chto-eto-bilo-genosid-ili-deportasiya>

2 Elizavetпольская губерния. Свод ст. данных, извлеченных из посемейных списков населения Кавказа Тифлис 1888. Стр. 5.

3 Elizavetпольская губерния. Свод ст. данных, извлеченных из посемейных списков населения Кавказа Тифлис 1888. Стр. 5.

4 Кавказский календарь на 1891г. отдел II, стр. 1-29. Available at: <https://viewer.rsl.ru/ru/>

Azerbaijanis accounted for nearly 270,400 of the 661,600 residents (41 percent). This population grew rapidly, reaching 276,000 by 1893 and nearly 313,000 by 1897⁵. According to the 1897 census, the Zangezur district had over 142,000 residents, with Azerbaijanis numbering 71,200 (50.1 percent) and Armenians 63,600 (44.8 percent)⁶.

The statistical data for the city of Iravan, where in 1896, out of 14.7 thousand city residents, 7.2 thousand were Azerbaijanis (49%) and 7.1 thousand were Armenians (48%)⁷. In the entire Iravan district, the number of Azerbaijanis exceeded the number of Armenians even more: out of 99 thousand people, 52.8 thousand were Azerbaijanis (53.5%) and 36.4 thousand were Armenians (48.4%); the same was true in the Surmalin district. In the Echmiadzin and Novobayazet districts, about thirty thousand Azerbaijanis lived in each, constituting just under a third of the total population of these districts⁸.

As of January 1, 1916, the ratio between the Azerbaijani and Armenian populations in these regions changed slightly, but Azerbaijanis still made up the majority in the Iravan district (74.2 thousand people, or 48%) and in the Zangezur district of the Elisabethpol Governorate (119.5 thousand people, or 53.3%)⁹. The number of Azerbaijanis also increased in the Surmaly district (to 45.9 thousand people) and the Novobayazet district (to 50.7 thousand people)¹⁰. Thus, the statistical data provided clearly demonstrates that by the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, a substantial Azerbaijani population resided on their ancestral lands within the territory of present-day Armenia.

rsl01003825010?page=1&rotate=0&theme=white

5 Кавказский календарь на 1894г., отдел V, ст. 19; 9. Available under the following link:

<https://viewer.rsl.ru/ru/rsl01003825007?page=1&rotate=0&theme=white>

6 Кавказский календарь на 1898г. III отдел. Стр. 56-59. Available under the following link: <https://viewer.rsl.ru/ru/rsl01003825003?page=1&rotate=0&theme=white>.

7 Кавказский календарь на 1897г. отдел V Стр. 58-59. Available at: <https://viewer.rsl.ru/ru/rsl01003825004?page=5&rotate=0&theme=white>

8 *ibid*

9 Кавказский календарь на 1917г. стат.отдел, стр. 190-197. Available at: <https://viewer.rsl.ru/ru/rsl01003824983?page=1&rotate=0&theme=white>

10 Кавказский календарь на 1917г. стат.отдел, стр. 214-221. Available at: <https://viewer.rsl.ru/ru/rsl01003824983?page=1&rotate=0&theme=white>

Attacks and intimidation against Azerbaijanis

The history of Azerbaijani displacement from Armenia is marked by a series of systematic and severe attacks that intensified throughout the 20th century. This pattern of intimidation was not an isolated phenomenon but part of a broader, state-orchestrated effort to alter the demographic composition of the region.

The post-World War II period saw a dramatic escalation in the forced relocation of Azerbaijanis from the Armenian SSR. On December 23, 1947, the USSR Council of Ministers issued a resolution, supported by Joseph Stalin, that sought to relocate the Azerbaijani population from Armenia to the Kura-Araz Plain in Azerbaijan. This decision was intertwined with the Armenian repatriation campaign, which aimed to bring Armenians from the diaspora back to Soviet Armenia. The forced resettlement of Azerbaijanis facilitated the accommodation of incoming Armenians by freeing up their homes and properties, resulting in the loss of Azerbaijani homes, lands, and cultural heritage.

The most egregious phase of ethnic cleansing occurred between 1987 and 1991. During this period, Armenia's aggressive policies, driven by territorial disputes with Azerbaijan, led to large-scale violence and the expulsion of Azerbaijani communities. This wave of ethnic cleansing was marked by unprecedented brutality and was actively supported by Armenian administrative and law enforcement agencies. The Armenians justified these actions by asserting that the lands inhabited by Azerbaijanis were historically Armenian.

A significant portion of the displaced Azerbaijanis were villagers who were forced to abandon their ancestral lands, including agricultural and pastoral properties that had been in their families for generations. Additionally, some refugees came from small industrial towns and urban centers such as the city of Iravan. Despite their deep roots, Azerbaijanis were persistently regarded as outsiders.

By December 2, 1988, the Azerbaijan SSR Council of Ministers reported that over 78,000 Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia had resettled in Azerbaijan. The 1989 All-Union census recorded 84,860 Azerbaijanis still residing in the Armenian SSR, who were subsequently expelled by 1990. These people initially lived in temporary resettlement facilities before being permanently relocated.

These attacks and intimidation against Azerbaijanis which culminated with their forced deportation and ethnic cleansing make it imperative to provide security guarantees for the Azerbaijanis upon their return to the modern Armenian territories. The concept of return of the Western Azerbaijani Community clearly underlines this necessity:

Due to the fact that the Armenian government has committed large-scale and systematic violence against the Azerbaijani population due to their ethnicity, the Community does not trust this country in security matters, and therefore, considers the deployment of an international security mission with an appropriate mandate and comprised of the forces of countries trusted by Western Azerbaijanis in the areas to be returned to as an essential condition.

The Community states that the mission should be established before the return of Azerbaijanis, with responsibilities including area control, civil-military coordination, and civil administration. The Community should be involved in shaping and managing the mission's mandate.

Deportation of Azerbaijanis

First Stage of Deportation, 1905-1906

Taking advantage of the unrest in Russia during 1905-1906, Armenians committed massacres against peaceful Azerbaijanis in the Baku, Irevan, Elizavetpol (Ganja), and Tiflis provinces. Armenian armed forces destroyed and expelled the Azerbaijani population from settlements along the Iravan-Nakhchivan-Zianguyazur-Karabakh and Gazakh-Ganja routes. They resettled Armenians in these territories, aiming to lay the foundation for the future state of “Great Armenia.” In the 1890s, more than 400 thousand Armenians (most of them armed) migrated to the South Caucasus from Turkey. Acting together, the Armenian church, Armenian political parties and the Armenian intelligentsia found a “solution” to resettle the families of Armenian refugees: expel the Azerbaijanis from their historical-ethnic lands, committing massacres, and resettle the Armenian families on Azerbaijanis territories. Research indicates that in 1905-1906, Armenian organizations, numbering more than 10,000 armed men, committed massacres in Baku, the city of Iravan and its surrounding villages, Etchmiadzin (Three Churches), Sharur-Derelayaz, and Nakhchivan districts. They also targeted the Goris, Gapan (Gafan), and Karakilsa regions of the Zangyazur district in the Elizavetopol (Ganja) province, as well as the Shusha, Javanshir, Dzhabrail, and Gazakh districts, the city of Tiflis, and Borchal. In total, more than 200 settlements were devastated.

Second Stage of Deportation, 1918-1920

At the beginning of the 20th century, Armenian nationalists initiated a systematic campaign of massacre and deportation against Azerbaijanis living in areas that would later become the Armenian SSR and are now part of the Republic of Armenia. For this to happen, ‘outlanders’, in this case Muslims (and therefore Azerbaijanis) had to be displaced from the lands. This would help with the establishment of cultural homogeneity.

In parallel with the massacre of Azerbaijanis in spring of 1918, perpetrated by Bolshevik and Dashnak militants of the Baku Council, similar events unfolded in the uyezds (districts) of the Iravan Governorate. The Dashnak regime killed or forcefully evicted 565,000 Azerbaijani Turks between 1918 and 1920¹¹. Around sixty percent of Azerbaijanis perished during the two years of Dashnak administration in 1918-1920¹².

In December 1920, Zangezur, which had originally been part of Azerbaijan, was transferred to Armenia. This transfer did not satisfy Armenian expansionist ambitions, which then extended to Karabakh and Nakhchivan. In 1921, Armenian efforts to incorporate the mountainous part of Karabakh into Armenia were unsuccessful. However, in July 1923, an autonomous region was artificially created in the mountainous part of Karabakh within the Azerbaijan SSR, largely due to Armenian influence and political maneuvering.

Between 1918 and 1920, Armenian armed forces wiped out numerous settlements: 58 in the Shemakha district, 112 in the Guba district, 323 in the Ganja province (including 166 in Zangezur and 157 in Karabakh), 300 in the Iravan province. Hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis were killed, and about a million were forced to leave their historical and ethnic lands.

In 1916, there were 373,582 Azerbaijanis registered in the Iravan province¹³. By November 1920, this number had drastically decreased to just 12,000 Azerbaijanis in the Armenian SSR. Following the establishment of Soviet power in Armenia, a small portion of Azerbaijanis managed to return to their homes. By 1922, there were 5,124 Azerbaijanis and 40,396 Armenians living in Iravan. This indicates that between 1918 and 1920, the Azerbaijani population decreased by 2.5 times, while the Armenian population increased by 4 times.

11 Karim Shukurov, (2010). Great Tragedy Deportation of Azerbaijanis from Armenia. 2010. <http://www.visions.az/en/news/233/19b4cf06>

12 Ibrahim, I. A. (2016). The Genocide of the Armenians against the Turkish Muslim population in the South Caucasus (1917-1920). *Eastern-European Scientific Journal*. Vol. 10(3). (pp. 42-46).

13 Nazim Mustafa, (2013). Toponymical genocide. <https://files.preslib.az/projects/qerbiazərbaycan/en/toponim.pdf>

The political and legal assessment of the massacres committed by Armenians against Azerbaijanis in the 19th and 20th centuries, including the deportation of Azerbaijanis, was formally addressed by President Heydar Aliyev of the Republic of Azerbaijan. On March 26, 1998, President Aliyev issued a decree titled “On the Genocide of Azerbaijanis,” which declared March 31 as the Day of Genocide of Azerbaijanis to commemorate all the tragedies of massacre committed against the Azerbaijani people.

Third Stage of Deportation, 1948-1953

On December 23, 1947, a resolution “On the resettlement of collective farmers and other Azerbaijani population from the Armenian SSR to the Kura-Aras Plain of the Azerbaijan SSR.” was adopted and signed by J. Stalin. The resolution of 1947 reveals its true intent in the final, 11th paragraph: “To allow the Council of Ministers of the Armenian SSR to use buildings and residential properties vacated by the Azerbaijani population, due to their resettlement to the Kura-Aras Plain of the Azerbaijan SSR, for the accommodation of foreign Armenians arriving in the Armenian SSR.” This clause makes it clear that the resettlement of Azerbaijanis from Armenia was part of a broader strategy to make way for Armenians arriving from abroad.

The second decision, No. 754 in official documentation, was issued on March 10, 1948, and ensured the implementation of the first decision. This resulted in approximately 150,000 Azerbaijanis being driven out of their homeland, particularly from Zangezur (Syunik in Armenian) region, with some adverse effects on the region’s population and culture¹⁴. Azerbaijanis had to abandon their homes, lands, and cultural heritage. Many cultural and religious landmarks were abandoned or destroyed, with the underlying aim of eliminating the Azerbaijani footprint from the region’s cultural and societal fabric. This policy was part of a deeper strategy that aimed to permanently relocate Armenians to

14 Bahramov, J. (2022). The Crime of Armenian Fascism Against the Azerbaijani People Based on Historical Facts. *International Scientific Journal: the Caucasus and the World*. Vol. 24, (pp.79-95). <https://doi.org/10.52340/ isj.2022.24.16>

these areas, including those living abroad in the Americas, Europe, and the Middle East¹⁵. Soviet authorities pursued a similar policy with the deportations of Chechens and Ingushes, Balkars and Karachays, and other nationalities to Kazakhstan and Central Asia.

It is important to highlight the stark contrast between the treatment of Azerbaijanis and Armenians during these periods. Azerbaijanis who were displaced from the Armenian SSR were forced to leave their long-established homes under harsh conditions, often facing humiliation and insults. In contrast, in Azerbaijan, extensive measures were taken to support and promote the Armenian community. For decades, key government positions in Azerbaijan were predominantly occupied by individuals of Armenian nationality, including roles such as secretaries of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, deputy chairmen of the Supreme Council, and ministers and their deputies. This disproportionate representation occurred despite the fact that the majority of the population in Azerbaijan was Azerbaijani.

Fourth Stage of Deportation, 1987-1991

The fourth wave of Azerbaijani expulsions from Armenia happened between 1987 and 1991. Azerbaijanis, once again, experienced brutal deportations that were enforced and supported by the Armenian government and police.¹⁶ Residents were forced to leave behind their homes, pastures, crops, and gardens that their families had developed for generations. The upward trend in the brutality with which Azerbaijanis were treated coincided with a rise of nationalism in Armenia. Slogans such as “Turk-less Armenia”, “Armenia should be cleansed of Turks!” and “Armenia is only for Armenians!” were being spread and widely utilized¹⁷.

15 Hamidov, H. (2018). Armenian Genocide against the Azerbaijani People, Educational Research International, Vol. 7(4). Available at: <http://www.erint.savap.org.pk/PDF/Vol.7.4/ER-Int.2018-7.4-02.pdf>

16 Кавказский календарь на 1917г. стат.отдел, стр. 214-221. Available at: <https://viewer.rsl.ru/ru/rsl01003824983?page=1&rotate=0&theme=white>

17 Huseynova, L. (2022). The issue of genocide and deportation of Azerbaijanis in the focus of the state (1993- 2003). Colloquium-journal. Vol. 14(137). (pp. 14-16). Available at: <https://journals.indexcopernicus.com/api/file/viewByFileId/1527425>

Moreover, those Azerbaijanis that did gather to protest and offer some kind of resistance were met with equally brutal actions, such as having their properties confiscated and even destroyed. Armenian nationalists argued that the deportation of Azerbaijanis was a response to violence against Armenians in Azerbaijan, especially in Sumgayit on February 27, 1988.

However, the first attacks against Azerbaijanis in Armenia happened before the event in Sumgayit. As early as in the fall of 1987, there was already violence against Azerbaijanis in Armenia. This became more large-scale and widespread by the beginning of February 1988¹⁸. In June 1988, the Armenian SSR Supreme Soviet requested the USSR Supreme Soviet to approve the annexation of Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast and formally declare it as part of Armenia. This request was rejected, leading to an even more complex and brutal situation for local Azerbaijanis who now had to endure more intense aggression against them. The villages of Zangiler, Zahmet, Demirchi, Dostlug, Nizami, and Sarvanlar, as well as the regional headquarters of Masis, were attacked by Armenian gangs on June 17-20. Over the course of one night, tens of thousands of Azerbaijanis relocated to the Soviet-Turkish border. Masis, for example, witnessed the forced removal of almost 3,000 residents.

The USSR's Ministry of Internal Affairs had no active part during any of these riots, largely acting as passive observers. Refugees were housed in transitional resettlement centers before being transferred to their new permanent communities. The Azerbaijani side estimates 250,000 Azerbaijanis were deported from Armenia in 1987-1991, with 216 killed and 1,154 wounded (president.az). De Waal (2003) maintains that about 186,000 Azerbaijanis along with 18,000 Kurdish Muslims and 3,500 Russians became refugees from Armenia – total 207,500 people. This issue has undoubtedly exacerbated tensions between Azerbaijan and Armenia. A complete lack of accountability for these actions resulted from the Soviet leadership's reluctance to move away from its

18 De Waal, T. (2003). *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*. New York University Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qg51h>

policy of placing equal blame on both sides of the conflict, regardless of the specific circumstances of a given tragedy or process.

Hence, the central authority regularly penalized individual managers, ministers, or law enforcement agents, but failed to address the broader humanitarian and political ramifications of the issue.¹⁹ This neglect allowed the problem to persist in all areas where Armenians and Azerbaijanis coexisted.²⁰ The suffering endured by thousands became a significant part of modern Azerbaijani political and societal discourse. Displaced Azerbaijanis faced profound changes and obstacles, many of which were never fully overcome. This issue warrants thorough investigation, as it constitutes a serious violation of international human rights law.

19 Yavuz, M. H., & Gunter, M. M. (2022). The Historical Background to the Continuing Conflict Over Nagorno-Karabakh. In: *The Karabakh Conflict Between Armenia and Azerbaijan: Causes & Consequences*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. (pp. 13-32). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-16262-6_2

20 Kucera, J. (2023). Azerbaijan seeks “Great Return” of refugees to Armenia. Retrieved from <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-seeks-great-return-of-refugees-to-armenia>

Erasure of the cultural heritage

The territory of present-day Armenia, historically part of Azerbaijani lands, was once home to numerous significant historical and architectural monuments, including caravanserais, palaces, mosques, mausoleums, cemeteries, tombs, and gravestones. Following the establishment of the first Armenian state on historical Azerbaijani lands in 1918, there was widespread destruction of Azerbaijani material and cultural heritage. Armenians systematically vandalized and erased countless historical monuments, including those within the Iravan fortress, such as the Ancient Shahar (City) Mosque, Blue (Goy) Mosque, Haji Novruzalibek Mosque, Haji Imamverdi Mosque, Mirzasafibek Mosque, Haji Jafarbek Mosque, and Haji Ilyas Mosque. Only the Blue (Goy) Mosque, which is today presented as Iranian and has been donated to the representatives of Iran, has not yet been destroyed²¹. In 1915, there were 38 Shiite mosques in the Zangezur district, and 382 Shiite and 9 Sunni Muslim mosques throughout Iravan province. The scarcity of Sunni mosques indicates that the province's population was predominantly Shiite.

Iravan Fortress

Iravan Fortress, constructed in 1504 by order of Safavid ruler Shah Ismayil I, was built by his vizier Ravangulu Khan on the banks of the Zangi River, in what is now the city of Iravan (Yerevan). The fortress was named Ravan or Iravan in honor of the vizier. Historical records indicate that the fortress housed 800 residences and 8 mosques. After its capture by Russian forces in 1827, a detailed draft confirmed the fortress's dimensions: 850 meters in length and 790 meters in width, covering an area of 7 hectares.

21 ErevanGala500 (2000), "Фальсификации в книге С.Карпетяна «Памятники армянской культуры в зоне Нагорного Карабаха», available at: <https://erevangala500.com/page/253.html> (Accessed: 26 April 2021).



The city's Turkic character had also impressed the Ottoman Sultans. Following the Revan campaign and the conquest of the city by Ottoman Sultan Murat IV, he constructed the famous Revan Mansion²² at the Topkapı Palace in 1635.



Iravan Fortress²³

22 “Yerevan’s Azerbaijani Past,” AVİM, avim.org.tr, 23 October 2020, <https://avim.org.tr/en/Yorum/YEREVAN-S-AZERBAIJANI-PAST>.

23 Evliya Chalabi, *Səyahatname*” A. Alakbarli, *Monuments of Western Azerbaijan* (2007)

The fortress, square in shape, featured double walls standing 10.5 to 12 meters high, with a single-layer wall running along the Zangi River. Iravan Fortress had three gates: the Tabriz Gate to the south, the Shirvan (Meydan) Gate, and the Bridge Gate to the north. Following the Russian occupation, the fortress was declared state property. In the 1850s, it underwent repairs and construction, and Russian military units, along with numerous cannons, were stationed there. The fortress served as a military fortification until March 12, 1864. After its official abandonment, local residents dismantled the stones from its walls and towers. By the 1880s, the buildings and defensive structures within the fortress had vanished. The complete destruction of the castle occurred in the 1930s.

Zal Khan Mosque

Zal Khan Mosque was a famous mosque situated in the City section, one of the oldest parts of Yerevan. According to Henry Lynch, the mosque was constructed in 1687 and featured inscriptions in Azerbaijani Turkish using Arabic script. This indicates that the mosque, located between the Gala and Tepebaşı massifs of Yerevan, was built after the 1679 earthquake. The mosque's yard and garden bore a resemblance to the Blue Mosque. In 1928, the great hall of the mosque was demolished to make way for the "Iravan" hotel. Following reconstruction efforts in 1999, the site was renamed "Golden Tulip Hotel Yerevan." The two-story building of the mosque was repurposed as an exhibition hall.

Approximately 250,000 Azerbaijanis lived in Armenia until the eruption of the conflict and the expulsion of the Azerbaijanis from Armenia during 1987–89. Many Muslim sites have been desecrated and destroyed and the rest have been intentionally misrepresented as belonging to Persian heritage. The Sardar Mosque (1785), built in honor of Shah Abbas, or the Rajab Pasha Mosque (1725), built in honor of Turkish commander Rajab Pasha, both destroyed during the first years of Soviet Armenia (1924), are only few that must be mentioned. The destruction of Azerbaijani Muslim heritage continued after the inde-

pendence of Armenia. Azerbaijani researcher Nazim Mustafa, in his book *Irean City*, refers to the destruction of madrasas, mosques, and sanctuaries²⁴.



*Zal Khan Mosque*²⁵

Among the destroyed sites described is a Muslim sanctuary that those who were forced to flee Iravan still remember; in its place, currently, is a French school. British journalist Thomas de Waal also describes his visit to Demirboulag Mosque which, unlike the Blue Mosque that was presented as part of Persian heritage, was simply demolished. Here, he refers to the narrative of an old Armenian woman who considered the building to be “useless” after the conflict between Azerbaijanis and Armenians erupted and admitted that Armenians destroyed it with a bulldozer in three days. Moreover, de Waal argues in *Black Garden* that “when the Armenians refer to the ‘Persian mosque’ in Yerevan, that name obscures the fact that most of the worshippers there,

24 N. Mustafa (2020), *Irean City* (Baku: Center of Analysis of International Relations), p. 237-238.

25 N. Mustafa, (2016) *Iravan Khanate: Eradication of Armenian Vandals Iravan Mosques*

when it was built in the 1760s, would have been, in effect, Azerbaijanis.”²⁶ Anthropologist and ethnographer Tsypylma Darieva considers that “the Blue mosque served as a Friday mosque for Yerevan’s Muslim (mostly Azeri-speaking) population, until the middle of the 1920s when it was closed under pressure from the anti-religion campaign.”²⁷ The Blue Mosque in Iravan was reconstructed as a relic of Persian cultural heritage. Moreover, according to the agreement signed between the governments of Iran and Armenia in 1995, the Iranian government financed the reconstruction expenses of the Blue Mosque. During its “reconstruction,” the architectural style of the building was changed²⁸.

After Soviet power was established in Armenia, a master plan for the city of Iravan was approved in 1924. Many researchers confirm that the main goal of this master plan, developed under the leadership of Alexander Tamanyan, was the complete destruction of Azerbaijani historical and architectural monuments. In 1936, a new master plan was developed, leading to the construction of modern high-rise buildings within the fortress.

The Haji Novruzali Bey Mosque

The Haji Novruzali Bey Mosque, situated in the Novruzali quarter of the city, was an architectural gem built in the second half of the 18th century by Kara Seyid. This mosque, notable for its singular minaret.

26 T. de Waal (2003), *Black Garden* (New York and London: New York University Press) p. 80.

27 Tsypylma Darieva (2016), “Prayer house or cultural centre? Restoring a mosque in post-socialist Armenia, Central Asian Survey”, available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02634937.2016.1140374> (Accessed: 24 April 2021).

28 Azertag (2020), “Hikmet Hajiyev: The Armenian government, which calls itself democratic, should first of all dismantle the monuments to fascist executioners”, available at: https://azertag.az/en/xeber/Hikmet_Hajiyev_The_Armenian_government_which_calls_itself_democratic_should_first_of_all_dismantle_the_monuments_to_fascist_executioners-1482951.



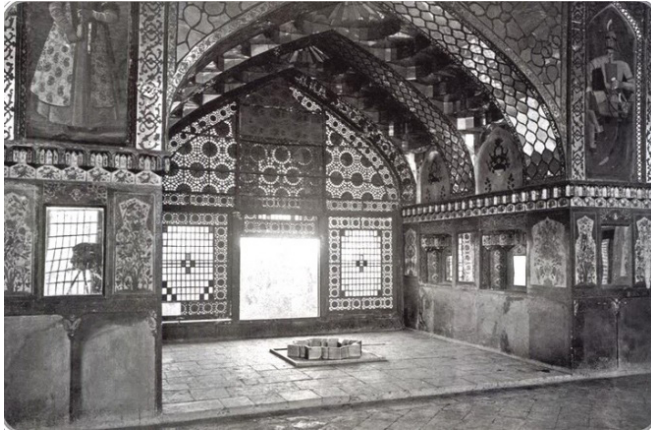
*The Haji Novruzali Bey Mosque*²⁹

During the period 1918-1920 and the early Soviet era, Armenian refugees from Türkiye were housed in the mosque. Unfortunately, this historical and cultural landmark was later destroyed by Armenians.

The Palace of Sardar

The Palace of Sardar, also known as the Khan's Palace, stands as a testament to Azerbaijani architecture and history. Built in 1578 by Tokhmag Khan, the Beylerbey of Irbayjan, this masterpiece was strategically situated near a large garden on the right bank of the Zangi River, enhancing its grandeur.

²⁹ Nazim Mustafa, (2016) Irbayjan Khanate: Irbayjan Mosques Destroyed by Armenian Vandals



*The Palace of Sardar*³⁰

The complex gained further prominence in 1791 when Muhammad Khan Qajar added the Hall of Mirrors and the Summer Palace in the Khan Garden, completing the palace ensemble. The palace underwent significant renovations in 1810 under the rule of Huseyngulu Khan, with new buildings added to expand its footprint. Notable among its features were the exquisite wall paintings, completed in 1815 by Mir Abdurza Khan, a prominent artist of the Tabriz school of painting.

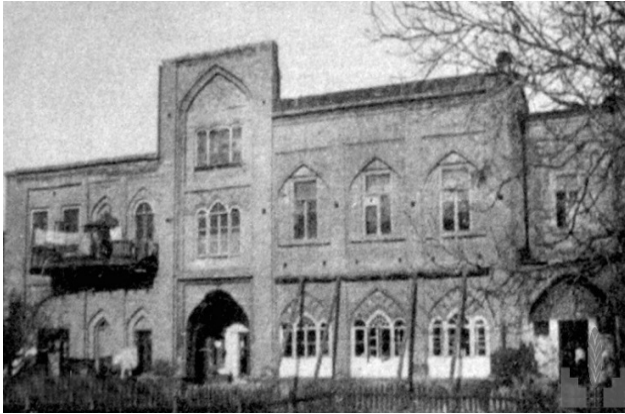
Following the Russian occupation of Iravan in 1827, the palace suffered severe damage. According to a city plan from 1837, the palace covered approximately 1 hectare. It saw renovations in the mid-19th century, and between 1867 and 1874, restoration efforts were carried out by Mirza Kadym Iravani.

However, the early 20th century marked the decline of the Sardar Palace. By 1914, it had fallen into complete ruin, with its artworks, including portraits, dismantled and taken to Georgia, where they are now preserved in the State Museum of Georgia. After the demolition of the palace, a brandy factory was built on its former site, erasing the last remnants of this architectural and historical treasure.

³⁰ A. Alakbarli (2007), *Monuments of Western Azerbaijan*

Khan's house

At the end of the former Panah Khan, later known as Azizbeyov Street, stands a notable building known to Iravan residents as the “Khan’s house.” While some, like Gasparyan, identified it as a residential house in the Demirbulag quarter, its distinct Islamic architectural features suggest it may have originally served as a madrasa, a Muslim spiritual school.



*Khan's house*³¹

In the early years of Soviet rule, this building hosted a Turkish women’s club, which was initially called the “Muslim Women’s Club” before being renamed in honor of Clara Zetkin. Over time, the building transitioned from a cultural center to a residential house, a function it still serves today. However, some of its original architectural elements, such as the brick entrance wall, have been destroyed, altering the historic character of the structure.

The Sardar Mosque

The Sardar Mosque, also known as the “Khan Mosque” or “Abbas Mirza Mosque,” was built in the 1810s and was a significant example

31 I. Mammadov (2009), Iravan notebook III (2009)

of architectural heritage in the Iravan region. After the Russian occupation, the mosque's purpose shifted, reflecting the changing political landscape. In August 1843, August von Haxthausen noted that the Sardar Mosque, located within the Iravan fortress, had been repurposed as a barracks by the Russian military.



*The Sardar Mosque*³²

By 1864, after Russian troops ceased using the Iravan fortress for military purposes. In the early 1900s, the mosque served as temporary housing for Armenians who migrated from the Ottoman Empire. During the Soviet era, the mosque suffered further damage and neglect, and residential houses were eventually constructed on its site. The mosque, a valuable piece of cultural history, was ultimately demolished in November 2014, erasing a significant architectural legacy.

The Tepebashi Mosque

The Tepebashi Mosque, whose exact construction date remains uncertain, is thought to have existed as early as the 1840s, with some

32 A. Alakbarli (2007), *Monuments of Western Azerbaijan*

sources suggesting it was built in 1687. However, it is likely that the mosque dates back even further, to the 17th or 18th century. According to some accounts, the mosque was commissioned by Abbasgulu Khan Iravanski, a member of the Iravan city administration.



*The Tepebashi Mosque*³³

Located in the Tepebashi residential area, the mosque was constructed entirely of bricks, with walls 1.5 meters thick. The mosque once featured a striking main dome adorned with glazed mosaic tiles in a rhombic pattern, similar to other mosques in Iravan. Unfortunately, this dome has since been destroyed, as seen in historical photographs.

The mosque's minaret collapsed in the 1960s, and over time, slums were built within and around its courtyard. Currently, the mosque stands in ruins, with Armenian families inhabiting the remains of the mosque and the imam's room, reflecting the complex and changing history of the site.

³³ Nazim Mustafa (2016), Iravan Khanate: Iravan Mosques Destroyed by Armenian Vandals

The Sartib Khan Mosque

The Sartib Khan Mosque, one of the eight mosques listed in the city of Iravan, was documented between 1906 and 1911 by B. Mehrabov, who served as a technical officer of the city. This mosque was part of Iravan's rich architectural heritage and reflected the city's historical Islamic influence.



*The Sartib Khan Mosque*³⁴

During the tumultuous years of 1918-1920 and the early Soviet period, Armenian refugees fleeing from the Ottoman Empire were temporarily housed in the Sartib Khan Mosque, illustrating the complex shifts in the region's demographics and the mosque's changing role. Unfortunately, the mosque was destroyed in the 1980s, leading to the loss of another significant piece of Iravan's cultural and architectural history.

34 Ibid

The Kekilli shrine

The Kekilli shrine, located on the road to the area known as “Sher-qmesha” near the Yukhari Giretagh village in the Gafan district of Zangezur mahal, was a significant burial site for Seyid Mir Ahmed Agha, a prominent religious figure of Zangilan, along with several of his relatives.



*The Kekilli shrine*³⁵

In the 1950s, the original tomb of Mir Ahmed Agha was destroyed by Armenians, and his remains were subsequently moved to the village of Pirjavidan. There, his son, Mir Ali Agha, honored his father by constructing a new tomb over his grave. Unfortunately, the Kekilli shrine itself was later destroyed by Armenian vandals.

35 A. Alakbarli, (2007), Monuments of Western Azerbaijan

Azerbaijanis' efforts to return to their homeland and legal foundations

Azerbaijanis expelled from present-day Armenia have made concerted efforts to return to their ancestral lands through organized initiatives and legal frameworks. One of the key organizations leading these efforts is the “Western Azerbaijan Community,” originally established in 1989 as the “Society of Azerbaijani Refugees”. In 2022, it was renamed to better reflect its mission of advocating for the rights of Azerbaijanis displaced from Armenia. The Community has positioned itself as the legitimate representative of these refugees and has expressed its intent to actively participate in the return process, engaging in dialogue with relevant states and international organizations. The concept of the Community declares that “as a legitimate representative of Western Azerbaijanis for decades, the Community will play an active role in the return process, will make efforts to conduct dialogue and cooperation with the relevant states and international organizations as an interested party and will strive to be recognized as the legitimate interlocutor by them.”

On March 11, 2023, the Western Azerbaijani Community reached out to Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, urging him to engage sincerely in discussions to rectify the long-standing injustices inflicted upon displaced Azerbaijanis. The letter sought to address the enduring suffering caused by these wrongs. The representatives of the Community made it clear that their desire to return to their homeland by no means is a plot against Armenia’s territorial integrity and sovereignty:

To be clear, our demands for the peaceful return to our homes should not be misinterpreted or misrepresented as being detrimental to the territorial integrity or sovereignty of Armenia. As the Government of Azerbaijan pledged and took actionable measures to ensure the rights of Armenian residents of the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan within its territorial integrity and sovereignty, the Government of Armenia must reciprocate by taking tangible steps to guarantee our rights.

Taking into account all those, we call on you to start talks with us on our return without further delay. Whereas we are always ready for a direct dialogue with the Government of Armenia on issues of mutual concern, the return process and subsequent ensuring our individual and collective rights shall be addressed within an appropriate international mechanism.

To the detriment of the efforts for peace and reconciliation between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the Armenian government did not respond to this letter and to the request of the Community for dialogue. Instead of responding to these calls for peaceful co-existence, Armenia persisted in encouraging and intensifying separatist movements among ethnic Armenians residing in Azerbaijan. The government of Armenia and then the Armenian separatist forces in the Karabakh region undermined Azerbaijan's efforts to reintegrate the local Armenians to the constitutional framework of Azerbaijan. The separatist leaders declined Baku's calls for meetings in Azerbaijan or in a European city to discuss the reintegration of Armenians. This led to the collapse of the peace efforts and the launch of anti-terror operations by the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan against the military structures of the separatist regime in September 2023. One-day military operations of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces resulted in the collapse of the separatist entity and restoration of Azerbaijan's sovereignty over the entire territories within the country's internationally recognized borders.

Based on the right to return as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, and other key international agreements, proper conditions must be established to allow Azerbaijanis displaced from what is now Armenia to return to their homeland and to safeguard their individual and collective rights upon their return. UN High Commission for Refugees is seen by the Western Azerbaijan community as the priority partner to carry out the return process in an organized and effective manner. By signing international legal agreements like the UN Charter, Armenia has undertaken certain commitments which include specific responsibilities regarding

the restoration and protection of the rights of Azerbaijanis who were expelled from its territory. This includes ensuring their safe and dignified return to their homeland.

Western Azerbaijanis who were expelled from what is now Armenia possess an inherent, inviolable, and absolute right to return to their homeland, a right that is central and non-negotiable. This right is enshrined in key international legal instruments. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserts in Article 13(2) that “Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country”. Similarly, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), in Article 12(4), emphasizes that “No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of the right to enter his own country.” These provisions underscore that the right to return is fundamental and cannot be contingent on the issuance of documents. According to international humanitarian law, such documentation is a procedural formality and does not create or negate the inherent right to return. The obligation to facilitate this right and ensure the issuance of necessary documents falls squarely on the state, as outlined in international legal obligations and standards.

On March 30, 2023, Prosecutor General Kamran Aliyev initiated a criminal case under Articles 103 (Genocide), 107 (Deportation or Forced Relocation of Population), 109 (Persecution), and 120.2-4, 120.2.7 (Intentional Homicide) of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The investigation has been entrusted to the Investigation Department of the Republic’s Prosecutor General’s Office. During the public hearings on “Return to West Azerbaijan: legal aspects” on 25 September 2023 at the Azerbaijani Parliament, Deputy Prosecutor General Elmar Camalov stated during the mass deportation and massacre that occurred between 1987 and 1991, 216 individuals were killed by Armenians in Western Azerbaijan. The close relatives of 30 of these individuals, as well as witnesses to the events, have been identified and interviewed: ‘They have been recognized as legal heirs of the victims. Additionally, it has been determined that 15 individuals were injured by Armenians using various objects during their deportation from Western

Azerbaijan. These individuals and their relatives have been identified and interviewed as victims or legal heirs of the victims.’

Aziz Alakbarli, Chairman of the Western Azerbaijan Community, emphasized that the last deportation in 1987-1991 was no different from the previous ones in its cruelty and brutality: ‘Our compatriots were expelled from their ancestral lands in Western Azerbaijan using the same brutal methods. During this process, over 200 of our compatriots were brutally killed by Armenians, more than 400 people were injured, nearly 300 settlements were vacated by Azerbaijanis, and individuals suffered material damage amounting to 2.5 billion USD for private properties and 17.5 billion USD for public properties. If we also account for the damage to underground and above-ground resources and historical-cultural monuments, the damage would likely be several times higher. The moral damage cannot be compensated by any amount of money.’”

Concluding remarks

The forced expulsion of Azerbaijanis from their ancestral lands in what is now Armenia, coupled with the systematic erasure of their cultural heritage, represents a profound and ongoing injustice that continues to challenge efforts toward peace and reconciliation in the South Caucasus. For more than a century, Azerbaijanis in the region have faced a relentless campaign of displacement, ethnic cleansing, cultural erasure, and denial of their historical presence, particularly following the establishment of the Armenian state in 1918. Despite these historical wrongs, the Western Azerbaijani Community remains steadfast in advocating for the peaceful return of Azerbaijanis to their homeland.

Through legal frameworks enshrined in international conventions, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Azerbaijanis possess the inalienable right to return to their homes. Yet, the Armenian government's refusal to engage in meaningful dialogue and its continued territorial claims against Azerbaijan undermine this fundamental right. Efforts to reintegrate Armenian residents in Azerbaijan stand in stark contrast to Armenia's reluctance to address the grievances of Azerbaijanis expelled from its territory.

Moreover, the systematic destruction and misrepresentation of Azerbaijani cultural heritage in present-day Armenia compound the challenges faced by the displaced population. Mosques, mausoleums, and architectural monuments – once proud symbols of Azerbaijani history – have been either erased or falsely attributed to foreign cultures. This cultural erasure is not only a historical crime but also an obstacle to genuine reconciliation between the two nations.

As Azerbaijanis seek to return to their homeland, the international community must play a crucial role in ensuring that Armenia upholds its commitments under international law. The preservation of

Azerbaijani heritage must be central to any peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Only through such measures can lasting peace and justice be achieved, allowing Azerbaijanis to reclaim their rightful place in the lands from which they were unjustly expelled.



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This report was jointly prepared by the
Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center)
and the Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM).

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