

# BULLETIN

HIGHLIGHT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

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## **I. Azerbaijan conducts a local counter-terrorism operation in Garabagh**

On September 19, the Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan launched a local counter-terrorism operation in order to disarm illegal armed formations in Garabagh. Azerbaijan, compelled to act in defense of its sovereignty and the safety of its citizens, launched a counter-terrorism operation. This decisive action was not an impulsive reaction but a measured response to a series of provocations and threats that could no longer be ignored. The backdrop to this operation was marked by Armenia's continued territorial claims and its unyielding support for separatism within Azerbaijani territory. The trigger came in the form of a tragic incident. On September 19, two civilians and four police officers became the victims of landmine explosions, a direct result of subversive acts by Armenian armed formations. The area, previously safe and regularly used, bore witness to the infiltration of Armenian sabotage groups who planted these deadly devices. A vehicle belonging to the Azerbaijan State Agency for Automobile Roads was tragically hit by a landmine, a sinister act orchestrated by the reconnaissance-subversion groups of Armenia's armed forces. This incident, occurring on the Ahmadbayli-Fuzuli-Shusha Road in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, claimed the lives of two civilians. On the same day, another explosion struck a vehicle carrying military personnel of the Internal Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, leading to additional fatalities and injuries. These were not isolated incidents but a

continuation of Armenia's intentional and planned policy of terror against Azerbaijan.

The Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan had, on numerous occasions, highlighted the persistent threat posed by the continued presence of Armenia's armed forces in the Karabakh region. Despite the Trilateral Statement signed on November 10, 2020, which was meant to herald a new era of peace and cooperation, Armenia's actions have been a source of grave concern, undermining regional peace and stability. In response to these provocations, Azerbaijan initiated local anti-terror measures. The objectives were clear and necessary - to enforce the provisions of the Trilateral Statement, quell the large-scale provocations in the Karabakh economic region, disarm and facilitate the withdrawal of Armenia's armed forces, neutralize their military infrastructure, and ensure the safety of the civilian population and military personnel. The ultimate goal was to restore the constitutional order of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan's response was swift but measured. The counter-terrorism operation aimed at neutralizing the imminent threat posed by illegal armed formations within its sovereign territory. Every action was in line with the nation's rights under the UN Charter and international law. The operation was limited, proportionate, and exclusively targeted at neutralizing legitimate military threats. Azerbaijan's commitment to international humanitarian law was evident throughout the operation. The armed forces, in an exemplary display of professionalism, used high-precision ammunition to neutralize illegal military installations, avoiding collateral damage to

civilians and civilian infrastructure. Public statements and notifications were issued, urging civilians to stay away from military installations. The operation, though necessitated by unfortunate circumstances, achieved its set goals. It underscored the fact that the respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity is not a negotiable principle but a foundational tenet of international relations. The cessation of the operation on September 20, following puppet regime's agreement to disarm and disband its illegal structures, marked a significant milestone.

In a televised address, President Ilham Aliyev announced that Azerbaijan's conditions were accepted by the puppet regime in Garabagh. A significant shift in the dynamics of the conflict was observed as representatives of the Armenian community, who had previously refused to engage in dialogue, agreed to meet in Yevlakh. This meeting, unmediated by any third party, marked a pivotal moment in the ongoing conflict. The Armenian government, led by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, opted for restraint, choosing not to militarily intervene during the clashes. The aftermath of the operation saw a ceasefire and the initiation of talks that culminated in an agreement on disarming and dissolving of the illegal armed groups in Garabagh. The accord stipulated the full withdrawal of Armenian armed forces and the complete disarmament of the puppet regime, marking a significant step towards the restoration of peace and stability in the region.

The reintegration of the Garabagh region into Azerbaijan was underscored by practical steps to ensure the rights and security of the Armenians. Baku responded positively to requests for humanitarian assistance,

providing fuel, food, and other essential supplies to the Armenian residents. The restoration of electricity supply to Garabagh, connecting it to Azerbaijan's energy grid, further symbolized the region's reintegration.

Russian peacekeepers reported the commencement of the handover of weapons by the illegal entity to Azerbaijan, a development that underscored the tangible progress being made on the ground. The move of local Armenians to Armenia via the Lachin checkpoint was facilitated, and humanitarian aid was delivered to the region by both Russian peacekeepers and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

In the aftermath of the 24-hour anti-terrorist operation launched by Azerbaijan on September 19, a fragile yet significant hope for peace emerges between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The echoes of war are giving way to conversations of reconciliation and coexistence, albeit amidst an atmosphere of deep-seated mistrust and historical animosities. Interviews with Armenians at the Lachin checkpoint, as reported by Azerbaijani media, revealed a nostalgic reminiscence of peaceful coexistence with Azerbaijanis during the Soviet era. Azerbaijan took steps to reassure Armenians remaining in Garabagh. Baku did not just stop at reassurances. A comprehensive reintegration process of Garabagh into Azerbaijan's legal framework is underway. A working group, comprising various government agencies, has been established to address social, humanitarian, economic, and infrastructure issues in Garabagh. In a gesture of reconciliation, Baku also offered amnesty to Armenian fighters in Garabagh who lay down their arms, a move

indicative of Azerbaijan's commitment to peace and stability.

The dissolution of the puppet regime on September 28, marked a pivotal moment in the protracted conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia. This development, catalyzed by Azerbaijan's swift restoration of sovereignty over the area, has not only redefined the geopolitical landscape of the South Caucasus but also breathed life into the prospects of a lasting peace. The reintegration of the Armenian population of the Garabagh region into Azerbaijani society is a cornerstone of the peace negotiations. Baku has initiated comprehensive measures to facilitate this process, extending an olive branch to those who left the region to return and obtain Azerbaijani passports. The administration has pledged to guarantee the freedom of religion and the protection of cultural and religious monuments for Karabakh Armenians, a commitment corroborated by the assessment of the United Nations mission to Garabagh.

However, the road to peace is not without its challenges. Azerbaijan has expressed concerns over the one-sided approach of international observers and institutions. The plight of over 250,000 Azerbaijanis who were forcibly expelled from their homes in Armenia in the late 1980s has been conspicuously absent from the international agenda. Baku is advocating for an all-inclusive peace process that addresses the concerns and interests of all parties involved, including the Azerbaijani refugees.

"The experience of restoring our territorial integrity is a very unique phenomenon. We have put an end to the conflict", President

Ilham Aliyev underscored in the aftermath of the counter-terrorist operation. "Today we can enter the era of peace in the South Caucasus", he emphasized. President Aliyev also rejected the fearmongering claims about Azerbaijan's plans to invade the territory of the south part of Armenia. "Had we harbored such intentions, we wouldn't have ceased military operations on September 20", President Ilham Aliyev noted on September 29.

The counter-terrorism measures of September 19-20, stand as a testament to Azerbaijan's unwavering commitment to its sovereignty and international humanitarian law. The counter-terrorism operation, a response to the subversive acts by illegal Armenian armed formations, was executed with precision, professionalism, and an acute awareness of the humanitarian imperatives that govern conflicts. The operation was precipitated by a series of provocations, including the explosion of mines planted by an Armenian sabotage group, leading to the tragic loss of civilian and military lives. Azerbaijan's response, though firm, was measured and aligned with the principles enshrined in the UN Charter. The armed forces, equipped with high-precision ammunition, focused on neutralizing legitimate military targets, ensuring minimal collateral damage and safeguarding civilian lives and infrastructure.

Public statements and notifications underscored Baku's commitment to transparency and civilian safety. Civilians were urged to distance themselves from military installations, a move that further attested to the nation's adherence to international humanitarian norms. The operation, though brief, highlighted the enduring challenges in

the South Caucasus and the imperative for a comprehensive peace that addresses the root causes of the conflict. The cessation of the operation on September 20 and the subsequent dissolution of the puppet regime on September 28 marked not just the end of military engagement but the beginning of a renewed focus on the reintegration of the ethnic Armenian residents of the Garabagh region into Azerbaijani society. Baku's commitment to ensuring the rights and freedoms of every citizen, irrespective of their ethnic background, is a cornerstone of its national policy and international obligations.

The unfolding events in the aftermath of the operation are indicative of the complexities that characterize the South Caucasus. The international community, now more than ever, is called upon to play a constructive role in supporting peace, stability, and justice in the region. The respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity stands as a non-negotiable principle, foundational to the architecture of international relations. As Azerbaijan navigates the aftermath of the operation, its commitment to international humanitarian law and the rights of all its citizens remains unwavering.

The September 19-20 operation is not just a chapter in the annals of the nation's history but a clarion call for a comprehensive and lasting peace. A peace rooted in respect for international law, the territorial integrity of nations, and the indomitable spirit of a region that has, for too long, been defined by conflict. In the ashes of confrontation, lies the seed of reconciliation, and the unwavering hope for a South Caucasus marked by peace, prosperity, and mutual respect.

## **II. Debunking the misinformation campaign against Azerbaijan after the counter-terrorism operation in Garabagh**

Armenia's recent attempt to manipulate the UN Security Council as a platform for disseminating misleading narratives is a deplorable act that warrants international attention. The country's appeal to the Council, rooted in Azerbaijan's legitimate counter-terrorism measures within its own borders, is a blatant violation of the UN Charter's principles of respecting state sovereignty and non-interference.

Azerbaijan's actions, conducted in strict adherence to international law, including international humanitarian law, were aimed at neutralizing the threat posed by Armenian armed formations illegally stationed on Azerbaijani soil. Armenia's misuse of the Security Council not only undermines the body's authority but also contradicts the ongoing dialogue for the reintegration of ethnic Armenian residents in the Garabagh region of Azerbaijan.

The Special Representative of the Government of Azerbaijan had initiated a constructive dialogue with the representatives of the Armenian residents, outlining plans for reintegration and discussing issues related to the restoration and operation of infrastructures. This dialogue, facilitated by Azerbaijan's commitment to peace and reconciliation, was previously obstructed by Armenia's heavy illegal military presence in the region.

Armenia's portrayal of Azerbaijan's counter-terrorism measures as an attack on "peaceful"

residents is a gross misrepresentation. These measures were essential to disarm the Armenian armed formations and were fully aligned with Azerbaijan's rights under the UN Charter. Armenia's persistent disregard for its international obligations necessitated these actions.

Armenia's accusation that Azerbaijan violated the Trilateral Statement of November 10, 2020, is baseless. It was Armenia that failed to uphold its commitment to withdraw its forces from Azerbaijani territory. The country maintained a significant illegal military presence, supported by heavy weaponry, in clear violation of the agreement.

Azerbaijan's counter-terrorism measures, conducted over 24 hours, neutralized more than 90 military outposts of the illegal formations and a significant amount of heavy weaponry. No sovereign state would tolerate such a blatant violation of its territorial integrity. Azerbaijan's actions were justified and safeguarded under international law and its Constitution.

Armenia's systematic attempts to establish a new status-quo of illegal use of force and sustain a gray zone in Azerbaijani territory were defeated. Azerbaijan had been alerting the international community about Armenia's looming military adventurism, marked by intensified military engineering works, forces buildup, and systematic shelling of Azerbaijani Armed Forces' positions.

Despite Armenia's Prime Minister acknowledging Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, including the Garabagh region, his provocative "congratulatory message" on the so-called "anniversary" of the establishment of

an illegal puppet structure in Azerbaijani territory escalated tensions.

Armenia's persistent territorial claims and support for separatism in Azerbaijan have remained a significant impediment to peace and stability in the region. The country's refusal to relinquish these claims is evident in its continued political, military, and financial backing of separatist movements within Azerbaijani territory.

One of the most glaring instances of this unyielding stance was the so-called "presidential elections" orchestrated by the puppet regime established in the territories of Azerbaijan occupied by Armenia. This provocative act not only contradicted Armenia's previous acknowledgments of Azerbaijan's sovereignty and territorial integrity but also exposed its insincere engagement in the ongoing peace treaty negotiations. The illegal elections held on September 9, 2023 in Azerbaijan's Garabagh region, have stirred a new wave of tension in an area already marked by complex geopolitical dynamics. These elections, occurring amidst ongoing efforts for the reintegration of Garabagh Armenians into Azerbaijan, met with widespread international condemnation, underscoring the global consensus on Azerbaijan's territorial integrity.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan was swift in its response, calling for a global denouncement of these illegitimate elections. The international community, including prominent states and organizations, echoed this sentiment, reaffirming their support for Azerbaijan's sovereignty. The United States, UK, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Turkey, Georgia,

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Hungary, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the European Union (EU), and the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), united in their stance against the unsanctioned electoral process.

Türkiye's Foreign Minister's assertion that the elections constituted a "gross violation of international law" resonated with the prevailing international sentiment. It underscored the infringement of UN Security Council resolutions and OSCE principles, highlighting the gravity of the situation.

Uzbekistan's unequivocal support for Azerbaijan's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and its condemnation of any interference in Azerbaijan's internal affairs, further amplified the international consensus. Stéphane Dujarric, the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, reiterated the Security Council's resolutions affirming Azerbaijan's sovereignty and territorial integrity, emphasizing the imperative of respecting these foundational principles.

The illegal elections, intended to garner external support, have instead galvanized international backing for Azerbaijan's territorial claims. It underscored the enduring significance of international law and the collective commitment to upholding the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The illegal elections in Azerbaijan's Garabagh region elicited a chorus of international responses, underscoring the complex geopolitical dynamics at play. State Department Spokesman Matthew Miller's unequivocal statement that the U.S. does not recognize Karabakh as an independent and

sovereign state, and the dismissal of the election results, echoes the prevailing sentiment of the international community.

Secretary General of the Council of Europe Marija Pejcinovic Burić's assertion that the so-called "presidential elections" in Khankendi lack legal ground, amplified the chorus of international voices rejecting the electoral process. Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin's statement, acknowledging Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and advocating for the smooth integration of Garabagh Armenians into Azerbaijan, marked an acknowledgement of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Following these sham elections, Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin declared that Nikol Pashinyan closed the issue by acknowledging Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and stating that the integration of Garabagh Armenians into Azerbaijan should go smoothly. This statement from the leader of a state, that is a strategic ally of Armenia was critical since it signified that the new situation in the region was now acknowledged even by Russia.

Armenia's efforts to destabilize the region extend beyond these provocative political maneuvers. A global smear campaign, founded on fabricated accusations of a "blockade" and "humanitarian crisis," sought to malign Azerbaijan's international reputation. However, this campaign crumbled on September 18, 2023, when Azerbaijan facilitated the delivery of humanitarian goods to the ethnic Armenian residents of the Garabagh region, debunking Armenia's baseless allegations.

In the wake of subversive acts by Armenian armed formations, which resulted in both civilian and military casualties, Azerbaijan was compelled to respond. The nation's armed forces initiated local counter-terror measures, a necessary action to disarm the illegal armed formations and neutralize the imminent threat they posed to the safety and security of Azerbaijani civilian and military personnel.

These counter-terror measures were neither arbitrary nor excessive; they were limited and proportionate, meticulously calibrated to address the specific threat to Azerbaijan's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as the safety and well-being of its citizens. Every step taken was a measured response to the provocations and aggressions instigated by Armenian armed formations.

Azerbaijan's actions were not just a response but a responsibility. The nation was exercising its sovereign right to self-defense, a right enshrined in the United Nations Charter. The counter-terror measures were exclusively aimed at neutralizing legitimate military targets within the sovereign territory of Azerbaijan. Every action was in strict adherence to international law, underscoring Azerbaijan's commitment to global legal norms even in the face of unprovoked aggression.

The context of these measures is crucial. They were not initiated in a vacuum but were a direct response to the subversive acts of Armenian armed formations. The casualties inflicted upon Azerbaijani civilians and military personnel were not just numbers but a stark reminder of the persistent threat that these illegal formations posed.

In the face of escalating tensions and provocations, Azerbaijan's counter-terror measures stood as a testament to the nation's unwavering commitment to the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the safety of its citizens. These actions, limited and proportionate, were meticulously executed to neutralize legitimate military targets within the sovereign territory of Azerbaijan, underscoring the nation's adherence to the right of self-defense as enshrined in the UN Charter.

Every step taken by Azerbaijan was in full compliance with the norms of humanitarian law. The nation's armed forces, with precision and restraint, ensured that all measures were taken to avoid collateral damage to civilians and civilian infrastructure. The accusations of intentional and deliberate targeting of civilians were not only baseless but were categorically refuted by photo and video evidence, laying bare the falsehoods propagated to malign Azerbaijan's justified actions.

Transparency and communication were at the forefront of Azerbaijan's response. From the very first minutes of the operation, the Ministry of Defence of Azerbaijan made several public statements, calling on civilians to stay away from military installations. In a bid to safeguard the Armenian residents of the Garabagh region of Azerbaijan, similar notifications were disseminated via mobile SMS service. This proactive communication was necessitated by the reckless attempts of Armenia-subordinated armed formations to deploy military equipment and installations within residential areas, exposing civilians to undue risk.



The counter-terror measures were not an act of aggression but a response to aggression. They were a manifestation of Azerbaijan's sovereign right to defend its territory and protect its citizens from the persistent threat posed by illegal armed formations. In a region marred by complexities and challenges, Azerbaijan's actions were a beacon of principle, showcasing a nation's resolve to uphold international law, ensure the safety of its citizens, and protect its territorial integrity.

In the aftermath of the counter-terror measures executed by Azerbaijan to neutralize the threats posed by illegal armed formations, the nation's commitment to humanitarian principles and international law has been unequivocally demonstrated. The Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan has assured the international community of its unwavering commitment to ensuring the protection and security of all administrative, social, educational, medical, and religious facilities, in strict adherence to the laws of Azerbaijan and norms of international humanitarian law.

The vulnerable segments of the population, including women, children, the elderly, people with disabilities, and the sick, have been prioritized, with the assurance of necessary medical aid, supplies, and other assistance. This commitment underscores Azerbaijan's dedication to upholding the highest standards of humanity, even amidst the complexities of counter-terror operations.

The professionalism of the armed forces of Azerbaijan has been exemplary. The use of high-precision ammunition to specifically target illegal military installations, while meticulously avoiding civilian areas, stands as

a testament to their training, discipline, and adherence to international norms. Video footages available to the public clearly demonstrate the forces' restraint and precision, deliberately refraining from striking even legitimate military targets to avoid collateral damage.

In the face of ungrounded accusations levied by the Armenian delegation and others, the Prime Minister of Armenia's own admission serves as a clarion call to truth. His public acknowledgment that there is no direct threat to the civilians in Garabagh and that allegations of mass atrocities are unfounded, vindicates Azerbaijan's stance and actions.

Azerbaijan's communication has been transparent and consistent. The nation has assured international interlocutors that the cessation of counter-terror measures would be immediate, contingent upon Armenia and its subordinate puppet regime's agreement to disarm and disband its illegal structures. This commitment was realized on September 20, 2023, when, facilitated by the command of the peacekeeping contingent of the Russian Federation, the conditions were accepted and the counter-terror measures were halted effective of 13:00 Baku time.

In the evolving landscape of regional security, Azerbaijan's actions and commitments are anchored in the principles of international law, humanitarian norms, and the unwavering resolve to protect its sovereignty and the safety of its citizens. The nation stands as a testament to the possibility of executing counter-terror measures with precision, restraint, and an unwavering commitment to humanitarian principles. In a world often

marred by complexities, Azerbaijan's stance offers a beacon of principle, showcasing the possibility of balancing national security imperatives with the highest standards of humanity.

As the international community evaluates the unfolding scenario, it is imperative to recognize the legality, necessity, and restraint characterizing Azerbaijan's counter-terror measures. In a world where the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity are often challenged, Azerbaijan's actions stand as a reminder of the unwavering commitment to these foundational principles, essential for regional peace and global stability.

In a significant development that marked a turning point in the prolonged conflict, it was unequivocally agreed that the armed forces of the Republic of Armenia would be fully withdrawn from the territory of Azerbaijan. This pivotal agreement also encompassed the disarmament of illegal armed formations that were trained, formed, and supplied by Armenia, involving local Armenian residents.

This consensus was not reached in isolation but was facilitated through the instrumental involvement of the Russian peacekeeping contingent present on the ground. The puppet structure, subordinated to Armenia, not only confirmed this agreement but also made a public declaration affirming the same. This public acknowledgment underscored the transparency and authenticity of the agreement, laying a foundation for subsequent steps towards a comprehensive resolution.

The agreement illuminated the undeniable fact of Armenia's military presence on the

sovereign soil of Azerbaijan, a clear breach of its commitment under the Trilateral Statement to withdraw. Armenia's previous attempts to deny such a presence were unveiled as a shameful deception, an effort to mislead the international community that was now laid bare.

In addition to the withdrawal and disarmament clause, the agreement also paved the way for addressing the complex issue of reintegration of ethnic Armenian residents into Azerbaijan. It was concurred that discussions regarding their rights and security, within the framework of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, would be conducted directly between the representatives of the ethnic Armenian residents and the central Azerbaijani authorities.

This direct engagement is indicative of Azerbaijan's commitment to a comprehensive and inclusive approach, ensuring that the voices of the ethnic Armenian residents are heard, and their concerns addressed in the reintegration process.

The counter-terror measures executed by Azerbaijan have been marked with success, achieving the intended objectives. This accomplishment underscores a missed opportunity where peace could have been the narrative, had Armenia adhered to its commitments under the Trilateral Statement. The blame, unequivocally, is laid at Armenia's doorstep for the escalation that ensued due to its non-compliance.

Armenia's persistent failure to fulfill its obligations for the full, immediate, and unconditional withdrawal of its forces from

Azerbaijani territory has been a longstanding impediment to international efforts aimed at resolving the armed conflict that has spanned over three decades. This continued illegal military presence has not only hampered post-conflict normalization between the two nations but has also obstructed the reintegration of the ethnic Armenian residents of the Garabagh region of Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan has been vocal, consistently highlighting the perils associated with Armenia's illegal military presence. While these concerns have been acknowledged in private corridors, the international community has been conspicuously silent in translating this acknowledgment into practical steps and public pronouncements. This silence has inadvertently bolstered Armenia's sense of impunity, leading to an escalation in military and political provocations. As Azerbaijan embarks on the practical implementation of disarmament and demilitarization, complemented by direct dialogue with Armenian residents, it is imperative for the international community to align its considerations with the prevailing realities on the ground.

The Security Council's engagement, if it is to be constructive, must eschew one-sided and biased approaches often influenced by short-term political considerations or lobby connections. Such approaches have proven to be not only counterproductive but also detrimental to the genuine process of normalization.

The current juncture presents a historic opportunity to foster good-neighborly relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, an

opportunity that has been elusive for over 30 years due to the bloody conflict. It is incumbent upon the international community, including the Security Council, to recognize the inherent risks and threats posed by Armenia's destructive actions.

Armenia's attempts to exploit the Security Council to absolve itself of its internationally wrongful acts must be met with resolute opposition. The focus should be unequivocally directed towards supporting the real process of normalization, a focus that transcends the whims of external forces seeking to exploit existing differences for their political gains.

As Azerbaijan advances in its efforts to restore peace and security, the international narrative must evolve to reflect the realities on the ground, championing objectivity and supporting the journey towards a lasting peace that has been elusive for far too long. The counter-terror measures, though necessitated by Armenia's non-compliance, have opened a new chapter where dialogue and compliance can pave the way for a future of coexistence and regional stability.

In the face of persistent challenges emanating from Armenia's unyielding and destructive stance, Azerbaijan stands resolute, reaffirming its commitment to a path of dialogue and negotiations. This commitment is anchored in principles of equality and mutual respect for each nation's legitimate interests, a foundation that Azerbaijan believes is integral to fostering lasting peace in the region.

Despite the deep scars left by Armenia's armed aggression, the devastation of Azerbaijani cities and villages, and the deliberate desecration of holy places, Azerbaijan extends

an olive branch. This gesture, marked by magnanimity and a vision for a future defined by peace rather than conflict, underscores Azerbaijan's unwavering commitment to a just, fair, and enduring peace.

Armenia's reciprocation to this offer is not just a matter of bilateral significance but is integral to regional stability. The wounds of conflict, though unhealed, should not be an impediment to a future where both nations coexist in harmony, respecting each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

On another front, Azerbaijan is unequivocal in its assurance to the ethnic Armenian residents of the Garabagh region. The nation reaffirms its commitment to guaranteeing all rights and freedoms in accordance with its Constitution and international human rights standards, including those specific to persons belonging to national minorities. Azerbaijan's rich tapestry of ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity is a testament to its legacy of unity in diversity. Ethnic Armenian residents are not just a part of this legacy but are integral to its enrichment.

However, this commitment to peace and inclusivity is not without its expectations. Azerbaijan underscores the inviolable principle of non-interference enshrined in international law. All states bear an obligation to respect the sovereignty of others, an obligation that extends to not undermining the integration of national minorities or fueling separatism.

As Azerbaijan extends its hand in peace, it does so with the expectation of reciprocity, not just from Armenia but from the international community. The path to peace is collective, requiring the concerted efforts of all

stakeholders. The scars of conflict may be deep, but the potential for a future defined by peace, cooperation, and mutual respect is profound. In this renewed call for peace, Azerbaijan affirms its readiness to turn the page, inviting Armenia and the world to join in writing a new chapter for the region—a chapter where the tragedies of the past give way to a future of opportunity, stability, and shared progress.

In these trying times, Azerbaijan remained steadfast in its commitment to international law and norms. The nation's actions were a testament to its unwavering dedication to protecting its citizens while upholding the principles that underpin international peace and security. Every measure taken was a reflection of a nation determined to defend its sovereignty, ensure the safety of its people, and contribute to the broader goal of regional stability.

As the dust settles, it is imperative for the international community to recognize the context and legality of Azerbaijan's actions. In a world where the rule of law and respect for sovereignty are the cornerstones of peace, understanding Azerbaijan's justified and measured response is not just necessary but essential for fostering an environment where peace, security, and justice prevail.

Despite this gesture of goodwill, Armenia escalated tensions the following day with a military provocation. The tragic loss of lives resulting from the explosion of mines planted by an Armenian sabotage group on the Fuzuli-Ahmadbeyli-Shusha road underscored the country's relentless aggression. The incident, which claimed the lives of two civilian road

constructors and injured several police officers, was a stark reminder of the persistent threat posed by Armenian forces.

The discovery and neutralization of 2,728 landmines manufactured in Armenia since the 2020 Trilateral Statement further attest to Armenia's ongoing hostile activities. These landmines, a clear violation of the agreement, have claimed the lives and safety of 314 individuals, marking a grim testament to Armenia's disregard for human life and international law.

Armenia's actions, characterized by a persistent campaign of aggression and misinformation, undermine the prospects of peace and stability in the region. The international community must recognize and address these provocations to foster an environment conducive to genuine dialogue and reconciliation. Azerbaijan remains committed to a peaceful resolution, grounded in respect for territorial integrity and the principles of international law. The onus is now on Armenia to demonstrate similar commitment and abandon its path of aggression and deceit.

### **III. Countering Armenia's fake narratives in the aftermath of the counter-terrorism operation in Garabagh**

In the intricate landscape of international relations and territorial sovereignty, Azerbaijan has consistently demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the norms and principles of international law. Every measure, including the recent counter-terrorism

operation in Garabagh, was meticulously executed to restore the nation's territorial integrity and sovereignty, while ensuring the protection of civilians and civilian objects.

For nearly three decades, Azerbaijanis endured the harrowing experiences of massacres and mass atrocities, a direct consequence of Armenia's military occupation. Despite these adversities, the Azerbaijani government remained steadfast in its commitment to uphold the rights of all ethnic minorities residing within its borders, including Armenians. This commitment was not a silent promise but was vocally and consistently expressed by the nation's leadership.

The international community, however, had been largely silent on the plight of approximately a million Azerbaijani refugees and displaced persons. Their rights to return to their homes in safety and dignity were overlooked. Azerbaijan, in the aftermath of the 44-day war and subsequent counter-terrorism measures, took steps to assist in identifying the whereabouts of missing persons. Yet, the same level of attention and scrutiny was not extended to the nearly 4000 missing Azerbaijanis. For too long, the international community turned a blind eye to Azerbaijan's pleas for justice, particularly for the genocide in Khojaly and other heinous crimes against humanity.

In the aftermath of the counter-terrorism operation, Azerbaijan strongly refuted the narratives disseminated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, which were a blatant denial of Armenia's responsibility for over three decades of military aggression,

occupation of Azerbaijan's territories, and the atrocities committed against the Azerbaijani people. Azerbaijan's actions against Armenia's occupation have always been rooted in justice. The anti-terrorism measures implemented in September were a legitimate response to nullify the threats posed by the illegal Armenian armed forces stationed in Azerbaijan, a clear violation of international law. Contrary to the claims made by the Armenian MFA, Azerbaijan has never targeted civilian Armenians. Azerbaijan reiterated its non-involvement in the decision of local Armenians to relocate, expressing its willingness to create better living conditions for them than those experienced under the military junta established by Armenia. The country is committed to reintegrating Armenian residents as equal citizens, grounded in the Constitution, national legislation, and international commitments. Azerbaijan firmly condemned and rejected the claims of "ethnic cleansing" in the Garabagh region of Azerbaijan, as alleged by Nikol Pashinyan, the Prime Minister of Armenia, on September 28, 2023. This assertion not only contradicted Pashinyan's earlier statement made just a week prior, acknowledging no threat to local Armenians from Azerbaijan, but also raised concerns of potentially undermining the delicate and ongoing peace process between the two nations. Azerbaijan has been actively engaged in providing humanitarian support and addressing the immediate needs of the Armenian residents in the Garabagh region. The narrative of "ethnic cleansing" is viewed as not only baseless but also as a disruptive element in the ongoing efforts for the reintegration and humanitarian assistance process.

The departure of some Armenian residents from the Garabagh region is a personal and individual decision, not a forced relocation. Azerbaijan emphasized its commitment to the rights and safety of all residents, calling on Armenians to remain in their places of residence and be part of a multiethnic Azerbaijan, governed by the rule of law and mutual respect. The path to lasting peace and security in the region is intricately linked to the successful reintegration of local Armenians and the conclusion of the negotiation process for a peace treaty. This treaty should be rooted in the principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty, foundational elements that are integral to the stability and prosperity of both nations.

#### **IV. France's double standards: Unmasking Macron's bias in the Garabagh Conflict**

The remarks made by French President Emmanuel Macron during his interviews with TF1 and France 2 channels on September 24, 2023 and the subsequent comments by the senior French officials in the aftermath of the Azerbaijan's counter-terrorism operation in Garabagh, unveiled a stark display of double standards and bias. Macron's distortion of the prevailing situation in the Garabagh region not only undermines the ongoing peace and reconciliation efforts but also echoes France's egregious neo-colonial tendencies.

France's support for separatism in the Garabagh region of Azerbaijan is rooted in a dangerous and unacceptable blend of geopolitical rivalry and "Orientalism." Macron's attempt to infuse the factor of

Christianity into the Azerbaijan-Armenia issue, while portraying France as a defender of human rights and international law, is a perilous approach. It undermines the secular and geopolitical nature of the conflict and threatens to inflame regional tensions.

Azerbaijan's operation to end Armenia's three-decade-long occupation and restore its territorial integrity was a legitimate exercise of its sovereign rights under international law. The anti-terror measures executed against Armenian armed formations on Azerbaijani territory between September 19-20 adhered strictly to international humanitarian law. This adherence was confirmed by reputable international organizations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Macron's allegations against Azerbaijan's anti-terror measures are baseless, especially considering Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan himself refuted claims of Azerbaijan allegedly targeting civilians. France's attempt to lecture Azerbaijan on human rights is a glaring hypocrisy, given the prosperity and harmony in which many ethnicities and ethnic minorities live within Azerbaijan.

France's selective advocacy, expressing intentions to protect the rights of Armenians while blatantly ignoring the rights of Azerbaijanis who have been displaced, deprived of their rights, and subjected to horrific massacres over the last 30 years, is a clear manifestation of its insidious intentions.

Azerbaijan has been proactive, not only in disarming Armenian armed formations and ensuring the withdrawal of Armenian armed forces from its territories but also in providing

aid to Armenian residents and facilitating their integration into Azerbaijani society.

France's efforts, marred by bias and double standards, do not serve peace and only serve to destabilize the situation in the Garabagh region. It is imperative for the international community to recognize and address these inconsistencies to foster an environment conducive to lasting peace and reconciliation in the region. The path to peace is paved with objectivity, fairness, and adherence to international law, not with the selective and biased interventions that have characterized France's approach to the Garabagh conflict.

#### **V. Landmines and missing persons: Overcoming the deadly remnants of the Armenian occupation in Garabagh**

In 2020, Azerbaijan, invoking its right of self-defense as endorsed by four United Nations Security Council resolutions from 1993, reclaimed the occupied territories. However, the liberation did not erase the lingering challenges birthed by the wars. The issues of missing persons and the peril of landmines continue to haunt the region. On August 3, 2023, the families of the missing, burdened by the uncertainty and anguish, sought the intervention of the United Nations. They implored Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to press Armenia to unveil the fate of the missing persons and disclose the locations of mass graves. The appointment of a U.N. special rapporteur on missing persons was also demanded, underscoring the urgency and gravity of the issue.

The haunting legacy of the Garabagh conflict is epitomized by the unresolved fate of thousands of missing Azerbaijani citizens. According to the State Commission on Prisoners of War, Hostages and Missing Persons of Azerbaijan, established in 1993, the count of the missing as of August 16, 2023, stands at 3,888. This figure comprises 3,170 servicemen and 718 civilians, including 71 children, 266 women, and 326 elderly individuals. The Commission has established that 871 of these missing persons were taken as prisoners of war or hostages. This group includes 604 servicemen and 267 civilians, with children, women, and the elderly among them. Tragically, 550 individuals are known to have been killed in captivity.

Azerbaijan has submitted a comprehensive list of its missing citizens to Armenia through the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), a list that is regularly updated. However, Armenia's refusal to account for the missing persons and its failure to conduct prompt and effective investigations into their fate constitutes a breach of international law. The additional suffering imposed upon the relatives of the missing persons, exacerbated by Armenia's obstructive stance, further underscores this violation.

Testimonies from prisoners who were either rescued or managed to escape before the war paint a harrowing picture of the fate of the disappeared. Allegations of abuse, forced labor, and executions are rife, with many of the missing believed to have been employed in hard labor, including dismantling tombstones and houses in the occupied territories. Despite these grave violations of international laws of

war, the Armenian side has yet to face sanctions.

In the aftermath of the war, the discovery of 10 mass graves across various districts has begun to shed light on the dark mystery of the missing. The unearthed remains of 51 individuals, bearing signs of torture, have ignited calls for justice and accountability. Each bone, each silent testimony, underscores the urgent need for a comprehensive investigation, international intervention, and a path towards healing and reconciliation.

As Azerbaijan emerges from the decades-long occupation, the nation grapples with the complex and multifaceted challenges. One of the most pressing issues is the pervasive threat of over a million mines laid in the occupied territories, a sinister legacy of the conflict that continues to haunt the region.

Hikmet Hajiyev, Foreign Policy Advisor to the President of Azerbaijan, underscores the gravity of the situation. The mines not only hinder the return of the civilian population to their ancestral lands but also obstruct the vital reconstruction efforts in the region. Despite the concerted efforts to clear these mines with the support of allied states, the challenge is exacerbated by Armenia's reluctance to provide accurate mine maps - the provided maps are only 25% accurate. Since the cessation of the Second Garabagh War on July 10, 2023, a mere 51,000 mines and unexploded ordnances have been neutralized.

The human cost of this lingering menace is stark. The Azerbaijan National Mine Agency reports that from 1991 to July 17, 2023, mine explosions have injured 3,382 people, including 357 children and 38 women. The



aftermath of the Second Garabagh War has witnessed 303 mine explosions resulting in deaths, injuries, and untold trauma.

Yet, the minefields are not the sole issue echoing the painful legacy of the wars. The expulsion of Azerbaijanis from their historical homelands in Armenia during the First Garabagh War remains an unresolved wound. The Western Azerbaijan Community (WAC), comprising Azerbaijanis who were forcibly displaced, seeks acknowledgment, justice, and the opportunity to return to their ancestral lands. Their pleas, however, have yet to elicit a positive response from Armenia or significant pressure from international organizations.

Armenia's stance in the post-war era, characterized by an avoidance of its responsibilities and obligations, continues to be a significant impediment to the normalization process. The unresolved issues of mine clearance, the fate of the missing, and the right of return for displaced Azerbaijanis are critical components that define the trajectory of Armenia-Azerbaijan relations.

## **VI. A green horizon: Unleashing the renewable energy potential of Central Asia and the South Caucasus**

As Europe grapples with the repercussions of the Russia-Ukraine war and the ensuing sanctions on the Russian energy sector, the strategic alliance between Azerbaijan and Georgia emerges as a beacon of hope and resilience. Nestled in the resource-rich Caspian Sea region, these two South Caucasus nations are not just neighbors but pivotal players in the

intricate dance of energy security and geopolitical stability.

The sanctions have precipitated a precipitous drop in Russian natural gas imports to Europe, with year-on-year comparisons revealing a staggering 90% decline in various transit routes. This decline has catapulted natural gas and electricity prices to unprecedented levels in Europe, underscoring the urgent need for diversification and strategic alliances.

Azerbaijan and Georgia, with their strategic partnerships with Ankara and robust connectivity in the region, are positioned as essential links between Central Asia, the Caspian region, and Europe. The Western sanctions and Russia's curtailing of natural gas supplies have amplified the significance of their role.

The EU, now more than ever, is focused on diversifying energy supplies and sources. The quest for energy independence is characterized by an increased focus on energy savings, local renewable energy production, and forging alliances with reliable energy partners. The USA, Qatar, Algeria, and the UAE have emerged as potential LNG suppliers to mitigate the energy shortfall in Europe.

However, the competition for LNG supplies is intensifying. The International Energy Agency (IEA) warns of a potential shortage of 30 bcm of natural gas in 2023 if the demand from China rebounds and Europe's mild winter temperatures do not persist. In this complex scenario, Azerbaijan's escalating natural gas exports to Europe, projected to reach 11.6 bcm in 2023, are a crucial element of the energy security matrix.

The Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) is a lifeline, albeit with infrastructural limitations. The Trans Adriatic Pipeline's (TAP) capacity enhancement and Turkey's potential redirection of its portion of the Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline to the EU could alleviate, but not completely resolve, the energy shortfall.

In this intricate geopolitical and energy landscape, Azerbaijan and Georgia's role transcends regional boundaries. Their strategic alliance is not just a testament to regional cooperation but a pivotal element of Europe's quest for energy security, diversification, and resilience in the face of geopolitical upheavals and uncertainties. The alliance underscores the intricate interplay of regional dynamics and global energy security, heralding a new chapter of strategic cooperation, resilience, and adaptability in the evolving geopolitical landscape.

The evolving energy landscape of Europe, marked by an insatiable demand and a decisive shift towards sustainability, is casting its gaze upon the abundant renewable energy resources of Central Asia and the South Caucasus. Beyond the rich reserves of fossil fuels, nations like Azerbaijan and Georgia are emerging as pivotal players in Europe's green energy narrative.

Central Asia and the South Caucasus are not just repositories of fossil fuels but are endowed with abundant renewable energy resources capable of not only meeting Europe's growing energy demand but also contributing significantly to its ambitious renewable energy target of 42.5% by 2030. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, rich in critical

minerals essential for renewable energy technologies, enhance the region's competitiveness and attractiveness for investments.

Azerbaijan's strategic partnership with the EU, epitomized by the "Memorandum of Understanding on a Strategic Partnership in the Field of Energy" signed on July 18, 2022, heralds a new era of energy cooperation. This partnership transcends the traditional fossil fuel paradigm, embracing the potential of exporting green energy to Europe, aligning with the REPowerEU plan focused on energy saving, clean energy production, and diversification of energy supplies.

Georgia, too, is deepening its ties with the EU, facilitated by the EU-Georgia Association Agreement, its membership in the Energy Community, and its commitment to implementing EU energy acquis in its legislation. Georgia's strategic geopolitical location, institutional reforms, and commitment to renewable energy and energy efficiency enhance its role as a reliable transit country for the EU.

The synergy between the abundant renewable energy resources of Central Asia and the South Caucasus and Europe's green energy aspirations is not just a convergence of interests but a strategic alignment that promises mutual benefits. It underscores a shared vision of energy security, sustainability, and resilience in a world where the imperatives of climate change and geopolitical dynamics are reshaping the global energy narrative.

As Europe navigates the complexities of energy security amidst geopolitical upheavals,

the strategic importance of Azerbaijan and Georgia is accentuated. Their role as bridges connecting the abundant renewable energy resources of Central Asia and the South Caucasus to Europe's green energy aspirations is pivotal. It's a partnership that promises to redefine the contours of energy security, sustainability, and geopolitical alliances in the evolving global landscape.

In the midst of an unfolding energy crisis, the strategic alliance between Azerbaijan and Georgia stands as a testament to innovation, resilience, and foresight. Their contributions to regional connectivity and energy transit infrastructure have not only enhanced the European Union's energy security but also positioned them as linchpins in the intricate web of global energy dynamics.

A landmark agreement signed on December 17, 2022, between Georgia, Azerbaijan, Romania, and Hungary underscores this strategic alignment. The development of the world's longest high-voltage submarine electricity cable under the Black Sea is more than an engineering feat; it's a symbol of regional cooperation and integration, connecting the South Caucasus with South-Eastern Europe and continental Europe. This project, accompanied by a high-speed fiber optic internet cable, promises to bolster

information transmission security between the regions, adding another layer to the multifaceted partnership.

Azerbaijan and Georgia are emerging as central figures in the development of the Middle Corridor, a development with far-reaching economic and political ramifications for the Central Asian and South Caucasus regions, as well as the EU. This corridor promises economic diversification, enhanced regional integration, and a reduction in dependence on Russia. It's not just a transit route but a catalyst for a transformed geopolitical and security environment, fostering peace and cooperation.

The commitment of Azerbaijan and Georgia to this shared vision and collaborative endeavor is unwavering. Their role in global food, energy, and transportation security is expanding, and their partnership is evolving into a blueprint for regional cooperation and integration. In a world marked by complexities and uncertainties, the alliance between Azerbaijan and Georgia illuminates the path forward, showcasing the power of regional cooperation, strategic investment in connectivity, and a shared vision for a future where energy security and regional integration are the cornerstones of stability and prosperity.