



CENTER OF ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
BEYNƏLXALQ MÜNƏSİBƏTLƏRİN TƏHLİLİ MƏRKƏZİ

BULLETIN

HIGHLIGHT OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

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I. Armenia's attack on Azerbaijan

On September 27, the Armenian armed forces started intensively shelling the positions of the Republic of Azerbaijan and civilian areas along the entire frontline using mortars, larger-caliber weapons and artillery mounts of different calibers. At the same time, the Armenian armed forces started systematically shelling densely populated areas, infrastructure facilities, residential buildings, hospitals, and schools, violating the international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Convention of 1949. Just in the first two days, more than 27 people were injured, many civilians including one entire family of five people, and two teenagers of 13 and 14 years old were killed. In compliance with international law invoking the right of UN member states to self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter and in order to suppress large-scale provocations and ensure the safety of the civilian population living along the frontlines, the army units of Azerbaijan started taking retaliatory measures against the enemy. A successful counter-offensive launched by the Armed Forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan led to the liberation of a number of occupied villages, strategic heights and advantageous positions. According to the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Azerbaijan, "as a result of the military operation in the Fuzuli-Jabrayil direction, Garakhanbeyli, Gervend, kend Horadiz, Yukhari Abdurrahmanli, Boyuk Marjanli and Nuzgar villages of Fizuli region, which have been under enemy occupation for many years, were liberated. Enemy posts located in the direction of Aghdara region and on the heights of Murov Mount range were destroyed and a number of important high grounds were taken under control." At the same time, a large number of military personnel and military equipment of the occupational forces were destroyed near the

frontlines. On the same day, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev noted that "Armenia's military provocation was pre-planned. They have been preparing for this provocation for a long time, and the intelligence we have shows that Armenia intends to start a new war against us." As a result of successful counter-offensive operations, Azerbaijan's Army has liberated Madagiz, Talish village of Terter district, the city of Jabrayil, the town of Hadrut, Mehdili, Chaxirli, Ashagi Maralyan, Sheybe, Guyjag Karkhulu, Shukurbeyli, Cherekan, Dashkasan, Horovlu, Mahmudlu, Jafarabad, Yuxari Maralyan, Dejal, Shikhali Agali, Sarijali and Mezre villages of Jabrayil district, Chayli, Yukhari Guzlek, Gorazilli, Gishlag, Garajali, Efendiler, Suleymanli and Sur villages. To date, as a result of Armenia's deliberate attacks on civilian population, a total of 41 civilians were killed and more than 200 others were wounded.

II. Pashinyan's systematic provocations preceding the attack

Since coming to power, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has actively derailed the negotiation process. As Dr Esmira Jafarova, a board member at the Center of Analysis of International Relations, noted "the provocations on the frontline were also accompanied by political provocations, nationalistic statements and cultural revanchism that the current leadership of Armenia has opted for as its foreign policy course vis-a-vis Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict." In March 2019, Pashinyan tried to change the negotiation format by trying to introduce the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh into the process. The move was categorically rejected by Azerbaijan and the Minsk Group Co-Chairs as being against the basis of the peace talks set

out in March 1992. In August 2019, during his visit to occupied territories of Azerbaijan, Pashinyan declared that “Nagorno-Karabakh is Armenia and period” coupled with the revival of a revanchist miatsum (unification) ideology in regard to the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. As Dr Farid Shafiyev, Chairman of the Center of Analysis of International Relations, noted at the time, it was “a declaration of the annexation of the territory of a neighboring country in violation of four resolutions of the UN Security Council (822,853, 874, and 884). Moreover, it was a return of the 1988 irredentist claim that, for so many years, the Armenian nationalists had tried to avoid.” In May 2020, Pashinyan participated in the “oath taking ceremony” for the new head of the occupational puppet regime in Nagorno-Karabakh. Rather provocatively, the Armenian side for the first time decided to hold the ceremony in Shusha – the city that is widely recognized as the cradle of Azerbaijani music and culture. In June 2020, the Armenian government went even further, announcing the construction of a new highway connecting Armenia with Azerbaijan’s occupied Nagorno-Karabakh region. It was such a provocative move that the members of the European Parliament – the Chair of the Delegation to the EU-Armenia, the EU-Azerbaijan and the EU-Georgia Parliamentary Committees Marina Kaljurand, the European Parliament’s Standing Rapporteur on Armenia Traian Băsescu and the European Parliament’s Standing Rapporteur on Azerbaijan Željana Zovko – had to issue a joint statement and note that “the decision to build this highway has been taken without the consent of the competent authorities of Azerbaijan – in violation of international law.” Emphasizing that they deplore this project since it does not “help to create conditions conducive to trust, peace and reconciliation,” they also pointed out that the decision to build a new highway

could consolidate “the illegal occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh and of its surrounding districts.”

In July, the Armenian military units attacked Azerbaijan at the direct border between the two countries, a couple of hundred kilometers away from the actual conflict zone around the occupied Nagorno-Karabakh region. The July attack became the single deadliest episode since the Four-Day War of April 2016. It was also accompanied with systematic attacks on Azerbaijanis living abroad. On July 21, approximately 50 members of the Azerbaijani community in the US were assaulted by Armenian extremists during the rally in front of Azerbaijan’s Consulate General in Los Angeles. On July 22, a string of attacks on Azerbaijanis took place in Brussels where the members of the Azerbaijani community, during the peaceful protests, were attacked by Armenian extremists using stones, explosives and other weapons. These gruesome attacks left 6 members of the Azerbaijani community, including a journalist, wounded and in need of medical attention. Armed Armenian extremists also attacked and wounded two Azerbaijanis living in Canada.

Following a catastrophic explosion in Beirut on August 4, the Armenian government has sought to exploit a worsening political and economic situation in Lebanon as a pretext for illegally settling ethnic Armenians from Lebanon in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. In August, Azerbaijan captured First Lieutenant Gurgen Alberyanyan, the commander of the sabotage-reconnaissance group of the Armenian forces, who was sent to carry out terrorist activities in Azerbaijan. With each new provocation by Armenia, the situation around the conflict was becoming even more unsustainable, risking spiraling out of control and getting into a full-blown war.

Another major provocation by Armenia was Pashinyan's declaration that Azerbaijan should negotiate with the so-called "Nagorno-Karabakh authorities". As President Ilham Aliyev pointed out, "not only we but also Minsk-Group rejected it. Because it changes completely the format of negotiations, which was elaborated for more than twenty years. And negotiations are taking place between Armenia and Azerbaijan. So, he puts precondition to us and we rejected it. And the reason why he did it, was again he wanted negotiations to stop and keep the status quo unchanged."

As Vasif Huseynov, a senior adviser at the Center of Analysis of International Relations, noted, "although the Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan of Armenia came to power in 2018 with an agenda promising peaceful resolution of the conflict, soon he resorted to dangerous populism making territorial claims not only to Azerbaijan but even to Turkey, its western neighbour." In August 2020, Pashinyan called Armenians not to forget the Treaty of Sevres declaring that "although the Treaty of Sevres was never implemented, it continues to be a historical fact, which reflects our long journey to restore our independent statehood. We are bound by duty to remember it, realize its importance and follow its message." This was a clear claim to the eastern parts of modern Turkey. Pashinyan's increasingly hostile and provocative rhetoric raised concerns even in Armenia itself. A few weeks before the breakout of hostilities, Jirair Libaridian, a senior adviser to the former President of Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, noted that "the statements by the President and Prime Minister of Armenia [concerning the Treaty of Sevres] were equivalent to a declaration of at least diplomatic war against Turkey... This was possibly the last step that will, in the eyes of our opponents and the international

community, define the Karabakh problem as a question of territorial expansion".

III. Organized disinformation campaign against Azerbaijan

From the first day of the flare-up, Azerbaijan has faced organized disinformation and coordinated social-media manipulation campaigns. Armenia has increasingly leveraged social media platforms to spread propaganda and fake news during the critical moments. The Armenian side tried to present the conflict as a religious war between Christianity and Islam, which is dangerous in itself because it could internationalize the issue by provoking an inter-religious conflict across the globe. Pashinyan declared that the frontline in Nagorno-Karabakh has become "a clash of civilizations" and "battle of survival" for "the first Christian nation", which effectively is a dog whistle to garner support from racists, white supremacists and various far-right parties and groups in the West. This kind of apocalyptic religious rhetoric has also exposed the bigoted mindset and genocidal intentions of the Armenian government. It is not surprising that this rhetoric plays well with far-right populists like Charlie Weimers, a Swedish politician from the far-right Sweden Democrats and Member of the European Parliament, who consistently attacked Azerbaijan. According to Dr Farid Shafiyev, "when Armenian ultranationalists launched their unification campaign in February 1988 in an already crumbling Soviet Union, Armenia's strong diaspora in the West supported it through a well-organized network of policymakers, journalists, and scholars. This ethnic conflict was portrayed as a religious one, even though Armenia manages to enjoy

as good relations with Iran as Azerbaijan does with Israel. For liberals, it was presented as a self-determination struggle, while the end goal of the ultranationalist campaign was Armenia's territorial expansion and the establishment of "Great Armenia." In the evolving geopolitical environment of the post-Cold war era, Armenians exploited Islamophobia and Turkophobia to advance their cause."

As it was the case with the now debunked stories of ISIS terrorists fighting for Azerbaijan in the Four-Day War of April 2016, Armenia again started spreading disinformation about foreign mercenaries from Syria and Libya fighting for Azerbaijan on the frontlines. As Vasif Huseynov noted, "this "information" was propagated without giving a single proof or at best by citing unspecified people or their relatives. Even President Emmanuel Macron who is the president of Minsk Group Co-Chairing state France that is legally required to be neutral in the Armenia – Azerbaijan conflict echoed this without providing evidence. It is in fact no coincidence, as similar stories about the cooperation between Azerbaijan and terrorist groups in the Middle East have been each time propagated when the conflict escalated." As Dr Farid Shafiyev, the Chairman of the Center of Analysis of International Relations, put it, Azerbaijan "is a country with strong secular traditions that has prosecuted Islamic radicals to the full extent of the law, imprisoned ISIS fighters, supported US operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, and assisted Western intelligence agencies in eradicating terrorism. Frankly, today's Azerbaijan is a Muslim country as much as the Netherlands is a Christian one."

Moreover, through systematic disinformation campaigns about Turkey's military involvement in the conflict Armenia is trying to transform the conflict into a regional one, thus securing external support for itself. In his interview with Al Jazeera, President Ilham Aliyev pointed out that "one of the Armenian fake news which now is not any longer in the media, was that Turkish F-16 shot down Armenia's SU-25. This is fake news." As President Ilham Aliyev pointed out, "the aim of Armenia is to insult the Azerbaijani army, which fulfills its duty with honor, by making such false reports and to create the impression that the conflicts have increased and third countries are getting involved in the issue." Turkey has strongly condemned Armenia and pledged full support with all its means to Azerbaijan. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan wrote on Twitter that "launching a new attack against Azerbaijan, Armenia has once again shown that it constitutes the biggest threat against peace and comfort in the region. The Turkish people stand with their Azeri brothers with all its means as it has always been." Azerbaijan also demanded for Turkey to be included in the peace process. At the same time, Armenia's claim that Ankara is militarily involved in the conflict does not hold water. President Ilham Aliyev repeatedly emphasized that Turkey is not a party to the conflict with Armenia and is only providing moral support to Azerbaijan.

IV. International situation around the conflict

"The permissive international regime" has allowed Armenia to occupy Azerbaijan's territories without any repercussions. One of the main reasons why the conflict has not been

resolved so far, as President Ilham Aliyev pointed out, “is that lack of insistence from the side of the mediators and lack of pressure on Armenia to start demanding resolutions of the United Nations Security Council.” The OSCE Minsk Group that was a main responsible international body for mediation and resolution of the conflict and international community as a whole did not pay adequate attention to deliberate obstruction and derailing of the peace and negotiation process. As Fuad Chiragov, Head of Department at Center of Analysis of International Relations, put it, “they have not just only done anything to prevent further rise of escalation but also shamefully neglected for 30 years the occupation and the violation of basic human rights of more than million IDPs. Instead, their approach and policies towards the conflict, in fact, can easily be interpreted as “appeasement of the aggressor” that committed war crimes and crimes against humanity, including the massacre in Khojaly in 1992. The OSCE Minsk Group remained blind to military build-up of Armenia in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, illegal change of demography through illegal settlement policy, alteration of the centuries-old toponyms, destruction of the cultural heritage in the occupied lands. They have not attempted to do anything to make Armenia comply with the UN Security Council resolutions 822, 853, 874 and 884 adopted in 1993, that demand from Armenia to withdraw immediately and unconditionally its armed forces from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan.” As Dr Esmira Jafarova has noted, “despite the occupation of its territories for over three decades Azerbaijan remained committed to peace process and finding a negotiated solution based on the norms and principles of international law, and the relevant resolutions of the UN Security Council (822, 853, 874, 884). Armenia has been openly flouting those

resolutions for about three decades and the militaristic-revanchist stance rigorously pursued and demonstrated by incumbent Armenian leadership leaves no hopes for optimism that Armenia might commit to meaningful peace negotiations from now on.”

At the same time, as Dr Farid Shafiyev pointed out, “A cohort of Western scholars, experts, and journalists writing about the conflict solely focused on geopolitics and history but remained largely silent on the most important element—namely international law—because it did not fit the pro-Armenian narrative.” Azerbaijan has a right to territorial integrity. There can be no revision of a state’s borders without either its consent or its initiation. This provision is fundamental because it prevents aggression from other states. The rules and norms of the UN and other international institutions clearly state that nonviolent ways are the only means acceptable for revising the global system. Occupation cannot be awarded with admission into the UN. However, when it comes to the occupation of Azerbaijan’s territories all these principles have been conveniently ignored. During his address at the 75th session of the UN General Assembly, President Ilham Aliyev called for the preparation of the updated timetable for withdrawal of armed forces of Armenia from the occupied lands of Azerbaijan. President Ilham Aliyev also pointed out that “the UN Security Council resolutions are not time-specific. These resolutions are valid until they are implemented. Misinterpretation of UN Security Council resolutions is unacceptable”.

As Dr Esmira Jafarova put it, “what we are witnessing today on the frontline is a direct consequence of misinterpretation and non-implementation of the above resolutions. Instead of abiding by the legally binding resolutions of the UN Security Council and heeding to the numerous calls and relevant

documents of the international community, Armenia's leaders, both previous and unfortunately, also the incumbent, chose to exploit sensitivities through heightened nationalism, militarism, populism, and revanchism. This road unfortunately leads to an impasse, increased instability, warmongering and deadly military hostilities, the kind of which we have already seen in July and also at present."

V. What does Azerbaijan want?

The main reason why the peace process has not yielded any tangible results so far is because Armenia did not want to change the status quo and sought to keep the occupied territories under its control forever. However, Azerbaijan through successful military counter-offensive operations has changed the status quo. The previous status quo based on the fact of the Armenian occupation does not exist anymore. As President Ilham Aliyev has noted, "there is no such thing as status-quo. It is over." Azerbaijan's main condition is for Armenia to comply with the international law and start withdrawal from the occupied territories. In his interview with Al Jazeera, President Ilham Aliyev emphasized that "we want to find a peaceful solution, therefore we waited for so many years and probably

negotiations would have been continued if not for [Pashinyan's] distractive approach. And after ['Karabakh is Armenia'] statement I had a meeting with Armenian Prime Minister but they were absolutely meaningless. They were formal. He was telling me that they are not going to give territories back. And then, what to talk about? If they don't want to do that, if they go against elaborated principles by the Minsk-Group, which they elaborated for years and means that he destroys negotiations. Negotiations cannot be held unilaterally. We need to have a partner but in Armenia so far we don't have a partner for negotiations." President Ilham Aliyev also added that "we need to do everything that this conflict stops as soon as possible, the resolution is found as soon as possible. We are not in the position to listen to statements as 'stop it and we will work, we will negotiate, we will help'. We heard it many times, we don't have time to wait another 30 years. The conflict must be resolved now. Those who want to help Armenia, their so-called close partners, let them help by telling them 'leave the territories, demonstrate your will, stop firing', tell that 'today or tomorrow only one week I will leave Aghdam, next time, next week I will leave Fuzuli, next week I will leave Kalbajar' etc. and we will stop. So, this is a very fair position, this is a position aimed at peace not at war."