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ANALYSIS

SUPPRESSING AZERBAIJANI VOICE

Hegel notoriously maintained that if facts contradict theory, then “um so schlimmer für die Fakten”—so much the worse for the facts

Long before the dissolution of the USSR, the Armenian diaspora in the West had been able to successfully integrate into the intellectual, academic, business and cultural elites of different countries, and earned strong and influential positions and admiration. Moreover, the Armenian diaspora was able to integrate the “Armenian cause” and their victimization narrative¹ into “the historically oppressed people” concept of the global liberal agenda. Enormous human energy, time, financial resources, and other social capital have gone into “genocide recognition” campaigns all over the world for many years. All these enabled the Armenian lobby to accumulate the significant political support and financial resources that were instrumental for the Armenian state both in its military aggression and information warfare against Azerbaijan. The Armenian diaspora continues, extensively and systematically, to exploit their narrative about “historically oppressed, ancient and highly civilized Christian people” for political purposes. In other words, the Armenian lobby has been exploiting both the empathy of liberal circles and the implicit or latent Christian solidarity existing in different Western countries.

Unlike Armenians, Azerbaijanis had not been represented in large communities in Western countries before the Soviet dissolution. Very few in the West knew or had heard about Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis—simply because there had been almost no direct contact of Azerbaijanis with the Western world before the dissolution of the USSR. And, before the USSR, Azerbaijan was not part of one of the Western colonial imperia, but a little-known province of the Russian empire

¹ Terzyan, A., “Identity conflicts? The sense of ‘victimhood’ and the enemy images of Turkey and Azerbaijan in the foreign policy discourse of Armenia,” *Slovak Journal of Political Sciences*, volume 18 (2), 2018.
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inhabited by Muslims. Unlike Azerbaijanis, Armenians have been widely present in the West since the middle ages; as Christians, they could easily travel and trade between East and West, and then, as settled migrants in modern Europe and America, were able to successfully integrate into Western society. For many decades, the absence of the voice of the Azerbaijani side and an alternative perspective enabled the Armenians to gain dominance in public opinion about the region and the conflict. As a result of these historical factors, the perceptions, prejudices, and attitudes toward the conflicting parties have been shaped in favor of the Armenian side.

Only after the independence of Azerbaijan could Azerbaijanis study in large numbers at different Western academic institutions and gain direct access to the different intellectual platforms in which they came across firmly established perceptions and narratives about the region. In the history of humankind, it has, always and everywhere, been hard to go against mainstream narratives and belief systems. The generation of Azerbaijani experts and scholars who learned the rules of intellectual debate in Western intellectual, academic, and media platforms is still very young, and it will take many years to convey an alternative point of view about the region.

For Azerbaijani experts, academicians, and commentators, it has been, and often still remains, very difficult to get published in Western academic journals and media on the conflict and region. Different platforms that are supposed to provide equal opportunity for voicing and listening to all sides often simply deny and silence a different perspective. More importantly, the institutions that demonstrate intolerance towards the Azerbaijani perspective claim, on the one hand, to be defenders of democratic values while, on the other, they encourage the voicing of unfounded allegations, inaccurate wording, and definitions concerning the region that, in most cases, do not have any difference from the official state propaganda and perspective of the Republic of Armenia. Before the Second Karabakh War, the main purpose of all reports, articles, books, studies, and documentaries² on the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia was to cement and to justify the previous status quo and legitimacy of the occupation of Azerbaijani territories. The best that Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijani authors could get was a “balanced approach” towards the conflicting sides. For three decades, by playing this “balanced approach” game, the Western commentators put the conflicting sides on the same level, not distinguishing who was the aggressor/invaser, who conducted ethnic cleansing of around one million people, who occupied, and who violated the basic principles of international law. As already, very precisely, noted, the media coverage from individuals and organizations, the majority of which claimed an impartial and objective stance about the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict, was intentionally distorted, twisted, and manipulated with regard to the legal elements and historical facts.³

To sum up, we can confidently state that a disconcerting pattern was established among certain institutions, media outlets, and individual journalists that expressed a one-sided view of the war and the history of the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. This Hegelian approach to the facts and their sympathies and biases, although informing policymakers, did not, in the end, help them to create adequate policies, but rather created more obstacles towards reaching peace in the region.

² Review of “Parts of a Circle: History of the Karabakh Conflict”, May 2020, Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center), <https://aircenter.az/uploads/files/review%20of%20parts%20of%20circle.pdf>

³ Neglecting the Voice of Azerbaijan in the Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict (ANALYSIS), January 11, 2021,

<https://news.az/news/neglecting-the-voice-of-azerbaijan-in-the-armenia-azerbaijan-conflict>

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We would like to draw attention to two different incidents that our experts experienced in 2021. In July 2021, the Georgian Institute of Politics, with the financial support of the **Heinrich Boell Stiftung**, organized a Summer Academy in Tbilisi, which invited Georgian, Azerbaijani, and Armenian experts and researchers. Our colleague, Senior Advisor Dr. Vasif Huseynov, also attended this academy. The participants were supposed to write a research paper after the event that would be published on the website of the Georgian Institute of Politics. In her feedback to Dr. Huseynov's paper, Ms. Sonja Schiffers, Director of the South Caucasus office of the Heinrich Boell Stiftung, clearly demonstrated how biased she and the approach of the institution she represents are with regard to the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict and political issues relating to Azerbaijan. Ms. Schiffers even problematized Dr. Huseynov's call for the recognition of each other's territorial integrity by Armenia and Azerbaijan for the sake of peace and security in the region. As a result, he had to withdraw the paper.

On September 29, 2021, the US-based **Newlines Institute** published a piece⁴ written by Neil Hauer, who claims to be a journalist and analyst based in Yerevan. However, a very sketchy or superficial glimpse at all his writings and posts on social media is more than enough to understand his unconcealed prejudice and hate speech against Azerbaijan. The mentioned piece also was full of baseless allegations against Azerbaijan. One of the staff submitted a piece in response to the allegations by Neil Hauer; however, the response was rejected. Later, another expert at the AIR Center submitted to the Newlines Institute a completely different piece on post-war opportunities and economic development prospects for Armenia and Azerbaijan, which was also rejected by the institute owing to one sentence critical of the Armenian perspective on regional cooperation. (That paper was published in a different outlet.⁵)

Among many other unpleasant rejections, we can also underline **Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights (ISHR)**⁶ and **Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft**, which published four anti-Azerbaijan op-eds and refused to accept an opposing perspective on a matter relating to regional security.

Below, you will find just two further examples of unpublished responses to the unfounded allegations against Azerbaijan. We are quite confident there are other, and numerous, cases of different Azerbaijani experts whose pieces, over many years, have been rejected just because they "did not fit" the publishers' pro-Armenian standards.

⁴ Hauer N., Azerbaijan's Dangerous New Escalations, September 29, 2021, https://newlinesinstitute.org/azerbaijan/azerbaijans-dangerous-new-escalations/?fbclid=IwAR3Gj11COtzqM6nKHwlvczUEN3wWA2vkrGX_4OsDVFko4HK4GsOqPr2hohY

⁵ Economic integration and development as a catalyst for stability in the South Caucasus, November 16, 2021, <https://www.eureporter.co/world/azerbaijan-world/2021/11/16/economic-integration-and-development-as-a-catalyst-for-stability-in-the-south-caucasus/>

⁶ <http://www.humanrightscolumbia.org/news/documentation-project-atrocities-nagorno-karabakh>

Example 1

Response to the article in the *Forbes*

By Dr. Esmira Jafarova,

Board Member, Center of Analysis of International Relations (Baku, Azerbaijan)

In a *Forbes* magazine article titled “A Year After Unleashing War Crimes Against Indigenous Armenians, Azerbaijan’s Threats and Violations Continue,”⁷ author Jackie Abramian exposes her bias in favor of the country that kept about 20% of Azerbaijani territories under occupation for nearly three decades. It should therefore not come as a surprise to anyone that the author deliberately omits to mention the four UN Security Council resolutions from 1993 (822, 853, 874, and 884) that called for the immediate, unconditional, and full withdrawal of all occupying forces from the internationally recognized territories of Azerbaijan.

Against this backdrop, the author starts from a false premise by putting the burden of blame for the war that broke on September 27, 2020, on Azerbaijan.

For years, the conflict in Karabakh continued to cause, directly or indirectly, massive losses of human life on both sides. Azerbaijan has always supported a peaceful resolution of the conflict and, after the change of government in Armenia in 2018, there was hope for a peace deal. However, the new Armenian government missed the opportunity to de-escalate the conflict and support a peaceful resolution. The tension between Armenia and Azerbaijan became worse when, in early 2020, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan called into question the “Madrid Principles.” These principles were endorsed by the OSCE Minsk Group mediators—France, Russia, and the United States—as well as by the conflicting parties, Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, Nikol Pashinyan disrupted the peace talks by publicly [raising doubts](#) about the format for negotiations.

A series of provocations by Armenia, especially the July 2020 cross-border [clashes](#) in the direction of the Tovuz district of Azerbaijan, further escalated the situation. The Tovuz district is a strategic region through which important transport and energy routes connect Azerbaijan to global markets, and it is located far from the conflict zone. Later, Armenia intensified its reconnaissance and sabotage activities along the front line in August 2020; and, on September 27, 2020, launched a massive attack against Azerbaijan. On that day, the Azerbaijani army embarked on a full-scale military counteroffensive to ensure the safety of its civilians. This marked the beginning of the 44 Day War.

Ms. Abramian’s attempts to portray Armenia’s occupational policy towards Karabakh as Azerbaijan “refuting the legal right to self-determination of the Armenian population” clearly

⁷ Abramian J., A Year After Unleashing War Crimes Against Indigenous Armenians, Azerbaijan’s Threats And Violations Continue, September 27, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackieabramian/2021/09/27/a-year-after-unleashing-war-crimes-against-indigenous-armenians-azerbaijans-threats-and-violations-continue/?sh=5cfa57118cc1>

shows she is influenced by the propagandistic narratives of the Armenian lobby. The Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region/Oblast (NKAO) was an autonomous entity within Soviet Azerbaijan and the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan erupted in 1988 with the Armenian territorial claims against Azerbaijan. Later, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, all the newly independent states—former Soviet Socialist Republics—inherited the administrative boundaries that they possessed within the Soviet Union according to the principle *uti possidetis juris* in customary international law: Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity was subsequently reaffirmed by the United Nations.

Thus, the independent Republic of Azerbaijan also inherited all of its previous borders, including the Nagorno-Karabakh region. However, territorial claims by the already independent Republic of Armenia against Azerbaijan did not cease and, as a result of active military hostilities that lasted till 1994, Armenia occupied twenty per cent of the internationally recognized territories of Azerbaijan. However, the puppet regime that was established in the occupied Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan was never recognized by any country, including Armenia itself.

During the three-decades-long peace process under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group, Azerbaijan repeatedly expressed its readiness to give Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians the highest degree of self-rule within Azerbaijan. This was, however, rejected by Armenia.

The use of the word “indigenous” in the article to refer to the Armenians of Karabakh is inappropriate and misconstrues the actual place of Karabakh Armenians in Azerbaijani society. Armenians of Karabakh are Azerbaijani citizens and have equal rights alongside everyone else under Azerbaijani law. However, if one embraces the author’s logic, then Azerbaijanis who had lived in Karabakh and were forcibly displaced during the aggression and occupation of these territories by Armenia should also be considered “indigenous” people of those lands. The Karabakh War of the 1990s left Azerbaijan with about one million refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP). Lamentably, Ms. Abramian demonstrates a solemn silence when it comes to the rights and plight of the “indigenous” Azerbaijani population of Karabakh. Selective empathy towards one ethnic group should not numb one’s ability to extend the same emotions towards another, apparently more vulnerable, ethnic group—in this case, the displaced Azerbaijanis of Karabakh.

Ms. Abramian’s ostentatious concern for the plight of Armenian civilians and accusations directed at Azerbaijan of so-called “war crimes against indigenous Armenians” also deserves specific attention. Her concern for Armenian citizens is unfortunately accompanied by her oblivion to the actual war crimes perpetrated by Armenia, including during the 44 Day War, against innocent Azerbaijani civilians who died as a result of wanton attacks on Ganja, Barda, Tartar, Goranboy, and other cities of Azerbaijan. All these cities are located far from the theater of military hostilities. During the 44 Day War, Armenia used BM-30 Smerch and “Tochka-U” tactical missile systems and a Scud missile against Azerbaijani civilians—the elderly, women, children, and other non-combatants. Moreover, Armenia targeted Azerbaijan’s Mingachevir electricity plant and water reservoir; fortunately, the Azerbaijani air defense system managed to intercept the rocket, thus preventing a huge ecological and humanitarian disaster.

There were also [reports](#) of the Armenian army using Iskander missiles as well as white phosphorus against Azerbaijan during the 44 Day War. Ignoring such crimes is akin to appeasing war criminals.

The war ended on November 10, 2020, when Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Russia signed the Trilateral Declaration.

Unfortunately, Azerbaijani civilians still suffer daily due to the landmines planted by Armenia in the liberated Azerbaijani territories during the years of occupation. According to [reports](#), more than 140 Azerbaijani civilians have been killed and maimed in mine explosion since the end of the 44 Day War in Fall 2020. These territories are now considered to be one of the world's most heavily mine-contaminated areas, and Armenia still refuses to fully release minefield maps to Azerbaijan. To make matters worse, those minefield maps of the Aghdam, Fuzuli, and Zangilan regions that were ultimately [delivered](#) by Armenia to Azerbaijan were discovered to be only [25% accurate](#).

Moreover, while talking about missing persons purely from the Armenian perspective, the author never mentions that Azerbaijan still does not know the whereabouts of its own citizens missing since the war in the 1990s. According to [the State Commission on Prisoners of War, Hostages and Missing Persons](#), the fate of 3,890 missing Azerbaijanis still remains unknown. After the 44 Day War, however, Azerbaijan found and returned to Armenia the bodies of more than [1,600 Armenian servicemen](#). Azerbaijan's magnanimity in such a sensitive issue is, sadly, not reciprocated.

Ms. Abramian's false allegations about the so-called "mercenaries and jihadis deployed from Syria and Libya under Turkey's command" is also utterly wrong and disappointing. Turkey was not a party to the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict or, later, the 44 Day War. Any support that Azerbaijan received from Turkey during the recent war was purely political and in line with the spirit of partnership and close ties between the two countries. Furthermore, both during the 44 Day War and later, Azerbaijan assertively rejected any claims regarding so-called "mercenaries from Syria and Libya." These claims, alongside other similar allegations, were concocted by Armenia's propaganda machine to spread misinformation. Azerbaijan possesses a professional army of about [100,000 people](#) and therefore does not, and did not, need any external assistance to defend its own lands. Apparently, ascribing Azerbaijan's confident victory to the presence of some "imaginary mercenaries" makes it easier to accept the defeat.

In contrast, there were plausible reports testifying to the instrumentalization of mercenaries and foreign fighters by Armenia during the 44 Day War. Media reports revealed that the Armenian authorities used mercenaries from foreign countries, particularly from Syria and Iraq, to fight against Azerbaijan in Karabakh. Militants from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), classified by all Western countries, including the US and the EU, as a terrorist organization, were deployed to the occupied territories to fight against Azerbaijan. [These reports](#) also testified to the presence of foreign fighters—citizens of Armenian descent from France, the United States, Greece, Georgia, Lebanon, Syria, Belarus, and other countries—fighting for Armenia during the war. Otherwise, one cannot find plausible explanations as to what a Lebanese citizen of Armenian origin (read: convicted Vicken Euljekijan) would be doing in the then-occupied Azerbaijani territories.

The author's argument about prisoners of war (PoW) also starts from a false legal premise. After the 44 Day War, Azerbaijan returned all POWs to Armenia. The "POWs and captive civilians" referred to by Jackie Abramian are militants and members of a sabotage group that arrived in Azerbaijani territories after passing through the Lachin Corridor on November 26, 2020—after the trilateral agreement that ended the war was signed. Azerbaijan captured 62 militants who were members of this sabotage group. Those criminals could therefore not be considered as POWs. As a gesture of goodwill, Azerbaijan [returned most of these detainees](#) to Armenia. Nevertheless, and depending on the gravity of their deeds, some of them, including the two Lebanese citizens the author refers to, are subject to trial and the due course of law. This is a standard practice in every state.

What boggles one's mind, however, is Ms. Abramian's attempt to again mislead the reader by distorting history regarding the so-called "systematic extermination of Armenians" in 1918. These assertions represent a purposeful misrepresentation of the actual events on the ground.

In fact, 1918 was a year when Azerbaijanis were subjected to massive extermination by Armenian Dashnak-Bolshevik armed groups. In March–April 1918, massacres were committed in Baku and other cities of Azerbaijan. Every year, on March 31, Azerbaijanis commemorate the victims of those [bloody events](#). Unfortunately, crimes against Azerbaijanis did not end there and the tragic events of the recent past shattered ordinary Azerbaijanis to their core as their compatriots were killed, victimized, and displaced. The [Khojaly massacre](#) of February 26, 1992, that left 613 Azerbaijanis killed and 487 wounded, was the gravest slaughter of the Karabakh war in the 1990s. Similarly, the tragedy of [Bashlibel](#), as well as the mass graves discovered therein and the new facts revealed, speaks volumes about the massive human rights violations that took place against Azerbaijanis and that yet await their proper appraisal by the international community. However, no follow-up appraisals or legal evaluations of these tragedies can make up for the sufferings and bereavement experienced by the victims.

In January and September, 2021, Azerbaijan therefore filed lawsuits against Armenia in the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) for human rights violations during the nearly thirty years of occupation of Azerbaijani territories. Azerbaijan [also launched proceedings](#) before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to hold Armenia responsible for violations of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD).

As to the author's claim about "Azerbaijan continuing to desecrate churches, etc. in Artsakh"—nothing could be further from the truth. The scale of destruction in the liberated Azerbaijani lands is now exposed for everyone to see. [Many international guests](#), upon visiting the liberated cities of Azerbaijan, have experienced the terrifying and complete destruction of formerly lively, inhabited cities. Nor were [Azerbaijan's religious heritage](#), mosques, and places of worship spared. [Of 67 mosques](#) in the territories that were under Armenian occupation, 65 have been destroyed and the remaining 2 severely damaged and desecrated; many other monuments were completely demolished. The city of Agdam has been dubbed by many as the "[Hiroshima of Caucasus](#)" owing to the magnitude of destruction. During 30 years of occupation, Armenia [destroyed](#) 22 museums housing more than 100,000 artefacts; 927 libraries containing 4.6 million

books; 85 music schools; 4 theater buildings; 2 music halls; 4 art galleries; and 808 entertainment centers, as well as 63 out of 67 religious monuments.

In contrast, Azerbaijan protects all religious shrines in the de-occupied territories, including Christian churches. Azerbaijan is a multicultural and multi-confessional country and, for centuries, Christian heritage has existed in our lands. Azerbaijan therefore never deliberately targeted any Armenian cultural or religious monuments. As a vivid example, the Armenian Church, right in the heart of Baku, that was damaged during the events of the early 1990s has been fully restored and nearly 5,000 Armenian manuscripts are kept in the library of that church. Moreover, two Armenian shrines—the Gazanchesots church in Shusha and Dadivank monastery in Vank, which attracted lots of attention from the Western media—remain substantially intact. Gazanchesots suffered from an accidental rocket strike, and the government of Azerbaijan recently restored it. Against this backdrop, the only Azerbaijani mosque in Yerevan is being misrepresented as being of “Persian” origin.

Last but not least, in her attempts to make a case for her biased propagandistic arguments against Azerbaijan, the author extensively refers to documentation provided by the Center for Truth and Justice (CFTJ), “the unaffiliated, all-volunteer NGO run by approximately 25 American-Armenian attorneys,” who supposedly “collect evidence through witness interviews with survivors of the 44-day war.” Should anyone at this point be surprised that CFTJ’s only members are people of Armenian origin? I am far from attempting to disregard or diminish the work done by this NGO; however, it is clear that one cannot expect neutrality and objectivity from the work of an NGO run by all-Armenian attorneys.

One can, however, blame the author, Ms. Jackie Abramian, for solely relying on the findings of this all-Armenian NGO in a desperate attempt to justify her viewpoint. Justice should not be the prerogative of some “privileged” group. If Ms. Abramian considers herself the advocate of the vulnerable, she should in no way remain neglectful of the sufferings of Azerbaijani people.

Luckily, those days are over and behind us. We are focused on moving on, reconstructing our liberated lands, and building a better future. Azerbaijan is also offering an olive branch to Armenia and has made several appeals to sign a peace treaty. Make no mistake: In the 21st century, territorial aggression and occupation should be condemned, not condoned. Learning from past mistakes may usher in a better future and clearer perspectives. Azerbaijan truly hopes that Armenia will learn from its own past mistakes and, henceforth, engage in peaceful and meaningful interactions with all of its neighbors—and, first and foremost, with Azerbaijan. If this happens, the likes of Jackie Abramian will have no grounds for “tilting at windmills” and instigating animosity between the two nations. Let peace finally come to the South Caucasus.

Example 2

On September 7, 2021, the Columbia Journalism Review (CJR) published a piece written by Lilit

Markosian titled “The story of Nagorno-Karabakh is incomplete.”⁸ On September 28, Fuad Chiragov, the Head of Department at the AIR Center, emailed the editor of the CJR and submitted a response to the allegations of L. Markasian for publication. The CJR, which has an exceptional reputation for its professionalism and balanced approach, did not respond to several emails within a month. On October 22, they finally sent a short email saying “though an interesting read, your response is not the right fit for publication in CJR—we are focused more on covering the world of journalism than hosting political debate”—or, more simply, providing any kind of chance to respond to the bold allegations against Azerbaijan.

The story of the Karabakh War must be completed

Fuad Chiragov

Hopefully, this piece will not be just a response to [a piece written by Lilit Markosian](#), but also a beginning of intellectual debate between two Columbia University alumni. In the past, I have had opportunities to have debates with [scholars](#) and [diplomats](#) from Armenia on different platforms. Now I am glad to have this opportunity to debate on the platform of my dear alma mater. Lilit Markosian was, in her undergraduate studies, trained in creative writing; I was trained in social sciences at Columbia University. She was trained to present and justify her position and emotions in the best professionally creative way; I was trained to justify my position with numbers, hard data, facts, and law. Often, my analysis might lack a human face and sentiment, and sometimes I have a hard time conveying the emotions and feelings of people as expressively as a professional writer who was trained in literature. Similarly, perhaps, Lilit sometimes has a hard time in backing up her thoughts and emotions with numbers, hard data, and facts.

Lilit starts her piece with a description of the documentary by Mr. Hanrahan and says that he was denied entry to Azerbaijan. But why Mr. Hanrahan was denied entry to Azerbaijan, which I believe is very much true, should be questioned. On June 4, 2021, [two Azerbaijani journalists died](#) in a landmine explosion in [Kalbajar](#), which was [a region of active fighting](#) and had been controlled by Armenian military forces. Despite all security measures and restrictions on visiting the former conflict zone, around [23 civilians died and 36 people were injured](#) due to landmines. The civilians who lost their lives were those who rushed to visit the graves of their relatives and the houses that they could not visit for decades. Recently, people in Azerbaijan were emotionally devastated by [a documentary](#) about a father who was able to visit the grave of his seven-year-old son for the first time in 28 years. Back in 1993, [the father left the grave](#) of his son, which he dug with his own hands in the garden of his house in [Aghdam](#), which was controlled by Armenian military forces until November 20, 2020. It took several months for engineers to cleanse the area of mines so that the father could visit and find the place where he buried his son. This is just one example from the thousands of tragic stories from throughout the 30 years of conflict. Besides tens of thousands of people who died in this conflict, the fate of 3,890 people missing since the 1990s is still unknown. [The remains of 719 civilians](#), including 71 children, 267 women, and 326 elderly people who were buried in different parts of Karabakh in [mass graves](#) are still waiting to be identified.

⁸ Markosian L., The story of Nagorno-Karabakh is incomplete, September 7, 2021, <https://www.cjr.org/criticism/nagorno-karabakh.php?fbclid=IwAR1DkkBlznDPkD10VGbJBjIwwMp5iqxUyeUct9jKJI9W7cx4z4pcrCkE0HU>

The 44 Day War of last year was less brutal to civilians than the war of the 1990s. The 2020 war caused the deaths of [60](#) Armenian and [100](#) Azerbaijani civilians, according to the official reports of both sides, with 416 civilians from the Azerbaijani side and 165 from the Armenian one injured. The Azerbaijani army intentionally did not enter areas in Karabakh that were densely populated with Armenians and, in the end, agreed to Russian peacekeepers entering those areas for the security of the Armenian civilians. Why only Russian peacekeepers? Because no other country had initiated or proposed any substantial alternative at that time. Azerbaijan had all military advantages and the capacity to enter the densely Armenian-populated areas but did not do so in order to avoid any unintended human casualties among civilians. In other words, during the military operations, Azerbaijan not only limited the conduct of its military operations to be within its internationally recognized territories, but also narrowed them to only those areas where, historically, Azerbaijanis were in the majority. Therefore, there were many fewer casualties among civilians after the war than was the case for the war in the 1990s.

Therefore, anyone who attempts to construct any arguments about “genocide” or a “massacre of civilians” during the Second Karabakh War should take a glance at all the documented facts and statistics from all sources—not a single source, such as a documentary by the Popular Front that might have sympathy towards one side and prejudice against the other. You cannot designate one source as “a fair attempt” at the truth just because it supports your position fully while complaining that others do not say what you want to hear. Truth and reality are not always what you like. Therefore, every problem should be analyzed from different perspectives and point of views, and using a scientific and objective approach. People in Azerbaijan [also believe](#) that throughout the Second Karabakh War a disconcerting pattern was established among certain institutions and media outlets, according to which individual journalists and the international media intentionally distorted, twisted, and manipulated perceptions with regard to legal elements and historical facts. Thus, we have two conflicting perspectives on the international media coverage.

Without going further into the details of the conflicting perspectives on the media coverage, let us look at some facts documented by some independent institutions, which have always been very critical toward Azerbaijan and its political system. [Amnesty International](#) and other sources during the war clearly indicated that the Armenian side intentionally located “military barracks and other installations which may be lawfully targeted in Stepanakert’s city center, in the midst of residential buildings and shops, putting civilians at risk.” The report of [Amnesty International](#) and other sources that Stepanakert (Khankendi) “contained military and dual-purpose infrastructure in the midst of densely populated civilian residential buildings, civilian infrastructure and businesses” is very good proof that during the military operations Azerbaijan targeted only lawful military targets and complied with the principles of international humanitarian law (IHL). [The recent report of Human Rights Watch](#) found that the Armenian side intentionally located military infrastructure in schools and kindergartens, thereby making them legitimate military targets. However, the low number of casualties among civilians, as well as reports from multiple other sources on the ground, demonstrate that, during the active phase of military operations, Azerbaijan was intentionally doing its best not to target civilian structures in order to minimize casualties among civilians. In an [interview](#) with Spanish journalist Pablo Gonzales, who worked for the Spanish news agency *EFE*, the Basque newspaper *Gara*, *Voice of America*, several Polish publications, and Latin American television, and who was reporting the war from the Armenian side, he said that the

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Azerbaijanis tried to strike at specific targets, for example, air-defense systems. “When the city was bombed, they deliberately did not touch civilian objects, including hotels and places with a large concentration of civilians. They did not even shoot at the presidential palace, although it was very easy to get into it if one wanted to – the building was clearly visible.”

Nor was any critical infrastructure or building in any residential area densely populated by Armenians seriously damaged, and therefore Armenians of Karabakh continue to live in those territories. In contrast, when in 1993 the Armenian military forces occupied Aghdam, where only 1.2 percent of population was Armenian according to [the 1979 census](#), this once-blossoming city was [so destroyed](#) that representatives of the [international](#) media called it the “[Hiroshima of the Caucasus](#).” It should be noted that, back on July 29, 1993, the UN Security Council Resolution (853) demanded the “complete and unconditional withdrawal of the occupying forces” from [Aghdam](#); this had been ignored for 27 years. Recently, [Armenia gave Azerbaijan maps of 97,000 landmines in Aghdam](#) that had been planted during the Armenian occupation. Other districts that used to be populated by mainly Azerbaijanis before the war ([Kalbajar](#): 0.1% Armenians, Lachin: 1.1%, [Fuzuli](#): 1.1%, and [Jabrail](#): 0.1 percent Armenians, as well as other settlements) were also razed to the ground. These territories are also massively mined so people still cannot visit their homes or the cemeteries, and it will probably take many years and the loss of many lives until all these lands are cleansed of mines and other explosive materials.

[According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in 2009](#), “the number of internally displaced persons from occupied Nagorno Karabakh and the seven adjacent districts was more than 600,000” and the Azerbaijani Government estimated that there remained 1 million naturalized refugees and internally displaced persons. Lilit writes that Karabakh’s ethnically Armenian population was about 150,000 and “tens of thousands of Armenians fled.” It would be better if Lilit were more specific about exactly how many Armenians left the Karabakh during the 44 Day War last year, how many of them returned right after the war ended, and how many of them continue to live in Karabakh, without, of course, counting illegal settlement in violation of the Geneva Convention.

Another point raised by Lilit is based on extracts from speeches by Azerbaijani and Turkish officials that she labels as examples of hate speech. I will not argue about the authenticity of the words of Hajibala Abutalibov and whether he said them or not; let us assume that he did. But when she writes about Erdogan’s words—that are taken out of the context—she should add that right after the war [the Turkish president](#) offered [a new chapter](#) in bilateral relations and the opening of borders. It should be noted that Lilit and other authors from Armenia who write in different Western platforms try to project the tragic events of the beginning of the 20th century into the current time to justify the current policies of Armenia. In addition, they demonize modern Turkey and project this demonization onto Azerbaijan as well. Moreover, in wartime it is quite natural and easy to find hate content in the speeches of politicians and public figures. Against Lilit’s examples, I could open a debate about [the systematic and institutional Azerbaijanophobia in Armenia](#). However, words and deeds are different. The former president of Armenia, Serj Sarkisyan, confessed [in an interview](#) that, during the first Karabakh War, Armenia deliberately attacked civilians in [Khodjali](#), where hundreds of civilians were slaughtered for the sake of calculated ends, which was [well documented](#) by [international human rights organizations](#) and [media](#). And former Minister of Defense of Armenia, Vagharshak Harutyunyan, in an interview with

Russian television, admitted that, during the 44 Day War, Armenia [intentionally launched missiles at cities and towns](#) of Azerbaijan that were well away from the conflict zone in the small hours of the morning.

I do not want to exhaust readers further with counterarguments about [POWs](#) or the [lobbying](#) concerning Azerbaijan and its interests in the West. I don't intend to compare here which side suffered more: My point is that, while bringing to light the suffering on one side, the other side should not be neglected. Emotions are still very high in Azerbaijan and Armenia, and waves of hatred have engulfed both societies. The ceasefire agreement leaves many of the concerns of both sides untouched; these should be addressed carefully and gradually, when wounds have healed and complex interdependencies between the countries and peoples have developed, over time, towards a durable settlement. Yet, I hope that, after the war and the sufferings of the two peoples, our debate should help to build bridges and arrive at common ground. Thus, in this piece, I have tried to respond to the arguments emotionally presented by Lilit with empathy for the opposing site. I believe an emotional approach to the tragedy of the two peoples will not help us. I would like to thank Lilit for her avowal that Armenia was aggressive in its territorial gains in the 1990s. Very few Armenian experts admit that. However, while admitting this fact, those aggressive acts should not be justified through any debatable historical narrative. History should not be weaponized in modern politics; that is a dangerous track for any nation. Conflicts cannot be resolved according to any one side's historical claims and narratives, or by playing the blame game. Instead, conflicts should and must be resolved according to the [principles of international law](#).

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