



RFA - Azerbaijan in the Republic of Armenia #2

Released on February 22nd, 2024

Our most recent **Red Flag Alert** for Azerbaijan in Armenia, issued on 1 November 2023, expressed deep concern with the alarming potential for an Azerbaijani invasion of Armenia’s Syunik Province in order to build a “Zangezur Corridor” to Azerbaijani-controlled exclave of Nakhichevan. The Lemkin Institute is issuing another alert based on the renewed aggressiveness of the Azerbaijani state in the wake of President Ilham Aliyev’s re-election on 7 February 2024. The Lemkin Institute is pleased to see that the European Union and the United States are taking more steps to show support for Armenia in the wake of the Artsakh genocide. We wish to make clear that Azerbaijan is a genocidal state that has shown time and again that it respects neither international law nor peace treaties. To have an impact on Azerbaijan’s future actions, and to avoid yet another regional conflict, the Western powers must take strong and coordinated measures to immediately withdraw military funding and threaten to cut off investments and trade if Azerbaijan does not walk back from its belligerent actions.

Since Azerbaijan invaded the territory of the Republic of Artsakh in September 2023 and emptied it of its Armenian citizens, who comprised 99 percent of the population, the Azerbaijani government has increasingly referred to Armenia’s **Syunik Province** as “Western Azerbaijan.” This geographic designation invalidates and ignores Armenian national identity, internationally recognized territory, and indigenous historical presence in the region. References to “Western Azerbaijan” are particularly alarming in the context of the ideology of Pan-Turkism, which is one of Azerbaijan’s main political commitments. Pan-Turkism promotes the idea of a single Turkic nation — and an eventual Turkic state — stretching from the Balkans to Central Asia, encompassing territories inhabited by Turkic-speaking populations. The “Zangezur Corridor” holds strategic importance as it represents a potential land

bridge connecting the other Turkic-majority nations with Nakhichevan and the rest of Azerbaijan. As we pointed out in November 2023, depriving Armenia of its southernmost Syunik Province could render Armenia almost entirely surrounded by powerful historical foes by also cutting it off from its southern neighbor, Iran, with which it has important economic ties. The Lemkin Institute must highlight once again that genocide is also expressed through a denial of indigenous territorial integrity.

Already in October 2023, United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken and U.S. representative Frank Pallone warned of an Azerbaijani invasion of sovereign Armenian territory, especially after facing few if any consequences for invading Artsakh. Armenia's ambassador to the European Union has made similar warnings. On Tuesday, February 13, 2024 Azerbaijani forces opened fire on Armenian military positions in **Nerkin Hand** in the Syunik Province, killing four Armenian soldiers and wounding one. Azerbaijani propaganda claims that this attack was a reprisal for an Armenian attack that wounded an Azeri soldier. However, such claims are part of a "mirroring" strategy that Azerbaijan employs as it prepares for a major offensive. Propaganda about "Armenian provocations" almost always predates an Azerbaijani assault. However, despite the recent escalations, Blinken's level of concern seems to have significantly diminished following his meeting with Aliyev on February 17th. There now appears to be nothing more than lip service, filled with empty statements and vague rhetoric. Rather than addressing the pressing issues at hand, his statements consist of hollow assurances, primarily advocating for the bolstering of ties and cooperation between the US and Azerbaijan, the so-called "normalization" of relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia along with a "peace agenda". This apparent lack of genuine concern is troubling, particularly in light of the ongoing tensions and the potential for further escalation in the region.

The Lemkin Institute warns that Azerbaijan is continuing its unprovoked illegal aggression against the Republic of Armenia and is threatening to launch an invasion and seizure of sovereign territory recognized under international law as indisputably Armenian. This attack serves as a stark reminder of the ongoing threat to Armenia's sovereignty and the urgent need for international intervention to address Azerbaijan's belligerent actions. With the well-established genocidal **Armenophobia** endemic in Turkey and Azerbaijan, an Azerbaijani invasion runs a dangerously high risk of devolving into the mass murder form of genocide, particularly if Azerbaijani troops encounter Armenian civilians who have not fled. However, we remind the world that genocide is not only expressed through mass murder — the ideology aimed at destroying the Armenian identity in whole or in part can achieve its goals by depopulating Armenian territory piece by piece.

Azerbaijan's recent attacks came days following Ilham Aliyev's re-election, when he secured yet another term as President, extending his presidency beyond two decades. What was new and "symbolic" about his reelection, however, was that Aliyev cast his ballot for his re-election in the now deserted capital of Artsakh, Stepanakert, abandoned after the Azerbaijani military forcibly displaced the indigenous Armenians in the region. Aliyev has renamed the city "Khankendi" and recently announced his plans to settle Azeris there.

With Aliyev's re-election, the future of Armenia remains in limbo, particularly following his 14 February statements that there will be no peace treaty with Armenia unless Armenia "puts an end to territorial claims against Azerbaijan" and "brings its legislation to normal." With these statements Aliyev intends to threaten Armenia to give up all claims to the territory of Artsakh, which has been Armenian for nearly 4000 years and before 19 September 2023 had never been under direct Azerbaijani control. Aliyev pointed to the preamble of Armenia's Constitution, which calls for the unification of Armenia and Artsakh. Azerbaijan is demanding that Armenia adopt a new constitution.

Azerbaijan also states that Armenia must not only change the Constitution, but also legal documents and attributes and symbols of the state. This underscores a systemic attempt to reshape Armenian national identity in alignment with Azerbaijani interests. The intimidation by Aliyev in the pursuit of "peace" is deeply concerning as it undermines the autonomy and sovereignty of Armenia. By leveraging threats and demands, Aliyev seeks to impose his will on Armenia, disregarding its right to self-determination and seeking to seize Armenia's internationally-recognized territory.

Given the ongoing threats from Azerbaijan, the Lemkin Institute is concerned about recent actions undertaken by the Armenian Government. These actions include proposed changes to the Constitution and to the use of significant cultural symbols, such as the name and iconic image of Mount Ararat, alterations to parts of the national anthem, and a proposed shift from teaching "Armenian History," which spans thousands of years and extends across wide swaths of the Middle East, to the "History of [the modern state of] Armenia" in schools. Such proposals raise alarm bells, as they risk bolstering President Aliyev's current campaign and inadvertently reinforcing his ideological stance.

For example, altering the history curriculum to cover only the "History of Armenia" could limit the scope of historical study simply to periods after Armenia gained recognition as a modern, independent state. This raises major concerns about the degree of inclusion of crucial historical events predating this, notably the Armenian Genocide. Hence, there is a legitimate worry that pivotal events may be

downplayed or manipulated, undermining the integrity of historical education and perpetuating a distorted narrative, jeopardizing Armenia's national spirit and essential foundations. Alarming, this would allow genocide denier like Azerbaijan and Turkey to downplay or even erase their roles or responsibilities in historical events that may reflect negatively on their governments' political agenda and/or national identities.

On February 15th, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan rejected Azerbaijan's ongoing calls for legislative alterations and expressed concerns that Baku might be planning "large-scale" military aggression against Armenia. An example of this would be the initiation of military operations along the border with Armenia with the potential of escalating into a full-fledged war against Armenia. According to Prime Minister Pashinyan, Azerbaijan is actively engaging in a "policy of military coercion," aiming to secure additional Armenian territory and extract concessions from Yerevan and this intention can be read in all statements and actions of Azerbaijan. A potential invasion of Armenia by Azerbaijan in the near future could be viewed as a strategic move, particularly given the current global focus on the genocides in Gaza and Ukraine and the continuing lack of strong international condemnation of Azerbaijan. With the international community's attention diverted elsewhere, Azerbaijan may see an opportunity to act without significant opposition, interference, and, most importantly, consequences. This maneuver bears resemblance to historical precedents, notably the tactics employed by its ally, Turkey, during the Armenian Genocide. The timing chosen to commit that genocide was a strategic move, as Turkish leaders knew that international powers would be too preoccupied with WW1 to act, and indeed, there was no significant action to stop the genocide.

Additionally, just before Azerbaijan initiated the bombing and invasion of Artsakh in September 2023 following a 10-month blockade, there was a notable increase in Azerbaijani cargo plane flights to the Ovda military air base in southern Israel. Ovda serves as a key point for Israel's export of explosive munitions. Last year saw a total of 19 such flights, the second-highest annual count, with a notable surge occurring just prior to the September 19 conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Investigations revealed that these flights tended to escalate whenever military operations took place in Artsakh or along the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. Notably, on September 1, 2023, amidst another provocation by Azerbaijan in Armenia's Sotk region, flights to Ovda resumed. Of particular concern is the recent recurrence of similar events, exemplified by the observation through Flightradar24 of three Azerbaijani heavy-lift flights heading to the Israeli base Ovda this year, the latest on February 18th. Notably, this activity follows closely after the military escalation in Syunik just a few days prior. This repetitive pattern is profoundly disconcerting, signaling a potential for further military escalations akin to those witnessed last

year. This repetition should be regarded as a significant warning sign, necessitating increased vigilance and proactive measures from the international community.

The recent attack on Syunik Province and Aliyev's subsequent demands for changes to Armenia's constitution and cultural symbols signal a broader agenda to undermine Armenia's sovereignty and erase the presence of Armenian cultural identity in the South Caucasus. The implications of these actions extend far beyond mere territorial disputes, touching upon the very existence of Armenia and Armenians in what is left of their ancestral homeland. It highlights a troubling trend of using legal and cultural mechanisms to undermine the integrity of Armenia as a nation-state. Moreover, it underscores the urgent need to address ongoing genocidal ideologies and undertake appropriate actions regionally, as Azerbaijan's efforts represent a direct assault on the survival and identity of the Armenian people. Such aggressions constitute a clear violation and provocation against the Republic of Armenia, as a sovereignly recognized country by the United Nations.

The Lemkin Institute is issuing this second **Red Flag Alert** on Azerbaijan's recent actions in Armenia due to Aliyev's repeated escalations that we believe are still not being taken seriously enough by the international community. The lack of response to and condemnation of Azerbaijan's September 2023 invasion of Artsakh—which caused the mass exodus of nearly all of Artsakh's 120,000 native Armenians—has emboldened Aliyev to continue with his genocide of the Armenian people. The sheer indifference of international powers regarding the future of Artsakh and Armenia is a gross oversight of the systems put in place to prevent such atrocities from happening. Additionally, the lack of media coverage of Azerbaijan's growing abuses of Armenian territory is allowing Aliyev to continue with his genocidal actions in the safety of darkness. The global community must denounce these reprehensible, unwarranted acts and urge Azerbaijan to remove its occupying forces from over 215 square kilometers of Armenian sovereign territory. If the international community wishes to prevent further development of the second Armenian Genocide that is unfolding before its very eyes, Azerbaijan must be met with swift condemnation and action barring the state from participating in international diplomatic and regulatory processes.

The Lemkin Institute suggests the same actions mentioned in our previous [Red Flag Alert](#). Granting impunity to the Azerbaijani government and its enabler, Turkey, will only embolden them to perpetuate their aggressive expansionist agenda. Western powers must support Armenia in strengthening its sovereign borders and diplomatic position in the region. This includes insisting on Armenian control of any corridors through its territory and imposing sanctions on the Aliyev regime. The United States, in particular, must end the waivers on [Section 907](#) of the Freedom Support Act (1992) and hold Azerbaijan accountable for its actions.

Moreover, Western leaders must acknowledge their role in destabilizing regional security and pressuring Turkey and Azerbaijan to pursue genuine peace. The international community cannot afford to ignore or legitimize genocide as a solution to conflicts perpetuated by regimes like Azerbaijan. Failure to act risks undermining the rules-based order established in the aftermath of the Holocaust and could usher in a new era of genocide with devastating consequences globally.