



**Lemkin Institute for
Genocide Prevention**

RFA - Azerbaijan in Armenia #3

Released on April 3rd, 2024

It has been one month since our most recent Red Flag Alert concerning Azerbaijan's threats to the sovereign **Republic of Armenia**. We are now issuing our third such RFA, given Azerbaijan's escalating rhetoric and demands and its recent attacks on Armenia's Syunik and Gegharkunik provinces. Previously we have issued numerous RFAs and SOS Alerts for the **Republic of Artsakh**, which was occupied and depopulated by Azerbaijan on September 19, 2023. Now, as anticipated in our previous publications, the threat of genocide has extended to the sovereign territory of the Republic of Armenia itself.

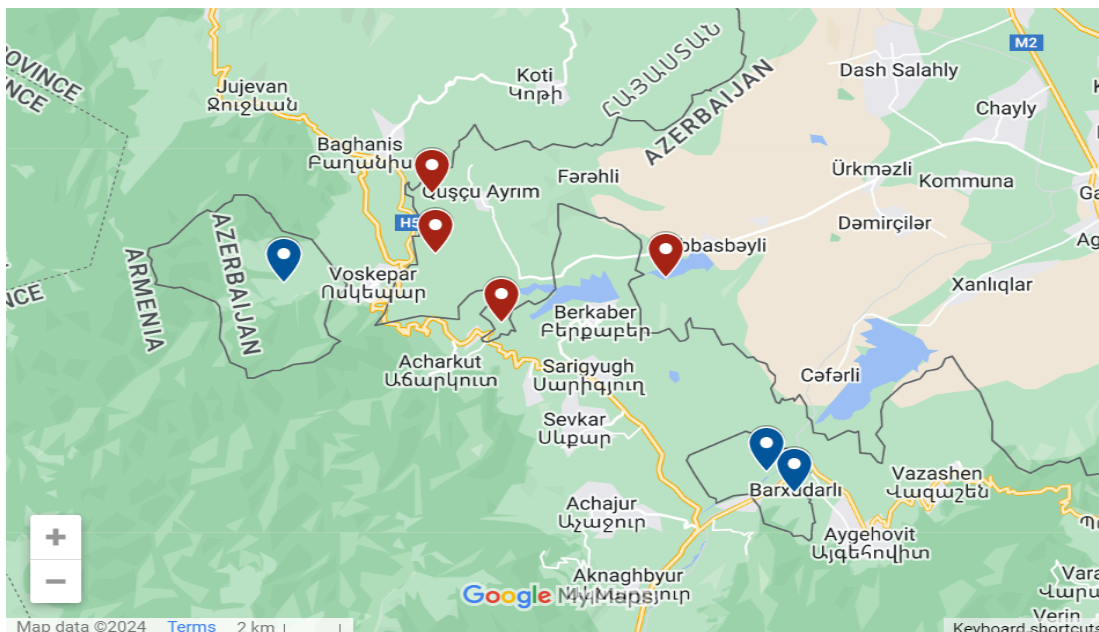
Azerbaijan appears to be pursuing a strategy of gradual occupation of Armenian sovereign territory. It is now seeking control over an additional "eight villages under Armenian occupation" in the Tavush Province and has dismissed Armenia's claims as mere "political manipulations". Its goal is the control of the entirety of the Armenian state and the unification of the **Azerbaijani** mainland with **Türkiye**, which views Azerbaijan as part of an expansive Turkic nation. By claiming control over strategic points across Armenia, Azerbaijan further appears to be modeling its policy on the Israeli settlements in Palestine. The danger to Armenia has become severe, necessitating immediate and coordinated attention from the international community. Urgent action is imperative to prevent another instance of territorial occupation and genocide akin to what occurred in Artsakh just six months ago.

These pressing developments in the Tavush Province appear to show a new development in Azerbaijan's approach to claiming Armenian territory: whereas for the past months Azerbaijan's priority was claiming "Western Azerbaijan" and the "**Zangezur corridor**" in Armenia's southern Syunik province, it is now targeting northern territories, a shift likely influenced by **Iran's** firm commitment to maintaining the border with Armenia in the south. However, it is essential to recognize that the underlying tensions and risks still persist and must not be ignored. Azerbaijan's stance on **Syunik** still remains and the underlying risk factors are not eliminated, especially after additional attacks on Togh village on April 2. Azerbaijan continues to promote international engagement in its concept of "**Western Azerbaijan**" and actively pushes its agenda behind the scenes, as seen by the "Western Azerbaijan is Historic Turkish Land" conference in the Netherlands

on 25 March 2024. Organized by the "[Western Azerbaijan Community](#)", the conference centered around the theme of "Western Azerbaijan is Historic Turkish Land." The promotion of the concept of Western Azerbaijan has been actively supported by the Azerbaijani government, with this narrative becoming official state rhetoric, particularly amid "peace negotiations" with Armenia. President Aliyev in one of his speeches insists: "[Let us work together on returning to Western Azerbaijan](#)," referring to the territory of the Republic of Armenia.

As of now, Azerbaijan has further intensified its territorial [demands](#). The Armenian government officially [confirmed](#) the ongoing Azeri occupation of 31 of its villages. It's crucial to emphasize that the 31 villages in question are on sovereign Armenian territory and are distinct from the **enclave-exclave** element, which has been a significant factor contributing to the delay in demarcating and delimiting the border between the two countries. An **exclave** refers to a portion of a territory that lacks geographical continuity with the main body of the country and is entirely enclosed by the territory of another state. An **enclave** is a part of a foreign state within another country. So, the areas concerned would be exclaves of Azerbaijan or Azerbaijani enclaves within Armenian territory.

The four non-exclave villages (highlighted in red), **Baghanis Ayrum** (Bağanis Ayrım), **Nerkin Voskepar** (Aşağı Əskipara), **Kheyrimly** (Xeyrımly), and **Kizil Hajily** (Qızılhacılı) in the Tavush region, are demanded by Azerbaijan immediately.



The issue of the other exclave villages (highlighted in blue), **Barxudarlu** (Barxudarlı), **Sofulu** (Sofulu), **Verin Voskepar** (Yuxarı Əskipara) located in the Tavush region, and **Tigranashen** (Karki) in the *Ararat Province*, as Azerbaijani Deputy Prime Minister Shahin Mustafayev [stated](#), "will be resolved within the framework of the border determination process".

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has said that Armenia could face a war with Azerbaijan if it does not compromise and cede control over four villages in the Armenian Tavush Province, which the Azeri Deputy Prime minister referred to as "unquestionably part of Azerbaijan." Alarmingly, we have seen military escalations at both Syunik's Tegh and Gegharkunik's Kut villages on April 2. The Lemkin Institute remains deeply troubled by the covert genocide unfolding as a result of Azerbaijan's advancing territorial claims, enforced through the continuous military conflict. The situation of the Tavush villages serves as a stark illustration of such territorial claims. However, these assertions and claims are put forth and persist without transparent maps or legal substantiation.

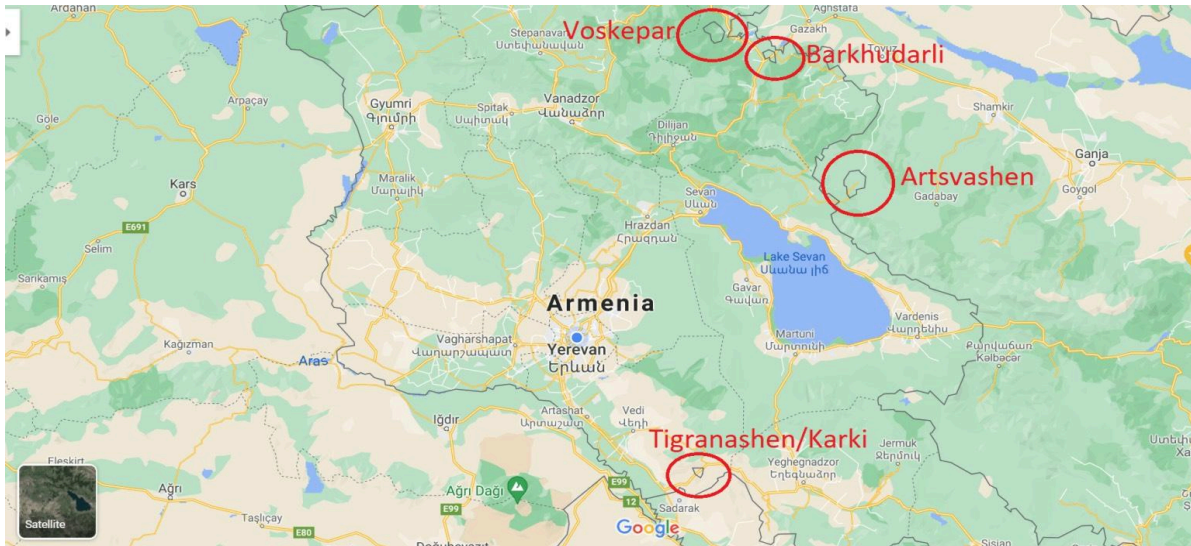
Map of Armenian SSR (1931):



The exclaves/enclaves in question emerged in Armenia and Azerbaijan in the 1940s during the Soviet era, but the legal basis for their transfer from Armenia to Azerbaijan remains unclear, though decisions made in Moscow and verbal justifications exist. The main rationale was that the villages were transferred due to the majority of their inhabitants being representatives of the neighboring republic (Azerbaijan). However, Armenia contends that the transfers have no legal basis. The territorial exchanges occurred without clear regulation, often at the discretion of local party leaders rather than the republic's leadership. Questions persist regarding the decision-makers, the timing of enforcement, and the legal

legitimacy of the changes. This skepticism is shared by Armenian experts and the country's leadership, including Prime Minister **Nikol Pashinyan**, who emphasizes the need for clarification on the legal grounds for the enclave boundaries. For compliance with international law, countries must provide legal documents substantiating their territorial claims to assert demands over specific territories. In the absence of such documentation, the situation remains subject to varying interpretations.

The territorial issue is not one-sided. Since the 1990's, Azerbaijan has been occupying parts of the Armenian territory along the border and an Armenian exclave **Artsvashen** (Bashkand), located in Qazax District which borders Tavush and Gegharkunik Provinces. Nikol Pashinyan raised the point of returning the formerly Azerbaijani enclaves in exchange for formerly Armenian Artsvashen. He also suggested that the border could be fixed by leaving all the enclaves the way they are at this point, which would solve the problem of Armenia's transportation to Georgia and Iran. However, there has been no sign from the Azerbaijani side indicating the possibility of returning the **Artsvashen** enclave to Armenia, nor does Azerbaijan view the status quo as desirable.



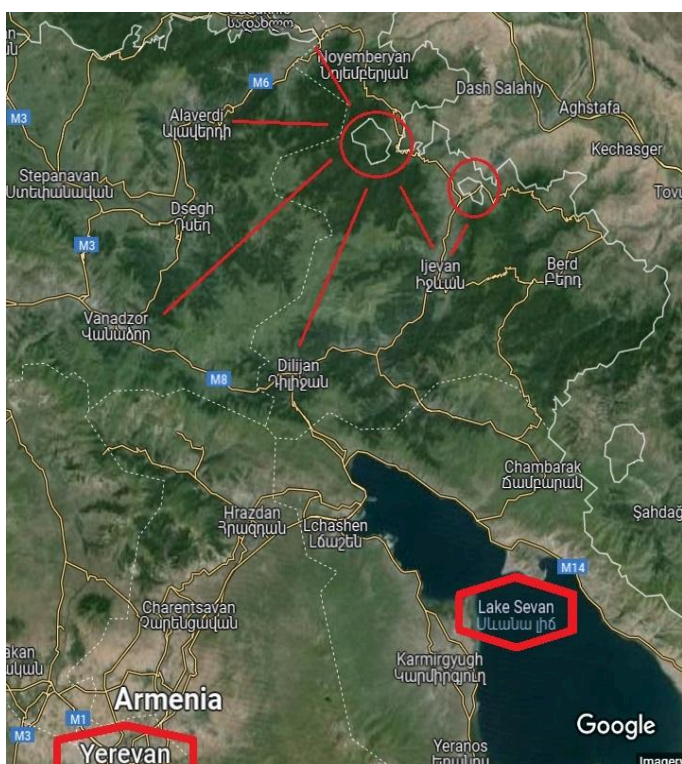
Importantly, the villages of Tavush straddle the main road between Yerevan and the Georgian border and are in proximity to a main commercial artery that links trade with Georgia in the north and Iran in the south. In the event of any disruption to those highways, finding alternative routes would prove challenging due to Armenia's rugged and mountainous terrain. If Azerbaijan were to seize critical Armenian communication arteries, Armenia risks being cut off from the important **Armenian-Georgian Highway** and the North-South gas pipeline. The **North-South gas pipeline**, or North Caucasus-Transcaucasia Gas Pipeline runs from Mozdok (Russia) through Tbilisi (Georgia) to Yerevan (Armenia) and supplies the Republic of Armenia with natural gas. As Armenia does not have any significant energy resources, it is heavily dependent on energy coming from Russia via this pipeline. Any potential move of the Azerbaijani positions closer to the road would pose a substantial threat to the security and stability of vital energy supplies and trade networks of Armenia.

In addition to vital communications, the four villages also play a crucial role in Armenia's strategic **defensive posture**. Armenia currently holds strategic heights and well-developed defensive lines along this part of the border. Tavush stands out as the only region with superior defensive positioning over Azerbaijan compared with other border areas, which can explain Azerbaijan's strong desire to obtain the villages, potentially facilitating the conquest of the entire country.

Consequently, Azerbaijani military units could be deployed along five sections of the **Yerevan-Tbilisi highway** which would render maintenance of the interstate road impossible. This scenario would disrupt crucial communication links between Armenia and Georgia, placing the security of the gas pipeline and export routes in jeopardy. In effect, Armenia would become a veritable enclave encircled by Azerbaijan, compromising its territorial integrity and security.

Azerbaijan's reluctance to seek a fair resolution to the territorial dispute, coupled with the ambiguity surrounding the border demarcation and ongoing occupation of **sovereign Armenian territory**, underscores legitimate concerns for Armenians. It's crucial to note that these villages are inhabited solely by Armenians, and surrendering them to Azerbaijan means that Azerbaijani military units would be positioned in close proximity to Armenian schools, kindergartens, and government institutions. The safety and protection of the inhabitants cannot be guaranteed under such circumstances, especially combined with constant military aggression and threats amid the backdrop of the recent genocide and ethnic expulsion of Armenians from **Artsakh**.

Edits to Tigran Abrahamyan's map done by the Lemkin Institute:



Any cession of **Nerqin and Verin Voskepar** as per Azerbaijani demand, would effectively isolate **Voskepar** village, turning it into an Armenian exclave within Azerbaijan. This one-sided stance by Azerbaijan threatens to result in the complete blockade of the Armenian Tavush region, potentially leading to a humanitarian catastrophe akin to what was witnessed during the 9-month blockade of Artsakh. During Pashinyan's recent visit to Voskepar, the residents raised concerns about the risk of a blockade and ethnic cleansing in their communities, drawing parallels to the events in Artsakh. Taking into account the traumatic past of the villagers, the memory of the massacre during the infamous Soviet **"Ring" Operation (1991)**, and the world's

inaction on the recent Artsakh genocide, the level of distrust and fear of repetition of the horrors from the 1990s and 2023 is very reasonable.

The loss of control over these villages would be detrimental not only considering the trauma of unrecognised and repeated genocide but also strategically as it would trap Armenia in a dangerous defensive disadvantage. This poses an existential threat to the Armenians living close to the border and potentially threatens further expansion to other Armenian regions.

As seen from the previous map, the looming danger posed to **Lake Sevan** and even the capital city of **Yerevan** cannot be underestimated, particularly in light of President Aliyev's ominous threats and the close proximity of potentially occupied Azerbaijani villages. This is especially worrying as there are clear indications from the Aliyev regime

that it plans to limit Armenia's control over significant water resources, such as Lake Sevan, in the future. The recent attacks on **Kut**, located near Lake Sevan in Gegharkunik Province on April 2, serve as evidence of this agenda. Aliyev's threats reflect a multifaceted agenda driven by strategic, geopolitical, economic, and ideological motives, all geared toward bolstering Azerbaijan's influence and asserting dominance in the region. These threats are not mere conjecture but represent tangible risks that could materialize swiftly if appropriate measures are not taken to safeguard Armenia. The potential loss of Lake Sevan would be catastrophic for Armenia, as it plays a pivotal role in sustaining the country's economy, environment, water supply, and cultural heritage. Targeting Lake Sevan strategically aligns with Azerbaijan's objectives to further weaken Armenia's position in the **South Caucasus** and continues to ignore Armenia's sovereignty.

Furthermore, on March 24, the Azerbaijani Military Prosecutor's Office issued warrants for 18 individuals from the village of **Baghanis Ayrum** in the Tavush region, alleging their involvement in what Azerbaijan claims was genocide during the war in the early 1990s. The Armenian government denies the existence of such individuals or events in that location and Azerbaijan provided no evidence. Claims that Armenians participated in a genocide in the 1990s have been used before without substantiation to take Armenians hostage. Should Armenia capitulate and relinquish control of the village, these 18 individuals will undoubtedly confront the same grave circumstances endured by the unlawfully detained prisoners of war, as well as Artsakh officials recently highlighted in a statement by the Lemkin Institute. The genocidal policy pursued by Azerbaijan intensifies hostility with each new provocation, setting the stage for potential future atrocities. Threats against the collective existence of the Republic of Armenia and its people have escalated significantly as a result. It's vital to continue pushing for the accountability of Azerbaijani crimes and to continue to safeguard human rights and prevent future conflicts.

Clearly Azerbaijan has put forward demands that explicitly favor Azerbaijani interests, rejecting any discussion on the withdrawal of its military forces from the 31 villages previously occupied during invasive attacks. These villages, integral parts of the recognized **sovereign territory of the Republic of Armenia**, were seized in aggressive actions spanning from November 2021 to throughout 2023, including aggressive military offensives in May 2022 and September 2022.

The Lemkin Institute highlights once again that genocide can be expressed through a denial of indigenous territorial integrity and sovereignty. In fact, this is a very common historical pattern of genocide. Azerbaijan is enforcing its territorial claims through the constant threat of military aggression, raising red flags for a gradual and covert genocide against Armenia. Azerbaijan has failed to provide any assurances regarding the security or safety of the Armenians in the villages it is claiming. Moreover, its rhetoric has been alarmingly **Armenophobic**, characterized by clear genocidal intent, as evidenced by Aliyev's assertions that Armenia should cease to exist. As Azerbaijan presses forward with its expansionist agenda, the Institute underscores the urgent need for international attention and intervention. We must highlight that such genocidal regimes do not stop without forceful pushback from the international community.

For more than two years, The Lemkin Institute has consistently advised and advocated for the same measures and actions summarized in our previous [Red Flag Alert](#). Our recommendations remain unchanged, reflecting the ongoing urgency and importance of the situation at hand. Granting impunity to the Azerbaijani government and its enabler, **Türkiye**, 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 waiver on [Section 907](#) of the **Freedom Support Act** (1992) and hold Azerbaijan accountable for its actions.

Moreover, global leaders must acknowledge their role in destabilizing regional security and must now pressure **Türkiye** 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 in 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.