



## RFA - Azerbaijan in the Republic of Armenia

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The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention is issuing a **Red Flag Alert** for the Republic of Azerbaijan in the Republic of Armenia, due to the alarming potential for an invasion of Armenia by Azerbaijan in the coming days and weeks. Azerbaijan has long coveted Armenia’s southern Syunik Province, which has been discussed in the recent past as the site of an Azerbaijani-controlled “Zangezur Corridor” to Nakhichevan. Considering recent political developments in the region—including the Azerbaijani invasion of Artsakh on September 19, 2023 and the ensuing seizure of the territory—and well-established genocidal Armenophobia endemic in Türkiye and Azerbaijan, an Azerbaijani invasion runs a dangerously high risk of devolving into genocide. We remind the world that genocide is not only expressed through mass murder. As was the case during the recent seizure of Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh in September of 2023, genocide can also be expressed through a pattern of massacre, atrocity, and forced displacement from indigenous territory when the ideology behind these actions is aimed at destroying an identity in whole or in part.



Map of Armenia in the South Caucasus Region, showing Armenia's Syunik region between Azerbaijan and its exclave, Nakhichevan. Also shown is the Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh region and the Lachin corridor.

Although Azerbaijani officials have recently distanced themselves from the plan for a “Zangezur Corridor” through Syunik, there are several reasons to remain concerned. After Azerbaijan’s aggressive war against the Armenian territory of Artsakh—which led to the brutal murder of Armenian civilians and the forced displacement of almost its entire Armenian population—Azerbaijan has publicly set its sights on Armenia’s southernmost **Syunik Province**, which it claims as its own territory, calling it “Western Azerbaijan.” On October 6, Armenia’s Ambassador-designate to the EU, Tigran Balayan, warned that Armenia expected Azerbaijan to invade

“within weeks.” US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken had warned a group of US lawmakers of similar threats on October 5. In an October 7 telephone call with European Council President Charles Michel, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev specifically threatened to invade Armenia to “claim” eight unspecified provinces in Armenia that he said were “occupied” and required “liberation.” He noted that if “new conflicts” were to arise in the region, it would be the fault of French President Emmanuel Macron, whom Aliyev has accused of “neocolonialism” in supporting Armenia’s security. Since 2020, the Aliyev regime has already taken 150 m<sup>2</sup> of territory in the sovereign Republic of Armenia in clear violation of both international law and the ceasefire statement which ended the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War of 2020.

Not only would Azerbaijan’s aggression against Armenia constitute an invasion and seizure of sovereign territory recognized under international law as indisputably Armenian territory, but also an Azerbaijani invasion of Armenia would realize the long-held goal shared by Azerbaijan and its close ally, Türkiye, of creating a land bridge between both states. It would deprive Armenia of its southernmost Syunik Province, and it could render Armenia a rump state almost entirely surrounded by powerful historical foes.

Armenia’s Syunik Province is of strategic interest to Azerbaijan not only because its seizure would finally realize the pan-Turkic dream that fuelled the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923, but also because it is the planned site for a potentially lucrative and strategically important land corridor between Europe and Central Asia that Azerbaijan and Türkiye together would like to control. This so-called “**Zangezur Corridor**” would connect Azerbaijan to its exclave Nakhichevan, which shares a border with Türkiye. Reports surrounding the corridor suggest that it would be controlled extraterritorially by Azerbaijan and/or Türkiye. Furthermore, from the Azerbaijani perspective, the corridor would have the added benefit of cutting Armenia off from its southern neighbor, Iran, with which Armenia has important economic ties. Russia supports this corridor, as do Western powers and Israel, due to a wide array of factors and national interests; the central question is which country or countries will control it.

Furthermore, given Azerbaijan’s recent success in seizing Nagorno-Karabakh and the current political crisis embroiling the Middle East, the present geopolitical circumstances present an opportunity for **Türkiye** to pursue its own self-interests amid a weakened Armenia. Türkiye, which has been facilitating Azerbaijani acts of aggression against Armenia for over thirty years, is actively pursuing territorial and diplomatic expansion in the Middle East, South Caucasus, and Central Asia. Its relationship with Azerbaijan is of immense strategic interest, forming an integral component of a pan-Turkic belt that Türkiye hopes to develop from its eastern border through the Caucasus into Central Asia; the Azerbaijani invasion and seizure of Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh constitutes a key act in pursuit of this goal.

Most alarmingly, Azerbaijan has begun to amass its military forces along its borders with Armenia, including in its Nakhichevan enclave (which borders Türkiye). Last week Azerbaijan also began a series of joint military exercises with Türkiye, much as it did in the weeks before invading Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2020. These red flags suggest that

Azerbaijan is readying itself for a possible invasion while also seeking to intimidate Armenia into ceding land and corridor rights to avoid invasion.

As tensions have simmered since the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, [Türkiye](#) and [Azerbaijan](#) have made their desire to rid the South Caucasus of Armenia and Armenians disturbingly clear—as well as their willingness to commit genocide in order to do so, culminating in acts of genocidal intent aimed at Armenians. Preceding Azerbaijan’s September 19 seizure of the remaining Armenian-controlled regions of Artsakh, it imposed a crippling, nine-month blockade of the **Lachin Corridor** that cut Artsakh off from the rest of the world, creating increasingly dire humanitarian conditions in which Artsakh-Armenians languished without access to [food](#), [medicine](#), [infant formula](#) or other goods necessary for survival; the Azerbaijani government also systematically severed gas, electric, and telecommunications services during the blockade. The Azerbaijani government expressly ignored [two orders from the International Court of Justice](#) to re-open the corridor before invading Nagorno-Karabakh on September 19, 2023, justifying the invasion as an “[anti-terror operation](#).” Since then, Azerbaijan has begun a campaign of “[re-integration](#)” in Nagorno-Karabakh which, despite claims of compliance with human rights standards, includes [confiscating Armenian passports](#) of the few Armenians who are still in the territory, destroying Armenian homes and cultural institutions, resettling Azerbaijanis in Armenian homes, [separating Armenian families](#), and monitoring communications between Armenians who remain in Nagorno-Karabakh.

These policies have been underpinned and supported by a longstanding tradition of genocidal Armenophobia—an ideology which has been nurtured by the Azerbaijani government and utilized to not only justify the elimination of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh and the erasure of Armenian identity from the territory, but discredit Armenian claims to territorial sovereignty in its entirety. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has repeatedly claimed that “[present-day Armenia is our land](#)” and has sought to present indigenous Armenian presence in the Caucasus as broadly illegitimate, possibly preceding an attempt to chip away and seize additional chunks of Armenian-inhabited territory.

In light of ongoing hostility from Azerbaijan and Türkiye, Armenia currently remains in a very difficult position and must secure its sovereignty in every possible way to avoid losing more land to regimes actively seeking to seize its internationally-recognized territory. The Lemkin Institute believes that it is critical for the Armenian state to retain control over any corridor that runs through its territory. While the Russian government has demonstrated increasing support for both Azerbaijani and Turkish regional ambitions – many analysts [believe](#) that the September 19 invasion of Artsakh was only possible with a greenlight from Russia – Armenia has been forced to rely more and more on the West. Unfortunately, Western regimes have been [playing both sides](#) of the conflict, and they have failed to offer any concrete security guarantees or military funding to Armenia as Türkiye and Israel continue to heavily [arm](#) Azerbaijan, giving the latter a powerful military advantage. If Azerbaijan were to invade Armenia, there is fear that the European Union and the United States, preoccupied with ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and Israel/Palestine, would fail to offer necessary military aid to protect Armenia and Armenians: the [lukewarm response](#) of European and American officials to Azerbaijan’s genocidal ethnic

cleansing campaign in September has demonstrated that Western powers are willing to sacrifice Armenian interests, even up to the point of genocide, in order to secure their strategic relationships with NATO-member Türkiye and Israel as well as to ensure Western access to any trade corridor connecting Türkiye with Central Asia, often viewed as a key source for oil, gas, and mineral resources.

To avoid a catastrophic invasion of Armenia by Azerbaijan, which would considerably threaten the peace and stability in the region for decades to come, it is imperative that Armenia and its allies do everything in their power to ensure that an invasion is unpalatable to Azerbaijan. Western powers, which have encouraged Armenia to distance itself from the Russian Federation (the state that has traditionally protected Armenia from Turkish and Azerbaijani aggression and expansionism—whom critics allege failed to defend Armenia from invasion as a member of the CSTO), must not fail to act while another genocide has begun brewing in the South Caucasus. Granting such a level of impunity to the genocidal atrocities committed by the Azerbaijani government and enabled by the Turkish state will only embolden them to continue their destabilizing agenda of aggression and expansionism in the South Caucasus, the Middle East, and Central Asia.

Accordingly Western powers need to help Armenia strengthen its sovereign borders and its diplomatic position in the region. They can do this by insisting on Armenian control of any corridor running through its territory. They can further assist Armenia in securing its sovereignty by forcing Azerbaijan to withdraw its army from the border regions, by imposing sanctions on the Aliyev family, and by suspending Azerbaijan's current visa and energy agreements with the EU, as suggested by a European Parliament resolution on October 5. France's decision to increase weapons sales to Armenia could be helpful, but only if there is coordinated action and material support in the event of an invasion by Azerbaijan. The United States, for its part, can enforce Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act (1992), which excludes Azerbaijan from participation in economic programs created by the act. Section 907 has been waived by US presidents each year since 2002 but, given that Aliyev has proven to be a brutal genocidaire, the waivers must come to a permanent end.

Western leaders must also take responsibility for destabilizing regional security in the South Caucasus in pursuit of self-interest, which has actively served to undercut Armenia's geopolitical security. This can only be achieved by placing pressure on NATO member Türkiye and its ally Azerbaijan to pursue real peace and to cease using the illusion of "peace negotiations" as a way to threaten Armenia with dismemberment. Furthermore, Western nations should pull back on any "all or nothing" ultimatums to Armenia that may exist to pressure Armenia to completely cut ties with Russia, especially given Russia's increasingly friendly economic and strategic relationships with Azerbaijan and Türkiye. Armenia must be able to use its sovereignty to explore new economic relationships with partners that will enable it to pursue an independent foreign policy without becoming embroiled in a new front of the proxy conflict between Russia and the West.

If the Western world continues to ignore genocide and effectively embrace it as a legitimate solution to intractable conflicts created and perpetuated by regimes like Azerbaijan, it will not only declare an end to the rules-based order of the post-Holocaust world; it will usher in an age of genocide as (if not more) destructive than the one that characterized the last mad rush for control of territory and resources across the globe.