15 ARTSAKH WAR MYTHS PERPETUATED BY MAINSTREAM MEDIA

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By Lucine Kasbarian, NJ, 25 October 2020

When geopolitical power, malignant governance, military might and petroleum wealth determine the political pecking order, being a landlocked country on the right side of history is a minor detail. It is through this lens that global citizens may observe the tiny besieged Republic of Armenia fighting for its survival alone against neighboring aggressors, ISIS, civilian bombings, foreign actors provoking instability in a bid for regional dominance, and world powers which gang up like hyenas before an uncaring world.

If this illustration of force ratio were not enough, media gatekeepers serving the interests of the powerful are working overtime to impose a false or at least misleading if not vilifying narrative about the Armenians in news coverage about the Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) War which exploded on the de facto Armenian state on September 27 after a nominal, 30-year truce with Azerbaijan.

From peddling false equivalence, to selectively reporting the facts, to committing sins of omission, to cherry-picking so-called experts to support a desired argument, to concluding news coverage with biased policy recommendations, these actions taken by mainstream media about the facts on the ground reveal the handiwork of master purveyors of fake news.



Let's review the top myths perpetuated by mainstream media in their coverage of the Artsakh War:

- **The Azeri claim that Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) belongs to Azerbaijan.** Artsakh has been continuously inhabited by a majority Armenian population for the last 2500 years. This is testified by ancient Greek historian Strabo and Roman historian Pliny the Elder (69 B.C.). Following Soviet law, Armenians of the Autonomous Oblast of Nagorno-Karabakh voted in a 1991 referendum to secede from the Soviet Union and rejoin Armenia. This was a fully legal step that did not require the permission or approval of Azerbaijan. After Artsakh declared its independence, Azerbaijani mobs, supported by their government apparatchiks, attacked Armenian communities in Baku, Sumgait, Kirovabad (Ganja) and Artsakh. Mass murders, pogroms, and property confiscations forced the Armenians of Artsakh to either flee or physically defend themselves from obliteration. The Artsakh Armenians successfully drove back invading Azeris in 1994, won the war, and have run a de facto state for nearly 30 years.

When Armenian Artsakh was an Autonomous Oblast under Azerbaijan, the Azeri leadership made sure to economically disempower the region. It also settled Azeris to tamper with the demographic, forbade the production of Armenian-language textbooks and committed other actions to drive Armenians out of the region. For Azerbaijan, there is no interest in nonviolent coexistence with Armenians, who simply desire to live on their ancestral homeland in peace. The Turkish and Azeri

plan is to seize Artsakh and empty it of its native Armenian population through ethnic cleansing. After Artsakh, Armenians believe that the Azerbaijanis and Turks will invade Armenia's Syunik province to form an unhindered border between Turkey and Azerbaijan proper. Their intention is land and conquest. This has already been apparent from the land grabs in Western Armenia (now Eastern Turkey) during and after the Armenian Genocide of 1915, the encroachment on Nakhichevan after native Armenians had been liquidated, and similar actions.

When journalists – lazily or deliberately -- call Armenians "occupiers," they fail to mention that Armenians have been continuously **"occupying"** Artsakh for the last 2500 years. When labeling Armenians **"separatists,"** journalists fail to mention that Armenians are the opposite: anti-separatists seeking to once again rejoin with Armenia. When describing Azeris who seek to **"liberate"** the territories of Artsakh, writers fail to mention that it was the indigenous, majority Armenians who liberated themselves from brutal Azeri rule.

From superficial reporting or deliberate omissions, consumers of news will almost never learn that Azerbaijan as a country did not exist prior to 1918. Any map (and primary sources of history) produced before that date will verify this.

- **That there is no precedent for the genocidal markers unfolding today in Armenia and Artsakh.** Armenians have been repeatedly subjected to ethnic cleansing in historically Armenian-populated lands in Western Armenia, Cilicia, Nakhichevan (a historically Armenian territory also gifted to the Azeris by Stalin), Baku, Sumgait, Kirovabad, and, Artsakh. Following Artsakh's declaration of independence, Azerbaijan violently persecuted the Armenians, who then rose up to avoid their annihilation. Armenians and global observers know that Turkey and Azerbaijan have genocide in mind once again. The sheer number of civilians, civilian infrastructure, cultural and historical monuments targeted by aerial shelling should leave no doubt. This is a continuation of the Armenian Genocide.
- **That when hostilities broke out on September 27, Armenians attacked the Azeris first. That both sides "blame the other" for violating the brokered humanitarian ceasefire agreements.** While surrounded by hostile forces blockading them, Armenians have nevertheless lived peacefully on their historic homeland and have been maintaining a defensive posture. Armenia and Artsakh are outnumbered and out-gunned by Turkey to the west and Azerbaijan to the east. There is proof that Turkey, Azerbaijan and Israel had been cooperating and planning an unprovoked military incursion into Artsakh and Armenia. This reached a peak when, in August, Turkey and Azerbaijan launched joint military air drills and ground exercises in Baku, Nakhichevan, Ganja and elsewhere. Turkish military personnel never left. In fact, Azeri President Ilham Aliyev inadvertently confessed to initiating the attack on Artakh. Although media outlets claim that both sides blame one another for the resumption of hostilities, there is a clear aggressor and defender. Rather than truthfully state that Azerbaijan violated ceasefire agreements, mainstream media prefer to report, without performing adequate research, that

each side blames the other for the violations. Media outlets also neglect to mention that for years, Armenia and Artsakh have requested the placement of electronic monitors to identify ceasefire violators while Azerbaijan has adamantly rejected this constructive idea.

- **That Turkey is not managing this war.** Turkey is not only providing guidance to Azerbaijan but has taken over their entire military command. Turkey is also managing all airstrikes on Armenian military and civilian targets. Moreover, Turkey has closed its airspace to humanitarian flights heading to Armenia. Contrary to the projections of Erdogan's psyche, Armenia is not "the greatest threat to peace in the region."

While every country of the world walks on eggshells to avoid provoking volatile Turkey and Azerbaijan, little Armenia and Artsakh are fighting like blazes. Why are mainstream media not reporting about the fearless, heroic Armenians fighting alone for their very existence and standing up to the global bullies whom everyone else appeases?

- **That the countries at war are evenly matched.** Turkey and Azerbaijan have a combined population of 92 million. Armenia and Artsakh have a combined population of 3.1 million. Turkey and Azerbaijan's combined GDP is $818 billion, while Armenia/Artsakh's combined GDP is about $12 billion. Turkey and Azerbaijan encompass 870.162 km2 territory, combined. Armenia and Artsakh encompass 41.201 km2 territory, combined. The employment of sophisticated drones and aerial weaponry utilized by Turkey are decimating the native civilian population. This is a proverbial David and Goliath struggle.



While mainstream media report that some world powers and so-called neutral observers are urging a ceasefire and a return to the negotiation table, why aren't the same media identifying Armenia's willingness to seek peaceful solutions and specifying that Turkey, Azerbaijan and Israel continue to agitate for war?

- **That this is not a NATO battle against Russia, using Turkey as its proxy, with Armenia as sacrificial lamb. That Armenia and Artsakh are "backwaters" of civilization, of no geopolitical or cultural importance.** Currently, NATO encroachment of Russia and the Caucasus is nearly complete. The political situation that arose from the secession of Artsakh is being used by Washington, London and Berlin to attack and destabilize Russia through their Ankara and Baku proxies. This region is the stage for WWIII between Russia, Iran, Turkey and its proxies – the US, Israel and NATO. Moreover, NATO, the UN, the CSTO and the Minsk Group are invested in seeing Azerbaijan and Turkey prevail.

As for Armenia's cultural significance, it will be a cold day in hell before any mainstream media outlet quotes Heinrich Schliemann, archaeologist and excavator of Troy, Mycenae, and Tiryns, who said, "The whole European culture considers itself the heir to the ancient Greek and Roman civilizations, not realizing that both of them, in their turn, originate from the ancient Armenian

civilization."

- **That Turkey and Azerbaijan are not buying media and government personnel to whitewash this crime against humanity.** Several U.S. PR companies are lobbying on Baku's behalf. This public relations blitz does not include the apathy of world governments compromised by caviar diplomacy, petro-lobbying and the widely-reported Azeri money laundromat scheme in Europe. According to *The American Conservative,* Azerbaijan ramped up its public relations campaigning, employing some of K Street's heavy-hitting firms, including Stellar Jay Communications, BGR, and the Podesta Group. Last year the country spent $1.3 million to camouflage its disgraceful human rights abuses and present Azerbaijan as a victim of Armenian aggression. Until mid-October, two other PR heavyweights, The Livingston Group and DLA Piper also threw their weight behind Azerbaijan, which had hired them.

Rather than mention this detail, why do mainstream media instead point out that a purportedly aggressive Armenian Diaspora (largely and ironically in existence because of prior Turkish and Azeri genocides) is giving Armenia an "unfair" advantage in this "Battle for Evermore?"

- **That Azerbaijan observes international rules of warfare. FALSE:** Turkey and Azerbaijan import jihadists and mercenaries to the Artsakh front – flouting the rules of warfare. Weapons such as Smerch multiple rocket launchers and Israeli-made cluster bombs -- prohibited by all international organizations -- are being used against the Armenian civilian populations throughout Artsakh and even Armenia. Since September 27 and as of October 18, more than 6000 residential, cultural and religious objects have been damaged and/or destroyed in the Artsakh Republic, according to the Armenian Unified Infocenter. This includes the deliberate pulverization of Armenian churches, homes, hospitals and kindergartens. Azerbaijan is also ignoring codes of wartime conduct by murdering elderly civilians and beheading Armenian prisoners of war – gross war crimes.

In addition to blurring the above facts by suggesting that they are partisan ravings or unverifiable, why do mainstream media not report about a particularly stark contrast: the Armenians' humane treatment of Azeri prisoners of war in Artsakh military hospitals and elsewhere?

- **That Pakistan is not helping Azerbaijan.** Pakistan has sent its troops to fight alongside Turkish, Azeri and mercenary combatants attacking Artsakh.

On October 7, Armenian Defense Ministry spokesman Artsrun Hovhannisyan said, "Unlike the Turks, Armenians fight for their land by shedding their own blood, not the blood of mercenaries." Why don't mainstream media convey that the losses sustained by Artsakh are its own young Armenian men protecting their families and borders? Or that Turkey is implementing a bait- and-switch upon their imported soldiers of fortune? Ample video footage has surfaced detailing that mercenaries are lured to Azerbaijan to "guard pipelines," after which they are sent directly to the battlefield as cannon

fodder, their passports and stipends withheld to prevent desertion.

- **That Russia does not favor Azerbaijan.** Russia has long sought to sustain the stalemated, frozen-conflict status quo between Azerbaijan and Armenia in order to maintain its dominant role in the Caucasus. As Azerbaijan is tightly aligned with Turkey and Israel while being courted by NATO, Russia often sacrifices Armenian interests in order to placate Azerbaijan and keep it in its sphere of influence.

In light of this, why do mainstream media insist that Armenia has the fearsome patronage of the Russian bogeyman, when this so-called ally has yet to come to Armenia's aid?

- **That Georgia is not giving Azerbaijan an advantage.** Georgia prevented Armenians of its Akhalkalaki region from sending used tires into Armenia to insulate military posts, yet allows the Turkish military free access over its sovereign territory by air and land.

- **That foreign actors are not working hand-in-hand with Iranian citizens of Azerbaijani descent to destabilize Iran, foment a secessionist movement, or at least cause chaos.** There is a concerted effort to drag Iran into a confrontation with Turkey and neighboring states. In fact, on October 7, hundreds of Azerbaijani troops purposely placed themselves in a position where Armenian artillery would violate the Iranian frontier, even though the Armenians avoided it.

- **That Azerbaijan is a bastion of interfaith and cultural tolerance.** Along with 9 other nations, Azerbaijan and Turkey are both on the US State Department's Special Watch List (SWL) for engaging in or tolerating severe violations of religious freedom pursuant of the International Religion and Freedom Act, according to the 2020 Annual Report of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom. Why have mainstream media neglected to mention that both Turkish and Azeri educational systems mandate discrimination and hatred against Armenians which spill over into every aspect of Turkish and Azeri culture?

Why have mainstream media not brought up that the brilliant Armenian culture, pre-dating both countries, was repugnant to Turkey and Azerbaijan when it was clearly a product of the Armenians, but that once Turkey and Azerbaijan appropriated and claimed parts of it as their own, they trumpeted their pride over the products of the very culture they once scorned?

- **That Azerbaijan has invaded and conquered several Armenian towns and villages within Artsakh.** Just one example is the yellow journalism about the takeover of the town of Hadrut. We know that at least two civilians were slain by the Azeris who violated the ceasefire just minutes after it went into effect on October 10. But before the murders, 200 "special operations" mercenaries invaded Hadrut specifically to hoist the Azeri flag up the town hall's flagpole. This action was taken to back up President Aliyev's earlier, boastful but false claim

that Azeri forces had taken the town. The mayor of Hadrut, with 23 men, held back the storm troopers until Armenian forces arrived and drove out the mercenaries. On their way out, in their humiliation, the Azeri forces massacred a woman and her disabled son. Somehow, these acts of Armenian heroism and Azeri cowardice also escaped the notice of mainstream media outlets.

- **That Azerbaijan is democratic and honors free speech and assembly.** Freedom House's "Freedom in the World" (FIW) 2020 Report describes those countries who have had the worst declines in freedom in the last 10 years. Azerbaijan received a "not free" country designation with a -10 decline in freedoms. Turkey also received a "not free" country designation with a -31 decline in freedom. Armenia is not listed among those objectionable countries, though did receive a mention as a promising, democratically-elected government.

Why has mainstream media not pointed out that in the past 30 years, Armenia and Artsakh have had four presidents each, per their constitutions, while Turkey and Azerbaijan continue to endure the same dictatorial, dynastic regimes under Erdogan and Aliyev Senior who then passed the sword to Aliyev Junior?

Foreign journalists have free access to information and complete freedom of movement in Armenia and Artsakh. If Azerbaijan were the honest broker it is portrayed to be in mainstream media, why are foreign journalists suppressed, forbidden from freely interviewing Azeri citizens, and prevented from visiting the war zone from the Azeri side?

Why don't mainstream media mention that the Azerbaijani government maintains tight control over the Internet, harasses social media activists, bloggers and online journalists? Or that even before this war, Azerbaijan blocked nearly all social media except for Twitter so that the Azeri government could control war propaganda?

Why do mainstream media not mention that the Artsakh Defense Ministry issues daily bulletins from the front while announcing military and civilian casualties whereas Azerbaijan does not?

An entire global media orchestra working in concert persuaded the world to stand up, denounce the death of George Floyd, and shout "Black Lives Matter." And yet, when the annihilation of an entire race of people – the Armenians – is once again unfolding before our eyes, the media -- and the public guided by them -- are conspicuously silent.

The mainstream media's failure to report the truth demands that we ask ourselves who is responsible for this mismanagement of information. This discrepancy would explain why the truth-telling alternative media universe has a populist following, why it is constantly under threat of annihilation, and why we must protect its precious existence.

The same may be said of the Armenians.

May the example of the endangered, deserted yet valiant Armenians be a warning to all that one

day, the dark forces will come for other innocents of this world and that by then, there will be no one left to protect global citizens persisting to safeguard life and liberty on the face of this earth.

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http://www.armeniapedia.org/wiki/Lucine_Kasbarian

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