

# ARMENIAN ARMED FORCES VANQUISH AZERI ATTACKERS

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**By Karen Mkrtchyan, Yerevan, 30 July 2020**

Between July 12-16, 2020, when the world was focused on fighting the global pandemic, Azerbaijani troops attacked Armenia. The attempted Azeri infiltration occurred in the northern Tavush province of Armenia--sovereign territory some 300 kilometers from the Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno Kharabagh), the usual target of Azeri aggression.

Although through the years Azerbaijan has violated the ceasefire agreement on many occasions, this is the first major aggression since the four-day war of April 2016. As a result of Azerbaijan's cowardly attack six Armenian soldiers were killed. Casualties on the Azeri side were nearly double that number, with the Azeri authorities reporting 11 dead, among them high-ranking officers Major General Polad Hashimov, chief of staff of the North Military Unit and Col. Ilgar Mirzayev among others. Even the special "Yashma" troops, which President Aliyev has spent millions on to train in various parts of the world, could not yield the desired results for Baku.

The Azeri forces suffered a heavy blow, raising doubts about Aliyev's continuous propaganda assertion that Azerbaijan's superior army could wipe out Armenia off the map. Once again, Azerbaijani citizens witnessed the defeat of their armed forces at the hands of a more capable Armenian army. The Azeri military leaders could hardly hide their shock when Armenian armed forces destroyed Azeri armament using locally-manufactured drones while also downing several Azerbaijani UAVs, including an Israeli-made drone costing \$30 million. Despite its usage in a number of conflicts, this was the first time the UAV was hit. The loss of the expensive technology came as a big blow to Azerbaijan.

For the past 30 years, the Azeri government has sold its citizens the dream of a strong, rich, successful Azerbaijan, pitted against "poor, weak and failed state" Armenia. The Azeri people, much as they believe everything the Government "feeds" them, have become irritated and impatient with the continuous defeats of their army by the allegedly weaker Armenian forces.

As the news of Major Gerasimov's death spread across Azerbaijan, thousands of Azerbaijanis poured to Baku streets calling for war on Armenia. Armenophobic chants ("Death to Armenians") filled the air, as protestors demanded the resignation of the head of Azerbaijan army. Soon rumors spread among the protestors that the killing of the popular Gen. Hashimov was an inside job and that someone had informed the Armenians of the general's location. Angry protestors stormed the Milli Mejlis (Parliament) building, clashed with law enforcement officers, vandalized property, and denounced the government. This was exactly what Aliyev had hoped for. He wanted to crack the whip: the angry mob had given him the perfect excuse.

In recent year, Aliyev has witnessed his popularity decline. The Azeri people are tired of reeling under Aliyev's dynastic rule and are hungry for change. The fall in oil prices has caused economic crisis featuring unemployment and inflation made worse by Covid-19. The peaceful, non-violent "Velvet Revolution" of Armenia in 2018 has made matters much harder for Aliyev. With Georgians

and Armenians successfully achieving regime change through mass mobilizations, the citizens of Azerbaijan can't help but look with envy towards their neighbors. Aspirations for a democratic Azerbaijan had gained momentum and Aliyev knew he had to respond. Having already used the Coronavirus as an excuse to shut down opposition party offices earlier this year, Aliyev needed another pretext to divert people's attention and settle domestic political scores. What better plot than to escalate tensions with Armenia? After orchestrating mass mobilization to display to the world that Azerbaijan is a democracy and people can come and demand action from the government, Aliyev arrested over 100 members of the Popular Front Party of Azerbaijan, Aliyev's most-vocal opposition. Aliyev has long considered them "the enemy within", denouncing them as "worse than Armenians." He has even claimed that supporters of the Popular Front Party were "the fifth column" funded from abroad whose main aim was "to destroy Azerbaijan." Other protestors were charged with aiding the spread of Corona virus by attending a mass gathering despite the pandemic.

Feeling the noose getting tighter around his neck, Aliyev is asserting his authority. While Azeris strive to replicate the revolution in Armenia, Aliyev has found inspiration in Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdoğan whose disregard for the opinions of the Western powers has won him fans among Muslims globally. Erdogan's crackdown on opposition leaders and critics within the armed forces after the self-orchestrated coup d'état attempt in July 2016, as well as his recent decision to transform Hagia Sophia to a mosque, have inspired Aliyev. Wanting to act tough like his big brother Erdogan, Aliyev is now wagging his finger at the co-chairs of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) a.k.a the Minsk Group, denouncing them for their inaction. Continuing with his maximalist approach and anti-Armenian rhetoric, Aliyev remarked to the local...press, *"...there can be no changes in our position... the conflict must be resolved within the territorial integrity of our country... all occupied lands must be liberated from the occupiers, and Azerbaijani citizens must return to the lands of their ancestors."*

It is evident Aliyev is not ready to budge. Criticizing the OSCE Minsk Group for calling for a peaceful settlement to the conflict, Aliyev said during the same interview: *"What is the main thesis of their statement? A military option is impossible. Who said that? Open the UN Charter and see if countries have the right to self-defense or not? Who do you think you are?! Are you above the UN?! Are you above the UN Charter?!"* Such brazen disregard for OSCE Minsk Group's position shows Aliyev's readiness to attack Armenia in the guise of "self-defense". The sacking of Elmar Mammadyarov, Azerbaijan's long-time foreign minister was another desperate attempt to flex his muscles. Mammadyarov has been the face of Azerbaijan during the negotiation process. By replacing him with Education Minister Jeyhun Bayramov, a non-diplomat, Aliyev is sending a clear message that he no longer attaches importance and meaning to the negotiations. This also helps Aliyev maintain his domestic image as a tough leader, having punished his foreign minister for failing to register substantial results in favor of Azerbaijan.

In a clear violation of fundamental principles of international humanitarian law, the ministry of

defense of Azerbaijan threatened to launch missile attacks on the Medzamor Nuclear Power Plant (M-NPP) of Armenia. The bombing of a nuclear power plant is a war crime that can spell disaster not only for Armenia but for the entire region. Thus, the threat shows Azerbaijan authorities are far from wanting a peaceful settlement to the conflict. Azerbaijan issued a similar threat in 2018, which has gone unnoticed. This is proof the plan to attack Armenia, apart from the M-NPP, has been in Azerbaijan's consideration for years. However, unlike in 2018, Azerbaijan faced criticism from international organizations, governments and politicians for its genocidal approach and rhetoric. The condemnation was partly due to the tireless lobbying efforts of Armenian governmental and non-governmental bodies and representatives of the Armenian Diaspora.

Faced with the humiliating defeat, Azerbaijani authorities decided to instigate discrimination and violence against the Armenian Diaspora. The Food City market in Moscow, owned by Azerbaijani Jewish businessmen, banned the sale of apricots from Armenia, leaving more than 65 trucks full of Armenian apricots on the road to perish. This was followed by another Azerbaijani business chain, "Tvoi Dom" banning Armenian products. Determined not to allow Armenian importers suffer losses, Armenian communities in all major cities in Russia flocked to buy every last one of the Armenian fruits. Defeated and humiliated by such display of strong Armenian unity, the Azerbaijani authorities instigated violent attacks against Armenians and Armenian businesses in Russia. Over 50 Azeri vandals were arrested on a single night by police. Similar attacks against Armenians took place in major cities of Europe and America, drawing strong words of condemnation from local authorities. Aliyev's miscalculation, coupled with an unprecedented display of unity in the country and the diaspora, helped Armenia register victories at all levels, both military and diplomatic. The US House of Representatives passed a resolution to continue US funding for de-mining efforts in the Republic of Artsakh, which had been stopped owing to Azerbaijani lobbying activities.

The Azerbaijani aggression, however, should not be viewed in isolation but rather within the larger geopolitics in the region. Turkey, which has, in recent years, tried to compete with Russia for influence in major conflicts, such as in Syria and Libya, while at the same time flexing its muscles against Greece and Cyprus, has thrown its weight behind Azerbaijan. Not only is Turkey using Azerbaijan to settle historic scores with Armenia, but Erdogan wants to send a message to Putin that just like Russia was forced to work with Turkey in other conflict zones on mutually beneficial terms, in the South Caucasus too the Turkey factor must be acknowledged. Ankara was quick to declare its unwavering support for Baku, with Erdogan threatening to "finish what our ancestors had started", which is an open threat of another genocide of Armenians. Reports of Turkey transferring ISIS fighters to Azerbaijan--on a \$2,000 per month contract to fight against Armenia--were circulated in the media. Similar terror outfits from Chechnya and Afghanistan, among others, had also been used against Armenia in the early '90s during the Artsakh war of liberation. To add weight to its threats, Turkey announced joint military exercises with Azerbaijan to be conducted in several places, including Nakhichevan, bordering Armenia. In retaliation, Russia declared combat-training activities together with the Armenian armed forces. A telephone conversation between Erdogan and Putin

was also held to reduce tension. Ibrahim Kalin, the spokesperson of President Erdogan declared Ankara would back Azerbaijan should tensions escalate any further. Turkish participation would automatically force Russia to get involved, resulting into a major conflict.

Despite the unprecedented unity shown by Armenians across the globe in confronting Azerbaijani aggression, some people grabbed the opportunity to advance their narrow, vested interests. Margarita Simonyan, editor-in-chief of "Russia Today" TV, in an open letter accused the Pashinyan government of fanning anti-Russian sentiments in Armenia and showing contempt towards Russia since coming to power. Citing the case of former President Robert Kocharyan's arrest, Simonyan accused Prime Minister Pashinyan of deliberately targeting politicians with close ties to Moscow to spite Russian authorities.

Her letter sparked a wide range of criticisms against her, with thousands of people demanding she change her surname. She followed up with another post, publishing a list of other Armenians in Russia who endorsed her views. In an interview with Russian media, Pashinyan dismissed her allegations as baseless.

Individuals such as Ms. Simonyan have been among us throughout our history. They have sought to advance their interests at the cost of our nation. As Garegin Nzdeh said, "Our misfortune lies not in the fact that there are Turks in the world, rather than that there are Turk-like Armenians." Simonyan will be forgotten in the trash can of history. As for Aliyev, it will take a long time to recover from the losses he suffered due to his adventurism. The blows inflicted by Armenian armed forces on the Azerbaijani armed forces and the capture of new strategic heights will contribute in Aliyev's eventual downfall.

**There are no comments yet.**