**Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict**

The Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict entered the history of the 20th century as one of the most tragic conflicts, its consequences had a serious impact on the fate of millions of Azerbaijanis.

This conflict, which started in the late 1980s with Armenia’s open territorial claims to the historical lands of Azerbaijan, provocations on ethnic grounds, and terrorist acts resulted in military aggression against Azerbaijan.

The Armenians in the Soviet Union leadership, the leadership of the Armenian SSR, and the Armenian diaspora abroad took advantage of the weakening of the central government in the late 1980s and began purposeful actions to separate the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) from Azerbaijan SSR, and integrate it to the Armenian SSR.

At the end of 1987, the process of brutal deportation of Azerbaijanis from their historical lands began in the Gafan region of the Armenian SSR. In 1988–1989, Azerbaijanis living in different cities and regions of Armenia faced the same fate. More than 250,000 Azerbaijanis living in Armenia were forcibly expelled from their historical lands, 216 of them were brutally murdered, and 1154 were injured. They were forced to seek refuge in Azerbaijan to save their lives from Armenian violence.

Azerbaijanis lived compactly in the territory of Armenia until 1988. However, unlike the Armenians living in the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, the Soviet authorities did not give autonomous status to the territories where Azerbaijanis were compactly settled within the Armenian SSR.

The beginning of the conflict

Dueing the years of 1905–1906, 1918–1920, 1948–1953, Azerbaijanis were purposefully displaced and deported from the territory of present-day Armenia. Only in 1948–1953, more than 150 thousand Azerbaijanis were forcibly deported from their historical homes in the territory of the Armenian SSR. At that time, some of them, especially the elderly and babies, died because they could not endure the harsh conditions of relocation, sharp climate change, physical shocks and spiritual suffering.

On February 13, 1988, the first demonstration of Armenians regarding the Karabakh issue was held in the center of NKAO, Khankendi (Stepanakert at that time). From February 16 to March 2, various rallies were organized in NKAO. On February 20, Armenian-born deputies of the NKAO Council of People’s Deputies voted in favor of the proposal to join the Armenian SSR (Azerbaijani and deputies of other nationalities did not participate in the meeting). On February 21, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union issued a decision “On the events of Nagorno-Karabakh”, and in this document, the decision of the NKAO Council was called an action “instigated by nationalist elements”. Nevertheless, on February 22, near Askaran settlement located on the Khankendi-Aghdam highway, Armenians opened fire on peaceful Azerbaijani demonstrators who protested against the above-mentioned decision of the NKAO Council of People’s Deputies. As a result, two young Azerbaijanis were martyred. At the beginning of March, the “Karabakh” organization, which was aimed to integrate Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia, started its activities in Yerevan, and the “Krunk” organization started its activities in Khankendi.

On June 14, the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR adopted a decision on the “incorporation” of NKAO into the Armenian SSR. In protest, on June 17, the Supreme Soviet of the Azerbaijan SSR reconfirmed the NKAO as part of the Azerbaijan SSR. On July 18, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR made a decision that it was impossible to change the national-territorial division of the Azerbaijan SSR and the Armenian SSR. With this, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR defended the principle of territorial integrity of the republics, guided by the relevant provision established in the Constitution of the USSR (Article 78).

As the overall state structure of the USSR weakened, the situation in the region worsened. Armed groups and terrorists, mainly sent from Armenia, engaged in disruptive activities in Nagorno-Karabakh. In such conditions, the activity of the Special Administration Committee (January 12 – November 28, 1989) created by the decision of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR failed.

On December 1, 1989, the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR adopted a decision “On the unification of the Armenian SSR and Nagorno-Karabakh”. On January 9, 1990, the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR included the socio-economic development of the NKAO in the 1990 plan of the Armenian SSR. On May 20, 1990, the election of deputies from NKAO to the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR was held.

The decisions of the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR clearly revealed the aggressive nature of Armenia. Territorial claims against Azerbaijan were put forward not only by nationalist groups, but also by the government of Armenia. Armenia wanted to occupy a part of Azerbaijan’s territory at any cost.

As a result of the victory of the Armenian National Movement in the parliamentary elections held in Armenia in May 1990, the extreme nationalist and chauvinist forces that propagated the war in the republic came to power. This accelerated the beginning of the aggressive war. Yerevan focused all its efforts on the creation of unofficial military units and their arming, preferring to solve the problem by force. It is for this reason that Armenia never approached the negotiation process seriously and tried to take advantage of it only for the purpose of creating an image in the international public opinion.

Both on the eve of the war and in the subsequent period, Azerbaijan’s position was fully justified in terms of the USSR Constitution and international legal norms. But at that time, the inactivity of the political elite of Azerbaijan and the absence of a political leader in the republic made the situation even more difficult. During this period, the prominent statesman, a far-sighted personality capable of analyzing the course of events comprehensively, perceive the will and principled stance of the people for the resolution of issues, mobilize the population for a common purpose, the national leader of the Azerbaijani people Heydar Aliyev was in forced resignation. His removal from politics had a direct effect on deepening the conflict which benefitted the Armenians.

Extreme Pressure Campaign

After the entry of USSR troops into Baku on January 20, 1990 and the Bloody January tragedy, the Kremlin and personally President Mikhail Gorbachev fell into disrepute. After Baku, Soviet troops killed civilians in Neftchala and Lankaran. In total, 150 people were killed across the country during the January events. The January 20 tragedy played an important role in completely changing the attitude of the Azerbaijani people towards the USSR and formation of the national independence movement. While the communist leaders of Azerbaijan did not see the fundamental changes in the national consciousness of the people, the national leader Heydar Aliyev went to the permanent representation of Azerbaijan in Moscow on January 21 and expressed his strong objection to the biased policy of the USSR leadership against the people of Azerbaijan, strongly condemned the Soviet army’s oppression of the civilian population, and later e left the Communist Party.

According to the decision of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR “On the measures to normalize the situation in the NKAO” dated November 28, 1989, it was decided to abolish the Special Administration Committee of the NKAO, restore the activity of the Council of People’s Deputies and establish the Republican Organizational Committee. But since the Committee was based on the ever-decreasing capabilities of the common union system, its operation was doomed from the start. After the events of August 1991, which seriously undermined the All-Union statehood, the activity of this Committee became insignificant. The new political reality that emerged showed that the power of the USSR was nominal and its end was near.

In addition to influencing the course of the conflict, the Armenian diaspora and lobby carried out propaganda work based on fabricated claims in the countries where they operated and tried to manipulate the solution of the conflict in accordance with their own interests.

On September 2, 1991, the so-called “Nagorno-Karabakh Republic” (“Nagorno-Karabakh Republic”) was declared within the boundaries of the NKAO and the Shaumyan (rural) district of the Azerbaijan SSR, and a “referendum” was held on December 10. It was clear that Armenia, taking into account the inevitable collapse of the USSR was implementing its activities according to a special plan and by pretending that it was not a party to the conflict was confusing the international opinion. As a response to this, on November 23, 1991, the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Azerbaijan abolished the autonomous status of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Until now, Armenia, which had openly voiced its territorial claims, started military operations against Azerbaijan without declaring a war. Thus, the conflict entered a new “violent stage”.

Large-scale Massacres, Acts of Genocide

During the military campaign, the armed forces of Armenia ruthlessly killed the peaceful Azerbaijani population in the regions and cities they occupied, without making any distinction between military personnel and civilians. Azerbaijanis were subjected to ethnic cleansing and genocide. The military and political leadership of Armenia aimed to physically destroy a part of the Azerbaijani civilian population living in Nagorno-Karabakh, and to break the resistance of the others and cleanse the region of them, by committing systematic massacre and genocide against the civilian population living in the village of Meshali in Askeran, the villages of Malibeyli and Gushchular in Shusha, the village of Garadaghli in Khojavend, the city of Khojaly, the village of Aghdaban in Kalbajar and in other places.

On the night of February 25-26, 1992, Armenia committed genocide against the Azerbaijani population in Khojaly. As a result, 613 civilians were killed, including 106 women and 63 children. As part of the “Justice for Khojaly!” campaign, the Khojaly massacre was recognized as an act of genocide by 23 US states, the Scottish Parliament of Great Britain, the House of Peoples of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the National Assembly of Djibouti, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Czech Parliament, the Upper House of the National Assembly of Afghanistan, the National Congress of Honduras, the First Commission of the House of Representatives of Indonesia, the Senate of the Jordanian National Assembly, the Second Constitutional Committee and the Foreign Relations Commission of the Colombian Senate, the Second Commission of the House of Representatives, the Guatemalan Congress, the Mexican General Assembly Committee on Foreign Affairs, the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Senate of Pakistan, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs of the National Assembly, the National Assembly of Panama, the Chamber of Deputies of the National Congress of Paraguay, the Congress of Peru, the National Council of Slovenia and the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the National Assembly of Sudan. In addition, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Turkic Council have recognized this tragedy as genocide.

In 1993, the intensifying military aggression of Armenia, at the same time, the threat of civil war in Azerbaijan, economic crisis, paralysis of state institutions put the country in danger of destruction. It was at this critical moment that the people of Azerbaijan saw their salvation in their genius son, wise statesman, national leader Heydar Aliyev and entrusted the future destiny of the country to him.

National Leader Heydar Aliyev’s Salvation Mission

On June 15, 1993, when national leader Heydar Aliyev returned to power at the insistence of the people, the country was in a complicated situation. The Great Leader came to the conclusion that solving the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict requires a comprehensive approach and consideration of important domestic and foreign policy factors. These are the provision of socio-political stability, the creation of a combat-capable regular army, the reformation of state institutions and ensuring their efficient operation, the restoration of the economy and the implementation of radical management reforms, the conclusion of strategic oil contracts that will ensure the country’s development for the next decades, and as a result, unification of the nation around one goal – ideology of Azerbaijaniism.

On May 12, 1994, a ceasefire agreement was reached. Until now, as a result of the military aggression of Armenia, 20 percent of the Republic of Azerbaijan’s territory – the city of Khankendi, Khojaly, Shusha, Lachin, Khojavand, Kalbajar, Aghdam, Fuzuli, Jabrayil, Gubadli, Zangilan districts, as well as 13 villages of Tartar, 7 villages of Gazakh, and 1 village of Sadarak district was occupied by the Armenian army.

As a result of Armenia’s aggression, more than 1 million Azerbaijanis became refugees and internally displaced persons, more than 20 thousand Azerbaijanis were killed during military operations, and more than 50 thousand people were disabled.

The further fate of 3,890 Azerbaijanis, including 71 children, 267 women, and 326 elderly people, who went missing as a result of the First Karabakh War, as well as 872 people identified as prisoners and hostages (as of December 1, 2020), is unknown.

In 1988–1993, in total, 900 settlements, 150 thousand houses, 7 thousand public buildings, 693 schools, 855 kindergartens, 695 medical institutions, 927 libraries, 44 temples, 9 mosques, 473 historical monuments, palaces and museums, 40 thousand museum exhibits, 6 thousand industrial and agricultural enterprises, 160 bridges and other infrastructure facilities were destroyed.

Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict in international documents

The Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, which has become a source of serious threat to international peace and security due to its interstate nature, has caused serious discussions within international organizations, and a number of important documents on the problem have been adopted.

On April 30, 1993, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution No. 822 demanding the immediate withdrawal of Armenian troops from the Kalbajar region of Azerbaijan and other occupied territories.

On July 29, 1993, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution No. 853 demanding the complete, immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian troops from the Aghdam region of Azerbaijan and other occupied territories.

On October 14, 1993, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution No. 874, which demanded the withdrawal of Armenian troops from the most recently occupied territories in accordance with the timetable of the OSCE Minsk Group.

On November 11, 1993, the UN Security Council adopted resolution No. 884. The resolution condemned the occupation of Zangilan region and Horadiz settlement, the attack on the civilian population and the bombing of the territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and demanded the withdrawal of forces from Zangilan region and Horadiz settlement and other recently occupied territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Acting as the main guarantor of international peace and security, these resolutions adopted by the UN Security Council in connection with the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict defined the legal basis of the political process for resolving the conflict based on the norms and principles of international law. The resolutions condemned the occupation of Azerbaijani territories, emphasized the inadmissibility of occupying territories through the use of force, reaffirmed the territorial integrity, sovereignty and inviolability of Azerbaijan’s borders, that Nagorno-Karabakh is an integral part of Azerbaijan, and the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of the forces from all occupied territories of Azerbaijan.

The documents adopted within the framework of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) formed the normative legal basis and mechanism of the negotiation process based on the principles and norms of international law and the resolutions of the UN Security Council. At the meeting of the CSCE Council of Ministers held in Prague on January 30-31, 1992, after the membership of Azerbaijan and Armenia to this organization, CSCE started closely dealing with the conflict. After sending a mission of rapporteurs to Armenia and Azerbaijan in February, the Panel of Eminent Persons of the organization made a decision and called on the parties to peace, including the announcement of a cease-fire, and to end territorial claims against neighboring states. On March 24, 1992, at the additional meeting of the CSCE Council of Ministers held in Helsinki, at the initiative of the Panel of Eminent Persons, it was stated that the CSCE should play a key role in the process of conflict resolution, it has been decided to call a special conference in Minsk, the capital of the Republic of Belarus that would act as a permanent framework for negotiations.

At the Organization’s Summit held in Budapest in 1994, an agreement was reached to strengthen efforts and send multinational forces to the conflict region to maintain peace within the framework of coordinated action that could promote the conflict resolution process, and the acting chairman of the CSCE was instructed to appoint the co-chairmen of the Minsk Group.

On December 2-3, 1996, at the Lisbon summit of the OSCE, despite Armenia’s objections, the principles of conflict resolution were discussed, and these principles were reflected in the statement of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, that was attached to the final document. The following are the principles to which all participating states of the OSCE have joined:

1. Territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia;

2. The legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh, including the highest self-government within Azerbaijan;

3. Guarantees for the security of Nagorno-Karabakh and its entire population, including mutual obligations to comply with the provisions of the settlement.

The determination of the aforementioned principles at the Lisbon summit, the establishment of a new co-chairman institution in the Minsk Group in early 1997, and the appointment of Russia, the United States and France as co-chairmen gave an impetus to the negotiation process. The co-chairs made written proposals on the resolution of the conflict. In the summer of 1997, a comprehensive draft agreement was presented to the parties. Despite Azerbaijan’s constructive position, Armenia rejected the proposal. During the visit of the co-chairs to the region in the fall of 1997, a “staged solution” plan was presented to the parties. According to this plan, the withdrawal of Armenian troops from the occupied regions, the return of internally displaced persons to their lands, the restoration of communication means, the deployment of the OSCE peacekeeping mission to the region, and then the issue of the status of Nagorno-Karabakh should be considered. However, Armenia has shown a less constructive position in the negotiation process.

Azerbaijan’s peace policy, Armenia’s destructive position in the conflict

In November 2007, the Minsk Group prepared proposals that included a peaceful solution to the conflict and went down in history as the “Madrid Principles”, and the first version of the document was presented to the parties. At the end of 2009, an updated draft of the Madrid document was prepared and presented to the parties again. However, due to the destructive position of Armenia, the expected progress was not achieved. Both documents envisaged a phased resolution of the conflict, the withdrawal of Armenian armed forces from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, the return of internally displaced persons to their native lands, the restoration of communication lines and other elements.

In subsequent meetings, the heads of state agreed to continue negotiations for a peaceful resolution of the conflict and paid special attention to the humanitarian aspects of the problem. However, seeing that the intensity of the negotiation process was increasing and that the process was not proceeding in accordance with its interests, Armenia tried to disrupt the negotiations through military provocations. Thus, on October 27, 2014, after the meeting of the presidents in Paris, on the initiative of France, instead of discussing the specific issues on the negotiation table, Armenia held a large-scale military exercise with the participation of more than 40,000 personnel in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. After the Armenian armed forces provoked offensive flights over the positions of the Azerbaijan’s Armed Forces on the line of contact, the intensity of the negotiation process decreased, and the meeting between the presidents of the two countries was resumed only on December 19, 2015 in Bern, Switzerland.

April 2016 battles

At the beginning of 2016, when concrete plans for the resolution of the conflict were being discussed, Armenia again resorted to military provocation and on April 2 fired at heavily populated areas, including schools, hospitals and places of worship, along the line of contact of the troops.

As a result of Armenia’s attacks, among the peaceful population of Azerbaijan, 6 people, including children were killed, and 33 people were seriously injured. In turn, the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan gave a worthy response to the enemy, and as a result of the counterattack, more than 2 thousand hectares of the occupied territory of Fuzuli, Jabrayil and the former Agdara region were liberated. On the one hand, the events of April showed the strength of the Azerbaijani Army, but on the other hand, it once again demonstrated that the maintenance of the status quo, the presence of Armenian troops in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan is the main cause of tension in the conflict region, and that Azerbaijan will never reconcile with the occupation.

At the end of the meeting between the heads of state of Azerbaijan and Armenia held in Moscow on November 2, 2008, the Moscow Declaration was signed by the presidents of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. The declaration stated that the conflict should be resolved by political means on the basis of the norms and principles of international law and based on the documents and decisions adopted in this framework, and this, in turn, would create conditions for comprehensive cooperation in the region.

During 2016, substantive discussions were held between the presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia at the meetings in Vienna and St. Petersburg, but due to the non-constructive position of Armenia, no progress was made in resolving the conflict in these meetings either.

Armenia continued its political and military provocations in 2017. In June and July, Azerbaijan’s OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs increased their efforts to resolve the conflict, and against the background of the international community’s serious calls for substantive negotiations, Armenia tried to escalate the situation along the line of contact. Armenian military units once again continued their aggressive actions and intensively fired heavy artillery at the frontline positions of the Azerbaijan’s Armed Forces and the areas inhabited by the civilian population. As a result, on July 4, civilians – Sahiba Allahverdiyeva, born in 1966, and her granddaughter, Zahra Guliyeva, born in 2016, were killed in Alkhanli village of Fuzuli district. Armenia’s deliberate targeting of civilians and objects has been sharply condemned by the international community. The international community is once again convinced that Armenia is not interested in a political solution of the conflict.

Numerous documents supporting Azerbaijan’s rightful position based on international law and historical justice regarding the conflict have also been accepted by other international organizations.

Offensive diplomacy

In the resolution “The situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan” adopted by the UN General Assembly on September 7, 2006 regarding the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, the fires ignited by Armenia in the occupied territories were condemned. The resolution of the same name adopted by the UN General Assembly on March 14, 2008 covered the legal, political and humanitarian aspects of the conflict and reaffirmed the principles of its resolution. These principles include respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian troops from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, the right of forcibly displaced people to return to their native lands, the provision of conditions for coexistence of both communities within Azerbaijan, and stressed the illegality of the situation created as a result of the occupation of the territories.

The conflict has been discussed many times within the framework of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The organization, guided by the principles and norms of international law, announced that Azerbaijan was subjected to military aggression. In 1993, the resolution adopted at the 21st meeting of the organization’s foreign ministers, held in Karachi, Pakistan condemned the Armenian aggression against Azerbaijan, demanded the immediate withdrawal of Armenian troops from all occupied territories, urged Armenia to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and resolve the conflict peacefully and justly.

In 1994, another resolution on Nagorno-Karabakh was adopted at the 7th Summit meeting of the heads of state and government of the OIC countries in Casablanca, Morocco. In that resolution, the fact that 20 percent of Azerbaijan’s territories were occupied by Armenia was sharply condemned and concern was expressed over the fact that more than one million Azerbaijanis became refugees and internally displaced persons. Referring to the known four resolutions of the UN Security Council, the mentioned document demanded the immediate withdrawal of the Armenian armed forces from all the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, and the actions against civilians as a result of Armenia’s aggression against Azerbaijan were assessed as a crime against humanity.

The Summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation held in Istanbul in 2016 established a “Contact Group on the aggression of the Republic of Armenia against Azerbaijan”. The Contact Group included nine countries: Azerbaijan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Malaysia, Morocco, Djibouti, Gambia and Somalia.

The declaration of the Summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States held in Baku on 15 October 2019 expressed support for the settlement of the conflict on the basis of the principles of territorial integrity, sovereignty and inviolability of the borders of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The Final Document adopted at the 16th Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement in Tehran in 2012 stressed the importance of resolving the conflict within the framework of the territorial integrity, sovereignty and internationally recognized borders of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The Final Document adopted at the 17th Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement in 2016 on the island of Margarita in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela expressed regret that despite relevant UN Security Council resolutions, the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan remained unresolved. The document also expressed support for the solution of the conflict within the framework of the territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

A new paragraph was included in the Final Document of the 18th Non-Aligned Movement Summit held in Baku on 25-26 October 2019. According to this paragraph, the heads of state and government stressed the inadmissibility of the occupation of territories by force. In addition, the Final Document stated that no state would recognize the legitimacy of the situation created as a result of the occupation of Azerbaijani territories and would not provide any support for maintaining the situation in the occupied territories, including economic activity. The “Document of Appreciation and Solidarity with the People and Government of Azerbaijan” adopted at the summit expressed solidarity with Azerbaijan’s efforts to restore its territorial integrity.

Resolution No. 1416 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) “On the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict mediated by the OSCE Minsk Group” dated 25 January 2005 confirmed the occupation of Azerbaijani territories and expressed concern over the ethnic cleansing conducted in these territories. It called for the compliance with Resolutions 822, 853, 874 and 884 of the UN Security Council and for the withdrawal of troops from the occupied territories. The organization also reaffirmed the right of IDPs to return to their lands and stressed the inadmissibility of occupation of the territory of a member state by another member state.

The resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe entitled “Deliberate deprivation of the residents of border regions of Azerbaijan of water”, adopted on 26 January 2016, stated that the Sarsang Reservoir, built on the Tartar River in 1976 to provide irrigation water to about 100,000 hectares of land in six districts of Azerbaijan, fell into disrepair as a result of the occupation, depriving residents of irrigation water. It called for the withdrawal of Armenian troops from the said region, described their actions as “ecological terror” and reaffirmed the occupation of a part of Azerbaijan’s territory by Armenia.

The European Court of Human Rights ruled on 16 June 2015 in the case of “Chiragov and Others vs. Armenia” that Armenia had occupied Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding districts.

In a statement issued on 9 November 1993, the European Union called for the withdrawal of troops from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan and expressed support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

In a Joint Declaration adopted at the EU Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels on 24 November 2017, the EU expressed its support for the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of all partners.

The “Partnership Priorities” document initialed between Azerbaijan and the European Union in 2018 also expressed support for Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity, independence, sovereignty and inviolability of its internationally recognized borders.

The final documents of the NATO Summits, including the Chicago Declaration of 2012, the Cardiff Declaration of 2014, the Warsaw Declaration of 2016 and the Brussels Declaration of 2018, express support for Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence.

In addition, when the heads of the CIS member states signed a memorandum on maintaining peace and stability in the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1995, Armenia refused to accept paragraphs 7 and 8 of the documents. The said paragraphs stated that “Member States … shall take measures to prevent any manifestation of separatism, nationalism, chauvinism and fascism in their territories … and undertake not to provide economic, financial, military or other assistance to such manifestations.”

Thus, throughout the said period, Azerbaijan pursued a resolute and principled policy, succeeded in establishing the legal groundwork for resolving the conflict on the basis of norms and principles of international law, neutralizing Armenia’s information provocations and attempts of the Armenian lobby to mislead the international community. Despite the historical reality, the fact that international law has created a solid foundation for a just settlement of the conflict, as well as Azerbaijan’s obvious superiority over Armenia in terms of economic potential, human resources and military power, Baku has demonstrated its commitment to peace talks. That is why President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev said: “Our biggest compromise is the fact that we are still committed to peace talks.”

However, Azerbaijan’s consistent efforts to resolve the conflict through negotiations were not appreciated by Armenia at all. On the contrary, the military-political leadership of Armenia began to threaten Azerbaijan with a new war and launched endeavors to expand the occupation. Due to Armenia’s hypocritical and obstructive policy, the talks became a virtually meaningless process and were therefore impossible to continue.

“Karabakh is Azerbaijan!”

On 5 August 2019, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan made a statement in Khankendi that “Karabakh is a part of Armenia and full stop”. Up until then, Armenia, aware of the international political, legal and moral implications of its policy of military occupation and annexation, tried to disguise its aggression by portraying it as the right of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh to self-determination. That statement by Nikol Pashinyan explicitly showed that Armenia’s actual goal was aggression. By calling for the annexation of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, Armenia violated the norms and principles of international law, the UN Charter, the Helsinki Final Act, and showed its disregard for the international community, in particular the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs tasked with resolving the conflict through negotiations. Addressing the 16th annual meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club on 3 October 2019, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev responded to Pashinyan’s statement: “… the statement says that ‘Karabakh is a part of Armenia and full stop’. First, this is a lie, to put it mildly. Both Lower and Upper Karabakh are recognized by the world as an integral part of Azerbaijan. Armenia does not recognize this illegal entity itself. Karabakh is historical and ancient land of Azerbaijan. So Karabakh is Azerbaijan and an exclamation mark.”

Also, on 15 February 2020, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan held panel discussions within the framework of the Munich Security Conference. During the discussions, the President of Azerbaijan once again communicated Azerbaijan’s rightful position on the conflict to the attention of the international community, exposed Armenia’s policy of aggression and shattered false claims using arguments based on historical facts and international law.

The so-called “elections” organized in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan in March 2020 was yet another act of provocation. As was the case with previous “elections”, these were not recognized by the international community, any international organization or state either. On the contrary, they were strongly condemned and denounced.

Armenia deliberately attempted to disrupt the format and nature of the process of negotiations to derail the peace process mediated by the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs, maintain the status quo in relation to the occupation and achieve the annexation of the occupied territories. In July 2020, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan put forward the unacceptable “seven conditions” for the settlement of the conflict, which clearly demonstrated the true colors of the occupying state. In this regard, President Ilham Aliyev said, “We have the only condition for peace. Armenian armed forces must withdraw from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. The whole world recognizes Nagorno-Karabakh as an integral part of Azerbaijan.”

Provocations in July-August 2020

In July 2020, Armenia committed yet another military provocation in the direction of Tovuz on the state border with Azerbaijan. The objective of the provocation was to create a new source of tension in the region, to put the issue of occupation of Azerbaijani territories by Armenia on the backburner, to involve third countries in the conflict and to cause damage to Azerbaijan’s strategic infrastructure. As a result, a group of Azerbaijani servicemen and a civilian, including high-ranking military officers, were killed. The Azerbaijani Army responded with a crushing blow to the enemy. Armenia conceded defeat by appealing to the Collective Security Treaty Organization for military support.v

In August 2020, Armenia resorted to another military provocation by sending a sabotage group to Azerbaijan to commit acts of terror. However, on 23 August 2020, the group was neutralized and its leader was detained. Thus, this provocation of Armenia was also thwarted.

Armenia’s adoption of an aggressive and belligerent military doctrine and national security strategy, the creation of armed groups of civilian volunteers to take part in military operations against Azerbaijan, the Armenian defense minister’s call for a “new war for new territories”, the threats by Armenia’s senior government officials to deal a blow to Azerbaijan’s critical civilian infrastructure, Armenia’s involvement of mercenaries and terrorists from various countries, acquisition of large quantities of weapons, etc. openly demonstrated that Armenia was preparing for a new war against Azerbaijan.

Armenia’s new war plan

On 21 September 2020, President of Azerbaijan and Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement Ilham Aliyev said in his remarks at the High-Level Meeting dedicated to the 75th anniversary of the UN within the framework of the 75th Session of the UN General Assembly that the aggressive rhetoric and provocations were evidence of the fact that Armenia was preparing for renewed aggression against Azerbaijan. “We call on the United Nations and the international community to deter Armenia from further military aggression. Responsibility for the provocations and the escalation of tensions lies squarely with the military-political leadership of Armenia. The Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict must be resolved within the framework of Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity and on the basis of UN Security Council resolutions.”

On 24 September 2020, in his remarks during the general debate of the 75th session of the UN General Assembly, President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev once again stated that Armenia was preparing for a new war against Azerbaijan.

Receiving the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus on 25 September 2020, the President of Azerbaijan reiterated that the intelligence data of the Azerbaijani side show that Armenia was making very serious military preparations for war against Azerbaijan, that its armed forces were concentrated on the line of contact, on the state border. “If they attack us, they will regret it. I simply want you to know that and convey this message to the European Commission and see what the European Commission can do to stop the new provocations of the aggressor.”

Unfortunately, no tangible steps were taken by the international community to put an end to Armenia’s successive provocations and new war plans. Emboldened by this, on 27 September 2020, Armenia attacked the positions of the Azerbaijan’s Army from several directions. It used heavy artillery to fire at Azerbaijani residential settlements.

Patriotic war – Operation Iron Fist

In response to yet another attempt at military aggression by Armenia, Azerbaijan’s Army launched a counterattack and, as a result of the 44-day Patriotic War, managed to crush the Armenian army, bring it to its knees and liberate the occupied territories. Operation Iron Fist carried out by the victorious Azerbaijani Army under the leadership of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, President Ilham Aliyev is inscribed in the history of the Azerbaijani people in golden letters as it led to Armenia’s capitulation, a country that glorified occupation and Nazism and turned it into a state policy.

On 10 November 2020, the “Statement of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and the President of the Russian Federation” was adopted and Armenia signed an act of capitulation. This put an end to the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and Azerbaijan restored its territorial integrity. The President of Azerbaijan said on that occasion, “The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been resolved, Azerbaijan has resolved this conflict alone, both on the battlefield and then at the table. Victory on the battlefield forced the enemy to wave the white flag, surrender and sign an act of capitulation. The document signed on 10 November is an act of capitulation signed by Armenia. Thus, according to this document, Aghdam, Kalbadjar and Lachin districts were liberated without a single martyr. The establishment of the Zangazur corridor has become a historical necessity.

Conflict Consigned to History and New Reality

During the occupation, Armenia looted and destroyed the national and cultural heritage of Azerbaijan (culturcide), destroyed cities (urbicide) and other settlements, and caused severe ecological damage to the region (ecocide). Hundreds of thousands of mines and booby traps have been planted across Azerbaijan’s territory.

Armenia will not evade legal responsibility for the numerous war crimes, massacres and genocides it committed against Azerbaijan during the conflict, for its acts of terror and vandalism, and will be forced to pay reparations for the immense socioeconomic damage caused to Azerbaijan.