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for international peace, security and development**

The situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan

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Letter dated 22 July 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

On 12 July 2020, the armed forces of Armenia, in blatant violation of international law, launched a cross-border attack against Azerbaijan in the Tovuz district, with the use of artillery and mortars. The attacks continued on the following days, directly targeting also the adjacent densely populated areas in the Aghdam, Dongar Qushchu and Alibeyli villages of the Tovuz district of Azerbaijan. As a result, a 76-year-old resident of the Aghdam village, Aziz Azizov, and 12 officers and soldiers of the armed forces of Azerbaijan were killed, and many were wounded. Serious damage was inflicted upon the civilian facilities in the area.

It is notable that Armenia launched the attacks across the international border, far away from the Nagorno-Karabakh region and other occupied territories of Azerbaijan. The objective of this deliberate action was to expand aggression and gain control over the heights in the territory of Azerbaijan that would enable the armed forces of Armenia to keep the surrounding Azerbaijani localities and the strategic oil and gas pipelines, including the Southern Gas Corridor, and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, situated near the area of military escalation (15–25 km and 10–12 km, respectively), under constant surveillance and threat.

By launching a cross-border attack, Armenia attempted also to introduce a new dimension into the unresolved Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict by involving the military-political alliance of which it is a member. Apart from that, with this act of aggression, the Armenian leadership tried to divert the attention of the public from the evolving deep economic, financial and political crisis that the country is facing, exacerbated by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.



Armenia's attacks followed the pattern of inflammatory statements and actions by its leadership against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. It may suffice here to recall some of them, which speak for themselves as graphic examples of the consistency of that Member State's policy of aggression.

Back in 2013, in response to the question whether the Armenian armed forces could strike first, the then Defence Minister of Armenia, Seyran Ohanyan, said: "I don't exclude anything because the doctrine of using our armed forces for the country's defense envisages numerous measures that can be not only defensive but also preemptive."¹

In his interview of August 2014, the then President of Armenia, Serzh Sargsyan, threatened to unleash short-range ballistic missiles against major cities in Azerbaijan by saying that "the Azerbaijani leadership knows very well what resources the Armenian armed forces have in stock. They are very well aware that we have ballistic missiles with an effective range of over 300 km, and that they are capable of turning into ruins any flourishing settlement in a glimpse, like the ruins of Aghdam".²

On 21 September 2017, the Chief of General Staff of Armenia, Lieutenant General Movses Hakobyan, confessed that "[w]e actually need more territory to better guarantee our republic's security".³

At a news conference on 24 July 2018, the Deputy Chief of General Staff of Armenia, Lieutenant General Levon Mnatsakanyan, who was in charge of the Armenian occupying forces, threatened Azerbaijan with missile strikes against civilian infrastructure: "That is definitely part of our tactical plans. In general, the art of warfare requires strikes on these facilities as well as military targets in case of a resumption of hostilities, which will damage the [enemy] economy and won't allow appropriate supplies to the armed forces. I see no need for that yet ... But if there is a need to strike [those targets] we will not hesitate for a second."⁴

On 30 March 2019, the Minister of Defence of Armenia, Davit Tonoyan, stated: "As the minister of defense, I announce that this format, territories for peace, I have re-phrased it. We are doing the opposite – a new war for new territories." He further added: "We will rid of this trench condition, the constant defense state, and will add the units which may shift the military actions to the territory of the enemy."⁵

The 12 July attack broke out two days after Armenia had adopted its new National Security Strategy, which reiterated its policy of aggression and annexation.⁶

¹ See Sargis Harutyunyan, "Armenian 'preemptive strike' in Karabakh not ruled out", *Azatutyun*, 9 May 2013.

² See transcript of Armnews television interview of President Serzh Sargsyan, 11 August 2014. Available at www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2014/08/11/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-interview-Armnews-Sochi/.

³ See Sargis Harutyunyan, "Armenian Army chief opposes territorial concessions to Baku", *Azatutyun*, 21 September 2017.

⁴ See Sisak Gabrielian, "Karabakh Army chief warns of missile strikes on Azerbaijan", *Azatutyun*, 24 July 2018.

⁵ See "We do the opposite – new war for new territories: Minister Tonoyan's tough statement", *Lragir*, 30 March 2019.

⁶ See message of Prime Minister to the Security Council of Armenia, 10 July 2020. Available at www.primeminister.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2020/-7/10/Nikol-Pashinyan-Security-Council-meeting/.

On 13 July 2020, the day after the launch of the attack, Minister of Defence Davit Tonoyan of Armenia, in a phone conversation with the Personal Representative of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Chairperson-in-Office on the conflict dealt with by the OSCE Minsk Conference, Ambassador Andrzej Kasprzyk, threatened to occupy new advantageous positions.⁷

Even the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has not prevented Armenia from its armed provocation. It is apparent that Armenia's statement on its alleged support for and adherence to the appeal of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for a global ceasefire is nothing other than utter falsehood. No doubt, Armenia's objective is not to save lives and alleviate the sufferings of people in need, but to expand and secure its aggression and annexation.

Instead of preparing its population for peace, the current Armenian leadership has replicated its predecessors' annexationist policy, both in words and deeds. The recent escalation has taken place against the background of Armenia's continued attempts to challenge the format of negotiations and derail the peace process, misinterpret the norms and principles of international law, the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council and other documents and decisions on the conflict settlement, prolong the occupation of the territories of Azerbaijan, strengthen its military build-up in these territories and change their demographic, cultural and physical character. Such actions have nothing in common with the objective of the peaceful and negotiated settlement of the conflict.

The Republic of Azerbaijan has repeatedly brought to the attention of the international community that the continuation of Armenia's aggression and its unlawful presence in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan are the main causes of the war and the reoccurring escalations on the ground. We have consistently stated that, as a country suffering from occupation of its territories and forcible displacement of hundreds of thousands of its citizens, Azerbaijan is the most interested party in finding an early and durable solution to the conflict.

However, Azerbaijan will not sit idle and will respond adequately to Armenia's provocations and ceasefire violations. Thus, in order to repulse the recent cross-border attacks of Armenia, the armed forces of Azerbaijan have taken the necessary countermeasures to ensure the safety of its civilian population, neutralize Armenian fire and stronghold battle positions, deter it from further acts of aggression and gain control over the situation. The determination and courage of the armed forces of Azerbaijan demonstrated that Azerbaijan will not tolerate the violation of its sovereignty and territorial integrity, nor will it reconcile with the occupation of its territories. Unlike Armenia, Azerbaijan acts solely within the purview of its right of self-defence, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and customary international law.

It is pertinent to reiterate that aggression and its military consequences do not represent a solution and will never produce the political outcome desired by Armenia. The resolution of the conflict is possible only on the basis of the norms and principles of international law, with full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan within its internationally recognized borders. Azerbaijan considers no political solution to the conflict beyond this framework and participates in the settlement process based on this understanding.

⁷ See "Armenian Defense Minister doesn't rule out capturing new positions", *Mediamax News Agency*, 13 July 2020, and Marianna Mkrtchyan, "David Tonoyan informed Kasprzyk about the readiness of the Armenian army to take new favorable positions", *Arminfo*, 13 July 2020, available at www.arminfo.info/full_news.php?id=53505&lang=3.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 32, 37, 70, 75 and 83, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Yashar Aliyev
Ambassador
Permanent Representative
