



A Peace to End All Peace? Lemkin Institute Statement on the International Actors Sponsoring So-Called Peace Negotiations Between Armenia and Azerbaijan

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The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention registers its deep concern over the glaring blind spots of international negotiators involved in the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace negotiations. We implore international actors, particularly US President Biden, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, Russian President Vladimir Putin, and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, to recognize the threat of genocide faced by Armenians in the South Caucasus. We further implore them to fully consider the implications of ignoring existing early warning systems and genocide prevention protocols by rewarding Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev for his threats against Armenia. Rewarding a dictator who has publicly threatened genocide will have long-term catastrophic implications not only for Armenians, but also for international peace and security.

This spring we have seen an internationally-brokered intensification of efforts to finalize a peace deal between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The details of these negotiations have been unclear, though they do clearly include enormous concessions by Armenia to Azerbaijan – such as giving up the historically Armenian territory of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) – with little offered to Armenia in exchange, other than paper guarantees of Armenia’s already-existing legal rights: Azerbaijan’s respect for Armenia’s sovereignty, the return of Armenian prisoners of war (POWs) from the 2020 conflict who are still illegally being held by Azerbaijan, and the sharing of information about the whereabouts of the disappeared. The Lemkin Institute is concerned that the major powers are cynically using threats to Armenia’s continued existence as a stick to force it to agree to very lopsided agreements. We fear that Armenia is being told that either it signs this agreement or it will face Azeri and Turkish aggression alone. The apparent international assumption that Azeri and Turkish threats will end once Armenia gives up all claims to Artsakh are baffling. Just last week President Aliyev demanded that the Armenians of Artsakh give up their representative institutions and that the leaders of Artsakh “turn themselves in” to the Azerbaijani authorities, warning them that “[e]veryone knows that we have the necessary capabilities to launch any type of operation in this region.”

Of particular concern to the Lemkin Institute is the very real threat of genocide that is going unaddressed: Ilham Aliyev has repeatedly threatened the sovereign Republic of Armenia (even suggesting that its capital, Yerevan, is historic Azeri land) and pushing — with its ally Türkiye — for an illegal so-called “Zangezur Corridor” through Armenia’s Syunik province, which would effectively constitute an occupation of Armenian land and would cut Armenia off from direct land access to its important southern trade partner, Iran. Because of these threats — which have been coupled with the Baku regime’s endorsement of horrific and genocidal atrocities against Armenian soldiers, POWs, and civilians during the 2016 and 2020 wars — there is no reason to believe that Azerbaijan will abide by any treaty or that its expansionist ambitions will stop with Artsakh. Azerbaijan’s disrespect for international norms is blatant and consistent, as shown by its repeated breach of the 2020 Tripartite Ceasefire Agreement that ended the 2020 war.

It is imperative that the great powers negotiating this peace view their work within the context of an on-going genocidal threat to Armenian life that has existed in the region since the 19th century and particularly since the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923. Due to Türkiye’s active and well-funded denial of the genocide, as well as its powerful geostrategic position and the coordinated pressure that it has placed on governments, research institutions, the United Nations, NATO and NGOs, this genocidal threat has never been accounted for and the transitional justice mechanisms that could transform the current genocidal power dynamics in the region have not been implemented. Given that Türkiye actively supports Azerbaijan militarily, diplomatically, politically, and economically, and that Azerbaijan has pursued similar techniques of denial, including notorious bribery schemes as part of its “caviar diplomacy,” these peace negotiations are setting the stage for disaster.

Nevertheless, the very real existential threats being faced by Armenians are being completely ignored by peace negotiators and the press. Charles Michel, President of the European Council who hosted talks between Aliyev and Armenian President Nikol Pashinyan on May 14, affirmed afterwards that the contested region of Nagorno-Karabakh will be recognized as part of Azerbaijan. He further “encouraged Azerbaijan to engage in developing a positive agenda with the aim of guaranteeing the rights and security of this population, in close cooperation with the international community” and added that he views a “need for a transparent and constructive dialogue between Baku and this population [Armenians in Artsakh].” The Lemkin Institute wonders how it is possible for the elected government of Artsakh, much less the 120,000 people who have been illegally blockaded in the territory for over five months by the Baku regime, to negotiate with a man and a government who have made anti-Armenianism and genocidal hate speech a core policy of their dictatorship.

We remind these powerful actors that their support for Baku’s claims to historic Armenian land can amount to complicity in genocide, as they are effectively acting as accomplices to the current

regime in Baku, which has overseen genocidal atrocities against Armenian POWs and civilians, routinely flouts the 2020 ceasefire agreement that ended the 44-day war, still holds hostage Armenian POWs in violation of international law, has illegally blockaded the population of Artsakh for five months now, and regularly launches incursions into the territory of the Republic of Armenia. Ignoring the genocidal threats from the Aliyev regime, and its ally Türkiye, is a dangerous move and a betrayal of humanity. It will most likely set the stage for a second Armenian Genocide and spell the end of post-1945 genocide prevention efforts, which the United States in particular has made an important part of its foreign policy. Geostregetic interests must be understood within a genocide prevention framework if the world is ever to have a chance for peace and security.

The Lemkin Institute believes that, given the circumstances, the self-determination of the people of Artsakh is a form of genocide prevention in addition to a right recognized by the Charter of the United Nations and several human rights treaties and declarations, which has become part of international jus cogens. Self-determination is further a recognized right of all peoples under oppressive colonial regimes. International law implies the responsibility of third party states to promote the realization of and respect for this right. Beyond this, the people of Artsakh have a strong case for self-determination. The land and the people of Artsakh – an historic Armenian territory granted to Azerbaijan by the Soviet Union – has never before been under the governance of the state of Azerbaijan. Under the Soviets it had the status of an autonomous oblast; in the 1980s it sought separation from Azerbaijan according to the constitution of the Soviet Union; and in the 1990s it fought a painful war for its independence after an Azerbaijani invasion. From 1994 to 2020 Artsakh was governed as a semi-independent and democratic nation within a buffer zone of formerly Azerbaijani territory occupied by Artsakh Armenian forces. After the 44-day war in 2020, Azerbaijani forces gained control of the territories in this buffer zone as well as parts of Artsakh itself. Since December 12, 2022 Azerbaijan has been illegally blockading the people of Artsakh, who are over 99 percent Armenian.

The international community, rather than exploiting Armenia's weakness (itself a long-term consequence of the 1915-1923 genocide), should be placing strong pressure on the Baku regime to cease its genocidal threats to Armenia and Armenians. Such pressure must include a recognition that placing Artsakh Armenians under the control of genocidal dictator Ilham Aliyev is akin to giving the fox the entire henhouse in reward for his predatory behavior. Instead of offering Aliyev a green light for genocide, international actors should be issuing targeted sanctions and using other mechanisms to contain Azerbaijan's aggression and guarantee Armenians security in the region. Self-determination for Artsakh should be adjudicated immediately through proper international mechanisms. In the long run an independent investigatory commission into Armenian and Azeri grievances and a transitional justice process will be necessary to craft an enduring peace in the South Caucasus. But the immediate priority must be the prevention of genocide against Armenians.