

Environmental terrorism

Ecology is one of the key areas of concern for the entire international community today, given the global process of climate change, land desertification and the shortage of clean drinking water.

In terms of potential danger to people, a new type of high-tech terrorism – environmental terrorism is more dangerous than its other varieties because violence or physical attacks occur against citizens or their property indirectly through the natural environment, where further human existence will be difficult or even impossible. Environmental terrorism usually leads to irreversible and difficult to eliminate planetary consequences.

The Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict entered the history of the twentieth century as one of the most tragic conflicts. Its consequences seriously affected the fate of millions of Azerbaijanis.



Beginning in the late 1980s with Armenia's territorial claims to historical Azerbaijani lands and ethnic provocations, as well as terrorist acts, this conflict led to military aggression against Azerbaijan.

Administrative districts of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding Lachin, Kalbajar, Gubadli, Zangilan, Jabrayil, Aghdam (district center and a large part of its territory), Fuzuli (district center and a large part of its territory) were occupied by Armenia in 1989-1993.

Along with the above-mentioned districts, a number of settlements in the frontline and border districts of Azerbaijan (Nakhchivan AR, Gazakh, Tartar, Aghjabedi, Gadabey) were occupied, several of them were seriously damaged (Aghstafa, Beylagan, Tovuz).

Armenia's territorial claims against Azerbaijan's Nagorno-Karabakh region have led to the destruction of hundreds of residential areas, deaths of thousands of people and the displacement of about 1 million civilians from their native lands. Armenia's armed aggression against Azerbaijan was accompanied by massive and gross violation of human rights. The Armenian armed forces killed over 20,000 people, more than 50,000 people were wounded and disabled, thousands of people went missing. Azerbaijan faced an emergency humanitarian situation following Armenia's armed aggression and the ethnic cleansing on the occupied territories. National and cultural monuments of the Azerbaijani people were also totally destroyed and our rich cultural heritage – an integral part of the culture of the peoples of the world – was inflicted an unprecedented damage during the occupation of Azerbaijan's territories by the military units of Armenia. As a result of all of this the ecological situation in the region has suffered enormous damage.

Illegal activities and exploitation of natural resources on the occupied territories resulted in a huge economic damage and numerous environmental ramifications. Deforestation and burning of forests, pollution of water resources, destruction of flora and fauna, and embezzlement of natural resources have

upset the environmental balance. Unhindered degradation of nature caused a backlash on the part of environmental organizations even in Armenia itself. As a result of Armenia's military aggression, 20 percent of the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan was occupied, and the immeasurable material and moral damage has been inflicted on our country.

At that time, free smuggling and, in some cases, the transport of narcotic substances was carried out



in the occupied sections of the borders of the Azerbaijan-Iran, which were left unattended. Construction materials of residential and public buildings, cut wood trees were transported from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan to Iran and Armenia.

These occupied territories were very rich in various types of construction materials, which are of great importance in the industry and construction of Azerbaijan. A large number of such materials are located in the territory of Aghdam region Chobandagh (140 million tons of limestone and 20 million tons of clay), Shakhbulag (25 million tons of clay), Boyahmedli (45 million tons of clay), and other deposits. Large construction stone deposits are in Khankendi and marble in Kharov.

163 types of mineral deposits, the reserves of which were confirmed before the occupation of our territories, including 5 gold, 7 mercury, 2 copper, 1 lead and sink, 1 coal stone, 6 clay-gypsum formations, 4 vermiculite, 1 raw material for soda production, 12 non-ferrous and ornamental stones (obsidian, marbled onyx, jasper, etc.), 10 building stones, 21 facing stones, 9 clay, 20 types of cement raw, 8 different types of building stones, 6 lime raw, 10 sand-gravel, 4 construction sand, 1 perlite, 8 pumice-volcanic ash, 16 underground freshwater deposits, and 11 mineral water deposits.

Armenia's eco-terrorism also negatively affected Azerbaijan's water management and planning system. More specifically, some transboundary drinking water resources and irrigation systems have for many years been directly encroached upon by Armenia and usually used as a "weapon" against Azerbaijani people.

Water scarcity is a vital topic in the contemporary world, including Azerbaijan, where 72,7% of all surface water resources are generated outside of the country. Armenia continuously contaminates transboundary water resources with chemical and biological items. Research shows that each year nearly 350 million cubic meters of water passing through Armenia is polluted with chemical substances. Armenia has a proven track record of neglecting environmental standards by letting its mining industry treat the Araz River as a depository for waste and the worst of sludge. The heavy metal release from the enterprises based in Kafan and Kajaran, located in the southern part of the country, together with the discharge of sewage from these districts are key elements of the disastrous environmental situation on the ground. The flow of pollutants from the copper-molybdenum facility in Kajaran to the Okchuchay River and the gold deposit in

Agarak to the Kharchevan, both rivers being tributaries of the Araz River, form another aspect of the bigger picture. Armenia has repeatedly and obstinately refused to change its practice of sending industrial waste originating in its heavy industry facilities to Okhcuchay and then to the Araz River. It has also failed to install water-treatment mechanisms, despite numerous sensible offers. Furthermore, microflora and microfauna of the 43 km part of the Araz river in the territories of Azerbaijan were completely destroyed and the amount of heavy metals in the Araz river is much higher than normal.



In 2016, PACE adopted Resolution 2085 titled “Inhabitants of Frontier Regions (lower Karabakh valley) of Azerbaijan are Deliberately Deprived of Water”.

Considering the gravity of this humanitarian problem, the Assembly called on the Armenian authorities to immediately withdraw the armed forces from the above-mentioned region, ensure research by independent engineers and hydrologists and stop using water as a means of political pressure.

The document also pointed out that the reservoir posed a danger to the whole border region. The Assembly emphasized that the state of disrepair of the Sarsang dam could result in a major disaster with great loss of human life and possibly a fresh humanitarian crisis.

It has been long years that Armenia has ignored both this and other resolution of international organizations.

On 28 August 2020, the Armenian side deliberately stopped the flow of Injasu River, which originates in Armenia and flows towards Gazakh District of Azerbaijan. This resulted in a significant reduction of water reserves in a reservoir in the frontier Kemerli village (Gazakh District), imminently disrupting farmland irrigation process.

Launching a counteroffensive on 27 September 2020, Azerbaijani army liberated Sugovushan village from occupation, thereby making it possible to supply water from the Sugovushan Reservoir. According to the Azerbaijan’s Ministry of Ecology, it was an important step towards irrigating Azerbaijani lowland districts and establishing the environmental balance.

In general, in the territories occupied by the Armenian Armed Forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 561 deposits, manifestation, and a promising area of mineralization were identified. The mineral waters of the İstisu located on the territory of the Kalbajar region are especially different from their favorable gas and chemical composition, high temperature, and large natural reserves. Its waters can be treated with both external and internal human diseases. A large resort and mineral water plant were built on the Istisu in the 80s. The plant produced 800 thousand liters of water per day.

The importance of Sugovushan settlement is that it is home to the Sugovushan reservoir. The reservoir is of great strategic significance. This reservoir, along with the Sarsang reservoir, was built on the

initiative of national leader Heydar Aliyev in 1976. The main purpose of these reservoirs was to supply water to the regions located outside the administrative boundaries of the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region – Tartar, Barda, Aghdam, Goranboy, and other districts.

Liberation of Sugovushan, Sarsang and Khudaferin reservoirs from Armenian occupation allows to restore ecological balance in Tartar, Goranboy, Yevlakh, Barda and other districts of Azerbaijan.

It is assumed that 39.6% of the total geological reserves of mineral waters in Azerbaijan fall on the share of the occupied regions. In the occupied territories there are about 120 deposits of mineral water of various composition and medicinal value. In other dimensions, this means a mineral water supply of 7805 m³/day.

Yukhari and Ashaghi Istisu, Baghirsag, Keshdak mineral water springs of the Kalbajar region, Iligsu, Minkend in the Lachin region, and Turshsu, Sirlan in the Shusha region and other mineral waters attract special attention.

Turshsu mineral spring is located 17 km away from Shusha. Water from this spring is used for internal illnesses treatment. And water from this spring was supplied to Shusha through the water pipe.

In addition to the pollution of water resources, forest areas have also suffered. Before the occupation there were 264 thousand hectares of forests in Nagorno-Karabakh. How many of them there are now – unknown. More than two thousand species of vegetation grew on this territory, which is 42% of the entire flora of Azerbaijan. At the same time, 50 species of vegetation and more than 70 species of animals were included in the “Red Book”. Unfortunately, as a result of barbaric activities of Armenians, we can confidently say that some species have disappeared from the face of the Earth forever.

One example of deforestation is the quarry formed between the Sarsang Reservoir and Chardagli village. In a 2010 satellite image of this area, it is clearly visible that there was no quarry there. One can



only imagine how many trees and other plants were destroyed. And this is not an isolated case of destruction of an entire forest area. A number of reserves and sanctuaries, created back in Soviet times to preserve the natural landscape, the world of rare plants and animals, are in a deplorable condition. Here we can name Besitchay State Nature Reserve, Garagol State Nature Reserve, Lachin

State Nature Reserve, Gubadli State Nature Reserve and Dashalti State Nature Reserve.

The Basitchay Reserve was established under the order of national leader Heydar Aliyev in 1974. Rare plane trees were protected by the state on more than 100 hectares. It was a forest of rare plane trees. The reserve covers an area of 107 hectares, which is occupied by sycamore forests. The object protected here is the eastern sycamore. The sycamore grove (the only one in Europe) stretches along the river for a distance of 12 km. The trees are up to 500 years old. The eastern sycamore (chinara) is included in the “Red

Book”. In addition to mixed species of sycamore trees, there are walnut, carcass, tout, willow, poplar, hawthorn, rosehip, buckthorn, derzhiderevo and other species of shrubby trees. The average age of sycamore trees in the reserve reaches 165 years, average height – 35 meters, average diameter – 1 meter, there are specimens of these species that have reached the age of 1200-1500 years with a height of 50 and a diameter of 4 meters. The vegetative forest reserve of each hectare is 190 m³, the total area is 16,200 m³, the annual growth on one hectare reaches 1.22 m³.

Unfortunately, such wealth was destroyed during the occupation, cut down and ruthlessly exploited in the production of furniture.

In the village of Razdere, Zangilan district, Armenians built and put into operation a woodworking shop that worked around the clock producing material for furniture. Such facts are nothing but ecological terror.

As a result of the use of white phosphorus by the Armenian side, the Topkhana forest near the city of Shusha was badly damaged. Restoration of the scorched places from white phosphorus is practically impossible. Armenians cut down and took to Armenia up to 2,000 oak trees planted by local people in the area called “Khacha Yal”.

A 100-million-dollar woodworking plant was built in the village of Mughanli in Zangilan district. The plant was put into operation with the sole purpose of cutting down the forests of Zangilan and other nearby districts to the roots. Of course, once again the main blow was struck at the chinaras.



The hazel trees listed in the “Red Book” in Kalbajar district (growing on the territory of 968 hectares) were cut down and sold abroad. More than 4 thousand species of various plants grow on the territory of the district, 200 of which are medicinal species, and they were collected in mass and taken abroad by foreign companies. The Armenians leaving Kalbajar set fires, thus destroying the rich flora and fauna of the area. In the last days before the return of the district, there was a mass cutting of forests for the production of furniture.

As a rule, each such case is the destruction of an ecosystem, environmental degradation, and loss of habitat for living beings. At the same time, the organisms that inhabited the area move to other places or become extinct, which reduces biodiversity. In addition, the replacement of forest communities with grassland and shrub communities leads to climate change.

For centuries, the mountainous part of Karabakh was in close economic relations with Nagorno-Karabakh. The roads along the river valleys have connected these two areas economically. Unlike all these historical and geographical realities, the capture of Nagorno-Karabakh by Armenians and its forced departure from Karabakh created very serious problems for the population and economy of the whole region.

Heavy military equipment moving in the occupied mountainous areas, large quantities of shells, suppressed mines cause strong damage to the soil cover and vegetation of these territories.

The Armenians, realizing the temporariness of their position in these territories, plundered the mineral deposits and natural resources located there. Mineral deposits, various technical materials and resources were all illegally appropriated. The Armenians who left Lachin and Kalbajar, according to the statement, started fires on these lands and thus caused serious damage to the ecology of these areas. As an illegal entity, Nagorno-Karabakh had no responsibility before international organizations for the environmental situation in the occupied territories, which had only worsened over time.

With the liberation of Azerbaijani lands, the ecological terror came to an end. It will take many decades to restore the ecological balance in Nagorno-Karabakh and improve biodiversity. Almost immediately after the liberation of the territories, work began on the restoration of forests in the region. Thus, several thousand trees were planted in Gubadli, Jabrayil, Fuzuli and Aghdam districts in a few days. Improvement works are being carried out here, these territories are being reconstructed. The Ministry carries out relevant monitoring on a regular basis.

As President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev emphasized in his speech: “The overall economic, agricultural and tourism potential of all the liberated districts is great. We must maximize this potential and turn the Karabakh region into one of the most beautiful regions not only in Azerbaijan, but also in the world, and I am sure that we will achieve this”.

In recent years, increasing attention has been devoted to the issue of environmental damage caused by military activities and prolonged anthropogenic impacts. Comprehensive assessments of natural resources conducted in 2023-2024 across affected territories revealed significant environmental degradation, including contamination of water resources, soil deterioration, and the destruction of natural ecosystems.

Documented evidence indicates substantial alterations to natural landscapes, the destruction of vegetation cover, and environmental pollution resulting from both domestic and industrial waste. In certain areas, disruptions to hydrological regimes and a decline in water quality have also been observed. The findings of these studies highlight the urgent need for large-scale restoration measures, as the consequences of such impacts are long-term in nature and affect not only ecological systems but also socio-economic development.

The discussion of these issues at international forums in 2024 contributed to raising awareness of environmental security concerns and emphasized the importance of assessing environmental damage. Furthermore, initiatives launched since 2025 have focused on the gradual restoration of the natural environment through environmental monitoring, the remediation of contaminated areas, land reclamation, and the development of long-term rehabilitation programs.

Particular importance is attached to the implementation of long-term environmental monitoring systems, which enable the evaluation of restoration effectiveness and help prevent further environmental deterioration. Addressing environmental damage requires a comprehensive and integrated approach that combines national efforts with international cooperation in the field of environmental restoration and sustainable ecosystem management.