

Massacres of 1905–1906

The scenario of massacres committed against Azerbaijani Turks in the South Caucasus, particularly in the territory of present-day Armenia in the early 20th century, was based on the experience gained by Armenians in Eastern Anatolia in the late 19th century. The "Armenian question" brought to the agenda after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 by the efforts of European states, later served as a means for Armenians to obtain autonomy and establish an independent Armenian state. To achieve this autonomy, it was necessary for Armenians first to obtain numerical superiority in the Eastern Anatolia provinces, which they referred to as "Western Armenia." However, Armenians did not have numerical superiority in any of the Eastern Anatolia provinces.

During those years, propaganda for the Armenian rebellion was disseminated in Türkiye with the assistance of England and France. The leadership of this effort was taken on by the "Armenakan", "Hnchak", and "Dashnaktsutyun" parties. The Armenians would attack Turks and Kurds to foment mass disturbances so that massacres would occur. Later, they would use Europe's mass media channels to portray Armenians as victims of massacres by Turks to draw attention worldwide.

After the suppression of the riots carried out by Armenians in Turkey in 1894-1896, most of the perpetrators of these uprisings migrated to the South Caucasus. According to N. Shavrov, in 1896, there were 900,000 Armenians living in the South Caucasus, and by 1908, this number had increased to 1,301,000. So, 400,000 Armenians were relocated to the South Caucasus during this period alone. 80 percent of the crimes perpetrated in the South Caucasus were committed by Armenian migrants from Turkey and hired assassins.

In the early 20th century, Armenians constituted a majority in only five out of 54 districts in the Caucasus. Armenians were the majority in 3 out of 7 districts in Iravan province and only 1 out of 8 districts in Yelizavetpol province. During the massacres of 1905-1906, of the 1301 inhabited areas in the Iravan province, Azerbaijanis resided in 959, while Armenians lived in 342. Muslims lived in 314 out of 406 villages of the Zangezur district of Yelizavetpol province, and Armenians lived in the remaining 92 villages.

In 1905, the turmoil caused by the upheavals in Russia and the growing wave of discontent with the Tsarist regime also had a strong echo in the South Caucasus. Armenians skillfully took advantage of these unrests. Armenian detachments, armed by high-ranking Armenian and pro-Armenian officials of the Caucasus Viceroyalty, launched armed attacks in 1905 on the territories where Azerbaijanis lived compactly in the South Caucasus, aiming to gain numerical superiority by carrying out ethnic cleansing and resettling Armenians fleeing from Turkey to these territories, and then to lay the foundation of an Armenian state by uniting the newly created Armenian enclaves.

On February 6, 1905, the first massacres in the city and surrounding settlements began with the killing of Agharza Babayev, a resident of the Sabunchu settlement, in the center of Baku. Azerbaijanis were

shot at from the roofs and windows of Armenian houses as they passed through the streets. Houses and shops were looted and set on fire. Many manufacturing facilities were burned down and destroyed in Baku.

After the first massacres perpetrated in Baku, Armenians continued their bloody deeds in Iravan. The main goal of the Armenian political parties was to seize the Iravan province by committing mass massacres in 1905-1906, and finally to attack from the Zangezur-Garabagh and Gazakh-Tovuz directions and capture the Azerbaijani villages located between these two directions and unite in Ganja.

On the morning of February 20, 1905, Armenians spread rumors that Azerbaijanis were massacring Armenians in the Bazar Square of Iravan city. A violent clash erupted in the city, that continued for two days. The riots resulted in the deaths and injuries of nearly 100 people on both sides.

On May 5, 1905, renewed tensions flared up with three Muslims severely injured in the village of Jahri in the Nakhchivan province, and on May 7, one Muslim was killed in the village of Tumbul. On May 10-12, Armenians rioted in the city of Nakhchivan. Armenian armed groups started shooting at Muslims in the Nakhchivan bazaar. Shots were fired from rifles and pistols in all the streets of the city. The number of those killed, burned, and injured exceeded 100. The clashes also spread to surrounding villages. However, the Armenians could not achieve their goals in Nakhchivan.

After the defeat in Nakhchivan, the Armenians resumed hostilities in Iravan. On May 23, the next massacre began in Iravan with an attack by Armenians on Muslim youths in the Garsachay gardens. Although the violence in Iravan stopped on May 31, the Armenians decided to attack the surrounding Muslim villages. On the same evening, Armenians attacked the village of Gozejik in the Girkhbulag district of Iravan Province. On June 2, an Armenian battalion consisting of ten thousand soldiers attacked the village of Mangus. The displaced population of 12 Muslim villages sought refuge in Tazakand. On June 3, the Armenians attacked the village of Gulluja. The unarmed population fled to the villages of Tutiya, Damagirmaz, and Kamal. The massacres continued for 18 days. Eventually, the Armenians destroyed the villages of Gozajik, Gulluja, Mangus, Damagirmaz, Tutiya, Kamal, and Masimli, looting their property to prevent the Azerbaijanis from returning.

On June 3, with the support of armed groups from Abaran, Shorayel, Pambak, and Aleksandropol, the Armenians attacked the village of Ushu in the Echmiadzin (Uchkilsa) district. On June 8, the Muslims abandoned the village. On June 9, the Armenians destroyed the villages of Parsi, Nazravan, Kichikkand, Kotuklu, Qoshabulaq, Irku, Angirsak, and Takiya. On June 10, the Armenians demolished 10 villages in Echmiadzin.

In 1905-1906, Armenians perpetrated mass killings in Iravan five times. The first massacre was carried out on February 20-21, 1905, the second on May 23-26, 1905, the third on September 18, 1905, the fourth on May 27, 1906, and the fifth on June 8-9, 1906.

In 1897, there were 313,176 Azerbaijanis recorded in the Iravan province, while after 10 years - in 1907, there were 302,965 recorded. Therefore, in addition to the natural population growth over the 10 years, more than 10,000 Azerbaijanis had either been killed or displaced from the Iravan province in 1905 and 1906.

The massacres of 1905-1906 caused the migration of wealthy Azerbaijani families either from the city of Iravan or from other areas of the Iravan province where massacres were committed. Most of the Azerbaijani families who could not succumb to the pressure of the Armenians were forced to migrate to Baku and Yelizavetpol provinces, and a few to Iran and Türkiye.

Armenians committed the first massacres in the Zangezur province in two villages bordering Nakhchivan province in June 1905.

On September 22, 1905, Armenians from Khoznavar and Khnachakh attacked Azerbaijani villages with the assistance of armed groups from surrounding villages and destroyed the villages of Bayandur, Halak, Kosalar, Malibeyli, Jaghajur, Chayli, Kalavalakh, and Novruzlu. The first three villages were completely plundered.

In October 1905, armed men from 10 Armenian villages of Zangezur province attacked the Azerbaijani-populated village of Sisyan, resulting in the deaths and injuries of 75 people.

On December 29, 1905, the Armenians of Tatev attacked the village called Kurds, where Azerbaijanis lived. However, the Azerbaijanis could not resist, suffering heavy losses and being forced to abandon the village. The village was plundered then set on fire and razed to the ground.

In February 1906, a peace conference (council) was held in Tiflis at the initiative of Voronsov-Dashkov, the Viceroy of the Caucasus, to put an end to the Armenian-Muslim massacres. At the conference, Muslim representatives such as Ahmed bey Aghayev, Alimardan bey Topchubashov, Adil khan Ziyadkhanov, and others exposed the intentions of the "Dashnaksutyun" party, demonstrating that it was the organizer and executor of the massacres and terrorism committed in the South Caucasus. They also provided evidence that official government circles turned a blind eye to the actions of this organization.

However, shortly after the peace conference, Armenian armed groups resumed the massacres. Since the Armenian population was very small in the area from Iravan to Zangezur and from Zangezur to Garabagh, the Armenian armed groups were ordered to attack Muslim villages along the way. On July 29, 1906, under the instructions of the "Dashnaksutyun" party, Armenians killed Safyar bey in the Meden bazaar of Zangezur province and then attacked the village of Karkhana. The Armenians had no mercy on anyone in this village, they killed or took captive all its inhabitants. On that same day, the Armenians razed to the ground the villages of Lov, Khalaj, Saldashli, Injavar, and Dashnov. On August 1, the Armenians attacked the village of Gatar. The people of Gatar defended their village for 9 days. In August and September of 1906, Armenian armed groups shifted the focus of the massacres to the Oxchu-Shabadak area

of Zangezur. The Armenians committed a real genocide in the village of Saqqarsu, where Azerbaijani survivors of the massacres gathered. Voluntary forces formed in the Ordubad district took action to put an end to the massacres committed by Armenians in Zangezur. With the assistance of nearly 800 volunteers from Ordubad and the participation of around 1000 soldiers from Oxchu-Shabadak, the villages of Oxchu-Shabadak were liberated from Armenian occupation on September 16-17. Afterward, the process of returning the surviving population to their villages begins. The Armenian author A-Do identified the names of 43 Azerbaijani villages subjected to destruction as follows: Bayandur, Halak, Binayeri, Kosalar, Malibeyli, Jaghazur, Chayli, Kalavalax, Novruzlu, Jejimli, Hajilar, Baghirbeyli, Garahunj, Unanav, Kurdler, Aghvani, Danzaver (Armudlu), Sisyan, Aghudi, Darabas, Pul, Arikli, Shukar, Maliklar, Yemazli, Xashtap, Almali, Karkhana, Gatar, Jibili, Khalaj, Kechi-Shabadin, Injavar, Chullu, Oxchu, Atgiz, Pirdavudan, Ajlili, Bughajiq, Kollu-Kishlag, Mtnadzor, Sanali.

The unification of Azerbaijanis, the formation of the "Difai" party in the autumn of 1906, which responded to Armenian terrorism with terrorism, forced Armenians to refrain from committing massacres.

In general, Armenians committed massacres in 15 provinces of the South Caucasus in 1905-1906 - in the provinces of Iravan, Nakhchivan, Sharur-Daralayaz, Novo-Bayazid, Echmiadzin, Alexandropol, Surmali, Shusha, Javanshir, Jabrayil, Zangezur, Ganja, Gazakh, Arash, and Borchali, as well as in 8 cities - Baku, Iravan, Nakhchivan, Gumru, Ganja, Shusha, Gazakh, and Tiflis.

In 1905-1906, approximately 100 thousand people were displaced from their homes in provinces, several thousand people were displaced from their homes in cities, and the loss of life was more than ten thousand people in the zone of national conflicts encompassing the territory inhabited by 1.5 million people in the South Caucasus. In general, more than 200 Azerbaijani settlements were destroyed in the territory of the Iravan and Yelizavetpol (Ganja) provinces, and their population was subjected to ethnic cleansing and mass murders.

Mass murders perpetrated by Armenians in 1905-1906 were the first stage of the series of genocides and deportations the people of Azerbaijan endured in the 20th century.

Nazim Mustafa
Doctor of Philosophy in History