HISTORICAL OVERVIEW FROM THE HISTORY OF ARTSAKH (KARABAKH) AND THE CONFLICT

Ancient Times

Artsakh was the 15th province of the Armenia Major (Mets Hayq). It stretched from Eastern side of the Lesser Caucasus (Poqr Kovkas) to the North-Eastern side of the Armenian Highlands. In the Urartian times (9-6 centuries B.C.), Artsakh was known as Urtekhe-Urtekhini. According to the historical sources, Artsakh was one of the 15 provinces in the Artaxiad Kingdom, proclaimed in 189 B.C. Artsakh province had 12 cantons and was in the territory of Armenia till the end of the 4th century A.D. Azerbaijani side notes that historically Artsakh belonged to their ancestors known as Caucasian Albania. Historical sources, however, have it that the border between Armenia Major and Caucasian Albania passed across Kura River, while Caucasian Albania was located on the Northern side of the river and Artsakh – on the Southern. After the collapse of the Artaxias in 387 Rome and Persia split Armenia in two parts and detached its strategically important furthest cantons. Artsakh with the Utik Province was attached to the Caucasian Albania located on the left side of Kura River, for the service delivered by the kings of Caucasian Albania to the Persian Shahs. Nevertheless, the Province maintained its Armenian Culture and ethnic identity. In their works many ancient authors, namely Strabo, Pliny the Elder, Claudius Ptolemy, Plutarch, Dio Cassius among others, wrote about Artsakh as part of Armenia.

Middle Ages

In the 4th century, Gregory the Enlightener founded the first Armenian Church in Amaras township of Artsakh, the construction of which was completed by his grandson Grigoris. After the creation of the Armenian alphabet (in 405) Mesrop Mashtots (creator of the alphabet) founded the first Armenian school in Amaras, Artsakh. Once again, this highlights the important role of Artsakh in the Armenian culture.

At the end of the 5th century Artsakh and Utik provinces gained some autonomy taking advantage of the conflicts in the Persian Royal Court. From 7-9th centuries Artsakh was under the rule of the Arab caliphate. In the 12th century, Seljuk turks invaded Artsakh and Turkish AqQoyunlu tribes invaded it from 15-17th. In the 13-14th centuries, the name “Karabakh” was mentioned in the Persian and Georgian

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1 Anania Shirakatsi, Ashkharhatsoyts, translated from old Armenian by Robert H. Hewsen (Caravan Books, 1994).
3 Claudius Ptolemos, Geography, page 5, 12. Pliny the Elder, Naturalis Historia, pp. 6, 39
5 ՄովսեսԿաղանկատվացի, «Աղուանից աշխարհի պատմութիւն», 1.4, 1.18, 3.22:
sources for the first time. The name has Persian, Turkish origin. Yet, till the modern times the population of Artsakh was homogeneous and the province was ruled by the princes of Khachen who received the noble title “melik” from the 15th century. Early 17 late 18 cc Artsakh melikdoms were established. Alongside with Syunik principalities, they led Armenians’ liberation movement against Persian and Ottoman states.

**New Ages**

Early 17 c historical Artsakh was gradually split into 5 melikdoms (Gulistan, Jraberd, Khachen, Varanda and Dizak) that formed Khamse Principalities. Artsakh was the only Armenian region that saved its Armenian autonomy after lasting Turko-Persian rule and had an internationally recognized sovereignty. Later Russia appeared in the region. During the Russo-Persian War (1805-1813) in 1805 Artsakh was occupied by Russian forces and passed under Russia’s control (from Persia) by the Treaty of Gulistan in 1813. By the manifesto (2nd of July, 1799) of Paul I of Russia, Russia officially recognized the independence of Artsakh meliks, who themselves helped the king to conquer it, however Russia eliminated their power and thousand-years rule of Principality of Khachen. Persia tried to return this territory from 1826-1828 but was defeated by the Russian forces and by the Treaty of Turkmenchay it had to reaffirm the ceding of the territories to Russia. The lasting absence of the statehood, the invasions of the nomadic tribes and the organized deportation by invaders (Armenians’ deportation in 1604 by Nader Shah) had their influence on Armenians - a minority in their own historical homeland that was now on the verge of eradication.

Furthermore, according to the 15th article of the Treaty of Turkmenchay Armenians under the Persian control had the right to settle in the territories ceded to Russia. These administrative lands later comprised the so-called Armenian Oblast, formed by Nicolas I of Russia (in Armenian – marz, in English - region) in 1828 that existed until 1840. Despite overwhelming Muslim population in the region, the legal owners were Armenians (also the name of oblast mentions it).

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9Esaı Hasan Jalalian, A brief history of the country of Albania (1702-1722), Baku, 1940.
13Акты Кавказской Археографической Комиссии. т. VII, док. № 437; The description of the province of Karabakh was established in 1823 by consultants Mogilevsky and Colonel Yermolov II, at the behest of the governor of Georgia: Yermolov, Описание Карабахской провинции составленное в 1823г. по распоряжению главноуправляющего в Грузии Ермолова, действительным статским советником Могилевским и полковником Ермоловым 2-м, in Russian, Tbilisi, 1866; George A. Bournoutian, A History of Qarabagh: An Annotated Translation of Mirza Jamal Jalanshir Qarabagh'i starikh-E Qarabagh (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers), 1994, p.18.
14Полное собрание законов Российской империи, собрание 2-е, т. XV, ст. 13368
The Roots of the Territorial Conflicts of Armenia

Azerbaijani sources often mention that according to the results of the census in 1836 there were 19,000 Armenians in Karabakh (approximately 35% of the population) and 35,000 Tatars, but the same source also mentions that the majority of Armenian population was settled in the mountainous areas where 91% of all Artsakh population was concentrated. The Azerbaijani side views this census regionally.\(^{15}\)

According to Russian Tsar’s decision in 1840, other administrative units were formed on the basis of Caucasian territories ceded to Russia – Georgian-Imereti Governorate and Caspian oblast. This new administrative division was implemented without taking into consideration national characteristics. Georgian-Imereti Governorate included Georgian Governorate, Armenian and Imereti oblasts. Caspian oblast also included Karabakh. Later, on the basis of these territories newly independent Transcaucasian states were formed, so these uncertain national-administrative borders would cause territorial conflicts.

The Modern Era

In May, 1918 three Transcaucasian states declared themselves independent from Russia. To protect themselves from Azerbaijani violations the population of Nagorny Karabakh (95% were Armenians) convened its first congress that proclaimed Nagorny Karabakh an independent political unit, and elected a National Council and Government.\(^{16}\) In 1918-1920 Nagorny Karabakh had all the trappings of statehood, including the army and legitimate authority. Great Britain supported Azerbaijan to establish its control on the oil reserves,\(^{17}\) so it is not accidental that till the Paris Peace Conference Britain ruled here.\(^{18}\)

From May 1918 to April 1920 armed units of Azerbaijan and its supporting Turkey exercised violence and massacres toward the Armenian population (in 1920 only in Shushi 40,000 Armenians were killed and deported). But these actions could not force Nagorny Karabakh population to accept the authority of Azerbaijan.

On December 1, 1920, based on the report of the III subcommittee, the V committee of the League of Nations responded to the territorial ambitions of Azerbaijan and jointly manifested against the membership of Azerbaijan Democratic Republic to the League of Nations. Before the final regulation of the conflict the League of Nations recognized Karabakh as a disputed territory to which all the conflicting sides agreed, including Azerbaijan. So, during the formation of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in 1918-1920 its sovereignty didn’t spread on the Nagornoy Karabakh (as well as Nakhichevan). In 1920 after the proclamation of Soviet Azerbaijan and before the peaceful solution of the conflict, Russian forces temporarily possessed Nagornoy Karabakh according to the agreement between Soviet Russia and the Republic of Armenia. Based on the announcement by Soviet Azerbaijan about the refusal of territorial ambitions on disputed territories and on the agreement between the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan Armenia proclaimed Nagorny Karabakh its integral part in June, 1920. So, Nagorny Karabakh de facto rejoined the Armenia.

Later Azerbaijani authority resumes discussions on its ambitions towards Karabakh. The plenum of the Caucasian Bureau of Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union ignoring the decision of League of Nations and the national referendum as a democratic mechanism for defining

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\(^{17}\) Nagorno-Karabakh in 1918-1923, Document No. 49, p. 79

\(^{18}\) Nagorno-Karabakh in 1918-1923, Document No. 214, p. 323-326
Armenian-Azerbaijani border, detaches Karabakh from Armenia and gives it a large autonomy status under the control of Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. This decision was made by Stalin in 1921 and was against the act of annexation.

Azerbaijan was delaying the fulfilment of demands of giving autonomy to Nagorny Karabakh. As a result of two-year armed battle of Armenians in Karabakh and claim of Communist Party of the Soviet Union only a small part of the region got the status of autonomous oblast in 1923. So, Nagorny Karabakh was split: in one part of it there was an autonomy and the other one dissolved in the administrative units of Soviet Azerbaijan so that there would be no physical and geographic connection with Armenia.

People living in Nagorny Karabakh Autonomous Oblast and the authorities of Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic wrote many letters to USSR central authorities against the decision to pass Karabakh to Azerbaijan SSR but all of them were neglected.

**Artsakh (Karabakh) Movement**

The policy of Perestroika (reformation) by Gorbachev gave a new birth to the Armenians’ claims. The Armenians of Artsakh tried to solve the issue with peaceful and constitutional way.

- **November, 1987**: Armenians sent a petition to Moscow on rejoining Karabakh with Soviet Armenia signed by all the adults of Artsakh.
- **January 5, 1988**: A delegation of Armenians in Karabakh left for Moscow to discuss the issue but that was in vain.
- **February 20, 1988**: NKAO (Nagorny Karabakh Autonomous Oblast) Regional Council decided on NKAO’s secession from Soviet Azerbaijan and its transfer to Soviet Armenia. This was unprecedented in the USSR history and it was not against the Constitution.
- **February 27-29, 1988**: The answer to the aforementioned decision were the Armenians’ massacres in Sumgait (Azerbaijan).
- **June 15, 1988**: Supreme Council of Armenian SSR decided to include NKAO in Soviet Armenian’s stand.
- **January 11, 1989**: The Supreme Council of USSR formed a committee of special administration for Nagorny Karabakh headed by A. Volsky. The Armenians in Karabakh were not satisfied with its administration.
- **August 16, 1989**: Congress of Authorized Representatives of the Karabakh population was held in Stepanakert (capital of Karabakh) that chose a National Council with 80 members.
- **December 1, 1989**: At last the special session of Supreme Council of Soviet Armenia made a decision on rejoining Soviet Armenia and Nagorny Karabakh.
- **January, 1990**: in response to this Azerbaijan implemented another Armenian massacres and deportation in the capital Baku.
- **Spring, 1991**: Azerbaijani authorities together with the Soviet Army conducted the military operation “Koltso” (Ring).
- **August 30, 1991**: Soviet Azerbaijan declared an independence from the USSR.


20See Chapter 8, Article 72 in Soviet Union, the 1977 Constitution, (Bucknell University: Lewisburg, PA, 1996); http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/1977toc.html
• September 2, 1991: Regional Council of NK and District Council of Shahumyan region declared independence.
• December 10, 1991: Referendum was held in NKAO and 80% of population having the right to vote participated in it. 99% of voters voted for independence. This was to be the end of the peaceful and constitutional struggle but unsatisfied Azerbaijani authorities started a war. It is to be mentioned that after declaring independence from Soviet Union Azerbaijan also declared itself a successor of Azerbaijan Republic of 1918-1920, and in those days the League of Nations did not recognise the forced transfer of Karabakh to Azerbaijan.21
• February 28, 1992: Committee of Senior Officials of Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe urges Russia and Kazakhstan to mediate and call Baku to end the blockade of Nagorny Karabakh.22
• On May 5, 1994 a ceasefire agreement was signed in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan. The representative of the Republic of Armenia was Parliament Speaker Babken Ararktsian, of the Republic of Nagorny Karabakh - Chairman of NKR Parliament Karen Baburian, of the Republic of Azerbaijan - First Deputy Parliament Speaker Afiyaddin Jalilov, and Russia's representative to the CSCE Minsk Group Vladimir Kazimirov.

Unfortunately, ceasefire agreement signed in 1994 did not put the end to the war. Today there is no declared war between the countries but Armenian borders are not quiet. Ceasefire violation by Azerbaijani army is continuing, causing death of not only Armenian soldiers but also civilians in bordering villages (especially in Tavush region). OSCE Minsk group is only satisfied with some announcements on peaceful settlement of the conflict and with monitorings on frontline positions at times.

22 http://ankakhutyun.am/archives/3431
Links

http://www.mfa.am
http://www.nkr.am
http://www.mountainous-karabakh.org
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