

Mass Crimes and Cultural Erasure: A Study of the 1918 Neftchala Genocide and Its Consequences in Historical and Social Contexts

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Abstract

Throughout history, major powers have skillfully employed the "Armenian card" and the "Armenian factor" against the Azerbaijani people, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, and the Republic of Azerbaijan. Historical evidence, sources, and documents confirm that the settlement of Armenians in the South Caucasus, including the historical territories of Azerbaijan, was initiated in accordance with Russia's strategic plan from the early 19th century. The ideology of "Armenianism," which propagated claims such as establishing a "Greater Armenia from the Black Sea to the Caspian Sea," primarily promoted by the Dashnaksutyun Party, aimed at the destruction of Turkish and Muslim peoples. To realize this goal, Armenians engaged in mass killings, massacres, terrorist acts, genocide, ethnic cleansing, and other violent actions. In 1918, with the active support of Armenians and their international allies, genocides were committed in various locations—including Baku, Quba, Shamakhi, Eastern Anatolia, Nakhchivan, Zangazur, Yerevan, Salyan, Neftchala, Lankaran, Goychay, as well as in regions of Southern Azerbaijan such as Khoy, Salmas, and Urmia. This article investigates the genocide perpetrated in Neftchala in 1918 by Armenian Dashnaks and their supporters.

Methodology

This research adopts a multidisciplinary approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. Primary sources include historical documents, eyewitness accounts, official reports, and archival materials. Secondary sources involve scholarly articles, books, and reports from international organizations. Comparative analysis is employed to identify common patterns, causes, and consequences of different genocides. Additionally, statistical data, where available, are analyzed to quantify the scale and impact of genocidal acts. Ethical considerations, including sensitivity to victims and their descendants, are strictly observed throughout the research process.

Introduction

What is Genocide?

Genocide is a deliberate and systematic act aimed at destroying, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group. The term was first coined by Raphael Lemkin in 1944 and later codified in international law through the United Nations Genocide Convention [1948].

Definition of Genocide:

According to the UN Genocide Convention, genocide includes any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a protected group:

- Killing members of the group
- Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group

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- Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part
- Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
- Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group

Genocide of Nations:

The genocide of nations refers to the targeted destruction of entire nations or ethnic groups, often involving mass killings, forced displacements, cultural erasure, and other acts aimed at annihilating the identity and existence of a people.

Impact of Genocide:

Genocide aims to eliminate the targeted group's presence from history, culture, and society. Its consequences include immense loss of life, destruction of cultural heritage, long-lasting trauma, and often, the destabilization of entire regions.

Genocide is one of the most heinous crimes in human history, representing an attempt to eradicate entire groups based on their identity. Recognizing and preventing genocide is a fundamental goal of international law and human rights efforts, emphasizing the importance of justice, remembrance, and safeguarding human dignity [Toten, 2024].

Actuality

Genocide remains one of the most tragic and urgent issues confronting humanity today. Despite international laws and efforts to prevent such atrocities, genocides and mass atrocities continue to occur in various regions across the globe. Understanding the causes, mechanisms, and consequences of genocide is essential for developing effective preventative strategies and ensuring justice for victims. The study of historical genocides also provides critical insights into the social, political, and economic factors that enable such crimes, emphasizing the importance of awareness, education, and international cooperation. Given the increasing reports of ethnic cleansing, mass killings, and systematic violence in different parts of the world, research on genocide remains highly relevant and necessary to inform policymakers, human rights organizations, and civil society.

Main Body

With the comprehensive backing of Tsarist Russia and other states, Armenians, under the guise of a policy of Christianization of historical Azerbaijani lands, repeatedly engaged in acts of aggression, plunder, ethnic cleansing, mass killings, and genocide, aligning with foreign political interests. In 1918, with the full support of regional and international powers, the so-called "Republic of Armenia" was established on historical Azerbaijani territories. During 1905–1907, 1918, 1920, 1948–1953, and the late 1980s, as well as during the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, Armenians carried out deportations, genocides, and ethnic cleansing against Turkic-Muslim populations [Talibli, 2024a].

It is noteworthy that, on August 31, 1918, based on a decision signed by Fətəli Khan Xoyski, the Prime Minister of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic [ADR], a Special Investigation Commission [SIC] was established in Ganja. Initially functioning within the ADR's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and later within the Ministry of Justice from July 15, 1918, to April 1920, the SIC was tasked with investigating crimes committed by Armenian Dashnaks against Azerbaijani lives and property. Additionally, Ali Mardan bey Topchubashov submitted materials and photographs compiled by the SIC to the Paris Peace Conference, aiming to inform the international community of these atrocities. A dedicated department under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was established for this purpose, and on March 31, 1919 and 1920, the Azerbaijani government marked these dates as national days of mourning [Talibli, 2025b].

1905–1906 Genocides

The massacres committed in South Caucasus during 1905–1906 constitute part of a systematic ethnic cleansing policy carried out by Armenians against Azerbaijanis in the 20th century. Supported by major powers, Armenian armed groups perpetrated robberies, massacres, terror acts, and mass killings across the region. Contemporary local and foreign press, writings, and eyewitness accounts record these events. Research, archival materials, and periodicals reveal that during 1905–1906, Armenians committed ethnic cleansing and massacres in 14 districts of South Caucasus—including Yerevan, Nakhchivan, Sharur-Daralayaz, Echmiadzin, Alexandropol, Surmali, Shusha, Javanşir, Cəbrayıl, Zangazur, Ganja, Qazakh, Ərəş, and Borchalı—and in eight cities such as Baku, Yerevan, Nakhchivan, Gümrü, Shusha, Ganja, Qazakh, and Tiflis.

During these massacres, approximately 286 villages were destroyed, and eight cities suffered extensive damage. Nearly 200 Azerbaijani settlements were razed or severely damaged, displacing over 150,000 families [~100,000 individuals] and resulting in the loss of more than 10,000 lives [Talibli, 2023].

Documents from the Special Investigation Commission on the 1918 Azerbaijani Genocide

A review of the documents of the Special Investigation Commission [SIC] regarding the 1918 Azerbaijani genocide reveals that investigations into crimes against Muslims, initiated on June 4, 1919, and led by figures such as A. Pashayev and A. Khusemmadov, aimed to hold perpetrators accountable. The commission prepared 128 draft resolutions, including one concerning Baku; 23 each for Shamakhi and its districts; 23 for Quba; 4 for Javad; 18 for Goychay; 1 each for Ganja and Nuxa; 2 for Ərəş; 1 for Javanşir; 11 for Shusha; 10 for Cəbrayıl; and 65 for Zangazur [Əbilov, 1999].

On August 27, 1919, Ch. Klassovski, a member of the SIC, noted that the collected materials comprised 36 volumes and 3,500 pages, including reports on violence in Baku and surrounding areas—6 volumes and 740 pages—as well as detailed documentation on Goychay, Shamakhi, Zangazur, Quba, and other districts. The commission prepared 128 reports and draft resolutions concerning individuals involved in crimes against Azerbaijanis, with accusations against 194 persons.

Although investigation materials for Goychay and Javad districts, created within the 36 volumes of the SIC, were lost or remained in archives, photographs and documents from the commission's files were later discovered in Paris, in Ali Mardan bey Topchubashov's archive [Talibli, 2024].

Thus, the materials related to the massacres in Goychay and Javad—primarily witnesses' testimonies and investigators' reports—have allowed for additional understanding of the 1918 massacres in two other Azerbaijani districts [Talibli & Abdullayev, 2025].

Aftermath and Reprisals

Following the April Revolution in Azerbaijan, the first Prime Minister Fətəli Khan Xoyski, the Speaker of Parliament Həsən Bəy Aghaev, and Interior Minister Behdud Khan Javanşir—who served in the second cabinet—were targeted and murdered in Tbilisi and Istanbul by Dashnak Armenian terrorists in 1920 and 1921, driven by motives of revenge.

Documents Adopted in the Republic of Azerbaijan Regarding the March 31 Azerbaijani Genocide

On March 26, 1998, the National Leader Heydar Əliyev issued a decree titled “On the Azerbaijani Genocide” [Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Heydar Əliyev "On the Azerbaijani Genocide". [*Azerbaijan Newspaper*, March 26, 1998. <http://anl.az/soyqirim>].

Furthermore, on January 18, 2008, President İlham Əliyev issued a decree titled “On the 100th Anniversary of the 1918 Azerbaijani Genocide” [“Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan İlham Əliyev on the 100th Anniversary of the 1918 Azerbaijani Genocide”, March 12, 2018, [president.az/az/articles/view/26762]. These decrees have played a significant historical, political, and legal role in the investigation of Armenian criminal and terrorist acts, as well as in raising awareness among international organizations and the global community.

In 2007, the mass graves of Armenians committed in Neftçala² were discovered in Quba. In 2009, the Azerbaijani Cabinet approved the “Plan of Measures for the Eternal Memorialization of the Victims of Mass Killings in

² **Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan İlham Aliyev on the 100th Anniversary of the Azerbaijani Genocide in 1918** (March 12, 2018). Retrieved from <https://president.az/az/articles/view/26762>

**The territory of Neftçala District is surrounded on the east by the Caspian Sea. It borders the districts of Salyan to the north, Biləsuvar, Masallı, Jalilabad, and Lankaran to the west. Its area is 1,451.7 square kilometers. The district includes one city, three settlements, and 48 villages. The population totals 88,846 people. The population density is 61 persons per square kilometer. The male population is 44,041, and the female population is 44,805. The terrain is predominantly flat. The southeastern part of the district, including the Shirvan Plain, Salyan Plain, and partially the Mugan Plain, constitutes the flat zone of Neftçala. The area lies below sea level. The territory is covered with Neogene-Quaternary deposits. The climate is semi-arid, characterized by mild warmth, with dry desert-like conditions. The longest river in Azerbaijan, the Kur River, flows through the district and drains into the Caspian Sea. The Kur forms a delta here. As it travels a considerable distance before reaching the district, the Kur River carries significant amounts of silt and soil. From this, one can conclude that Neftçala consolidates and unites all Azerbaijani lands gram by gram.

Quba District,” and on September 18, 2013, the Quba Genocide Memorial Complex was inaugurated. These mass graves include not only Azerbaijani victims but also members of ethnic minorities such as Lezgins, Jews, Tats, and other groups, who were mercilessly murdered and buried. All these facts clearly indicate that the primary aim was to perpetrate genocide against Azerbaijanis, thereby creating a region devoid of Turkic-Muslim peoples, and to erase the historical Azerbaijani territories [Məmmədov, 2002].

In June 1918, Armenian Dashnak bandits arrived in the Caspian Sea via two armored ships and four transport vessels, sailing from Baku along the Caspian. The ships are recorded in documents under the names *Krasnovodsk*, *Yelets*, *Iraq*, *Bakinets*, *Salyanets*, and *Demosfen*. These vessels crossed the Caspian and, along with armed Armenian Dashnak groups, attacked surrounding villages, looting residents’ property, and brutally murdered civilians.

During the Shirvan Khanate period (1747–1820), the present-day district was part of the Salyan region. In February 1868, the Javad District was established within the Baku Governorate. At that time, Neftçala was part of Salyan, which served as its administrative and cultural center. During the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, Javad District comprised five police stations. The district head, Muhammad Bey Suleyman Beyov, managed it through Salyan (city police station Hacıyev, assistant Həsənov), the villages of Xilli-Boji Promisel (Russian: Божий Промысел) (police officer Haqverdiyev, assistant Həsənov), and via the districts of Cavad, Mugan, and Biləsuvar. Researcher-historian Firdovsi Tağıyev, in his book *Lower Surra Village* (Mütərcim, 2017), referencing 19th-century Russian sources, notes that in 1796, by order of Count Valerian Zubov, Ivan Drenyakin prepared a topographic map of Shirvan, indicating that on the left bank of the Kur River, in the main section between its two branches, there were three villages with 600 houses, belonging to the Qaramanlı, Qəzvinli, and present-day Neftçala district.

In the First Karabakh War, brave sons of Neftçala displayed remarkable heroism. Over 170 Neftçala residents lost their lives in the 1990s Karabakh conflicts. Three residents—Xanoğlan Sadiqoğlu Məmmədov, Zakir Nüsrət oğlu Məcidov, and Samid Gülağa oğlu İmanov—were awarded the title of National Hero of the Republic of Azerbaijan. During the April 2016 battles, heroes Major Samid İmanov and Junior Sergeant Elimdar Səfərov fell in combat. Major Samid İmanov was awarded the title of *National Hero of Azerbaijan* by the order of President İlham Əliyev. In the ongoing Patriotic War for Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity, 43 servicemen from Neftçala displayed exceptional heroism and were posthumously awarded the title of *Hero of the Patriotic War*. Among them, Chief Private İsmayilov Camal Vidadi oğlu was awarded the title of *Hero of the Patriotic War* by presidential decree. During this war, 177 servicemen from Neftçala were wounded—some severely, some moderately, and others partially—losing their health. Of these, 28 were recognized as disabled; 21 with third-degree disability and 7 with second-degree disability.

On January 25, 1990, during the Neftçala events, two residents were martyred, ten wounded, and a total of thirty persons suffered harm. During these January events, in response to the aggressive invasion by Soviet Armed Forces into Baku and several other regions of the republic, many individuals demonstrated exemplary patriotism, bravery, and heroism. They were awarded the honorary title “*Fighter for Freedom*”. Twelve residents of Neftçala received this honor, including:

- Ağahüseynov Nürrəddin Aslan oğlu (posthumously),
- Cəfərov Əbülfəz Böyükğa oğlu (posthumously),
- Orucov Şəmsəddin Əbilhəsən oğlu (posthumously),
- Ramiz Cəfər oğlu Hüseynov,
- Novruz Allahverdi oğlu Dadaşov,
- Ələkbər Məmmədəli oğlu Talıbov,
- Bəxtiyar Ağahüseyn oğlu Ağayev,
- Məhəmməd Təzəxan oğlu Fərziyev,
- Fərman Kamran oğlu Hüseynov,
- Oqtay Əbilhəsən oğlu Orucov,
- Əliheydər Xanəhəd oğlu Məmmədov,
- Abdulla Xanəli oğlu Ağayev,
- İmamverdi Ağaməhəmməd oğlu Zeynalov.

Experts believe that the geological exploration of the Xilli, Neftçala, and other fields of the Kur oil deposits is associated with the renowned researcher and academician Q. B. Abix. He first studied surface oil and gas signs and hydrogen sulfide hot springs in Babazanan in 1849. In 1859, he revisited the Kur Plain, conducting geological investigations not only in new fields near Babazanan but also in the Neftçala deposit. In 1861, following the formation of the Caspian Sea island Kumani, he returned to the Kur Plain for further research. His work *Information about island formation in the Caspian Sea and mud volcanoes in the Caspian region* was published in 1863. The first exploration well in the Neftçala area was drilled in 1872, according to historical sources. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, prominent oil industry entrepreneurs such as Alfred Bernhard Nobel (1833–1896), Bakendorf, and Alexei Ivanovich Putilov (1866–1940) drilled exploration wells in the Kur Plain, including in Neftçala. However, apart from Neftçala, no oil was produced from other fields. Due to various difficulties, exploration activities often remained incomplete, and oil accumulated in numerous wells in the drilled fields. In 1926, the Azerbaijani Geology Bureau, under the leadership of M. B. Borinov, resumed exploration drilling in Neftçala. In the summer of 1951, Azerbaijani scientist and academic Yusif Mammadaliyev conducted experiments on iodine bromine in Neftçala, concluding that establishing a new iodine-bromine plant would be beneficial. This plant was built and commissioned in 1980.

The route taken by these bandits passed through numerous villages in Neftçala, including Bankə³, Seyidlər, Uzumbabalı, Tatarməhlə, Xilli, Abasallı, Qaralı, Qəzvinli, Qarabucaq, Surra, Ərəbbəbirxanlı, Cəngən, and the mouth of the Kur River, where they conducted looting, massacres, and acts of genocide.

During this period, fighting also took place along the Kur River near Göychay, involving Bolshevik-Dashnak forces and Turkish-Azerbaijani units. On the following morning, at 4 a.m., hostilities resumed between Surra and Qarabucaq villages. The continuous fire from the military ships stationed on the Kur River forced the Turkish-Azerbaijani troops to retreat from their positions. As they withdrew, they attempted to establish new positions near Arabqardaşbəyli to block the Soviet forces; however, this effort was unsuccessful [Izvestiya Bakinskog Soveta, 1918, July 2].

The Soviet force involved in these battles comprised over 2,000 infantry soldiers, 12 machine guns, and six artillery pieces. The force was supported by two warships and a transport vessel navigating the Kur River. It was believed that the force included approximately 200 Russians, 300 Iranians, and the remainder Armenians. However, the Bolshevik commissar Mugharan planned to further increase the forces to 6,000 by mobilizing among the local Russian population, requesting weapons and ammunition from Baku [Yüceer, 1996].

Following the unsuccessful engagement around Surra and Qarabucaq, Commander of the Javad detachment dispatched a unit consisting of infantry, a machine gun team, and a mountain cannon to counter the Bolshevik forces. This unit united with Turkish-Azerbaijani units operating near Salyan, initiating combat against Bolshevik forces. On July 2, the Bolsheviks, unable to withstand the Turkish-Azerbaijani offensive, retreated towards Baku. According to Turkish sources, the Bolshevik forces suffered approximately 600 casualties during this engagement [ibid.].

With the aid of Turkish troops, an assault was launched on the village of Xilli, which was liberated from Bolshevik-Dashnak forces. The retreating Red Army units regrouped in Barda. Following thorough preparations, Turkish-Azerbaijani units and volunteer detachments launched an attack on Barda in late July. The Red Army could not withstand this assault and retreated swiftly towards Baku. Many of their military supplies were abandoned, and survivors fled by ships to Baku [Tokarjovski, 1957, p. 124].

The mouth of the Kur River was liberated from Bolshevik forces. To prevent the advance of Soviet warships along the Kur River, several vessels and barges were sunk at the river's estuary. The commander of the Salyan detachment reported to the 5th Caucasian Division headquarters: "...The enemy, driven out, left behind four machine guns, 63 infantry rifles, 100 boxes of infantry and artillery shells, seven small ships, some gasoline, salted fish, and other spoils. Thirty-one prisoners were taken, including one Armenian and the rest Iranians. Among the casualties, two militiamen [volunteers] and 11 soldiers were killed, and one officer and 13 soldiers wounded. This operation and combat earned recognition for the commanders of the 28th Regiment's 3rd Company, First Lieutenant Bəsrî Efəndi, and the 26th Regiment's 1st Company, Həmədi Efəndi, for their dedication [Süleymanov, 2008].

According to M. Süleymanov, "The results of the battles around Salyan and Barda, as well as the significant defeat near Shamakhi, were associated with the unreliability of the Dashnak forces. However, the true significance of this victory in cleansing Azerbaijan of Bolshevik-Dashnak forces was the result of the organizational skill of the Cauca-

³ **Bankə** — is a city-type settlement located within the administrative boundaries of the Neftçala district of the Azerbaijan Republic. Bankə is a settlement with a unique rich history and was formerly a fishing industry center. It is situated on the left bank of the Kur River, in the Southeast Shirvan Plain. The most famous settlement of Neftçala is renowned for its black caviar. Historically, specially packaged caviar from Bankə was sent as a gift to world leaders such as Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin (1878–1953), Margaret Hilda Thatcher (1925–2013), and Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948).

The history of Bankə begins in the first half of the 19th century. The development of fishing in the settlement was significantly influenced by the establishment of the "Boji Promisel," founded in 1842 in the nearby Tatarməhlə village. According to the records of the "List of Inhabited Places of the Russian Empire, 1859–1864, Baku Governorate, Tiflis, 1870," published in Tiflis in 1870, there was a settlement in northeastern Bankə (formerly known as). In 1859, this settlement had one house, with a total population of 19 people—12 men and 7 women. Among Russian sources of the 19th century, Nikolay Kalashov's 1884 work *"The Settlement of Salyan in the Javat District"* mentions Bankə. Kalashov notes that on the right bank of northeastern Bankə, there are unexploited salt lakes called Qobu Salt Lake and Neft Salt Lake. Since 1935, it has been classified as a city-type settlement: the surrounding inhabited localities—such as I Mayak, Yenikənd, Qırmızı Şəfəq, Sübh, Uzumbabalı, Müşliq, Nord-Ost Qoltuq, and II Mayak—were incorporated into the Bankə administrative district during the Soviet period. During the Soviet era, the Bankə Fish Combine, one of the large industrial complexes of that time, operated in the settlement. The "İmam Həsən" mosque community also functions in Bankə.

The word **"Bank"** (or **"banka"**) is of Indo-European origin and means "coast," "shallow place," "small strait," or "shallow areas of the sea" (referring to the Kur Bank in the Caspian Sea). It is found across a broad Eurasian region. The variant "Bankə" is adapted to local pronunciation. The term was recorded in 1933 as "Bang-mədən" (Bank mine).

sus Islamic Army command, the strategic and justified offensive conducted, and the bravery and resolve demonstrated by the soldiers and officers fighting on the front lines” [Süleymanov, 2008].

The defeat of the Armenian-Bolshevik forces in Neftchala and Salyan, achieved through the efforts of Turkish brothers and military efforts, is also discussed in this context. The reasons for the Armenian-Bolshevik massacre in Neftchala and Salyan are examined in this book. These regions were of strategic importance for the entry of Armenian-Bolshevik forces from the Caspian Sea via the Kur River into the interior of Azerbaijan. Control over these areas disrupted communication between Ganja and Baku, while the region’s abundant grain reserves made it a key target for the invading forces. The Caucasus Islamic Army played a crucial role in liberating these territories, coming to the aid of Turkish brothers [Əbilov, 1999].

According to a report in the June 13, 1918 issue of *Izvestiya Bakinskog Soveta*, the Bolsheviks’ 3rd and 5th battalions were stationed in Salyan and Neftchala, respectively. The 3rd battalion in Salyan was commanded by Ter Avakimov, and the 5th in Neftchala by Danilyan.

In 1918, Sürəyya Abbasova, who lost her right hand due to Armenian oppression in Qaragaşi, survived to tell her story. Her account, recounted as a frightening tale, remains vivid in memory: "It was summer. Panic spread in the village: run, the Armenians are coming. My family was not with me. My brother-in-law, Ağakişi, took six women and two children from the village and led them on foot toward Babazənni Mountain. Ağakişi's wife, who was pregnant with their twelfth child, was with him. We took shelter in a cave in Babazənni. Suddenly, we saw a rider followed by five or six foot soldiers, all armed. The leader was a local from the village, who was guiding the Armenians and was unfaithful. As soon as they arrived, they shot Ağakişi. When he fell, the bride crawled toward her husband. She embraced him tightly, and when she tried to console him, the invading bridegroom also killed her. She, twelve months pregnant, was stained with her husband's blood. When the crowd's children, seeking refuge in my arms, approached, I was shot. I was wounded in my shoulder, wrist, and knee. The remaining eighteen people were also murdered by the Armenians. I stayed among the corpses for three days and nights during Ramadan." Later, when Turkish forces arrived to retrieve the bodies, Sürəyya was found alive. She also reported that one Armenian remained hiding among the rocks near the Kur River, where he was eventually beheaded with an axe by one of the local women [Nurlu 2004].

A month later, an epidemic of typhus broke out in the village, resulting in many deaths. The graves of those who perished in that year are still marked in the local cemetery, where families buried their loved ones house-by-house. In 1948, stories about Sürəyya Abbasova were still told in Baku, with people listening to her recount her ordeal and recording her testimony.

Official Documents Adopted by the Republic of Azerbaijan Concerning the March 31 Azerbaijani Genocide

On March 26, 1998, the Azerbaijani President Heydar Əliyev issued a decree titled “On the Azerbaijani Genocide” [*Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Heydar Əliyev “On the Azerbaijani Genocide”*. *Azerbaijan Newspaper*, March 26, 1998. [anl.az/soyqirim/pdf/ferman-26.03.1998]]. Additionally, on January 18, 2008, President İlham Əliyev enacted a decree titled “On the 100th Anniversary of the 1918 Azerbaijani Genocide” [“Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan İlham Əliyev on the 100th Anniversary of the 1918 Azerbaijani Genocide”, March 12, 2018, [president.az/az/articles/view/26762]]. These documents have played a crucial historical, political, and legal role in the investigation of Armenian criminal and terrorist activities, as well as in raising awareness among international organizations and the global community.

In 2007, the mass graves of Armenians perpetrated in Neftchala were discovered near Quba [Məmmədov, 2002]. In 2009, the Azerbaijani government approved the “Plan of Measures for the Eternal Memorialization of the Victims of Mass Killings in Quba District,” and on September 18, 2013, the Quba Genocide Memorial Complex was inaugurated. These mass graves include victims not only among Azerbaijanis but also members of ethnic minorities such as Lezgins, Jews, Tats, and others, who were ruthlessly murdered and buried. All these facts clearly indicate that the primary aim was to carry out genocide against Azerbaijanis, thereby erasing their historical presence in Azerbaijani territories and creating a region devoid of Turkic-Muslim peoples [Najafov, 2025a].

In June 1918, Armenian Dashnak brigands arrived in the Caspian Sea aboard two armored ships and four transport vessels, sailing from Baku via the Caspian. The ships are documented under the names *Krasnovodsk*, *Yelets*, *Iraq*, *Bakinets*, *Salyanets*, and *Demosfen*. These vessels crossed the Caspian and, together with armed Armenian Dashnak groups, attacked surrounding villages, looting residents’ property and brutally murdering civilians. The route taken by these brigands passed through numerous villages in Neftchala, including Bankə, Seyidlər, Uzumbabalı, Tatarməhlə, Xilli, Abasallı, Qaralı, Qəzvinli, Qarabucaq, Surra, Ərəbbəbirxanlı, Cəngən, and the mouth

of the Kur River, where they committed looting, massacres, and acts of genocide [List of populated places of the Russian Empire, 1859–1864, 1870].

During this period, fighting also took place along the Kur River near Göychay, involving Bolshevik-Dashnak forces and Turkish-Azerbaijani units. On the following morning at 4 a.m., hostilities resumed between Surra and Qarabucaq villages. The continuous artillery fire from military ships stationed on the Kur River compelled Turkish-Azerbaijani troops to retreat from their positions. As they withdrew, they attempted to establish new positions near Arabqardaşbəyli to block the advance of Soviet forces; however, this effort was unsuccessful [Izvestiya Bakinskog Soveta, 1918, July 2].

The Soviet forces involved in these battles comprised over 2,000 infantry soldiers, 12 machine guns, and six artillery pieces. They were supported by two warships and a transport vessel navigating the Kur River. It is believed that the force included approximately 200 Russians, 300 Iranians, and the remainder Armenians. However, Bolshevik commissar Mugharan planned to increase the forces to 6,000 by mobilizing the local Russian population and requesting weapons and ammunition from Baku [Lemkin, 19447].

Following the unsuccessful engagement around Surra and Qarabucaq, the commander of the Javad detachment dispatched a unit consisting of infantry, a machine gun team, and a mountain cannon to counter the Bolshevik forces. This unit united with Turkish-Azerbaijani units operating near Salyan and launched an attack against the Bolshevik forces. On July 2, the Bolsheviks, unable to withstand the Turkish-Azerbaijani offensive, retreated towards Baku. According to Turkish sources, the Bolshevik forces suffered approximately 600 casualties during this operation [Najafov, 2023.].

With the assistance of Turkish troops, an assault was launched on the village of Xilli, which was liberated from Bolshevik-Dashnak forces. The retreating Red Army units regrouped in Barda. After thorough preparations, Turkish-Azerbaijani units and volunteer detachments launched an attack on Barda in late July. The Red Army was unable to withstand this assault and retreated swiftly toward Baku. Many of their military supplies were abandoned, and survivors fled by ships to Baku [Tokarjovski, 1957, p. 124].

The mouth of the Kur River was liberated from Bolshevik forces. To prevent the advance of Soviet warships along the Kur River, several vessels and barges were sunk at the river's estuary. The commander of the Salyan detachment reported to the 5th Caucasian Division headquarters: "*The enemy, driven out, left behind four machine guns, 63 infantry rifles, 100 boxes of artillery and infantry shells, seven small ships, some gasoline, salted fish, and other spoils. Thirty-one prisoners were taken, including one Armenian and the rest Iranians. Among the casualties, two militiamen [volunteers] and 11 soldiers were killed, and one officer and 13 soldiers wounded.*" This operation and the ensuing battles earned recognition for the commanders of the 28th Regiment's 3rd Company, First Lieutenant Bəsri Efendi, and the 26th Regiment's 1st Company, Həmdi Efendi, for their dedication [Süleymanov, 2008].

According to M. Süleymanov, "The results of the battles around Salyan and Barda, as well as the significant defeat near Shamakhi, reflected the unreliability of Dashnak forces. However, the real significance of this victory in cleansing Azerbaijan of Bolshevik-Dashnak forces lay in the organizational skill of the Caucasus Islamic Army command, the justified and strategic offensive conducted, and the bravery and resilience demonstrated by the soldiers and officers fighting on the front lines" [Nurlu, 2017.].

The defeat of the Armenian-Bolshevik forces in Neftchala and Salyan, achieved through the efforts of Turkish comrades and military operations, is also discussed extensively in this context. The reasons behind the Armenian-Bolshevik massacre in Neftchala and Salyan are examined in this publication. These regions held strategic importance for the entry of Armenian-Bolshevik forces from the Caspian Sea via the Kur River into Azerbaijan's interior. Control over these areas disrupted communication between Ganja and Baku, while the region's abundant grain reserves made it a key target for the invading forces. The Caucasus Islamic Army played a vital role in liberating these territories, coming to the aid of Turkish brothers [Əbilov, 1999].

According to a report in the June 13, 1918 issue of *Izvestiya Bakinskog Soveta*, Bolshevik 3rd and 5th battalions were stationed in Salyan and Neftchala, respectively. The 3rd battalion in Salyan was commanded by Ter Avakimov, and the 5th in Neftchala by Danilyan [Qaziyev, 2009].

In 1918, Sürəyya Abbasova, who lost her right hand due to Armenian oppression near Qaragaşi, survived to recount her story. Her account, preserved on a recorded tape, remains vivid: "It was summer. The village was in panic: run, the Armenians are coming. My family was not with me. My brother-in-law, Ağakişi, took six women and

two children and led them on foot toward Babazənni Mountain. Ağakışi's wife, who was pregnant with their twelfth child, was with him. We found shelter in a cave in Babazənni. Suddenly, we saw a rider followed by five or six armed foot soldiers. They were locals, treacherous guides for the Armenians. As soon as they arrived, they shot Ağakışi. When he fell, the bride crawled toward her husband. She embraced him, and when she tried to console him, the invading bridegroom also killed her. She, twelve months pregnant, was stained with her husband's blood. When the crowd's children, seeking refuge in my arms, approached, I was shot. I was wounded in my shoulder, wrist, and knee. The remaining eighteen people were also murdered by the Armenians. I remained among the corpses for three days and nights during Ramadan." [Əbilov, 1999].

Later, Turkish forces arrived and recovered the bodies, finding Sürəyya alive. She also mentioned that an Armenian had hidden among the rocks near the Kur River, where he was eventually beheaded with an axe by a local woman.

A month later, an outbreak of typhus devastated the village. The graves of those who perished that year are still marked in the local cemetery, where families buried their loved ones house-by-house. In 1948, stories about Sürəyya Abbasova were still told in Baku, with people listening to her recount her ordeal and recording her testimony [Nurlu, 2004].

Conclusion

It is imperative to continuously inform both the local and international communities about the historical context of the Azerbaijani genocide, elucidate the reasons, essence, and consequences of the crimes committed against the Turkic-Muslim population, and expose the aims of Armenian Dashnak, Bolshevik, and foreign forces. Recognizing the malicious intentions of Armenian aggressors and the regional and international powers supporting them is crucial. The measures undertaken by the independent Azerbaijani Republic concerning the genocide should be comprehensively understood and documented through historical facts, including archival materials, scholarly research, media reports, photographs, and the materials of the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic's Special Investigation Commission.

Accurate and detailed dissemination of the historical truths regarding the massacres in cities, towns, and villages across Baku, Quba, Shamakhi, Eastern Anatolia, Nakhchivan, Zangazur, Yerevan, Salyan, Neftchala, Lankaran, Goychay, and southern Azerbaijan regions like Khoy, Salmas, and Urmia is of utmost importance. Particularly, in foreign media, scientific journals, and in collaboration with Azerbaijani and international authors, articles and books should be published; joint seminars, conferences, and research events should be organized in foreign institutions, research centers, and NGOs. Support must be extended to Azerbaijani researchers specializing in the study of the Azerbaijani genocide abroad, inviting them regularly to relevant international conferences to ensure the continued dissemination and acknowledgment of these historical realities.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest in relation to this research. The opinions expressed are solely those of the author and do not reflect the views of any affiliated institutions or organizations.

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