

Echoes of 1915: U.S. Betrayal of Promise to Armenia

MICHAEL VAKIAN



**AJ MUSTE FOUNDATION
FOR PEACE + JUSTICE**

Who was A.J. Muste?

Abraham Johannes Muste was born in Zierkzee, Zeeland, the Netherlands, in 1885. His family immigrated to America and settled in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1891. He was admitted to Hope Preparatory School in 1898, the youngest student at that time. He graduated from Hope College in 1902 after only three years at the age of 20.

In 1909, Muste graduated from the New Brunswick Theological Seminary, married Anna Huizenga in Rock Valley, Iowa, was ordained in the Reformed Church in America, and was installed as first minister of the Fort Washington Collegiate Church in New York City.

The ultimate pacifist, Muste protested against every major war waged during his lifetime. He joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation, an inter-faith pacifist organization, in 1916. In 1917, he resigned from the Central Congregational Church because of his pacifistic views, and the next year led the Lawrence, Massachusetts, textile workers strike. Among the many places where he protested are famous landmarks like Red Square in Moscow, the United Nations, Times Square, and the White House.

Muste has had an impact on major figures in the peace movement, and many called him the “American Gandhi.” The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. was a seminary student when he first heard Muste speak. The fact that the struggle for civil rights in this country has been so bloodless when compared to some other parts of the world is in large part attributable to Muste.

In 1948, Muste stopped paying federal income tax because they were financing the machineries of war. Each year he sent a package to the IRS containing a Bible, a copy of Henry Thoreau’s “Essay on Civil Disobedience,” and a three-page typewritten paper outlining the principles preventing him from contributing to the armaments of the United States. Although in 1961 the United States Tax Court ruled that the government had a right to back taxes, collection against Muste’s small retirement income was never attempted. A.J. Muste died in 1967 at age 82.

Several biographies have been produced detailing A.J.’s life including:

- Abraham Went Out: A Biography of A.J. Muste, by Jo Ann Ooiman Robinson (1981)
- Peace Agitator: The Story of A. J. Muste, by Nat Hentoff (1963)
- American Gandhi: A.J. Muste and the History of Radicalism in the Twentieth Century, by Leilah Danielson (2014)

A.J. Muste Foundation for Peace and Justice

The A.J. Muste Foundation for Peace and Justice (formerly the A.J. Muste Memorial Institute) was founded in 1974. The Foundation provides grants, fiscal sponsorships, and educational resources to hundreds of grassroots projects. We fund innovative organizing and nonviolent direct action for the liberation of all, often with seed funds that give a necessary boost to bold ideas.

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Michael Vakian

A.J. Muste Foundation Fellow, 2024

In the White House’s formal recognition of the Armenian Genocide on April 24, 2021, the Biden administration committed to “preventing such an atrocity from ever again occurring.”[1] Through providing military aid to Azerbaijan, the United States has been complicit in Azerbaijan's attacks on Nagorno-Karabakh process (Artsakh), a region indigenous to ethnic Armenians with a majority-Armenian population of approximately 120,000 as of September 2023.[2] Since that historic statement of genocide recognition, the U.S. administration has fallen well short of keeping its promise to the Armenian people, violating international law and basic human rights standards in the process. I am a 20-year-old Armenian American who grew up in Tarzana, California. I attended A.G.B.U. Manoogian-Demirdjian School, an Armenian private school established by the Armenian General Benevolent Union (A.G.B.U.). A.G.B.U. is a nonprofit organization founded in 1906 whose mission is to “help promote the prosperity and wellbeing of all Armenians.”[3] Having attended the same small Armenian school from preschool through high school, where we spoke Armenian, I have always been acutely in touch with my Armenian heritage. From a young age, I was consistently told about the atrocious genocide committed against my ancestors by the Ottoman Turks in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including my great-grandfather who was orphaned and relocated out of Armenia to Beirut, Lebanon.

Despite cultural destruction, mass deportations, widespread rape, starvation, and a death toll of 1.5 million Armenians, this genocide remains one of the most overlooked international tragedies in history.[4] The historical amnesia of this event is evidenced by Hitler’s infamous comment, “Who, after all, speaks today of the extermination of the Armenians?” ahead of the attacks he orchestrated against the Jews.[5]

Since preschool, it was a yearly tradition to come to school on April 24 with a flower to commemorate the anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. My classmates and I would stand in front of a makeshift Armenian Genocide monument made of cardboard; then, one by one we dropped off flowers to honor those who were slaughtered in 1915. Soon after, my family and I began attending yearly rallies protesting the injustices of the Armenian Genocide in front of the Turkish consulate in Los Angeles.

As a pre-law student at the University of Southern California, I developed a passion for analyzing the workings of the U.S. government and its international policies and involvement. The United States’ century-long refusal to publicly acknowledge the

[1] "Statement by President Joe Biden on Armenian Remembrance Day," The White House, April 24, 2021, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/24/statement-by-president-joe-biden-on-armenian-remembrance-day/>.

[2] Alex Stambaugh, Josh Pennington, Heather Chen, and Hafsa Khalil, "Ethnic Armenians to Leave Nagorno-Karabakh Following Azerbaijan Victory, Local Official Says," CNN, September 24, 2023, available at <https://www.cnn.com/2023/09/24/world/nagorno-karabakh-humanitarian-aid-intl-hnk/index.html>.

[3] AGBU, "Armenian General Benevolent Union," accessed August 2, 2024, <https://agbu.org/>.

[4] United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "The Armenian Genocide (1915-16): Overview," Holocaust Encyclopedia, available at <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-armenian-genocide-1915-16-overview>. See also Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004).

[5] "Hitler and the Armenian Genocide," The Genocide Education Project, available at <https://genocideeducation.org/background/hitler-and-the-armenian-genocide/>.

Armenian genocide out of fear of severing its relationship with its NATO-ally Turkey was shameful to me as a U.S. citizen. I felt frustrated by my government's moral ineptitude. Although the 2021 Biden administration's formal acknowledgement of the genocide was a significant –and symbolic–moment for all Armenian Americans, it has done nothing to prevent similar atrocities from occurring against the Armenian people. [6] Now, the U.S. is complicit in what is spiraling toward what some are calling the second Armenian genocide.

A Brief History of the Conflicted Area

The current conflict, involving Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Azerbaijan stems back more than a century. The region of Nagorno-Karabakh has been predominantly inhabited by Armenians and was claimed by ancient Armenian kingdoms by the late 11th century.[7] In 1920, in the aftermath of the 1915 genocide, Armenia was Sovietized.[8] Three years later the Soviet Union arbitrarily granted the region of Nagorno-Karabakh to another soviet nation, Azerbaijan, despite Nagorno-Karabakh's overwhelming Armenian majority and the region's significance in Armenian culture.[9] In 1988, Nagorno-Karabakh voted to gain independence from Azerbaijan.[10] This led to a full-scale war between Armenia and Azerbaijan after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.[11] Russia brokered a ceasefire to end the war in 1994.[12] Thereafter, Nagorno-Karabakh assumed de facto independence, despite the lack of any legal doctrine granting them official independence.

In September 2020, Azerbaijan reignited the conflict through attacks on the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh. Backed by military support from Turkey, Azerbaijan was able to capture significant territory into the Nagorno-Karabakh region. A temporary ceasefire was brokered in November 2020, but Azerbaijan continued its offensive thereafter. [13]Azerbaijan ethnically cleansed the region of Armenians by September 2023.[14]

[6] Joe Biden, "Statement by President Joe Biden on Armenian Remembrance Day," The White House, April 24, 2021, available at [https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/24/statement-by-president-joe-biden-on-armenian-remembrance-](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/24/statement-by-president-joe-biden-on-armenian-remembrance-day/#:~:text=Statement%20by%20President%20Joe%20Biden%20on%20Armenian%20Remembrance%20Day,-Home&text=We%20honor%20the%20victims%20of,hate%20in%20all%20its%20forms)

[day/#:~:text=Statement%20by%20President%20Joe%20Biden%20on%20Armenian%20Remembrance%20Day,-Home&text=We%20honor%20the%20victims%20of,hate%20in%20all%20its%20forms](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/24/statement-by-president-joe-biden-on-armenian-remembrance-day/#:~:text=Statement%20by%20President%20Joe%20Biden%20on%20Armenian%20Remembrance%20Day,-Home&text=We%20honor%20the%20victims%20of,hate%20in%20all%20its%20forms).

[7] Karen Minasyan, "Why Nagorno-Karabakh? The Historical Background of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Conflict," Meduza, October 1, 2020, available at <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2020/10/01/why-nagorno-karabakh>.

[8] "Sovietization of Armenia," Soviet History, Michigan State University, December 2, 1920, available at <https://soviethistory.msu.edu/1921-2/transcaucasia/transcaucasia-texts/sovietization-of-armenia/>.

[9] Center for Preventative Action, "Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," Council on Foreign Relations, March 20, 2024, available at <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/nagorno-karabakh-conflict>.

[10] Jonathan Steele, "Nagorno-Karabakh Votes to Secede from Soviet Azerbaijan – Archive, 1988," The Guardian, September 27, 2023, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/27/nagorno-karabakh-votes-to-secede-from-soviet-azerbaijan-1988>.

[11] U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, "The Collapse of the Soviet Union," U.S. Department of State, available at <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1989-1992/collapse-soviet-union#:~:text=On%20December%2025%2C%201991%2C%20the,the%20newly%20independent%20Russian%20state>.

[12] Center for Preventative Action, "Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict."

[13] Zia Weise, Jan Cienski and David M. Herszenhorn, "The Armenia-Azerbaijani Conflict Explained," Politico, September 28, 2020, available at <https://www.politico.eu/article/the-nagorno-karabakh-conflict-explained-armenia-azerbaijan/>.

[14] "Armenia says more than 100,000 people fled Nagorno-Karabakh" Al Jazeera, September 30, 2023, available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/30/more-than-80-percent-of-nagorno-karabakhs-people-have-fled-armenia-govt>.

Why Should You Care?

The attacks by Azerbaijan against Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh constitute war crimes. The assault on Armenian lives has been more intentional than an attempt at regaining lost territory; Azerbaijan has demonstrated a clear goal of wiping out the Armenian race and eliminating any remaining signs of Armenian culture in the region. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has shown this intention by referring in 2015 to ethnic Armenians as a “virus” and in 2023 stating “we will chase them away like dogs, and we are doing that.”[15]

Gruesome tactics included execution of civilians, beheadings, and bombings. Former Armenian prisoners of war described torture and ill-treatment meant intentionally to humiliate them, such as being beaten for hours at a time, having their hands burnt with cigarette lighters, being poked with metal rods, and being denied food for multiple days.[16] The Azerbaijani regime’s barbaric acts were reminiscent of those of 1915, which included beheadings, slitting of throats, and mass shootings.[17] Despite this, President Aliyev described accusations of war crimes as “fake news,” which he attributed to biased narratives perpetuated by Western media.[18]

In addition to human rights violations, Azerbaijan's attacks involved the deliberate destruction of historic Armenian cultural sites, including churches and monuments. In 2023, there was a 75% increase in destroyed cultural sites and a 29% increase in sites classified as “threatened.”[19] The Holy Savior Ghazanchetsots Cathedral, a prominent historical landmark, was shelled twice leading to the severe injuries of three individuals seeking refuge inside the church. An Azerbaijani military truck destroyed a stone cross in the village of Arakel. Stone crosses, known as “khachkars” in the Armenian language, are iconic of the Armenian Christian faith and are protected by UNESCO.[20] Countless examples of graffiti and vandalism also occurred, including churches and gravesites.[21] These actions reflected a deeper motivation behind the Azerbaijan attacks. More so than just territorial gains, Azerbaijan was interested in the complete elimination of Armenian heritage in the Nagorno-Karabakh, accomplished by wiping out all cultural impact of Armenians in the region.

[15] Luis Moreno Ocampo, "The ICC Should Consider the New Armenian Genocide Petition," Politico, May 10, 2024, available at <https://www.politico.eu/article/icc-armenian-genocide-nagorno-karabakh-azerbaijan-ilham-aliyev/>.

[16] "Azerbaijan: Armenian POWs Abused in Custody," Human Rights Watch, March 19, 2021, available at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/19/azerbaijan-armenian-pows-abused-custody>.

[17] "Armenia/Azerbaijan: Decapitation and War Crimes in Gruesome Videos Must Be Urgently Investigated." Amnesty International, December 10, 2020, available at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2020/12/armenia-azerbaijan-decapitation-and-war-crimes-in-gruesome-videos-must-be-urgently-investigated/>.

[18] "Ilham Aliyev was Interviewed by BBC News," President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, November 9, 2020, available at <https://president.az/en/articles/view/45845>.

[19] Rhea Nayyar, "Satellite Image Report Points to Extensive Demolitions in Artsakh," Hyperallergic, June 23, 2024, available at <https://hyperallergic.com/927532/satellite-image-report-points-to-extensive-demolitions-in-artsakh/>.

[20] UNESCO, "Armenian Cross-Stones Art. Symbolism and Craftsmanship of Khachkars," UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, available at <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/armenian-cross-stones-art-symbolism-and-craftsmanship-of-khachkars-00434>.

[21] "The Armenian Bar Association and the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin Submitted the Following Report Regarding the Need to Safeguard Armenian Cultural Heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh and to Provide Access," Armenian Bar Association, January 25, 2021, available at <https://armenianbar.org/2021/01/25/the-armenian-bar-association-and-the-mother-see-of-holy-etchmiadzin-submitted-the-following-report-regarding-the-need-to-safeguard-armenian-cultural-heritage-in-nagorno-karabakh-and-to-provide-access/>.

In 2024, Tereza Yerimyan, the Government Affairs Director at the National Armenian Committee of America, detailed the culture of Armenian villainization in Azerbaijan. “If you look at Azerbaijani children's school books, they incite violence,” she said. “They portray Armenians as dogs and as less than humans.” Yerimyan described one key difference between the Genocide of 1915 and the more recent Azerbaijani attacks:

“Azerbaijan invested a lot more time (in comparison to Turkey in 1915) to create an enemy, to create a psychological enemy as much as a physical one. When you look at the generation of the soldiers who fought in the Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) war on the Azerbaijani side, they've learned that the Armenians are lesser individuals, that it is a blessing and honor to kill them.”[22]

Despite bearing witness to a recurrence of the genocide by Ottoman Turks that wiped out 1.5 million Armenians over a century ago, the international community was reluctant to intervene. Nations have prioritized their geopolitical interests over the condemnation of egregious human rights violations. With Turkey’s staunch support of Azerbaijan, other NATO countries have prioritized their relationship with Turkey over publicly condemning Azerbaijan's atrocities.

Another factor in this reluctance to condemn Azerbaijan's actions is the potential for Azerbaijan to serve as a key supplier of oil and gas to the European Union. This could serve several purposes. If the EU can reduce its reliance on Russia, it could feasibly impose sanctions on Russia, reduce Russia's financial gains as a major EU oil supplier, and display strong condemnation of Russia's war efforts in Ukraine. In the first quarter of 2024, the EU imported 1.2 million tons of oil products from STAR, an Azerbaijani-owned refinery. This figure reflects a 40% increase from the first three months of 2022, before the Russian attacks on Ukraine had occurred. However, Azerbaijan began buying crude oil from Russia to meet its new increased oil export demand, and in turn undermined the EU’s attempts to sanction Russia.[23]

Despite this, the newfound reliance on Azerbaijan as a key oil supplier for the EU created a conflict of interest for the European nations that might have defended Armenia against Azerbaijan’s attacks.

The ethnic Armenian community was mercilessly attacked, and despite the dire need for humanitarian aid by the Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh, the international community failed to provide such assistance. This begs the question, what is to stop Azerbaijan from finishing the job Turkey started in 1915?

[22] Author interview with Tereza Yerimyan, July 31, 2024

[23] "EU Imports of Russian-Origin Fuel on the Rise Despite Sanctions," Global Witness, July 11, 2024, available at <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/fossil-gas/eu-importing-more-russian-origin-fuel-azeri-refinery/#:~:text=EU%20imports%20of%20Russian%20origin,refinery%2C%20located%20in%20western%20Turkey.>

A Critique of U.S. Complicity

United States' complicity stems from its financial and military aid to Azerbaijan. During the first war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the U.S. enacted the 1992 Freedom Support Act, in which Section 907 prohibited direct U.S. aid to the government of Azerbaijan.[24] However, in 2002, Section 907 was waived by approval from Congress, as President George W. Bush aimed to provide Azerbaijan with military and financial support as a part of a counter-terrorism initiative.[25] The U.S. has given around \$164 million to Azerbaijan since 2002 specifically for security assistance under the Section 907 waiver.[26]

Military and financial aid from the U.S. indirectly contribute to the human rights and international law violations committed by Azerbaijan against the Armenians. In the published document in which Section 907 was waived, one of the conditions for the waiver was that the provided aid “will not undermine or hamper ongoing efforts to negotiate a peaceful settlement between Armenia and Azerbaijan or be used for offensive purposes against Armenia.” Exactly that has happened, yet the waiver of section 907 has not been rescinded.[27]

U.S. complicity in the Azerbaijani genocide against the Armenians in Nagorno-Kharapagh violates international law. The criteria for genocide, according to the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (CPPCG), is “any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group:

1. Killing members of the group
2. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group
3. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part
4. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
5. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group”[28]

Azerbaijan has contributed to “killing members of the group,” with an Armenian death toll of thousands from the September 2020 attacks until this writing, also meeting the criteria for “causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group.”[29] As for, “deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part,” Azerbaijan has blocked essential goods to

[24] Congress.gov, "Text - S.2532 - 102nd Congress (1991-1992): FREEDOM Support Act," October 24, 1992, available at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/102nd-congress/senate-bill/2532/text>.

[25] The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Presidential Determination on Azerbaijan," January 25, 2002, available at <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020128-20.html>.

[26] U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Arms Sales: State Department and DOD Should Improve Efforts to Ensure Foreign Military Sales Program Following Congressional Guidance," GAO-22-104619, November 2021, available at <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-22-104619#:~:text=The%20Departments%20of%20State%2C%20Defense,fiscal%20years%202002%20through%202020>.

[27] The White House, "Presidential Determination on Azerbaijan."

[28] "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide," United Nations, December 9, 1948, available at https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.1_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf.

[29] Center for Preventative Action, "Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict."

Armenians in Artsakh, destroyed homes, hospitals, and schools, and forced Armenians to evacuate from the region.[30]

Complicity in genocide is considered punishable by law. Article III of the CPPCG legal framework for the prosecution of genocidal acts established “complicity in genocide” as being punishable.[31] The 1987 Genocide Convention Implementation Act implemented the CPPCG into U.S. law.[32] Thus, U.S. complicity in these genocidal actions are illegal, both at an international and federal level. U.S. funds appropriated for counterterrorism are instead being used for inhumane acts. These actions also constitute government violations of U.S. statutes, as the aid to Azerbaijan constitutes a violation of the Leahy Law, legislation that prohibits the providing of military assistance to foreign military groups that are credibly involved in gross violations of human rights.[33]

In addition to being illegal, the nature of the U.S. government's continued military and financial aid to Azerbaijan does not represent the will of many Americans. It contradicts the values of democracy and ignores the rule of law. In a national security memorandum issued by the White House in February 2024, the government details some of its key objectives with respect to transfer of defense articles and services to foreign nations. Objectives include to:

- (a) strengthen the collective security of the United States and its allies and partners by enhancing interoperability and supporting United States-led diplomacy in building and maintaining international coalitions;
 - (b) promote international peace and stability, and help allies and partners deter and defend themselves against aggression and foreign malign influence;
 - (c) strengthen United States national security by reinforcing respect for human rights, international humanitarian law, democratic governance, and the rule of law;
 - (d) prevent arms transfers that risk facilitating or otherwise contributing to violations of human rights or international humanitarian law; and
 - (e) strengthen ally and partner capacity to respect their obligations under international law and reduce the risk of civilian harm, including through appropriate tools, training, advising, and institutional capacity-building efforts that accompany arms transfers.
- [34]

In its support of the Azerbaijan military, the United States has drifted far from its purported priorities. In addition to the violations of law and ethical standards, the disparity between what is written in the memo and the actions of the government reflect clear deception. That disparity violates the values of democracy. Government

[30] "National Security Memorandum on Safeguards and Accountability With Respect to Transferred Defense Articles and Defense Services," The White House, February 8, 2024, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2024/02/08/national-security-memorandum-on-safeguards-and-accountability-with-respect-to-transferred-defense-articles-and-defense-services/>.

[31] Center for Preventative Action, "Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict."

[32] "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide," United Nations.

[33] "Genocide Convention Implementation Act of 1987 (The Proxmire Act)," S. 1851, 100th Congress, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/100th-congress/senate-bill/1851>.

[34] U.S. Department of State, "Leahy Law Fact Sheet," Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, available at <https://www.state.gov/key-topics-bureau-of-democracy-human-rights-and-labor/human-rights/leahy-law-fact-sheet/>.

dishonesty infringes upon the credibility of our electoral system, as citizens are less able to elect candidates in an informed manner when deceived by those candidates. Government deceit on this scale could be avoided by transparency and rigorous initiatives to hold government agencies accountable.

Statistics demonstrating why the American public would not support the funding of human rights violations bear out this departure from democratic values. A majority of Americans, 65%, believe that defending human rights globally should be a goal of American foreign policy, according to the University of Maryland Critical Issue Poll.[35] The U.S. government has previously been apprised of human rights violations in Nagorno-Karabakh. On September 14, 2023, Yuri Kim, then the U.S. Acting Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, addressed the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to discuss her concerns regarding the severity of the attacks occurring in Nagorno-Karabakh. Kim condemned Azerbaijan's aggression, advocating for the U.S. to work toward fostering peace between the two regions.[36] However, just five days after this testimony, Azerbaijan launched another military offensive, as the U.S. remained silent.[37] On May 6, 2024, the U.S. ambassador to Azerbaijan, Mark Libby visited the city of Shushi (Shusha). Libby described being “extremely impressed by (the) tour and seeing first-hand how the city is developing,” stating that he will “look forward to continuing (his) travels throughout Azerbaijan.”[38] The ambassador's comments highlight the U.S.’ seeming indifference toward addressing the ethnic cleansing that occurred in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Dr. Bedross Der Matossian, professor of Middle East History and Politics at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln summarized the U.S. government’s shortcomings in addressing Azerbaijan’s wrongdoings. A board member at the Zoryan Institute and the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research, he notes,

“Recognition (of the 1915 Armenian Genocide) is one thing, while taking action is another thing. Despite the fact that the recognition said that the aim is not repetition of the same events, we still saw an ethnic cleansing. The international community in general, and the United States in particular, did not do anything to stop this ethnic cleansing, nor put the pressure on Azerbaijan to prevent any type of ethnic cleansing. (Dr. Der Matossian specifically refers to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh as an “ethnic cleansing” as opposed to genocide.)”[39]

[35] “American Public Attitudes on the U.S. Role in Global Human Rights and Democracy,” Critical Issues Poll, February 2024, available at https://criticalissues.umd.edu/sites/criticalissues.umd.edu/files/UMCIP_February2024_HR-Democracy_Results.pdf.

[36] “Assessing the Crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh,” United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, September 14, 2023, available at <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/hearings/assessing-the-crisis-in-nagorno-karabakh>.

[37] Gabriel Gavin, “Azerbaijan Launches Attack in Nagorno-Karabakh, Announces ‘Evacuation’ of Armenian Population,” Politico, September 19, 2023, available at <https://www.politico.eu/article/azerbaijan-launch-anti-terror-operation-nagorno-karabakh-armenia/>.

[38] “U.S. Envoy ‘Extremely Impressed’ By Trip To Karabakh Town,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, May 6, 2024, available at <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32935377.html>.

[39] Author interview with Dr. Bedross Der Matossian, July 29, 2024.

Empowering Anti-Democratic Ideologies in the Caucasus Region

The Caucasus region is rife with geopolitical instability. Amid this turmoil, Armenia remains the only beacon of democracy in a region overcome by authoritarian corruption.

Countries such as Russia, Turkey, and Azerbaijan operate under authoritarian models of government that oppose the democratic values that the U.S. government is built on. These nations' blatant disregard for human rights, driven by their authoritarian regimes, perpetuate cycles of violence and instability across the Caucasus. The U.S. government's reluctance to defend Armenia reflects a troubling unwillingness to combat corrupt authoritarianism and champion democracy on the global stage. Its emboldening of non-western anti-democratic states sends the message that their totalitarian regimes are free to further commit human rights violations. Dr. Der Matossian expanded on this idea, stating,

“The West keeps criticizing some governments for being undemocratic. Here (Armenia) we have a democratic government, which is the most democratic government within the region of the Caucasus.... Supposedly, the United States is a major promoter for a backer of democratic regimes. We did not see anything as such. We see empty words.”[40]

The U.S. government's support to Ukraine against Russia further demonstrates U.S. priorities. The U.S. has geopolitical interests in defending Ukraine, including preventing Russian territorial expansion, fostering regional stability among NATO member states, and upholding Ukraine's exportability of natural gas to European nations. On July 12, 2023, President Biden remarked that “faced with a threat to the peace and stability of the world, to democratic values we hold dear, to freedom itself, we did what we always do: The United States stepped up,” referring to the U.S. government's support of Ukraine against Russian attacks.[41] However when faced with the same threats to democratic values, without the geopolitical benefits, the U.S. government failed to support Armenians.

Why the Armenian Plight is Overlooked

Today, protests against genocidal conduct run rampant throughout the US and much of the world. Demonstrations calling for an Israeli ceasefire in its bombardment of Gaza since October 2023 have taken place in more than 100 American colleges.[42] In stark

[40] Author interview with Dr. Bedross Der Matossian, July 29, 2024

[41] Joseph R. Biden, "Remarks by President Biden on Supporting Ukraine, Defending Democratic Values, and Taking Action to Address Global Challenges," The White House, July 12, 2023, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/07/12/remarks-by-president-biden-on-supporting-ukraine-defending-democratic-values-and-taking-action-to-address-global-challenges-vilnius-lithuania/>.

[42] Robin Hattersley, "Which Colleges and Universities Are Experiencing Pro-Palestine Protests?" Campus Safety Magazine, May 16, 2024, available at <https://www.campussafetymagazine.com/news/which-universities-are-experiencing-pro-palestine-protests/134553/>.

contrast and despite recurring atrocities against the sovereignty of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijani atrocities remain overlooked.

Propaganda by the Turkish state plays a role in downplaying the rights and needs of Armenia as a nation and as an ethnicity. Some 100 years late, the modern Turkish Republic still refuses to acknowledge the genocide committed by Ottomans. An article on the Republic of Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs website describes Armenian claims of genocide as "infusing history with myth" and claiming the Armenian portrayal is "one-sided and steeped in bias." [43] This narrative is promulgated by the Turkish government today despite numerous letters, reports, and treatises written by Western diplomats, such as American Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, who served in the Ottoman Empire. [44] Additionally, newspaper articles, photographic evidence, and countless eyewitness accounts further contradict this narrative. Yerimyan discussed the impact of Turkish media control, stating,

"The Turkish lobby has put in an extensive amount of effort to whitewash their history. They have paid a lot of money to PR firms, to think tanks, to politicians, to educational institutions to really tell the story in their perspective, getting it out to be a war, a casualty of war, not a genocide of Armenians." [45]

For non-Armenian U.S. citizens, the manufactured uncertainty around this issue can make it difficult to take a stand in defense of Armenian subjugation. Media failure to dispel misconceptions about the events of 1915 perpetrated by the Turkish government have helped keep the Armenian genocide shrouded in the darkness of World War I, as today's public focuses on equally tragic human rights violations in other countries.

Dr. Der Matossian summarized similar media issues with the Azerbaijani attacks on Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh. He observes, "the Azeri lobby is very strong....it's able to control through its PR forums, the public opinion within Europe and United States through articles being published." [46] Der Matossian detailed the issue of "both sidesism" present in the scant media coverage on the Nagorno-Karabakh situation, typically describing a war between two opposing nations, rather than the deliberate Azerbaijani attempts to seize control of the entire region. [47]

A lack of education on the Armenian Genocide has also contributed to the Armenian cause being overlooked historically. Yeremyan notes,

"The Armenian Genocide particularly, is a part of American history. It's a part of world history, and yet it's not taught in those curricula in high school. Think about not being educated on World War One and two, right? It's significant parts of our country's history that are being omitted. That creates an opportunity to overlook

[43] "The Armenian Allegation of Genocide: The Issue and the Facts," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, available at <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-armenian-allegation-of-genocide-the-issue-and-the-facts.en.mfa>.

[44] "Ambassador Morgenthau's Story," Armenian National Institute, available at https://www.armenian-genocide.org/statement_morgenthau.html.

[45] Author interview with Tereza Yerimyan, July 31, 2024

[46] Author interview with Dr. Bedross Der Matossian, July 29, 2024

[47] Author interview with Dr. Bedross Der Matossian, July 29, 2024

what's taken place, and then to overlook the patterns, both in history and today, that are consistently repeated.”

The Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh endured or perished from atrocities similar to those the Ottoman Turks perpetrated during the 1915 Armenian Genocide. History has repeated itself, with a virtual blackout of media coverage and an anemic global outcry about the Armenian manslaughter. This shadow Armenian struggle has been subsumed by other assaults, from Russia and Ukraine to Israel and Palestine. Geopolitical interests are to blame, with Israel and Ukraine being key allies of the United States. Those conflicts have had the full attention of the government and the mainstream media. That has caused the public to listen and react.

Call to Action

To address the current atrocities, informed citizens must advocate for governmental reform. Egregious human rights violations by Azerbaijan against the Armenian community in Nagorno-Karabakh are illegal and not to be tolerated. Our government is complicit because it provides military and financial aid to Azerbaijan. In doing so, the U.S. contributes to Azeri violations of international law and violates the terms of the waiver of Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act. Unethical and undemocratic, this behavior reflects a government detached from the will of its citizens. Taxpayers have the power, and the moral obligation, to demand that our tax dollars not be used to commit these barbarities.

Here are several ways to do this.

1. **Raising Awareness:** Raising awareness to those unfamiliar with the issue is essential to fostering significant change on a larger scale. One of the major shortcomings of advocacy for the Armenian cause has been an overall lack of knowledge about the subject by the general public. There has been little mainstream media coverage, and few public figures have been outspoken about the severity of the issue. Thus, it is the responsibility of all American citizens concerned about human rights to educate others.

2. **Participating in Armenian advocacy groups:** Support nonprofits like Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), Armenian Assembly of America, Armenian Relief Society (ARS), Hayastan All-Armenian Fund, The Genocide Education Project, and Armenian Youth Federation (AYF). Increased public outcry can attract legislative attention.

3. Participating in legislative change: Voting for legislators who will prioritize opposing government funding to Azerbaijan and to any other human rights violations is something American citizens must do to achieve a more honest and ethical government. That includes voting for congresspersons in favor of the Armenian Protection Act of 2024.[48] This proposed bill would rescind the waiver of section 907 of the Freedom Support Act. Electing pro-Armenian congressmen is a key step to raising awareness of Armenian human rights concerns within the legislative branch.

[48] "Armenian Protection Act of 2023," 118th Congress, Senate Bill 3000, available at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/3000/all-info>.

4. Opposing COP 29 (Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC) in Azerbaijan: Baku, Azerbaijan is scheduled to be the host country for the United Nations 29th Climate Change Conference in late 2024.[49] For a nation like Azerbaijan, which has participated in the ethnic cleansing of over 100,000 people, to be the host of a global UN conference indicates that the UN is willing to allow atrocities to continue to occur without holding Azerbaijan accountable.[50] It is imperative that American citizens draw attention to this issue through educating friends, contacting the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Secretariat (secretariat@unfccc.int), as well as engaging in local protests. Azerbaijan must be held accountable for its inhumane actions. Allowing Cop 29 to take place in Azerbaijan sends a clear signal that the UN is falling short in doing so. Ms. Yerimyan summarizes the inherent issues with COP 29 being held in Baku,

“Not only did they (Azerbaijan) not get punished or sanctioned for what they did, for the Genocide that they just committed, but they received an additional reward by being the host of COP 29, the UN's biggest Summit, Climate Summit, where foreign ministers and dignitaries from every nation the world are expected to attend. So how is that punishment? How do you cleanse out one of the few oldest Christian nations from its homeland and then get to host COP 29? What does that say about humanity? Not much.[51]”

5. Writing opinion pieces for local papers: Personal stories of how the Armenian genocide has impacted various communities are an important way to reach people on a human level. It is urgent that grandchildren, great grandchildren and their relatives record the firsthand accounts of those who perished, those who fled, and the details of their circumstances. Media visibility in local and national newspapers or online postings allows for the general public to gain awareness regarding how real families have been affected by attacks against the Armenian people, mitigating the harm from false propaganda from Turkish and Azerbaijani media.

The U.S. is complicit in modern-day genocidal acts against Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh. As a global champion of democracy and the rule of law, the U.S. must immediately cease all financial and military aid to Azerbaijan and hold its government accountable for human rights violations. Given the Biden administration's 2021 promise, meaningful action and unwavering support are necessary to honor past commitments and prevent a repetition of the 1915 atrocities.

[49] "COP29 Azerbaijan - United Nations Climate Change Conference," available at

<https://cop29.az/en#:~:text=When%20and%20where%20will%20COP29,the%20capital%20city%20of%20Azerbaijan.>

[50] Gayane Matevosyan, "Past Promises Ring Hollow for Ethnic Armenians in Artsakh," Human Rights First, October 19, 2023, available at <https://humanrightsfirst.org/library/past-promises-ring-hollow-for-ethnic-armenians-in-artsakh/>.

[51] Author interview with Tereza Yerimyan, July 31, 2024



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