

# MEDIA COVERAGE AS IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTOR TO VICTORY

(BASED ON THE PRESIDENT’S INTERVIEW WITH BBC)

The counter-offensive operation of the Azerbaijani Army, which began in response to Armenia’s military provocations on 27 September, ended in the liberation of most of the occupied districts and the signing of a ceasefire agreement on 10 November 2020, whereby the remaining territories were liberated as well. Information support has played an important role in the victory. Throughout the hostilities, Azerbaijan was inviting foreign journalists to the country, provided them with the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the consequences of Armenia’s barbaric strikes on peaceful settlements and the progress of battles in general. President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has played an enormous role in informing the world community about the state of affairs. In the 44 days of the war, the President gave interviews to more than 30 major news and information agencies and TV channels, including BBC, EFE (Spain), Interfax (Russia), Fox News (USA), TASS (Russia), RIA-Novosti (Russia), TV channels ARD (Germany), Rai-1 (Italy), A-Haber (Turkey), TRT (Turkey), NTV (Turkey), France-24 (France), Haber-Turk (Turkey), Haber- Global (Turkey), RBK (Russia), Sky News, CNN, Euronews, Channel One (Russia), Al Arabiya, Al Jazeera, Russia-1 (Russia), newspapers La Repubblica (Italy), Le Figaro (France), Nikkei (Japan).



**From the editorial board  
of “Irs-Heritage”**



**The following are excerpts from  
the President's interview with BBC  
on 6 November 2020**

**- Do you intend to fight for every square inch of Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding seven territories?**

- Our position has been quite clear from the very beginning. We are ready, and are still ready to stop as soon as the Armenian side commits to leave the occupied territories. I have been saying this from the very beginning of the war – if the Armenian prime minister makes a public commitment that they will leave the occupied territories, we will stop. But so far – it has been 40 days – there is no sign of him saying this.

**- So that means you will be fighting to the end?**

- We will fight until the end if Armenia does not make a commitment that they will withdraw from the occupied territories. I think Armenia is making a big mistake, because if they had listened to us from the very beginning, the war would have stopped a long time ago and we would already be on the negotiating table.

**- But with all due respect, Mr. President, you are delivering an ultimatum. You are saying that they have to agree to give up all of this territory, and then there can be talks. That's a very big precondition for talks.**

- No, not exactly, because what I am saying is based on the basic principles, and the basic principles are very clear with respect to the liberation of the territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh. It is a very clear message to Armenia. Unfortunately, Armenia did not agree to the basic principles which were elaborated by the Minsk Group co-chairs and the previous Armenian leadership. These basic principles say that at the first stage, they have to vacate five occupied territories and two more at the second stage. But four out of the five have already been liberated. Therefore, if they do it, if they leave a part of Agdam, if they leave Kalbajar and Lachin, we will stop.

**- So, just to be clear, Mr. President, because these locations are not familiar to our international audience. Are you saying that if the Armenian leadership agrees to vacate the territories outside of Nagorno-Karabakh, you will stop, you will not fight on?**

- Exactly. This is the position I have articulated many times. At the same time, this is not the whole issue on the negotiating table. Of course, after that we will work on the return of Azerbaijani refugees to Nagorno-Karabakh. Because before the war in the 1990s, there were 40,000 Azerbaijanis living in Nagorno-Karabakh, and the Azerbaijani population accounted for 25 percent. They expelled them all. After that, they committed ethnic cleansing and then declared independence.



**- But the fear is that if you take control of Nagorno-Karabakh by force, you may do exactly the same. There are very strong fears being expressed by Armenia that there will be ethnic cleansing of their people.**

- These are groundless accusations. First, if Armenia is really concerned about that, why didn't they agree to the basic principles? If the basic principles are confirmed and Armenia makes a commitment I have told them about many times, then everything will stop.

**- So you are not asking them to withdraw from Nagorno-Karabakh. You are asking only for the territories alongside.**

- We ask and demand the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions which were adopted back in 1993. They demand an immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian troops from the occupied territories. With respect to the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh, they will continue to live there. They are our citizens, and I have expressed this position on many occasions.

**- So are you saying that you will give an absolute guarantee that there will be no ethnic cleansing of**

**Armenian citizens in Nagorno-Karabakh?**

- Yes. We are not Armenians. They have committed ethnic cleansing against us. They have expelled all Azerbaijanis from Nagorno-Karabakh and seven surrounding districts. Thus, we have one million refugees as a result of Armenia's policy of ethnic cleansing. But we will not act in the same way, we will not take revenge. I have said this many times even when they bombed Ganja, when they bombed Barda, when they bombed other cities and killed 92 civilians. I said that we would take revenge on the battlefield. Therefore, taking into account this official position and the fact that there are thousands of Armenians living in Azerbaijan and nobody is ethnically cleansing them, why should we do it there?

- Today, as you know, the Azerbaijani Army is winning the battle. Today, we are liberating one city after another, one village after another. In principle, anyone in Azerbaijan can say, look, they have committed an act of genocide in Khojaly, they have expelled the Azerbaijanis from their native lands, they have destroyed all our cities and villages.

**- Armenians, of course, also claim that they were**

*Ganja after a ballistic missile attack by Armenian armed forces on 11 October 2020. Ten civilians were killed and 34 wounded*



**expelled and they were the victims of massacres over the years?**

- From where were they expelled? From where? They were not expelled. We did not commit ethnic cleansing against Armenians. No! Armenians live in Azerbaijan. They expelled us not only from Nagorno-Karabakh but also from seven districts on the administrative border of Nagorno-Karabakh where Armenian population had never lived before. They have changed the names of our cities and villages.

- Have you seen the images of Azerbaijani mosques on the occupied territories? They are all destroyed. They keep pigs in our mosques. The recent video footage of a mosque in Zangilan, which has been liberated, shows that they kept pigs there.

We closely monitor the western media and during these 40 days, I have given almost 30 interviews. All of them were very aggressive, as if this was not an interview, as if it was some kind of an accusation. Nothing is happening on the Armenian side. Nobody is asking Pashinyan why he hits Ganja with ballistic missiles, why he has killed 92 people, why they attacked a funeral procession in Tartar, why they used Smerch with cluster

munitions to attack Barda, killing 21 people and injuring 70. No-one asks him where he gets weapons. They only attack us. International media only demonize Azerbaijan.

**- May I ask, President Aliyev, how many civilians have been killed on this side now? What is the death toll?**

- Ninety-two civilians have been killed, 405 wounded and almost 3,000 houses have been either demolished or seriously damaged by Pashinyan's regime. So this is a fact. You can verify that when you go there and see.

- Nobody knows. Again, coming back to the beginning of our conversation, if Pashinyan says today that yes, he accepts the basic principles and will vacate the part of Agdam, Kalbajar, and Lachin in one week or in two weeks, we will stop immediately.

- On the basic principles, we have a very clear picture. The liberation of seven districts, then the return of Azerbaijani IDPs, the return of Azerbaijani people, refugees to Nagorno-Karabakh.

**- So he has to give you Nagorno-Karabakh also?**

- He has to allow Azerbaijanis to go back there. To go back to Shusha.

**- So, President Aliyev, you have made significant advances already and taking territory alongside Nagorno-Karabakh. How soon do you plan to start sending your civilians back?**

- First, we will need to evaluate the damage caused by the Armenian state to Azerbaijan and to the property of our citizens. Because almost everything in the liberated territories is now destroyed. I have said many times that we could not find a single safe building in the big city of Fizuli, where ten thousands of people used to live, to raise our flag. So we raised it on a derrick. Therefore, first of all, we will evaluate the damage, we will invite international experts to evaluate the damage which was caused to our ecology, to our infrastructure, to our civilians who lost their houses and to our state, to our historical heritage, because all the mosques have been destroyed, all the museums have been destroyed. This is first. After that, of course, there will be lawsuits, lawsuits against the Armenian state, and we are already preparing for that. Second, we will need to create at least initial conditions for people to live there. We need to provide construction materials, we need to invest in infrastructure.

Why did the conflict start? I can tell you – Armenia wanted to disrupt the negotiations. They launched an attack on us on 12 July, at the state border, and entered our territory. We had to push them back. That clash lasted four days. We stopped after we pushed them back from Azerbaijan and did not cross the state border. Then, in the middle of August, they sent a sabotage group which crossed the line of contact, and the head of that group was detained. He confessed that they were planning terror acts against civilians. Then they started to shell our cities on 27 September, and we had victims in the early hours, maybe early minutes, among civilians and among our military servicemen. They shelled us with heavy artillery. This is how it started.

I said from the very beginning that if Pashinyan, him personally, not his foreign minister, him personally, says that Armenia is withdrawing its troops from Agdam, from Kalbajar, from Lachin, the three remaining districts which they still have, gives us a timetable, we will stop immediately. We don't want to continue this war. We don't want that. We want to stop, and I have been saying what I am saying now from the very beginning. Those who know me can confirm that I am a man of my word. I do what I say. If Pashinyan tells us today, I promise you that we will stop immediately, but he doesn't do it. He doesn't do it. He wants to regain the territories. He wants to use these ceasefire opportunities to regroup

his forces, to mobilize more people. As you said, he sent a letter to President Putin asking for military assistance. Thus, he is admitting his defeat, and if he admits his defeat, why can't he say that he will leave the territories? These territories do not belong to Armenia. These are our lands. They have to give them back to us. If they don't do it, as I said, we will go until the end. There is no way we will stop.

- May I ask you a long-term question, President Aliyev? How do you see the future of the South Caucasus? How do you see peace coming here? I mean do you ever see a day when there will be peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia?

- Yes, if you ask for my position, I think it is possible. But it depends not only on me, it depends also on the Armenian side. And during this 40 days of war, on several occasions, I have said that I want to see a day when the three South Caucasus countries working together. As, for instance, we do with Georgia – our close strategic partner and friend. Look how many projects we have implemented with them, how close our relations are! They are based on historical legacy and they are based on pragmatism, on a balance of interests. So why has Armenia become isolated? Because of the occupation. And if you look at the map, for instance, our energy and transportation projects, you will see that they bypass Armenia. The shortest way for us to deliver our resources to international markets was through Armenia and we offered them that in the 1990s. We said, "look, leave the territories, and let's build the pipeline through Armenian territory, then through Nakhchivan and Turkey, and we will combine the interests of all countries". We will make all countries of the region interdependent. And that will be a guarantee for peace. They said no. I offered them many times through the Minsk Group co-chairs, they can confirm it – financial assistance, social programs in Nagorno-Karabakh financed from our budget if they leave our territories. They said no. I offered an autonomy, the highest possible autonomy in the world, to Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenians said no. They said no to everything. So what is happening now is their own fault. By the way, the first Armenian president who was overthrown by the Karabakh clan published an article saying that what Azerbaijanis are offering us now will not be offered ever again. That was in the middle of 1990s.

**- So what do you want for Nagorno-Karabakh?**

- Nagorno-Karabakh is a part of Azerbaijan. It will be a part of Azerbaijan just like any other region of Azerbaijan. ✪

*Fizuli became a ghost city  
after Armenian occupation*

