

Khojalu and Gaza before the gaze of the Islamic solidarity

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Bogdan B. Atanesyan

On February 25-26, Azerbaijan will commemorate the 34th anniversary of the “Khojalu genocide”. According to Azerbaijani sources, the republic is getting ready for the event as in previous years: preparing reports, editing new television films, presenting “research” papers and books. However, the current date is special because for the first time in 34 years Khojalu (Ivanyan) together with the entire territory of Nagorno-Karabakh has come under Baku’s full control and, it can be assumed, that the events are planned in the settlement itself.

The intention is quite clear: Azerbaijan really needs to raise a wave of information and propaganda on Khojalu, to evoke a major impact in the domestic and, preferably, on international platforms. The aim is to at least partially compensate for the image losses of the Aliyev’s regime after the September 2023 events, which were marked by ethnic cleansing, acts of genocide, vandalism and xenophobia against Karabakh Armenians before the eyes of the entire world.

Enough has been said and written over the years that the Azerbaijani interpretation of the events of 34 years ago, initiated against the Meskhetian Turks on the outskirts of Aghdam and presented as the “events in Khojalu”, is a mixture of lies, manipulations and propaganda tricks. There are volumes of factual data, video materials with a timing of dozens of hours with eyewitnesses' confessions, detailed studies (and not only by Armenian authors) testifying that the so-called “Khojalu events” were the result of internal political squabbles in Azerbaijan aimed at overthrowing of the then-ruling president *Mutalibov*. Azerbaijan remembers, for example, journalist *Chingiz Mustafayev*, whose video materials and confessions alone overthrow the official version of the events. They also remember that after becoming the head of the country, *H. Aliyev* ordered to dissolve the structure that investigated the “Khojalu events” and destroy the collected materials. And only afterwards the “Armenian trace”, which was a “by-product” of the Khojalu adventure, was brought to the forefront and worked out by Azerbaijani propagandists to whip up xenophobic hysteria in Azerbaijan, as well as to devalue the moral and legal foundations of the Karabakh Liberation struggle.

However, in the context of this publication another thing is important.

For decades, through false narratives about the events “in Khojalu”, the Azerbaijani public has been systematically uncited wild hatred towards Armenians as a “*genocidal nation*”, which has based its national identity on the destruction of other people’s identity, extermination of neighboring peoples and appropriation of their cultural and historical heritage. Moreover, the propaganda of “*Khojalu genocide*” was carried out both inside AzR and at the international level with the aim to “internationalize” the “predatory actions” of Armenians, to consolidate the image of a “*fascist nation*” that carries out its crimes against any ethnic group that stands in the way of implementation of their “*satanic*” program. In this regard, “Khojalu” continues to be presented as an act of crime on a universal scale, which should *a priori* justify the world’s silence on the allegedly purely retaliatory actions of Azerbaijan and its allies to “*de-Armenianize*” the entire region, “sterilize” it from the “*Armenian Nazism*”, which is “*threatening the humanity as a whole*”.

The special target of Baku's propaganda was and is the world Islamic community, on whose “*righteous anger*” Azerbaijan counts, constantly spinning the spiral of Armenophobia with reference to the “Khojalu massacre”. For decades, Baku, while developing interaction with Islamic countries both bilaterally and in various group formats, has systematically put the “Khojalu factor” on the agenda of relations, persuading and, in some cases, even demanding that it be considered when establishing any relations between these countries and Armenia. Azerbaijan has openly played with the religious feelings of the subjects of the Islamic *Ummah* by presenting the “Khojalu massacre” as a criminal act against a Muslim country, a Muslim nation, a Muslim community, as an act of openly religious, in this case - anti-Islamic angle and motivation.

Another question is to what extent Baku managed to influence the consciousness and convictions of its Islamic partners, but the fact is that Azerbaijan, exploiting the “*Khojalu issue*”, still received various dividends from many Islamic partners and allies in the form of political support on international platforms, material assistance and even cooling of relations with Armenia.

However, the problem is not that these countries, guided by the the sence of Islamic solidarity, followed the Azerbaijani propaganda and have turned the “Khojalu issue” into a significant factor determining the degree of their attitude towards Armenia. Considering the experience and peculiarities of the political history of Islam, such a phenomenon is not something new and it even has some objective reasons. The question is different. Namely, how justified were the expectations of the Islamic countries and political groups that trusted the Azerbaijani policy, that Baku would reward them for their understanding and support in the same way? More precisely, what was payment for the Palestinians and brothers-in-faith who now openly stand in their defense, from whom Azerbaijan in its time consistently forced the rhetoric of condemning the Armenians “for Khojalu”, for alleged desecration of Muslim shrines in Karabakh and even promises to start a holy *jihad* in the name of liberation of Azerbaijani brothers-in-faith from “*Armenian terror*”?

This is the 5th month of Israel's Operation “*Iron Sword*” in the Gaza Strip. In reality, it's not an anti-terrorist operation, as was claimed, but a punitive campaign against an entire nation. Nearly 90% of Gaza has been razed to the ground; the number of civilian deaths, according to Palestinian figures, has exceeded 30,000; the number of wounded is estimated at over 100,000; and two million people are homeless, living in ruins or in tents in the desert on the Israeli-Egyptian border; people are suffering from hunger, infections, and lack of medicine. According to eyewitnesses, the Israeli military is shooting at all moving targets in the “Special operation” zone, whether they are Hamas fighters, Red Crescent vehicles, civilians or children. In such circumstances, the ongoing squabbles in the UN and other international governmental structures over whether the actions of the State of Israel meet the criteria for the definition of “genocide” look helpless. While these squabbles are going on, caused mainly by the foreign policy conjuncture of the world's leading countries imposing their will to the international community, hundreds of civilians are being killed every day in Gaza. And whatever you call it – an operation, a war, a massacre, or a dramatic events – the fact is that the world is facing the real annihilation of an entire nation, its expulsion from its homeland, the destruction of its sanctuaries, and nullification of its right to life.

For objective reasons, the Islamic community is the only international solidarity group on the issue of defining what is happening as genocide, and the synchronization of this

assessment takes place even among those Muslim countries, that have divergent views on almost all other issues of the international and Islamic agenda. However, even in the Islamic world, which is extremely solidarized these days, there is a state that not only refrains from joining the “Palestinian case”, but with all its behavior and all its deeds, openly condones the heinous act of destruction of Gaza and its civilian population. And that country is Azerbaijan: nominally an Islamic state, a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and many other platforms of inter-Islamic interaction. A state that through all the 5 months of the Gaza disaster expressed its condolences to only one party - Israel. A state that uses the term “massacre” when describing what is happening in the south of the Jewish state, but only refers to the Hamas attack on Jewish settlements on October 7, 2023. A state that at all levels - government, press and society – refers to the resistance in Gaza as defending “terrorist leftovers”. A state that supplies the Israeli operation with a strategic product – fuel – and increases these supplies every month. A state that, after the final destruction of Gaza and the enslavement of its bleeding people, will be the first to congratulate Israel on its victory.

This is Azerbaijan's payment. In this way, it is repaying its debt to the Islamic community and its brothers-infaith – the Palestinians, whom Baku has been trying for decades to involve in the adventure of an all-Islamic “*trial*” against the Armenians and the “*Islamicide*” *unleashed by them*”.

On February 25-26, 2024, Azerbaijan will commemorate the 34th anniversary of the “Khojalu events”, and at that time Israel plans to finish the active phase of the operation in the Gaza Strip. Remembering Khojalu, Azerbaijan will wail and carry its mugham laments to all corners of the world. Gaza will be smoking and silent, staring numbly into the unknown with the withered eyes of its survived children.

And now it is the time for the Islamic community, Islamic solidarity, faithful Muslims, including those who are citizens of Azerbaijan, to decide where the pain lies and where does the apostasy, covered by hypocrisy lies.