

## **Armed Conflict Expert: On the Unprecedented Escalation of Delimitation-Demarcation and Cartographic Manipulation of the Toponymy of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh**



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At the end of the 44-day Azerbaijani-Turkish military aggression in 2020 against the Nagorno Karabakh Republic (NKR) and the Republic of Armenia, an unprecedented escalation of the process of delimitation and demarcation of the Armenian-Azerbaijani borders was launched. This was done contrary to the principles and procedure for border delimitation and demarcation recommended by the OSCE Secretariat (See Delimitation and Demarcation of State Boundaries in the OSCE Area. Vienna, OSCE Secretariat, 19 December 2017, <https://www.osce.org/ru/secretariat/363471>).

The unparalleled pressure applied by the initiators of the aggression on the Armenian population from Karabakh was accompanied by subsequent attempts to undermine the settlement process under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairmanship, despite the internationally recognized legality of the right to self-determination of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh. Among the arguments in substantiating their claims to include Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan, the Baku authorities refer to the Azerbaijani-language toponymy, which allegedly has a long history.

Azerbaijani justifications of territorial claims to the NKR and the Republic of Armenia are an essential component of the falsification of the history of Artsakh and Armenia. In the issue of falsification of the history of Artsakh and Armenia, Azerbaijan pays considerable attention to the "substantiation" of the thesis "about the arrival" of the Armenian population and its appearance on the territory of Artsakh and Armenia only in the first quarter of the 19th century. Azerbaijan deliberately bypasses the documented fact of the settlement of the territories of Eastern Armenia by the Muslim population in the first third of the 19th century.

To promote its expansionist geostrategic interests in this issue, Azerbaijan uses the fact that Turkic toponyms appeared on maps of Artsakh in the first quarter of the 19th century, published after the incorporation of Artsakh into the Russian Empire. This is presented as proof of the "autochthonous Azerbaijanis on the territory of Artsakh." This argument is much supported internationally after the Azerbaijani-Turkish military aggression against the NKR. The goal of these political propaganda throw-ins into the media is the formation of pro-Azerbaijani sentiments in the process of post-war settlement of the Karabakh conflict. In these conditions, for the NKR and the RA, as well as the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs, objective academic analysis and identification of the true reasons for the presence of Turkic toponyms on maps acquire particularly important not only historical and political, but also security and political significance.

The Institute for National Strategic Studies, Ministry of Defense, Republic of Armenia assigned itself the task of analyzing this problem from the point of view of political security studies, using historical facts and archival documents. In our collective monograph, based on the academic analysis of factual material, the demographic picture of Armenia and Artsakh in the first quarter of the 19th century and the factual dynamics of transformation of the toponymic system in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh are presented.

The academic work of INSS, MOD, RA consists of the main development, accompanying academic and expert reports and factual documentary materials attached as an appendix. The essence of the problem and its key components are outlined in the systematic source study based on Armenian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Persian, Arabic, Georgian and Russian primary sources. The accompanying reports analyze the main areas that directly caused the formation and distortion of the Armenian toponymic system of Armenia and Artsakh by the newcomer Turks. The appendix includes documents, as well as written evidence, which have the value of the primary source and are important aid for the impartial academic and expert confirmation of the indisputability of the Armenian primary basis of toponymy of Eastern Armenia.

Of fundamental importance is the confirmation of the reality that Azerbaijan, unlike Armenia and Georgia, does not have medieval primary sources for the study of its own toponymy. In Azerbaijani toponymic manipulations, toponyms that arose in the 19th-20th centuries or distorted forms of Armenian toponyms are used.

From the archival materials underlying the study, it is necessary to highlight the agreements cited on the basis of Armenian originals belonging to Armenian villages, which, being subordinate to the Gandzasar Catholicosate, were temporarily transferred on a leasehold basis to the leaders of Muslim tribal groups who moved to Artsakh in 1817 - with the condition of paying tribute to Gandzasar.

Of particular academic value are Armenian documents preserved in originals or copies of the 16th-19th centuries, which contain Armenian toponyms of Artsakh, preceding those names that, based on distortions of Muslim tribal leaders who settled in Artsakh in the 19th century, were recorded during the description of the territory initiated by the Russian authorities. The appendix also contains copies of documents of the 19th century, which describe the influx of Muslims to Artsakh in the first quarter of this century.

The appendix contains the comments of the authors of the "Cameral description of the Karabakh province", hastily undertaken in Artsakh in 1823 on the instructions of the Russian authorities. In these notes, Russian officials-scribes admit that during the compilation of this essay, information was obtained not by visiting settlements and interviewing the population, but mainly on the basis of oral messages received from Muslim *beks*<sup>1</sup>-newcomers. The toponyms recorded in the oral reports of the Turkic-speaking beks who took possession of the lands of the Armenian *meliks*<sup>2</sup> became the primary source for the subsequent compilation of maps.

Of particular importance are the primary sources for the first population census in Artsakh in 1832/1833, which we are introducing into academic circulation for the first time. They cover the toponymic system and demographic picture in the entire Karabakh province with academic and factual accuracy. According to this census, the population of Artsakh continued to remain Armenian, while Muslims were an absolute minority. The cited documents confirm the fact that in the Karabakh province a temporary numerical superiority of the Muslim population was formed in 1812-1827 due to emigrating from various places, including those resettled in 1827 and settled mainly on the territory of Plain Karabakh Muslim nomads who, having no permanent place of residence, settled in nomad camps.

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<sup>1</sup>A Turkic tribal chief.

<sup>2</sup> A hereditary Armenian noble title.

The conclusion of our study provides conclusions that can be considered for the academic and expert consulting of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs, who confirmed their readiness to continue discussing the issues of the Karabakh settlement the aftermath of the military aggression of Turkey and Azerbaijan in 2020 - in violation of the agreed principles of non-use of force or threat of force.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

The academic study of Artsakh's toponymic system is of great importance not only in the academic-historical-political, but also in the international security aspect.

The claims and statements of Azerbaijan are groundless, due to the lack of a factual basis, since there are no Azeri primary sources, and there are no mentions of Turkic-language toponyms in the foreign-language sources. When falsifying the history of Artsakh, Azerbaijan actively uses the Turkic-language toponyms of the settlements of Artsakh, presented on the maps of the 19th-20th centuries. The indigenous Armenian toponyms of Artsakh (the names of settlements, spiritual institutions, regions, mountains, rivers) are constantly mentioned in the Armenian primary sources - starting from the 5th century AD up to the 20th century. Data on Armenian toponymy are contained in Armenian rock carvings, books of records of church estates, diocesan decrees. Armenian toponyms of Artsakh are recorded in Armenian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Persian, Arab, Georgian and Russian sources.

During the Persian, Ottoman, and Russian rule in Artsakh and other parts of Armenia, the imperial system of toponymy, that replaced the former Armenian one, did not reflect any changes in the ethnic composition of the population, but it was imposed mostly for political and administrative reasons. Until the beginning of the 19th century, Artsakh was inhabited exclusively by Armenians. The key to the millennial existence of the Armenian toponymic system in Eastern Armenia was the continued presence of influential secular and ecclesiastical authorities, as well as the rich Armenian spiritual and cultural heritage.

As a result of registration for official use in the Russian Empire of toponyms, carried out on the basis of oral statements of Muslim newcomers, a misconception about the ethnic picture of the region may emerge, which Azerbaijan uses in order to deny the existence of the indigenous Armenian toponymic system and the indigenous nature of the Armenian population.

Thus, on the threshold of the resumption of the Karabakh settlement under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairmanship, it would be advisable to use this research<sup>3</sup> by the Institute for National Strategic Studies, Ministry of Defense, Republic of Armenia as one of the sources of academic and expert consulting. The results of this study can also help bring the process of delimitation and demarcation of the Armenian-Azerbaijani border in line with the academically sound recommendations of the OSCE Secretariat.

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<sup>3</sup> Доктор-профессор Павел Чобанян “О некоторых вопросах истории Арцаха (XIII—XIX вв. - <https://artsakhib.am/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Павел-Чобанян-—О-некоторых-вопросах-истории-Арцаха-ХШ-—XIX-вв..pdf>)