

BEGINNING OF ARMENIAN TERROR IN SHUSHA IN 1905

*Terrorist detachment of the Armenian
“Dashnaktsutyun” party*

August 1905 marked a new milestone in the history of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict of 1905-1906, laying the foundation for even more bloody clashes that swept across more cities and counties of the South Caucasus. In the second half of August 1905, an Armenian-Azerbaijani massacre erupted in the Shusha district of the Elizabethpol province. The fact that it began here was not accidental. At the beginning of the 20 century. Shusha was one of the key centers of Armenian national extremism. As the governor of Elizabethpol wrote in 1903, it was in Shusha that “the propaganda of Armenian revolutionaries made a nest so strong that the fight against their criminal activity takes on the significance of an increasingly serious task of the government” (11, p. 6). In the gendarme reports of 1904, Shusha was not referred to as none other than “the headquarters of the central committee of Armenians” (4, p. 28).



As was the case in other cities of Northern Azerbaijan with an ethnically heterogeneous population, Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Shusha also lived in compact masses. The upper part of the city was occupied by the Azerbaijanis and the lower by Armenians.

Terrorist detachment of the Armenian “Hnchak” party

This advantage created favorable conditions for the Armenians to terrorize the Azerbaijani population of Shusha and to drive them out of those places with the aim of creating an ethnically homogeneous enclave in the Karabakh region.

Various episodes of clashes between the two nations became the harbinger of the Shusha massacre. On 8 August, the Armenians killed lamplighter Mammadhuseyn Usub oglu in Shusha. The Azerbaijanis demanded for several days that the Armenians surrender the killers, but in vain – the Armenians claimed that the lamplighter was killed by the Muslims themselves in order to provoke a massacre. Tensions escalated and climaxed after the news of a shootout between the peasants of the Azerbaijani village of Jinni who had descended from nomadic lands and the Armenians of the village of Dashanli. Several people were killed and wounded on both sides in the shootout. In this regard, the Azerbaijanis of the villages neighboring Shusha began to take measures to curb the rampant Armenian terror. They began to lie in wait for armed gangs of Armenians roaming the roads, detaining them and taking away their weapons (3, p. 7; 12, p. 165).

As is evident, the ethnic feud in Shusha already reached a level when only one pretext was sufficient for it to turn into large-scale bloody clashes which started on 16 August. Judging by the archive documents sent by police and civil authorities from Elizabetpol and Tiflis to St. Petersburg, the reason for the start of the confrontation was not very clear. According to the Armenian side, the clashes began in the wake of the wounding of their compatriot, an inhabitant of the village of Zarisli. There was a theory that an Armenian was wounded by a Cossack for refusing to provide a weapon. The wounded Armenian, with blood all over his body, walked along the most crowded streets of the city several times looking either for police or a doctor. The people were called to the streets by the sound of the church bell. The Armenians first went back to their homes but then gathered in the square of the Armenian bazaar – this time they were armed with rifles. Exciting speeches began to be made there that Muslims were allegedly killing Armenians, that four people were killed outside the city, etc. Electrified by this, Armenians killed two Azerbaijanis and launched pogroms and set fire to the trading shops of Azerbaijanis in the Armenian part of the city. There was shooting from both sides: the Armenians sitting on



the heights fired at the highway leading to Shusha. The Azerbaijanis responded with firing and began to set fire to the houses of Armenians in their part of the city. On the first day of the massacre, the exact number of victims was not established (3, p. 4; 5, p. 3; 6, p. 3). Even if we accept the Armenian version of events, it immediately catches the eye that the Armenians decided to seize the opportunity to start killing the Azerbaijanis. Judging by the evidence cited, those gathered at the call of church bells in the streets ran to their homes and came back with arms. This suggests that preparations for the massacre were carried out in advance and the Armenians decided to use the fact of wounding of their fellow tribesman as an excuse for attacking the Azerbaijanis. In fact, the details of this wounding remained unclear and it is not known for sure whether this was the work of the Azerbaijanis or someone else had injured him. It is also noteworthy that the incident was deliberately inflated to escalate the tensions. In particular, doctor Mashuryants, seeing that the Armenian was slightly wounded and had been bandaged, was worried that such a minor case would not make a proper impression on the crowd, tore the bandage off the wounded and led him bleeding along the main street, shouting: “This is what the Tatars are doing to us” (6, p. 3).

Continuing the atrocities in the city, the Armenians poured kerosene and set fire to the street that made up the border between the Azerbaijani and Armenian parts of Shusha in order to prevent Muslims from entering the Armenian part. There are archive materials showing how the Armenians acted during the arson of houses: “covered by the elderly, boys ran up to Tatar houses, put rags under the wooden parts of the gate and fence, poured kerosene on them and set them on fire. The boys had special equipment: bags with rags and bottles with kerosene” (9, p. 64).



Meanwhile, the Azerbaijani side began to take measures to protect itself from Armenian terror. Azerbaijanis responded with the same token, but more actively than the Armenians. A serious breakthrough for the Azerbaijani side was the capture on 17 August of the church, which the Armenians had turned into a strategic base from which the firing originated (7, p. 3). During the fighting, Azerbaijani self-defense units managed to push back the Armenians, who had occupied more advantageous positions in the elevated part of the city. This posed the threat of destroying the entire Armenian neighborhood. Troops and Cossacks came to the defense of Shusha's Armenians. They used volleys of guns against Muslims "who were fearlessly climbing the steep approaches to the Armenian part", as the official report said (3, p. 8).

On 17 August, an attempt was made to stop the bloodshed: the Armenian side suggested meeting with the Azerbaijanis in the Armenian part of Shusha and asked the Shusha district governor, M. I. Pivovarov, to act as a mediator in the negotiations. The Azerbaijanis stated that they would not go to the Armenian part of

the city and suggested meeting at the house of Prince Fatali Mirza, the most convenient place for a meeting, because it can be accessed along both Armenian and Muslim streets. When M. I. Pivovarov communicated this condition to the Armenians, they replied that they had to invite someone else to finalize the issue. The governor concluded from this situation that the parties were in no hurry to end the negotiations and reach a cessation to the hostilities. M. I. Pivovarov emphasized that the Armenians always demanded that troops use weapons to defend them, but he did not agree because he did not notice a military superiority of the Azerbaijanis. At the same time, he admitted that he did not have sufficient resources to take tough measures against both sides (3, p. 4).

On 18 August, the parties tried to reach a truce. The initiative in this matter was taken by local authorities and Armenians. In his report, M. I. Pivovarov wrote that when the victory of the Azerbaijanis became evident on the morning of 18 August, he, on the instruction of Elizabetspol Vice-Governor, V. N. Baranovski, "rushed" to the Muslim part of Shusha to communicate the

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Armenians' consent to meet with Muslims anywhere. Representatives of Azerbaijanis said that the people were so furious over the losses and arsons of houses that it would be difficult to call them for a truce. With this in mind, they asked to wait until the evening and then, after taking measures to prevent firing, to begin negotiations in the morning. Using persuasion, supplications and references to the governor, M. I. Pivovarov succeeded in ensuring that the clergy and honorable Muslims promised to use all their strength to stop the shootout by 4 o'clock in the afternoon. The Azerbaijanis also demanded that not a single shot be fired from the Armenian side (3, p. 5).

However, the firing from the Armenians continued, so the Azerbaijani representatives did not come to the house of Prince Fatali Mirza where the truce talks were to be held. On 19 August, Vice-Governor V. N. Baranovski arrived in Shusha. With the aid of influential Azerbaijanis and Sheikh-ul-Islam A. Akhundzade, who had arrived in the city on the instruction of the governor on 20 August, the vice-governor began to persuade the Azerbaijani side to stop the attacks and agree to a truce (3, p. 8). On the same day, influential Shusha nobleman Javad agha Javanshir together with M. I. Pivovarov and an Armenian bishop first went to the Armenian part of the city and then, with the provincial archimandrite, to the Azerbaijani part. After a tour of the city, peace was achieved, albeit not final. On this day, two Azerbaijani and two Armenian houses were set on fire (3, p. 5).

A violent exchange resumed on 20 August. Encouraged by superiority in strength, the Azerbaijanis decided to put an end to Armenian provocations. By 9 am, Vice-Governor V. N. Baranovski persuaded Muslims to agree to reconciliation. In one of his later reports, he wrote: "...Tatars in Shusha not only helped me, but also showed chivalry in their behavior". On the other hand, fearing a new outbreak of violence, he insisted that the Armenian clergy, with a cross and gonfalons, move down the Azerbaijani part of Shusha. There they were joined by the Muslim clergy and the peaceful procession visited mosques and went up to the Armenian part. By the evening of that day, calm was established in the city and the parties exchanged hostages and corpses (3, p. 5; 6, p. 29). According to an eyewitness, when the procession left the mosque, an Azerbaijani was killed by a shot from Armenian positions. Despite such treachery, the Muslims, who had given the word to end



the hostilities, did not respond. Subsequently, it turned out that after the reconciliation the Armenians killed 17 more Persian Muslims who worked in the building of the school (7, p. 4).

On 26 August 1905, Elizabethpol Vice-Governor V. N. Baranovsky sent a report to the governor, providing his assessment of the Shusha massacre and the overall situation in the province. According to him, the cause of interethnic bloodshed was the centuries-old enmity of Azerbaijanis and Armenians. It was based on the contempt of the former for the latter, because the Azerbaijanis considered the Armenians a cowardly nation incapable of noble conduct. V. N. Baranovsky wrote that although such relations caused individual of cases hostilities, they didn't reach the level of riots up until the Armenians started uniting into committees, showing confidence in their abilities and inspiring the masses what they could resist the Muslims. "In this regard, the Armenians have made great strides in recent years and, unable to limit themselves to that, have begun to show too much arrogance. Led by some hot heads, they have gone a little too far." According to the official, the only way to fight civil strife in the region should be the ruthless prosecution of the leaders of the Armenian committees both nations want to get rid of. If the government does not do this, the Armenian population itself will turn to lynching, considering the existence of these committees harmful to themselves (3, p. 28-29).

Despite the achievement of a truce, Armenian-Azerbaijani clashes in Shusha continued throughout the second half of 1905. Avoiding frequent attacks on Azerbaijani villages, the Armenians resorted to the tactics of blockading the Azerbaijani population of Shusha. Dashnak detachments occupied the road between Agdam and Shusha near Askeran. This was one of the sustained blockades of Shusha – it began in August



1905 and lasted until 1906. The complete cessation of communication with the city threatened the population with famine and complete destruction. The closure by Armenians of the tract from the Askeran fortress and all country roads from Agdam to Shusha led to the fact that not only the residents of the city, but also the Muslims of Shusha, Jabrayil and Zangezur provinces were deprived of the opportunity to receive food and basic necessities (14, p. 137).

During the Shusha massacre, the Armenians, as was already the case during the clashes in Baku, Erivan, Nakhchivan and Tiflis, tried to portray themselves as innocent victims. In a letter of Shusha Armenians to the governor, they accused Azerbaijanis of enhanced armament in the run-up to the massacre and describing themselves as the defending side. Playing the notorious card of "Muslim fanaticism" again and remaining tight-lipped over which of the warring parties suffered more losses, the Armenians tried to convince the governor that the goal the Azerbaijanis pursued in organizing the Shusha massacre was "to deal a blow to the well-being of the Armenians and weaken the Christian element in order to enable the ignorant and excitable mass of fanatics to rush at its peaceful neighbor at any moment. They were attracted by the prospect of robberies" (10, p. 163-164). Regarding such explanations of the Armenians, General E. N. Shirinkin wrote to the head of the Police Department, N. P. Garin: "Notice the desire of the Armenians to portray themselves as unhappy victims after an unsuccessful collision. They use biased correspondence and false telegraph reports. As an example, the governor-general indicated that, by his order, an ambush was organized in Javanshir province to seize a suspicious pack in which bombs were found between student notebooks. The guilty have been detained and

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an investigation is under way. Meanwhile, issue 199 of the "New Review" newspaper said that the Tatars had allegedly attacked unfortunate teacher Mirzoyev and stole textbooks and money" (2, p. 4-5).

Data on victims of the Shusha massacre and material losses were never ascertained. A report of the Elizabethpol governor said there were 250 dead and wounded without specifying their nationality and about 200 houses were destroyed (1, p. 603). More than 200 killed and wounded were also reported to St. Petersburg by police General E. N. Shirinkin (13, p. 12). According to the assistant to the head of the Tiflis gendarme administration in the Elizabethpol province, Cpt M. E. Khutsiyev, the Azerbaijanis lost up to 300 and Armenians about 100 people. The same figures but in reverse order also expressed the number of houses burned in Shusha. According to M. E. Khutsiyev, such a significant difference in the losses of the parties was explained by the fact that up to 2,000 people arrived from the neighboring villages to help the Azerbaijanis of Shusha. Otherwise, the advantage would have been on the side of the Armenians, who were superior to the Azerbaijanis in Shusha both in terms of their number and armament. At the same time, M. E. Khutsiyev emphasized that both Azerbaijanis and Armenians were hiding those killed in their homes and they were not included in the above figures (3, p. 8). A report of the prosecutor of the Elizabethpol district court A. A. Skulski to the Ministry of Justice on the results of the massacre noted that the Azerbaijanis were the losing party in Shusha. A. A. Skulski emphasized that the Armenians were better prepared and organized: they had detachments with chiefs, trumpeters and even sisters of mercy (9, p. 64). The same idea was confirmed in a letter from the head of the Baku branch of the Partnership of the Nobel Brothers, G. Eclund, to the company's board dated 22 August 1905. G. Eclund wrote that "when the Tatars clashed with the Armenians in Shusha, the latter prevailed thanks to their large numbers, while the Tatars turned out to be severely affected" (8, p. 2).

The Shusha massacre marked the start of a second stage of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. It was noteworthy in a number of ways aspects. Firstly, the Armenians took into account all the circumstances of their previous failures in Baku, Nakhchivan and Erivan and prepared more thoroughly for the pogroms in Shusha. Secondly, it was in Shusha that the Armenians

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began to carry out attacks and killings of the Azerbaijani population for the first time in order to reduce its number and expel them from their homes afterwards. Only this can explain the continuous attacks on the Azerbaijani part of the city, the closure of vital roads and the blockade of Azerbaijani settlements. ❀

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*Armenian terrorist groups
have always been well equipped and armed*