



Israel's Role in Supporting Azerbaijan's War Against Armenia with Intelligence and Arms Revisited

While Israel faces ever-growing global condemnation for ongoing war crimes and human rights violations in Gaza, it is worth revisiting its role in other egregious abuses during recent conflicts such as Azerbaijan's war against Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh. Major human rights organizations including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have documented credible evidence of war crimes committed by both Azerbaijani and Armenian forces during the 2020 war and the 2023 offensive. As Azerbaijan's chief supplier of weapons and intelligence, Israel has been criticized as enabling and being complicit in these war crimes in Nagorno-Karabakh. Data from experts at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), which conducts research on international arms transfers and conflicts, has shown that Israel supplied Azerbaijan with nearly 70% of its arms imports between 2016 and 2020 – the period just prior to the outbreak of the 2020 iteration of the Nagorno-Karabakh war. It is these weapons that were then determined to be used to indiscriminately target civilian populations and infrastructure throughout the territory.

In addition to their use to commit gross human rights abuses, critics of the Israeli arms sales to Azerbaijan have also noted that they warrant denunciation for the role they play in fueling and perpetuating conflict – particularly given the type of destructive weaponry that is provided for offensive military operations in volatile regions like Nagorno-Karabakh. This has included deadly cluster bombs, which are banned by more than 120 nations around the world, and which independent groups confirmed Azerbaijan deployed against civilian populations during the course of hostilities. Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and others documented several instances back in October of 2020 where Azerbaijani forces used Israeli-made M095 DPICM and LAR-160 series cluster munition rockets in residential areas of Stepanakert and Hadrut in Nagorno-Karabakh. The widespread international ban on weapons such as these has been put in place due to the indiscriminate and long-lasting danger that they pose to civilians. Cluster bombs release hundreds of smaller submunitions over a broad area, making them extremely indiscriminate when used in or close to heavily populated areas. Since a significant portion of these bombs often fail to detonate on impact, they also leave behind unexploded ordnance that acts like landmines for years and even decades.

Proof of massive Israeli arms transfers to Azerbaijan for use in Nagorno-Karabakh were not only evident during the 2020 war, but also in the 2023 Azerbaijani offensive there. Back in early September of 2023 – just weeks before the offensive was launched – and as diplomats scrambled to urge for peace talks and avert any renewed escalations in Nagorno-Karabakh, flight tracking data showed that Azerbaijani cargo planes were streaming into Ovda – an Israeli military base known as the only airport in the country that handles the export of explosives. At least six flights from Azerbaijan landed at Ovda between September 1st and September 17th, in the lead-up to the September 19th military offensive a mere two days later. An investigation conducted by an Israeli newspaper had even found that sudden surges of military cargo flights to and from Ovda Airport coincided with upticks of fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh – clear evidence of Israel's role in escalating the conflict.

The close ties between Israel and Azerbaijan extend beyond the supplying of weapons and include intelligence sharing as well. While not publicly confirmed by either, reports and analysis outline that Azerbaijan provides the Israeli Mossad with intelligence gathering facilities and access – largely as a platform for monitoring the Iranian

government in Tehran. The Mossad is believed to maintain what has been labeled a “large and significant presence” in Azerbaijan, with many contending that Azerbaijan has allowed its territory and airspace to be used by Israel for launching military and sabotage operations against Iran and its nuclear program. In fact, Azerbaijan was suspected to be the final destination of thousands of top-secret documents regarding Iran’s nuclear program that were stolen during a covert 2018 operation carried out by Mossad agents on a warehouse outside of Tehran. The knowledge of Israeli activities in Azerbaijan has even been put forth in reports from U.S. officials, who have expressed that Israel has gained access to airbases in Azerbaijan as a means of monitoring Iran.