

DAMAGES TO AZERBAIJANI HEALTHCARE AS A RESULT OF ARMENIAN AGGRESSION

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Summary

This article examines the extensive damage inflicted on the healthcare infrastructure of Azerbaijan as a result of Armenian military aggression and occupation during the First Karabakh War. Based on archival documents, official statistics, scientific literature, and historical sources, the study analyzes the destruction of hospitals, polyclinics, pharmacies, maternity hospitals, sanatoriums, feldsher-midwife stations, and other medical institutions in the occupied districts of Shusha, Kalbajar, Aghdam, Fuzuli, Qubadli, Jabrayil, Zangilan, Lachin, Tartar, Khojaly, Khojavand, and Khankendi. The research demonstrates that hundreds of healthcare facilities equipped with modern medical technologies were looted, burned, or completely destroyed, causing billions of US dollars in economic losses to Azerbaijan. The occupation also resulted in the forced displacement of thousands of healthcare professionals and residents, severely affecting the medical and social well-being of the local population. Particular attention is devoted to the destruction of health resorts, mineral water resources, and therapeutic centers of strategic importance. The article further highlights the post-2020 reconstruction process in the liberated territories, emphasizing the establishment of modern healthcare institutions within the framework of the “smart city,” “smart village,” and “green energy zone” concepts in Karabakh and Eastern Zangezur.

Key words: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Karabakh, health, polyclinics, pharmacies, doctors, sanatoriums.

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1. Introduction

As in previous periods, the Azerbaijani government paid significant attention to the healthcare of the population of Karabakh during 1986–1988. By 1988, there were 103 hospitals with 5,780 beds equipped with modern medical devices and various types of equipment, 165 outpatient and polyclinic institutions, and 487 women’s consultation centers operating in Karabakh. During the studied period, the number of hospital beds per 10,000 population reached 97.7 in Azerbaijan, 86.2 in Armenia, 98 in Karabakh overall, and 101.7 in Nagorno-Karabakh. In 1988, 1,614 highly qualified physicians of various specializations were working in Karabakh.

The mountainous part of Karabakh ranked first both within the Soviet Union and at the republican level in terms of the provision of medical personnel and physicians to the population. Research findings indicate that while the number of mid-level medical staff per 10,000 population was 114.7 in the USSR, 93.5 in Azerbaijan, and 93.5 in Armenia, this figure reached 117 in Karabakh overall and 122.7 in its mountainous region. In addition, the number of physicians

of all specialties per 10,000 population was 25.9 in the Nakhchivan ASSR, 27 in Karabakh as a whole, and 29.1 in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Karabakh gained recognition for its healthcare institutions, recreation centers, and picturesque resorts (*Məmmədov, 2020a, p. 698*). Sanatoriums and recreation facilities of all-Union significance, as well as tourist bases, operated in the region. Unfortunately, this extensive infrastructure, established through substantial investments by the Azerbaijani state, was subjected to occupation by Armenian armed groups and was subsequently looted and destroyed.

2. Results and Discussions

Damage inflicted on the healthcare system of the Shusha district: As a result of Armenia's armed aggression and occupation, enormous material damage was inflicted upon the healthcare infrastructure of the Shusha district. In the occupied territory of Shusha district, one hospital (valued at 45 million USD), one polyclinic (valued at 5 million USD), the "Shusha" sanatorium (valued at 250 million USD), the "Shafa" tourist center (valued at 12 million USD), a children's sanatorium (valued at 25 million USD), the "Forest Health Center" (valued at 7 million USD), an emergency medical aid station (valued at 5 million USD), a sanitary-epidemiological station (valued at 2 million USD), a dental polyclinic (valued at 3 million USD), five pharmacies (valued at 1 million USD), one optical store (valued at 125 thousand USD), two rural district hospitals (valued at 800 thousand USD), six rural medical outpatient clinics (valued at 750 thousand USD), and eleven feldsher-midwife stations (valued at 900 thousand USD) were subjected to nearly thirty years of Armenian vandalism. In total, the damage inflicted upon the healthcare sector of the Shusha district was estimated at 776 million 950 thousand USD (*Süleymanov & Süleymanov, 2012, p. 126*).

Shusha has long been renowned worldwide for its natural scenery, fresh air, pure water, the famous Isa Spring, and the mineral-rich Turshsu waters. Among several mineral springs similar to Narzan waters, the Lisagorsk mineral spring, located near the Lisagor Pass approximately 19 kilometers southwest of Shusha city, possesses particularly significant therapeutic value. Due to the beauty of its nature and the purity of its climate, Shusha has been regarded as the jewel of the Caucasus. As a center of health and recreation and one of the most beautiful regions of Karabakh, Shusha has also been known as a land of longevity. The therapeutic climate of Shusha has been studied by scholars from around the world. According to Professor Figrovskiy, the resort conditions of Shusha were comparable to those of Kislovodsk and Abastumani and even superior to the Davos resort in Switzerland (*Məmmədov, 2016b, p. 35*).

Thus, Shusha possesses rich and unique resort and tourism resources. These resources are primarily based on the region's clean mountain air, forests, therapeutic mineral waters and springs, picturesque landscapes, alpine meadows, historical monuments, and the hospitality of the local population. Unfortunately, these resources were completely destroyed, looted, and devastated by Armenian extremists, while the Azerbaijani population was forcibly expelled from its ancestral homeland.

Destruction of the Healthcare System in the Kalbajar District: The Kalbajar district, covering an area of 3,054 square kilometers and consisting of 143 settlements, was occupied by Armenian armed forces on April 2, 1993. Following the occupation, the district was subjected to widespread destruction and looting. After the occupation of Kalbajar, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution No. 822 at its 3205th meeting, demanding the immediate withdrawal of all occupying forces from the Kalbajar district and other occupied territories of Azerbaijan. However, for nearly thirty years, none of the obligations arising from this resolution

were fulfilled. On the contrary, beginning in 1999, Armenians were unlawfully settled in the territory of the Kalbajar district in violation of the principles of the United Nations and the OSCE.

As in other sectors, the healthcare system of the Kalbajar district also suffered severe destruction as a result of the aggression carried out by the Armenian armed forces. According to official data, 76 healthcare institutions in the district sustained damages amounting to 17 million US dollars. As a consequence of the occupation, 7 hospitals (valued at 1.6 million USD), 23 polyclinics (valued at 2.5 million USD), 1 maternity hospital (valued at 125 thousand USD), 44 pharmacies (valued at 1.2 million USD), and other healthcare institutions became victims of vandalism (*Süleymanov & Süleymanov, 2012, p. 115*).

Mineral Water Deposits – Historical information regarding the Istisu thermal springs emerging in the territories of Yukhari Istisu, Ashaghi Istisu, Goturlu Istisu, and Turshsu dates back to the twelfth century. Although it is claimed that the Istisu mineral springs were formed as a result of the earthquake that occurred in 1139, geological studies indicate that knowledge about the thermal springs of Istisu existed thousands of years earlier. According to oral sources, Istisu was regarded as a sacred healing place (“Ocaq”). Several centuries ago, people suffering from disabilities and various illnesses were brought to Istisu in search of healing.

The district is rich in mineral water resources, including the Istisu springs and highly productive Narzan-type acidic mineral waters. In addition, radon-containing waters are located 1–2 kilometers southeast of Yukhari Istisu. These waters have been used in the treatment of neurological, joint, and cardiovascular diseases. More than 3,000 springs are located within the territory of Kalbajar (*Azərbaycan Respublikası Səhiyyə Nazirliyi, 1990, p. 61*).

The first chemical analysis of the Istisu mineral waters was conducted in 1927. Alongside the geological, hydrogeological, and physicochemical composition of these mineral waters, their therapeutic significance was also investigated. According to their temperature, chemical composition, and other physicochemical properties, the mineral waters emerging in the Istisu region are classified into several groups (*Məmmədov, 2020c, p. 96*).

The thermal springs located in the Istisu resort area possess substantial reserves of carbon dioxide suitable for industrial use. The abundance of carbon dioxide also creates opportunities for export to foreign countries. Approximately 1–2 kilometers from Lower Istisu toward Kalbajar city, on the left bank of the Tartar River, the Istisu mineral water emerges to the surface in the form of a fountain and flows directly into the river. This location is known as “Fontan.” The mineral water found there has a significantly richer composition than that of the other springs. Local residents traditionally created small pools around the fountain and used them for therapeutic bathing.

Despite its popularity, the construction of resort facilities in Upper Istisu began only after 1925 (*Müstəqil Azərbaycan 10 ildə, 2001, p. 186*). According to the decision adopted in 1931 on accelerating resort construction in the Transcaucasian republics, Upper Istisu was recognized as one of the principal resort sites in Azerbaijan. In October 1932, the State Planning Committee (“Gosplan”) adopted a resolution declaring Upper Istisu one of the republic’s most important health resorts. By a decision of the Council of Ministers of Azerbaijan dated September 7, 1950, bath facilities, a resort hospital, and a hotel were constructed in Upper Istisu in 1951.

The altitude of the Istisu region, its dry, clean, and dust-free air, the abundance of sunny days with high solar radiation, and the protection of the Tartar River valley from strong winds created favorable conditions for transforming Istisu into a first-class therapeutic resort center (*Məmmədov, 2020d, p. 98*). Unfortunately, during the occupation period, Armenian businessmen marketed Azerbaijan’s famous Istisu mineral water under the brand name “Jermuk” in foreign markets and generated substantial profits from its sale.

The Devastation of Aghdam's Healthcare System. On July 23, 1993, 850 square kilometers of the Aghdam district, which covered a total area of 1,157 square kilometers, were occupied by Armenian armed forces. At that time, the Aghdam district consisted of 126 settlements, 83 of which were subjected to Armenian vandalism. A total of 120 healthcare institutions in the district suffered damages amounting to 110 million US dollars. Within the district, 17 hospitals (damages estimated at 30 million USD), 24 polyclinics (28 million USD), 1 maternity hospital (2 million USD), 26 pharmacies (2 million USD), 52 medical centers (3 million USD), and other healthcare facilities were looted, destroyed, and burned down. According to the 2000 report of the U.S. Committee for Refugees, 129,000 out of Aghdam's 153,000 residents became internally displaced persons. By occupying the Aghdam district, the Armenian armed forces inflicted damages amounting to 15 billion US dollars on Azerbaijan. As in other sectors, the occupation of the Aghdam district was accompanied by extreme brutality toward healthcare institutions and gross violations of the norms of the Geneva Convention by Armenian troops (*Azərbaycan Respublikası Prezidentinin İşlər İdarəsi İctimai-Siyasi Sənədlər Arxivi*, n.d., p. 17).

The Damage Inflicted on the Healthcare System of Fuzuli District: On August 23, 1993, 800 square kilometers of the Fuzuli district, which had a total area of 1,386 square kilometers, were occupied by Armenian armed forces. This meant the occupation of 52 out of the district's 78 settlements. As a result, 55,000 residents of Fuzuli were forcibly displaced and resettled across 60 districts of Azerbaijan (*Məmmədov, 2020e, p. 698*). The district suffered 2,500 martyrs, had 8 national heroes, 113 hostages, and 1,450 people who became disabled to varying degrees. Similar to other facilities in the district, 127 healthcare institutions were looted and destroyed by Armenian vandals. The total damage inflicted on healthcare institutions was estimated at 17 million US dollars. In Fuzuli district, 61 hospitals, medical centers, and feldsher-midwife stations, 2 polyclinics, and 63 pharmacies remained under the occupation of Armenian armed forces. At the time of the occupation, 205 highly educated and 571 secondary-level medical personnel were serving the healthcare needs of the population in the district; however, due to the occupation, they too were forced to live the life of displaced persons (*Abdullayev, 2004, p. 3*).

The Plundered Healthcare System of Qubadli. On August 31, 1993, the Qubadli district was occupied by Armenian armed forces. On September 10, 1993, Acting President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, addressed the occupation of the Qubadli district during a special press conference convened in connection with the worsening situation caused by Armenia's military aggression. In his statement, he declared: "Recently, direct meetings were held between the relevant bodies of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the ruling forces in Nagorno-Karabakh. Based on these meetings, an agreement on the cessation of hostilities was reached. This occurred on August 31. However, immediately afterwards, Azerbaijan's Qubadli district was seized and completely occupied by Armenian armed formations... Those lands were the homeland of hardworking people, a symbol of honor and abundance. The people of Qubadli stood like a magnificent fortress on the road leading to Karabakh, Lachin, Kalbajar, and Armenia. I was deeply shaken by the occupation of Qubadli" (*Əliyev, 1998, p. 131*).

It should be noted with regret that despite the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution No. 874 on October 14, 1993, which demanded the withdrawal of Armenian armed forces from the occupied territories following the occupation of the Fuzuli, Jabrayil, and Qubadli districts, the resolution remained unimplemented in practice (*Qocayeva, 2004*).

Before the occupation, the Qubadli district had a population of nearly 30,000 people. During the battles for Qubadli, 54 people were martyred. Overall, during the Karabakh war, 238 residents of Qubadli lost their lives and 190 became disabled (*Azərbaycan Respublikası Prezidentinin İşlər İdarəsi İctimai-Siyasi Sənədlər Arxivi*, p. 9).

After occupying the Qubadli district, Armenian armed formations looted and burned healthcare institutions, as they did with other facilities in the region. During the occupation period, Qubadli district had 86 healthcare institutions, including 5 hospitals with a total capacity of 280 beds, 1 maternity hospital, 4 pharmacies, 4 women's and children's polyclinics, and 8 outpatient polyclinics providing ambulatory medical services to the population. A total of 77 highly educated physicians and 335 secondary-level medical personnel served the people of Qubadli (*Məmmədov, 2025f, p. 221*). The district also possessed modern and well-equipped X-ray units, physiotherapy rooms, laboratories, 20 treatment and preventive care institutions (including 5 inpatient facilities), dermatological and venereal disease dispensaries, tuberculosis and oncology dispensaries, sanitary education centers, sanitary-epidemiological stations, blood transfusion stations, and other healthcare institutions, all of which were seized and subjected to vandalism by Armenian armed groups. Research conducted by us has revealed that the occupation inflicted damages amounting to 150 million US dollars on the healthcare system of the Qubadli district (*Süleymanov & Süleymanov, 2012, p. 127*).

Damage Inflicted on Healthcare Facilities in the Jabrayil District: The Jabrayil district, with a total area of 1,050 square kilometers, was occupied by Armenian armed forces on August 23, 1993, with 1,042 square kilometers falling under occupation. This meant that 92 out of the district's 94 settlements were occupied. During the First Karabakh War, 420 residents of Jabrayil were martyred in battles fought for the liberation of Azerbaijani territories, while 156 young people lost their health and became permanently disabled. In recognition of their exceptional bravery during the war, six residents of Jabrayil were awarded the highest national honor of Azerbaijan – the title of National Hero. It should also be noted that in 1994, based on the strategic plan of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Heydar Aliyev, 8 square kilometers of the Jabrayil district were liberated from enemy occupation through military operations (*Kazımlı, 2016, p. 162*).

During a meeting with internally displaced persons from the Jabrayil district on September 7, 1996, National Leader Heydar Aliyev described the occupation of Jabrayil as a profound sorrow and a great tragedy. He also emphasized that everything seized in the district had been transported to Iran by Armenians and sold for insignificant prices (*Azərbaycan Respublikası Prezidentinin İşlər İdarəsi İctimai-Siyasi Sənədlər Arxivi, n.d., p. 10*).

Research conducted by us has revealed that as a result of the aggression carried out by Armenian armed formations, 86 healthcare institutions in the Jabrayil district were occupied, causing damages amounting to 130 million US dollars to the Republic of Azerbaijan. Four hospitals equipped with all necessary medical equipment suffered damages estimated at 65 million USD, one polyclinic incurred losses of 54 million USD, one maternity hospital suffered damages amounting to 3 million USD, and four pharmacies sustained damages totaling 2 million USD (*Suleymanov Suleymanov, 2012, p. 126*). It should also be noted that prior to the occupation, 90 highly educated physicians and 446 secondary-level medical personnel served the population in the healthcare institutions of the Jabrayil district. These medical staff members, together with technical personnel, were also forced to endure the hardships of displacement.

The Destruction of Zangilan's Healthcare System:

The Zangilan district fell under occupation on October 30, 1993. During the struggle against Armenian occupiers, the Zangilan district lost 188 martyrs, 44 people went missing, 110 individuals became disabled, and nearly 200 children were left orphaned. The district, with a total area of 707 square kilometers, including 81 villages, one urban-type settlement, and the city of Zangilan, remained under enemy occupation.

As a result of the occupation, 66 healthcare institutions worth 25 million US dollars were destroyed or lost, including 45 polyclinics equipped with various medical facilities (valued at 12 million USD), 9 maternity hospitals (2 million USD), 6 pharmacies (1.5 million USD), and numerous other healthcare facilities, together with all of their property and medical equipment. If one also considers the temporary loss of the 107-hectare natural plane tree forest, the second largest in the world and the largest in Europe, along with dozens of underground and surface natural resources, it becomes possible to gain a clearer understanding of the severe consequences of enemy aggression.

The National Leader of the Azerbaijani people, Heydar Aliyev, recalled the occupation of the Zangilan district with deep sorrow during his meeting with representatives of the district's public community. He stated: "There are historical monuments in Zangilan reflecting the national culture of the Azerbaijani people. Historical events representing the life of the Azerbaijani nation took place there. In past centuries, highly respected and valuable individuals of our people lived and created in Zangilan. Therefore, Zangilan, both because of its nature and because of what the people living on that land built and created, as well as the heritage they passed on to future generations, is a precious region and an invaluable part of Azerbaijan" (*Əliyev, 1998, p. 403*).

Armenian Vandalism Against the Healthcare System of Lachin. On May 18, 1992, the Lachin district was occupied by Armenian armed formations. During the battles for Lachin, 328 people were martyred, 225 became disabled, 33 children lost both parents, and 6 individuals were awarded the title of National Hero of Azerbaijan for their bravery. A total area of 1,835 square kilometers of the Lachin district, including 127 settlements, remained under occupation (*Süleymanov & Süleymanov, 2012, p. 230*). Since 1992, approximately 70,000 residents of the Lachin district have been forced to live as internally displaced persons in various regions of Azerbaijan (*Qocayeva, 2004, p. 2*).

As a result of the occupation, 142 healthcare institutions in the Lachin district, valued at 25 million US dollars, were subjected to Armenian vandalism (*Süleymanov & Süleymanov, 2012, p. 142*). Among them were 54 hospitals valued at 20 million USD, 1 polyclinic valued at 1 million USD, 83 feldsher-midwife stations valued at 3 million USD, 4 pharmacies valued at 200 thousand USD, sanitary-epidemiological stations, and other healthcare institutions, all of which were looted and destroyed. During the occupation period, 104 highly educated physicians and 478 secondary-level medical personnel were serving the population in the healthcare sector of the Lachin district. These healthcare workers were also forced to endure the hardships of displacement (*Qasimov, 2012, p. 271*).

The Destruction of Tartar's Healthcare System. On June 17, 1993, 530 square kilometers of the Tartar district's total territory of 957 square kilometers, or 23 out of its 77 settlements, were occupied by Armenian armed formations. During the occupation, 310 residents of the Tartar district were martyred. For their personal bravery displayed in battles fought for the freedom and territorial integrity of the Motherland, two residents of Tartar were awarded the title of National Hero of the Republic of Azerbaijan (*AMEA Tarix və Etnologiya İnstitutu Arxiv, p. 3*).

As a result of the occupation carried out by Armenian armed formations, 32 healthcare facilities in the Tartar district, with a total value of 250 thousand US dollars, were subjected to vandalism. These included 1 hospital equipped with modern medical equipment valued at 35 thousand USD, 1 polyclinic valued at 20 thousand USD, village feldsher-midwife stations valued at 130 thousand USD, 2 maternity hospitals valued at 25 thousand USD, 6 pharmacies valued at 8 thousand USD, and 1 sanitary-epidemiological station, all of which were looted

and destroyed (*Azərbaycan Respublikası Prezidentinin İşlər İdarəsi İctimai-Siyasi Sənədlər Arxivi, n.d., p. 2*).

Other Healthcare Institutions. In addition to the above-mentioned damages, one hospital in the Aghjabadi district with a total value of 900 thousand US dollars, one hospital in the Beylagan district valued at 750 thousand US dollars, eight healthcare institutions in the Gazakh district valued at 350 thousand US dollars, healthcare facilities covering an area of 300 square meters in the Aghstafa district valued at 200 thousand US dollars, and a 110-square-meter healthcare facility in the Gadabay district valued at 50 thousand US dollars were destroyed.

Furthermore, 14 healthcare institutions in the Khojaly district with a total value of 5 million US dollars, and 32 healthcare institutions in the Khojavand district valued at 10 million US dollars were also subjected to destruction. In the city of Khankendi, there were 9 hospitals with a total capacity of 900 beds, 2 dispensaries (dermatological-venereal and tuberculosis), a sanitary-epidemiological station, a blood transfusion station, modern X-ray units equipped with advanced medical devices, physiotherapy rooms, laboratories, a sanitary education center, and other healthcare institutions, the total value of which was estimated at 120 million US dollars. For more than 30 years, these facilities served the healthcare needs of Armenians

3. Conclusion

Modern Azerbaijani history is currently experiencing one of its proudest and, at the same time, most responsible stages. The Patriotic War of 2020 entered history not only as a military victory but also as a triumph of national consciousness, justice, and state determination. This victory was the result of the patience, resilience, and unwavering belief of the Azerbaijani people in their rightful cause.

Within a short period of time, new residential areas based on modern urban planning principles were established in Karabakh and Eastern Zangezur. The implementation of the “smart city” and “smart village” concepts is transforming these regions into some of the most modern territories not only in the country but, arguably, in the world. In particular, the “green energy zone” concept has increased the strategic importance of the region from both economic and ecological perspectives. At the core of all these developments lies the human factor – people’s well-being and health.

It can proudly be stated that by 2026, 7 cities, 3 settlements, and 22 villages had welcomed returning residents. At the same time, modern healthcare institutions equipped with advanced medical technologies have been put into operation in the liberated territories where resettlement has taken place. To date, 6,465 families, comprising 25,417 individuals, have resettled in their native lands. This process continues consistently. Currently, more than 62,000 people live, work, and study in the liberated territories. Today, these lands symbolize not only victory but also development and revival. Every building erected and every tricolor flag waving over these territories reflects Azerbaijan’s confidence in its future.

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