

Occupation of Kelbajar: how Armenians ignored the UN and the Council of Europe

On March 27, 1993, Armenian armed formations launched an offensive on the Kelbajar district of Azerbaijan. The Armenian troops attacked from the west of Kelbajar, from the Vardenis region of Armenia. Before the offensive, the high mountain villages of the Kelbajar district were fired on by “Grad” installations and bomb attacks by Armenian aviation. Many settlements were destroyed.

[\[Thomas de Waal. The Black Garden. Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War. New York University Press. Moscow – 2005, pp. 285-287\]](#)

[\[“Rossiyskaya Gazeta” newspaper, 06.04.1993, p. 7\]](#)

[\[“Bakinskiy rabochiy” newspaper. 06.04.1993. № 47 \(22557\). p. 3\]](#)

On April 1, 1993, the Azerbaijani troops possessed a military map belonging to Major S.O. Barseghyan. The data on the map indicated that Barseghyan was on the shore of Lake of Sevan on March 2, and he had already headed towards Kelbajar on March 27.

[\[Thomas de Waal. The Black Garden. Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War. New York University Press. Moscow – 2005, p. 409\]](#)

“The city is constantly being subjected to rocket and artillery shelling and aerial bombardments. There are numerous casualties among the civilian population. The fate of thousands of people is unknown” – the “Izvestia” newspaper reports.

[\[“Izvestia” newspaper. 02.04.1993. № 61 \(23916\). p. 1\]](#)

Within the week (27.03.-03.04.1993), 40.000 civilians were evacuated from Kelbajar. 15.000 residents who were surrounded by the Armenian occupiers were threatened with danger of extermination. Most of the dead, missing and taken hostage

were children, women, helpless disabled people. The total population of the Kelbajar district at that time was 60.000 people, i.e. with the occupation of this district, about 60.000 people became refugees, who were later placed in Ganja, Khanlar (now Goy-Gol district), Samukh, Geranboy, Barda, Yevlakh districts of Azerbaijan.

[\["Pravda" newspaper. 03.04.1993. № 64 \(27018\). p. 1\]](#)

[\["Bakinskiy rabochiy" newspaper. 06.04.1993. № 47 \(22557\). p. 1,2\]](#)

On April 3, 1993, the Armenians captured the city of Kelbajar. Armenian armed formations occupied the entire district, almost without any losses, due to the fact that Kelbajar was defended by a small group of Azerbaijani soldiers who did not receive reinforcements in time and were forced to retreat. The Vardenis corps of the Armenian army had 24 combat aircraft, 48 military helicopters, 87 tanks and other types of military equipment. There were suppositions that besides Armenians, armed forces personnel of the 7th Russian Army also took part in the military operations.

[\["Bakinskiy rabochiy" newspaper. 22.04.1993. № 54 \(22564\). p. 1\]](#)

[\[Thomas de Waal. The Black Garden. Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War. New York University Press. Moscow – 2005, p. 286,287\]](#)

[\["Bakinskiy rabochiy" newspaper. 06.04.1993. № 47 \(22557\). p. 2,3\]](#)

A couple of days after the occupation of the district, in spite of Azerbaijan's attempts to call on Armenia to cease hostilities in Kelbajar, neither the UN nor the CSCE reacted in any way. Turkey, having learned about the occupation of the Kelbajar region, toughened its position against Armenia and demanded the immediate withdrawal of Armenian forces from the occupied Azerbaijani territories. With the occupation of Kelbajar, Turkey completely put an end to bilateral relations with Armenia and blocked the delivery, through its territory, of the second humanitarian aid (wheat) of the European Union to Armenia.

[\["Izvestia" newspaper. 06.04.1993. No. 63. p. 2\]](#)

[\["Pravda" newspaper. 07.04.1993. № 66 \(27020\). p. 1\]](#)

[\[Thomas de Waal. The Black Garden. Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War. New York](#)

On April 12, 1993, the Chairman of the UN Security Council, Richard Boucher, condemned the offensive of Armenian forces on Azerbaijan and stated that the US government would influence the Armenian government so that military operations would be suspended and Armenian forces withdrawn from the territory of Azerbaijan. The Council of Europe also supported Richard Boucher's call.

[\["Bakinskiy rabochiy" newspaper. 15.04.1993. № 51 \(22561\). p. 1\]](#)

[\["Bakinskiy rabochiy" newspaper. 20.04.1993. № 53 \(22563\). p. 1\]](#)

On April 30, 1993, the UN Security Council adopted the first resolution on the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. The resolution contained a demand for "immediate withdrawal of the occupying forces" of Armenia from Kelbajar. As history shows, the Armenian side has ignored international law for 27 years. On November 10, 2020, on the basis of a trilateral agreement between Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia, the city of Kelbajar together with the district were returned to Azerbaijan.