

The Alexander Lapshin Case: Extradited and Imprisoned in Azerbaijan over Telling the Truth about Nagorno-Karabakh

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Until a few weeks ago no one in North America even heard of journalist-blogger Alexander Lapshin. He lives primarily in Moscow but as a Russian-Israeli-Ukrainian [citizen](#) possessing three passports, Lapshin is a globetrotter who writes a blog called “Life Adventures” for the popular travel website [LiveJournal](#). In Russia his on the road stories to off the beaten path, unusual places around the world ([122](#) in all) have generated quite a following for their colorful and humorous portrayal of life as a foreign tourist visiting various diverse cultures and locations. But the 40-year old Lapshin is in political hot water now as a political prisoner sitting in a jail in Baku, Azerbaijan. His legal case has attracted international attention and involves high profile politics in four different nations.

On December 15th last year, Alexander Lapshin was detained in Minsk, Belarus. Viewing the blogger as a threat to “[homeland security](#)” based on his alleged “espionage,” the Azerbaijan prosecuting office had ordered the blogger’s arrest and requested extradition at the behest of Azeri President Ilham Aliyev. The travel journalist had made trips in [2011 and 2012](#) to Nagorno-Karabakh, sympathizing and identifying with the Armenians he met as reflected in his blog entries. Then on his social media account on April 6, 2016 and again on June 29th last year, Alexander commented on the unfairness of Azerbaijan’s territorial claims based on its attempted invasion of the disputed region, calling for recognition of the enclave’s independence, apparently a crime in violation of Azeri law code [281.2](#). Aware that the popular journalist’s messages were reaching a receptive audience of thousands of readers, the Baku government was growing nervous that his writings were contributing to the Nagorno-Karabakh movement for worldwide recognized independence. Thus, the reactionary oppressive state drew up a legal case against Lapshin, charging him with violating Azerbaijan’s “territorial integrity.” Baku was determined to set a harsh example of him to show the rest of the world what happens to journalists who publicly badmouth Azerbaijan.

Gloating over the victory of extraditing Lapshin and his current Baku incarceration, the deputy speaker for Azerbaijan’s legislature warned the rest of the world:

Those not reckoning with Azerbaijan, may share Lapshin’s fate.

The [timing](#) of the blogger’s detainment in Belarus came immediately following Lapshin’s Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu’s visit to Baku to close a [\\$5 billion](#) missile arms deal with Azerbaijan. With Azeri-Israeli relations never chummier, the Baku government seized the

moment when in mid-December the traveling journalist landed in Minsk, a capital housing a government sympathetic to the Azeri cause.

Another arbitrary Azeri law no one ever heard of apparently until the Lapshin case prohibits visitors from other countries to travel to Nagorno-Karabakh without authorized permission (code [318.2](#)) from the Baku government. Of course thousands of individuals have gone to Nagorno-Karabakh since 1994, after Azerbaijan and Armenia fought a bloody [six year war](#) resulting in 30,000 deaths that Armenia won, leaving only Armenians who've been living there for many centuries. But since 1994 apparently Alexander Lapshin is the first and only person ever arrested for entering the disputed region without clearing the visit with Baku officials.

The long contested territory originated when [Josef Stalin](#) in 1920 gave Azerbaijan administrative control, despite Nagorno-Karabakh's overwhelming majority population being Armenian since ancient times. And hence arose the controversy by the ruthless Soviet dictator acting by designed decree as a shrewd divide and rule strategist to facilitate autocratic control over his territorial Soviet colonies Azerbaijan and Armenia. Since the Armenians were still facing genocide, Stalin knew handing over power to the [Turkish](#) brethren the Azeris would result in further persecution of Armenian residents in Nagorno-Karabakh, otherwise known as [Artsakh](#) to the Armenians. This ancient Armenian land had been home to Armenians long before the Azeris as an ethnic group and culture ever came into existence.

The world's first Christian nation of Armenia in [301 AD](#) included what is a large portion of now eastern Turkey ([Western Armenia](#)), Artsakh, another Armenian enclave Nakhichevan as well as the current small nation Armenia (Eastern Armenia). Even prior to the breakup of the Soviet Empire in 1991, the residents of Artsakh submitted to Moscow a peaceful [appeal](#) for Armenian reunification back in 1988. As the pogrom killings of Armenians in Baku and other Azeri cities became more prevalent, eventually in self-defense, war broke out. Amidst the ongoing war, in 1991 Artsakh residents overwhelmingly voted for their own independence, declaring itself the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh. At one point Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev was receptive to granting sovereignty, but the matter was delayed by bureaucracy in the face of the unstable, chaotic dissolution of the Soviet Union. Smaller than the state of Connecticut with a population near [150,000](#) Armenians, the mountainous region remains a global hotspot to this day that could potentially be the incendiary igniting World War III.

The question of justice for the Armenian people has lingered unanswered for well over a century. Public acknowledgement has come extremely slow for the twentieth century's first genocide to be officially recognized by the offending nation Turkey, which to this day has chosen to remain in complete [denial](#) after killing one and a half million [Armenians](#). 100 years after the genocide began, only [20 nations](#) around the world have formally acknowledged this mostly forgotten, gross injustice. But in the last couple years a total of [29](#) can now be counted. Because US Empire has [geo-strategically](#) needed NATO member Turkey for airbases to carry out its imperialistic wars in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, US leaders have lacked the moral courage to nationally [recognize](#) the genocide, fearing it would offend the offending nation. And of course the fellow Turkish cousins, the Azeris will also always pretend the massacres never happened.

Last year within 24 hours after President Aliyev visited Secretary of State John Kerry in Washington, during the overnight hours on April Fool's Day, the Azeri army attempted to

“fool” Armenians with a premeditated surprise attack, launching a failed [invasion](#) into Nagorno-Karabakh. But Armenian soldiers from the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic squelched the invaders’ aggression after several days of fierce fighting, successfully repelling the Azeri offensive in courageous self-defense of their ancient homeland. Evidence of Azeri war crime [atrocities](#) committed against Armenian civilians and soldiers was confirmed.

It’s common knowledge that in recent years Turkey (like the US) has been a huge supporter of ISIS and in Syria ISIS terrorists have targeted Christian minorities among them [Armenians](#) living in northern Syria, especially in and around the now decimated city [Aleppo](#) where historically a large population of Armenians have lived for centuries. The genocide is not over in the minds and actions of many who still hate Armenians. Responding to last April’s attack, Turkish President Recep Erdogan [vowed](#), “We will support Azerbaijan to the end!” Not only did the Turkish president love Azeris killing Armenians, but in the broader context of the geopolitics chessboard, the Azeri attacks on Armenians had the tacit approval of the United States government as well.

Regime change queen Victoria [Nuland](#), the foul mouthed neocon who was Hillary’s State Department Undersecretary for Europe and Eurasia, credited with engineering the illegal [Ukraine coup](#) three years ago this month, had visited Azerbaijan last year shortly ahead of the five day war in April, sniffing out regime change color revolutions in the Caucasus, no doubt targeting Armenia to destabilize and deliver payback to Putin. After all, the Russian leader had singlehandedly [humiliated](#) and upended Empire’s Great Game (aka regime change) in Syria where Putin’s intervention coming to the requested aid of much maligned President Assad was turning [the tide](#) against the terrorists the [US created](#). Together Syria, with a contingent from Iran’s Revolutionary Guard, Hezbollah, Syrian Kurds and Russian air cover protection, Empire’s secret proxy war mercenary ally ISIS and al Qaeda were getting their [asses kicked](#). So the Nuland neocons were busily worming their way into enflaming the Caucasus on Russia’s Chechnya-Dagestan doorstep in a subversive ploy to force Putin’s hand away from eliminating what’s left of the US Empire’s secret killing machine that thanks to the neocons have become the world’s largest terrorist organization.

Nothing new here, Islamic jihadist terrorists had been a longtime USA creation and proxy companion, starting with globalists Brezhenski and George HW’s CIA in the late 1970’s deployed in the empire graveyard [Afghanistan](#) to fight the Russians throughout the [1980’s](#), helping to break up their Soviet empire, then onto [Yugoslavia](#) throughout the 1990’s to “balkanize” that nation into a half dozen broken pieces, then using 19 more jihadists as phantom patsy [fall guys](#) for the Cheney-Bush “[new Pearl Harbor](#)” 9/11 false flag and then, to this day as fake enemies in the neocons’ “[endless war on terror](#)” in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen and beyond. Treasonous presidents and their minions have yet to be brought to justice for all their egregious crimes against humanity that include the death of over [4 million Muslims](#). And throughout, Putin has outwitted, outclassed, and out-maneuvered the US Empire and its savage bedfellows at every turn.

Thus, in the broader sense, the Armenians, deemed pro-Russian loyalists by Washington, have been a targeted barrier [hindering](#) Empire expansion. On the other hand, seeing [dollar signs](#), the US and Azerbaijan have curried mutual favor, and as such, Empire’s “closeness” with Armenia’s historic Muslim enemies, supporting [oil-rich](#) Azerbaijan and geo-strategic rich Turkey has never been closer. The US has exploited this dynamic, knowing both nations are frothing at the mouth to finish the genocide against Armenians started a century ago. Flanked by large hostile populations, Turkey to the west (approaching [80 million](#)) and

Azerbaijan to the east (near [10 million](#)), both having sealed off their borders preventing any trade routes into Armenia (pop. 3.8 million), Armenia and its defiant little enclave Artsakh have always been a bloody thorn in their side. So after last year's military defeat, Baku figured the time is right in 2017 to imprison Alexander Lapshin for his audacity to publicly speak out through his writings exposing Azerbaijan's horrific human rights record and gross injustice toward the Artsakh Armenians.

To the controlling evildoers of the world, the moral conscience of every truth speaking journalist must be silenced as authoritarian tyranny increasingly takes hold on this planet. And even though Lapshin is both a Russian and Israeli citizen, Azerbaijan in collusion with fellow two decade dictator Belarus President Alyaksandr [Lukashenka](#), figure their [cozily cordial](#) business relationships with both [Moscow](#) and [Tel Aviv](#) shouldn't get in the way of either nation coming to the rescue of one defiant journalist who captured the wrath of King Aliyev... I mean President Aliyev, who inherited his dictatorship from his [dictator daddy](#) after running the country from 1993-2003.

After the authorities in Minsk arrested Lapshin, the Belarusian president [stated](#):

He [Lapshin] was detained in accordance with an Interpol decision, and according to the law we have to pass him to Azerbaijan.

But it appears that Lukashenka lied, merely passing the buck as an [Interpol](#) spokesman later confirmed that Interpol had nothing to do with the Lapshin arrest in Belarus.

[Russian](#) and [Armenian](#) commentators are suggesting that the authoritarian Belarus president may be using Lapshin as a political football aimed mostly at Putin but Armenia too, and a jab at the Collective Security Treaty Organization's ([CSTO](#)) disunity, which Russia, Armenia, Belarus and Azerbaijan are all members. Additionally, according to the Russian Federation Constitution, a Russian citizen cannot be [extradited](#) from another country. Yet Belarus defied Russian law.

Lapshin had refused to delete his blogs and said his being blacklisted was "[nonsense](#)." Displaying such public defiance and moral conviction was an affront to Azerbaijan's tyrannical dictatorship. The human rights records in both [Belarus](#) and [Azerbaijan](#) where imprisoning and/or killing truth-telling journalists is commonplace, and rank among the worst in the entire world. So it is that when the Belarus Supreme Court [upheld](#) Azerbaijan's extradition order this week, delivering the journalist to Baku last Tuesday, Aliyev took time out of his busy dictator schedule to personally thank the Belarusian president's "fair stance" with a [phone call](#).

Prior to extradition a spokesman for the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic [stated](#):

Azerbaijan wishes to achieve the extradition of a citizen of a foreign state, to try [him] on a fictitious 'crime;' this is a gross violation of international law and international humanitarian law.

In response to Lapshin being extradited and now in Azeri custody, the Republic of Armenia spokesman [remarked](#) that:

Alexander Lapshin's persecution and his extradition to Azerbaijan amount to a gross violation of the freedom of speech and movement and fundamental human rights.

What neither Aliyev nor Lukashenka are counting on is the outpouring of support for the journalist and [condemnation](#) toward Belarus and Azerbaijan from the international community reacting to his extradition, imprisonment and soon to begin trial. Rallies of support and protest began last month in [Yerevan](#) outside the Belarus Embassy, but quickly spread to Armenian Americans protesting outside Belarus Embassies in [New York](#) and Washington as well, also in Canberra, [Australia](#) too. The Armenian Diaspora around the world is mobilizing efforts to bring needed awareness worldwide and mounting pressures for justice to this flagrant case of in-the-world's-face oppression. Also support from fellow Russian and Israeli citizens is expected. International and national laws grant journalists the freedom of expression and mobility. And with free press not so free any more in both the US and world these days, this case is not going away any time soon, and nations like Azerbaijan and Belarus will only alienate themselves further from the rest of the world.

The big question remains will Putin and Netanyahu intervene on one of their own citizen's behalf or is the weapons for oil trade more important than right from wrong? If only a feeble, going-through-the-motions attempt through diplomatic channels are made by Russia and Israel to assuage worldwide public outrage, and the journalist rots away in an Azeri jail cell for the next [thirteen years](#), which by the bogus Baku laws Lapshin's been framed, he could actually do, then shame on the three host nations where Lapshin holds citizenship, but especially shame on Belarus and the main perpetrator Azerbaijan.

If Lapshin is not released soon, it's time to review extradition laws. The Azeri axe-murdering [Ramil Safarov](#) in 2004 took the life of an Armenian soldier while sleeping in his bunk during a joint training exercise in Hungary, and then shortly afterwards received a hero's [welcome](#) home by President Aliyev. Should Safarov ever leave Azerbaijan, he needs to be sent directly to Armenia to stand trial and meet his overdue punishment for a far worse crime than speaking the truth.

This legal case of course brings to the international attention once again the long overdue plight of the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Armenian people. Last century's [genocide](#) wiped out one third of all Armenians off the face of this earth at the hands of the Turks in the closing days of the Ottoman Empire during World War I (1915-1917), setting up the now century old, largely unknown conflict that's been brewing still unresolved for the last 100 years.

The Artsakh ombudsman predicts that the Lapshin case will backfire and increase interest and [support](#) towards recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh Republic's independence. As the ugly truth about Azerbaijan spreads, and the truth about the people of Artsakh grows, gradually an increasing number of individual leaders, states and nations are coming around to [recognizing](#) the Republic's hard-earned, long overdue independence. And in parallel process, so is the genocide issue being recognized. After last April's attack on the Artsakh Armenians, political leaders around the world including several from both Europe and America began calling for international recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh as an independent and sovereign state.

People of conscience know that is the right thing to do. Oil-rich Azerbaijan's purchase of sophisticated [kamikaze drone](#) technology and [Iron Dome](#) missile system from Israel and the latest state of the art high powered weaponry from its biggest arms dealer [Russia](#) are just waiting for the day when it can overpower the tiny Armenian enclave, and by bloody force once again retake the small turf in the rural mountainous region, purely out of spite and hatred toward a peaceful religious people who have always just wanted what has been, by

any moral judgment, rightfully theirs all along.

Though the economically strapped Republic of Armenia has supplied Artsakh with whatever modest means available militarily for their Armenian brothers and sisters in the enclave to defend themselves, perhaps next time the Azeris strike, it won't be enough. Though Russia has a military base in Armenia and on credit loans, sells military [hardware](#) to Yerevan, supplying arms to the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan that both opposing sides use to kill each other, Putin has not offered any financial or military aid to Nagorno-Karabakh, and has remained neutral in the forever conflict, despite the Russians being responsible for originally causing the conflict a century ago.

Outside the 3.8 million Armenians living in the Republic of Armenia where just over one third of all the world's [10 million](#) Armenians reside, Russia's Armenian population of 2.2 million is the largest within the Diaspora. Next comes America as home to the world's third largest Armenian population at 1.4 million. Despite the genocide that forced Armenians to spread themselves thin throughout the globe, as an enterprising, hardworking people in their numerous host countries, they have achieved great [success](#) in the arts as well as the social and economic life of their nations. Ironically, Armenians inside Armenia have not fared so well as they continue to struggle living in one of the [poorest](#) former Soviet states. When it comes to the geopolitics chessboard game of world domination, Armenia and Armenians have had very little power [to stop](#) the larger destructive forces that, over time, have always worked against them.

In contrast, US and Western oil interests have invested [billions](#) in producing and shipping Azerbaijani oil and gas through pipelines built at higher cost and many more miles around Armenian borders, through Georgia to Turkey and onto Europe as another way to undercut Europe's dependence on Russian gas. The fallen oil prices have hurt the Azeri economy and caused internal turmoil under Aliyev's increasing totalitarian dictatorship. Aliyev has willfully used the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to raise nationalism to help offset his political and economic instability. The presence of the Armenian people and their borders have imposed an inconvenient and costly obstacle to ambitious Western-Azeri pipeline expansion.

Issues of legal cases against Turkey seeking [reparations](#) for the slaughter of Armenian people, stealing their wealth and lands a century ago, or Armenians' diehard persistence combating continued injustice, or facing the onslaught of negative publicity, collateral damage and legal [challenges](#) from the international community resulting from the unlawful, unethical extradition and imprisonment of one defiantly moral journalist, certainly do not rank high on any globalist powerbroker's to-do list. Nor does the Artsakh or Armenia cause for that matter.

Despite having a Russian [military base](#) in Armenia and moving a [Russian S-400](#) missile defense system to the Armenian border with Turkey during the height of Putin and Erdogan's strained relations last year, critics amongst both the Armenian and Russian communities claim that even Putin regards the Armenian Question as an inconvenient liability. Speculative dialogue arose during the Azeri-Armenian clash last spring when Putin [critics](#) expected him to live up to the defense pact alliance he has with Yerevan to rush to the aid of the Armenians, especially after Azeri shelling hit border towns in the Republic of [Armenia](#). Putin's defense pact does not apply to Artsakh. Also complaints were heard that as the main arms supplier to both Armenia and Azerbaijan, at least Putin should provide [parity](#) in weapons capability that due to Azeri oil money in recent years has tilted decidedly in Azerbaijan's favor.

With a Russian citizen now languishing inside an Azeri jail cell set to stand trial in a Baku kangaroo court, unable to receive a fair and impartial trial, again critics feel that Putin should have applied his full court pressure to Russian vassals Belarus and Azerbaijan and prevented this international spectacle from ever taking place. They contend that redemption now can only be accommodated by pulling rank on Aliyev to send Lapshin home to Moscow. But at this point that would only cause the Azeri dictator to seriously lose face before the world. And with Putin still [courting](#) Aliyev in the ongoing balance of power tug-of-war between East and West, Putin doesn't want to risk losing Azeri favor, especially now that his relations with Azerbaijan's strongest ally Turkey have only been recently [restored](#). Next month Putin meets with Erdogan. Strong arming Aliyev for Lapshin's release is not likely in the cards either.

Just as the US constantly makes up lies to discredit and demonize its designated enemies like [Putin](#), and does so with complete impunity, other despotic nations like Azerbaijan follow Empire's lead. And though Aliyev has no moral grounds to justify punishing a foreign journalist for speaking the truth, the Azeri tyrant believes he'll get away with his unjust crime with complicit US backing. Aliyev assessed the risk was worth taking because Putin already has his hands full in Ukraine and Syria, and warding off incessant propaganda attacks from the West. Aliyev figures he has capital that can be used against Putin's vested interest in preserving "friendlier" business relations with Azerbaijan. And he's probably correct.

In the global chessboard game where so much is in flux and at stake in this world right now, one man's fate over one relatively "minor" hotspot Nagorno-Karabakh, amidst other bigger hotspots that include escalating proxy wars unfolding in [Ukraine](#), Syria and [Yemen](#), that in turn are ratcheting up border tensions and hostilities between the West and Putin and his strongest Eastern allies [China](#) and [Iran](#), the big picture may cause Lapshin to not be a high enough priority for Putin to forcefully react on his behalf. And don't count on Bibi to save Alexander either. In the meantime, the world will be closely watching what happens in the Baku courtroom. And if Alexander Lapshin is destined to spend the next dozen plus years sitting behind bars, the voices for justice will only grow infinitely louder in the world court of public opinion.

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