

THE NAGORNO KARABAKH CONFLICT AND AZERI POLICIES, 1988-1994

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Abstract:

The Nagorno Karabakh problem is the longest-running conflict in the former Soviet Union. This problem and the Armenian occupation of Azerbaijan's territories deeply influenced the Azerbaijanian and Armenian domestic policies. The Armenian expansionist policies against Azerbaijan created one of the most touching human tragedies of the modern times. Because of the conflict in Karabakh, revival of Azerbaijani nationalism gained a great momentum. On the other hand, this problem negatively influenced Azerbaijani governments causing them to be coercive and corrupt. Although there were great expectations that Azerbaijan would achieve serious successes to improve its democracy and economic growth in relation with the country's promising human and economic sources, outbreak of an armed conflict with the Armenians, and Armenian occupation of considerable part of the Azerbaijani territories prevented these expectations to be realized. This paper mainly scrutinizes the Nagorno Karabakh conflict and Armenian occupation of Azerbaijani territories in the context of Azerbaijan's domestic policies.

Keywords:

Karabakh, APF, Elchibey, 'Black January', CIS, Armenian Occupation, Armenian Atrocities, OSCE-Minsk Group, Bishkek Protocol

INTRODUCTION

The Armenians have always dreamed of establishing a greater Armenia, one claiming ancient Armenian territory and drawing broader borders from east and south Turkey to deep into the Caucasus. When they realized that they could not achieve this dream by themselves, they looked for foreign assistance. The Russian Empire became the Armenians' big brother to restore their historical territories. When Russia invaded Eastern Turkey at the beginning of World War I, the Armenian nationalists joined the Russian invasion. When Russia was forced

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to withdraw, many Armenians withdrew from the Russian troops and settled in, what are today's known, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Armenian casualties during the war created a deep national grievance, one kept alive during the following generations both among the Armenians in Armenia and in Diaspora. These historical hatreds resurfaced before the Soviet Union's disintegration.

When the Bolshevik revolution occurred, the Armenians, particularly in Azerbaijan, not in Armenia, had supported the Bolsheviks. Despite the Armenians expected a lot from Moscow, the Soviets created an Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR), being the smallest of all Soviet republics.

The breezes of Glastnost created ethnic problems and territorial claim storms in Azerbaijan. With the beginning of Glastnost, Azeris found themselves in an ethnic clash with the Armenians over the Armenian enclave of Nagorno Karabakh in Azerbaijan. History is above everything in Caucasus politics. Unresolved ethnic clashes create problems, and history often repeats itself. Primordial ideologies appeal to the rights of nations to do so. In this sense, as early as in 1987, Gorbachev's advisor, Abel G. Aganbegian, an ethnic Armenian, announced that both Karabakh and Nahchevan were part of the historic Armenian territory and these territories should be given to Armenia.¹ In February 1988, Armenian demonstrations took place in Nagorno Karabakh and in Yerevan for Nagorno Karabakh's secession from Azerbaijan. On July 12, the Armenian Karabakh Soviet unilaterally declared its secession from Azerbaijan. Moscow did not recognize this declaration and formed a special commission to improve Karabakh's autonomous status.

Armenian territorial claims created nationalistic reactions in Azerbaijan. Azeri intellectuals started a propaganda campaign, claiming that Karabakh was historically Azeri territory and that the enclave was economically linked to Azerbaijan. Due to rising ethnic problems, the Azeris began to leave Armenia and Karabakh, generally pouring into the port cities of Baku and Sumgayit. Azeri refugees increased the tension, and anti-Armenian riots broke out in March 1988 in Sumgayit, resulting in 26 Armenian and 6 Azeri casualties.

¹ Audrey L. Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1992), p. 156.

Mass public protests started in Baku from November 17, 1988. The Azeri and Soviet governments were ineffective in solving ethnic problems. No violence occurred during the protests, and the meetings continued until December 4th, when Azeri police forces cracked down on the demonstrations.² The number of demonstrators reached half a million during the day and 20,000 at night.³ Demonstrations were led by individuals, because at that time there was no political organization to undertake this task. People took responsibility for the country's integrity and filled Lenin Square in Baku. Nemat Penakov became a leading figure in the demonstrations, and people titled him 'son of the people.'⁴ Nemat Penakov was a 26-year-old worker in Baku and appeared to be the 'Lech Walesa of Azerbaijan.'⁵

NATIONAL REVIVAL IN AZERBAIJAN

Armenian claims to Karabakh were the driving force behind the creation of a new mass national movement in Azerbaijan.⁶ Nationalist publications and publications about Azeri history greatly increased during the Glastnost period. Azeris made some adjustments against Armenian claims that the Armenians in Karabakh were not indigenous people. Rather, they were the Armenians, who came from Turkey and Iran. They argued that Stalin deported some 100,000 Azeris from Armenia in 1948. Even Gorbachev reminded the Armenians that before the Revolution Azeris had comprised forty-three percent of the population of Yerevan.⁷

Besides making these historical interpretations, Azeri intellectuals revived their national values. First, Azeri Turkish gradually replaced Russian in the schools. Bahtiyar Vahabzade, one of Azerbaijan's prominent poets, argued that although Azeri Turkish theoretically enjoys the status of the Republic's state language, in practice it had not been used for conducting official business for fifty years. He argued that a man who does not know

² Alstadt, *The Azerbaijani* ... , pp. 201-202.

³ Elizabeth Fuller, *RL (Radio Liberty)* 70/89, January 31, 1989.

⁴ Elizabeth Fuller, *RL (Radio Liberty)* 70/89, January 31, 1989.

⁵ Tamara Dragadze, 'Azerbaijanis' *The Nationalities Question in the Soviet Union*, (London & New York: 1990), p. 168.

⁶ 'Interview with Tadeusz Swietochowski', *Uncaptive Minds*, Spring 1991, p. 6.

⁷ Dragadze, *Azerbaijanis* ... , p. 167.

his own language should not be provided with a job.⁸ Vahapzade attracted public attention to the establishment of the Azeri Popular Front, which would lead the people in national policies.

During the spring of 1989, after being released from prison, seven activists, who had joined the protests created the Azerbaijan People's Front (APF). The government recognized this underground organization in October. Tevfik Gasimov, one of the founders of the APF, said that the main goal of the APF was to gain political and economic sovereignty for the Azeri republic within the framework of the Soviet Union. The APF believed that Perestroika would make the Soviet Union more democratic and that the republics would obtain full autonomy, with the Soviet Union becoming a union of independent states. Gasimov said that, because of this speculation they naively affirmed their desire to remain within the Soviet Union.⁹

The APF's leader, Ebulfeyz Elchibey, defined the Front's movement as a mass one, with a democratic and national character. According to Elchibey, there was no class struggle. Rather, the problem was a struggle between the Azeri Communist Party and the rest of society. In the summer of 1989, the APF party program included human and civil rights, free elections, the political and economic sovereignty of Azeris in Azerbaijan, the equality of all nationalities, and the protection of all cultural freedoms.¹⁰

In 1989, some other short-lived political organizations -such as Birlik (Unification), Dirilish (Resurgence), Kizilbash, People's Front, the Social Democratic Organization, and National Salvation Organization- were formed. Birlik, the second-most popular organization after APF, pursued the policies of unifying Soviet Azerbaijan with Iranian Azerbaijan as one country. Dirilish aimed to revive pan-Islamist and pan-Turkist sentiments.

An intellectual circle that emerged from the Communist intellectual circle established the APF. But, the organization shared no political commonalties with the Communists. Indeed, the APF adamantly criticized the Communist government and led public

⁸ Yasin Aslan, Elizabeth Fuller, *RL* 104/89, February 1989.

⁹ 'The War Against the Azeri Popular Front: An Interview with Tevfik Gasimov', *Uncaptive Minds*, November-December 1990, p. 12.

¹⁰ Alstadt, *The Azerbaijani ...*, p. 205.

protests against it. The APF started massive strikes all over the country, and railway transportation between Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia was cut. APF partisans launched attacks on the governmental building and seized power in Celalabad and Lenkoran, close to the Iranian border. The APF intensified its actions on the issue of Iranian Azerbaijan. The Front compared the Soviet-Iranian border with the Berlin Wall.

The APF organized a series of meetings throughout the Republic to call for the easing of restrictions on crossing the border with Iran. Hundreds of Azeris camped out on both sides of the border for nearly a month, waiting for a chance to see relatives. Eventually, angry mobs pulled down border fences and guard posts. Then, they crossed the border from both sides.¹¹ Since 1939, the border with Iran was closed, due to the APF's pressure; Soviet authorities negotiated with Iran to reopen the border at the end of 1988.¹²

The strikes ended after the APF's negotiations with the Azeri government. After these negotiations, the government recognized the APF, and it was agreed that the rail stoppage would soon be ended in return for some concessions, including the Azeri Communist Party's support for demands that Azeri Turks in Armenia be granted autonomy comparable with that of Armenians in Karabakh.¹³

Azeris' determination to keep Nagorno Karabakh integrated with Azerbaijan forged support for APF. In August, having mass public support, the APF imposed a railway blockade against Armenia and Karabakh. At the end of 1989, Armenians in Karabakh organized meetings to protest the Azeri blockade. On January 15, 1990, Russia sent around 17.000 additional troops to Karabakh to enforce the state of emergency. Russian troops virtually controlled the Karabakh and patrolled the Armenian-Azerbaijani border.¹⁴

The Armenians increased their military attacks in Karabakh, and the number of Azeri refugees from Karabakh and Armenia dramatically increased in Azerbaijan. The APF organized public

¹¹ Ronald Grigor Suny, 'On the Road to Independence; Cultural Cohesion and Ethnic Revival in a Multinational Society', *Transcaucasia, Nationalism and Social Change*, p. 384.

¹² 'The War ...', p. 13.

¹³ Alstadt, *The Azerbaijani...*, p. 206.

¹⁴ 'Azerbaijan, Seven Years of Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh', Human Rights Watch, Helsinki, December 1994 by Human Right Watch, printed in the United States of America, p. 9.

protests in Baku. On January 13, 1990, hundreds of thousands of people joined the APF's rally in Baku, and the people called for the resignation of the Azeri Communist Party first secretary, Abdurrahman Vezirov, and for a referendum on the secession of Azerbaijan from the USSR.¹⁵ Gorbachev decided to send Soviet troops to Baku in order to ease the tension in the city. Actually, Gorbachev aimed to crush the nationalist APF by sending troops. On January 20, 1990, Soviet troops entered Baku and killed around 160 people, mostly civilians. The Azeris reacted strongly to Moscow's invasion, calling it 'Black January.' Although, the Soviets authorities had imposed a curfew, but thousands of Azeris gathered to protest the Soviet invasion. An estimated 100,000 of Azerbaijan's 380,000 Communist Party members destroyed their party membership cards during these meetings. In opposition to Gorbachev's plan, public support for the APF drastically increased after the invasion.

After the Baku invasion, Moscow replaced Azeri Communist Party first secretary Vezirov with Ayaz Muttalibov. Instead of embracing Glastnost and Perestroika, Azeri political life remained set in the ways of the early 1980s. The APF had little effect on the Azeri government's politics. Azerbaijan was politically the most conservative of the Trans-Caucasian republics. When the August coup took place against Gorbachev, Muttalibov was visiting Iran and announced to the Iranian media that he supported the coup. When the coup failed, he denied that he had supported it and sent a congratulatory telegram to Yeltsin.¹⁶

After the coup, however, Muttalibov remained a conservative Communist, but he changed his political agenda. Azerbaijan's territorial integrity was the most important goal of his agenda. Muttalibov sought economic autonomy and the possibility of secession from the USSR. With mixed feelings about Azerbaijan's future in the Communist Party and among the people, Azerbaijan declared its independence on August 20, 1991. Interestingly, in 1989, when some Azeri intellectuals were asked about when they thought that Azerbaijan would become independent, most answered sometime after the year 2000. They did not imagine that the country would be independent two years later.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Fuller, *RL* 55/90, January 24, 1990.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Fuller, *RL* 320/91, August 28, 1991.

In this period, the Communist Party was fully in power, and the opposition was not able to challenge the party's rule. Because of growing ethnic problems and Armenian territorial claims, the people defended their own rights through public rallies and strikes, not trusting that the Communist government of Azerbaijan would solve the problems.

The people's consciousness about their future was important in Azeri politics. Demonstrations and the search for political opposition paved the way for the establishment of the APF. But the Front was more reactionary rather than presenting its own agenda and programs. Generally, the opposition was willing to share the power to solve the country's problems but the opposition did not know how to deal with problems. Because of this uncertainty, some established opposition political organizations lived short.

AZERI POLITICS AFTER INDEPENDENCE AND NAGORNO KARABAKH PROBLEM

After independence, the Communist Party of Azerbaijan and the Azeri nomenklatura survived under new names. Some democratic changes in name but not in essence granted legal rights to the Communists in the newly independent Republic. The ruling Communist power paid lip service to democracy and the opposition groups. But, growing ethnic conflicts with the Armenians and quickly deteriorating economic conditions made the opposition stronger and more demanding.

After independence, Azerbaijan adopted a presidential form of government. Hence the office of first secretary of the Azerbaijan Communist Party re-emerged as that of president. And the Communist Party apparatus became the presidential apparatus. In September 1990, a parliamentary poll was conducted to elect the members of the Azerbaijan Soviet. The APF protested this poll because it was held under a state of emergency. The Communist Party won ninety-one percent of the 360 seats.¹⁷ Parallel to the continued Soviet political traditions, the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan acted as a parliamentary legislative body with its 360 members, and the Council of the Ministries took on the role of a cabinet.

¹⁷ Dilip Hiro, 'The Emergence of Multi-Party Politics in the Southern Caucasus: Azerbaijan', *Perspectives on Central Asia*, Vol. 2, No. 11, (Internet version.)

In September 1991, Muttalibov was elected as president in a non-contested presidential poll. He won ninety-eight percent of the votes, with a seventy percent turnout.¹⁸ The APF contested the fairness of the presidential election. The state of emergency still in force prevented a just election process. Muttalibov also joined the CIS, thereby undermining the great opposition from the APF not to join the commonwealth.

After the formal disintegration of the Soviet Union in December 1991, the Russian troops left Karabakh leaving their weapons and arsenal in the region in favor of the Armenians. Therefore, armed clashes between the Armenians and the Azeris intensified and these clashes turned into a full-scale war in 1992. Pouring Russian weapons, Russian troops and combatant groups fighting on Armenian side in the war, seriously strengthened Armenian military and political position against the Azeris.

In November 1991, due to firm public demands in taking some concrete actions towards the Karabakh problem, the Azerbaijani parliament abolished Nagorno-Karabakh's status of autonomous oblast. In exchange, the Nagorno-Karabakh parliament responded the Azeri parliament's decision holding a referendum of independence from Azerbaijan that this decision was supported by Karabakh Armenians. Therefore, on January 6, 1992, the Nagorno-Karabakh parliament took an illegal action, and declared independence from Azerbaijan.¹⁹

Because of the Azeri military and political defeat in Karabakh and massive opposition pressure, Muttalibov dissolved the parliament in early 1992 and appointed a fifty-member National Council that was divided equally between the Communists and the Popular Front. Due to the Soviet legacy, the separation of power between legislative and executive branches of the government was blurred. Important decisions were made by the presidential apparatus and by the Council of the Ministers, diminishing the role of the National Council in the government. In fact, all important political decisions were made by presidential decrees.²⁰ After independence, the new Azeri constitution was also adopted. This

¹⁸ Hiro, *The Emergence ...*

¹⁹ *Azerbaijan ...*, p. 9.

²⁰ Lale Larissa Wiesner, *Privatization in Previously Centrally Planned Economies: The Case of Azerbaijan*, (Frankfurt, Berlin, New York: European University Studies, 1997), p. 133.

constitution was the updated version of the 1978 Azeri Constitution, supplemented by the Declaration of Independence. This updated Soviet type of constitution gave the legitimate right to the president to act supremely over the parliament.

The opposition seriously pressured the Muttalibov government, when the Armenians massacred some 1000 Azeris in Hocali in March 1992. The APF made Muttalibov responsible for this massacre, because of his negligence in supporting the Azeris against the Armenian attacks. Russia took advantage of the Azeri defeat of the Armenians and forced Azerbaijan to sign the Collective Defense Treaty of CIS. Muttalibov was willing to sign this agreement, allowing Russian troops to solve the military conflict with Armenia. Muttalibov's attitude in signing the defense treaty created severe APF-led anti-government protests in Azerbaijan. On May 15, 1992, anti-government protestors took over the parliament, state television, and the presidential palace,²¹ forcing Muttalibov to resign. Under these tremendous pressures, Muttalibov indeed resigned and fled to Moscow. An interim APF government was formed under the leadership of the chair of the National Council, Etibar Memedov, until the previously scheduled presidential elections could be held one month later.

On June 7, 1992, the first democratic presidential election took place in Azerbaijan, and the APF's leader, Ebulfeyz Elchibey, won the contested election, gaining sixty percent of the vote. Elchibey's election program included the liberation of Karabakh in six months, the establishment of true democracy, the granting of human rights, and the secularization of the nation. In addition, new parliamentary and local elections were promised. Elchibey favored defense alliances with Turkey and the US, and he pledged to withdraw Azerbaijan from the CIS.²²

Elchibey proposed a pure democratic government in Azerbaijan. His ideals could not be achieved because of a lack of democratic traditions in the nation and strong Russian and Iranian opposition to the Azeri government. In October, Elchibey withdrew Azerbaijan from the CIS. He alienated Russia and Iran. This alienation resulted in a significant decrease of oil exports to these countries. Elchibey's radical political changes and a lack of administrative, political, and diplomatic skills, along with his pan-

²¹ Lexis-Nexis Country Profile, 'Azerbaijan.'

²² Hiro, *The Emergence ...*

Turkism alienated him from other nations. The failure of Turkey and the Western democracies to support his government left him alone at home and in the international arena.

In June 1992, the Azeri forces started a large scale offensive against the Geranboi (Shaumian) region of Azerbaijan and Mardakert in Nagorno-Karabakh. Azeri forces achieved military successes and took back 80% of Mardakert territories. In February 1993, the Karabakh Armenians started offensive in the Mardakert region and recaptured the places, where were taken back by Azeris. The Armenian counter-offensive advanced in Azerbaijani territories including Agdam and Fizuli. Azeri defeat was certain and the defeat created turmoil in the country.

Armenian offensive opened another bloody chapter in the war. The Karabakh Armenians with support of the Armenians in Armenia and the Russians waged a 'blitzkrieg' between March 27 and April 5 and invaded Kelbajar province. Before the offensive, around 60.000 Azeris lived in Kelbajar. Beginning by March 29, Karabakh Armenian forces with assistance from Armenia encircled the city for surrender. Heavy Armenian artillery and fired rockets from the territories of Armenian Republic ruined the city. The Azeri government burdened a great task airlifting remaining Azeri victims with its limited number of helicopters. Rescuing the victims and flying over the Murov mountains was very risky and dangerous. Armenian military campaign forced entire Muslim population to flee their homes or to face the massacres. The Murov Mountains were the only connection to Azerbaijan from Kelbajar. Thousands tried to pass the treacherous mountains to find a safe haven in Azerbaijan. Many of them perished and were killed by Armenian artillery and gunshots on their painful journey. Finally, the Armenians cleansed all Muslim population from Kelbajar leaving it empty and looted.²³ Great number of Azeris took refuge in the mountains and tried to survive under harsh conditions.²⁴

When the Armenians captured Azeri towns Fuzuli, Qubatlí and Zangelan, similar faith caught the Azeris who lived in those towns. Like Kelbajar, those towns were also deserted and their residents were either killed or forced to leave their homes. The results of the

²³ *Azerbaijan, ...*, p. 12.

²⁴ *Azerbaijan, ...*, p. 16.

Armenian offensive were catastrophic for Azerbaijan. On May 1, 1993, Azeri officials reported that there were some 546.000 registered refugees and displaced persons in the republic.²⁵

In February, the APF government criticized Colonel Surat Huseinov, who commanded the Azeri army in the war that he amateurishly organized the defense against the Armenian attacks and accused him ordering military withdrawal from the region. Huseinov, then, lost his commanding position.²⁶ In June 1993, Suret Huseinov, a former colonel and wool merchant, led a military rebellion against the popularly elected Elchibey.²⁷ His military base was in Gence, and in mid-June his forces gained control of Baku. Elchibey was forced to flee to Nahchevan. Therefore, the Elchibey government lasted only for a year. The communists prepared this coup and Huseinov's troops used arms against Elchibey, which were handed over to the communists, when the Soviet troops had invaded Baku in January 1990. On June 30, 1993, the military junta invited Haydar Aliiev, the president of Nahchevan district, to establish his rule in Baku. In a return to his presidency, Aliiev appointed the rebel Huseinov prime minister as well as defense, national security, and interior minister.

The failure of the Elchibey government in such a short time stemmed from various political reasons. As it was true in Elchibey's case, establishment of democratic institutions is not easy in after the reign of the totalitarian regimes. Three months before his election, when he was not even yet a candidate, Elchibey said in a speech to the parliament that 'the president you elect in three months will be overthrown in a year because the state we live in today is only deserving of a president who can be kept in power by force. We need to create structures that can protect a president and prevent him from turning into a dictator. If we fail to create such structures, whoever you elect as president will destroy himself or be destroyed by those nearest to him.'²⁸ Elchibey clearly defined hardship in the establishment of democracy in a country that had long totalitarian regime.

The Azeri people earlier had represented an admirable political and democratic unity in claiming their national rights. The Azeri

²⁵ *Azerbaijan, ...*, p. 17.

²⁶ *Azerbaijan, ...*, p. 11.

²⁷ Lexis-Nexis, 'Surat Huseynov.'

²⁸ Thomas Goltz, *Azerbaijan Diary*, (New York, London: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), p. 28.

people, who opposed the Communist government of Azerbaijan, created and supported the APF and finally ousted the Communists from power and elected Elchibey. Interestingly, the people became tired of politics. The people, who elected Elchibey, did not support him against the coup. However, hundreds of thousands of Azeris used to gather in the streets to protest the authoritarian regime; they kept their silence during the coup, and, moreover, supported the Aliev presidency. The main theme of this public attitude was a growing sentiment that life was better under Communist rule. Now their lives were ruined. The people also happened to believe that an authoritarian regime could solve Azerbaijan's mammoth problems. Aliev was also very credible and trusted among the people, and the people realized that Aliev was the only leader, who could solve the military conflict with Armenia and growing economic problems. Beginning with the Aliev government, the people become more pacified in politics. Oppositional political movements, however, grew.

ARMENIAN OCCUPATIONS, AZERBAIJAN AND INTERNATIONAL REACTIONS

Armenian atrocities and invasion of Azeri territories disturbed regional, European powers and the United States. First OSCE - Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe- tried for a cease-fire. Minsk Group talks between February 25-March 2 raised hopes that peace initials would success. Russia and Turkey volunteered to mediate the peace talks. On April 21, Azerbaijan and Armenia agreed to continue work on the OSCE Minsk Group peace process. With Turkey's great effort, on April 30, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 822, which called for cease-fire, the withdrawal of all occupying forces from the Kelbajar region. In exchange, Azerbaijan would end the energy blockade. Armenia and Azerbaijan accepted the Resolution but the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians refused it. The Nagorno-Karabakh State Defense Committee Robert Kocharian stated that the Resolution was not in the interest of the Karabakh Armenians. The Karabakh Armenians eventually did not accept the resolution but Azerbaijan declared a unilateral cease-fire on May 24.²⁹

Under the pressure of Ter-Petrosyan, Kocharian tended to accept the plan to evacuate from occupied Azeri territories in

²⁹ *Azerbaijan, ...*, p. 17.

exchange some guarantees for the Karabakh Armenians, but, eventually, Kocharian challenged all peace initials of OSCE and UN and Armenian forces seized another Azeri territory, Agdam, taking advantage of weak internal Azeri political position after the coup against Elchibey.³⁰ After a month long severe fights, on July 23, 1993, the Armenians captured Agdam with its 50.000 people. Although, Colonel Huseinov announced that he would personally lead the Azeri troops to save Agdam, his effort had no impact to save the city. As usual, the Armenians looted and burned Agdam and neighboring villages.

On July 29, 1993, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 853 regarding the Armenian-Azeri fighting. The Resolution condemned seizure of Agdam and called on all parties to cease supplying weapons to the belligerent sides, especially to the Armenians, because, military assistances by third parties, especially by Armenia and Russia, intensified the fighting and resulted the continuation of the occupation of Azeri territories. The resolution also called on the Armenia to use its influence with the Karabakh authorities to comply the UN resolutions and Minsk Group initiatives. The Resolution also called for the lifting of all economic and energy blockades in the region.³¹

Azerbaijan once again immediately announced the acceptance of the UN Resolution, but Karabakh Armenians denied the resolution declaring that the decision was biased and favored Azerbaijan. The Nagorno Karabakh authorities also claimed that OSCE Minsk Group tried to brand Karabakh aggressor while omitting Azeri aggression.³² Therefore, the Karabakh Armenians denounced the UN Resolution and continued occupation of more Azerbaijani territories.

On August 20, Fizuli fell to Armenians. After Fizuli, on August 31, the Karabakh forces, supported with Armenian troops, advanced in Azeri territories as far as within twenty kilometers of the Iranian border. Armenian military advance in Azerbaijan created tremendous situation for Azeri civilians. Helsinki Report on Karabakh stated that 'The Azeris displaced in the August 1993 offensive were trapped between the Araks River (the Iranian border) to the south, hostile Armenia to the west, and Karabakh

³⁰ *Azerbaijan, ...*, p. 17.

³¹ *Azerbaijan, ...*, p. 24.

³² *Azerbaijan, ...*, p. 24.

Armenian forces advancing from the north. Only a thin finger of land stretched along the Araks River towards the east and safety, but Karabakh Armenian forces shelled it from time to time. Artillery fire even fell on Iranian territory.³³

In August 1993, the ICRC reported that some 60.000 people were fleeing from Fizuli and Jebrayil to seek refuge in regions unaffected by the fighting. A reporter for Christian Science Monitor described the Azeri victims' exodus saying 'since the offensive began; the narrow road has been jammed with trucks and carts piled high with livestock and furniture. In fields alongside the roadside, just twenty miles from the fighting, thousands of refugees have set up makeshift homes.'³⁴

After recent Armenian offensive, some 60.000 refugees poured into Azeri town Imishli. The Azeri government, fearing social unrests, blocked the roads to prevent refugees to go Baku. The Iranian government agreed to establish a camp in Azerbaijan for 100.000 people. Turkey also immediately sent humanitarian aid and Turkish Red Crescent set up camps. The Saudi government also participated relief efforts.³⁵

After the latest offensive, regional powers and UN announced its serious concerns about Armenian aggression. On August 18, the UN Security Council condemned Armenian attack on Fizuli and demanded a stop to all attacks and cease of all hostilities. This time, Iran, traditional ally of the Armenians, also strongly warned the Armenians. Tehran based Kayhan International stated that if the Armenians continued the offensive, for sure, the government would adopt vigilant policies to halt Armenian offensive, which seriously threatened Iran's border security. Iranian Foreign Ministry and military authorities expressed their disturbance of Armenian offensive.

Turkey severely criticized Armenian policies and Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Çiller warned the Armenians that Turkey would not watch the happenings with its arms crossed. Turkey also started to reinforce the Armenian border. Interestingly major humanitarian goods came to Armenia via Turkey. According to the agreement with France and US, Turkey allowed mass shipment of Armenian

³³ *Azerbaijan, ...*, p. 29.

³⁴ *Azerbaijan, ...*, p. 30.

³⁵ *Azerbaijan, ...*, p. 30

aid materials through Turkey. But in April 1993, after the Karabakh Armenians with Armenians from Armenia and Russians seized Kelbajar and committed atrocities in the province, Turkey cut supply routes.

Amid of Armenian turbulence in the region, Russia started its own peace initial. Despite Russia politically supported Armenians and materially furnished the Armenian troops, removal of Elchibey regime and increasing Turkish and Iranian involvement into the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, urged Russia to take steps for a constructive peace implementation. On September 13, 1993, bilateral Azerbaijani-Karabakh talks were held in Moscow. During the talks, a cease-fire was declared by two sides but, as it happened before, the Armenians broke the cease-fire.³⁶

Armenian disobedience of the cease-fire harnessed new waves of fights. This time, Azeris were helped by outside groups. On October 21, Afghan 'mujahadeen' mercenaries attacked Armenian troops in Jebrayil. Armenian troops started counter attack and occupied Zangelan province. Thus, they succeeded to cut the thin strip of land along the Araks River that this land was the only route for the Azeris to escape to Azerbaijan. Armenians also captured strategic town of Horadiz on the Iranian border. The Armenian troops saved no Azeris in the town. They were either killed or they succeeded to flee to Iran. Because the Armenians destroyed the bridge on the Araks, which was main gate to enter into Iran, the Azeris had to cross the river. Many were drowned and Armenian troops frequently shelled the refugees who were trying to swim across the Araks River.³⁷ At the end, some 60.000 Azeris poured into Iran. Some 500.000 Azeris who lived in Armenian captured Azeri territories other than Karabakh, were uprooted and they became refugees.³⁸

At the end, the Karabakh Armenian forces occupied twenty to twenty-five percent of Azerbaijan's territories. Human Rights Watch reported in 1994 that 'Because 1993 witnessed unrelenting Karabakh Armenian offensives against the Azerbaijani provinces surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh, the vast majority of the violations during this period were direct result of these offensive actions. The

³⁶ Azerbaijan, ... , p. 31.

³⁷ Azerbaijan, ... , p. 31.

³⁸ Azerbaijan, ... , p. 35.

Armenia did not only militarily support the Karabakh Armenians, but also the country even released the prisoners and sent them to Azerbaijan to fight.

Azeri civilian population was expelled from all areas captured by Karabakh Armenian forces, Azeri civilians caught by advancing Karabakh Armenian forces during their offensives of 1993 were taken hostage and many Azeris were killed by indiscriminate fire as they attempted to escape.

Wide-scale looting and destruction of civilian property accompanied these actions. Some instances of looting and pillaging, such as in Agdam, an Azeri city of some 50.000 that fell to Karabakh Armenian forces in July 1993, were organized and planned by the authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh.³⁹

By mid-December 1993, Azerbaijan started a general offensive. Since June 1992, the Armenians for the first time were forced to retreat. Azerbaijani forces achieved impressive successes and took back some strategic places such as Horadiz, heights around Agdam and Mardakert. The Azeri forces pushed the Armenians south of Murov Mountains.

Azeri military successes created a panic in Karabakh and Armenia. While maximum age of compulsory conscription was increased from forty-three to fifty in Karabakh, calls were often made for volunteers in Karabakh, Armenia and in Diaspora. As if Armenia was not part of the war, after Azerbaijan's recent military success, Armenian President Ter-Petrosyan announced that if the Karabakh Armenians were faced with forced deportation or genocide, regular Armenian army forces would be deployed in the fighting.⁴⁰ Despite in every occasion, Armenia denied its participation, however, this country actively participated in the war sending troops and heavy weaponry. Moreover, some artillery fires came from Armenian territories. Armenia did not only militarily support the Karabakh Armenians, but also the country even released the prisoners and sent them to Azerbaijan to fight.⁴¹ It was not secret for western observers, journalists and human right workers to see and observe that each day thousands of armed

³⁹ Azerbaijan, ... , p. 4.

⁴⁰ Azerbaijan, ... , p 36.

⁴¹ Azerbaijan, ... , p. 47.

The Armenians occupied twenty-five percent of Azeri territory -seventy percent of Azeri arable land- and created some one million refugees.

Armenian troops poured into occupied Azerbaijani territories. The Republic of Armenia sent its police forces to perform police duties in occupied Azerbaijan.⁴² On April 26, 1994, Ashot Bleyan, an outspoken Armenian parliamentarian, accused the Armenian government of conducting an undeclared war. According to Bleyan, only during the last three or four months more than 1.000 Armenian youths were killed.⁴³

By mid-February, 1994, the Karabakh Armenians and troops from Armenia started a counter offensive. In short, they took back almost entire Azerbaijani territories, where were taken back by Azeri forces in their latest offensive. This fighting produced another 50.000 Azeri refugees.⁴⁴

In 1994 due to Armenian occupation of Karabakh and other Azerbaijani territories some 800.0000 Azeris became refugees. On the other hand, around 350.000 Armenians fled Azerbaijan since the Azeri land became hostile for the Armenians.⁴⁵ But these Armenians left Azerbaijan before the war when Azerbaijan did not declare her independence yet. Azerbaijani government burdened a great task to help refugees with its very limited budget. Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia established refugee camps through the country. The refugees lived in bad conditions, and according to the Azeri authorities, only five to ten percent of refugees were employed.⁴⁶

Neither democracy nor economic hardship occupied the most important central position for the Azeri public. The war with Armenia and the consequences of that war were the main public consideration. The Armenians occupied twenty-five percent of Azeri territory -seventy percent of Azeri arable land- and created some one million refugees. One out of seven Azeris became refugees in Azerbaijan. A million refugees poured into the Azeri

⁴² *Azerbaijan, ...*, p. 49.

⁴³ *Azerbaijan, ...*, p. 48.

⁴⁴ *Azerbaijan, ...*, p. 36.

⁴⁵ *Azerbaijan, ...*, p. 43.

⁴⁶ *Azerbaijan, ...*, p.45.

towns and lived in the streets, in the open air, in tents, and even in caves without any running water, electricity, food, and medicine. The unemployment rate was one hundred percent in some refugee camps. Former U.S. national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski described the situation in Azerbaijan as one of the worst for refugees anywhere in the world.

It is an interesting point that Azerbaijan, whose population was two times bigger than Armenia's and had great natural and economic resources, actually lost the war against Armenia. The reason was strikingly odd in the Azeri case. As the historian Tadeusz Swietochowski said, Azerbaijan was a country without any friends. Russia militarily supported Armenia against Azerbaijan because the country was pursuing pro-Turkish, pro-Western policies under Elchibey's presidency. When Azerbaijan refused to sign the Collective Defense Agreement of CIS and even withdrew from CIS, Armenia and Russia signed some defense agreements and Russia established military bases in Armenia. Russian troops began to protect Armenian borders. Additionally, the Westerners helped Armenia. As the Washington Post correspondent in Azerbaijan, Thomas Goltz, said, the West speculated that Armenia was a Christian island in a sea of Muslims, and an outpost of Western civilization surrounded by backwardness. In this sense, Armenian and Russian atrocities in Azerbaijan did not gain popularity in the Western press and the public. The Armenian military advance in Azerbaijan with the Russian military support did not bother the West until the oil issue became popular in the West.

Elchibey, however, pursued pro-Turkish and pro-Western policies; he did not have considerable support from Turkey and the West. Turkey hesitated to enter into conflict with Russia in the Caucasus, and to give military support to Azerbaijan. In 1991, a well-equipped Armenian militia numbering around 100,000 existed, but there was no counterpart in Azerbaijan. The establishment of the Azeri military took a long time and was always hampered by shortage of material.

Armenia received an enormous amount of help from the European Union, the United States, IMF, and the World Bank. Armenia received the second largest amount of American foreign aid per capita. Due to Armenian military aggression, Azerbaijan closed its border with Armenia and blocked Armenia's landlocked economic supply lines. Then, Turkey closed its border with

Armenia, leaving the country with enormous economic problems. Azerbaijan's policy created a reaction in international politics. At the beginning of the 1990s, 18 countries, including the US, Israel, South Korea, and Canada, imposed a trade embargo against Azerbaijan. These countries refused to import Azeri goods and refused economic help. The United States helped to enforce this embargo long, even though American oil firms get the lion's share of Azeri oil projects, and even Azerbaijan excluded Iran in the oil deals at America's request.

According to Helsinki Human Watch Report of 1994, US Congress' Karabakh policies manipulated by domestic policies, which was greatly influenced by the Armenian lobby. According to Freedom Support Act of 1992 the Congress denied all kinds of aid to Azerbaijan, unless this country respected international human rights standards, abandoned its blockade of Armenia, ceased its use of force against Karabakh and Armenia, and sought a peaceful solution to the conflict. Azerbaijan was only former Soviet republics that US denied aid. But US government granted abundant assistance to Armenia. By 1994, total US governmental aid to Armenia reached to 335 million dollars.⁴⁷

Despite the victimization of Azerbaijan, the stupidity in the American Congress continued. Like a century ago because of biased and distorted news by missionaries and by propaganda officers had led public opinion and policy makers wrongly, the American Congress proved the traditional continuation of stereotype beliefs for Muslim societies. As usual, in any conflict between the Muslims and the Christian societies, the west simultaneously blamed the Muslims. The Azeris were not different and they had similar treat at the Congress. In February 1993, Rep. David Bonior of Michigan prepared a resolution to condemn Azerbaijan for its blockade of Armenia. When the Clinton administration sent a bill to the Congress to lift air restrictions of Azerbaijan, there was a great opposition against the bill. In March 1994, Democrat representative Dick Sweet of New Hampshire represented the ignorant and the bias American policies when he talked against the bill. He strongly urged that US had to retain the prohibition on American assistance to Azerbaijan 'until Azerbaijani troops cease their occupation of Nagorno Karabakh and stop their

⁴⁷ *Azerbaijan, ...*, p. 52.

aggressive actions against the republic of Armenia.⁴⁸ Perhaps Mr. Sweet did not know that Karabakh was Azerbaijani territory and it was occupied by Armenians with support of Armenian Republic and Russia. Mr. Sweet also was not aware that in 1994, no Azeri troops were in Karabakh, however, the Armenians seized a bulk of Azerbaijani territory other than Karabakh. Maybe he knew the truth but did not speak the truth because of some personal political gains on the expense of misleading American foreign policies.

The State Department adopted a balanced approach to the problem and usually condemned both sides. The Clinton Administration supported Russian led OSCE Minsk Group peace negotiations and Clinton stated that if both sides agreed, the US was positive in sending Russian troops to the region for peace keeping.⁴⁹

ALIEV'S PRESIDENCY

Haydar Aliev was Azerbaijan's most popular political leader. Beginning in 1969, Aliev became the first secretary of the Azeri Communist Party and ruled Azerbaijan for 18 years. During his rule, Azerbaijan succeeded in achieving some industrial and economic goals, and Aliev was rewarded from Moscow for these outstanding successes. When he developed the economy in the republic, he permitted widespread political corruption. A close associate of Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, Aliev also became a member of the Central Committee of the CPSU in 1971 and a full member of the Politburo in 1983. Then he became deputy prime minister of the Soviet Union. He was the first ethnic Turkic, who ever gained such high political office in the Soviet Union. In 1987, Gorbachev ousted him from his prestigious party post. After staying three years in Moscow, Aliev turned back to his hometown of Nahchevan and acted as president of the autonomous Nahchevan district. Aliev could not run in the 1992 presidential elections because he was 69 years old. According to the Azeri election rules, presidential candidates could not be older than 65.

In October 1993, Aliev was elected as president in a non-contested race. Aliev scored 99 percent of the vote with an official claim of 90 percent voter turnout. Some Western diplomats

⁴⁸ *Azerbaijan, ...*, p. 53.

⁴⁹ *Azerbaijan, ...*, p. 53.

announced that the turnout was actually around 50 percent.⁵⁰ Aliev began to distribute the governmental posts to former Communists. Fifty seats of the Azeri Parliament (Milli Mejlis) were held by former Communists.

On November 12, 1995, the elections were held for Azerbaijan's 124 seat new Parliament. The deputies would be elected for five years. According to the electoral law, 25 of the 125 seats of the Mejlis would be elected by a party list and 100 from a single-member district. Interestingly, however, almost a half percent of the Azeri population lived in the Baku district, and only 26 seats were elected from this district, because opposition was better organized in this district. Ninety-nine came from the regional areas.⁵¹ The elections were boycotted by the opposition because most of the opposition parties were closed down. Before the elections, Aliev reinstated several parties, which had been closed down earlier -including the APF, the Communist Party, and the Social Democratic Party. The bans on the Islamic Party and the Independent Democratic Party led by Leyla Yunusova were not lifted.

In the elections, twelve parties ran, but Aliev's New Azerbaijan Party gained 54 seats in the parliament. The Popular Front and National Independence parties each gained 4 seats. Non-affiliated party candidates won 55 seats in the parliament, and the remaining seats were shared among six parties. In February 1996, the parliamentary elections were repeated for 15 seats, and the New Azerbaijan Party increased its seats to 67 in these elections. Finally, ninety percent of Azeri parliament members were either from Aliev's Party or were friendly and loyal to Aliev, even if they ran independently. According to international observers, the elections did not meet international 'free-and-fair' standards.⁵²

ALIEV'S POLICIES

Aliev's political priority was to end the war with Armenia. The devastating results of the war would never let Azerbaijan deal with the country's other problems. Aliyev first established an

⁵⁰ Hiro, *The Emergence ...*

⁵¹ EIU, 'The Economist Intelligence Unit Country Report Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan', (London: 1995), p. 32.

⁵² 'Report on the U.S. Helsinki Commission Delegation to Georgia and Azerbaijan, April 22-23, 1996.' (Washington: Commission on Security Cooperation in Europe 1996), p. 6.

authoritarian regime, pressuring the opposition and imposing censorship on the press, and then warmed up relations with Russia. Aliev calculated on the presence of Russian help in finishing the war, Azerbaijan's rejoining the CIS, and the signing of the Defense Treaty. The Armenians still had occupied 20 percent of Azeri territory, which was four times larger than Nagorno Karabakh, and the Armenians were marching on Nahchevan in order to invade the district. Turkey and Iran strongly warned Armenia that if Armenia attacked Nahchevan, Turkey and Iran would enter the war and repel the Armenians from their borders with Nahchevan. Aliev started an offensive to force the Armenians to make peace. His offensive was successful at the beginning, but eventually failed to push back the Armenian military.

In September 1993, the legislature in Baku voted 31 to 13, with one abstention, to rejoin the CIS, but opposed further membership in the CIS. It did not favor the Defense Treaty. Parallel to Aliev's new policies, Azerbaijan gave oil concessions to Russian Lukoil in order to gain Moscow's confidence.

By May 1994, fighting became cool and fierce was over. Russia started another peace initiative. In May 1994, with Yeltsin and Nazarbayev's mediation, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Karabakh signed the Bishkek protocol, calling for cease-fire and the beginning of troop withdrawals. As a result of Russian effort, on June 27, 1994, the defense ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan and the head of Nagorno Karabakh's armed forces signed a cease-fire. On September 8, Aliyev and Ter-Petrosyan participated closed-door talks in Moscow under Russian auspices to find a solution to the problem.⁵³ In 1994, OSCE meeting in Budapest, the Karabakh Armenians were accepted to be negotiators besides Azerbaijan and Armenia. In 1994 CIS countries, except Armenia, signed a memorandum that CIS states would be respectful to member countries' territorial integrity and national sovereignty. These principles were reemphasized in Almati in February 1995. In Azerbaijan and Armenia, the opposition denounced the agreement, claiming that their presidents sold out the national interests. In Armenia, growing ultra-nationalist opposition forced Levon Terpetrosian, who was seeking to settle the problems with Azerbaijan and Turkey, to resign.

⁵³ *Azerbaijan, ...*, p. 36.

After signing the cease-fire with Armenia, Aliev pursued a comprehensive balance of politics between Russia and Turkey and the West. Aliev was anxious about the growing Russian influence in Azerbaijan and in the Trans-Caucasus. Russia stirred the ethnic conflicts in order to send its troops to the region and to gain military and political influence over the regional states. Because of ethnic problems, Russia sent troops to Georgia and Armenia, but Azerbaijan resisted Russia to receive Russian troops.

Because of the Chechen war in 1994, Russia closed its border with Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan's major oil export route was cut. Because of this incident, Azerbaijan began to trade with Iran, Turkey, and the West more than with Russia and the former Soviet republics. In time, Azerbaijan's dependence on Russia was greatly reduced, and this opportunity allowed Aliev to begin political maneuvers against Moscow.

Beginning in 1994, Azerbaijan wanted to improve its relations with the West and the Middle Eastern countries. Azerbaijan signed the NATO Partnership for Peace, giving Azerbaijan associate status. Aliev visited some Middle Eastern countries in order to develop relations with these nations. But Azerbaijan's warming relations with Turkey, America, and Israel bothered Iran. In exchange, Iran signed an economic cooperation agreement with Turkmenistan and Armenia in September 1995. Iranian foreign minister Ali Ekber Velayeti described it as a sign of the deep political understanding among the three. Iran became the second biggest trading partner of Armenia after Russia. This agreement dissatisfied Aliev, and he soured relations with Iran. Because of Iran's close ties with Armenia and Russia and because of the US pressure, Azerbaijan excluded Iran in oil negotiations.

The mistrust between Baku and Moscow led to open accusations on both sides. The Aliev government openly accused Moscow of interfering in Azeri domestic policies, supporting opposition and underground organizations that prepared coup attempts and an assassination attempt against Aliev. Baku openly accused the coup leader Huseinov, who was formerly Aliev's protector and prime minister, of being a Russian agent. In turn, Moscow accused Baku of supporting rebel Chechens and sending military aid. Azerbaijan and Georgia often complained about the Russian troops in Armenia and large Russian arms sales to this country. According to Aliev, Russia had 40,000 troops in Armenia, and sold sophisticated weapons to this country, including missile

systems capable of carrying nuclear warheads, shoulder-mounted anti-aircraft missiles, and even S-300 missiles. Aliev repeatedly called on Moscow to withdraw its troops from Armenia and stop arms sales to this country.⁵⁴

CONCLUSION

The Karabakh problem is the longest-running conflict in the former Soviet Union. After 1992, the Armenians enlarged their military operations area including the Azeri-populated areas around Nagorno-Karabakh. This war cost some 25.000 soldiers and civilians and uprooted more than a million people from their places.

The Karabakh problem greatly influenced both Azeri and Armenian domestic policies. In Armenia, the Karabakh Committee, which promoted idea of an independent Karabakh, was renamed as Armenian National Movement and its leader Levon Ter-Petrosyan first became the chairman of the Armenian Supreme Soviet, and later, he became Armenia's president. Robert Kocharian, who was head of the Karabakh Armenian forces, followed the same path. In Azerbaijan, the Karabakh problem popularized the APF and its leader Elchibey was elected as Azerbaijan's president. Then, war conditions replaced Elchibey with Aliev in Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan's international alienation and Armenian military successes created political chaos in the country, and this problem was one of the reasons why democratic institutions did not develop in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan's dependency to the regional powers, especially to Russia, and ostensible Russian assistance to the Armenians weakened the country's position against Armenian expansionism. When Armenian military movements advanced in Azerbaijan territories, Azeri politics became much more unstable and coups, plots followed one another helping Azeri governments being more strict and corrupt. Since the Armenian occupation of Azeri territories did not cease, Azerbaijan's political disorder continued parallel to the continuation of the Armenian occupation. Expected economic growth of Azerbaijan, because of the country's vast natural resources and agricultural potential, is also not achieved because of the political outcomes of the war with

⁵⁴ *Azerbaijan, ...*, p. 1.

Armenians and Armenian occupation. First of all, Russia and the west are responsible to encourage and assist the Armenian expansionism, undermining Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. While Russia economically and militarily supported Armenia and Karabakh Armenians, United States and Europe also poured variety of assistance to Armenia.