



THE ARMENIAN CAUSE

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20 years and counting

As it has been 20 years since the autonomous region of Nagorno Karabagh voted to separate from Azerbaijan on July 12, 1988 through a decision held by regional authorities. The editorial board of The Armenian Cause felt it would only be natural to dedicate this edition to the current status of the Republic of Nagorno Karabagh.

It was proclaimed as such on September 2, 1991. Though this de facto independent state is still unrecognized internationally, though we believe this attitude is due for a review.

Indeed, recent developments on the international stage should change the attitude of the world community with regards to recognizing Karabagh as an independent state.

With the decision taken by the free world regarding Kosovo, we think that international policy makers have finally begun to realize the importance of self-determination vs. territorial integrity of sovereign states. It is even more so for the countries that had their borders arbitrarily drawn for past geo-political expediency.

The old territorial integrity excuse for sovereign nations to remain with their borders unchanged has already been discarded by the defenders of self-determination when it came to recognizing Kosovo's independence.

In this context, the (highly objectionable, if not fictitious) territorial integrity of Azerbaijan becomes irrelevant when the right to self-determination of the people of Karabagh is the issue. Certainly, Azerbaijan does continue to play the territorial integrity card, which, up to date, has been considered untouchable by the international community. It would be hypocritical to apply one set of rules for Kosovo and another for Karabagh.

It is hypocritical to condemn everything Stalin has done, but when it comes to the arbitrary inclusion of Nagorno Karabagh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia in artificial redrawn borders, the same critics accept the specific acts of Stalin for political expediency.

Moreover, the principle and right to self-determination is included in the United Nations Charter and also has been repeatedly recognized in a series of UN resolutions.

Nagorno Karabagh has more rights for independence than the other unrecognized republics or Kosovo, since Nagorno Karabagh has already been an autonomous oblast before its independence. That autonomous state was given to Nagorno Karabagh in 1921,

when Stalin gave the region to Azerbaijan in an ill-conceived gesture to Kemal Ataturk, even though the Revolutionary Committee of Azerbaijan had already recognized Nagorno Karabagh, with its 94 per cent Armenian population, was part of Armenia.

For the past 20 years, the Republic has been functioning as an independent state with no ties to Azerbaijan whatsoever. The ties were abruptly broken from Azerbaijan since 1989, when the latter imposed a blockade, which continues to date. A similar one is imposed by Turkey on Armenia. The economic hardships resulting from the blockade are intended to provide leverage for Azerbaijan in negotiations. The result has been the emergence of a de facto state, completely independent of Azerbaijan, which still hopes to annexe it. The Nagorno Karabagh Republic stands out as a success story, despite the efforts of Azeris and the neglect of the international community.

As for Armenia, though blockaded and living the aftermath of a devastating earthquake in 1988, it managed to resettle more than 260,000 refugees from Azerbaijan, fleeing pogroms that same year. Some were brought to Armenia, some to Nagorno Karabagh and some to Russia. In 2005, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees reported that Armenia was granting citizenship and was attempting to provide housing in different parts of Armenia. This is in contrast to Azerbaijani authorities, who have forced their own refugees to live in camps in considerable hardship in oil-rich Azerbaijan. They are clearly being used as pawns in a political chess game.

Historically, Nagorno Karabagh has never been part of Azerbaijan until its artificial annexation by Stalin in 1921. Its population, overwhelmingly Armenian, remained stubbornly unchanged despite Azeri efforts to cleanse the area ethnically.

Another recent development is the tragic outcome of the military efforts of the forceful takeover of South Ossetia in Georgia. We cannot but compare the situations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia with that of Nagorno Karabagh.

A truce signed since 1994 separates the Nagorno Karabagh Republic, plus a defensible security zone, from Azerbaijan, along a cease-fire line. Worrisome recent statements by Azeri authorities to take military action against the Republic are another reason for us to review the situation of Nagorno Karabagh.

History of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabagh)

Nagorno-Karabagh (the historical Artsakh) occupies the eastern and the south eastern mountainous and foothill regions of the Caucasus Minor, constituting the north eastern part of the Armenian plateau. It archly stretches from the mountains, surrounding from the east basin of Lake Sevan, to the south east, as far as the river Yeraskh (Araks).

Liberation Struggle

PRINCIPALITIES OF ARTSAKH

The history of the Armenian people abounds in the episodes of struggles with a foreign domination. Located at the confluence of different civilizations and having an exceptional geographical position, the Armenian plateau was constantly subjected to invasions. The people carried on a continuous struggle for restoration of its native land, its lost nationhood, freedoms and rights. The Armenian people of Artsakh played a part in this struggle, and during certain stages of history, it appeared in the role of leader for the national liberation movement.

NAGORNO-KARABAGH 1918-1920

1918-1920 marks one of the difficult periods of the centuries-old history of the Karabagh Armenians. It was in those years that the ancient Armenian region of Artsakh was turned into the subject of "territorial debates."

The struggle for self-determination of the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabagh saw dramatic developments during the establishment of the Soviet rule in the Transcaucasus. On April 28, 1920, Soviet rule was established in Azerbaijan, but this did not impact the Azerbaijani policies of 1918-1920 towards Nagorno-Karabagh.

On April 29, the next day after Soviet rule was es-

tablished in Azerbaijan, the Foreign Commissar (Foreign Minister) of Soviet Azerbaijan, Huseinov, sent the following note to the Republic of Armenia: "On behalf of the government of workers and peasants of the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijani Republic, the Revolutionary Committee demands first of all that your armed forces leave the territory of Karabagh and Zangezur."

This note confirms that the government of Soviet Azerbaijan inherited the principles of the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic's aggressive policy. According to the Bolshevik's plan of "exporting the revolution," the leadership of the Red Army demanded from the Commander of the Armed Forces of Karabagh-Zangezur, Drastamat Kanayan (Dro), that they leave Karabagh. In case of non-compliance with this demand, the armed confrontation between Armenia and Azerbaijan was inevitable. In this case the Red Army and the armed forces of Soviet Azerbaijan would have to act jointly against the Republic of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabagh.

THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM FROM THE AZSSR (1923-1988)

The authorities of Azerbaijan SSR systematically and persistently violated the rights and interests of the Armenian population of the Nagorno-Karabagh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) during the entire time it was under Azeri rule. Azerbaijan treated Nagorno-

Enriched with oil money, Azerbaijan has been spending enormous amounts to upgrade its army and threatening to use it. Whether such rhetoric is for domestic political consumption or based on actual plans remains to be seen.

All the war mongering should stress the necessity of keeping the defence lines unaltered, since the present configuration of the frontline is optimal for the security of Armenian towns. Should Nagorno Karabagh concede any of the security zones to Azerbaijan, the frontline between Armenia and Azerbaijan will be considerably longer and less defensible. Moreover, the towns in Nagorno Karabagh, as well as border towns in Armenia, will find themselves unprotected in the face of possible massive shelling.

Our concerns persist despite a tripartite agreement between Armenia, Russia and Azerbaijan signed November 2, 2008 aiming for a "peaceful" solution, and even despite Azerbaijan's less aggressive and less arrogant attitude in front of Russia. We are very conscious that Azeri government rituals will always fall back along the same lines eventually.

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Karabagh primarily as a source for raw materials. Its policy of discrimination against Nagorno-Karabagh was aimed at artificial suppression of its social-economic development and active de-Armenization. Armenian monuments and cultural artefacts were destroyed or presented as of Azeri origin. Trying to avoid the plight of once-Armenian Nakhichevan, the Armenian population of which had dropped from 60 per cent (at the time of the creation of Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic) to 1.5 per cent according to the census of 1953 and later disappeared, the Armenians of Karabagh never abandoned their intent to restore historic justice and to secede from Azerbaijan, seeing secession as the only guarantee for their secure future.

The struggle took different forms and used various methods despite Azerbaijan's efforts to crush it. As early as the 1920s, the Central Committee of the Communist Party (CCCP) of Azerbaijan was forced to discuss issues pertaining to the Karabagh movement. Many leaders of NKAO and its regions were accused of nationalism and repressed during the 1920s and 30s.

Attempts were made to raise the Nagorno-Karabagh issue before the central authorities of the USSR after WWII: in 1945, 1965, 1967 and 1977. Representatives of the people of Nagorno-Karabagh appealed with numerous letters and petitions to Moscow. The petition of 1965 was signed by 45,000 people. Based on this petition, the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) ordered the CCCPs of Armenia and Azerbaijan to jointly investigate the Nagorno-Karabagh problem. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan once again torpedoed the possible resolution of the problem, finding support among some influential leaders of the USSR.

The Azerbaijani authorities provoked ethnic clashes. In the course of crushing popular protests, Azerbaijani authorities forced more than 100 families to leave Karabagh due to persecutions, which lasted for two subsequent years. These acts were initiated and implemented by then KGB secretary, former Azerbaijani President and father of the current president, Heydar Aliyev.

1988

The Perestroika declared by the General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, Mikhail Gorbachev, laid the grounds for liberalization of the political regime in the USSR. It was perceived by the people of Karabagh as an opportunity to correct the mistakes of the past. This is why the people of Nagorno-Karabagh were hoping for a democratic solution to the problem and practical implementation of norms of international law in the interethnic relations.

Mass pogroms and murders of Armenians on February 27 to 29, 1988, in the Azeri town of Sumgait, situated hundreds of miles away from Nagorno-Karabagh, became the continuation of Azerbaijan's official policy of hindering the possibility of a just solution for Karabagh. Leaders of factories and organiza-

tions ordered their workers to attend anti-Armenian rallies, leading to three days of massacres and pogroms where dozens of Armenians were murdered, many with extreme cruelty. Hundreds were injured and subjected to rape, torture and persecution. Eighteen thousand became refugees...

1989

Considering the difficult situation at hand, for the first time in the history of the USSR, the central authorities introduced a special form of governance in NKAO effective January 12, 1989.

Blockaded by Azerbaijan and with no direct access to Armenia, NKAO was practically isolated from the outside world. Food, fuel and construction materials stopped entering NKAO, thus closing down the majority of the industrial enterprises, transport and agricultural machinery, whereas the harvest could not be exported. The population was on the verge of famine.

1990

The campaign of ethnic cleansing continued in the capital of Azerbaijan SSR, Baku, which resulted in the murder of hundreds of Armenians and the creation of a new wave of refugees. The cruelty of the Sumgait pogroms was matched in Baku, where people were burned alive, stabbed and beaten to death. Instances of cannibalism were also reported. Realizing that the central authorities were not taking action to stop the massacre of the Armenian population, the Popular Front of Azerbaijan, which was formed in 1989 as an opposition party, with the silent consent of the official authorities, organized an armed assault on the Armenian villages of Shahumian and Khanlar. On the border of Armenia and Azerbaijan, military operations began.

THE WAR OF 1991-1994

From the beginning of 1991, Azerbaijan embarked on attacking the Armenian population of both the Nagorno-Karabagh and Shahumian regions, whereas an edict by then Azerbaijan president, Ajaz Motalibov, led to the distribution in the Shahumian region of leaflets containing an ultimatum demand that the Armenian people should leave the bounds of Nagorno-Karabagh at the earliest possible date.

The aim of the Azerbaijani leadership was obvious: to liquidate another Armenian district, deporting its indigenous inhabitants and repopulating the Armenian villages with Azeris. During that time, the Shahumian district had twenty thousand inhabitants, 82 per cent were Armenians.

On January 22, the Special Forces of Azerbaijan refused entry to a group of deputies from the RSFSR Supreme Soviet who had arrived to study the situation. The deputies had arrived under the instructions of the Russian Supreme Soviet and were sent back to Baku.

This punitive act taken against the Armenians in late April and early May of 1991 involved the forces of

the USSR Ministry of the Interior together with Azerbaijani special militia detachments. On the pretext of a "passport check," an unprecedented action of State terror was carried out with the aim of destroying the nerve centre of the Movement and annihilating national unity. The male population was taken out to an unknown location where a "passport check" took place accompanied with brutality, looting and robbery. During three days, the population of 24 Karabagh villages were subjected to similar treatment and deportation. More than 100 people were killed and several hundred more were taken hostage. Two of the villages were in the Khanlar district, three in the Shahumian district, 15 in the Gadрут district and four in the Shushi district.

The Azerbaijani leadership continued its policy of deportation of the Armenian population, justifying this deportation as voluntary departures. These actions were accompanied with atrocities, including torture, murder, looting, banditry, brutality and violence.

The mediation initiative of then Russian President Boris Yeltsin did not lead to the improvement of the situation in Nagorno-Karabagh. On the contrary, Azeris rapidly escalated the bombardment and attacks on Armenian populated areas.

Meanwhile, in Baku, anti-Armenian riots were organized with the Azerbaijani Popular Front, making calls to create a regular army to capture Karabagh.

On November 28, a resolution by the USSR Committee of Constitutional Supervision condemned the Azerbaijani legislative body act as a violation of the status of NKAO, which was sealed by the USSR constitution.

The most important stage in the national liberation struggle of the Karabagh people became the all-republican referendum, held on December 10, 1991. Nine-eight per cent of participants voted in favour of independence of the Nagorno-Karabagh Republic. On December 28, despite constant bombardment by the Azerbaijani Army, elections for the Supreme Soviet of the republic were carried out in the NKR. On January 6, 1992, the NKR newly elected legislative body, proceeding from the essential right of people to self-determination and based on the Nagorno-Karabagh peoples' will expressed through a referendum, adopted the Declaration of NKR Independence.

Taking advantage of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan proceeded to escalate wide-scale military offensives against Nagorno-Karabagh. The Azeri populated villages surrounding Stepanakert, were turned into large military bases from which by means of artillery guns the capital of the republic was being methodically destroyed. The shelling by 40-barrelled missile rocket launchers "Grad" of Armenian districts began, and as a result, many people, including children were killed. "Grad" is a weapon of mass elimination, the use of which against civilian population is forbidden by numerous international conventions.

Azeris were equipped with modern military equipment and weapons including aircraft many of which

were flown by foreign mercenaries. Early in 1992, the arsenal of the Azeri armed forces was considerably increased at the expense of the captured warehouses of the Transcaucasian military district of the former Soviet Army, located in the territory of Azerbaijan, where thousands of carriages with ammunition were stored. As military experts asserted, there was enough arsenal to carry out intensive military offences for at least a year.

1992

On the first day of 1992, from the territory of Agdam, Azerbaijani troops accompanied by ten tanks and ATC (armoured troop carriers) attacked the Armenian village of Khramort and burned it. The NKR capital Stepanakert and Armenian villages were subjected to further and constant intensive shelling.

The escalation of military offensives compelled the NKR to organize and improve its defence. With that end in view, detachments on a volunteer basis were being created throughout Artsakh. A headquarters of the self-defence forces was created to centralize and coordinate these operations. At the beginning of the year, more than ten companies and platoons existed, comprising more than 1000 people. This became one of the important steps of creating a regular army. On the night of January 21-22, 1992, the headquarters of Azerbaijani OMON was eliminated in Stepanakert. A few weeks later, firing points adjacent to the NKR capital were destroyed. Nevertheless, the situation continued to remain extremely dense. From the enemy firing point, practically located along the full length of the Azerbaijan-Armenia border, long range weapons operated, causing mass destruction and high casualty rates amongst the people.

One of the primary tasks of the Artsakh self-defence forces was the removal and destruction of the enemy's bridgehead at Khojaly. Here there was a considerable contingent of manpower, a great quantity of military equipment. It was essential to reopen the corridor that linked the settlement of Askeran with the capital Stepanakert and also to regain control of the republic's airport, which was in Azeri hands.

On February 25, the Artsakh self-defence detachments, taking up a position in the west of Khojaly, demanded that the enemies leave the military base and allow the civilians through the established corridor.

Ayaz Mutabilov, then president of Azerbaijan, confessed that the "corridor was established by the Armenians to let the civilian inhabitants through." (The *Nexavisamaya Gazette*, April 2, 1992). Meanwhile, the Azeri service men acted in another way, using the inhabitants in the village as a shield, they resumed bombardment of the NKR populated points, and when they were compelled to leave the village, they themselves shot the civilian inhabitants. The same Mutabilov connected this unprecedented criminal action with the Azerbaijani Popular Opposition Front's efforts to remove him from office, putting the whole responsibility for what had happened on him.

PROCLAMATION

THE NAGORNO-KARABAGH REPUBLIC WITHIN THE BORDERS OF THE CURRENT NAGORNO-KARABAGH AUTONOMOUS OBLAST AND NEIGHBOURING SHAHUMIAN REAGION. (Abr. NKR)

The Nagorno Karabagh Republic enjoys the authorities given to Republics by the USSR Constitution and legislation and reserves the right to decide independently the issue of its state-legal status based on political consultations and negotiations with the leadership of the Union and Republics.

The USSR Constitution and legislation, as well as other laws currently in force, which do not contradict the goals and principles of this Declaration and peculiarities of the Republic apply on the territory of the Nagorno Karabagh Republic, until the NKR Constitution and laws are adopted.

**Joint session of the
Nagorno Karabagh Oblast
and Shahumian regional councils
of people's deputies
with the participation of deputies
of councils of all levels**

September 2, 1991

From the town of Shushi, towering above Stepanakert, the sustained rocket-artillery bombardment of the NKR capital and other populated points were carried throughout the days and nights that followed. On May 7, the Azeri infantry, backed with military helicopters, embarked on an assault against the Karabagh defence positions in the southeast of Stepanakert.

The self-defence force command made a decision to neutralize the strong points of the enemy in these inhabited localities. On May 8, in the evening, the Artsakh self-defence sub-units assumed an offensive, taking the Shushi-Lachin main road under their control. By noon, the defence of Shushi from the north and south had been broken. As a result of street battles, the Armenian formations had taken control of the central quarters of the town. By May 9, Shushi was entirely liberated.

Meanwhile the enemy was preparing for a wide-scale military operation. On June 12, Azerbaijani troops embarked on an offensive in the north-eastern, eastern and south eastern sectors of the front with practically, the whole weight of the Azerbaijani military. With the help of armour equipment, Grad multiple missile rocket launchers and aircraft, the enemy was able to capture the whole Shahumian district, the part of Mardakert and Askeran districts and came close to the district centre of Askeran. As a result of an offensive of unprecedented scale, the Azerbaijani na-

tional army destroyed and burned scores of villages, forty thousand inhabitants of the republic became refugees. Taking into account this situation, on June 18, the NKR Supreme Soviet announced a state of emergency in the republic. Partial mobilization covering sergeants, the reserve, conscripts between 18-40 years of age, officers up to 50 years old, and women were all given special training.

Meanwhile, heavy battles were continuing in the different sectors of the front. Simultaneously, the Azerbaijani air force continued to attack civilian inhabited localities. On August 18, pellet bombs were dropped onto Stepanakert, the use of which was forbidden by international law.

1993

Early in January, military offensives along the full length of the Azerbaijani-Karabagh front entered a new stage. Azerbaijan engaged almost the whole of its arsenal, attacking with aircraft, heavy tanks, various weapons and infantry.

In late spring, after a short interval, Azeris resumed military operations on the full length of the front, choosing the eastern Martuni sector for the main attack. All attempts to break through the defence of the Karabagh troops failed.

During this period, the leadership of Azerbaijan declared the mobilization of all men from the age of 18-40 years old. In addition, mercenaries were hired, including about a 1,500 mudjahiddins from Afghanistan. The participation of mercenaries in the war was confirmed by personal papers, military maps, letters and photos, dictionaries and national currencies.

1994

In early 1994, Azerbaijan made one more attempt to take hold of the situation, intensifying the offensives on the full front. In spite of serious losses, Azeris did not give up. Withstanding the defence and carrying on a number of successful counter offensives, the NKR troops, in early February, started liquidating the Azeri bases.

The military defeats compelled Azerbaijan to accept the Russian Federation's proposal on armistice. On May 5, under the mediation of Russia, Kyrgyzstan, and the CIS Parliamentary Assembly, in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabagh and Armenia signed the Bishkek Protocol, which let to the cease-fire agreement.

Defence Ministers of the Russian Federation and Armenia, Pavel Grachev and Serge Sarkissian, and the NKR Defence Army Commander, Samvel Babayan, signed the document. However, Azerbaijan's Defence Minister, Mamedraffi Mamedov, did not sign the document and was urgently summoned to Baku. In spite of Azerbaijan's refusal to sign the final protocol of the Moscow agreement, a durable armistice settled over Nagorno-Karabagh.

THE POLITICS OF ARMENOPHOBIA

The art of hysteria-whipping as perfected by Azerbaijan's leaders

To counter various protests at the national or international levels, as well as any negative feedbacks that such protests engender, the President and most dignitaries of Azerbaijan routinely whip-up the war-and-violence propaganda as a major pre-emptive tool against any dissent against their governance. Keeping the flames of anti-Armenian hatred alive has thus become the main method by which the Baku regime maintains its stranglehold on power. Such methods, of course, a violation of international treaties related to civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, as well as a permanent threat of the recurrence of violent and genocidal acts against Armenians.

One such act happened on February 19, 2004: Gurgen Margaryan—an Armenian military officer attending a NATO's "Partnership for Peace" program—was hacked to death with an ax by a fellow participant from Azerbaijan, Ramil Safarov. M. Margaryan was killed while asleep. Below are a few samples of how official Azerbaijan reacted to the act:

"I always tell our officers who study in Turkey: 'You are needed in Karabagh. They [Armenians] must be killed in Karabagh not in the other countries.'"

Anar Mamedkhanov, MP
(*Zerkalo*, Baku, March 6, 2004)

"[I] do not advise Armenians to sleep safely until the Karabagh conflict is settled. Incidents like in Budapest cannot be ruled out."

Agshin Mehdiyev, Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the Council of Europe
(*Zerkalo*, February 23, 2004)

"Ramil Safarov must become an example of patriotism for the Azerbaijani youth."

Elmira Suleymanova,
Ombudsman of Azerbaijan
(*Zerkalo*, February 28, 2004)

"If today we fail to protect Ramil Safarov tomorrow no Azerbaijani will fight against Armenians in case of necessity."

Zakhid Orudch, MP
(*Zerkalo*, February 28, 2004)

"...if at the present moment the society of Azerbaijan fails to free Ramil Safarov from the hands of Armenian Diaspora, then in the future we will fail to win the war for liberation of the occupied Azer-

baidjani lands."

Gyultekin Hadjiev
Member of Azerbaijani delegation to PACE
(*Zerkalo*, February 28, 2004)

Such rhetoric is not reserved for special cases. As mentioned above, Azerbaijan's dignitaries practice it routinely, like the examples below show:

"There are many people with alien blood among the ranks of Azerbaijani diplomats and those diplomats whose mothers are Armenians, Jews, Russians, let alone other minorities, cannot serve Azerbaijan with dignity and loyalty abroad."

Isfendiakh Vahabzade
Permanent representative of Azerbaijan at the Geneva branch of the UN,
In an official letter to the speaker of the Azerbaijani parliament Murtuz Aleskereov regarding the recall of Eldar Huseynov, the Permanent representative of Azerbaijan at UN
(*Echo* newspaper, Baku, June 5, 2001)

"In order to preserve the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, we paid much attention to Karabagh. Of course, some dilettantes accused me of that. I did so, firstly, Nagorno Karabagh had to be inhabited by Azerbaijani population, and secondly, in order not to give the Armenians an opportunity to raise that question."

Heydar Aliyev, President of Azerbaijan
addressing parliamentary hearings on the Karabagh conflict
(*Bakinski rabochi*, January 24, 2001)

"Not only no status at all should be given to Nagorno Karabagh within Azerbaijan, but even

granting citizenship to Armenians in Azerbaijan is a crime."

Vafa Guluzade
Advisor of President Heydar Aliyev
(*Bakinski Rabochi*, February 24, 2001)

"If by October of this year (1992) a single Armenian remains in Karabagh, the people of Azerbaijan can hang me in the central square of Baku."

Abulfaz Elcibey, President of Azerbaijan

Quoted in "Ethnic cleansing in progress: war in Nagorno Karabakh" by Caroline Cox and John Eibnerl,
1993:

"I am sharply increasing the military budget. The military expenses in Azerbaijan in 2004 amounted to 170 million dollars, in 2005 to 300 million dollars, and in 2006 they will amount to 600 million dollars. I stated that our military expenses should be equal to the whole budget of Armenia, and we will achieve this. We have to be strong ourselves. If we are strong we will solve everything."

Ilham Aliyev, president of Azerbaijan,
(*INTERFAX*, October 30, 2005)

"In the nearest 25-30 years there will be no Armenian state in South Caucasus. This people played so many dirty tricks on their neighbours, that they have no right to live in this region. Modern Armenia is built on the historical Azerbaijani territories. I think that in 25-30 years these territories will be transferred back under the jurisdiction of Azerbaijan."

Ramiz Melikov
Speaker of the Ministry of Defence of Azerbaijan,
(*Zerkalo*, August 4, 2004)

Armenian Capture of Khojali, February 1992

BY DAVID DAVIDIAN

Events preceding the February 26, 1992 capture of Khojali by Armenian forces in Nagorno Karabagh allow one to view subsequent events with a context devoid of accusations of barbarism and genocide.

Khojali is a village about 7 km north of Stepanakert, the capital of Nagorno-Karabagh. Due to its geographic location, it was a staging ground for small-scale military operations and large scale shelling of Armenian villages and towns, especially Stepanakert.

The following are reports taken from the international press. It is also noteworthy that none of the events that led up to the February 26, 1992 attack on Khojali were videotaped or witnessed by any significant number of foreign journalists. However, immediately after the Armenian attack on Khojali, an orchestrated effort was made to document the event posthumously.

The following are the major events in and around Stepanakert and Khojali, preceding the February 26, 1992 capture of Khojali.

February 4, 1992: The Armenian villages of Berdadzor and Hasanabad in Nagorno Karabagh's Askeran region came under machine gun fire from the Azerbaijani village of Khojali.

February 14, 1992: Fighting between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces in the town of Khojali in the Askeran region of Nagorno Karabagh.

February 16, 1992: Fighting reported between Armenians and the Azerbaijani town of Khojali in the Askeran region of Nagorno Karabagh. Two killed and others wounded.

February 17, 1992: Azerbaijanis continue to fire grad and rapira rockets on Stepanakert, the capital of Nagorno Karabagh. Over 300 artillery shells have been launched at the city in the past 24 hours-one shell every five minutes. An entire block of 31 residential buildings in Stepanakert has been demolished. Over 15 people have been killed and several dozen wounded. The number of those killed and wounded continues to grow since corpses and mutilated bodies are still being dug out from debris of demolished buildings.

February 19, 1992: Over 20 people killed and many more wounded when Stepanakert was shelled with 180 missiles.

February 20, 1992: An Azerbaijani rocket attack on Stepanakert resulted in 17 dead and 34 wounded. More than 350 shells and rockets were launched at Stepanakert, from the direction of nearby Shushi, 218 of which were of the shrapnel type.

February 21, 1992: Thirty grad rockets were launched on Stepanakert, from the direction of nearby Shushi. At 1705 Moscow time, a second salvo was fired causing considerable damage. At 1845, 35 rockets ex-

ploded in residential areas. The town is on fire.

February 23, 1992: Six civilians were killed and dozens hurt today as four salvos of grad rockets were launched against Stepanakert, from the direction of Shushi. Eighty Grad shrapnel strafed the 366th Motorized Rifle Regiment, stationed in Stepanakert. One serviceman was killed, 10 wounded.

February 23, 1992: The 366th Motorized Rifle Regiment was bombarded from a Grad rocket launcher.

February 24, 1992: The command of the Transcaucasian Military District has ordered the troops stationed on the Azerbaijani-Armenian border to take retaliatory measures if they are attacked by Armenian or Azerbaijani guerrillas.

February 24, 1992: Azerbaijani Army sub-units in Khojali, in the Askeran region of Nagorno Karabagh, launched an offensive in the direction of the Armenian village of Berdadzor in the Askeran region of Nagorno Karabagh with the support of armoured vehicles.

February 25, 1992: Stepanakert was twice subjected to rocket shelling. At 1030 in the morning Azerbaijanis launched more than 150 missiles at residential districts and the territory of the 366th Motorized Rifle Regiment which is stationed there.

February 25, 1992: Russian Radio reported that the Azerbaijani town of Khojali in the Askeran region of Nagorno Karabagh came under attack from Armenian armed formations, citing the Azerbaijani People's Front.

February 26, 1992: The shelling of Stepanakert by Azerbaijani forces has been continuous for the past 24 hours. There are civilian casualties.

February 26, 1992: Armenian forces succeed in capturing the second largest Azerbaijani-populated centre in Nagorno Karabagh, Khojali, in the Askeran region, which had also doubled as a potent launching point for GRAD missile attacks upon surrounding Armenian regions.

February 26, 1992: Russian President Boris Yeltsin had said Azerbaijani President Ayaz Mutalibov had contacted him vis-à-vis Azerbaijan's military status. Mutalibov said that if the CIS 366th Motor Rifle Regiment were withdrawn from Nagorno Karabagh, Azerbaijan would be prepared to join the CIS agreement, already signed by eight CIS states, on having "joint armed forces under a joint command."

February 27, 1992: Azerbaijani forces launched

an offensive in the Khojali-Stepanakert direction in the Askeran region of Nagorno Karabagh. During a civilian evacuation process, fighting erupted between Armenian and CIS soldiers guarding this evacuation and Azerbaijani soldiers mixed in with these evacuating civilians. The result was the deaths of hundreds of evacuating Azerbaijani civilians and soldiers. Within hours of this event, news spread of a massacre of thousands of civilians by Armenian forces.

Of the many international press reports, several are noteworthy. What remains to be explained, however, are the following four points. First, an unsubstantiated claim of 1,000 Azerbaijanis murdered and mutilated by Armenians; second, a regular Armenian-Azerbaijani dead body exchange shown as Azerbaijani deaths in Khojali, as shown on French television; third, a Czech reporter seeing the same dead bodies three days after the events Khojali, mutilated later in Aghdam; and fourth, the account by the Czech reporter asking Mutalibov why Azerbaijanis were shot in the feet, a report Mutalibov didn't dispute.

PRESS ACCOUNTS

The Czech journalist Jana Mazalova conducted an interview with ousted Azerbaijani President Ayaz Mutalibov in Moscow. The following is an excerpt from that interview, "Azerbaijani Leader Ayaz Mutalibov Says 'Massacre Incident' Was Staged," which was published in the April 2, 1992 issue of *Nizavisimaya Gazeta*.

Mazalova: What are your thoughts about the incident in Khojali, which was followed by your resignation? Corpses from the fighting in Khojali have been found not far from Aghdam. It appears that these people were initially shot in the foot to prevent them to move further, after which they were hit with axes. On February 19, my colleagues had filmed these corpses. On March 2, the same corpses were shown scalped. It seems like weird games.

Mutalibov: Those residents who survived the Khojali incidents have stated that whatever happened there was orchestrated only to create the scenario for my resignation. There were certain elements working the overthrow of the President. I highly doubt that the Armenians would provide revealing documents to the Azerbaijanis. I can only assume that certain people were interested in using those pictures at the plenary session of the Azerbaijani Supreme Council to place the focus of the attention on my person.

A French reporter, Florence David from French Intel-5 TV, sent the following account to Paris on March 2, 1992.

According to Ms. David, on March 1, the Azerbaijanis and Armenians had agreed to exchange, at a place near Khojali, the bodies of those killed during recent actions. During the exchange there were 100 bodies lying in an open field. While the exchange was proceeding, Ms. David said, "From nowhere and suddenly an

Azerbaijani helicopter appeared in the sky, flew directly over the site of the exchange. It was full of Azerbaijani and foreign correspondents, who were taking pictures or videotaping the exchange. The next day, the Turkish press and television presented the pictures and videotapes as the 'massacre' of 'thousands' of defenseless Azerbaijani civilians by Armenians."

In conclusion, Ms. David said, "This was a sinister manipulation of the facts."

In a *Rossiskaya Gazeta* article, "How 'Thousands Were Killed' in Khojali," French television correspondent Florence David said television reports shown in Azerbaijan, Turkey and Russia picturing thousands of bodies of Azerbaijanis allegedly massacred in Khojali, Nagorno Karabagh are "just a trick pure and simple."

According to her, the reports were filmed on March 1, 1992, when Armenia and Azerbaijan were exchanging their dead under an agreement brokered by the Iranian Red Crescent Society. The French journalist, who witnessed the exchange, maintains that under the terms of the agreement numerous dead bodies had been taken to a predetermined location for the exchange procedure. The key element of the story is that those were the corpses of Armenians as well as Azerbaijanis killed at "various times and places in Nagorno Karabagh." The French journalist says she saw television crews filming the dead bodies from helicopters and from the ground.

According to a March 26, 2002 article by the *Bilik Dunyasi* news agency in Baku, "Azerbaijani Opposition MPs Refuse to Vote for the Azerbaijani Genocide Bill," at the March 26 plenary session of the Milli Maclis, deputies started debating a draft resolution "On the genocide of Azerbaijanis in the town of Xocali (Khojali)." "The Bilik Dunyasi news agency already reported about the bloody events, which happened in this small town in Nagorno Karabagh on the night of February 25-26, 1992.

"But when it came to voting on the issue, the opposition deputies refused to support the final document, with one vote. It became known that it is mainly Azerbaijanis themselves that are to blame for the Xocali tragedy and Azerbaijani genocide.

THE ARMENIAN RESPONSE

During a discussion of the issue "On the Violation of Human Rights and Main Freedoms Throughout the World" at the 57th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights in 2001, the Azerbaijani delegation made a statement about the events in Khojali. In response, the Armenian delegation submitted information on the actual events of February 1992 to the chairman of the UN Commission on Human Rights.

The document, which was based on Azerbaijani sources, was also published that same year in the May 26, 2001 issue of the Armenian Weekly under the title "Events in Khojali According to Azerbaijani Sources:

An Armenian Response.” The official document stated that the Azerbaijani side had committed the atrocities there in the name of “political intrigues and the struggle for power” in Azerbaijan.

CONCLUSIONS

First, why was it necessary to attribute a regular exchange of Armenian and Azerbaijani deaths as only Khojali Azerbaijani deaths?

Second, why were bodies mutilated three days after they were dead, from areas not associated with deaths in Khojali?

Third, why does official Baku listing 167 civilian deaths in Khojali remain unreferenced by Azerbaijanis?

Fourth, how was it possible that video cameras and other documentation methods were well in place for this one event, whereas a planned massacre of 80 Armenian civilians by Azerbaijani soldiers in Maragha went undocumented?

Fifth, why were dead Azerbaijani bodies found shot in the feet?

A review of these facts leads to a number of conclusions.

First, while many people died during the Armenian capture of Khojali, its aftermath was planned for political reasons. President Ayaz Mutabilov was swept from office within days of this event.

Second, there is no evidence of thousands of deaths.

Third, it can be speculated that the deaths of so many soldiers of the CIS’s 366th Motor Rifle Division sparked some form of retaliation, as per their orders. Since one of the major centres of Azerbaijani shelling was Khojali, their public departure towards Khojali could have easily been used for ulterior political ends.

During an on-the-spot interview with Siavash Novruzov, deputy executive secretary of the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party, conducted by L. Nuri of Azerbaijan’s Russian-language *Zerkalo* daily on February 21, 2003 during the party’s Khojali commemoration, Nuri asked if Yeni Azerbaijan would be participating in the Karabagh Liberation Army’s commemoration of Khojali on the following day.

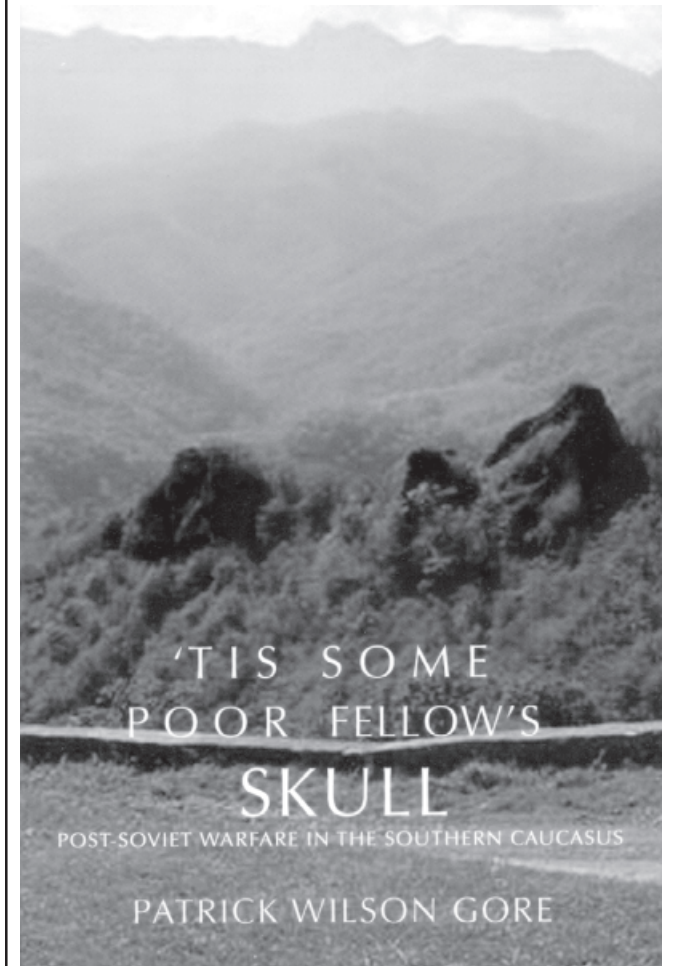
“No, because that rally is being organized by the opposition who had a hand in this [Khojali] tragedy,” stated Novruzov. Yeni Azerbaijan’s rally included banners reading, “Khojali Genocide, Worst Crime of the 20th Century.”

* * *

Thus, even today questions are raised regarding the role of the Azerbaijani opposition in the Khojali events. However, if this was such a major crime, why do those that had a role in it remain free in Baku?

Today, Baku tries to use Khojalou events for concealing the butchery taken place in Sumgait on February 25-28, 1988.

More on the subject ...



Seeking to fragment any possible source of resistance to Moscow’s authority, Stalin split the Armenian nation between Armenia and Azerbaijan. When the USSR fell apart, the outlook seemed bleak for the Nagorno-Karabagh Armenians locked uncomfortably into Azerbaijan. Random pogroms were followed by systematic ethnic cleansing. And armed resistance.

Oil-rich Azerbaijan cracked down and a bloody conflict ensued in which elements of the old Soviet military machine were put to the test in unexpected ways. Afghan Mujahidin, Chechen terrorists and missing nuclear weapons all played roles in Nagorno-Karabagh’s struggle to survive.

Patrick Wilson Gore specialized in military history and theory of war at Oxford, and subsequently graduated from one of NATO’s senior command colleges. He has also qualified as a paratrooper and marine commando. Much of his career has focused on strategic intelligence.

Patrick Wilson Gore, *'Tis some poor fellow's skull: Post-Soviet Warfare in the Southern Caucasus*, iUniverse, 2008. Paperback, 160 pages