

Nagorno-Karabakh: 'apple of discord'

by Joseph Brewda and Linda de Hoyos

The reopening of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict at first appears to have had its source in Moscow. In 1987, the Soviet semi-official *Literaturnaya Gazeta* opened an environmentalist scare campaign against the nuclear reactor near Yerevan, the Armenian capital, and against the city's synthetic rubber plant. By September 1987, the author, Zoray Balayan, a reputed member of the inner circle around then-Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachov, organized a demonstration at the rubber plant. The rally was joined by Armenian nationalist leader Paruyr Hairikian.

The dual scare was only the springboard for bigger aims. By the end of October, Balayan's "green" movement was calling for the unification of Karabakh with Armenia. On Oct. 18, Soviet authorities dispersed "green" demonstrators demanding Karabakh's repatriation.

From that point onward, three Armenian leaders emerged in the international spotlight: Zoray Balayan; Abel Aganbegyan, Gorbachov's chief economic spokesman; and Sergio Mikoyan, then editor of the KGB's *América Latina*. Ironically, Mikoyan's father, Anastas Mikoyan, the KGB strongman and Stalin lieutenant, had dominated the Nagorno-Karabakh Commission that had carved out Karabakh as a separate enclave within Azerbaijan in the 1920s.

In January 1988, the three set out to organize the large Armenian diaspora in the west for Karabakh's return—Mikoyan and Balayan to the United States, and Aganbegyan to London and Paris.

Mikoyan and Balayan, accompanied by Rair Simonyan, a member of the Soviet General Staff, attended a Feb. 1-5 conference sponsored by the Center for Soviet-American Dialogue in Raddison, Maryland. They then toured the United States, calling upon the Armenian-American community to mobilize for immediate unification. Their rhetoric was so inflammatory, Armenian sources emphasize, that many of their



Levon Ter-Petrossian, the President of Armenia (left) and Heidar Aliyev, the President of Azerbaijan (right). Both emerged from the Soviet KGB, and both countries are now being torn apart by internal warfare.



comments were censored in the often sensationalist Armenian-American press, out of fear that the push for unification was being covertly sponsored by Gorbachov as a strategic trap.

Nevertheless, within Armenia, irredentism surfaced dramatically.

On Feb. 20, the Nagorno-Kabarakh Autonomous Regional Soviet voted to "transfer the Autonomous Region of Nagorno-Karabakh from the Azerbaijani S.S.R. to the Armenian S.S.R., and at the same time to intercede with the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. to reach a positive resolution regarding the transfer of the region from the Azerbaijani S.S.R. to the Armenian S.S.R." The next day, 50,000 people marched in Yerevan in support of the demand. Within a week, 1 million Armenians were marching in the streets.

According to Armenian and other regional sources, various Armenian nationalists, such as Paruyr Hairikian, were convinced that they had the backing of both Soviet and western government agencies in this effort. Events showed otherwise.

Reaction from Azerbaijan was no less intense. On Feb. 27, Azeri squads began a two-day anti-Armenian pogrom in Sumgait, an Armenian-Azeri town 30 miles from Baku, the Azeri capital. Azeri sources believe that the riot, which killed several dozen people, could not have occurred without Soviet

complicity. Soviet troops later intervened and imposed martial law.

On March 23, the Soviet presidium issued its ruling on Karabakh: It recognized that Armenian national rights had been infringed, but a change in status was impossible. Both sides were simultaneously encouraged and provoked.

On June 15, the Armenian Supreme Soviet reported it would accept the Karabakh Soviet's call for unification. On July 12, the Karabakh Soviet announced that it had "seceded" from Azerbaijan, and was now to be known as the Artsakh autonomous region of Armenia.

On Sept. 18, 1988, clashes between Armenians and Azeris began in Stepanakert, the Karabakh capital.

The war was on. By November, refugees were fleeing both States under threat of murderous pogroms: 180,000 Armenians in Azerbaijan, out of a total population of 400,000, ran to Armenia; 150,000 of the 160,000 Azeris in Armenia took refuge in Azerbaijan.

The war proceeded indecisively until February 1992, when the Armenians began gaining victories, beginning with the capture of Khojaly, and then Shusha and the Lachin Corridor in March. In 1993, the Armenians struck deep into Azeri territory, taking Kelbajar (March), Agdam (July), Jebraill and Fizuli (August). In September, they took Kubatly, giving them domination over the 160-kilometer Azeri-Iranian bor-

der. A cease-fire was declared in May 1994, which is still holding. Approximately one-sixth of Azerbaijan's total land is now under Armenian occupation. Some 1 million Azeris have been driven from their homes. Armenia remains under a murderous blockade, imposed by Turkey and Azerbaijan.

Double, double cross

Although it is true that both Azeris and Armenians have waged the war over Nagorno-Karabakh with passion and fury, it is doubtful that any such war would occur at all, if it were not for the parallel and mutually abetting policies of both British and Russian intelligence. Armenia and Azerbaijan today stand, each as mirror images of the other, but it is the string-pullers in London and Moscow who are holding the mirrors, first tilting one way, then the other.

Today, each country is ruled by someone who was once a prominent member of the Soviet KGB—Levon Ter-Petrosian in Armenia, and Heidar Aliyev in Azerbaijan. In the fall of 1990, Ter-Petrosian of the Karabakh Committee won the Presidency in the general election. Raised in Syria with close political ties to Syrian President Hafez al-Assad, Ter-Petrosian came to the Armenian Presidency from a career in the Mideast division of Soviet KGB.

In Azerbaijan, Aliyev came to the fore in September 1992, when he created the New Azerbaijan Party. Before 1990, Aliyev had been the Soviet deputy prime minister, a post he came to as a high official of the KGB, where he specialized in the Mideast division. Aliyev came to power in June 1993, after a series of Azeri military defeats. He promptly brought Azerbaijan into the Community of Independent States, distanced Azerbaijan from Turkey, and brought a halt to any discussion of uniting with Azeris on the other side of the Iranian border.

Aliyev and Ter-Petrosian have similar domestic opponents. In Armenia, once in power, Ter-Petrosian has squared off against the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, or Dashnag, which had led the campaign for unification with Karabakh. Dashnag is based in Athens, Greece, and in the United States, but was created as far back as 1890, under the sponsorship of Britain's William Gladstone and Prime Minister Lord Salisbury. Today, it enjoys the patronage of the Christian Solidarity International (CSI) of Baroness Caroline Cox, deputy speaker of the British House of Lords. In 1992, Ter-Petrosian expelled Dashnag chief Grair Marukhian from Armenia, and in December 1994, he banned the party altogether. Dashnag's lobbying in the United States has been crucial to the Armenian cause. In 1993, the U.S. Congress allocated \$193 million to Armenia, second only in amount to that given to Russia among the former Soviet States.

In Azerbaijan, Aliyev's opponent is the Azerbaijan Popular Front (APF) of Abulfaz Elcibey, a Sufi historian with close ties to Turkey, specifically to the Pan-Turkic Party of Gen. Alparslan Turkes.

The APF grew out of the Varlyg (Reality) organization, which sprang into action in Baku against Armenia in May 1988. In early 1989, Varlyg formed the APF with a coalition of other nationalist groups. After the December 1989 ruling of the Armenian Supreme Soviet to formally incorporate Karabakh, armed groups of the APF began destroying Soviet installations on the border with Iran, in protest against Soviet inaction. In Baku and other cities, the APF led pogroms against Armenians. The wave of violence was finally halted in January 1990, when Moscow declared a state of emergency and a 20,000-man force invaded Azerbaijan. The political result of this action, however, sent the APF's popularity soaring.

In the wake of Armenian military victories against Azeri forces, the APF stormed the palace of Azeri President Mutalibov in May 1992, forcing him to flee to Moscow. In June 1992, Elcibey was elected President. Soon, followers of Pan-Turkic Party leader Gen. Alparslan Turkes were traveling to Azerbaijan to train the army. Elcibey demanded unity with Iranian Azerbaijan. Elcibey, however, could not stem the tide of Azeri defeats, and, on this basis, Aliyev took the reins of power in 1993.

Thus, each country is in a near-state of internal war, between what would appear to be those forces orbiting Moscow, and those orbiting London.

Arms to all sides

Complicating matters further is that both Russia and London, and allied forces, have provided aid and military assistance to both countries simultaneously, deliberately prolonging the hostilities between the two interlocking countries.

From 1988 to 1992, Moscow aided and abetted both sides in the Nagorno-Karabakh war, through massive arms deliveries, up to and including armor, artillery, attack helicopters, and combat aircraft, and the "loaning" of Russian "volunteer" military specialists to both sides. This process occurred through the withdrawal of Russian forces, leaving behind stocks of arms, ammunition, and equipment.

Russian aid to Armenia: In the case of the 366th Motorized Rifle Regiment, in its withdrawal from Karabakh in February-March 1992, its Armenian components joined the Karabakh "Self-Defense Forces." This enabled the Karabakh Armenians to launch the offensives of April-May 1992 that won the crucial Lachin Corridor, establishing an overland road link between the Armenian "mainland" and Karabakh. In May 1992, Russian Defense Minister Pavel Grachov traveled to Armenia to discuss a security pact. In 1993, Armenia took a second Armenia-Karabakh Corridor through Kelbadjar, and captured Azerbaijani territory to the north, east, and south of Karabakh.

Russian aid to Azerbaijan: The overthrow of Abulfaz Elcibey in Azerbaijan in 1993 was made logistically possible

through the mass transfer of arms, equipment, vehicles, and fuel by units of the Russian Army withdrawing from Azerbaijan. The central role in this process was played by the Russian 104th Airborne Division, which was withdrawn from Azerbaijan in February to May 1993. By arrangement, the division turned over large stocks, not to the regular units of the Azerbaijan Army, but to the private "army" of "Colonel" Suret Huseinov (an enlisted veteran of Soviet Airborne Forces).

Huseinov, during Aliyev's earlier rule in Azerbaijan within the Soviet Union, had already become a multimillionaire through illegal private sales of textiles and other goods from State enterprises, well on the way to becoming the type of "private mafioso" now dominating Russia. With his millions, and his solid KGB and military connections, he was able to raise the numerically strongest private army in Azerbaijan. Through the largesse of the 104th Airborne Division, overnight, his units became the best-armed and -equipped in Azerbaijan.

In June 1993, Huseinov launched a revolt of Azeri troops, which seized the nation's second largest city, Ganja. The rebels then began a "March on Baku," which forced a terrified President Elcibey to flee. Within days, Aliyev was in power.

The Iran-Contra hand

Russia's militaristic meddling is matched by London's.

British-U.S. aid to Azerbaijan: British aid to Azerbaijan in the form of arms, arms training, and mercenaries, first surfaced in January 1994, when the British Foreign Office, responding to press reports, admitted to knowledge of such activity. The commercial cover for this aid has been the British-registered, Northern Cyprus-based, Summit (Consortium) Ltd. The covert supply was directed by Lord Erskine of Rerrick, a retired career military officer with experience in Asia, who had been managing director of Lonrho Ltd. in Iran in the 1970s.

The U.S. Bush administration's involvement in arming and training the Azeris first surfaced in 1991. Case officer for this detail was Gen. Richard Secord of Iran-Contra fame, and Gen. Heine Aderholt, Secord's former superior officer, then head of the Air Commando Association. Both had been contracted to train special commando units in four military training camps in Azerbaijan.

To provide cover for the training, the Azeri government hired MegaOil USA of Marietta, Georgia, and Ponder Industries, of Alice, Texas, to provide technical services for Azerbaijan's oil industry. MegaOil Chairman Gary Best had a long-standing relationship with Afghan mujahideen warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

According to the initial terms of the MegaOil deal, Secord and Aderholt were to train 5,000 Azeri troops for commando missions against Armenian forces in Nagorno-Karabakh. Secord made several trips to Azerbaijan to that end in the early 1990s.

When the APF's Elcibey came to power in Azerbaijan in May 1992, western assistance to Azerbaijan increased. Turkish officers began training the Azeri officer corps, both in Azerbaijan and Turkey. Israel also provided military training, including at its facilities in Israel.

But Elcibey's overthrow by the KGB's Aliyev in June 1993 did not end British, American, and Israeli military boosting of Azerbaijan. By 1994, an estimated 1,000 to 3,500 former Afghan mujahideen, who had been trained in Pakistan by the British and U.S. mujahideen organizers, were brought into Azerbaijan, to fight against Armenia.

British-U.S. aid to Armenia: The key figure promoting the Armenian Karabakh cause internationally has been Deputy Speaker of the British House of Lords Baroness Caroline Cox, a longtime intimate of former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. A career British intelligence official who had earlier handled relations with the Polish Solidarity organization, Cox emerged as the principal international supporter of Armenian efforts to seize Karabakh in 1990. Since then, she has led over a dozen fact-finding trips there, and has repeatedly testified before numerous European parliaments, as well as the U.S. Congress.

Baroness Cox paints the conflict in apocalyptic terms. "Azerbaijan has an explicit policy of ethnic cleansing of the Armenians in Karabakh," she told the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington in February 1995. "The Armenians have been fighting for the survival of their lives, and their—and our—Christian heritage." "Islamic extremism" and "hatred of Christianity," she said, are the cause of the war.

Baroness Cox's crusade for Armenia is run under the aegis of her Christian Solidarity International, a group formed by the Keston Institute of Oxford, England. Yet, CSI is hardly consistent. One of its founders, Lord Avebury, the head of the Human Rights Committee of the Parliament, is the major foreign propagandist for the Muslim Chechens who have long been allied with the Azeris. Like Colonel Stokes earlier in this century, Avebury wants to become the founding father of a Northern Caucasian Muslim confederation, and has traveled to Abkhazia, Chechnya, and other Caucasian areas to that end.

For its part, the Bush administration, which tended to be dominated by Thatcher, first sent aid to Armenia in the aftermath of the December 1988 earthquake. At that early point, Bush representatives gave encouraging signals to Armenian organizations determined to seize Karabakh. Among the relief agencies on the scene were Amicares and the International Rescue Committee.

Americares had been one of the major sources of funds to the Afghan mujahideen. George Bush's brother, Prescott Bush, Jr., and Gen. Richard Stilwell, the former Pentagon intelligence chief in the Reagan-Bush administration, are on the group's board. The International Rescue Committee is led by Leo Cherne, who was then also deputy director of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board.