

Turmoil On Southwest Asia's Northeast Flank

by Rachel Douglas

Southwest Asia is to be recognized as bounded by four principal states, whose appropriate cooperation is indispensable for creating a zone of stability among the nations and peoples of the region as a whole. These are Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Egypt. The security of the northeast corner of the region so defined, depends on protecting its flank, by ensuring non-interference from outside interests, that by the exclusion of meddling outside parties from intrusion into current discussions on cooperation among Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Iran.

—Lyndon LaRouche, in “Southwest Asia: The LaRouche Doctrine” (EIR, April 30).

LaRouche put a point on the matter in his April 24 interview with Hussein Askary (page 6): “If someone is to destabilize Transcaucasia, including the problems between Azerbaijan and Armenia and Iran, then you could not possibly maintain a secure Middle East security policy.”

Who Meddles, and How

The three nation-states of the Transcaucasus are Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia; these republics in the Soviet Union became independent in 1991. Armenia and Georgia are ancient nations, with independent Christian churches dating to the 4th Century. Azerbaijan, on the western shore of the Caspian Sea, is inhabited by traditionally Shi'ite Muslim Azeris, who also populate northern Iran. Georgia and Azerbaijan border on the Russian North Caucasus (including Chechnya); Azerbaijan and Armenia border on Iran; Armenia and Georgia have borders with Turkey; and Georgia has a coastline on the Black Sea. Armenia and Azerbaijan went to war in the 1990s over Nagorno-Karabakh, a traditionally Armenian district (but also containing places of importance in Azeri culture), assigned to Azerbaijan by the Soviets. Karabakh is now controlled by Armenia, but without a lasting juridical settlement of the territorial dispute. (See map, page 9).

In 2003, the leadership of Azerbaijan and Georgia changed. The long-time Soviet intelligence operative and President of Azerbaijan, Heidar Aliyev, died, but not before promoting his son, Ilham Aliyev, to the Presidency in a tightly controlled election process. In Georgia, ex-Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, President of Georgia since the early 1990s, was overthrown in the so-called “Roses Revolution” by Michael Saakashvili, a graduate of Columbia University Law School, and recipient of substantial monies from

the Open Society Institute of George Soros (see Roman Besonov, “Georgia: Soros, Stalin, and a Gallon of Wine,” *EIR*, Dec. 5, 2003).

This Spring, Armenian President Robert Kocharian faces a serious challenge to his power from an alliance of opposition parties, who charge him with corruption and vote-stealing in the Presidential election of 2003. A large opposition demonstration in Yerevan was ended by force on April 13, but anti-Kocharian marches of thousands of people resumed after that.

The patterns of foreign involvement in Transcaucasia, including the explosive “meddling” of which LaRouche warns, are several. Russia, of course, has a long and special relationship with each of these southern neighbors, dating from the Soviet period and earlier. When the typical “clan” mode of doing business and politics in the Transcaucasus intersects the interests, including criminal economic ones, of Russia's *nouveaux riches* and their foreign partners, the result can be an aggravation of clan warfare and further immiseration of the population.

But the greater part of dangerous meddling comes from the West, in the form of: 1) courtship of, especially, Georgia and Azerbaijan into military training, basing of NATO forces, and other other relations that Moscow views as potentially adversarial; 2) economic exploitation, such as looting by international energy-finance sharks involved in privatizing the area's power grids, and the petroleum multinationals' drive to control the export of Caspian Sea oil through Azerbaijan and Georgia (the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline); 3) political destabilizations under the banner of promoting “democratization,” which often coincide with the indicated military-strategic and economic priorities of Western government or private interests. The measuring rod of “how far along the transition to a democratic system these countries are” is used constantly by U.S. government-funded think-tank analysts, but is worse than irrelevant to the betterment of conditions for people in the region, or its stability.

The North-South Corridor

The special relations of the late Heidar Aliyev's Soviet-era intelligence circles with British SIS had a visible impact on the foreign and economic policy postures of Azerbaijan in the 1990s. In particular, British Petroleum has shaped decisions taken on Baku oil throughout the post-Soviet period. Meanwhile, during the Azerbaijan-Armenia armed conflict over Karabakh, Armenia drew closer to Iran, seeking a friend in its large southern neighbor, through diplomacy and trade.

In recent months, however, the younger Aliyev has taken steps to chart a more independent policy. Especially dramatic are his government's contacts with Iran. When Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Mohsen Aminzadeh visited Baku in January, for example, his discussions with President Aliyev and others focussed on the North-South Eurasian Transport Corridor, a project initiated by Russia, Iran, and India. Its route currently runs through Iran by rail, then transport by boat across the Caspian to Russian ports. If Azerbaijan and other

Transcaucasus countries became involved, this would become the kind of mutual-interest economic endeavor promoted in "Southwest Asia: The LaRouche Doctrine." Moreover, Azerbaijan and Iran began attempts to reconcile their positions on sovereignty over the Caspian Sea and its sea-floor resources; as two out of the five Caspian littoral countries, they have been on opposite sides of the years-long, stalled negotiations over its status. And, the two sides discussed ways to un-deadlock the Azerbaijan-Armenia dispute over Karabakh.

On April 28, Presidents Kocharian and Aliyev met in Warsaw, where they were attending the European Economic Summit, to discuss approaches to further negotiations on Karabakh. But Kocharian remains preoccupied with the street demonstrations against him, which he denounced on April 25 as "treason." Talks between the regime and opposition coalition leaders broke off on April 27. Council of Europe Secretary-General Walter Schwimmer then proposed, that the CoE come in to sponsor such talks. The Armenian weekly *Iravunk* reports that Kocharian's Prime Minister and the Speaker of the National Assembly have publicly threatened to join the opposition camp.

The "Roses Revolution" has been cited as an exemplary "velvet," or non-violent, regime change—a model to be followed in Armenia and, perhaps, Ukraine. But Georgia has not stabilized under Saakashvili. The new President has under-

taken balanced diplomacy with the great powers, visiting both Moscow and Washington since his inauguration. At the same time, he is viewed as a dangerous hothead even by some other members of his coalition. In particular, Saakashvili has been in confrontations with Aslan Abashidze, leader of the autonomous republic of Ajaria, who continues to insist that last year's election victory by Saakashvili's National Movement was fraudulent.

Turkey's Treaty Commitment

Earlier this year the showdown between them led to a blockade of the Black Sea port of Batumi, Ajaria's capital, and armed conflict loomed. Russian mediation, by Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov and shadowy businessman Grigori Luchansky, and the Foreign Ministry, cooled it out for now. However, Ajaria's Parliament declared a state of emergency on April 24, in response to a Georgian national Parliament resolution that called for disarming the militias in Ajaria. Saakashvili said that his regime would "not allow the country to be disintegrated," addressing a parade of Georgian troops who had just finished a U.S. military training program.

Ajaria's autonomous status within Georgia was enshrined in the 1921 Treaty of Kars between Turkey and Russia, which gave Ajaria to Russia, but reserved for Turkey the right of intervention, should that autonomy be threatened. Turkish officials have cited that clause several times in recent weeks.

Georgians Tell EIR: 'LaRouche Concept' Is Needed

Three politically active Georgian intellectuals spoke with EIR in February 2004 at the Academy of National and Social Relations, in Tbilisi. Prof. Grigori Zhvania, Prof. Vakhtang Gogvadze and Valeri Kvaratskhelia, editor of Kalkhi (The People) magazine and former press secretary for ex-President Eduard Shevardnadze, are officers of the Academy. The interview was conducted by Dr. Vladimir Kilasonia, Schiller Institute representative in Georgia.

Dr. Kilasonia: Mr. Gogvadze, as chairman of the Georgian-Russian Friendship Society and former Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia (1992-1995), how do you assess current relations between Georgia and Russia?

Prof. Gogvadze: Why hide the truth? I have dedicated the Society to something that doesn't exist, insofar as there has been no real friendship between Russia and Georgia for the past ten years. Such aggravated, tense relations between our fraternal peoples have not been seen before in history. This is the doing of American politicians, who have driven a wedge between our countries. This unnatural state of affairs will pass. So, the Georgian-Russian

Friendship Society exists for the near-term future. In the meantime, we are preparing the ideological basis for the spiritual rebirth and development of our ties. The key to saving Georgia is in the global interests of the United States and Russia, just as, 400 years ago, our fate was determined by relations among the [Turkish] sultan, the [Persian] shah and the Kalmyks, on the one side, and Russia on the other.

Prof. Zhvania: We are planning a conference at our Academy, on the theme of "The Role of Russia and the USA in Deciding Georgia's Fateful Problems." In this connection, the concept of my young friend (seven years younger than I am) Lyndon LaRouche will serve as a positive, constructive element. Our American friend Lyndon LaRouche should know that he is loved and highly valued in Georgia! And if the American people were to follow LaRouche's concept, America would gain, as would our little Georgia, and the entire world.

Kilasonia: Mr. Kvaratskhelia, your popular newspaper *2000* has disseminated and popularized Mr. LaRouche's ideas. We appreciate this.

Valeri Kvaratskhelia: Thank you for the "thank you," but, to tell you the truth, we are more grateful to *him*, since such people ennoble the impression one has about a country. If it were not for Americans of the quality of this humanist, we would be infected with Americanophobia.