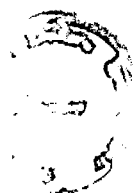


**RUSSIA AND THE ETHNO-TERRITORIAL  
CONFLICT BETWEEN ARMENIA  
AND AZERBAIJAN**



**Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru  
University in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the award of  
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C E R T I F I C A T E

This is to certify that the M.Phil dissertation entitled, "RUSSIA AND THE ETHNO-TERRITORIAL CONFLICT BETWEEN ARMENIA AND AZERBAIJAN", submitted by Shri ANAND KUMAR in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY has not been submitted earlier for any other degree to this or to any other University.

It is recommended that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for their evaluation for the award of the degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY.

(Prof. Devendra Kaushik)  
Supervisor

(Prof. R.R. Sharma)  
Chairperson



*Dedicated to my Late  
Grandfather*

## NOW THAT IT'S OVER...

One realises how an end is also a beginning. At least in this case where the end of the dissertation implies a return to the past to recollect the day when I actually began this.

With the final sentence having been written -- oh, that sentence -- it is time to acknowledge those without whose critical help this would not have been possible.

I sincerely thank Professor Devendra Kaushik, my guide, without whose constant encouragement and guidance, this work could have been like any other one-line thought ;

For invaluable suggestions, my thanks to Rashid, Ashish, Dhiraj, Saddy, Taruna, Manavendra ;

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I am obliged to my parents and my family for supporting me in every ups and downs of my life.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

One of the most visible features distinguishing one social group from the other is ethnicity. Members of any specific ethnic group share a common sense of peoplehood, have similar socio-cultural and physical characteristics and have religious, racial, lingual, regional and national similarities. Such members are also characterised by similar patterns of normative behaviour, which reflects in their symbolic formations and activities such as kinship, marriage, rituals and other social ceremonies.

It is due to ethnic bonds that the average individual harbours a quest for preserving one's type. He exists in an ethnic identity system which, more often than not, has strong links with the political goals of the concerned individual. The demand for cultural autonomy as well as the preservation of languages and religion are the most obvious offshoots of ethnicity.

An ethnic identity thus consists of political will & thus is a very effective medium for ensuring group mobilization. As L.W. Summer puts it, a group

makes a sense of "We group" & "Other group" among its members which unites same kind of people and distinguishes other.<sup>1</sup>

What engenders ethnic conflict is the presence of two or more ethnic groups within a geographically defined frontier. With self-preservation one of the primary desires - and since political goals of each group are so obviously different - conflict is a predictable consequence.<sup>2</sup>

Ethnic conflict always has various aspects. Quite often, it is linked to nationalism and thus related to both nationalist and separatist movements. These conflicts can also become instruments for changing the society. This is since if two ethnic groups exist within a common territory, and one tries to suppress the other for gaining political mileage, the latter reacts with positive action, creating possibilities for altering the social and political structure. And when an ethnic conflict has territorial connotations, the issue may be termed as ethno-territorial.

Just one look at parts of the former Soviet Union shows that the past few years have been characterised by dramatic outbursts of nationalist unrest on its territory. Most of the disturbances have taken place in the non-Russian republics located along the periphery of the former U.S.S.R. One such ethno-

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1.L.W.Sumner, Social Darwinism: Selected Essays, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1963.

2.Raymond Hall (ed), Ethnic Autonomy : Comparative Dynamics, Pergam, New York, 1979.



mainly inhabited by Muslims whereas Armenians are mostly Christians. The ethnic tension of the region manifested in the disturbances caused due to the issue of Nagorno Karabakh.

Formerly Shushensky Uyezed, the region that both Armenia and Azerbaijan had been wanting to possess was renamed Nagorno-karabakh on 7th July 1923. The territory was in the Trans-Caucasian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic which consisted of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

Early 1988 saw acute ethnic problems in the region. The Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh demanded the region to be incorporated within the geographical boundaries of the Armenian Republic amidst opposition by the Azerbaijan Republic.

A mountainous area, Nagorno Karabakh's economy is based on various forms of agricultural activities. It was incorporated in the Russian empire in 1840 as Shushensky Uyezed. The Uyezed had an area of 11, 911 sq kilometres with a population of 1,40, 000 with ethnic composition of 58.2 Percent Armenians, 41.5 percent Azerbaizanis and 0.3 percent Russians.

Nagorno-Karabakh is very much dependent on the system of transport for its' economic development. Highways and railways are its' main mode of transport. As described earlier, agriculture, cattle and sheep breeding, piggery, poultry and cultivation feature among the occupations of the inhabitants in this

mountainous region.

Table

The Ethnic composition of Nagorno-Karabakh  
(Till the outbreak the present conflict)

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Nationality	1840	1959	1970	1979	1987
Armenians	81,480	1,10,053	1,21,068	1,23,076	1,40,400
Azerbaijan	58,100	17,995	27,179	37,264	37,800
Russian	420	1,790	1,310	265	1,200
Others	N.A.	1,30,406	1,50,313	1,62,181	1,80,000

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Source : Soviet Geography, Vol XXIX,1989. <sup>4</sup>

The main issue raised by the Armenians in the region was that their cultural values were being eroded by Azerbaijan. Their language was not being taught in schools. They believed that the solution to these problems lay in their merger with the Armenian Republic. The problem had been precipitated by the dominance of one ethnic group in the territory, the ethnic Armenians. When Joseph Stalin decided to include Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan, he did not take this aspect into consideration.

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4.This table has also been cited in Mainstream, 15th january,1989, p-73.

Until the early 19th century Nagorno-Karabakh was populated mostly by Azerbaijanis, besides people of United Turkey, Iranian and Caucasian background that was predominantly Islamic. But, the Armenians swept in during two waves of forced migration from Turkey and Iran. Most of them belong to the Orthodox denomination which has preserved Christianity in its most pristine form since the second century.

By 1980's the ethnic composition became as such that three-fourths of population were Armenians. Since they were annexed to the Soviet Union in 1920, both Azerbaijan and Armenia have had custody of the territory at one time or another, but Moscow ultimately awarded the area to Azerbaijan. The Armenians in the contested territory chafed under Azerbaijan rule, complaining that their language, culture and religion were stifled.<sup>5</sup>

International diplomatic opinion held that the handling of the conflict between Armenians and the Azeris would be a test of Gorbachev's ability to control the situation as also to ascertain the attempts to relax Moscow's rigid control over the Soviet regions. In the Soviet republics of Armenia and

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5. Felicity Barrinager, and Bill Keller, Armenia: No tempering with Boundaries, Times of India, new Delhi, 18 March 1988.

Azerbaijan, the Kremlin held the lid on a simmering brew of economic and cultural grievances, historic mistrust and heightened political expectancy.<sup>6</sup>

Armenia was supposed to be a showpiece of the Soviet Union. Highly industrialized and one of the major centres of the electronics industry, it attracted thousands of Armenians from different parts of the world. The neighboring Azerbaijan republic, with Baku as its capital, was also highly industrialized and was a major centre of the Soviet oil and natural gas industry. During Czarist times, little love was lost between the Armenians who are Christians and the Azerbaijanis who are Muslims. The demonstration of February and March 1988 showed that 70 years of fraternal integration have not wiped out nationalistic sentiments.<sup>7</sup> And indeed, the age old hostility between the groups remain unmitigated.

The present crisis cannot be understood in the absence of a historical backdrop. Armenia is one of the oldest seats of human civilization. It has one of the world's earliest alphabets and in AD 300, Armenians were the first to embrace Christianity as the state religion. Its capital, Yerevan, was founded about 2800 years ago. As an ethnic and religious group, the Armenians formed

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6. "Will Gorbachev Overcome the Armenian Obstacle?" (Financial Times), Times Of India, New Delhi, 1988.

7. Bhabani Sen Gupta, Melting Pot of Soviet Paces, Statesman, New Delhi, 1988.

90 percent of Soviet Armenia. In the Soviet Union, they were third after Russians and Jews in terms of scientific achievement. As a minority, they lived in compact groups in Georgia, Azerbaijan and North Caucasus.

Passionately devoted to their land and their religion, the Armenians are characterised by a certain zeal. This attribute has been their bane, and there are very few periods in time which are marked by a blissful absence of massacre.

Even in 900 BC, the Armenians had a well organised state which expanded to Great Armenia later. It soon became a prized territorial possession and for the next several centuries, there was a constant struggle for possession between Roman and Parthians. When the Parthians departed from the scene in the third century AD, their presence was substituted by the powerful Persian Empire. One contest was jettisoned by another, depriving Armenia of a state of sustained tranquility and peace.

The rise of Islam spawned another ground for duel : between Muslim and Christian Armenians this time. This was a war between two religious communities both of which were keen to establish supremacy over Armenia. In the first century AD, the Armenians had accepted Christianity which became their official religion in 301 AD.

With the rule of Islam, a new crisis arose for Armenia. In 698-700 AD the Arabs conquered the whole of Trans-Caucasia, which includes present-day Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The high rate of taxes on non-Muslims led to repeated uprisings, which were suppressed in cold blood. In times of peace the Armenian trader made his country prosperous.

The Mongol rule lasted in Russia for 240 years; it lasted a little longer in Armenia. The fate of Armenia changed which, as a part of Georgia, had been united with Tsarist Russia in 1801. In 1828, as a result of the war between Tsarist Russia and Iran, the remaining part of Eastern Armenia was also included in the Tsarist empire.

It would be difficult not to recognise, however, that the territorial expansion of Armenia was rooted to an area covering parts of what is known as western and eastern Armenia. This area, with the nation it embodies, was caught and divided tragically between two empires of great importance in the last century : Turkey and Russia.<sup>8</sup>Big parts of Armenia remained in Turkey was quite unhappy as compared to the life of other compatriots in Tsarist Russia. Economically also, Russian Armenia prospered more than Turkish and Iranian Armenians.

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<sup>8</sup>C. J. Walker, *Between Turkey and Russia: Armenia's Predicament*, *The World Today*, Aug-Sept 1988.

The greatest tragedy in the history of Armenians occurred in 1915-16 when Turkish Armenia was devastated. Out of its 2.5 million population as many as 1.5 million were massacred; 6,00,000 fled to Mesopotamia, where also the majority were murdered; 1,00,000 fled to several countries in Europe and America while 3,00,000 came to Tsarist Russia. These 3,00,000 lived in safety unlike most of their counterparts. In the years 1915-1916 many small towns in the Caucasia had a population of only a few thousands. These 3,00,000 changed the composition of the population. In the 1918-1920 civil war one fifth of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh which was an Azerbaijanian majority area, became an area with an Armenian majority.

Armenian arguments over the legitimacy of Nagorno-Karabakh's incorporation into Soviet Azerbaijan require the testimony of events and arguments unfolding through the exchanges between Turkey and Russia and, indeed, between Lenin and Kemal Ataturk.<sup>9</sup>

Until now, both the Turkish as well as the Russian governments have been secretive. The governments, as a matter of policy, have not allowed

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9.G.B.Libaridian(ed), *The Karabakh File: Documents And Facts on the question of Mountainous Karabakh, 1918-1988*, Cambridge Mass/Toronto: Zoriyan Institute For Contemporary Armenian Reasearch and Documentation, 1988.

access to the relevant archives. It is thus extremely frustrating for scholars who have to rely on informed guesses or oral sources. Presumably too the lack of documentation has resulted in the kind of speculations which have fuelled misunderstandings and unrest. The "Karabakh File" it self can only cite secondary sources for how a decision taken on 3rd July, 1921 to attach Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia was reversed two days later on 5th July, 1921.

In the absence of relevant documents, all the literature since then have sought to clarify the reasons for the reversal of the earlier decision. In one of the recent publications, Claire Mounradian writes that Stalin first promised Nagorno-Karabakh to the Armenians in order to win them over to the Bolshevik rule and, once he had secured it, he then reversed the decision in order to reduce the influence of Kemal Ataturk and the Muslim world.

Although Stalin has been implicated in the decision to put Nagorno-Karabakh under Azerbaijan rule. it should be remembered that at that time he was responsible for internal ethnic relations and not for foreign relations. This points to the possibility of secret accord between Lenin and Kemal Ataturk, the favourite theory of many Soviet historians. Armenians use a similar supposition to show how closely the Turks identified their interests with the Azerbaijanis, and vice versa. According to their view, it is a testimony of the aggressive designs of the Azerbaijanis towards the Armenian people, echoing Turkish attitudes of earlier in this country.



An indisputable fact is that Lenin was optimistic about the future of Turkey and admired Kemal Ataturk. And it would be not unreasonable to believe that he responded positively to Ataturk's request. It has been suggested that Lenin's argument might not have pleased his comrades Stalin and even Orjonikidze who, at that time, was head of all Trans Caucasia and the most powerful Bolshevik in the region. Orjonikidze, however, was intent on creating a Trans Caucasian Federation in which all regional boundaries would be abolished. In view of this Lenin might have been less relevant to Kemal Ataturk's request than otherwise.<sup>10</sup>

Possibly too, Ataturk on his part believed that with time the fortunes of Turks in their battles with Russia would be reversed and that it would be easier for him to seize areas already having special status. The Azerbaijanis were nevertheless to be the beneficiaries in most of the disputed areas. However, many historians believe that Ajara within Soviet Georgia also featured in the agreement reached between Ataturk and Lenin, that hinged on territories under the rule of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

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10. Tamara Dragadze, *The Armenian-Azerbaijani Conflict: Structure and Sentiment*, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol II No. 1 Jan 1989, p-61.

Alternatively, the reversal of decision concerning Nagorno-Karabakh might have taken place when Lenin negotiated for Russia's withdrawal with Germany and Turkey. This is certainly a familiar story for all countries with a legacy of colonialism and empire, where border decisions were made in the designated centres of power.

It is believed by some analysts that the party leadership in Kremlin could not give this area to Armenia without stirring a hornet's nest. The declared policy of the Soviet Union would have been violated. This policy was based on assuring every Soviet citizen of the same rights and privileges, which he /she enjoyed in the state, and which belonged to his/her own ethnic group.

There existed in the Soviet Union, dozens of ethnic groups which did not have their own states, either because they were too small, or they were not a substantial majority in any specific area. Moreover, after the second World War the party leadership had deliberately encouraged the intermingling of nationalities. "This policy was pursued vigorously till the sixties but could not be carried out in the seventies and eighties due to the drastic fall in the birth rate of two major ethnic groups - the Russians and the Ukrainians".<sup>11</sup>

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11. N.S. Saksena, *Roots of Armenian Unrest*, Indian Express, New Delhi, 11 April 1988.

Clearly, 'historical memories' have played an important role in the conflict since Nagorno-Karabakh was given to neighbouring Azerbaijan in 1923 after an Azerbaijan Bolshevik army helped topple Armenian and Georgian governments in the post-revolutionary civil war. The Soviet Union's 4.5 million Armenians were considered one of the most vigorous and enterprising nationalities, and they possessed a high proportion of party members. The community was almost zealously protective about its 16-century old Christian tradition. Apart from that, their relations with Islamic neighbours, as in the case of Azerbaijan, had furnished with the latent point of friction. When they saw glasnost, they felt they had a concrete chance to assert their feelings of identity.<sup>12</sup>

The official Soviet view classified the situation in the troubled region as the result of the "stagnation period" of the seventies and early eighties. This was the period when Leonid Brezhnev was the CPSU's unquestioned leader. The ousted first secretary of the Armenian Party, (he was ousted in the mid 80's) Demirchyan Karus was termed close "Brezhnev man" who, according to one perspective, had even the courage to think that perestroika was a long-accomplished fact in Armenia way back in 1987.

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12. Andrew Wilson, Gorbachev's Race to Save Perestroika, Observer, London, 28th February, 1988.

However, according to government daily Izvestia (Jul 27, 1988), Mr. Karus, who started his work in 1974 with promises to improve the economy, put an end to corruption, besides making men the cornerstone of the administration's policies. Unable to live up to the expectations raised by his commitments, however, Karus's years at the top saw the situation deteriorate.<sup>13</sup>

Yet, the roots of the conflict can be traced to the antagonism between the Armenians and the Turks inherited from the centuries gone by. The treaty of Moscow signed between Soviet Russia and Turkey in March, 1921 and confirmed by the Treaty of Kars in October, 1926, by which Nagorno-Karabakh went to Azerbaijan, has left an indelible impact on the Armenian people. A Soviet historian B.A. Boriah has called it one of history's most intolerable and unfavourable treaties. It is this treaty which specified Armenia's unjust borders with Turkey, conceding much of Armenian territory to it, and allocated Nachikevan and Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan. In the mistaken belief that Turkey would be pro-Soviet under Kemal Ataturk, Soviet Leaders of that time, Lenin and Stalin were anxious to appease the Turks.

The fresh crisis over the fate of Nagorno-Karabakh which started in the early 1987 worsened to such an extent that in December 1988 the Soviet

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13. Rajive Shah, Revelations Of Armenian Rebellion, Patriot, New Delhi, 1988.

Government had to announce high-handed measures to bring the situation under control.<sup>14</sup> This situation definitely did not arise between Moscow and the republics but between the two communities of Armenia & Azerbaijan .

Prior to the disintegration, both sides demanded justice from Moscow. President Gorbachev was put in a very awkward position. If he decided in the favour of one or the other he would have been instantly damned by the losing side. It was a critical moment in history when Gorbachev had to summon his willpower, resources and determination to make a rigid choice. This, given the political situation, he could not have.

In the post disintegration period , this lingering crisis acquired even more turbulent dimensions. Earlier, what was limited to ethnic riots assumed the shape of an open conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Despite world communities' repeated efforts, any concrete solution to this ongoing crisis seems to be very difficult in the near future -- if not impossible.

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14.Dev Murarka, Moscow's Problems in the Caucasus, Times of India, New Delhi, 7 December 1988.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **GLASNOST AND NATIONALIST UPSURGE**

The fresh crisis in the form of protests by Armenians over the issues of Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) increased dramatically between 1985 and 1987.<sup>15</sup> The notable rise in such activity was clearly linked to the greater ease of voicing pent up grievances because of the new Soviet policy of liberalisation i.e. glasnost or openness.

In general, Gorbachev's policy of glasnost gave the various ethnic groups impetus to raise their head and rally their grievances. Thus a host of nationality movements started acquiring momentum. There were a number of separate nationalist and local issues & grievances that had been pent up and officially suppressed for most of the 70 years of socialist rule. Liberalisation achieved under the new policy motivated people to take risks, and explore the boundaries of glasnost' and perestroika. Some commentators felt that sudden liberalisation engendered dilemmas for all reformers of authoritarian systems. The most dangerous moment for a repressive regime, they added farther, was not when it was most harsh, but when it tried to relax the controls.

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15. The Central Committee of the CPSU and the USSR Council of Ministers received thousands of individual and collective letters addressing this issue. The letters included demands that, at a minimum, television broadcasts from Yerevan to the NKAO be permitted and that road links between the two areas be improved.



It was natural that under these new conditions Armenians would renew their Karabakh campaign in a vigorous manner. Another important factor which contributed to public activism in Armenia was growing concern over ecological issues.<sup>16</sup> In fact, several of the mass demonstrations in Yerevan calling for the unification of the NKAO with Armenia followed a series of demonstrations protesting against environmental pollution.

In late 1987 and early 1988, several delegations from NKAO met senior party officials in Moscow to discuss the status of the NKAO and other Armenian grievances.<sup>17</sup> However, no concrete progress was made; and in February 1988, a stream of telegrams from the NKAO, as well as resolutions passed at meetings held in various local enterprises, began to arrive in Moscow. These demanded that the autonomous oblast be reunited with Armenia.

On 10 February, the Azerbaijani Information Agency announced that Azerbaijan could never agree to such demands, and Azerbaijani officials increased their pressure on Armenian activists in the NKAO to stop raising this issue.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless the overwhelming majority of Armenians in the NKAO

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16.E. Fuller, *Is Armenia on the Brink of an Ecological Disaster?*, Radio Liberty Research Bulletin, 307/86, August 5.

17.Radio Liberty Research Bulletin, 17.12.1989.

18.Ibid.



supported unification with the Armenian SSR, and they looked to Moscow for a favourable resolution to this issue. On 22 February, they began to hold strikes. Their protest was against a CPSU central committee resolution which stated that separating the NKAO from Azerbaijan was not in the interest of the Armenian and Azerbaijani peoples.

At, almost the same time, daily demonstrations and strikes calling for the return of Nagorn-Karabakh began to be held in Yerevan, paralysing the city soon. Attempts by officials from Moscow to mollify the protesters were unsuccessful. By 26 February 1988, nearly one million people were reported to be on the streets. This was the date when Gorbachev met with two prominent Armenian activists and listened carefully to their arguments. He promised that a just solution to the problem would be found very soon (although he is also reported to have complained that the Armenians were "stabbing perestroika in the back"). He stated that in the course of the next month the situation in the NKAO would be roughly re-examined. The very next day the organisers of the demonstrations in Yerevan agreed to end protests until 26 March in order to allow a special commission newly formed by the CPSU control committee to come to its' conclusions.

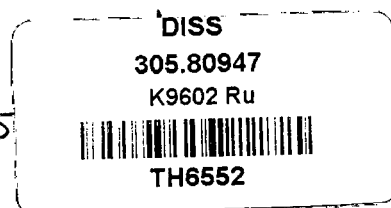
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The calm in Armenia did not spread to Azerbaijan. There had been earlier reports of scattered, non-lethal violence. But on 27th February, Baku radio reported the death of the two Azerbaijani youths in connection with the unrest in



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NKAO, and on 27 and 28th February, retaliatory violence occurred in the Azerbaijani city of Sumgait. This incident contributed to an already sizable flow of refugees who crossed the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan in both directions to escape intercommunal violence.

The central Soviet Press initially held the "hooligan elements" as responsible for the Sumgait tragedy. But Armenian reports claimed that it was well organised "Pogrom" which was aimed only at Armenians and conducted in complicity with local Azerbaijani party officials.<sup>19</sup> Armenian despair and anger over the events in Sumgait were compounded when, by the end of March 1988, it became clear that the authorities in Moscow would oppose any change in the territorial status of the NKAO. Although the Federal government announced an eight year development programme for the NKAO, this clearly did not satisfy many Armenians demands, which had become more insistent in the wake of growing inter communal violence.

The arrival of Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia, (according to official figures there were 165,000 but the press claimed that the real figures were more like 220,000) two third of whom were unemployed, homeless and unregistered, greatly intensified the situation and paved the way for the political explosion at the end of summer. Enraged by the treatment they had received at the hands of the Armenians and by the way they had been may by Azerbiajani officials, they

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19. Glasnost Information Bulletin no. 16-18 1989.

noticeably changed the moral and political climate of the republic.

To prevent further disturbances, troops and police were deployed in Yerevan and the NAKO. Although a general strike at the end of March closed down Stepanakert, the capital of NKAO, for several days, it seemed that a return to a situation of relative calm might be possible. However, Armenians were convinced that Moscow was taking a consistently anti-Armenian, pro-Azerbaijani stance. Understandably, they felt betrayed.<sup>20</sup>

The relative calm in April soon proved to be deceptive, and the Armenian and Azerbaijani government's inability to prevent new disturbances in May led to the "retirement" of the communist party heads of Armenia and Azerbaijan. The "retired" officials were replaced by individuals who were expected to be more amenable to negotiation and compromise. Matters again came to a head in June 1988, when the Armenian Supreme Soviet, the republic's legislature, voted to incorporate the NKAO in Armenia.<sup>21</sup> Two days later, the Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet passed a resolution

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20. Many Azeris claim that Armenians have a great deal of influence in circles close to Gorbachev, and also have the strong moral and financial support of Armenian emigrants. New York Times, 11 March, 1989.

21. Its claim was justified by article 70 of the Soviet Constitution, which affirms the right to self-determination of the people of the USSR. In fact, this recognition of the principle of self-determination is only a part of general declaratory statements about the nature of the Soviet Federation.

on the unacceptability of such a transfer.<sup>22</sup> Clearly, the situation seemed to have reached a point of no return.

This situation was not resolved at the Nineteenth All-Union Party conference at the end of June. Proposals were made to transfer control of the NKAO to third party (eg. by making it part of the Russian Republic or handing over control to the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet). Another solution in a compromising note suggested that NKAO be granted the more prestigious status of autonomous republic instead of an autonomous oblast. This generated little interest and support, although it seemed to provide a logical solution.<sup>23</sup> Azerbaijan's delegates rejected all these proposals, and Gorbachev again stated that no changes in the territorial statues of the NKAO would be permitted. The NKAO Soviet of People's Deputies decided in a dramatic move on 12 July, to secede from Azerbaijan. On the same day, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan declared this decision null and void. When the issue was presented before the Presidium the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet on 18 July, it repeated its argument that a change in borders was impossible.

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22. It referred to article 78 of the Soviet constitution, which states that boundaries between Union Republics can be changed only with agreements of both the concerned republics.  
F. Field, Nagorno-Karabakh: A Constitutional Conundrum, Radio Liberty Research Bulletin, 313/88, 15 July.

23. Ibid



Although a number of strikes and demonstrations took place in the NKAO and Armenia throughout the summer of 1988, tension mounted considerably in September. The NKAO provided with the centrestage for renewed strikes and demonstrations -- as well as inter communal violence involving firearms. Moscow finally declared a "state of emergency" in the NKAO on 21 September. This act was followed by the deployment of troops and armed vehicles in the NKAO and several Armenian centres.

The resurgence of tension in the region took place on 23 June 1989. On that day Armenian nationalists from Nagorno Karabakh , with full connivance of the Special Administrative committee, began to blockade all Azerbaijani settlements in the region. Simultaneously, the Autonomous Republic of Nachikevan was blockaded from the Armenian side. Armenian fighting divisions carried out almost ceaseless attacks on the villages of Sadark and Shakhbuz in the Nachikevan Autonomous Republic.

Acts of terror increased on the Azerbaijan sections of the railway which passed through the Armenian territory of Megrinsk. Railway lines were destroyed; buildings were blown up; trams were fired at; passengers and railway workers were beaten up and killed. On 18 August, one of the extremists, 30 year old A.Parsaganian blew himself up while trying to lay explosives on the railway bed near Karchevan in Megrinsk.

Protesting against the blockade and the actions of the extremists, the workers at the Dzhulfin depot in Azerbaijan went on strike. They demanded

guarantees of safety of a 50 km long railway track passing through Armenia. After the involvement of Moscow, the party leaders of Armenia gave a guarantee of safety to railway workers and passengers. And from 20nd August traffic was restored to normal.<sup>24</sup>

However, the situation in NKAO continued to worsen. Attacks by armed Armenian brigades on Azerbaijani border settlements almost the whole length of the border increased considerably. This new escalation of tension resulted in the decision of a session of the people's deputies of the Supreme Soviet on July 12 to create a special commission to study the Nagorno-Karabakh problem. The Special Administrative Committee, which claimed to work for the reestablishment of peace in the region, only contributed to worsen the situation.

Military divisions became demoralised fast. Capitalising on the sagging military morale, the Armenians began to force Azerbaijanis out of Nagorno-Karabakh. The military soon joined in. All Azerbaijanis were forced out of the villages of Dzhamili, Khasanabad and Dashbulat. All these events were unopposed by the Central Committee of the Armenian Republic and officials of the central government. Under these circumstances, the National Front of Azerbaijan began a campaign to defend the sovereign rights of Azerbaijanis. Large meetings were held on 29th July and on 5 and 9 August in order to

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24. Central Asia and Caucasia Review, p-10, 1989.

cognise the public and the government about the position of Azerbaijanis in Nagorno-Karabakh and speed up the process of normalisation in the region. However, the meetings did not have the desired result. Subsequently a meeting was called for 12 August in Lenin Square, in Baku by the People's Front of Azerbaijan, in which 2,00,000 people took part. At this meeting the following demands were expressed:

1. To call an extraordinary session of the Supreme Soviet of the Azerbaijan SSR in order to pass laws on sovereignty, citizenship and economic independence, to establish the sovereignty of Azerbaijan SSR in Nagorno-Karabakh, to abolish the curfew and the emergency in Baku and other regions of the republic. At the same time a) to broadcast the session on the television, b) to hold nominal election, c) to enable members of the administration of Nagorno-Karabakh to take part in the session.
2. The freeing of all political prisoners.
3. The official recognition of the People's Front of Azerbaijan.
4. The creation of the necessary preconditions in order to hold democratic election in the local and Supreme soviet of the republic.<sup>25</sup>

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25. Ibid.

On Monday 14 August, a one-day warning strike, which involved workers from 61 enterprises, was held in Baku in support of these demands. On the evening of the same day, a meeting involving approximately 5,00,000 people was held at Lenin Square. The government of the republic entered into negotiations with PFA, but the meetings on 15 and 18 August yielded no results. On 19 August, the PFA organised another meetings in which almost half a million inhabitants of Baku participated. On 21-22 August, another token two-day was called by the PFA in Baku.

Another similar strike at Sumgait involved workers from 101 enterprises. Since the government remained passive, the PFA called on the inhabitants to hold a republican meeting on 2 September in support of the demands, and if they were again ignored, to start a week-long national strike on Monday, 4 September.

The subsequent two-week break can be explained by the fact that a broad political action of this kind required detailed preparation : strike committees must be formed in each enterprise, a republican strike committee must be formed and material aid must be provided for the stickers etc.

The republican government relaxed. The obedient press began to threaten



the population, saying that as a result of recent events the crime rate had risen and the valiant militia were having a hard time. Leaflets were pasted , which suggested the involvement of Azerinform , smearing the PFA and its members. Later on 8 september, after women had picketed the offices of Azerianform, the agency publicly declared that it had not taken part in the distribution of these leaflets.

At this point, on 31 August, a committee to aid Karabakh was set up. The leaders of the PFA viewed this committee as an alternative front and it was not supported by the people.

Times had changed, and aroused by events in Nagorno-Karabakh the Azerbaijanis no longer had conviction in the promises made to them. On 2 September, in most areas of Azerbaijan, meetings of over a thousand participants were held, and on 4 September the first general republican strike for 70 years began. All enterprises, including those connected with defence and oil refining, stopped work, the exceptions were essential services, health care and oil wells. The inhabitants of Sumgait, Nakhichevan, Sheki, Kirovabad, Lenkoran and other regions in the republic supported the strike. However, the railway workers' strike immediately claimed the attention of the public and the government. By the second day, traffic on the North Caucasian stretch of the railway was practically at a standstill, and in two days the economy of the South was seriously paralysed. The situation in Armenian was also complicated, because

over 85% of goods entering this republic had to pass along Azerbaijani railways.

The country was unaware of all this because Moscow had declared an embargo on all information about Azerbaijan & Armenia. The events in the Baltic and the strikes in Moldova were well covered, but the events in Azerbaijan were initially completely unreported and then the press began to give out carefully filtered misleading information later. In mid-September, the press began to talk about a blockade of Armenia was not completely surrounded by Azerbaijan and it was impossible for Azerbaijan to blockade the republic. Goods continued to arrive in Armenia, although in lesser quantities. The Azerbaijani counter-allegation was that the situation was the repercussion of economic sanctions against Azerbaijan by Armenia. In response to this act, what had been engendered was in all respects an undeclared war against Azerbaijan by Armenia, which was expressed in territorial claims, the forced expulsion of Azerbaijanis from Armenia, the siege of the Nachikewan Autonomous Republic and the export of arms from Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh.

Concerned about the progress of the strike, "emissaries" were sent from Moscow and troops began to pour into the republic. The republican press tried to scare the public by talking about economic difficulties. However, the public was determined and was not to be intimidated by difficulties and the beginning of repression (arrests and dismissals). In addition, at the meeting on 6 September, another demand was added to the list by PFA- the dismissal of the entire repub-

lican administration. From this time onwards, ta'til (strike) and iste'fa (dismissal) became an integral part of the political vocabulary of Azerbaijanis. It also needs to be said that in contrast to last year's meetings these were all organised and took place at the stated time of 1800 to 2200 hours. There was one more characteristic. Last year people arrived at meetings holding the flags of the Azerbaijan Republic, they still believed in the party. This year, however, the only flags were the tricolour of the Azerbaijan democratic republic, which lasted only 23 months from 1918 to 1920. These banners were considered truly patriotic and with them the PFA called meetings and strikes. Obviously, the mental state of Azerbaijanis had changed considerably and the authorities had to come to terms with this.

Negotiations began between the PFA and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan. The next meeting on 9 September, which 5,00,000 people attended, was held under the slogan of the political dialogue between the administration and PFA. The second secretary of the Central Committee, V.Polianichko reported on the decision by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the republic to hold an extraordinary session of the Supreme Soviet and invited representatives of the PFA to attend. However, since the stickers' demands had not been accepted, it was declared at the meeting that the dialogue would continue, and it was further stated that if by half past eight on the evening of 10 September a representative of the PFA did not appear on republican television to declare an end to the strike, then no agreement would

have been reached, and the strike would continue from 12 September.

On the evening of September 10, the chairman of the PFA, A. Aliev appeared on the television accompanied by members of the administration of the Front. It was announced that the demands of the strikers had been granted in full, and therefore it was decided to halt the strike temporarily until the end of the discussions.

On the 15 September the extraordinary session of the Supreme Soviet of the Azerbaijan SSR took place, and even though the scission was being broadcast for the first time on republican television, thousands of people gathered in front of the republican parliament buildings with banners from early in the morning to late at night. Their feelings were understandable since the fate of the republic was being decided, and nobody had any faith in the deputies.

It is true that all the leaders of the PFA were present at the meeting and two of them, I. Kambarov and E. Mamedov, actually spoke in the meeting, but A. Vezirov remained confident and, with a diplomat's wiles, endeavoured to distort the contents of the documents that the meeting was intended to confirm. This was particularly obvious at the evening session.

When the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh was being discussed, the atmosphere became very tense late at night. Vezirov suggested that the meeting

should restrict itself to making a statement and should not pass a resolution on removing the Special Administrative Committee. He wanted to close the session without considering the other issues which had been agreed in advance between the PFA and the Central Committee. Upset by this breach of protocol, the leaders of the PFA registered a complaint and, addressing the television viewers, called for a general strike.

In the night, in the square in front of the Parliament buildings, a thousand-strong meeting began, and in other areas of the republic some continuously working factories went out on strike. A crisis had begun, and A. Verzirov asked for a fifteen minute break which stretched to two hours. It was not until two in the morning of 16 September that the negotiations between the PFA and the republican government were concluded with the passing of a resolution on the abolition of the Special Administrative Committee and an amendment to the 70th article of the constitution of the Azerbaijani republic.

According to this amendment, the changes to the territorial or administrative structure of the republic were to be decided in future by a referendum. The session also decided to publish all draft laws on the political sovereignty, citizenship and economic independence of Azerbaijan in the republican press for discussion, and interrupted its work for a week to consider these questions.

However, only the draft laws on sovereignty and on the abolition of the Special Administrative Committee were published on 17 and 19 September respectively. The population of the republic considered these questions with an interest and an activity which had never been seen before, despite an incident which considerably worsened the situation. On 16 September, not far from Elakha, a bus destined for Baku was blown up and 5 Azerbaijanis, including a baby, were killed. Six more died later in the hospital and 21 were wounded.

To this day no one knows who placed the time bomb under one of the passenger seats. Two days later, on 18 September, there was an incident near the villages of Giasli and Khydryly in the Agdam region. A motorcade collecting few Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh and accompanied by 120 soldiers was stopped by a group of villagers (approx 1500 people). Anticipating a sudden attack from the Azerbaijanis, without warning, the soldiers opened fire. Three young Azerbaijanis were badly wounded.

The Agdam police were able to distract the crowd and the soldiers left the area. However, a group of civilians unexpectedly appeared and without introducing themselves began to photograph the scene of the incident. This caused a new wave of anger among those who were gathered and they took the photographers for provocateurs. There was a clash, as a result of which two of the strangers, who turned out to be employees of the Ministry of Internal

Affairs, were killed.

Despite these incidents, a referendum was successfully held on the draft sovereignty law and, on 23 September 1989, the extraordinary session of the Supreme Soviet of the Azerbaijan SSR continued its work and passed a constitutional law on sovereignty.

The passage of such a law in Azerbaijan was completely unexpected for the Soviet people, just as much as the fact that the law was passed under pressure from a new social force—the People's Front of Azerbaijan. Any where else it might not have been such a surprise, but nobody expected such a law in Azerbaijan.

On September 20 a draft law was published in the press : "On the economic independence of the Azerbaijani SSR and its transition to Khoszraset and self-financing" The published draft law did not satisfy the demands of economic independence and total Khozraschet of which Azerbaijan thought it was capable.

The same applies to the law on elections, the draft of which had not been published despite the assurances of the party leaders of the republic, and which considerably complicated Azerbaijan's preparation for the elections. The intention was clear : to reduce the time available to the PFA before the elections. They also expected provocation connected with Karabakh to distract the

democratic forces towards solving the problem .

The champions of democracy in Azerbaijan considered that the introduction of emergency measures and martial law, the stationing of special troops on the Azerbaijani railways provided a precedent of starting a wave of irreversible reaction through the country. The use of force in Trans Caucasia, will inevitably lead to its use in other regions. The Azerbaijani Press reported on its loss of faith in Moscow .<sup>26</sup>

The Soviet and international opinion showed no concern over the situation in the blockaded Azerbaijani villages in Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhichevan, which have been blockaded since the summer. The Soviet people did not react to the cruel deportation of the more than 2,00,000 strong Azerbaijani population of Armenia, which did not end even with the armed attacks on Azerbaijani villages along the whole length of the Armenian and Azerbaijani border which have noticeably increased during the past month.

The central press, the ministry of communication headed by Minister Komarev, the people's deputies of the USSR only expressed their censure after the interruption of goods deliveries to Armenia via the Azerbaijani railways."

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26. Central Asia and Caucasia Review, 1990.



The so-called "blockade" began as a part of the republican strike which the PFA called on 4 September, the aim of which was to force the leaders of the republic to accept the proposed demands. However, it must be pointed out that the railway workers had already resorted to a strike at the end of June with demand of safety guarantees for staff when crossing Armenian territory. The inclusion of the railways in the republican strike was very important, and the rail workers were genuinely determined to fight till the last in view of the working conditions they had faced recently.

These extreme forms of struggle : economic pressure, strikes and embargoes on the export of oil products were applied when the atmosphere in the republic was extremely tense.<sup>27</sup> They thought that they were only hours away from incidents of bloody national conflict or armed civil war. They were convinced that if it had come to this the struggle would have lasted no more than one day, and then the "exemplary" the Soviet Army would soak the whole area in blood, thereby destroying all hopes of democratic change in Trans Caucasia and perhaps more.

The PFA resorted to extreme forms of economic pressure in order to avoid bloodshed. In brief, they chose the lesser of the two evils. The situation

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27. Of Pipedreams and Hubble Bubble, *The Economist*, 25 March, 1995.

was critical. On every night plane, loads of soldiers arrived at the airport. In this situation, every new armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh or on the Armenian border may have served as the beginning of open conflict on all fronts.

Faced with the threat of civil war, Azerbaijanis resorted to economic sanctions and their were threatened by occupation. In Moscow an ultimatum was proposed : either lift the blockade, or else, troops would be brought in by rail within 24 hours. As a result of discussion in Moscow on 26 September, a joint protocol was signed according to which 5 members of the administration of the PFA pledged themselves to propose that economic sanctions against Armenia would be stopped for 14 days by the end of the week. This was in order to carry out negotiations during this period on a range of questions caused by the sanctions". V.A. Pal and V.A. Collusive signed the protocol on behalf of the Interregional Deputies' Group and Iu. Samedogly, Z. Alizade, L Iunusova, I. Kambarov and N. Nadzhafov signed on behalf of the PFA.

The Azerbaijanis also understood that to propose new compromises and retreats to a people who had been constantly compromising for twenty months (the acceptance of a programme of socio economic development for Nagorno-Karabakh in which not only the Azerbaijani SSR was to take part but also the Armenian SSR, the redirection of many enterprises from NKAO to Armenia) without any guarantee of a resolution to the conflict and the prevention of bloodshed, was impossible. Most importantly, the national character should

have been taken into account : the ultimatum had no effect in Azerbaijan.

Reported a national daily in Armenia : "Troops! Arrests, repressions... fine! They retreated and compromised in 1920, but now they don't want to retreat." All suffering has an end" that was Azerbaijan's answer. "Even if the leaders of the PFA decide to allow oil into Armenia we will not !" warned the rail workers.

On 5 October PFA economic sanctions agreed to end against Armenia, and to allow all deliveries including oil. In this way the blockade ended. However, Azerbaijani villages in Nagorno-Karabakh continued to be blockaded as before. On 24 October, the leaders of the PFA renewed the blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh until that of Azerbaijani settlements was over. On 6 October 1989, the PFA was officially registered by the Council of Ministers of Azerbaijan in accordance with a decree of 1932. This was a day of great celebration, rejoicing, hope.

The Armenians felt that with the emergence of glasnost and perestroika, their claims for self-determination for Karabakh could finally be realised. As has been mentioned earlier, the Armenians formed an informal group which was called the Karabakh Committee. Support was mobilised on the Nagorno-karabakh issue. On the ecological front, there remained the threat posed by the Erevan nuclear plant and the pollution from the Noirit Chemical works. On 18 September 1987, these activities resulted in a massive demonstration of 5,00,000

people in Erevan. On 20 February 1989, the NKAO Soviet surprised leaders in both republics by calling for unification with Armenia.

These arrests resulted in spontaneous mass mobilisation and demonstrations in Armenia. The focal point of the meeting and demonstrations in Erevan was the aptly named Theatre Square in the centre of the city. Tanks were kept out of the square with symbolic banners of students holding Armenian flags & piles of Lenin's 'Collected works'. The demonstrations created a carnival like atmosphere, which broke down traditional barriers of town vs country and men vs women. For example during the period of mass demonstrations, men & women strangers conversed freely on the streets, something which was perceived as a taboo in patriarchal Armenia.

Initially the supporters of Karabakh movement assumed that Gorbachev would support them in their plea for self-determination. Encouraged by a placatory television broadcast by Gorbachev on 26 February, demonstrators on the streets of Erevan carried his portrait.

After the February demonstrations two prominent intellectuals, Zori Balayan and Silva Kaputikyan met Gorbachev in Moscow. On their return to Erevan they persuaded the crowds to accept a one year moratorium over the status of NKAO - at the end of which they assumed that Gorbachev would allow NKAO to join Armenia.

In fact, Moscow saw the upheaval in Karabakh not as democracy in action. On the contrary, it was viewed as a diversion from the task of Perestroika which could set a dangerous precedent for territorial changes elsewhere in the USSR. A Pravda editorial of 21 February condemned the NKAO demonstrators as 'extremists' and on 24 March the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium announced that the status of NKAO would not be changed.

Within Karabakh the local party elite and non-party activists began working in close collaboration. By March 1988, the CPSU regional committee (obkom) in NKAO had rallied behind the NKAO Soviet's declaration for independence. Even the new Russian sent in as second secretary of the NKAO obkom promptly voted in favour of unification with Armenia. When the nationalists organising committee in NKAO, named krunk ('Crane' - the bird which always returns to its nest), was banned, it promptly re-emerged as the Directors' council formed by local factory managers.

The nationalists tried to use all the legitimate channels at their disposal to articulate their demands. In May 1988, for the first time in party history, delegates to the 19th CPSU Conference in Moscow were elected on a competitive basis (by party members). In most regions of the USSR local party chiefs

successfully rigged these elections, but in NKAO delegates who supported the Karabakh causes were elected in fairly free voting.

However, at the party conference in June Gorbachev maintained tight control and kept nationality issues off the agenda. Gorbachev had been caught off guard by the Karabakh movement. He had expected democratisation to provide public support for his programme of economic perestroika- but instead found that people used it to raise issues far removed from his objectives.

In response to the let-down by the 19th Party conference, another wave of demonstrations hit the streets of Erevan. These culminated in the extraordinary events of 15 June 1988 when a crowd of one million people surrounded the parliament building and forced the Supreme Soviet to vote in favour of the unification of NKAO with Armenia. There followed an uneasy period of dual power, in which the Karabakh Committee strengthened its position through publicity, strikes and demonstrations. Meanwhile, armed clashes between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in border areas became increasingly frequent. In NKAO a general strike lasted two months from May to July, and on 13 July the NKAO soviet formally voted to secede from Azerbaijan- a decision which was rejected by the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium on 18 July.

In its efforts to preserve the status quo, Moscow turned increasingly to

force. A strike at Erevan airport on 3 JULY led to a crackdown by Interior Ministry (MVD) troops which left one Armenian dead. The nationalist leader Parvyr

Airikyan was forcibly expelled from the USSR on 21 July. The MVD troops in the republic were no longer able to maintain control (they were mostly native Armenians, and were increasingly reluctant to use force). On 18 September the Soviet Army imposed 'special regime' (osobo polocherie) in NKAO to curb the mounting violence and on 23 September army units were deployed in readiness throughout Armenia.

By this time the Karabakh Committee, operating from the Writers' Union building, enjoyed such popular authority that they were able to negotiate with the CPA for official participation in the 7 November demonstration in Erevan, which they hijacked and turned into their own parade.

A general strike began in Armenia on 18 November, calling for implementation of unification with Nagorno Karanakh. A military curfew was imposed in Erevan on 25 November, and as armed clashes went out of control, the Soviet Army imposed military rule across the whole republic on 5 December. Troops broke up 27 road blocks and arrested 5000 curfew violators. Just two days later a devastating earthquake struck northern Armenia, killing 17000, destroying 17% of the housing stock and leaving 530,000 homeless.

On 12 January 1989 ,the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium removed NKAO from administration by Azerbaijan and placed it under the control of a newly-created Committee for the Special Administration of NKAO, which answered directly to the USSR Supreme Soviet. The committee was headed by Arkadii Volsky, a former industrialist and protege of Andropov who had served for many years as a department head in the CPSU Central Committee organisation which included five Russians, three Armenians and one Azerbaijani. Gorbachev also appointed one of his proteges as the Armenian Prime Minister. An ethnic Armenian called Vladimir Markaryants, the newly appointed Prime Minister was not conversant with the native language of Armenia.

The Karabakh movement took place in the context of a triangular ballgame which Armenian leaders were forced to play with Moscow and Baku. Armenia was acutely aware of being outnumbered by 7 million Azerbaijanis - and by 57 million Turks who could possibly intervene on the side of Azerbaijan. Even if Armenia were to win a military victory and secure Karabakh's borders, the larger population and economic resources of her adversary would pose a continued threat in the long run.

Many argued that Armenia's best strategy for regaining Karabakh was to



seek support for her cause from Moscow, and from other world powers such as the USA. Thus the Armenians followed their ancient adage of 'better the Russians than the Turks.' This meant, paradoxically, that in order to win back NKAO, the nationalists had to modify their demands for Armenia's independence from the USSR, and tone down their attacks on the local communists. This dilemma prompted intense debates within the nationalist leadership over the wisdom of relying on Moscow for assistance.

The Armenians did not see the Karabakh issue as a conflict over territory, but as a question of principle : the right to self-determination for the region's inhabitants. They dismissed Azerbaijan's claims on Nagorno Karabakh on the grounds that it had been handed to them by Stalin merely to placate the Turks. They saw Karabakh as an issue of human rights and justice. <sup>28</sup>

According to them, Azerbaijani oppression, and not Armenian irredentism, was the problem. The CPA broadly shared this position : relations between the communists and the opposition being much less polarised compared to neighbouring Azerbaijan.

The Armenians argued that the only thing delaying a peaceful outcome

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28. Nagorno-Karabakh- "Apple of Discord, Central Asian Survey, Vol 7, 1988, p-72.

was the fact that Azerbaijan was still ruled by the old Brezhnev-Aliev clique, who were playing the nationalist card in a desperate bid to cling to power and stave off perestroika. Because they were convinced of the justice of their cause, moderate Armenian nationalists consistently showed a desire to negotiate. Azerbaijan, in contrast, saw no need to open negotiations over the status of NKAO. The Armenians cited Article 70 of the Soviet Constitution, which called for self-determination. On the other hand, the Azerbaijanis claimed Armenia was violating Article 78, which guaranteed that borders could not be changed without the consent of both the involved republics. Thus the half-dozen occasions on which Armenian and Azerbaijani party leaders entered into direct negotiations failed to find a solution to the problem.

The Armenians consistently underestimated the strength of Azerbaijani nationalism - and the possibility that Armenian aggression could trigger its growth. They argued that while the Armenian nation had existed for two millennia, it was only a century ago that Baku intellectuals started to forge a concept of Azerbaijani nationhood. It became clear that it was the opposition Popular Front, rather than the communist leadership who were championing the nationalist cause in Azerbaijan. On the contrary, the Armenians argued that this situation, far from being an offshoot of real nationalism, merely signified a political struggle for power.

By the end of 1980's and the beginning of 1990's, there was an overall change in the equation of nationalities within the Soviet Union. Gorbachev's

policies of glasnost and perestroika had started showing its predictable consequences. The republics started seceding from the Union and, finally, by the end of 1991, Soviet Union disintegrated.

On the Armenian and Azerbaijani fronts, the situation was deteriorating. Gorbachev, who failed to provide any definite solution to the issue of Nagorno Karabakh, did not manage to harmonise the relations between these two republics. In the absence of any supreme authority and constitutional binding, the republics, both of whom were discontented and seeking a solution, were readying themselves for the inevitable : an open conflict.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **FROM ETHNIC RIOTS TO ARMED MILITARY CONFLICT**

" The attempt to reform the Soviet Union led to its collapse. The revolution from above initiated secessionism from below. The search for real socialism and a groping oward capilism."<sup>29</sup>

The begining of the 1990's witnessed some major upheavals in the erstwhile U.S.S.R., apart from the most important development i.e. fall of the Soviet system,there was a was a new turn in the ongoing ethnic riots in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Now these riots were replaced by a full fledged war between these two republics.

Although efforts were still on, by Russia and the world community, for negotiation between Armenia and Azerbaijan but all these efforts were bringing no result. The issue of Nagornokarabakh was attatched to their nationals ethnic sentiment and the leaders of both the republics concidered compromise as a

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29. Anuradha Chenoy, Systemic Change and Systematic Collapse, Seminar, Sep-1992, p-18.

humiliation situation had become from bad to worse.

Analysis of the events in and around Nagorno-Karabkh, demonstrates that these events have passed through several distinct stages.<sup>30</sup>

1. The economic, linguistic and national-cultural conflict between the local Armenian population and the government of the autonomous oblast and that of the republic of Azerbaijan as a result of infringements on the right of the local Armenian population. During this period, the conflict was restricted to the Karabakh region (winter 1987-88).
2. The conflict over the territorial status of Nagorno-Karabakh, which gradually encompassed the population of Armenia and Azerbaijan. This conflict was based on mutually exclusive conceptions of the ethnic territory of the respective groups. The dispute called into the question the legitimacy of republican boundaries and the state administrative affiliation of Karabakh (spring summer 1988).
3. Open confrontation and ethnic clashes resulted in the death of hundreds of people and in massive migration of refugees between various republics (beginning in the fall of 1988). Only the oragic earthquake in Armenia

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30. A. M. Yamskov, *Ethnic Conflict in the Trans Caucasus, Theory and Society*, Vol 20, No. 5, October 91, p-636.

on December 7, 1988 put a temporary stop to these dashes, but in the spring of 1989, the situation began to deteriorate rapidly again. In the fall and winter of 1989-1990 there were numerous armed Armenian-Azeri clashes that were both bloodier and more organised. In the fall of 1987, all Azeris were expelled from Armenia and the overwhelming majority of Armenians were expelled from Azerbaijan; in early 1990 including those on the border between the two republics were interrupted only by the decisive military action of the armed forces of the Central Government, an intervention that resulted in numerous casualties in Baku.

Despite the customary use of army to prevent bloodshed it was proved impossible to prevent or put a quick end to the pogroms. It proved that the Karabakh question could not be resolved in the usual fashion. The incidents which took place in Sumgait in the spring of 1988 and in Baku in January of 1990 made only a solid base for a full blown inter-republican crisis.

The break up of the U.S.S.R. was followed by the formation of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Soon Armenia along with other independent republics of the former U.S.S.R. joined it. At that point of time Azerbaijan didn't join CIS because it had always suspected Russian intentions of favouring Armenia. Armenia on the other hand from the very beginning, had developed good relations with Russia. One of the factors behind it could be its

religious similarity and hence treated U.S.S.R. as its historical protector.<sup>31</sup>

Neither of these republics wanted this war to get prolonged. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan wanted a logical conclusion of this war, so some mediating organisation was required which can initiate talks between the two republics to end the war. Both the republics joined conference on security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) in January 1992. But as usual even after several round talks negotiations under its auspices went in vain. \* But the problem was that none of the parties was ready to compromise over the Karabakh issue.

Azerbaijan under Pan-Turkish Elchibey defied Russia by demanding the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Azeri territories. These events on the heels of the heavy defeat suffered by Azerbaijan at the hand of the Elchibey through a coup, with alleged 'Russian involvement, led to shift of policy in Azerbaijan and hence the Azeri Republic joined the C.I.S. But even this bore no result over the Karabakh issue. The assaults and the counter assaults on each others territories continued.

The first outside attempt to mediate the bloody conflict between Armenia

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31. Radyuhin Valdimir, Raging War in the Caucasus, Hindu (Madras), 16 March, 1992.



and Azerbaijan was persuaded by the Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati in February

1992. Mr. Velayati brokered a three days ceasefire. But the ceasefire collapsed within hours of its coming into force. Each side blamed the other for renewing the violence and gave warnings of all out war. Immediately Dr.Velayati's trip to Nagorno-Karabakh was cancelled on 25th February 92, Azerbaijan's news agency quoted Dr.Velayati as saying that his trip to the enclave collapsed because of "Obstacles of the Common wealth of Independent States" armed forces leadership, which handles the situation in the area.<sup>32</sup> Later Armenian and Russian reports blamed Azerbaijan for the failure of the latest attempt of ceasefire, accusing Azerbaijani forces armed with tanks, combat helicopters and crrad missiles of launching a new offensive from Agdam,to the north east of the territory. The reports said that the Azerbaijani forces penetrated three miles into the territory and people in the town of Askyaran,on the main route to stepanakert, capital of Nagorno-Karabakh,had been killed and wounded.

Azerbaijan accrsed Armenians from Askyaran of opening fire on villages in the Agdam region. Armenians laid it was a return fire. But what was common,each side accused common wealth troops of fighting on the other side. It seemed as

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32. Iranian Effort to Stop Fighting in Nagorno- Karabakh, Times, 28 February, 1992.

the common wealth forces were playing a very dubious role in this conflict.

In such a situation when both the parties involved in the conflict suspected the presence of the forces of the CIS on the either side- made the validity of such a force questionable. The people of Azerbaijan come under impression that this force is giving impetus in the escalation to the present crises rather than providing an effective mediation. The deterioration in the situation was intensified following the resignation of the Azeri president Mutalibov on the 6th March 1992. A career communist Mutalibov, held the power in Azerbaijan despite the Soviet collapse. His resignation came amid severe military setbacks to Azerbaijan in the February 1992.<sup>33</sup>

On the 6th March 92 when Azerbaijan legislators met in an emergency session, thousand of people rallied outside the parliament demanding his resignation. Accepting the public mandate which was clearly against him the president resigned.

Times (London), reported on the 7th March 92.

"Mr. Mutalibov's departure is likely to mean a worsening in the four year old battle for Nagorno Karabakh, which Muslim Azerbaijan has controlled since 1923. Muslim Azerbaijan has controlled since 1988 in the bloodiest ethnic con-

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33. Fears of Increasing Karabakh Violence as Mutalibov Goes, Times, 7 March, 1992.

flict in the former soviet union".<sup>34</sup>

The coalition against Mutalibov was united only by dissatisfaction with Azerbaijani losses in Nagorno-Karabakh and the feeling that the president was doing too little to prosecute the war. It combined pan-Turkic nationalists with social democrats and Azerbaijani members of the former Soviet military stationed in the republic.

Actually the Azerbaijanis wanted a leader who should take an initiative to form a separate force in Nagorno Karabakh, comprised of civilian volunteers and deserters from the former Soviet units stationed in the republic.

In the response of Armenian attack in the February 92, Azerbaijan launched a counter attack on Armenian villages in Nagorno Karabakh seizing and burning a village not far from the site of an alleged mass killing of Azerbaijanis. Azerbaijan claimed that at least 1000 people were killed in this attack. Armenia did not dispute the attack, but said the number of victims had been exaggerated.<sup>35</sup>

Forces of the commonwealth of Independent states and the former Red

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34. Ibid.

35. "Karabakh Survivors Flee to Mountains", Antol Lieven, Times, March 2, 1992.

Army were stationed in Nagorno-Karabakh. These forces were now attempting to withdraw and not get involved in the local war, but their exit was blocked by the Armenians. The Azerbaijanis accused CIS forces of siding with the Armenians and Armenians on the other hand were in favour of CIS troops restraining both sides from escalating the fighting.

Armenians ordered a general mobilisation of all men below 50. It appeared that the Armenian forces were better organised, trained and equipped. The former Armenian nationalist militia constituted the mainstay of the Armenian force. As against this the Azerbaijanis were not well organised, trained and equipped. The former Armenian nationalist militia constituted the mainstay of the Armenian force. As against this the Azerbaijanis were not well organised through they were one of the three republics along with Ukraine and Moldova which had opted to have their own armed forces independent from the joint force for the commonwealth of independent states. The attempt to raise a National Guard in Azerbaijan attracted only 150 recruits. The fighting on the Azerbaijan side was carried out by mid 1992 was in the favour of the Armenians.

Fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh turned to be a dispute such as one of those like Lebanon, which seems intractable, localised and only marginal to the interests of big powers. None the less with the escalating disturbances at least five peace initiatives were undertaken by Russia, Iran, Turkey, CSCE and the NATO co-

operation council. All these schemes for the enclave that would allow the villagers to co-exist, with outside guarantees acceptable to both sides. Given the sense of grievance in both communities the proposals based on compromise appeared futile. The alternative was a wholesale transfer of population, with the Armenians moving out of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Azerbaijanis out of Nachikewan, the Azerbaijani enclave between Armenia and Turkey. Turkey suggested a double corridor solution a demilitarised zone giving Armenians free access to Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijanis to Nachikewan. But the question was - Who will take the guarantee of protecting the corridors?

The United Nations has too much on its hands. A European peace keeping force to protect some 180,000 villagers would be enormously expensive. The terrain is hostile, the boundaries unclear and the population suspicious. Any such force could go in only after political agreement between Yerevan and Baku. But neither the Armenians nor Azerbaijani leadership can do much. Public opinion is enraged and wants war. Thousands of refugees are insisting on the right to return. The government themselves have little control over the guerrillas.

Nagorno Karabakh has become a trump card in the power struggles in both the republics. The leaders of both the republics owe their elevation to power to the uncompromising stands they took on the issue.<sup>36</sup> As the conflict gathered

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36. War in Caucasus, Bangkok Post, 10 July, 1993.

momentum, the Azerbaijani parliament deprived Nagorno-Karabakh of its autonomous status, while Armenian legislators voted to incorporate the region into Armenia. Finally Nagorno-Karabakh proclaimed itself an independent republic and applied for the membership of the Commonwealth of Independent States. But it hasn't got the membership yet.

From military point of view, the situation has reached a stalemate. The Azerbaijanis cannot oust Armenian Commandos, who are in control of Nagorno-Karabakh, nor can Armenian Commandos who have infiltrated from across the border defend the province against Azerbaijani attacks. As mentioned earlier, the lack of regular army on both sides have kept the conflict almost in a neutral state.

All efforts of settling the dispute have so far failed. Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan are both under strong pressure from nationalist opposition at home, not to make any concessions to the other side. Moreover neither of the leaders are in full control of the situation as powerful forces in both the republics are not interested in a settlement. Black market trade in weapons and ammunition brings in enormous profits and too many people of influence have a stake in the war going on. Meanwhile, the danger of internationalisation of the conflict has become very real, with persistent reports of arms being smuggled in from Iran and Turkey, and Iranian and Lebanese mercenaries fighting on both sides. Any attempt to initiate a dialogue provokes a fresh escalation of fighting and the talks



break off.

Armenia lost 25,000 people in the 1988 earthquake and several dozen more in the Azerbaijani pogrom at Sumgait-north of Baku. Since then Azerbaijan has blockaded them,starving them of oil and most other necessities of life. Because of the earthquake they have had to shut down the Medzamor nuclear power plant. Nation's trees have been cut down for firewood.

Lord Bethell, a British and a representative of European Parliament visited Yerevan in mid 1993 , curiting his account of this travel he called Yerevan a city of ghosts. He further said"Even in the Gorbachev Suite at the government guest house,we lived without heating or hot water,sleeping in hats,socks,gloves and many sweaters. And this was at freezing point,warm compared to the minus 20'c people endured in winter.

In a report on Armenia,Time magazine on 1st March 1993 described Yerevan-

"As the wintry sun sinks,Armenia's capital takes on the eerie cast of a medieual town under seige. Life in Yerevan has reled backward, like a grainy black and white film,toward a barbaric era of ethnic and religious war- an apocalyptic time when death becomes hundrum,the threat of disease is ever present and noting matters but daily,Primal survival.

Along empty, until streets in the gathering gloom, sleighs rasp over the ice. They carry branches lopped off trees that now stand like amputees in mute supplication to the heavens. Soon this last source of fuel for the city's 1.5 million hungry, freezing residents will be gone, and the suffering will intensify."<sup>37</sup>

Instead of enjoying a new life offer becoming an independent republic the Armenians are dying of cold and hunger. In some cities unemployment is 90 percent. There are 300,000 refugees. The average monthly wage is enough for one meal at Yerevan's one restaurant which is of course, owned by local mafia. Schools and hospitals are almost closed: the sick stay mostly at home. Either they get better or they die. The sewage system is broken and when hot weather comes, hepatitis and typhoid becomes widespread.

This is the place where electricity is available only a few hours a day, telephone works intermittently if at all and seven liters of gasoline costs more than the average monthly salary. The daily ration of 250 grams of bread is less than the amount allotted workers in Leningrad during the German siege in World War II. Whatever little food is available is sold for double the exorbitant prices

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37. In the Icy Grip of, Time, 1 March, 1993, p-24.



charged in Moscow. According to the government report 30,000n people died in the winter 1993 from cold malnutrition and starvation. The death rate rose sharply as the weekend population succumbed to the diseases of deprivation; morgues were overflowing with corpses that relatives couldn't afford to bury. Harant bagration the Prime Minister of Armenia was quoted saying "We are dying : we need fuel and energy through it is in in an earthquake zone We have no alternative"

With the escalation of the conflict, the Azeris imposed a blockade Armenka, cutting of oil and gaslines. A crucial gas pipeline in Georgia, the neighbour to the north-where minority unrest also sputters unchecked-was blown up several times, reducing the flow of gas to trickle. Loans from Russia and some international aid that managed to by pass the blockade have saved Armenia from total collapse, but because of the power shortage only 6 of 400 factories are operating.

Many citizens blame the government of president Levon Ter Petrosyan for the economic collapse. People who are fed up of this conflict say that a government whose people are starving does not have the moral right to rule. It is now time to compromise own Nagorno-Karabakh. The people now want to stop the war by any means. They want an effective intervention of the world community. But a militantly nationalist opposition, supported by the several million-strong Armenian diaspora around the

world, rejects the slightest concession over Nagorno-Karabakh, even to arrange a ceasefire.

Russia could probably provide more assistance, but President Yeltsin, for all his sympathy for Armenia, clearly does not want to get caught in the war, especially at the risk of alienating his own country's Muslim minority.

The condition is no better in Azerbaijan and it is the same as in Armenia. Several thousand of innocent people have died in the non-ending war and an apocalyptic situation prevails there too.<sup>38</sup> People are disappointed and disillusioned by the way things are going on. The laws are not working and discipline is at its lowest ebb. Even the army currently consists of a group of people dressed in uniform rather than a disciplined armed force. The country is locked in internal power struggle with rival political groupings. Political ceasefires don't last long since many opposition members distrust the government.

Since the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, more than a dozen conflicts grew in its newly independent republics. The longest amongst them is the Azeri-Armenian conflict. This conflict will undoubtedly have an impact on burgeoning dreams of independence among other ethnic minorities.

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38. Assault on Azerbaijan, Time, April 19, 1993, p-24.

As was in Yugoslavia the Azeri-Armenian fight too is much more a fight for land than a religious or ethnic war. Nagorno-Karabakh which declared independence in December 1991 after a referendum, is fighting to survive. No country has recognised it, not even its supporter Armenia.

The health minister of Nagorno-Karabakh government Vyacheslav Agabalian was quoted saying "We don't want to be slaves. We want to be free human beings."

Azerbaijan now offers autonomy to Nagorno-Karabakh but vows never to give up the enclave, which measures only about 70 by 45 miles (133 by 72 kilometers) at its longest and widest points. Armenia is being constantly condemned of supplying Nagorno-Karabakh separatists with troops and weapons.

Russia and the West also favour autonomy, fearing border changes could open a Pandora's box of nationalist violence throughout the region. The stance of Russia couldn't check the eruption of violence in Chechnya and central Asia.

Even the offer of autonomy does not satisfy the people of Nagorno-

Karabakh who were haunted by the Turkish massacre in 1915 and are wary of the situation. Many refer Azerbaijanis a Turkic people, as 'Turks'.

Now at this point it seems the consequence of this non ending war will be much worse than Bosnia. Nagorno-Karabakh might seem a tiny place but, it's a place where a lot of interests meet..pa

## CHAPTER IV

**RUSSIA'S POLICY TOWARDS AZERI-ARMENIAN  
CONFLICTS**



Following the disintegration of the U. S. S. R. in late 1991, the evolution of Russian views on peacekeeping in the disturbed Trans Caucasian region has reflected the political trends in the foreign and national security policies of Russia.<sup>39</sup>

After a relatively short period of indecision and foreign policy dissonance in 1992, a consensus among the Russian political elite is emphatic on the need for the Russian Federation to play a more assertive and dynamic role in the post-Soviet Trans Caucasia. This role, Russian strategists argue, has been imposed upon Russia by its unique geo-political position and historical realities. Besides, there are a host of new challenges from the 'near abroad' and enduring interdependence between 'Russian heartland' and the rest of fragmented Soviet Union.

Before we go into a detailed analysis of Russian policy towards the Azeri-Armenian conflict, it is important to reflect on the policies of the erstwhile U.S.S.R. to bring

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39. The term peace keeping is used here to define both traditional UN style 'peace keeping' operations and some more assertive 'peace making' or peace enforcement operations.

about peace in this region.

Since the outbreak of the crisis in 1987 that continues till date, several attempts were made by the CPSU Central Committee and the then President Mikhail Gorbachev to calm down the situation in the troubled territory. Following a massive demonstration by the Armenians on 26 February, 1988, Gorbachev met prominent Armenian activists, listened carefully to their arguments and promised a "just solution" to the problem. He stated that in the course of next month the situation would be thoroughly re-examined. But after a few days, in a meeting of the CPSU Central Committee, the case for transferring Nagorno-Karabakh was ruled out.

The Committee believed that the actions and demands aimed at a revision of the existing national- territorial structure were at a variance with the interest of the working people of the Azerbaijan and Armenian Republics and would spoil the relations between nationalities.<sup>40</sup>

In July 1988, the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian Republic again requested the U. S. S. R. Supreme Soviet to get Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast transferred to Armenia because the Armenians constituted a large section of the population. Immediately thereafter, the

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40. current soviet press. Vol. XL, No. 8, 23 March 1988, P-6

Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan openly opposed the suggestion.

However, the Soviet Constitution also could not have offered any solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh dilemma which had widely intensified by the end of 1988 and the beginning of 1989. Ethnic riots in Baku and Nagorno-Karabakh, coupled with regular demonstrations in Erevan, had become a common feature. Article 78 of the Soviet Constitution stated that the "territory of a union republic cannot be changed without its consent. Boundaries between union republics may be changed by mutual agreement of the concerned republics which should be approved by the union of soviet socialist Republic. " 9<sup>41</sup>

This created a constitutional problem in NKAO's secession. Its transfer to Armenia was impossible. The only thing Gorbachev could have done -- and he did attempt thus -- was constantly persuading the leaders and the people of both of the republics to normalise the condition. The last attempt by Gorbachev was made in September, 1991, when he, along with other Russian and Khazak leaders, tried to persuade Azeri and Amenian leaders to bring peace to the disputed region.

Despite Gorbachev's constant persuasion, however, the situation in this

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41. The constitution of the U. S. S. R., Moscow, 1974.



region kept on deteriorating further. In December 1991, following the disintegration of the former Soviet Union, the ethnic riots in this region were replaced by an open conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

An examination of the successor republics of the former Soviet Union shows an increasing hegemony of Russia. The Russian Federation utilised a series of overt and covert military, economic and political levers in support of a medley of objectives :

- (i) Establishment and support of governments favourable to Moscow.
- (ii) Participation in the military protection of the outer bound areas of the former Soviet Union, even remote ones from the Russian Federation.
- (iii) Strengthening the position of the Russian Federation as the leader of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) bound to Russian leadership by a complex economic, political and security treaties.
- (iv) Buttressing Russia's economic positions in near- neighbour countries through increased control of assets, resources and transport facilities within them.

- (v) Providing support for Russian minorities in the non Russian republics and
- (vi) Promotion of greater political, social and economic stability in the near-neighbour countries in order to prevent chaos from spreading to Russia itself.

Military intervention by Moscow to stop ethnic conflict in the near-neighbour countries was proposed by President Boris Yeltsin as early as February 28, 1993 <sup>42</sup>. Participation of Russian forces in ethnic conflicts has been associated with changes of political leadership in Tajikistan, Azerbaijan and Georgia. In each case, timely intervention of Russian troops at critical point helped to establish or sustain regimes that were less nationalistic and more favourable to Russian interests than the ousted governments.<sup>2</sup> <sup>43</sup>

The economic power of Russia is based on its position as a principal supplier of raw materials, especially of fuel to most of the non-Russian republics, and as a market for many of their products. By far the most powerful lever has been the supply of Russian natural gas and petroleum, which are

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42. New York Times, March 1, 1993, Pp 1 and 4

43. Yuriy .N. Afanas 'yev in New York Times, February 28, 1984, P. A- 11

crucial for industry, electricity supply and domestic heating in most of other republics. These republics generally have not had the financial resources to pay for all the fuel they import. Consequently, they repeatedly have accumulated huge debts to Russia, which then has curtailed supplies, causing decline in industrial production and the supply of electricity.

The frequent renegotiations of these debts has enabled Russia to exact numerous economic, political and military concessions, and sometimes outright or partial ownership of facilities, establishments, or resources in the debtor countries.

Political leadership by Russia has been enhanced by its role in intervention in disputes. Russia has utilised ethnic, national, tribal and other divisions and feuds to bolster its position as an arbiter on which both sides depend.<sup>44</sup> Key examples of this propositions are- ethnic, tribal and regional struggles in Tajikistan, the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh and numerous ancient tribal and ethnic feuds in North Caucasus.

It would be wrong to assume that all Russian interventions are cold-blooded Machiavellian tactics of divide and rule. A significant element is the Russian fear

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44. Chauncy .D. Harris, Ethnic Tension in the Successor Republics in 1993 and Early 1994, Past Soviet Geography, April, 94 P. 186.

of chaos and instability along its own southern borders. Therefore , its assumptions of the role of an honest broker in settling disputes and in achieving political consensus and social stability.

Despite the existence of such a motive, however, Russian moves to promote stability seemed to come after the political leaders in non-Russian republics became dependent on Moscow. It was due to intense military, economic and political pressure by the Russian Federation that Azerbaijan decided to join the Commonwealth of Independent States in late 1993.

Russian policy has not been uniformly applied in every successor republic. For, Russia itself is badly split into many factions of reformers, former communists and ardent nationalists with differing interests and viewpoints.<sup>45</sup> Further, because of the weakness of the central government, local and regional Russian groups, some of them heavily armed, have been able to intervene independently in conflicts, and often at cross purposes (eg. in Abkhazia) with the announced policies of the government. These divisions have resulted in numerous contradictory actions and unco-ordinated policies.

Some tension is clearly visible, for example, with respect to the formulation of policies for the protection of Russian minorities in

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45. *Izvestia*, September 29, 1993 P-3

the non-Russian republics. The second Congress of Russian communities in Moscow, January 29-30, 1994, attracted 1,800 delegates. The chairman noted that one-sixth of all Russians constituted the population of minorities in the non-Russian republics. They number 25 million, and perhaps six million of them may return to Russia within the next two years.<sup>546</sup>

The delegates were critical of government leaders in all the successor republics of the former Soviet Union, including the Russian Federation, and demanded better housing for Russian minorities, increased safety, freedom from ethnic slurs directed at Russian, more help and better conditions for Russian refugees and forced migrants, and legal restrictions on foreigners in Russia. They called for reunification of the Russian nations as a unified state and as the successor to the Russian empire and the Soviet Union.<sup>647</sup>

The Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs frequently have made contradictory statements on the issues of withdrawal of Russian troops and the use of economic measures to force better treatment of Russian minorities in the neighbouring countries. The latter measures represent a double-

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46. Nazavisimaya gazeta, Feb 1, 1994 P-2 -- asquated in past Soviet Geography April 1994 P-186.

47. No government leaders participated in this nationalistic Congress - Segodneya, Fenruary 1, 1994 P-9

edged sword, since cutting down on the shipments of fuel and goods from Russia would severely affect the former union enterprises, in which the majority of workers actually were Russians, not members of the titular nationalities.<sup>748</sup>

Even though political leaders repeatedly sign agreements that announced the end of a particular conflict, the underlying causes have not been dealt with adequately or the political leadership simply has lacked the ability to execute the policies. The consequence often is that the same conflict erupts once and again.

Russian influence on the neighbouring countries rests on economic, political and military predominance. As mentioned earlier, its economic dominance rests in part on its role as source of fuel and energy, raw materials and food, industrial component and industrial products, besides as the main market for the republics.

Its political role rests on the relics of the Russian imperial expansion and long established patterns of political leadership. Its military role has particularly been exercised through intervention in regional and ethnic conflicts, notably, the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno- Karabakh.

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48. Segodnya, November 13, 1993. P-2.

The bombardment by the Azeri forces on Stepanakert in January 1992 had made the situation on the Azeri-Armenian fronts such that it forced Boris Yeltsin to intervene. However, like the earlier attempts made by the Gorbachev Government, Yeltsin's attempt was also wasted.

None of the parties, however, were ready to compromise. The difficulty of any ceasefire was intensified by the fact that most of the fighting was done by irregular troops whose sentimental involvement in the struggle made any peace process to go in vain. According to the Moscow Military Paper *Krasnaya Zvezda* (quoted in Times, London, 28th February 1992), large groups of Armenians and Azerbaijani troops stationed in the region transferred their allegiance to their home republic, after Moscow withdrew its Interior Ministry forces in January, 1992.

The Armed Forces spokesperson in Moscow denied that any Commonwealth unit was supporting either side, but they conceded that the frustration among the officers stationed in Stepanakert was reaching a dangerous level. They were often compelled into returning fire when attacks and casualties became more frequent.

✓ Yeltsin's failed mediation attempt was followed by an attempt by Iran for

a ceasefire which was believed to reflect the nation's duality. On the one hand, Iran feared the spread of the conflict in its own Azerbaijani population, on the other, it appeared to be competing, especially with Turkey, for influence in the former Soviet Republics. The Armenians, despite being Christians, supported Iran's effort when they expressed concern that the Armenian side should be given a fair deal.

In the early 1992 conflict, the Azerbaijani Government repeatedly accused Soviet troops of involvement. This would have possibly been an attempt to find excuses for the serious military depots, which could threaten the survival of the then President Mutalibov.

In fact, part of reason for Armenia's initial successes in the ongoing civil war was her better organisation, discipline and training. It had bought most of its equipment from the Soviet soldiers in return for dollars provided by the Armenian diaspora.<sup>49</sup>

From 1987 to 1991, i.e. prior to the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Armenians repeatedly accused the Soviet Army for siding with Azerbaijan, but after the break-up of the U.S.S.R., most of the Armenians regarded the Commonwealth forces as their defenders. The civilians reportedly blocked roads

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49. Times, London, 2 March, 1992.



to prevent the CIS troops from leaving Nagorno-Karabakh. The Azerbaijanis were convinced that the CIS regiment took part in the Armenian capture of 'Khodjaly' and the killing of several Azerbaijanis. So, they blocked the path of the regiment which was retreating to Russia after crossing Azerbaijan.

The situation had a dangerous escalatory potential with far reaching implications. ✓ Turkish President Turgut Ozal started talking of cultural and religious links between Azeris and Turks. Consequently there was a growing feeling of mutual support between the Turkish and Azerbaijani people.

✓ To apply pressure on Armenia, Turkey denied it access to its port on the Black Sea which is the natural outlet for landlocked Armenia. On 11 March, the Tribune, reported: " The Turkish stand, especially in view of the Turkish record in Cyprus, is likely to enhance the fears of those who are worried about the emergence of an Islamic bloc. Any Turkish belligerence against Armenia in favour of Azerbaijan will adversely affect its chances of getting closer to the European Economic Community."

Meanwhile, Moscow, which was getting regular reports from Armenia and Azerbaijan, was attempting to monitor the complex developments of the Azeri-Armenian war. The Azeri leaders constantly accused the Commonwealth of Independent States - they called the CIS a shadow umbrella organisation -- of co-ordinating among the former Soviet Republics and of siding with Armenia. It

was difficult to ascertain the truth in the absence of authentic information from the war zone.

The taciturnity of Moscow boomeranged. Initially, it faced the flak of the Azeris, now Armenia too trained her guns at it. Interestingly, the accusation was common: that Moscow, each side said, had been supporting the other.

✓ The critics have gone upto the extent by stating, "Russia is facing propound identity crisis in foreign policy and has been successful at maintaining leverage over both Armenia and Azerbaijan." <sup>50</sup> Some suggest that Russia alternatively supported each side by offering economic assurance or making weapons available, thus keeping both countries weak and increasingly dependent on the Big Brother.

Russia's attempt has been twofold: to dislodge the Turkish hegemony by means fair and foul, and dodging any positive involvement in the Caucasian wars. Influenced by attitudes in the neighbouring south, and supported by the opulence of natural resources, many North Caucasian republics within Russia are taking up arms for independence. As a result, Russia finds itself more entangled in the Georgian civil war. Having not articulated its interests, Russia seems to be in troubled waters. Its desires appear

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50. Wuilliam Ward Mags, *Current History* January 1993 p.6

to be lacking in direction as, ambitious, it attempts to have its fingers in every thinkable pie : be it Georgia, or Armenia, or Azerbaijan.

Even strong nationalists in the foreign policy establishment concede that Russia should never again control events in the Southern Caucasus. Andranik Migranyan, director of the CIS Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences 'Institute of International Economic and Political Research' in an essay<sup>51</sup>, says that even after pulling out of the Caucasus, "Russia's vital interests be safeguarded through the efforts of countries that are able to act in Russia's long term interests."

✓ Many Russians, however, have a different story to tell. In an interview to the "Russia", political scientist Oleg Tsagolov said: "For Russia to leave the Caucasus could mean to doom itself to no Caucasus wars, to give in to Turkey and Iran, and to get a Lebanon on its borders." Such statements reflect the concerns and ambitions of the prominent Russians.

In July 1993, Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachev announced that two Russian bases would be established in Armenia. This was confirmed by Erevan. According to Armenia's 'Snark News Agency', Colonel Y. Ivanov of

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51. Rossiiskya garetta, August 4, 1992

the Russian Defence Ministry visited Erevan in August 1993 and had talks with his Armenian counterparts on the deployment of Russian troops in Armenia.

✓ Azerbaijani Defence Ministry has frequently stated that the Russian Federation, having declared itself as the successor to the U. S. S. R. , continues to practice imperial politics, provoking clashes on international soil. Russia is involved in an undeclared war, as an undeclared party.

Russia's economic problems have restrained her from fighting on several fronts. So, it temporarily froze the Trans Caucasian conflicts. It is no coincidence that peace processes are going on simultaneously in Armenia and Azerbaijan. The same was done in Trans Dniester region, where neither the conflict was ended, nor the problem settled.

Russia's sedate political movements in the Caucasus has encouraged the Armenians to extract the maximum advantage and turn Armenia into a stabilising factor in the region. The Armenian Press confirms such claims. Under the headlines "National State Ideal and How to Achieve it," the Armenian weekly "Azatamant" remarked that Armenia's task was to carefully study Russia's political manoeuvres in the Caucasus and take maximum advantage of them. <sup>52</sup>

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52. quoted in Turkey holds the key to the Caucasus conflict, Yasin Aslan, Eurasian Studies, Spring, 1994.

Consequently, if possible, Armenia should help those processes which would keep Russia within her borders along the Caucasian ridge.

According to the paper, relations between Armenia and Russia demanded the presence of a strong Armenia, failing which a poor and parasitic republic would be replaced by some other partner.

Armenia and Azerbaijan are at war. And Russia has a lot at stake in the Caucasus. In the region, mainly these two vulnerable nations, Moscow's policy is motivated by two factors : its concern with strengthening its southern flank near Turkey; and economic interests in the oil and gas resources located particularly in Azerbaijan.

The Russian policy is also couched in a diplomatic pretext : that of safeguarding the interests of the Russian minorities in each of the Caucasian states. Clearly, however, the issues of defence and access to natural resources are prioritised ahead of the well being of its own people. In fact, Russia's main intention has been the establishment of its hegemony over the successor republics. And this, no 'reason' offered otherwise can deny.

## **EPILOGUE**

In the fraternal family of Soviet peoples, nationalism had been ruthlessly suppressed for decades. When this emotion emerged after Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of glasnost came into being, the throttled ethnic grievances and recriminations were manipulated by rival ruling clans in both Azerbaijan and Armenia. Essaying to subvert the impact of the Soviet democratic reforms, it is said that the omnipotent secret police, the KGB, also stoked the fires of the ethnic conflict.

Yet, the activities of the local government in Nagorno-Karabakh remained unaltered. Following events which have left an indelible imprint on Armenia till today , scores of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh were massacred by Azerbaijanis, provoking similar atrocities by Armenians. Within two years, 300,000 Armenians were forced to flee Azerbaijan. Armenia witnessed an equally bizarre happening : 200,000 Azerbaijanis fled the republic. The state of the conflict worsened.

Meanwhile, both the republics were marked by power struggles. And Nagorno-Karabakh had become a common trump card in both. President Ayaz

Mulalibov of Azerbaijan and President Levon Ter Petrosyan of Armenia owed their elevation to power to their rigid stands on the NKAO issue.

As the conflict gathered momentum, the Azerbaijani Parliament deprived Nagorno-Karabakh of its autonomous status. On the other hand, Armenian legislators voted to incorporate the region in Armenia. Finally, Nagorno Karabakh proclaimed itself an Independent Republic and applied for the membership of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

From the military perspective, the situation in this region has reached a deadlock. Azerbaijan cannot oust Armenian commandos who have effective control over Nagorno-Karabakh. At the same time, Armenian commandos who have infiltrated from across the border defend the province against Azerbaijani attacks. Whereas zealous sentiments continue to guide the course of the conflict, neither of the two republics can claim to have a strong regular army.

All efforts at fruitful negotiations have been futile. This is since leaders of both the republics have been under strong pressure from nationalist oppositions, eliminating the possibility of any concession to the other side. Moreover, neither of the leaders seem quite in control of the situation, as powerful forces in both republics are not interested in a settlement. Blackmarket trade in weapons and ammunitions bring enormous profit and too many people are busy making their individual fortunes from the ongoing conflict. The issue



has been more or less internationalised with persistent reports of arms being smuggled in from

Iran and Turkey. Besides, Iranian and Lebanese mercenaries are common to the forces on both the sides.

Any attempt to initiate a dialogue has heightened the intensity of struggle. The temporary ceasefire during such dialogues inevitably come to an end. The peace overture triggered off by Mr. James Baker, the US Secretary of State, besides the Peace Mission of the European Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe have failed to stabilise the situation in this region. Each side has been accusing the other of using deadly artillery in the urban areas -- an act that is strictly prohibited under international law.

Latest developments indicate that the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia are interested in ending the conflict which is eroding the stability of their regimes and ruining their economy. Yet, each leader is measuring his step with caution, fully aware that one false step or incorrect statement can unseat him from the pedestal of political power.

Neighbouring Iran and Turkey with far influence in the former Soviet Republics, have been always very anxious to play the role of mediator between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Iran finds itself reacting since it has twice the number of Azerbaijanis living on its soil compared to Azerbaijan itself. The

destabilisation effect of the Caucasian conflict on its domestic situation also concerns Iran.

The foreign minister of Iran Mr. Ali Akbar Velayati has had talks earlier in Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, and even negotiated for a three day ceasefire. However, neither Iran nor Turkey seem to have enough political and, what is more important, economic leverage on the conflicting parties to make them talk peace.

The one party which could have done this is the CIS of which both Azerbaijan and Armenia are members. Yet, the CIS is too torn by internal differences to play an effective peacekeeper's role in the conflict.

During the entire 1995, there was relative peace in this disturbed region. This period was free from the reports of any major massacre. However, an incident at the Azeri-Armenian border on 23rd February, 1996, brought an end to the year-long peace in the Nagorno - Karabakh region where fresh negotiations are supposed to take place. Here, U.S. and Russia are supposed to propose the exchange of territories in a step towards terminating this lingering crisis.

To end the conflict with a territorial exchange, a concept has been evolved by the American political scientist

Paul Globe. According to this concept , Nagorno - Karabakh would be unified with Armenia; and the Zangezur district of Armenia would be given to Azerbaijan, creating a direct border with Turkey.) Globe's plan was first discussed in the early 1990s only to be ignored with the passage of time. In February 1996, he returned with a new and improved plan.

(Globe believes that there are three possible dimensions to the problem of Nagorno-Karabakh. In the first, the war continues and the Karabakh region comes up the loser.

In the second, an "external power" (meaning Russia) forces its own solution in the region-the preservation of existing borders and the creation of a Russian protectorate. The third possibility suggests that, following Globe's plan as envisaged earlier, Nagorno Karabakh goes to Armenia with the Lachin corridor and Zangezur goes to Azerbaijan.

The new amendment to Globe's plan gives Armenia the Western part of Nakhichevan, the precise spot where the incident on the 22nd February ended the armistice. Besides, he also takes into account the pipeline that will transport oil from the Caspian Sea. The political scientist suggests that Armenia should hold negotiations with Azerbaijan and Georgia, since the pipeline could well pass through Armenian territory.

Baku is ignoring Globe's plan on the grounds of the assertion that the change of borders violates international agreements and UN principles. The position of Azerbaijan president Geidar Aliyev remains unchanged. Baku agrees

to give the Karabakh region "broad autonomy" in exchange for 20 percent of occupied Azerbaijan land and the return of some 1.5 million refugees. It is also prepared to discuss the idea of autonomy depending on the liberation of annexed territory and the step-by-step return of refugees living in camps in Iran and Russia.

Azerbaijan's leadership rejects the idea of "federalising" the state of Azerbaijan or establishing confederate relations with Nagorno Karabakh.

The invariably tough position of Azerbaijan caused the deadlock in negotiations in Rome and Minsk under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. It also ended the peace making efforts of the CIS inter-parliamentary assembly.

Aleksan Arutyunyan, the permanent representative of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic in Armenia, compares the Karabakh conflict to the situation in Bosnia. He recalls recent events in Sarajevo, where 100 thousand Serbs ignored guarantees by the UN and NATO and left their native city, burning their homes as they went.

He thus obviously believes that an autonomous Karabakh within Azerbaijan is an impossibility; and that the "Bosnian solution," - the Dayton agreements on Bosnia concluded under extreme pressure by mediators -- cannot be applied in the Karabakh conflict. As far as Azerbaijan's proposal of autonomy goes, Arutyunyan says that the proposal was never made during negotiations.

He also maintains that such a proposal has to be made by the OSCE group in Minsk, and not by Azerbaijan. Arkady Gukasyan, Nagorno Karabakh's



Minister of Foreign Affairs, believes that one of the sides has to make concessions. "Everyone expects us to make the concessions, but we think differently. We're waiting for Azerbaijan to make a move," he said.

Yerevan, like Baku, is not prepared to discuss an exchange of territory. Globe isn't the only one who has made such proposals. Nelson Ledski, the former U. S. ambassador to Turkey, had also proposed changing the Armenian-Azerbaijan border; as did Jack Mareska, the former U. S. representative to the OSCE Minsk group. Yerevan's position has not changed. It demands that the people of Nagorno-Karabakh be permitted to decide their future for themselves.

(However, the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic and Armenia must take into consideration the interest of the West, which are directly or indirectly tied to Caspian oil. Arkady Gukasyan believes that the Karabakh delegation was under heavy pressure by mediators during the last negotiations. He is of the opinion that this is due to the mediators being more concerned with their own interests than actually ending the conflict.

In other words, Russia and the United States are interested in Azerbaijan's oil. "Azerbaijan thinks that it can use its oil pipelines to get other countries to put pressure on Armenia," says Zhirair Liparityan, an adviser to the Armenian President. But President Ter-Petrosyan officially admitted that "Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh should find a more flexible and constructive approach to negotiations."

During President Yeltsin's January meeting with Armenian President Ter-Petrosyan in Moscow, Yeltsin said that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would

begin to follow a policy of "shuttle diplomacy". The two sides agreed that there was no need to reinvent the wheel, since adequate mechanisms for peacemaking already existed after four years of diplomatic activity.

The Kremlin confirmed that it intended to avoid any drastic moves in solving the Karabakh conflict. Preferring step-by-step negotiations, Russia underlined that it would not support either of the sides, but would remain a neutral mediator which, Paul Globe feels, was "a mistake". He holds that the world will quickly grow weary of Russia's inconsistent policy -supporting Baku today and Yerevan tomorrow.

Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Yevgeny Primakov still rejects the idea of a territorial exchange. Primakov, on the eve of a visit to Baku, Stepanakert, and Yerevan, said that his proposals would take into account the positions of all sides, including the United States. However, it's not clear what those proposals actually are, since Primakov and the presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia believe that making the details public would affect the process of negotiations.

Washington hasn't been twiddling its thumbs either. This was made clear by Joseph Pressel, the U. S. representative to the OSCE Minsk group, during his visit to Yerevan. The diplomat met with the Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosyan, the President of the Nagorny Karabakh Republic Robert Kocharyan, and the Russian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Boris Pastykhov.

Without divulging the details of the issues discussed, Pressel said that the U. S. and Russia had agreed "not to give each other any surprises." He added

that his meeting with Pastukhov proved once more the need for consultations between Russia and the U. S. over the Karabakh conflict. As far as Nagorno-Karabakh's future status goes, Pressel believes that it should only be defined in a "legitimate manner," or else it will be "too superficial and poorly formulated." Pressel also noted that "constructive vagueness" could be useful in the matter.

The vagueness in statements by American diplomats and the silence of Yevgeny Primakov shows that, while remaining mediators in the conflict, Washington and Moscow are secretly trying to outwit one another in terms of their peacekeeping potential.

(Both sides approach the problem from opposite directions. Moscow prefers the preservation of existing borders and improved status for Nagorno Karabakh either in the federation or the confederation (depending on the agreements reached). This solution would give Russia a chance to increase its influence in the Trans-Caucasus. The White House, for the fourth time in five years, is indirectly (through independent experts) proposing a territorial exchange. This would take Russia out of the 21st century oil picture and strengthen the Pro-Western stance of Azerbaijan through Turkey.)

Stepanakert had a reason for calling the American solution "Bosnian". The Kremlin's peacemaking role in Bosnia, which has been divided into three sectors, is largely symbolic. In the Karabakh conflict Russia has a chance, as all the parties involved are opposed to changing the borders.

Torn by ethnic strife and under the impact of the conflict's internationalisation, Nagorno-Karabakh is in a state of sustained turmoil. As



vested interests and parochial convictions dictate the course of events, a solution to the problem seems to elude the people within as well as the world outside.



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