

tcg-30
Part Two

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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To: Readers of Tom Goltz's newsletters

From: Peter Martin

Using my own weary eyes as a gauge, I have
arbitrarily divided Tom's Newsletter Number 30
(tcg-30) into two parts.

This is tcg-30 (Part Two)

You're welcome,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'PM' or a stylized 'Peter Martin'.

24.3.92

Agreeing to talk peace, Azerbaijan prepares for War

Baku, Azerbaijan--Despite its agreement to participate in a international peace conference on Nagorno Karabakh, the leadership of the former Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan today announced plans to put the country on war footing to counter Armenian gains in and around the disputed, enclave territory.

The peace conference agreement, reached in the Finnish capital Helsinki between Armenian, Azerbaijan and other CSCE member countries, foresees a meeting between Armenia and Azerbaijan along with eight other nations at the Belorus capital of Mensk. No date for the peace conference was given.

But even as Baku's representatives in Helsinki were agreeing to mediation, the government-in-forming at home voiced a commitment to aggressively defend the country's frontiers through increased military preparedness.

The issue of maintaining an independent military force outside the control structure of the new Commonwealth of Independent States was first mooted some six months ago, but very little has been done until recently, when a string of defeats at the hands of Armenian militiamen in Nagorno Karabakh made it abundantly clear how much the Azeris must do to create a credible force.

The fall of Xojali, one of two remaining Azeri enclaves within the Armenian enclave and the attendant massacre of up to 1,000 civilians a month ago, directly led to the resignation of President Ayaz Mutaibov early this month. Mutaibov's fall is now being followed up by a political pogrom of all those perceived to have retarded the creation of the army.

At a special session of the Supreme Soviet, or Azeri parliament on Tuesday, speaker after speaker--including the new acting president, Dr Yagub Mahmedov--made withering attacks on the former government without once mentioning the prospect of a negotiated peace with Armenia. Rather, the Azeri position has frozen into one of national honor: let those Armenians who lived in Nagorno Karabakh stay there so long as they subscribe to Azeri law as normal citizens of the state; all other Armenians must go. This is the position of the opposition Popular Front, which now holds a virtual veto power over policy in Azerbaijan.

The most recent Front gain in government is the new acting Defense Minister, Rahim Gaziev, a mathematician turned soldier/hero who organized the defense of Shusha, the last Azeri stronghold in Nagorno Karabakh. Gaziev scored further national points when he threatened to turn Baku into 'a second Tiblisi' if Russian troops were called in to save Mutaibov on the day that the former president and communist party boss resigned.

"We all saw it coming, not just Xojali but all the other (Azeri) villages in Karabakh as the Armenians took them one by one," Gaziev said in a key-note address on Tuesday that drew chants of 'here, here!' and applause even from members of the old communist elite who numerically dominate the present Azeri parliament, "I am not here today to accuse anyone in this chamber by name, but you know you are all responsible for the disastrous situation of today."

"We have no army at present," Gaziev said of the defense establishment he now heads, "We called for 20,000 volunteers but

in real terms we have less than 5,000. The borders are weak and even towns under attack have not bothered to fortify positions," he continued, "There is no plan, no sense of tactics, no idea of what equipment is available or even who knows how to use it. This is the truth and the people need to understand this fact. To build up an army takes years, and we are presently at war."

He also called on the parliament to declare a state of emergency and to close down places of entertainment at nine o'clock at night so that the whole nation might 'understand' the conditions the soldiers were living in at the front.

"Those who were not willing to die for the homeland have no right to live in it," he said.

He also harshly attacked his predecessors of looting the till.

"The first act of the first minister of defense was to buy a Gaz-31 luxury sedan," Gaziev charged, "I have ordered a complete check of the books since the ministry of defense was established to see what has been stolen in the way of money and material, and offenders should be tried under laws of acts against the nation."

Gaziev said that he would report back to the parliament in one month, but that the law-makers should not expect much because there was so much to do. To address this need, Gaziev said that he had called several retired generals to assist in the organization of the new force and that the existing militia groups acting on their own on the front should be 'liquidated' and included in the new national army before Azerbaijan devolves into a new Lebanon. He specifically demanded that all weapons be registered with the Ministry of Defense.

"If the Supreme Soviet does not give me the authority to dismantle the volunteer forces, we will soon be faced by the gravest problem because the sad truth is that we have more enemies among us than friends," the acting minister said.

Acting President Dr Yagub Mahmedov also appeared to have embraced the nationalist position by praising Gaziev's speech and promising that parliament would pass all laws and measures Gaziev deemed necessary as the 'only salvation for the country.'

Mahmedov also said that everyone had to accept the fact that Azerbaijan was in a 'state of emergency, a state of war.'

Mahmedov reiterated his hope that the Karabakh conflict might still be solved through peaceful means, but said that the moral and material resources of the nation had to be marshalled lest peace negotiations fail--the sole, oblique reference to the ten nation conference to be held in Minsk.

In other speeches on the floor, the political pogrom continued unabated as politicians formerly loyal to the old Soviet system attempted to distance themselves from the past and embrace the nationalist cause. The most bizarre moment in the special session came when Sheikh ul Islam Allahshukur Pashazade, the chief Muslim cleric for the Muslims of the Caucasus region, weakly defended himself against allegations that he has served as a KGB agent.

In addition to threaten to resign unless 'unfounded' press reports about his association with the former Soviet security apparatus cease, Pashazade suggested that the Karabakh problem was the result of the nation having strayed from the Shariah, or Islamic law.

The Sheikh's remarks were met with peels of derisive laughter.



Above, New Defense Minister Rahim Gaziev, and
Below, Two Baku Babes, Oblivious To War In The Land

24.3.92

Political Crisis in Azerbaijan Grows

Baku--The political crisis in Azerbaijan continued to deepen (this week) with the decision of the broad-based Popular Front movement not to participate in a coalition government with remnants of former communist party.

The decision came after two stormy days in parliament, convened to create a policy of national unity in the face of the deteriorating military situation in the disputed territory of Nagorno Karabakh. But the session quickly devolved into a heated debate over the future of the presidential apparatus and the status of the former communist-controlled parliament itself.

Nagorno Karabakh--the largely Armenian populated 'autonomous region' within Azerbaijan--has completely dominated the domestic political scene in Azerbaijan for months, if not years. But it erupted into a live-or-die issue in late February when Armenian militiamen--allegedly backed by (former) Soviet troops--overran one of two remaining Azeri Turkish settlements in the region and slaughtered hundreds of fleeing civilians.

Public indignation over the initial silence of the government led to the resignation of the President Ayaz Mutsalibov on March 6th, and there has been a leadership vacuum in the wake of his departure. Although despised by most Azeris as being little more than a Moscow puppet, Mutsalibov did represent central authority, and now there is none.

The powerful position of president has been temporarily filled by the new chairman of the parliament, Dr Yagub Mahmedov, a Mutsalibov intimate and former communist functionary who initially tried to distance himself from the tainted legacy of the past.

After making the historic decision to enter into consultations with the Popular Front--the broad-based dissident movement now grown into a shadow government of the streets--Mahmedov and Prime Minister Hasan Hasanov agreed in principle that the presidential apparatus should be suspended or abolished in line with Popular Front conditions to participate in an emergency government.

The Front also demanded that parliament suspend itself and turn legislative power over to the Milli Shura, or National Council--a 50 person body equally divided between members of the parliamentary minority opposition and the old communist elite.

The government appeared to comply with Front demands when Hasanov appointed three Front-supported men to assume the cabinet posts of Minister of Defense, the Interior and Publications. But in a move described by Front leaders as 'double cross', Mahmedov called for a vote on the issue of the presidency by the full, (former) communist party-dominated parliament.

The results were predictable: desperate to retain their own status, the majority voted against the abolition or even suspension of the presidential apparatus and clung to constitutional legality, which has it that new presidential elections be held within three months of the last president's resignation--in this case, June 7th of this year.

The decision to continue with the present governmental structure was a slap in the face of the Popular Front and threw the parliament into chaos, with members of the Democratic Block calling their adversaries 'traitors', and even worse.

"Know that you are now responsible for all that happens as a result of this travesty you have perpetrated in order to protect the presidential apparatus and your old friends," Democratic Block member and Popular Front leader Arif Hadjiev said to Mahmedov following the lop-sided voting.

According to the Azerbaijan constitution, a quorum of 240 of the 350 seats is required to pass any given resolution. Out of the 262 parliamentarians voting on the motion to dissolve the presidential apparatus, 207 voted against while 35 voted for it. Twenty voters either abstained or had their ballots invalidated. Of 263 parliamentarians voting on the motion to suspend the presidency during the election campaign leading up to the polls on June 7th, 191 voted against while 54 voted for the resolution, with 18 either abstaining or having invalid votes.

The Popular Front requested a new vote, but were turned down. One of their number threw away his parliamentarian card and left the hall in disgust. Off the floor, others went further, saying that the former communists were deliberately pursuing a political course that would devolve into 'civil war' in line with alleged Moscow-inspired plans to de-stabilize Azerbaijan.

"It will end in blood," said deputy Tahir Karimli, "We signed a protocol with the government and announced our readiness to participate (in a coalition) to the nation. But now the government has broken its promise and made us look like fools. Who knows what will happen next."

The most remarkable appearance at the session was that of Abulfaz Elchibey, the brain behind the Front's position on everything from defense to independence from the former USSR.

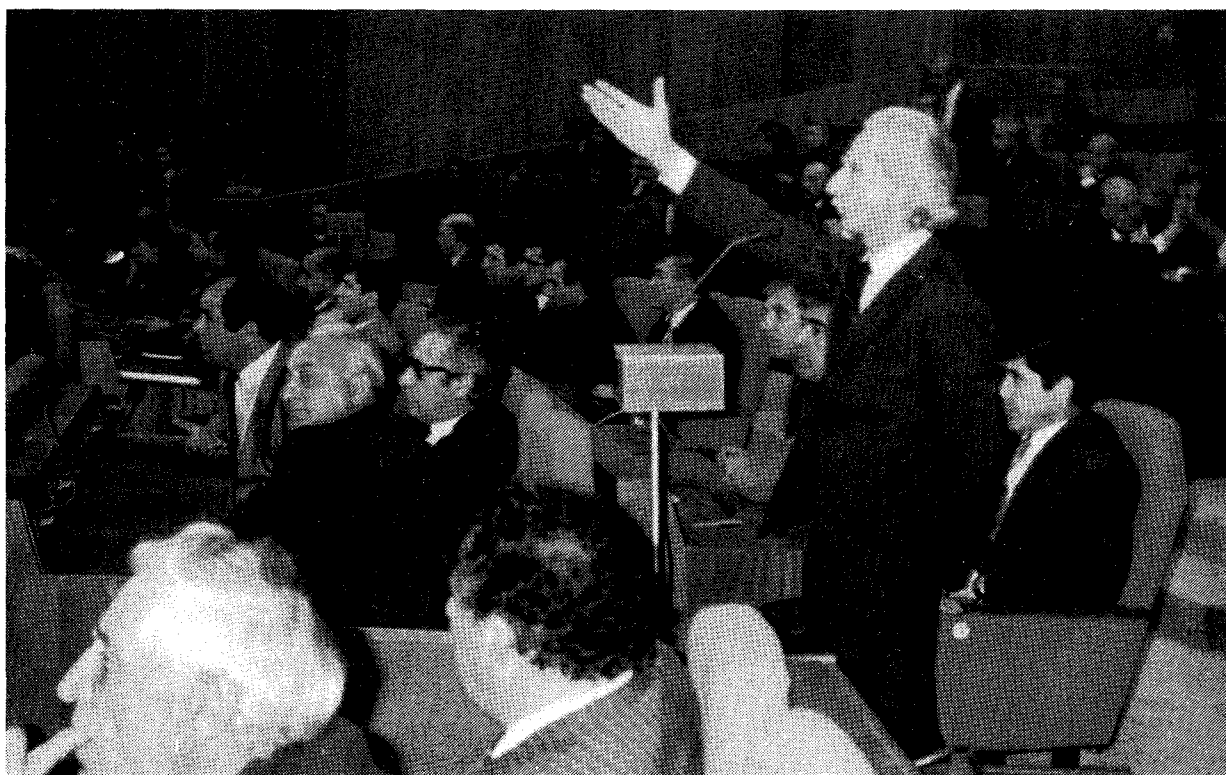
A long time dissident who spent 16 months at hard labor in the 1970s for espousing Turkic nationalism, Elchibey is less a politician than a living think-tank who has devoted his adult life to prying Azerbaijan out of the erstwhile Soviet orbit. As such, he has been persona non grata in the Azeri media for years.

But in an abrupt turn around reflecting the level of disintegration of the former communist government apparatus and the creeping coup of the Popular Front (as well as a last ditch government attempt to co-opt the opposition) Elchibey was not only invited to attend parliament, but permitted to address the body--even as the partocrats voted to secure their continued tenure in power by voting for the continuation of the presidential apparatus and scheduling the elections in June.

"We have been deceived," said Elchibey in an elaborate, staccato address that silenced the chamber, "We agreed to enter into a coalition with the government in view of the critical situation in Karabakh. But now the government wants to put all power back into the presidential apparatus which is an invitation to once again abuse the organs of power in the state.

"We are not adamant about the abolition of the presidency, only on its monopoly on power," Elchibey continued, "Share it. Give some to the judiciary, some to the cabinet of ministers, some to the parliament. But after 70 years of domination by Moscow, we know very well what the presidency means: control from above and manipulation of whoever is below."

Observers suggest that the Front-associated deputies will most likely refrain from participating in the National Council, thus leaving the pending disaster in Karabakh the responsibility of the present parliament and its acting president.



Above, Opposition deputy Towfig Gasimov Maligning the Government,
Below, 'Crocodiles' (communist elite) in their swamp-seats

24.4.92

Text of speech by Abulfaz Elchibey in parliament after former communists had refused to postpone presidential elections. 1)

Esteemed ladies and gentlemen!

Thank you for allowing me to speak here. I'd like to present you my thoughts so that you can come to certain conclusions. I don't want to begin with complaining but the situation requires that I do so. Perhaps, it's my fate to lose so often.

I now regret having accepted the proposal of Premier Hasan Hasanov and Chairman of Parliament Yagub Mahmedov to participate in a coalition government.

This game you are playing is very insulting and I don't know how I will respond to the 80,000 rank and file members of the Popular Front when they ask me: 'What did you do?'

It is not the first time that I have been fooled. 2)

I once said I might be fooled twice but I won't forgive anyone who means to deceive me three times.

Many people say: 'Why make so much noise here? If you are so brave, then go to Karabakh!'

This is idiocy.

If Karabakh is the heart of the nation, its brains are here, in parliament, and we cannot divide them.

Our tragedy is that Moscow is creating all possible obstacles so that we cannot build a democratic state here in Azerbaijan. And things won't improve unless we create this democratic society. Everything else is a wasted effort.

But now you are in a rush to elect a new president--elect him!

1) I was in the gallery at the time, but have to confess that in addition to bad acoustics, Elchibey dipped down deep into his native, Nakhchivanian dialect and tried to cram about an hour of talk into his allotted five minutes on the floor. I couldn't pick it all up--neither on paper nor tape. And I don't think I was alone because the transcript of the speech I picked up from the Popular Front newspaper Azadlik differs from my notes from the evening in some particulars. For example, Elchibey specifically said that he had only **entered** into the coalition agreement with Hasanov and Mahmedov, and that he would never have done so with Mutalibov. Note that within the transcript, the word 'Mutalibov' never appears. Still, I think it useful to include the longer version here for future reference.

Here is the **scene setter**: Elchibey was invited to the podium around 10:00 pm, and everyone's nerves are frayed. His delivery was machine-gun staccato, punctuated only by quick pauses to look at his watch to check that he has not run over time. Throughout his address, he mainly looked center and left, toward the seats occupied exclusively by **old communists**; to the right were the seats occupied by a mixture of old communists and members of the Democratic Bloc.

2) Presumably a reference to the Front's decision in the Spring of 1990 to go along with the idea of creating an executive presidency. As soon as the old Communist Party had the agreement, the CP-dominated parliament added a nifty postscript: that the first President would be none other than the CP General Secretary, Ayaz Mutalibov.

But the president you elect in three months (June 7th) will be overthrown in a year.

And this is natural.

Because today the state that we live in is only deserving of a president who can be kept in power by force, and the people will be forced to overthrow that force.

What is the alternative?

We need to create structures that can protect a president and prevent him from turning into a dictator.

This requires special institutions. Power can be divided into legislative and executive branches with an independent judiciary supervising the first two branches. Everybody must obey the Court, including the president--workers, peasants, everyone. Everyone has a right in such a society to bring an action against anyone, even the president. Otherwise no-one will fear anyone and least of all the law.

If we fail to create such (counter-balancing) structures, whoever you elect as president--even a clergyman--will destroy himself or be destroyed by those nearest to him because there is no institutional structure to prevent all this.

Just before this session started, the Popular Front appealed to the people not to rally in front of Parliament. But in spite of this appeal, certain people with weapons came here.

And now imagine this: the presidential campaign will be held not in offices, but at street meetings.

Who can guarantee that no one will open fire?

Grenades purchased in Agdam are sold today on Baku street corners. We must first confiscate weapons from different groups and only then we can have presidential elections.

It's the fate of the nation that is at stake.

We also need a transitional period of three or five months (before elections are possible). The presidential powers should be shared between the National Council, the chairman of the Parliament and the Prime Minister.

Everything has its time and place.

Many of you sitting here were involved in the oppression of those who struggled for this tri-color, national flag. They were oppressed by your orders. Nobody could then utter the name of Mahmed Emin. People were afraid. But now? Why should we again fight our way to democracy facing such obstacles, suffering such losses? There is another way to achieve this.

Many of you wanted us to join the Commonwealth of Independent States. We urged you not to do this. We said the CIS would not exist more than six months. Three months have passed. In another three, the CIS is sure to collapse. The Ukraine says: such a Commonwealth has no future. That proves we were right to stand against joining the CIS. On the other hand, it's good that the Azeri President signed the CIS agreement because it has created confusion. In Moscow, they now say that Azerbaijan is playing a double game, and that it's difficult to tell whether Azerbaijan entered the Commonwealth or not.

A movement for independence should have focus. We will fight five days, we will fight ten days--but we should get what we are fighting for.

The Xojali tragedy was done by the Empire's KGB. We possess the facts that first rallies and strikes in Khankendi (Stepanakert) were organized by the then-USSR KGB's deputy

chairman. It was the KGB that organized the first rallies in Yerevan. Even here in Baku they managed to organize a few meetings. Suspecting nothing, we all participated in them. We are being hit from two sides: Moscow does everything possible, including pitting different groups of our population against each other, in order prevent us from creating a truly independent state. Then, when we manage to agree and meet each other half way, they organize something in Karabakh and border areas to distract our attention and create chaos.

If we elected the president now you would be clapping your hands and a few months later when he would resign you are sure to do the same.

Just two months ago, when the former president was speaking here, those of you who were then present nodded in agreement to everything he said.

You also nodded in agreement when he resigned.

We cannot create a state that way.

Azerbaijan possesses so many resources that if they don't go to Russia, they will be enough for you, your children and grandchildren. You will be able to build all the plants and factories you like.

I don't understand what you are afraid of.

In three or four months Russia will be obliged to get its intelligence network out of here and concentrate on its own problems. If you asked Yeltsin in a few months where Karabakh is located, he will respond and tell you that he doesn't give a damn, that he is only concerned about Chechen-Ingush.

The empire that brought so many tragedies to us is seeking to thrust its hand in anew.

To prevent this, we should first reform our own National Security Ministry. (KGB)

We believe in our Defense Minister.

We believe that Interior Ministry can and should be reformed.

But as for National Security, it should be reorganized completely. Once we are sure we can defend ourselves--then, and only then we will be able to speak about elections and other matters.

My time is up.

I am over by two minutes. Excuse me. Thank you. 3)

3) Events rolled quickly after this. Mahmedov once again praised Abulfaz as a great man and thinker and that he greatly respected his thoughts, but that it was time to move on to other matters, like voting on the election commission laws. The usual series of speakers from the Democratic Bloc got up to address this piece of business, with the task of driving in the nail left up to Iskender Hamidov--the live wire of the Front/Democratic Bloc.

"Yagub Muallem," he said, referring to the acting president by the title of 'teacher,' "there really is no point in discussing of even voting on the new election laws and the commission. You can conduct the elections any way you see fit, but don't waste any more money from the treasury on the matter. You have enough yourself..."

There was enough noise in the chamber, growing into a roar from the communist benches, to obscure Iskender's exact words: but even if he was not referring to Mahmedov's alleged penchant for graft-taking from students, the effect on Mahmedov and his



Burnt-out School In Agdam--The Destruction Goes On

cronies was exactly that. Mahmedov, sputtering, declared that he would no longer tolerate such public abuse and stormed out of the session in an apparent resignation. Instantly, the microphone was seized by (local) KGB chairman Il. Hussein Husseinov who demanded, in Russian, that Hamidov be brought to trial for slander.

Cat-calls from the bench and demands from the gallery that Husseinov 'speak Azeri' and 'this isn't Moscow' brought the session into complete chaos until Mahmedov, through the agency of Elchibey, was brought back to his chair in a last, desperate attempt to secure national unity. The crocodiles cheered, and Mahmedov, acting as if he never resigned or that anything unusual had taken place, resumed with the discussion of several other items on the agenda. It was surreal. Then KGB finally managed to expel the press from chamber.

31.3.92

Popular Front to Contest June Elections in Azerbaijan

Baku--The broad-based opposition Popular Front of Azerbaijan has announced that it will contest presidential elections scheduled for June 7th, provided that current election laws said to be open to abuse are changed and that international observers are on hand to insure a clean result.

Speaking to a crowd of around 15,000 gathered at the first Front rally in Baku in months, representatives of the dozen political parties and organizations associated with the umbrella group announced that their candidate would be Popular Front chairman Abulfaz Elchibey, Azerbaijan's leading dissident during the 1970s and 1980s.

Elchibey, a hermit intellectual, has previously shunned running for elected office but appears to have acquiesced to popular demand to contest the elections for the all-powerful presidency in order to reduce the power of the office by a system of political checks and balances akin to that in the USA.

It is not yet clear who loyalists to the now defunct Communist Party will field as their candidate, although observers say that acting president Yagub Mahmedov is a natural choice.

Legal registration of candidates is on Tuesday, April 7th.

But the Front's decision to field Elchibey has thrown a new wrinkle into what some observers call 'the political whorehouse' of Baku. The 54 year old Elchibey--and most of the leadership of the Front--had previously announced that they favored boycotting the polls. To many, this seemed tantamount to admitting that the main opposition organization in Azerbaijan is incapable of organizing anything more than street demonstrations and then entering into compromise deals with the former communist elite.

Following Mutalibov's resignation on March 6th in the wake of a series of defeats and disasters in the disputed territory of Nagorno Karabakh, Elchibey entered into an unprecedented protocol with Mahmedov and Prime Minister Hasan Hasanov that envisaged forming a coalition government of national unity. The conditions that the Front lay down were the suspension and/or immediate dissolution of the all-powerful presidential apparatus and that legislative power be turned over from the communist-dominated parliament to a National Council, a body to consist of equal numbers of former communists and opposition parliamentarians.

Mahmedov agreed to the formula, but then in a move described by the Front as 'deception and bad faith,' threw the issue of the future status of the presidency on the floor of the whole parliament to vote. Predictably, the majority of the 350 person body voted for the continued survival of the institution that has served as their own security umbrella; specifically, they voted to maintain the constitutional clause that requires that new elections be held for the presidency within three months of the vacancy of the position--or June 7th.

They also overwhelmingly voted to maintain the presidential apparatus in its present form despite pleas from the Front that at a bare minimum, the power of the executive must be re-distributed between the Prime Minister, the Judiciary and other organs.

The Front countered by threatening to not participate in the temporary government and also to boycott the elections--thus leave the onus of the growing disaster in Nagorno Karabakh the exclusive responsibility of the old communist government.

But in a remarkable turn around which Front leaders say is rooted in a deep sense of civil responsibility and patriotism, the Front now seems ready to contest the elections.

"We have recognized that if the people of Azerbaijan cannot solve their own internal problems, there is no reason why the world should not accept Mutalibov, Mahmedov or any other old communist as the legitimate leader of the country," Front leader Kurban Mahmedov said, "The people have been trained to suspect and even hate the leadership because of the level of corruption in the country, but we cannot remain in opposition forever."



Nationalist Sign Commemorating Short-lived Republic of 1918-20

4.4.92

Azerbaijan Prime Minister Resigns

Baku: Azerbaijan Prime Minister and strong-man Hasan Hasanov, a former communist functionary who was seen by many as someone who might bridge the gulf between the partocrats and the nationalists of the Popular Front, resigned his office on Saturday amid rumors of fraud and bribery, further polarizing this oil-rich but war-torn Caucasus country into two inimical camps.

Sources close to the former Prime Minister suggest that Hasanov made the decision to resign after details of a huge customs' fraud scandal began emerging in the opposition press, in the hope that he might secure an appointment as the Azeri Ambassador to either Washington or the United Nations before being implicated.

The scandal, in which a reported 22 million dollars were transferred from Azerbaijan for the purchase of foreign goods, but of which only a tenth returned to Azerbaijan, now threatens to implicate many high bureaucrats.

It comes in the wake of charges last month that officials at the highest level of government used emergency relief funds targeted for Azeri refugees from Karabakh to purchase Japanese-made cars, video equipment and tons of Marlboro cigarettes.

Hasanov was in the process of creating a coalition government of 'national unity' and had already appointed two Front supporters to head the key ministries of Defense and the Interior. It is now doubtful that the two, new acting ministers will accept reporting directly to the presidential apparatus again.¹⁰

¹⁰) Not so. The two men, Tahir Aliyev (Minister of the Interior) and Rahim Gaziev (Minister of Defense) attended the cabinet meeting when the decision to oust Hasanov was taken. And there was someone else in the presidential palace there, too: Ayaz Mutalibov. Two eye-witnesses confirmed this--Robert Finn of the U.S embassy, who just happened to be waiting for Yagub Mahmedov to sign on to some protocol of other ('they were not happy to see me see them all together') and 'deep throat' Vafa Goulizade, who assured me over a long and deep bottle of vodka that the former president was often seen lurking around his former office.

4.4.92

Russia and Azerbaijan establish diplomatic ties

Baku: The Russian Federation and the Republic of Azerbaijan formally established diplomatic ties on Saturday, officially ending more than 160 years of occupation or domination by St Petersburg and Moscow over the oil-rich, Caucasus nation.

"We regard this as the historic moment when Russia has at long last recognized the sovereignty of Azerbaijan," said Azeri Foreign Minister Hasan Sadikov at a joint press conference with his Russian counterpart, Andrei Kozyrev, "But it is clear that after so many years we have many special ties."

Czarist Russia captured the last territory that now makes up Azerbaijan in 1828, following a brief war with Iran. With the exception of the brief existence of the Azerbaijan Republic of 1918-20, the country was either a part of Russia or under indirect rule from Moscow until September, 1991, when Azerbaijan declared itself independent along with the other, former Soviet Republics.

When asked when Russia intended to open an embassy in Baku, the Russian Foreign Minister looked confused for a moment, and then said 'soon,' leaving the impression that Moscow had not seriously considered establishing a physical presence yet.

Kozyrev also told reporters that in addition to lengthy, official discussions with acting Azeri head of state Yagub Mahmedov and acting Minister of Defense Rahim Gaziev about bi-lateral issues and the current crisis between Azerbaijan and neighboring Armenia over the disputed territory of Nagorno Karabakh, that he had 'unofficially' met with representatives of the large, ethnic Russian community in Baku.

"They assured me that they shared the positions and concerns of all other citizens of Azerbaijan (on Karabakh)," Kozyrev said, obliquely addressing the growing anti-Russian sentiment in Azerbaijan.

Recently, scores of non-Azeris have been applying for refugee status at the newly opened American embassy in Baku, apparently out of fear that they will be the subject of a nationalistic backlash growing out of the crisis situation in Nagorno Karabakh.

Following the press conference, Kozyrev was introduced to a destitute family from the Azeri town of Xojali, destroyed in late February by Armenian militiamen allegedly supported by the 366th battalion of the (former) Soviet Interior Ministry Army, then stationed in Stepanakert.

"I don't need to talk to any Russian minister, I just need a house to live in," the anonymous man repeatedly told the Azeri officials who had brought him in to meet Kozyrev.

Following the interview and photo opportunity, the Azeri foreign minister shuttled his Russian guests off to an official dinner, leaving the Xojali family on a Baku street to fend for themselves.

The Kozyrev and his party are scheduled to travel into Nagorno Karabakh on Sunday to meet with leaders of the enclave as well as a group of Iranian diplomats involved in the peace mission.

FEATURE

10,000 mixed Armenian-Azeri families huddle in fear in Azerbaijan

Baku--Elchin is a man who loves his wife as she loves him but they have a family problem.

He is an Azeri Turk and she is an Armenian, and they are afraid that she will soon become the most recent pawn in the increasingly bitter dispute between his ethnic nation and hers.

Specifically, they fear that Gala will be abducted by Elchin's countrymen and exchanged for Azeri hostages in the disputed territory of Nagorno Karabakh.

There have been enough instances of sudden disappearances of friends and relatives to justify their fears.

"You jump every time someone knocks on the door, but that's stupid," said Elchin, a Falstaffian set-designer and artist whose favorite subject in normal times is food, "The people we are worried about don't knock; they just kick in the door, put a bag over your head and take you away."

The captive-takers are Azeri militiamen whose relatives have been captured by Armenian militiamen. Faced with the inability of the government in Baku of getting their loved-ones back, they are busy finding their own hostages to use in trade--local Armenians married to Azeris or Russians. It is a matter of indifference to them that the dwindling pool of potential bartering chips happen to be citizens of Azerbaijan with no desire to leave.

"My life is here, my children were born here and are going to school here," said Gala, a musician, "We have no desire to live in Armenia. Can you imagine what it would be like for Elchin as an Azeri in Yerevan?"

It is not known how many mixed Azeri/Armenian marriages there are in Armenia, but the number is thought to be very low or nil. Whatever mixed couples that were fled the country in 1988, when the 200,000 ethnic Azeris living in Armenia were uprooted and obliged to flee in the wake of the first upsurge of inter-ethnic violence.

The Azeri refugees from Armenia, in turn, focused their wrath at the large Armenian community in Baku, demanding that Armenian housing be given to them in exchange for their lost properties.

Most of the 400,000 ethnic Armenians in the Azeri capital and smaller communities fled mob violence in January, 1990 under circumstances usually described as a pogrom.

But more than 10,000 Armenians remained, sheltered by their Azeri neighbors, or decided to return in the hopes that the rise of xenophobia was only a passing moment and that life could somehow return to normal.

It has not.

The continued spiral of violence in Nagorno Karabakh has exposed the remaining Armenians to the full blast of Azeri hyper-nationalism, and the small community of Armenians still in Baku are terrified.

"We have heard of cases of men giving away their Armenian sisters-in-law while the Azeri husband stood by in terror and did nothing," related Elchin, "We also know of cases where the neighbors have chased away would-be abductors. We don't know of any case of the police or KGB actually preventing an abduction."

One recent cause celebre brought to the attention of this correspondent was that of an octogenarian Armenian composer with 'national artist' status who, despite multiple chances to leave over the past four years, chose to stay in Baku.

He was dragged off in March, presumably to the front-line city of Agdam to be exchanged, rumor had it, for the elderly father of a well-known Azeri judge. It is not known whether the composer--whose name was not made public by his family--survived the journey or if he has yet been exchanged.

A western observer sent to track down the man could not find him, but discovered 15 Armenian male hostages of varying ages who were awaiting exchange for a number of Azeris, both living and dead. Several of the hostages were common criminals, released from their jail terms in order to be traded.

Armenia maintains that Baku is only trading in women and children.

As a result of the atmosphere of fear and the perceived inability or indifference of the government of Azerbaijan to protect the local Armenians and other minorities, the new American embassy in Baku has found itself in the uncomfortable position of becoming a center for potential refugees--and even before the embassy consists of anything more than a series of hotel rooms.

The bulk of would-be asylum seekers are not Armenians, but members of the 500,000 strong, local Russian population who say that the anti-foreigner atmosphere prevalent in Baku has now started to affect their lives. It is, however, doubtful that many of the ethnic Russians will be accepted as refugees in the United States due to the proximity of the Russian Federation, despite the fact that few wish to move there due to economic hardship.

According to American asylum policy, economic refugees come at the bottom of the pecking order.

"A lot of Russians who left have now come back to Baku because there is no place for them there," said Nana, an Azeri-speaking physical therapist who now works as a maid, "They didn't want to sleep in railway stations in Russia. But they still have to learn to adapt to life in Azerbaijan. That is why they all want to go to America."

No Russians or members of other ethnic groups are known to have been abducted, although there are reports of several close calls made by mistake.

A Turkish diplomat in Baku related how he witnessed how a gang descended on an old man in the central market and accused him, on account of his accent, of being Armenian. The man was only released when he proved himself to be a Jew by dint of circumcision.

"If he had been a non-circumcised Russian, he would probably be in Armenia by now," said the diplomat.

The main problem for would-be migrants is obtaining travel documents--or even daring to travel out of the country in order to obtain them in Russia or elsewhere.

Few of the Baku Armenians who want to leave dare apply for a passport, lest they be identified by some low-level xenophobic Azeri in the chain of application who will either stall the application while tipping off someone in need of a hostage.

"We have told the government of Azerbaijan that it is in their interest to have free migration because it is a condition for

most favored nation status," said a American official, quoting policy, "the government assures us that is what they want, too."

"I absolutely condemn the hostage taking," said Popular Front chairman Abulfaz Elchibey, "but at the same time you have to try and understand the motivation behind the hostage takers. They have lost their families. They know there are Armenians in Baku. They find out who they are and they take them. It is inhuman. But what else can they do?"

The new Minister of Defense, Rahim Gaziev--himself a member of the Front--has announced that he will put an end to such practices--not out of any love for Armenians, but because it is not an efficient way to run a war.

"There are rules of war that one subscribes to," said Gaziev, "And one is that you do not exchange gasoline for prisoners or hostages for bodies."

Despite the threat of abduction, though, Elchin and Gala do not want to leave Baku--and certainly not for an unknown future in the United States.

"Our life is here and we want to stay," said Elchin, familiar with the various refugee criteria in the United States concerning the legitimate fear of persecution due to race, religion or ethnic background: Gala qualifies on everyone.

"What can we do in the United States?" he asked rhetorically, "Wash dishes and join a refugee culture club?"

The preferred temporary asylum for Gala, ironically enough, is Turkey--a country that is sufficiently close, both culturally and physically, for the couple to feel that they have not severed the link to Azerbaijan or to each other, while they wait for the conflict between their two nations to heal.

But the decision to part appears to painful to push through, and the couple continues to play cat-and-mouse with potential abductors while attempting to maintain a normal life.

They continue to attend the opera and theater with new foreign friends, and drop in for an a pres with old ones--Azeris, Jews, Russians, Georgians--to remember the good old days when Baku was a multi-cultural Soviet city and was famous for its culture and art, a place where well dressed, cultured people strolled along the streets until late into the night.

Now, the pedestrian zones are empty, and Elchin, leaving his wife Gala with different friends every night, goes home alone--waiting until morning when his wife will join him again.

14.4.92

American Legislators Call For Conditions in US/CIS Aid

Baku--Following contacts in the Armenian capital of Yerevan and the Azerbaijan capital of Baku over the weekend, Arizona (D) senator Dennis DeConcini says that in his joint role of Chairman of the Senate Commission on Human Rights and Member of the Appropriations Committee, he is in favor of tying future aid to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to Moscow's willingness to allow former Soviet Republics like Armenian and Azerbaijan to go their own way.

Senator DeConcini, along with Foreign Relations Committee member James Jeffords (R; Vermont) and Senator Daniel Akaka (D; Hawaii) arrived in Sunday as part of a fact-finding trip that also includes Armenia, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and the Ukraine.

The legislators said that their mission was partially to determine to what degree former republics belonging to the defunct USSR wanted to be members of the CIS, and to address prospective aid levels accordingly.

"After what we have seen in these two republics (Armenia and Azerbaijan) I intend to qualify aid to what was the USSR in accordance with Moscow's ability to let these countries be free," DeConcini said in an exclusive interview.

Both Armenia and Azerbaijan, locked in a bloody--if low-intensity--war over the disputed territory of Nagorno Karabakh, maintain that non-official Russian involvement in the fight is root cause of the atavistic conflict, that has claimed up to 4,000 lives over the past four years.

In addition to meeting with members of Azerbaijan's acting president Yagub Mahmedov on Monday, the Helsinki Commission team also had the chance to meet with members of the increasingly powerful, opposition Popular Front of Azerbaijan on Sunday. 11)

The chairman of the Front, Abulfaz Elchibey, was officially announced as a candidate for the presidency of Azerbaijan on April 7th. Senator DeConcini said that the USA would send an expert team observers to insure the fairness of the elections.

The primary candidate is Elchibey, Azerbaijan's pre-eminent dissident throughout the 1970s and 1980s, who is at once the most popular candidate for the office of president vacated on March 6th by (former) Communist Party functionary Ayaz Mutsalibov.

Elchibey is also the most unlikely: the Popular Front initially decided to boycott the elections following flim-flammy in the national parliament in March, but reversed itself in early April when the Front announced that it would

11) I can't resist relating the following anecdote about the CODEL (Congressional Delegation). When the CODEL drove up to the Front Headquarters, the usual knot of 100-200 men were waiting outside, attentively listening to an Azeri from Iran speaking about some political subject or other. The speaker paused as the senators walked up the steps, extending their hands to baffled members of the crowd who had no idea who they were. 'Glad to see you,' said DeConcini, pressing flesh. The next day, at breakfast with the senators, DeConcini remarked to me that 'that scene on the steps yesterday was straight from central casting.' I was obliged to tell him the sad truth--that no-one knew who he was.

contest the June polls out of a sense of 'national responsibility'. The Front's intention is to take control of the all-powerful presidential apparatus in order to disband it or limit its powers along the lines of the Executive, Congress and Judiciary branches of the government of the USA.

Deconcini, Jeffords and Akaka met with other opposition and government people on Monday to try and determine to what extent the official and non-official Azeri leadership were interested in supporting an international peace conference on Nagorno Karabakh, and what to do with the thorny issue of human rights in the CIS.

"We welcome intermediary efforts by anyone who comes along," said Popular Front deputy chairman Niyazi Ibrahim, "But there is no one who knows about the Azeri/Armenian conflict better than the Azeris and Armenians. You can have all the international conferences you like but they are meaningless until the two sides sit down and talk--and without Russia." 12)

12) There were a couple of odd moments during the CODEL visit. One came over an interview breakfast in the Sovyetskaya Guest House, when a couple of Yankee businessmen were also staying as guests of the state interrupted our chat to discretely praise Mutalibov. It was so clear: the Americans were in bed with old system loyalists who were so desperate to preserve their own prerogatives that they had started to seed eager ears with other disinformation, particularly of the all important business variety: Mutalibov was now 'moderate' and 'pro-business', just a regular fella who wanted everything America and Europe had to offer for his country, while the Popular Front was a xenophobic, neo-Bolshevik organization intent on nationalizing foreign investments and letting the country slip into the orbit of 'Islamic fundamentalists' from Iran. There are several problems with this, not the least of which is the evil of 'nationalization' of foreign investments. Are memories so short? Up until last September, this was the USSR where there were no foreign investments save those approved and owned 51% by the state! As far as Ayaz being 'pro' western investment, this is absolutely true--so long as part of the investment went into his personal coffers. If this is the type of business the West wants itself associated with, so be it, but let us call a spade a spade: Mutalibov was pro-graft. Has the Popular Front gone on record of being against that? Yes. The Front has announced that if they take power, they will review every last contract with foreign companies signed during Mutalibov's tenure in power and and abrogate any deals that appear of dubious vintage. It is not all that remarkable that the anti-western business culumny began shortly after the Front had announced its position on this issue: both the bought and the buyers were trying to protect their commissions and investments.



Portrait Of Ayaz Mutalibov In Urinal At Supreme Soviet Men's Room

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