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EVERYTHING YOU NEVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT AZERBAIJAN: Part Three

Coup and Counter-Coup

Dear Peter,

Here is the penultimate offering in my package about the political roller coaster in Azerbaijan in the Spring of 1992. It brings us through May and the presidential elections of June 7th.

Once again, this epistle consists mainly of published and unpublished press reports, with some footnotes. Most of the dateline stories were filed (or at least designed to be filed) to the New York Times. All were ultimately conceived as a running history.

The major exception to this is the quasi-introduction, which I drafted in mid-May as a separate ICWA offering. Then events overtook me, and I have kind of grafted it on to the press reports (or vice versa). I don't think it is too incongruous, and certainly should set the stage for the 'stories.'

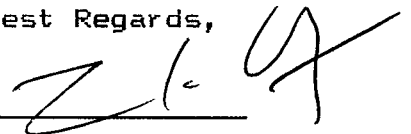
As with Part Two--which was also a string of press reports with commentary--there will be a certain amount of repetition as a theme rolls over. I have cut the most glaring repetitions, but not all--partially for sense and partially out of a sense of honesty: stories did not get written anew from top to bottom every day; cliches were recycled.

Also, while I provided a number of pictures in Part Two (and as single portrait in Part One), Part Three is fairly packed with pictures due to the simple fact that I had a decent camera at my disposal.

Part Two left off in mid-April just before my trip to Iran, and I pick up here upon my return to the Azeri province of Nakhjivan on May 5th--just as the poop was hitting the fan again.

Thomas Goltz  
Livingston, Montana  
July 10th 1992

Best Regards,



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Welcome Home: More Graves For The Recent Fallen In Karabakh

10.4.92

Intro Essay: Reflections on a dirty little war

Dear Peter,

I write you this with a sense of bitter obligation.

I will try and keep it short.

It is about Nagorno Karabakh and the fall of the last Azeri settlement/position in the territory.

Karabakh--is there no escape from the subject?

Probably not for as long as I live in Azerbaijan.

Actually, I was in eastern Turkey and on my way from Iran in early May when I tuned in the radio and listened to disturbing news: there was fighting in Azerbaijan.

Nothing very new about that.

But this time it was happening just across the frontier from my hotel room.

I couldn't believe it at first.

I thought it was Turkish news-hype.

But the next day, while smoothing over my entry via the new bridge at Sadarak, it was all confirmed: on May 1st, shooting had broken out between Armenia and the Azeri enclave province of Nakhjivan, and right around the area of the bridge.

This was very strange and very dangerous.

Strange because Nakhjivan had avoided involvement in the Armenian/Azeri dispute over Karabakh, partially due its exposed position but mainly and to the leadership of native-son Haydar Aliiev, the former Azerbaijan strong-man and Politburo member who has settled in the province.

And dangerous because Turkey had just re-signed a 1921 treaty with Nakhjivan that supposedly gave Ankara the right of intervention if the borders of Nakhjivan were to be changed.

Now, suddenly, it appeared that Armenia--or some Armenians, or mysterious others--were threatening to do just that.

And war between Turkey and Armenia theoretically meant war between Turkey and Armenia's ally, Russia.

And if you will permit me to slip into this hyperbolic mode for a moment, this meant war between NATO and whatever one wants to call whatever remains of the Warsaw Pact.

World War Three and all that.

It was almost too crazy to consider.

And once again, by sheerest chance, I happened to be right where the action was.

Why me, why me? I am beginning to ask myself.

Well, to record the facts, I guess.

And in this instance it was important because Haydar was howling for the Turks to intervene because the Armenians were threatening the bridge, due to open officially at the end of the month.

My assessment was a little different.

The situation was critical, but not out of hand.

On the Azeri/Nakhjivani side, there were four dead--including one doctor shot by a sniper as he tried to rescue a wounded soldier and a woman whose car had been blown up while she was traveling to the front to look after the welfare of her son.

There were also 40 wounded, and the town of Sadarak (Sederek; population 15,000) had been evacuated.

Aliiev told me he had been in contact with Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosyan every day. He said he had demanded an immediate cease-fire and called for a commission to determine who had shot first. He also put all the armed forces in the territory under the strictest discipline to hold their fire unless absolutely necessary while he scurried around the territory to address spontaneous meetings and tell people to go home.

But he knew that something bad was in the air.

His suspicion was that the Armenians involved in the conflict were members of the right-wing Dashnaksutun Party, usually regarded as the most radical Armenian group whose aggressive policies have often 'embarrassed' Ter-Petrosyan in the past.

Aliiev said that Ter-Petrosyan denied that he controlled the Armenians shelling Sadarak--as he usually denies the ability to control the Karabakh Armenians.

But the Sadarak action was happening within 40 miles of the Armenian capital of Yerevan, and included the use of heavy artillery.

Aliiev said he was left with two explanations, and neither was very comforting:

1) Ter-Petrosyan was telling the truth, and serving notice that he has so useful function in any sort of negotiations because he does not control his own country, or

2) Ter-Petrosyan was lying, and was using the excuse of 'no control' to further his own larger plan.

There were a number of other things about the Nakhjivan fighting that were strange, and Aliiev hinted at his thinking but would not say anything directly.

First, the Armenians had timed their attack to coincide with the visit to Baku of Turkish Premier Suleyman Demirel, set for May 2nd. In addition to the general souring of the visit by such bad news, it would also be a direct challenge to Turkey to intervene in accordance with the 1921 Kars Agreement that had just been renewed between Demirel and Aliiev in Ankara in March.

Now, evoking its right as 'guarantor' of Nakhjivan to intervene would be a very serious step for Ankara; evoking the same right to intervene in Cyprus in 1974 made Turkey an international pariah for years.

But not evoking the right to intervene would also be acutely embarrassing for Ankara.

For domestic political reasons, Turkey would have to do something: after all the Pan-Turkic jubilation about rediscovering the Central Asian Turks, Ankara could not remain silent about rescuing the one group of former Soviet Turks that they had so publicly contracted to defend--and especially after Aliiev had called on Turkey to 'do what was necessary' to stop 'Armenian aggression.'

His words were splashed across the front pages of the Turkish press. Demonstrations were mounted throughout Turkey.

Typically and pathetically, no less a personage than Bulent Ecevit--Turkish Premier at the time of the 1974 invasion of Cyprus--called on Demirel's government to intervene.

On May 6th, a cease-fire was effected and held.

But that night on Moscow News, following some material about Turkey's alleged threat to intervene, there was a special program on Nagorno Karabakh.

The Azeris had been shelling Stepanakert's airport and damaging the runway, the program related.

You will remember the name of the place:

Xojali.

How the hell could the Azeris be shelling Xojali?

From Shusha?

Memories are short: Xojali was out of range of help from Azerbaijan because there was a mountain range in between it and the rest of the country.

But the Armenians announced that either the United Nations had to intervene to stop the Azeris from continuing their attacks or they would have to attack to silence the batteries themselves...

You didn't even have to be a seer to know what it all meant: Shusha was doomed.

The next piece of news I heard confirmed this.

An urgent meeting in Tehran to effect a new cease-fire had been set for the next day, the 7th, in Tehran.

In my book, I always equate an urgently arranged Iranian cease-fire with an Armenian attack.

So after touring the pathetic front lines at Sadarak, I returned from Nakhjivan to Baku on the 7th.

My first urgent stop was at the Turkish embassy to tell a friend about what I had seen in Nakhjivan and warn him to take anything Aliev said with a grain of salt.

It was my own little gesture aimed at preventing WW III.

Then I went home to discover that my phone had been cut because of unpaid bills and my wife had not bothered to pay them because she didn't have any money.

Neither did I.

So I made a demarche on the communications ministry to demand that the line be restored so I could function as a journalist.

Almost incidentally, I asked whether anyone had heard anything from Shusha. The assistant minister I was dealing with almost broke down in tears.

The telephone and radio link had gone dead earlier in the day, he said, but the ministry had picked up some radio traffic from the area in Armenian.

According to all indications, the city had fallen and the Armenians were in complete control of Nagorno Karabakh.

They had just won the war, or almost. All they now needed to do was to force through a land corridor between the territory and Armenia itself, and then make it stick.

It was all pretty shocking, but it came as no surprise.

Shusha was the last Azeri stronghold in the territory and as such, in Armenian eyes, represented a cancer that had to be excised. Not incidentally, Azeri soldiers there were also bombing the Karabakh capital of Stepanakert from the mountain fortress, giving the Armenian forces sufficient cause to take them out.

But the point is less that Shusha was strategically important than that the Armenians have claimed Nagorno Karabakh for years and had developed a detailed plan to effect that end, and Shusha was necessarily part of that plan.

Quite naturally they used any means available to achieve their goal, and one has to admit that they marshalled their resources masterfully.

They had to.

Because the Karabakh conflict was--and is--a battle between some 200,000 Armenians and 7,000,000 Azeris.

Excuse me? A typo?

No, odds of 35 to 1.

That the former were supported by the three million citizens of Armenia (as well as a very active diaspora) via an air bridge is almost incidental.

The actually fighting men on the ground in Karabakh were massively outnumbered, and had to twist the odds by any means available.

It goes without saying that military preparedness and determination played a decisive roll in the Armenian victory.

But just as important was the understanding of the other factors that are so essential to waging successful war in the late 20th century.

These include the manipulation of the media to gain sympathy, the abuse of temporary truces and pledges of peace to further war aims and the ability to capitalize on the weaknesses of the enemy--in this case, the internal dynamics of Azerbaijan, often referred to as the 'political whorehouse in Baku.'

And the Armenians effected this part of their agenda as masterfully as they have mounted their military campaign.

To give credit where credit is due, I would have done the same thing, if I were an Armenian.

Again, maybe the sole reason for their success has been less a function of tactical and strategic brilliance than the woeful ineptitude of the Azeris, and their total inability to see and understand patterns and then counter them.

As such, I feel a deep sense of personal loss when I think about dead friends and acquaintances, but I don't feel much sympathy for Azerbaijan as a whole.

As a nation, they have been too stupid to feel sorry for.

Because the scenario has always been the same.

After a period of relative calm, during which any thinking person knows that the Karabakh Armenians are re-grouping, a piece of news is floated that the Azeris are either bombing Stepanakert or some other settlement.

Moscow television is the usual vehicle for such reports.

Not all are inaccurate, because the Azeri forces remain pretty casual in terms of discipline and are perfectly capable of lobbing a few GRAD missiles down on Stepanakert for fun.

The stupidity in this action is because the GRAD is designed as a noisy and frightening weapon to be used against on-coming infantry in order to disperse those forces.

It is not a weapon designed to destroy buildings.

Cannons are made for that.

They pack a lot more punch. They rip through buildings and explode according to different fuses.

You don't get frightened, wailing refugees in a basement.

You get dead people in rubble.

That might sound brutal and horrible and inhuman and it is, but the point is that the Azeris have been destroying Stepanakert a chunk of wall or roof at a time, killing the odd pregnant women

unlucky enough to be walking down the street during an attack, but they weren't driving the Armenians out of the city or really achieving any tactical objective at all, save for giving the Armenians cause for acute hatred and the rationale to start a good slaughter themselves.

There is evidence of the Armenians actually provoking such attacks--even when high level visitors were in the city--in order to create a climate of revenge, but that, too, is beside the point: the details about who shot first and why were and are usually lost in the transmission of the news that Stepanakert had once more been hit due to the simple fact that the Armenians understand the nature of news.

They know how to use the fax.

So the first clue to an impending Armenian assault on Azeri settlements or positions in Karabakh has always been news that the Karabakh Armenians are once more on the defensive and that Stepanakert is under a massive GRAD attack.

The second consistent clue to the imminence of something big has consistently been a call by Yerevan for a cease-fire and for international peace keepers to be stationed in Karabakh.

The third clue is the news that Azerbaijan has agreed to talk.

While the Armenians from Yerevan and the Azeris from Baku are sitting down to trade insults, the Karabakh Armenians attack another Azeri position, justify it in terms of self-defense.

The most recent territorial fait accompli accomplished, the Armenians then consolidate their gains and gird themselves for the next step in realizing their unaltered plan.

Announcement of new Azeri GRAD attacks.

Calls for help.

Agreement to brokered cease-fires.

Then attack and claim a lack of control over those who do the dirty work.

Cynical?

Yes.

Effective?

Absolutely.

Step by step and despite their small numbers, the scrappy Armenian 'defenders' have managed to evict every last Azeri from Nagorno Karabakh.

The Israelis probably wish they had been so successful with the Arabs.

And the most remarkable thing about the entire, calculated process is that the Azeris never seem to learn from the experience that has just proceeded.

Every step along the way it has been the same story.

So it was so with Imaret Kervan.

So it was with Umudlu.

It was the same with the 50 other villages and towns in Karabakh that the Azeris have been evicted from over the course of the past four years, but especially over the past nine months.

The most dramatic example was Xojali--but you have heard enough about that massacre-for-self-defense so I will not repeat the story here, save for this: Armenian nationalists still rationalize the attack as reasonable and required because the Azeris had been shelling the Stepanakert airport for months.

Hold the phone.

Xojali was the Stepanakert airport.

Were the Azeris shelling themselves?

Perhaps the world thinks that Shusha was an Armenian town under Azeri occupation in Karabakh, and needed to be relieved of that burden of oppression.

Anyway, the next, perfectly obvious and fully anticipated move (at least for anyone with eyes to see) is for the Armenians to establish a corridor between Karabakh and Armenia.

This will happen along existing transportation lines, and by the shortest possible route.

That means Lachin--the town situated smack-dab between Nagorno Karabakh and Armenia itself.

By the time this gets to you, it will probably be history, but for the record let me predict this:

The Armenians will increase their barrage on Lachin from both within Nagorno Karabakh and, perhaps more discretely, from Armenia itself.

The Azeris at some point will be obliged to try and silence the guns firing from just inside Armenia.

Yerevan will announce that Azerbaijan has violated the territorial integrity of Armenia, and call on the international community--the UN, the CSCE, NATO and the CIS--for help.

Then it will launch a self-defensive counter attack against the Azeri aggressor.

Lachin will fall within a day and the long-awaited corridor will be established by default.

Chaos will descend on Baku, and an anti-nationalist crack-down will occur. A suborned bunch of 'Islamic' fundamentalist will take power in Baku, fulfilling everyone's expectations.

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As I edit this, on May 14th, the above prediction has come true: forces loyal to communist/crocodile former president Ayaz Mutalibov, backed by 'Islamists' have effected a coup.

Meanwhile, the BBC is announcing that:

a) Armenia welcomed the dispatch of international team of fact finders/peace keepers from the United Nations to Nagorno Karabakh

b) Armenian forces were 'moping up' Azeri resistance around Shusha

c) the Armenian Ministry of Defense was concerned about Azerbaijan 'escalating the conflict' by a heavy bombardment of Armenian border villages.

Peter, I feel utterly sick.

In reverse order, a commentary:

c) Today, on May 14th, 1992, the Republic of Azerbaijan is in such a chaotic mess that the idea that it might be capable of organizing an attack on Armenia is insane.

b) The Azeri resistance was snuffed out five days ago.

a) I refer you to the Peace Talks = War scenario.

It is happening exactly as I said it would.

Well, enough background.

Here are some reports from the field.



7.5.1992

**Armenian Forces Attack Shusha**

Baku--With the ink scarcely dry on the most recent cease-fire agreement signed in Tehran between the former Soviet Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan, Armenian forces, reportedly backed by tanks and helicopter gun-ships, have overrun the last Azeri stronghold in the disputed territory of Nagorno Karabakh.

Reports from the mountain fortress town of Shusha remain sketchy because all communication links have been cut, but the number of dead is thought to range in the hundreds of Saturday evening, a number that will no doubt rise as fighting continues.

The Azerbaijan defense ministry admitted the fall of the city on Saturday afternoon, and said that survivors joined by military units in the nearby town of Lachin have now mounted a counter-attack.

In addition to Shusha, several other outlying villages also fell to the Armenians on Friday night or Saturday morning. In total, the Armenian operation has effectively cleaned Nagorno Karabakh of the last traces of the Azeri Turks, making peace negotiations appear ridiculous and the prospect of all out war between Armenia and Azerbaijan inevitable.



Following The Fall of Shusha, 'Unknown' Vandals Toppled The Memorial Monument To The Red Army In Baku, Saying That Russian Units Had Participated In The Attack. Lenin's Statues Are Fair Game, But Destroying Mementos Of The Great Patriotic War Is Something Else

10.5.92

## Fighting Continues Over Shusha 1)

Baku--Fighting between Armenian and Azeri nationalists continues unabated in the disputed territory of Nagorno Karabakh, with both sides claiming control over the strategic, Azeri mountain fortress town of Shusha that fell to Armenian forces on Saturday.

Communications links between Baku and the Karabakh region are intermittent at best and casualty reports remain sketchy, although the death toll is believed to be in the hundreds at the least.

Armenian sources say that 30 people were killed in the fighting for the town.

In addition to Shusha, the last Azeri settlement in Karabakh as well as a major Azeri garrison town, the Azerbaijan Ministry of Defense reported that a string of villages, towns and small cities outside of Karabakh are under attack from Karabakh-based Armenians as well as forces from within Armenia proper.

The attack on Shusha, while long expected, began Friday only hours after acting Azerbaijan President Yagub Mahmedov and the Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosyan signed a cease-fire agreement in Tehran. 2)

But even as the two leaders were initialing the agreement, the provisional government in Karabakh was reporting a need for international peace keepers to stop the 'intense Azeri bombardment' of the airport town of Xojali, which up until late February was an Azeri settlement.

There was an element of macabre deja vu about the timing of the assault, because all major attacks by Armenian forces on Azeri communities and positions in Karabakh have generally been preceded by similar distress calls and peace negotiations.

The last major Armenian assault came within a day of a similar, Iranian brokered cease-fire between the two sides in late February, and resulted in the taking of Xojali and the killing of upwards of 1,000 people, including women and children, who were gunned down as they attempt to flee.

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1) A balloon story based on falsified information coming out of the Ministry of Defense. Chaotically retreating Azeri forces were trying to escape from Lachin at the time this was written. The interesting point of this disinformation is that it was the exact opposite of the disinformation employed when Xojali fell--or was it? This time around, it appeared to be the Defense Ministry, controlled by the Popular Front, which was giving the lie while the presidential apparatus was trying to get the unspeakable truth out to the people. In the light of events, however, it would appear--and I stress appear--to have been a double game played by the presidential apparatus to discredit the Ministry of Defense (and thus the Popular Front) by means of an agent inside the MoD. The final chapter on this seminal conspiracy has yet to be written, but something about it smells to high heaven.

2) After all my nasty remarks about Iran's peace initiatives, I have to remark at this point that there are many in the government of the Islamic Republic who feel as if the Armenians 'betrayed' their trust. Once burned, twice shy, and twice burned, the Iranians now want to get out of the kitchen.

The death toll in Shusha has the potential for being even higher, although the majority of casualties will be combatants.

Shusha was a city of some 25,000 inhabitants, although the majority fled over the past six months, turning the city into an armed camp of volunteers in the new Azeri army, militiamen and policemen. Recent visitors say that the total population on the eve of the attack consisted of several thousand soldiers and perhaps 1,000 civilians servicing the military.

"It is an outrage," Azeri Foreign Minister Hussein Sadikov after meeting with members of the special CSCE committee on establishing peace in Nagorno Karabakh, "Every time we sit down to talk peace with the Armenians, they take another chunk of Azerbaijan and then blame it on forces operating outside the control of Yerevan. There can be no peace negotiations until the Armenians withdraw from Shusha. It is the right and duty of Azerbaijan to protect the honor and the integrity of the country, and we will use necessary force to dislodge the aggressor from the occupied territories."

Sadikov called for Armenia's expulsion from both the CSCE as well as the UN for its gross violation of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, a member state of both bodies.

A spokesman for the CSCE team, while admitting to 'acute embarrassment' about the timing of the mission coinciding with the Armenian offensive, pointed out that the committee had no authority to sanction anyone, and that the issue of Nagorno Karabakh would be taken up at a meeting in Helsinki on May 18th.

"Why should we bother to attend?" asked an Azeri official intimately involved with the CSCE talks, "Every time we sit to talk peace, they take another city."

But the fall of Shusha is more than the fall of just another city. Its capture by the Armenians represents the effective eradication of the last traces of the Azeris from Nagorno Karabakh--and the taking of the strongest Azeri position in the troubled territory.

Despite the reports that fighting continues, those familiar with the geography of the area and the state of preparedness of the Azeri forces say that the Azeris have virtually no hope of regaining the city by military means.

"It is suicide to try and retake Shusha," said a senior government official, "the Armenians had enough equipment to take Shusha while fighting up-hill; they captured all the tanks, gasoline and other strategic equipment they need to hold out for another five years. And now we are trying to retake it? I pity the soldiers sent on that mission."

The base of any Azeri counter-attack is the town of Lachin, situated in an exposed gorge between Armenia and Karabakh. Lachin is now reportedly under missile attack as Armenian nationalists attempt to open a corridor between the two territories, with the presumed aim of uniting them.

Armenia consistently denies direct involvement in the Karabakh conflict, suggesting that the Karabakh militants are operating outside of the direct authority of Yerevan. But that fiction has worn thin due to the presence of air-born paratroopers, heavy armored equipment and attack helicopter and war-planes in the present fighting.

11.5.92

## In wake of Karabakh Debacle, Civil War Looms

Baku--Following the loss of the disputed territory of Nagorno Karabakh to Armenian nationalists, the prospect of civil war now hangs over the oil-rich but corrupt former Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan, as a break-down of authority continues in Baku.

Nightly, the streets ring with the sound of gun-fire as the country splits into two armed camps--one represented by the Popular Front organization, and the other by supporters of former President and Communist Party boss Ayaz Mutsalibov and his long-time political servants.

The former have embraced pan-Turkish nationalism as their cause, while the latter are attempting to claim the banner of Islamic solidarity.

In between the two camps is the demoralized Azerbaijan army, now in an ugly and volatile mood following its humiliating loss of Shusha, the last Azeri stronghold in Karabakh over the weekend.

The long-awaited show-down between the nationalists and the so-called 'crocodiles,' or old communist elite, started coming to a head on Monday, when the acting president, Dr Yagub Mahmedov, in a twice-aired television broadcast, accused the Minister of Defense of giving him inaccurate information about the deteriorating status of Shusha over a period of three days. Mahmedov also charged that the minister avoided a face to face meeting to explain the discrepancies in war reporting, and ended his address by saying that the minister had 'disappeared to Moscow'--a reference that in the Azerbaijan context is tantamount to calling someone of flunky the KGB of the old USSR.

The Defense Minister, Rahim Gaziev, replied on Tuesday with televised counter-charge from the front with Armenia that it was Mahmedov who had 'sold out' Shusha, and promised not only to retake the fallen city but also to root out the 'traitors in Baku' who had sullied his name.

The two agree on at least one point: known not only was Shusha the last and strongest Azeri position in Nagorno Karabakh, but that it fell with scarcely a fight. Many of the soldiers and militiamen defending it were mysteriously pulled out just before the Armenian militiamen began their long expected assault.

Rumors of fifth-columnist doping the defenders before the fight and sniping detonation cables in defensive mine fields remain unconfirmed, if widely circulated in the streets.

"Help me leave this country," said a half Azeri, half Russian professional woman of a usually calm disposition, "I don't know who to believe anymore. It is all a game, or a bad dream. I just want to leave and not come back."

Grand conspiracy theories aside, the history of the Mahmedov and Gaziev make them archetypical rivals.

Mahmedov, an intimate of former president Mutsalibov and a Communist Party functionary, came to power following the Mutsalibov's resignation on March 6th when the former Communist Party general secretary was forced to quit his post under massive pressure resulting from the last great debacle in Karabakh, when Armenia forces overran the town of Xojali in late February.

Gaziev, in contrast, is a former mathematician-cum-militia commander associated with the broad-based opposition grouping Popular Front who gained the reputation as a national hero by having secured Shusha's defense last year. He was promoted into the position of Defense Minister in the Mahmedov cabinet in the wake of the Xojali disaster in order to promote an atmosphere of national unity in build up to the presidential elections scheduled for early June.

The Popular Front initially opposed holding the elections on the grounds that the nation needed to be pre-occupied with the crisis in Karabakh and not candidates, but eventually fielded its chairman, Abulfaz Elchibey as its candidate.

Public opinion polls suggest that Elchibey, a long-time dissident figure in Azerbaijan who is greatly respected despite his almost total lack of administrative experience, would easily defeat Mahmedov and the five other candidates running for the office. His nearest rival is a non-candidate: former Politburo member and retired KGB General Haydar Aliiev, who, at 69 years of age, is four years too old to contest the presidential elections.

While announcing that he was against the elections and would not stand as a candidate, Aliiev recently called on the people of Azerbaijan to write his name on the ballot, leading many people in this confused country to think that the current break-down in authority is all part of a grand design to let Aliiev return from his self-imposed exile in the obscure Azerbaijan province of Nakhjivan to lead the country again. Among the broad mass of people, however, there is very real sense of nostalgia for Aliiev's days in power, when there was security on the streets and when the shelves were full.

But the elections are now in jeopardy.

Under pressure from armed, quasi-Islamic groups camped around parliament, the National Council has called for an emergency session of the full, former communist-dominated parliament on Thursday. The main subject on the agenda is expected to be the postponement or even cancellation of the June 7th elections.

"With their majority, the 'crocodiles' (the former Communist elite) can pull the rug out from under the Popular Front and save Mahmedov from defeat," said a Turkish diplomat, "But the result is likely to be a blood-bath when the Popular Front supporters hit the streets."

The Front, in a statement on Wednesday, announced that while it would refrain from public meetings due to the crisis situation, it would call its members to defend the country if the communist-dominated parliament tries to change the constitution.

The battle ground is likely to be in the heights above Baku, where the national parliament, the state television station and the newly-spaded Martyrs' cemetery are all situated within a stone's throw of each other. All have become gathering points for demonstrations, remonstrations and increasingly emotional burials.

The largest crowds gather in the cemetery, where hundreds of grim, uniformed men come to bury their fallen, fellow soldiers and let off massive volleys of blanks as if to simulate the fusillade of shells which killed their comrades-in-arms.

One of the most recent burials was that of Albert Marum, a Jewish Azeri, whose feats of bravery as a volunteer fighter in Shusha made him one of the most popular soldiers in the theater.

His funeral, attended by hundreds of soldiers and friends, was an odd mixture of Shi'ite Muslim funeral rite and Safardic Jewish Kadesh, and the rattle of machine-gun fire released from dozens of guns sent casual observers scurrying for cover.

Many thought the long-expected civil war had just broken out.

Scarcely 100 yards away were another group of around 200 men, many heavily armed, who belong to an allegedly 'Islamic' group calling for the restoration of former president Mutalibov, who they maintain was 'drugged' before he resigned on March 6th.

Although the demonstrations is technically illegal, the group is fed and provided for around the clock by a series of well-stocked tents set up in front of the parliament.

On the hour, they chant 'Allah ul-Akbar (God is Great)--although the new sense of Muslim identity is exactly what Mutalibov used to accuse his opponents of.

"There are alliances coming to light that no one would have dreamt of two months ago," said an American diplomat in Baku, "No one knows who belongs to whom anymore."

In a show of force on Tuesday, about 30 members of the 'Islamic' group refused to allow law-makers assembled for an emergency session of the National Council to leave the parliament; they even drew their guns on acting President Mahmedov when he attempted to leave the building to meet with western diplomats. After a tense ten minutes, the men then allowed the acting president to enter his Mercedes and drive away.

The most crucial installation on the hill, however, is the Azerbaijan national television station right across the street from parliament. The television has come under intense criticism for its contradictory reports on the status of Karabakh, and is increasingly subject to partisan reporting.

On Monday night, this correspondent was allowed to see the rushes and raw-editing of two separate reports from the front which were highly critical of the Mahmedov government. 3) Both were spiked 'by those above' before they could be aired in lieu of a replay of the Mahmedov file denouncing Gaziev as a traitor.

On Tuesday night, however, one of the censored clippings ran--and with apparent approval of someone somewhere in the power structure--in which defense minister Gaziev called the acting president a 'liar' and promised military justice for those who had abandoned their positions on the Shusha front as well as for those who called into question his personal integrity.

"The fact that Gaziev played on national television, and given the content of his speech, the only thing left is for someone to announce the beginning of a state of civil war," a western diplomat said.

Unconfirmed reports suggest that Mahmedov has already prepared for that eventuality, by having invited Russia to intervene in case of a deepening of the crisis or the outbreak of street fighting.

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3) The cameraman and star of Azeri television, Genghiz Fuataliev, I am saddened to note, was killed outside Geranboy in June.





Above, Deceptively Calm and Pretty Baku, Waiting For a Coup  
Below, Money-changers Ponder The Future In Baku Tea Shop

May 14

Azerbaijan Parliament Votes to Restore ousted President To Power;  
Chaos looms

Baku--In a surprise move designed to stop the unraveling of authority in this troubled former Soviet republic, the parliament of Azerbaijan on Thursday overwhelmingly voted to restore Ayaz Mutalibov to his former position as president and cancel new elections scheduled for June 7th.

But rather than saving the country from further political deterioration, the move is almost certain to lead to the outbreak of civil war.

"It is a great day," said Sheikh-ul Islam Allahshukur Pashazade, the leading Islamic cleric in Azerbaijan who also serves as a member of parliament, "the country finally has a leader again."

As Pashazade and other deputies of the dissolved communist party glad-handed each other and rejoiced in their quasi-legal putsch, an armed crowd of around 200 men who had been camping outside parliament chanted 'Allah ul Akbar,' or God is Great! and took credit for Mutalibov's return.

"We saw how Imam Khomeini managed to oust the Shah of Iran through his believe in Almighty God, and now we have effected our ends through similar faith!" shouted one bearded leader of the group.

But others ascribe Mutalibov's return less to divine intervention in the affairs of state than to the labyrinth of power politics in this oil rich but highly corrupt country, and predict that civil war will soon follow.

"It is all part of a plot so deep and thick that it is almost impossible to explain," said a senior presidential advisor, who accurately predicted Mutalibov's return earlier in the day, 4) "It is the local mafia working in collusion with the former Soviet KGB and now with the Iranians, none of whom want to see a free and independent Azerbaijan. The same people who have brought this country to the brink of total ruin are so desperate to cling to power that they have brought back the biggest thief and traitor of them all."

Mutalibov, the last Communist Party General Secretary in Azerbaijan before the party was dissolved last September, also became the country's first elected president later that month in elections boycotted by the broad-based opposition group, the Popular Front. He was forced to resign in early March under massive public protest for his handling of the crisis in the disputed territory of Nagorno Karabakh, and specifically blamed for allowing Armenian militants to capture the key Azeri town of Xojali, and then covering up reports that the inhabitants were massacred.

At the time of his resignation, he promised to withdraw from politics 'forever' in return for a hefty pension and immunity from prosecution.

But Mutalibov was frequently seen attending cabinet level meetings in his former office, and through a subtle campaign, he

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4) None other than 'deep throat,' Vafa Goulizade



also began an effort to dump the onus of the Xojali disaster on the Popular Front.

During his short absence from the presidential office, the position of acting president was filled by a close associate, Dr Yagub Mahmedov, the chairman of Supreme Soviet, or parliament. New elections for the five year post of president were scheduled for June 7th, and Mahmedov had announced himself as an independent candidate, although it was well known that he was effectively the candidate of the defunct communist party.

His main rival, and the clear front-runner, was the Chairman of the Popular Front, Abulfaz Elchibey, a long time dissident whose essential campaign message is a commitment to remove Azerbaijan from Moscow's orbit and restore Nagorno Karabakh to Azeri control.

Following Mutalibov's restoration, the annulment of elections and the imposition of martial law, Elchibey went into hiding in Baku in anticipation of the closure of the Front offices in downtown Baku and the arrest of parliamentary deputies associated with the Front.

No sooner had a smiling Mutalibov retaken his seat at the head of parliament than a huge crowd began gathering in order to defend the Front headquarters from an attack.

"We will not attack first because we lack the strength, but we will defend ourselves and the honor of the country," said Professor Towfik Gasimov, as men armed with machine guns and hand grenades took up defensive positions on the roof and balconies.

Gasimov also said that a core group of men and women would stay in the building to maintain contact with 'democratic' forces in the rest of the world, especially in Turkey, the United States and the Russian parliament.

The Front leaders also met with representatives from the Turkish and American embassies in Baku to explain the situation and ask for moral support and to collect assurances that both the United States and Turkey would take up a joint position of protest in the event of an attack on the Front headquarters.

Turkey has already promised safe-haven for families of Front leaders in its new embassy complex, and that it is ready to assist in the way of asylum if necessary.

The wild card in the current situation is whether the demoralized Azerbaijan army, now in an ugly mood following its humiliating inability to defend Azeri positions in and around Nagorno Karabakh, will remain neutral or side with the Popular Front.

As a lead-up to the legal putsch, the government mounted what is best called a campaign of defamation against defense minister Rahim Gaziev, suggesting that the popular commander was treasonably responsible for the fall of Shusha.

Gaziev's whereabouts are unknown.



Above, 'Crocodiles' Congratulate Themselves On Mutalibov's Return  
Below, Abulfaz Elchibey Calls On People to Defend Popular Front

15.3.92

## Popular Front Assaults Parliament And Seizes Power

Baku--Backed by thousand of civilian supports, and announcing their intentions with a fusillade of fire that left many believing that civil war had broken out, national army units loyal to the Popular Front of Azerbaijan stormed parliament Friday to reverse what they call a coup by former communist president Ayaz Mutaalibov.

Leaders of the Front say they are now firmly in control of the capital Baku and most of the country, and that the constitutional order upset by Mutaalibov's short-lived restoration has been restored.

The former president's whereabouts are still unknown, but a determined search to find him as begun.

"The Mutaalibov must be found and punished for his crimes against the people and the state," said Popular Front leader Abulfaz Elchibey on state television, shortly after the successful and remarkably bloodless counter-coup, "the totalitarian regime which has brought Azerbaijan to the brink of disaster is in its last hours."

In a move to give the popular putsch a legal basis, the reconstituted National Council has declared Mutaalibov's re-installment as president by the full, former communist party dominated parliament on Thursday to be null and void.

Friday's putsch came only one day after Mutaalibov was returned to power by his former communist party colleagues, two months after he resigned in the face of massive opposition for his handling of the crisis in the disputed territory of Nagorno Karabakh.

Despite a lack of a quorum and the effective boycotting of the proceedings by Front-associated deputies, the parliament of 'old crocodiles' voted to restore their fallen leader, and rejoiced in the effectiveness of their ploy. After taking his seat at the head of parliament, a smiling and relaxed Mutaalibov immediately canceled new elections scheduled for June 7th and announced a ban on all political activity--in effect threatening to shut down the Popular Front.

"These people are insane," said a Turkish diplomat in parliament at the time, "they have just started the clock ticking on their own doom."

By Thursday night, tens of thousands of Front supporters had rallied to the call to defend the Front Headquarters in downtown Baku; overnight, armed units backed by tanks and APCs had joined the defense perimeter, having been pulled out of front-line units around Nagorno Karabakh to add force to the Front's ultimatum that 'citizen Mutaalibov' vacate the presidential palace by 15:00 hours Friday.

Depressed and despondent police and paramilitary units called to defend the presidential palace told this correspondent at the time the deadline expired that Mutaalibov and all of his advisors had vacated the palace, but that their orders stood to defend it against a Front attack.

"This crisis can only be resolved through blood," said a captain in the police, wearing a flak-jacket and toting a sniper

rifle, "We are following orders, but it is crazy to defend someone who has already fled."

But after a feinting maneuver toward the presidential palace, the bulk of the Front forces marched on the scantily defended parliament building and adjacent television station.

And as small arms and canon fire echoed through the streets of Baku, individual citizens, believing that civil war had broken out, attacked the police around the presidential palace with their fists.

"Look what you have brought us to!" wailed one distraught man, lashing out at three police, "What, who are you defending!"

More police were needed to restrain the man, whose passion clearly unnerved and demoralized the presidential loyalists even more.

The attack on parliament by the Front forces, meanwhile, though loud and sustained, resulted in an miraculously low number of casualties given the intensity of the gun-fire around parliament and the state television tower and the emotions involved.

According to reports, only three fighters were wounded; the solitary death was that of a soldier crushed beneath the wheels of a BTR, the standard Soviet Armored Personal Carrier, on which he was riding.

The parliament building itself was in shambles following the attack, and is now under the guard of the nationalist forces.

The Presidential palace surrendered itself late Friday night without a fight; rather, when no attack came, the thousand police and dispirited national guardsmen guarding the building simply went home, after which the Front troops moved in.

The spark that set off the current crisis came upon Mutalibov's re-installment as President of this oil rich but highly corrupt Caucasus nation on Thursday, when the parliament of Azerbaijan, dominated by former communist party members, voted without a quorum to restore Mutalibov to his position as president and cancel new elections scheduled for June.

Mutalibov, the last Communist Party General Secretary in Azerbaijan before the party was dissolved last September, also became the country's first elected president later that month in elections boycotted by the Popular Front.

He was forced to resign in early March under massive public protest for his handling of the crisis in the disputed territory of Nagorno Karabakh, and specifically blamed for allowing Armenian militants to capture the key Azeri town of Xojali, and then covering up reports that the inhabitants were massacred.

At the time of his resignation, he promised to withdraw from politics 'forever' in return for a hefty pension and immunity from prosecution.

But foreign and local observers suggest that Friday's popular putsch may just be the beginning of another long and tragic chapter of the history of Azerbaijan in the 20th century.

Absorbed into Czarist Russian during the early 19th century, the country became the first secular, independent Turkish state in 1918, but was crushed by the Bolsheviks in 1920 and remained bound to Moscow until September 1st, 1991. Then, in the wake of the collapse of the former USSR, Azerbaijan declared its independence again--albeit in the context of the rash of suddenly

'independent' states that still wished to maintain significant ties to Moscow.

The Moscow connection remains the mystery card in the current unrest, because Azerbaijan is the most developed, most nationalistic and independent minded off all the Turkic/Muslim republics of the former USSR, and the seizure of power in Baku by nationalist opposition forces who totally reject the concept of the new Commonwealth of Independent States might well start a trend in other, nominally passive, former Soviet states.

"This is just the first act," said a western observer, surveying the shattered windows of the parliament building, "There is too much at stake for the old apparatchik elite and ancient powers in Moscow to let go so quickly."



Above, Assault On Parliament Moves Out Of Front HQ After 3:00 pm Deadline To Evacuate Presidential Office Passes;  
Below, Hicran Goltz Waits For Attack Along With Defenders Of Presidential Palace. Moments Later, PF Forces Hit Parliament To Start Brief and Bloodless Civil War

17.5.92

## Popular Putsch in Azerbaijan

Baku--Moving rapidly in their consolidation of power in the following Friday's democratic coup against the former communist elite, the nationalists forces in Azerbaijan have succeeded in bringing most of the country under their control and have called on the nation to start a campaign to retake the disputed territory of Nagorno Karabakh, from which the last Azeri was expelled a week ago.

Although occasional gunfire is heard from different quarters in Baku both night and day--including a spraying of the headquarters of the Popular Front late Saturday night--the number of wounded has been amazing low; the solitary death over the first three days of the populist counter-coup that drove former Communist Party boss and erstwhile president Ayaz Mutsalibov from power was a new recruit in the national army who, falling from his transport, was crushed beneath the wheels of a armed personal carrier when a column of soldiers joined by thousands of civilians stormed the national parliament and television station on Friday.

The attack by presumed Mutsalibov loyalists on the Front headquarters on Saturday night, and subsequent shooting on Sunday is regarded as incidental by the nationalist leadership, who more greatly fear an effort by die-hard followers of Mutsalibov to attack members of the large Russian minority in Baku in order to create an atmosphere in which Moscow might intervene.

Many ethnic Russians have left Baku, and most remain in-doors on the advice of the Popular Front.

The Front has also secured assurances from commanders of the erstwhile Red Army based in Azerbaijan that the current events are an 'internal affair' in which they will not become involved.

In the popular imagination, the events leading up to the attempted restoration of Mutsalibov as president of this oil rich but highly corrupt former Soviet Republic are the result of a grand conspiracy by Moscow to maintain control of Azerbaijan.

Most Azeris, including the leadership of the Popular Front, make little distinction between the concepts of 'Moscow' as the capital of the Russian Federation and the 'Kremlin,' which represents the manipulative power-center of the former USSR from which the Azeri nationalists are determined to leave by whatever name.

"That what our action was all about," said Popular Front chairman Abulfaz Elchibey, "We meant to restore the democratic process interrupted by the illegal restoration of Mutsalibov that was inspired by Russian imperialism. We want nothing to do with the Commonwealth of Independent States because we want to be an independent state."

The current crisis came to a head on Thursday, when the former communist party dominated parliament voted, without a proper quorum, to restore Mutsalibov to the presidency a scant two months after he resigned the post in the face of massive public outrage over his handling of the crisis in the disputed territory of Nagorno Karabakh.

Although he promised to remove himself from political life 'forever' in return for a hefty pension and immunity from prosecution, Mutalibov continued to manipulate parliament and government from behind the scenes, a cat and mouse game that culminated in his quasi-legal restoration to power last Thursday.

No sooner than had a smiling Mutalibov retaken his seat at the head of the former communist party dominated parliament, whereupon he immediately cancelled presidential elections scheduled for June 7th and called for the imposition of a state of emergency and for the closure of the Popular Front.

The Front responded by issuing an ultimatum that it would mobilize all its forces to restore the constitutional order if the government did not reverse its coup, and when the deadline passed, its forces stormed the national parliament and seized the television station.

"I was too afraid of being called a coward to turn back," said a Turkish diplomat among the thousands of citizens who joined the attackers in their assault on parliament, "We didn't know what was waiting for us up on the hill."

Mutalibov's forces, consisting of thousands of depressed and confused policemen merely following orders, had been positioned in front of the presidential palace where they had anticipated the assault by the Front forces.

"If the Front had hit the presidential building, there would have been a blood bath the country would have been faced with real civil war," said a western observer, "The first proof of the Front's ability to rule the country was the decision to leave the Mutalibov forces to wander home one by one."

That is exactly what happened.

Within hours of the conquest of the parliament building and television station, the policemen and guards nominally loyal to Mutalibov had vanished, and the building was taken over by the Front without a shot having been fired.

Significantly, the nationalists have made the decision to cleave to constitutional legality to preserve their victory, in effect turning back the clock to May 14th.

In theory, this means that Yagub Mahmedov, a Mutalibov intimate who replaced the former communist party boss in March, will remain as acting president. In practice, though, the office will be stripped of all power and authority.

Mahmedov, a key-player in the attempt to restore Mutalibov, was seen sulking around the shattered parliament building on Saturday, looking pale and frightened. Other parliamentarians who had supported the attempt to restore Mutalibov were also in the building, trying to atone for their political sins.

"In a democracy, the will of the people is paramount and the people clearly did not want Mutalibov restored," said an ethnic Ukrainian deputy who, only two days before had announced his joy at the return of the deposed president, "We made a mistake."

The former president's whereabouts are still unknown, but a determined search to find him has begun.

Many observers in Baku are speaking about the similarities between the events of the past few days and the failed putsch in Moscow on August 19th of last year, when Boris Yeltsin effected his own revolution by demanding a return to the constitutional order.

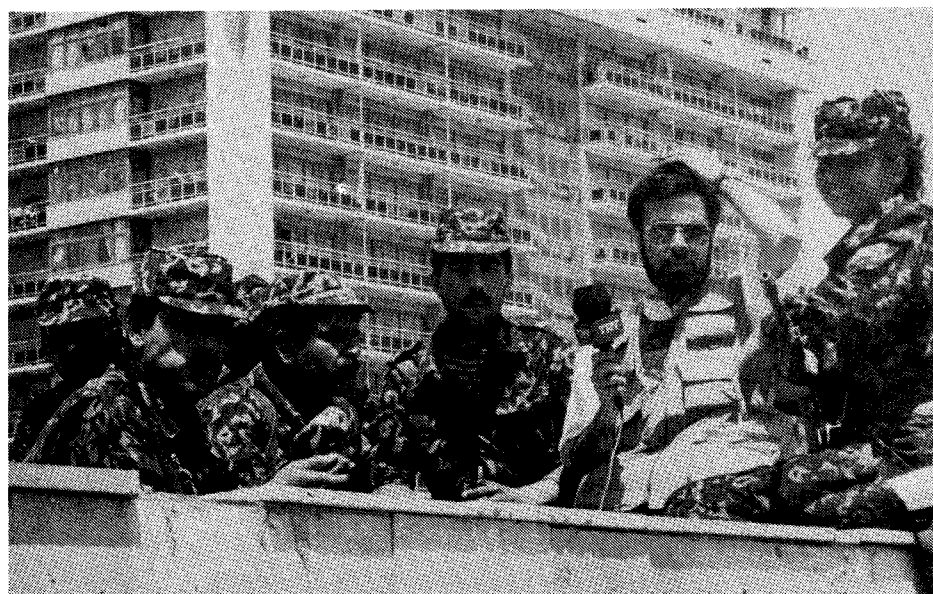


But few are naive enough to think that the power struggle is completely over and the joy at having effected a counter-coup against a hated, former communist leader is tempered by the rapid deterioration of the Karabakh front.

Not only have the Armenians captured the last Azeri stronghold in the territory, but they are now threatening to punch through the long expected corridor between Karabakh and Armenia proper.

One obvious reason for the weakened state of the Azeri forces is that many of the troops that effected the assault on parliament were pulled out of the front lines.

"They can't be sent right back while the situation in Baku remains so fluid," said a western observer, "Baku has to be absolutely secured before a single tank or gun can be dispatched back to the front. It looks bad." nnnn



Above, Janitors Clean Up Glass After Attack On Parliament, Below, The Victors Strut Their Stuff (the woman soldier is none other than Nurjahan Husseinova of Post 19 fame)



16.4.92

## Armenia Forces Karabakh Corridor

Baku--Armenian forces both within the disputed territory of Nagorno Karabakh and Armenia itself have reportedly begun their long awaited offense to open up a corridor between the two territories in order to link them.

Reports remained contradictory and confused, but the Armenian forces, in a pincer movement from both Karabakh and Armenia itself, are said to have intensified rocket and canon fire on the Azeri town of Lachin, which straddles the main highway route into Karabakh from Armenia.

Radio reports quoting Armenian sources say that the Azeri forces mounted an attack of around 1,000 men to retake the strategic city of Shusha--the last Azeri settlement in Karabakh which the Armenians conquered last weekend.

But both local and foreign observers in Baku doubt the report, suggesting, instead, that the sophisticated Armenian propaganda machine usually floats such reports to justify the necessity to go on the offensive.

"Whenever you hear reports about waves of Azeris attacking defenseless Armenians on the international media, you can usually assume an Armenia defensive victory the next day," said a western observer in Baku. "They know which stings to play when preparing their next fait accompli."

But the threat to the Armenian position in Nagorno Karabakh is increasingly real as the Azeri nationalist forces consolidate their power in the wake of Friday's counter-coup against former Communist Party boss Ayaz Mutalibov.

Although gun-fire still rings through the capital, there is little question that the nationalists forces have succeeded in bringing most of the country under their control following a remarkably bloodless, if chaotic attack on parliament last Friday.

On Saturday, gunmen riding in a car sprayed the headquarters of the Popular Front with gun-fire; none were injured and the men were subsequently arrested. On Sunday, a large explosion rocked an up-market residential district, and there was sporadic gun-fire after hours, as security forces continued their sweep of the city in order to disarm militiamen and gangs still loyal to ousted former communist boss Ayaz Mutalibov.

While distressing, the Front leadership says it regards such incidents as marginal, but fears that hard-liners might now target the large Russian minority in Baku in order to create an atmosphere in which Moscow might intervene.

Many ethnic Russians have left Baku, and most remain in-doors on the advice of the Popular Front.

The Front has secured assurances from commanders of the erstwhile Red Army based in Azerbaijan that the current events are an 'internal affair' in which they will not become involved.



The Mood In Baku: Staking Out Parliament To Force Commies To Quit

18.5.92

## Isa Gamberov New Acting Azeri President

Baku--The parliament of Azerbaijan, meeting in an emergency session following last week's state coup by former communists and subsequent counter-coup by the opposition Popular Front, on Monday elected a new chairman and voted to suspend itself and bestow authority on a National Council, dominated by the Front.

The new chairman of parliament, Isa Gamberov, is a leading figure in the Popular Front. In the absence of an elected president of Azerbaijan, he thus becomes acting president of the country until elections on June 7th.

As such, he is the first non-communist party associated leader of Azerbaijan.

The session, delayed by the lack of a quorum for a number of hours and plagued by procedural delays once met, finally voted at midnight by a majority of 244 of 255 votes to dissolve itself after a mixture of cajoling and threatening finally convinced the lawmakers that they had no place in the new Azerbaijan.

"Perhaps there some deputies here from the provinces who have not been in Baku for the past few days," said Arif Hadjiev, the deputy chairman of the Popular Front deputy chairman in exasperation at the last ditch attempt by the old communist party elite to cling to some semblance of power, "This is a revolution by the Popular Front and we are in control of the country, so stop playing your games and vote like we say."

Hundreds of military men and a crowd of several thousand waiting outside the parliament backed up the Front threat by insisting that no deputies be allowed to leave the building until the Front agenda was finished--meaning the legal dissolution of parliament.

As a face saving concession to the old communist elite, a number of figures from the old regime were named as cabinet ministers in a 'coalition government,' but their inclusion was mocked by members of the Front as the voting proceeded.

"The new ministers won't even have time to set up their staffs before a new government is formed," cackled opposition deputy Towfik Gasimov, referring to the up-coming presidential elections on June 7th in which the Front chairman, Abulfaz Elchibey, is the clear favorite.

Assuming his election, the new president will then appoint a new prime minister and have veto right over a new cabinet, which observers predict will be made up entirely of Front members.

"The crocodiles (the locally used term for the old communist party elite) have not just slithered off into the swamp," said a western diplomat observing the proceedings, the have just voted themselves off into the tar pit of history. This is nothing less than a democratic putsch, and because it is in Azerbaijan, one has to wonder what the old crocodile elite of the Central Asian states are thinking right now."

The greatest procedural glitch came in the wake of the resignation of the parliamentary chairman, Yagub Mahmedov, who was also the acting president of Azerbaijan following the resignation of Communist Party chairman and first Azerbaijan president Ayaz Mutaalibov in March. Mutaalibov's attempt to restore himself to power last week precipitated the present crisis. The

parliament, without a quorum, then voted to restore the former president although he lasted a mere 24 hours before fleeing the country in the face of massive discontent.

Like many intimate associates Mutsalibov, Mahmedov was not in attendance at Monday's parliamentary session.

But following the announcement of Isa Gamberov as the Front's candidate for parliamentary chairman, elements of the former communist party suggested made a pathetic last ditch attempt to cling to power by suggesting the alternative candidacy of Haydar Aliiev.

The 63 year old former KGB general and Politburo member who now serves as the president of the Azeri territory of Nakhjivan, declined answering telephone calls from the parliament about his unsolicited candidacy because he was 'too busy' with an Armenian attack on Nakhjivan.

'Haydar Aliiev, although he was once their boss, is an experienced politician who knows that the people want nothing to do with anyone marketed by the old communist elite," Gamberov told this correspondent shortly before his election, "He didn't answer the phone because he didn't want to."

Despite a long standing power feud between Aliiev and the Front, Aliiev threw his support behind the nationalists in the wake of the short-lived Mutsalibov coup of May 14th, saying that Nakhjivan did regard the decision to re-instate the former president as null and void and that the people should gather around the Front.

Gamberov's election as chairman of parliament--and thus acting president--quickly followed, with the Front leader's waving off applause with the demand that the doomed assembly get down to the business of dissolving itself forever.

Meanwhile, the tasks to be faced by the new, nationalist administration remain momentous and grim.

In addition to consolidating real power and security in Baku, the government has committed itself to the task of re-conquering the disputed territory of Nagorno Karabakh, now fully under Armenian control. The Armenians of Karabakh and Armenia itself have reportedly opened the long-awaited land corridor between the two territories.

More ominously, the Armenians have also mounted a new series of attacks on Nakhjivan, which remains protected, in theory, by Turkey due to the Kars Agreement of 1923. That treaty, renewed by Aliiev in the Turkish capital of Ankara earlier this year, gives Turkey the right of intervention in the event that Nakhjivan is attacked by a third power--a specifically oblique reference to Armenia.

"Public sentiment in Turkey about Armenia attacks of Karabakh is hard enough to contain," said a Turkish diplomat in Baku, "But no Turkish government can survive abandoning historic, treaty obligations like those in Nakhjivan."

20.5.92

## Splitting Ranks Among Victorious Opposition

Baku--Scarcely 46 hours after ousting the former communist dominated government and establishing a new administration, the broad-based opposition coalition known as the Popular Front is now threatened with war on two fronts--one with the neighboring Republic of Armenia over the disputed territory of Nagorno Karabakh, and the second--and more ominous--conflict with disgruntled allies who accuse the Front of being too accommodating with elements of the former communist regime.

Significantly, the internal conflict is not between the Popular Front and forces loyal to ousted Communist Party boss Ayaz Mutalibov--although this too, remains a very real threat--but between the victorious Front and a young war-lord who feels that he and his private militia have been cut out of the fruits of last week-end's populist victory over the old communist regime.

At a snap press conference in Baku on Wednesday, a sulking Itibar Mahmedov, the chairman of the National Independence Party, declared that he would 'wage a war of national liberation with those who attempt to divide the country'.

In context, the aggressive declaration meant that if Mahmedov is not given a sufficient share of power, he will keep his private army out of the war with Armenia.

Almost incidentally, he noted that his reasons for not endorsing the new Front government is because he feels it is still dominated by too many members of the old nomenclature.

"There was far too much bazaar bargaining between the Popular Front and the old nomenclature in parliament," Mahmedov said, "It is impossible for us to cooperate with the current leadership in principle, because the new government is still dominated by the Mutalibov inner circle. I suspect a filthy deal has been worked out. I have evidence that it was the Front, in consort with the nomenclature, that ordered the withdrawal of Azeri forces from (Nagorno Karabakh) for their own political ends. This is treason."

The Popular Front, an amorphous, broad-based opposition group that grew up in the early 1980s and received a legal charter in 1989, is the organization that successfully seized power over the week-end from the old communist-dominated parliament. Less a political party than a movement, the Front includes everything from the Azerbaijan Committee on Women's Legal Rights and the Azerbaijan Employer's Part to the local chapter of the All Union Society of Meschitian Turks under its nationalist umbrella. Pan-Turkic groups predominate, while Islamic-oriented associations tend to stay far away. Mahmedov was once a member of the organization, but left it last fall to form his own political party outside the nationalist umbrella, although he embraced virtually all of its essential causes: a totally independent, westward-looking Azerbaijan, whose model would be secular Turkey and not Islamic Iran.

The difference between Mahmedov and most of the other organizations once or currently associated with the Front, is that Mahmedov has his own army, which has maintained separate status from the inchoate national army of Azerbaijan.

During the horse-trading session preceding the Front's parliamentary counter-coup against the old communists over the week-end, Mahmedov was offered the position of Prime Minister in the new, quasi-coalition cabinet that is to rule Azerbaijan before the June elections as a concession to his status as party chief and war-lord.

Mahmedov spurned the post because it 'lacked sufficient power.'

As a result, the Front nominated and passed an inner cabinet consisting of discredited members of the former elite, mainly in order to allow the old nomenclatura a relatively graceful egress from power.

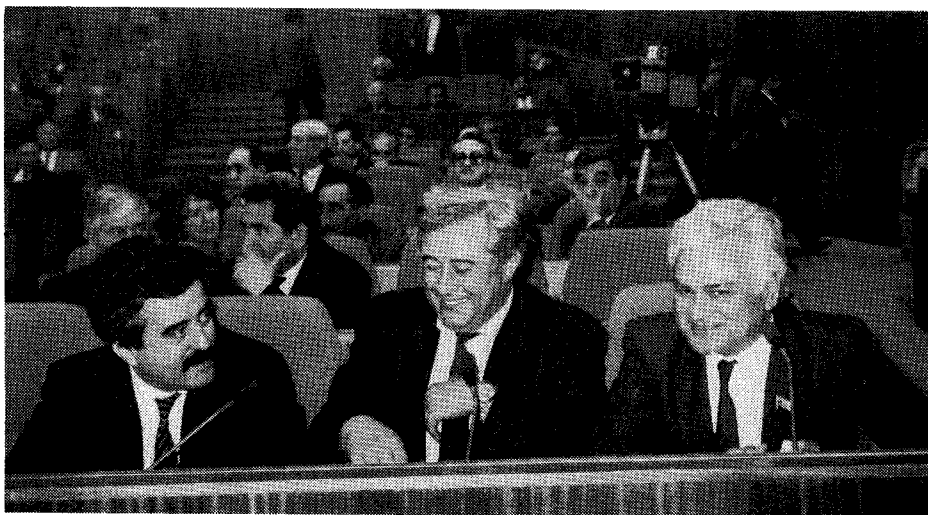
Although politically expedient, the move left the Front's first government exposed to the charge of collaborating with the hopelessly discredited communists, even if for only three weeks. The run-away favorite for president in the June 7th polls is the chairman of the Popular Front, Abulfaz Elchibey, and there is little doubt that Elchibey will clear the cabinet of all remnants of the former regime.

Mahmedov, whose support comes from something incongruously called the 'national bourgeoisie'--IE, the Azeri mafia--had also declared himself a candidate for president, but has now withdrawn from the race saying that elections are 'impossible' in the present critical circumstances.

"The Front called upon us for aid and assistance before in their moment of need and we provided it," said Mahmedov in a performance marked by a deep insinuation and personal abuse of the Front leadership, "But they abused our faith and we will not help them a second time--even in the eventuality of a Russian invasion of the country."

As such, observers point out, it will be increasingly difficult for the Front to mobilize all forces at its command for the undeclared war with Armenia.

"The point of the populist coup was to secure the flank," said a western observer in the Azeri capital, "But with Itibar's men playing spoilers, resources that could be sent to the front will have to be divided lest Mahmedov mount a counter coup."



Itibar Mahmedov (dark hair on left) with 'National Bourgeoisie'

21.5.92

## Azeri President Does Not Want Turkish Aid For Nakhjivan

Baku--The acting president of the war-torn Azerbaijan says that his country does not want to escalate the conflict with neighboring Armenia by third party intervention, but that the current undeclared state of war between the two former Soviet Republics should be resolved through the application of international law as interpreted by the United Nations and such bodies as the Committee for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE).

Referring to the recent flare up in violence between Armenian militiamen and the forces of the Azeri enclave territory of Nakhjivan, acting Azeri president Isa Gamberov described the 'Armenian aggression' in Nakhjivan as an attempt by Armenia to force neighboring Turkey to invoke the Kars Agreement and thus come to Nakhjivan's aid.

At least 10 people have been killed and over 100 wounded as fighting has raged around the border town of Sadarak, over the past few days, violating a cease-fire established earlier this month.

The Kars agreement, first signed in 1921 as part of defining the frontier between Turkey and the new Soviet republics of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, allegedly allows Ankara to intervene to preserve the status of Nakhjivan if the territory is attacked by a third party. The agreement was renewed earlier this year during a state visit by Nakhjivan assembly president Haydar Aliiev to Turkey.

"It is clear that the aggression is designed to draw Turkey into the conflict on the side of Nakhjivan and thus provoke Russia to side with Armenia against Turkey," Gamberov in an exclusive interview, "I am against widening the conflict and will attempt to restrain it by diplomatic means."

Gamberov said that while information from Nakhjivan remains sketchy, fighting around the town of Sadarak continues.

The mystery of the current conflict is who started it and why.

"It is very murky," said a western observer in Baku, "But our working theory is that it is an attempt by Armenians to create a quid-pro-quo situation in which Turkey becomes the active guarantor of Nakhjivan and somebody else becomes the guarantor of Nagorno Karabakh."

NATO member Turkey, the source pointed out, has no desire to go to war with Russia or other members of the Commonwealth of Independent States with whom Armenia has just signed a military security pact, and the government in Ankara remembers all too well the last time its right to intervene in the affairs of another state were invoked.

The year was 1974, and the place was Cyprus, where the minority Turkish Cypriots were under attack by pan-Hellenic nationalists who wanted to join the Mediterranean island to Greece in clear violation of the terms agreed to by Turkey, Greece and the United Kingdom about the country's independence. However technically legal the Turkish intervention, though, it made the country an international pariah for at least a decade. Complicating the picture is Russia's announcement that the Kars

Agreement is no longer valid, and that a Turkish intervention against Armenia would lead to 'dire consequences.'

In addition to the quid-pro-quo theory for reasons of the current crisis in Nakhjivan, there are other scenarios that range from the marginally reasonable to the insane: the most extreme of these is that Armenia is actually and actively seeking war with Turkey, in order to gain by the chaos that would necessarily ensue from a limited, quasi-Christian/Muslim, quasi NATO/Warsaw pact war.

A more reasonable explanation is that Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosyan is not in control of the forces engaged with the Azeris in Nakhjivan and Nagorno Karabakh, who are using the vacuum of power to their own advantage.

"We suspect that it is members of the Dashnaksutun group of Armenian ultra-nationalists," Nakhjivan President Haydar Aliiev said in early May interview following the initial fighting in the territory, "I have been in constant contact with Ter-Petrosyan to make a cease fire in order to determine who began the conflict, but he says he does not control the Armenians involved--despite the fact that they have heavy weapons and are within 40 miles of Yerevan."

Observers note, however, that it has been 'very convenient' for Ter-Petrosyan to deny control over various Armenian militant groups, but to use their gains to his own advantage.

"Either Ter-Petrosyan is lying and using militia groups when it suits him to further war ends, or he is telling the truth--and tacitly admitting that he has no business sitting at anybody's cease-fire or peace-conference table," said an observer.

The third theory is a mixture of the first two, namely, that Armenian forces openly operating out of the control of the Yerevan authorities are making a land grab while they can, attempting to either rub Turkey's nose in the mud of international immobility while trying to unseat Ter-Petrosyan in the process.

"The fact that (the Dashnaksutun Party) are playing around with a war between a member of NATO and a member of the rump Warsaw Pact seems incidental to them," an observer said.

Lastly, there are those who say the fighting in Nakhjivan is nothing more than a high-stakes diversion from the key issue of the Armenian conquest of Nagorno Karabakh and the opening of a land corridor to the disputed territory over the weekend.

While the world ponders the possibility of a post cold war conflict between Turkey and Russia over the obscure territory of Nakhjivan, the Armenians--either government, opposition of radical nationalist or all three--continue to extend their grip over Karabakh and environs.

Over the weekend, the Armenians forced through the long-awaited corridor via the town of Lachin, situated in a wide valley lying between Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh.

At a CSCE meeting in Helsinki, Armenia rationalized the assault on Lachin as a 'humanitarian action' designed to assist ethnic Kurds from Azeri Turkish repression; it later dropped that dubious rational in favor of the argument that it was forced to open the corridor lest the Karabakh Armenians, supplied only by air over the past four years, 'starve to death'.



The Armenia authorities did not comment on the apparent Karabakh Armenian preference for guns over butter, or why the fighting continues well outside the disputed territory.

"We are unprepared for the conflict but are determined to pursue it until the end, no matter how long it takes," said acting President Gamberov, "the people of Azerbaijan will not give up one inch of the occupied territories through aggression or negotiation. We are preparing ourselves for a long and bitter up-hill struggle. No other government would do less."



Isa Gamberov, 35, in Nakhjivan; To His Left is Haydar Aliev

## Feature: Kurds in the Courtyard

Baku--In a tree shaded residential courtyard in Baku, some 200 volunteers have gathered to receive uniforms, weapons, rations and a bit of badly needed cheer before shipping out to the front of an undeclared war with neighboring Armenia.

They are men and women, and come from every level of Azerbaijan society--taxi drivers, school teachers, former Kolkoz agricultural workers, professionals--all responding to a call to arms to defend the country and re-conquer lost territory.

The volunteers also span the ethnic and linguistic rainbow of peoples who live in the former Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan.

In addition to the dominant Azeri Turks, there are Persian-speaking Talish from the south and Lezgin and Avar speakers from the border with Daghistan. There are also a handful of Tats, Baku Jews and local Russians.

But in the courtyard of the handsome Bankers' Building, the people responding to the call of arms against Armenia are mainly Kurds.

Most are from Lachin, a dumpy little town situated in a gorge between Armenia and the disputed territory of Nagorno Karabakh. Several previously lived in Armenia, but were thrown out along with the Azeri Turks in 1988 in the first round of the pogroms and killings in the undeclared war between the two former Soviet republics that has claimed at least 4,000 lives and displaced over half a million people on both sides.

The presence of the Kurds in the courtyard is but one of many bitter ironies in the bloody and dirty little war, because the Armenian forces that conquered Lachin last week say they did it to assist Kurds revolting against Azeri Turks.

"It is lie just like the other lies promoted by Armenian about us," said Rashit Gagoev, a Kurd from Yerevan who was expelled in 1988 and who resettled in Lachin, "The Kurdish language radio in Yerevan is a Dashnak Party tool. There isn't a Kurd left in Armenia to listen to it. We lost everything there and now we are losing everything again."

Lachin fell to Armenian fighters in mid-May when the Armenians, having successfully conquered all of Nagorno Karabakh, punched a land corridor through to Armenia over territory that indisputably belongs to Azerbaijan.

The rationale for the move provided by the Armenian Foreign Minister was brilliant in its convolution: the Armenian fighters from Karabakh had attacked Lachin in support of a popular 'Kurdish uprising' in the area; the Republic of Armenia had no part in it.

"You have to give credit where credit is due," said a western observer in Baku, "It is a cliché that Turks instinctively oppress Kurds and the Armenian suggestion that they were merely saving Kurds gave them an excuse to effect another fait accompli."

When it was revealed that few if any of the estimated 10,000 local Azeri Kurds had stayed behind to embrace their liberators, it was far too late: the Karabakh Armenians, allegedly acting 'out of control' of Yerevan once again, had established the corridor, and had opened the town of Lachin up to burning and looting.

"The Armenians told me that the Kurds were all just Muslims anyway," said Rory Peck, British television journalist who toured Lachin over the weekend, "They drove the Kurds out along with the Turks. I couldn't find one."

Reports reaching Baku now suggest that Yerevan is moving the non-Muslim Yezidi Kurds into the Lachin area, with a view toward establishing a quasi-Kurdish autonomous zone, thus providing a legal fiction to conceal their most recent conquest.

Indeed, the Armenian aggression in the Karabakh region--for that is what has now been termed by any number of governments and international organizations in oblique or direct form--has been a case study in the effective use of both arms and propaganda by a numerically smaller nation against a larger one.

The string of defeats suffered by Azerbaijan might best be compared with the fiascos experienced by the Arab states confronting Israel, when a similarly out-numbered but highly motivated nation managed to disgrace a statistically superior foe.

In addition to technological superiority, the Armenians have managed to develop a command structure that simply doesn't exist among the Azeris.

"People take orders on the Armenian side and fight in units," said a western military observer, "The Azeris, while highly motivated, have no apparent command structure to speak of. It is every man for himself--and in war, that means a lot of volunteer cannon fodder."

Compounding the problem of discipline is the fact that not all Azeri forces are under central control: a plethora of small militia groups now exists as the private armies of local war-lords. Sometimes they fight together but often don't because of personal jealousy and internal rivalries or simple incompetence.

"I had breakfast washed down by vodka with a local commander in Agdam," said a Turkish journalist just back from the Karabakh front, "He said it would be a shame to smell of liquor among his men, so he went home and slept for the day."

Another parallel between the Israeli and Armenian victories has been the financial and moral assistance of the diaspora, as well as a cool and calculated manipulation of international opinion through the use of cultural prejudice or disinformation.

"Everytime you heard that the Armenians were facing an imminent attack by the Azeris you knew they were planning to launch their own, well-planned offensives to capture new territory," said a tired observer of the conflict.

Even Armenian atrocities, such as the slaughter of hundreds and perhaps a thousand fleeing civilians from the Azeri town of Xojali in February, have been quickly and expertly disguised by counter-claims of high Armenian casualties, or by suggesting that the Azeris were killing themselves.

Most cynically, though, the government of Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosyan in Yerevan has also proven itself a master of using the peace conference to promote war aims.

"Everytime Ter-Petrosyan sits down to sign a cease fire, Armenian fighters seize more territory," said a western observer, "It is a little too convenient to claim he does not control them. Either he is lying, or he has no power and no business signing anybody's peace document."

The latest conference on Karabakh is a case in point: the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkey, Russia and several other interested states are scheduled to meet in Rome on May 1st as a preliminary meeting to a full-fledged peace conference in the Belorus capital of Minsk in June.

The basic points of the preliminary conference are already clear: a call for Armenia to evacuate the towns of Lachin and Shusha--the last Azeri position in Nagorno Karabakh, that fell on May 8th--in return for Azerbaijan's agreement to lift an embargo on the territory.

"Armenia will agree to evacuate because it continues to maintain that it has never occupied one inch of Azeri territory--it has always been the Armenians of Karabakh who do all the dirty work," said Wafa Goulizade, the foreign affairs advisor of the Azeri president, "With the good cop/bad cop attitude, it promises to be a very short peace conference indeed."

Even if the conference results in the censure or even expulsion of Armenia from the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) or even the United Nations--as called for by Azerbaijan--the Azeri leadership is pessimistic that the Karabakh problem can be solved by any other means than war--and one they are not prepared for.

Now, after having rapidly re-established order in the Azeri capital Baku, the new administration of the nationalistic Popular Front that seized power in a counter-coup in mid-May says that its highest priority is to liberate 'all occupied territories.'

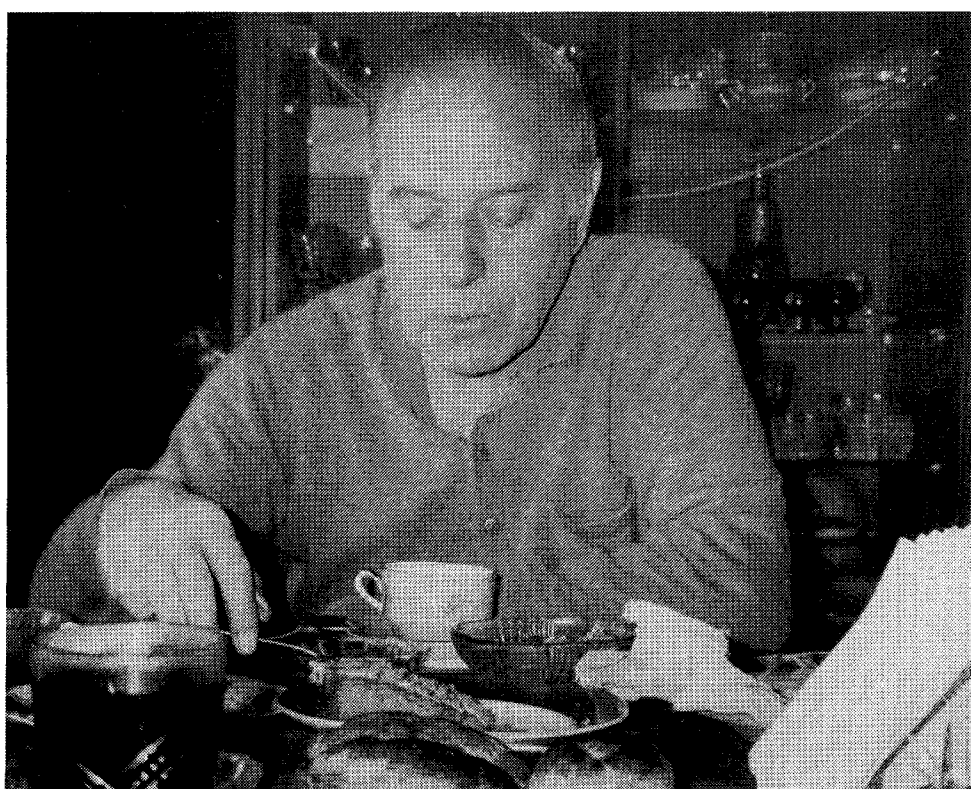
"It may take years," said acting President Isa Gamberov, "But we will not negotiate over one inch of the territory of Azerbaijan--including Nagorno Karabakh."

In the build up toward new presidential elections to be held on June 7th, a new mood of national unity seems to support this absolutist program--although after the string of defeats there are very few who allow themselves the illusion that it will be easy to unseat the Armenians from their entrenched positions.

"It will be three times as hard to take back the territory we have lost than it would have been to defend it properly in the first place," said Shahin, an Afghan veteran whose unit was driven out of both Shusha and Lachin.

Meanwhile in the courtyard of the Bankers' Building, a structure registered as an historic landmark, the Azeri Kurdish men and women from Lachin are joining their Azeri Turkish fellow citizens to gear up for the coming war to retake the homes.

The dirty little war about Karabakh continues.



Above, Kurdish Volunteers From Lachin Lining Up In Goltz's Courtyard in Baku  
Below, Haydar ('Geidar') Aliev, Having Breakfast In His Three-Room 'Palace' That He Shares With Sister And Family in Nakhjivan

## FEATURE: Haydar Aliev--A Dinosaur Thrives in Nakhjivan

May 28th 1992

As the Gulf-Stream jet of Turkish Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel roared into the sky above the obscure Azerbaijan territory of the Autonomous Republic of Nakhjivan last Thursday, two men and their retinues were left standing on the tarmac, wondering what to do with the other.

One was 35 year old acting president Isa Gamberov, a leader of the nationalist Popular Front organization that seized power in Baku following a bungled putsch attempt by former communists.

The other was 69 year old Haydar Aliev, the president of the Nakhjivan--and a former communist party boss who ruled Azerbaijan when most of the Popular Front leadership were sitting in jail.

The occasion that brought them together was the anniversary of the establishment of the first, short-lived Republic of Azerbaijan in 1918, celebrated by the official opening of a bridge linking Nakhjivan to Turkey over the Araxes River--the first concrete step in the creation of a new, Turkic-speaking world encompassing territories from the Aegean Sea to China.

Tens of thousands of people from both sides of the frontier met to listen to speeches celebrating Turkish unity, and to warn an inimical Armenia that it should harbor no designs on Nakhjivan, which is separated from the rest of Azerbaijan by a long strip of Armenia.

But no sooner was Demirel in the skies above than the first cracks began to appear on the tarmac below.

"It is time to transfer authority from old shoulders like mine to the younger generation," Aliev cordially told Gamberov.

"Your long years of leadership will be a great source of experience for us," replied Gamberov with apparent respect.

But the smooth words could scarcely cover-up the real tension of the moment, and fooled no-one in attendance.

Aliev had not bothered to meet Gamberov at the airport upon the acting president's arrival. Nor did he bother with the usual protocol of waiting for the presidential jet to taxi before he left the airport. He had also remained conspicuously unavailable during the day, until the two men bumped into each other at the airport minutes before Demirel's celebrated arrival--at which point Gamberov was rudely shouldered aside by an excited press corp desperate to capture the two better-known personalities of Demirel and Aliev standing together on celluloid.

More importantly, Aliev consistently made a distinction between Nakhjivan and Azerbaijan in his speeches marking the bridge opening and the independence day celebrations, almost suggesting that Nakhjivan was a separate state. The point was not lost on Gamberov and his retinue from the Popular Front, who were put in the awkward situation of stressing Azeri unity at the expense of the more popular evocation of pan-Turkism.

"The important thing is that a president of Azerbaijan came to Nakhjivan," said a patient if irritated Gamberov at the end of the long, hot day, "Other aspects of the visit will have to be evaluated over time."

'Other aspects' include an apparent effort by Aliev to play a deep game to restore himself as the ruler of all of Azerbaijan.

For that is what the 69 year-old Aliiev once was--and there are few who can pretend to fathom his real intentions of what he wants now.

Because Haydar Aliiev has been many thing--KGB general, Communist Party boss and, finally, Politburo member in the Kremlin, when he was brought to Moscow by spy-master Yuri Andropov in 1982. He later fell from grace during the Gorbachev era after being identified as being a hard-line hold-out, and was dumped from the inner circle in 1987 to disappear into obscure retirement in Moscow.

But now Aliiev is back, and claims to be a reborn Turkish nationalist with no other ambitions than to secure peace and prosperity for his people--a claim as ardently believed by his supporters as dismissed as utter rubbish by his many detractors.

It is but one of many contradiction surrounding the man.

Known throughout the former USSR as a man who accumulated massive wealth through graft, Aliiev now lives like a hermit priest as if atoning for past political sins. He shares a two room walk-up apartment with his sister and her family; he doesn't even have a closet for his two suits.

"This is the palace they say I own," said Aliiev to this correspondent over breakfast in the flat, "I have nothing and am nothing--thus I am free to serve the people."

Others dismiss such talk as nonsense, and wonder why Aliiev is playing such an obscure game.

"Theater," sneered a Baku matron who claims to know Aliiev well, "he didn't run Azerbaijan for a decade and sit in the Kremlin for five years without salting away a bundle. Are there no other vacant apartments in Nakhjivan?"

It is this sense of theatrics which make many wary of Aliiev's true intentions, and theories range from the relatively innocuous to the truly devious--that he is part of a deep, dark plot to restore the former glories of the Soviet Union he once helped run by creating instability in Azerbaijan.

The Grand Conspiracy theorists found new evidence in May, when Armenian forces began firing on the town of Sadarak near the new bridge and Aliiev called on Turkey to intervene in accordance with the 1923 Kars Agreement--a treaty that gives Turkey the status of guarantor of Nakhjivan's frontiers. Armenia responded by evoking the newly signed military pact with Russia and other countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, and for a brief, tense moment, it looked as if Turkey and Russia were about to go to war over Nakhjivan.

"It still isn't entirely clear who started the shooting," said a Turkish diplomat in Baku, "But Aliiev was howling on Turkey to come and start World War Three. Not bad for a political come back."

Aliiev returned to his native Nakhjivan in the summer of 1990, was elected as President of the parliament in 1991 and has ruled the territory with an iron hand ever since.

"I didn't even want the job," he says, noting that he Caesar-like thrice refused to accept the presidency before consenting to popular demand, "I finally accepted because I feared that the democratic forces in Nakhjivan would be strangled by the old communist guard if I did not."

The claim to support the democratic forces--which in the Azeri context means the Popular Front--seems strange. The Front



effectively deposed of the old communist guard on May 15th, when an effort to restore ex-president Ayaz Mütalibov was thwarted by massive public unrest spear-headed by the Front. The chairman of parliament, a Mütalibov intimate, then resigned and the cowed parliament elected Gamberov as the position--and thus acting president until elections scheduled for June 7th are held.

But on Thursday, even while Aliiev was avoiding Gamberov--and thus ritually accepting that the younger man was the legal leader of the country--he met with members of the temporary cabinet who were traveling with the acting president.

All of them were members of the old communist elite, appointed to their positions as a concession to national unity.

"It was like old-home week," said a diplomat allowed to sit in on the meeting, "They were contrite and apologetic about having spurned Aliiev during his long years in the political wilderness, and promised abject loyalty in the future. Haydar was still the boss."



The Turkish Hack-Pack And Haydar. Focus Of Crush Is Turkish Premier Suleyman Demirel, In Nakhjivan On May 28th To Open Bridge Of Hope At Sadarak; On The Ground And Out Of Sight Is Isa Gamberov, Who Turkish and Foreign Journalists Didn't Recognize

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