

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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Getting Out the News Blues

Dear Peter,

I suspect most epistles you receive from wandering ICWA-ites tend toward the profound (like mine)^{of} the trivial (also like mine).

Well, for this report I have chosen a new approach--repetition.

What you hold in your hands is nothing less than a series of press reports either included in or drawn from tcg-12 ('Back in Baku'). There is little or no new material here whatsoever.

Then why send it at all?

Well, mainly because I am not sure if one word has been published and I want to put it on someone's record that I did my level best to participate in the great information flow. Also, and almost incidentally, I think it might be of interest to someone, somewhere, how one tags together disjointed pieces of information into some connected whole and how journalists (at least me) roll over news from one story into the next, and why.

Perhaps a bit of explanation is in order.

As I mentioned in tcg-12, while in Moscow after the aborted August 19th putsch, I reactivated some of my press strings in order to recapture a certain edge I felt I lacked as a pure 'research scientist'. But the most familiar and friendly avenue for filing news out of Central Asia, the Washington Post, was closed due to the presence of a Post staffer, also in Tashkent on a grant. Accordingly, I contacted the competition over at the New York Times and they expressed delight in anticipation of the occasional file out^{of} deepest darkest Turkistan and elsewhere I might wander. Well, wander I did, with a first stop in Baku, Azerbaijan, from where I did file a few stories for the Times although I have no idea if anything was ever used. Then began a series of 'maybe later' answers. Staffers were roaming all the place and the news plate was full. Churlishly, perhaps, I then started drifting back to my pals at the Post: I was in Baku where they had neither staffer nor stringer and they were, after all, old pals. Indeed, when I contacted them they professed great delight in my resurfacing to file the occasional story. But just like the Times, the problem with the Post was space and it is still not clear whether one word of anything I have filed to date has been used. Given the ephemeral nature of news, that means that the majority of material I have sent seems destined for the trash-bin.

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Since 1925 the Institute of Current World Affairs (the Crane-Rogers Foundation) has provided long-term fellowships to enable outstanding young adults to live outside the United States and write about international areas and issues. Endowed by the late Charles R. Crane, the Institute is also supported by contributions from like-minded individuals and foundations.

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This was and is acutely painful, especially when I reflect on the sheer number of hours spent trying to find a telex line (the only reliable means of communication out of here) and then the additional hours spent waiting for a trunk call to confirm the receipt of the story (because local telexs only send and do not receive). Forget about modems and faxes--this is the real fourth world as regards basic communication.

Still more aggravating was and is the sense that I am virtually the only foreign witness to momentous events happening in an very obscure place, and that the main reason why there has been so little interest in Goltz phoning in from afar is the simple fact that no Big Feet happen to be stomping around the landscape, creating a sense of 'news' by dint of their very presence.

No Big Foot, No Story.

So almost more for myself than for you I present you with the following series of files--a sort of testimony of effort to get out the news.

Perhaps I was the wrong guy in the wrong place at the wrong time; maybe if it had been someone else, the same stories would have sailed. I leave it up to you to judge whether the prose is so bad or hacked or the material so banal that a little time on the editing block might not have salvaged something.

I have to warn you to expect a certain roll over in the stories: when I learned one day's material had not or would not be used, I often included salient material in the next effort. Also, the following have been lightly edited to spare the reader telex typos and the like; the material is around 90-90% what an editor had on his or her plate.

Too, I would like to stress that these are only stories which I filed. There is a plethora of other material that is still in process and not included here simply and reasonably because no editor had a chance to reject it.

We will title this report:

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Feel free to use any of the above items in your South North News Service if you can see a breath of life left in anything.

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September 14th (filed to New York Times, Moscow)

In Azerbaijan, ambivalence about independence

Baku--The leader of the main, opposition group in Azerbaijan says that the dissolution of the Communist Party over the weekend is a direct result of pressure put on the government of President Ayaz Mutsalibov by the people and that the party will be unable to reassert itself in the future, even under a different name.

But Mr Abulfaz Elchibey of the Halk Cephesi, or Popular Front, said that the dissolution of the party was but the first step toward creating a democratic Azerbaijan and that Mutsalibov must now dissolve parliament and call for new elections or face unspecified acts of civil disobedience. The Popular Front has asked for United Nations observers to monitor future elections to prevent fraud.

"Let Mutsalibov run again and if he wins he can be president," said Elchibey in an interview in school-room headquarters of the Front that was sacked by government thugs on August 23rd, "Our position is that it is not the change of persons in government but the structure of the state that needs reform."

The Popular Front boycotted the presidential elections held on September 8th, along with the provinces of Nagorna-Karabagh and Nahchivan and has charged the government with ballot-box stuffing and fraud after the results gave Mutsalibov 98% support.

While the Mutsalibov government has been calling on other states--notably Turkey--to recognize Azerbaijan independence, the Popular Front has asked other countries to refrain from doing so until Azerbaijan has secured such 'attributes of statehood' as its own currency and army.

On Saturday, a high-level Turkish delegation touring the six, mainly Turkic Muslim Republics of the USSR met with both Mutsalibov and Elchibey to "express solidarity and sympathy during this transitional period" and to determine what Azerbaijan really means about its declaration of independence.

"Turkey will be the first to recognize Azerbaijan once the time is right," prevaricated Ambassador Bilal Simsir, the head of the Turkish delegation, implying that Ankara's announced "intent to recognize" Azerbaijan would not move to full recognition until details of the new union treaty make it clear that doing so is not a serious political faux pas.

The Turks appear to be justified in their reticence given the support the Popular Front is able to muster on the streets of Baku to back their rejectionist position.

The most recent show of force was a rally held on the evening of Friday the 13th when a crowd described by organizers of numbering more than 300,000 but probably closer to 30,000 gathered in front of the ceremonial steps of the Government House on Independence Square to wave the blue, green and red Azeri flag and demand that the Communist Party be dissolved and not just renamed, as happened in Kazakhstan.

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The crowd appeared to be drawn from across the social spectrum, consisting of young and old and with Muslim fundamentalists standing shoulder to shoulder next to young women in short skirts and make-up, all of whom raised their fists as the dirge-like national anthem was played to mark the beginning of the rally and cheered and jeered as speaker after speaker lambasted the government.

The only untoward event occurred as the end of the two-hour rally, when police seized the driver's license and other identification of Mr Elchibey's driver. Curiously, perhaps, the source of such harrassment, Azerbaijan KGB chief, Mr Vagif Husseinov, had been removed from his position earlier in the day.

But whether Mutaibov is listening to the calls for his resignation and new elections is open to question; rather, the impression given is an effort to jettison unwanted baggage but to still cling to power.

On Saturday, the Azerbaijan Communist Party duly dissolved itself according to the President's request that it do so, and with only three dissenting votes. Those close to President Mutaibov say that the decision to dissolve the party was a foregone conclusion and described the proceedings in the former Communist Party building as the "death agony of a handful of partocrats".

"The Azerbaijan Communist Party was a branch office of the Communist Party of the USSR," said Mr Vafa Goulizade, one of Mutaibov's key advisors, "The idea that it could exist independently from the central organization was only held by a few men who have lost touch with reality in a desperate effort to preserve their privileges."

Goulizade noted that Mutaibov had already suspended party activity in all government offices and enterprises and that the vast majority of the party's 400,000 membership had long stopped paying dues, making it a hollow organization without funds or any real power or popular base and that party property was nationalized earlier in September and given over to different governmental agencies or ministries.

One of the most symbolic structures turned over to new purpose is the monolithic Lenin Museum building on the Baku quay. The dirt and dust scars on the marquee still delineate the letters of the Bolshevik leader's name even if the two foot characters have been removed.

Friday was moving day, with some members of the 56-person staff found packing up portraits, documents and other memorabilia to be trucked off to some unknown storage destination while others moved in new displays. A room formerly devoted to Lenin's first cabinet will now house the Azerbaijan National Theater Museum, to the delight of its director, Mr Sefattin Babaev.

Still, other members of the staff are distressed at the change and the lack of organization in the move.

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"We applied to the Ministry of Culture to have the building turned into a museum of Azerbaijan in the 20th century and thus save at least some of the history now being boxed up and forgotten," said Sevda Akhundova, who has worked in the museum as a guide and then director of training for the past 16 years.

"It all just breaks my heart," said Ms Akhundova as she conducted her last tour of the premises, twisting between up-turned bookcases and shelves to comment on the displays still standing and pausing to study a huge portrait of Lenin turned on its side, "I know that the history represented here was distorted. Up until a few years ago we only learned about the bad side of the bourgeois Republic of Azerbaijan (1918-20). But the fact remains that there would be no republics at all in the USSR without the February revolution. We would have all simply been part of Russia. No one wants to talk about that at all."

Nor is this the first alteration to the displays, Ms Akhundova pointed out. Following the anti-Armenian hysteria in the wake of the Soviet Army's bloody repression on January 20th, 1990, a decision was taken to remove all traces of Armenians involved in Soviet Azerbaijan history, including all portraits and references to Stepan Shaumiyan, the so-called "Lenin of the Caucasus."

"History is history whether we like it or not," said Ms Akhundova, "you can't just erase it."

Meanwhile, a new boil-up of Azeri-Armenian tension in the enclave province of Nahchivan appears to be subsiding, according to the Baku-based Assa-Irada "independent" news agency.

Assa-Irada reported last week that Armenian militants had abducted two shepherds in the region of the Zangazur corridor, which divides Nahchivan from Azerbaijan. In response, over 120 Armenian nationals traveling from the Armenian capital of Yerevan through Nahchivan to the town of Kafan in the corridor via a train guarded by Azeri police and Soviet soldiers were taken hostage in the town of Ordubad until an accounting of the two missing shepherds and their flocks was made by the Armenian authorities.

On Saturday, the bodies of the two shepherds were discovered, resulting in an angry demonstration by the citizens of Ordubad who demanded the perpetrators be brought to trial in Nahchivan even while contacts between Nahchivan interior minister Mamed Mamedov and his Armenia counterpart Ashot Munucharyan managed to effect the release of the Armenian hostages.

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September 22nd (filed to NYT/Moscow)

In Nagorno Karabakh, Azeri cynicism over Yeltsin's Road show

Hodjali/Karabakh, Azerbaijan--A day before Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin's visit to Nagorno Karabakh the population of this tiny Azeri Turkish enclave within the Armenian enclave in Azerbaijan took to the streets after the rumor went round that Yeltsin had arrived but was only interested in talking to the majority Armenian population of the neighboring city of Stepanakert.

"Gather your children and blockade the road to the airport and make him stop until he listens," announced mayor Elman Mahmedov to several hundred people gathered on the dumpy main square of the township, "Let him know that we are here and will not go away!"

In the event, Soviet soldiers had already corridoned off the airport and would not let the citizens of Hodjali pass; too, it later turned out that due to scheduling problems, Yeltsin and his partner in peace, Kazakistan President Nursultan Nazirbaijev, had not arrived but had delayed their arrival in the disputed province by one day.

But the panic that ran through Hodjali served to underline Azeri fears that Yeltsin's peace efforts are destined to be one-sided, and that the Russian President's visit to the province can not augur well for their own cause.

Azeri officials in Karabagh say there was not one incident of communal violence in Karabagh during the 60 hours of the failed hard-liner coup against Soviet President Mikhael Gorbachev but the day after Gorbachev's restoration, thanks to Boris Yeltsin, the cycle of shootings and house burnings began anew and that Yeltsin is somehow to blame. The worst incident since the failure of the coup in Moscow was rocket attack on Hodjali on September 10th, when 64 Alazan-type missiles rained down upon this settlement of 6,000.

"The Armenians are trying to drive us away through terror," said mayor Mehmedov, "We want to live in peace with our Armenian neighbors like we have for years, but they must respect the constitution of Azerbaijan. Do the four million Armenians in California subscribe to their own? Why should 200,000 here have a different law? The only solution we see is that the Armenians must be disarmed and the leaders of the lawlessness deported to Armenia and Yeltsin's grandstanding is not helping achieve that end."

Three years ago, Hodjali had a population of three thousand, but it has mushroomed into a sprawling community of twice that with the arrival of Azeri refugees from Armenia and from smaller Turkish settlements within Karabakh as well as 50 families of so-called Miskhiti Turks from Uzbekistan who now fear their third expulsion from their homes in 50 years.

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Among the saddest of the refugees are some twenty families of mixed Armenian-Azeri heritage, driven out of the provincial capital of Stepanakert along with all "pure" Azeris by dint of their Azeri blood.

"I never had any problems until 1988, when my school friends started to call me names," related Selima Allahverdiva, 20, whose father is Azeri but whose mother is Armenian, "we finally left after someone told us our house would be burned that night."

Others say that even those individuals who are only a fraction Azeri and who are not even Muslims were driven out by Armenians intent on "purifying" Karabakh of all traces of non-Armenianness.

"This is a racism akin to that of the Nazis against the Jews," said Murat Shukerov, 35, whose name disguises the fact that his mother is an Armenian from the town of Tashbulak in Armenia, "There are even cases of people who are only 1/4 Azeri and who sons have not been circumcized and who do not subscribe to Islam who have been evicted from Armenia or the Armenian areas of Karabakh."

Both Shukerov and Allahverdiva say they have lost all contact with their Armenian relatives and friends since the troubles began.

"I can't say that all my Armenian friends have become enemies because I haven't had contact with them since 1989," he related.

The suspicion, however, is that that is precisely the case.

In the village of Imaret Kervan, Azeri Turks say that there Armenian neighbors, known by name, are the ones who have mounted a series of arson raids on outlying Turkish houses.

"It was Heno and Limberk and Vladmir and Agop" said Valida Kafarova, 39, whose house, though torched, miraculously escaped staying on fire on the night of September 20th while those of four neighbors were reduced to charred ruins; within one, a 96 year old blind Azeri matron, Zeynep Alieva was immolated alive.

Azeri Turks also say that Armenia violence has extended even to those Armenians willing to cooperate or work with the Azeri government.

One such victim was one Yevgelia Avopovna, the Aeroflot station chief at Hodjali, who was locked in her Stepanakert house and burned alive after a mere week on the job in 1990.

(dictation cut off at this point)

...Another, possibly appocraphal, story related in Hodjali concerns a group of Armenians from Stepanakert who had secretly booked air passage to Baku to confere about the deteriorating situation; Armenian militants reportedly caught wind of the plans for the clandestine meeting and the group were allegedly rounded up and shot.

Azeri and Soviet Union security sources say that they are prevented from arrest alleged perpetrators because the local police lack the resources and courage to enter Armenian areas due to the level of weaponry in the hands of the Armenians, and that no

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orders have been given to the better equipped all-Union forces to act on the behalf of the police.

In a specific example, a single armoured personal vehicle carrying this correspondent and a inspection team from the Azeri internal security apparatus was sent up from the strong hold city of Shusha, four hours away by day-time road, to Imaret Kervan to detail the fire-bombings of the night before. A battalion of 150 soldiers with four of the same vehicles remained in their garrison within the precincts of the town, unable or unwilling to enter the neighboring Armenian village of Chapar to question the alleged perpetrator, one Heno Asyrian.

All this tallies strangely with other elements of Azer-Armenian "cooperation" in the way of security.

Up until Stepanakert declared its independence from Azerbaijan earlier this month, Armenian police officials were still sending common criminals to the Azeri authorities even if they refused to pursue individuals sought for acts of terrorism and violence.

Three Armenian convicts in the Shusha jail administered by Azeri Turks at present are Vladimir Araturov, 43, convicted on narcotics charges; Mikhail Avanisyan, 26, convicted on charges of holliganism, and Armen Matlivossyan, 21, convicted of theft.

All three were arrested by ethnic Armenian police in Stepanakert in 1990 and tried by ethnic Armenian judges before being sent off to the Azeri Turkish administered jail at Shusha.

Erevan has now asked for their extradition but Baku has refused.

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September 22nd (Material file for Business Week)

Meanwhile in Azerbaijan...

Of all the newly independent Republics, possibly the one with the greatest potential for real economic independence is Azerbaijan.

The reason for this is quite simple: oil.

(Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan are said to be the only two former Soviets who enjoy a positive trade balances with the Russian heartland and the other Republics.)

And yet despite its mineral and agricultural wealth and the increasingly vocal cries of the opposition Popular Front for true independence, the government of Ayaz Muttalibov appears to prefer finding its place within a re-structured union than outside of it.

Muttalibov announced Azerbaijan's unilateral declaration of independence on August 30th; a week later, on September 8th, the Azeri Communist party dissolved on Muttalibov's instruction.

To observers, both the declaration of independence and the dissolution of the party are just further proof that Muttalibov is intent on running a one man show. Chief opposition leader Tamerlane Garayev, vice chairman of the Azerbaijan Supreme Soviet, says that he gave Muttalibov twenty days in power after dissolving the Communist Party before 'serious social unrest' would start. Garayev now has lengthened the president's tenure in power due the series of meetings over the Armenian enclave of Nagorno Karabakh sponsored by Russian President Boris Yeltsin, as the apparently positive outcome of the talks for Azerbaijan have at least temporarily raised Muttalibov's stature.

Still, there is no question that the four year old problem of Karabakh has stalled any movement toward the free market in Azerbaijan.

"The president has had little time for anything else," said Presidential advisor Wafa Goulizade, "everything in the country has suffered."

Others say that Muttalibov has merely found in Karabakh a convenient excuse for neglecting the serious issue of pursuing real independence, an attitude born perhaps of over 150 years of central control--first by the czars in St Petersburg and then by the commissars in Moscow.

And there is no doubt that 'the center' continues to exercise a stranglehold of economic ties over Azerbaijan.

"People do not really understand the extent that political freedom and economic freedom are intertwined," said Musa Mahmedov, senior advisor to the President Muttalibov on foreign economic affairs, "personally I want complete independence, but the center effected a level of inter-dependency that is difficult to break. We are destined to stay in the restructured union--just as are the Baltic states."

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This is a curious attitude, perhaps, but so is Mahmedov's job.

The 'foreign economic advisor' appears to spend most of his time negotiating new, 'horizontal' economic ties with those states expected to remain within the restructured USSR or those that have just recently left it--like Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. These states, he feels, will be Azerbaijan's gateway to Scandinavian and northern European markets. Azerbaijan will thus become the bridge between those states and Iran, Pakistan and Turkey.

Mahmedov's inclusion of Turkey is strange indeed, given the fact that Turkey, which successfully embraced radical economic reforms more than a decade ago, has long constituted the real business 'bridge' between Europe and the Middle East.

Still others say that Azerbaijan's economic problems stem more from the fact that the country is being run by a small, self-protecting elite--often referred to as 'the Azeri mafia'--which permeates both macro and micro economic activity.

Indeed, Azerbaijan has long been famous throughout the Union for its rather dubious business practices; in the bad-old-days of the communist party, the ability to conduct commerce by any means was no doubt appreciated by many. But with the official cast-off of Marxist egalitarianism as the ideological basis of the state, many are concerned that the so-called "Azeri Mafia" continues and will continue to control economic strings at the expense of emerging businessmen.

"No one can do anything here with the right permissions," said a young business man who declined to be named, "When I opened my place two years ago, the unofficial bribe was 100 roubles per square meter of space. Now it is 1000. And as for big projects, one needn't even talk in terms of roubles: it is deutschmarks and dollars that people want before they turn a blind eye."

Happily, there appear to be a few significant exceptions to the general picture of gloom.

Bakmil, an Italian-Azeri joint venture, produces air-conditioners outside of Baku; the Ankara-based Turkish Pet Holding has invested in both the oil sector as well as other areas of the economy, including a leather-working plant. Other--especially Turkish firms--are keen to cash in on the rosy feeling toward Turkey to set up the processing and packaging factories Azerbaijan needs to move out of the category of raw product producer: some estimate that 30 percent of the country's agriculture rots in the fields or goes unsold in markets because there is virtually no juicing or jamming plants in the land. The Turkish connection here might be regarded as cynical: during the 1980s Turkey became a sort of museum of First World industrial machines of a generation ago (like aluminium soft drink cans with detaching pop-tops) and it is trying to export the same machines to Azerbaijan.

"The hotels are crowded with Turkish businessmen eager to make a quick buck from their Azeri kin," said an Istanbul-based lawyer who

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admitted his purpose in surveying the economic landscape was to see which "museum" pieces might be best off-loaded in Azerbaijan.

But clearly, the most active sector of the Azerbaijan economy is oil, and a number of recent joint ventures with BP, Amaco and other corporations for drilling and lifting at sea and land underline the fact that petroleum will attract business wherever it lies.

Baku was the first oil town in the world, and if its significance in Soviet (and world) production has diminished with time, on and off shore wells still produce some 12 million tons of sweet crude annually--a "mere" three percent of the total product of the Soviet Union--not bad if one considers that the USSR is the largest oil producer in the world.

But even with value-added from processing in Azerbaijan, the bulk of the product is then on-sold on the Soviet market at a fraction of world price--diesel sold to Moscow sells for around \$2 a ton, as opposed to around \$150 per ton on the world market. Some estimates suggest that the freight charge of getting Baku diesel and gas to Moscow costs more than the return.

Still, a certain latitude has opened up in the past year, with foreign oil companies invited to make joint ventures that are exempted from tax for two years and with permission to sell their percentage of the oil they lift at world price.

Arguably the most interesting joint-venture in the oil sector is a small but growing firm determined to make as big an impact--and profit--as they can by exploiting the sad fact that most of the Azerbaijan oil industry is based on ancient and outmoded technology. Literally hundreds of thousands of tons of crude are dumped or pumped into the immediate environment annually.

Baku-Invest, a Soviet-German JV involving elements of a number of state agencies and individuals with 49% held by the Hamburg-based Semaitec (and with new headquarters in the old KGB club in downtown Baku) was initially formed as an ecological company with an eye for making "patriotic profit" by cleaning up the environmental mess made by a century of exploiting oil in and around Baku. But the company has now moved beyond reclaiming hydrocarbon waste into similar profit-through-created-efficiency schemes in such sectors as non-ferrous metals and cement as well as the export of mineral water. Initial forays into the hotel sector have been shelved for the time being. Like all joint ventures, it enjoys a two year tax free status, after which 30% of its profits will go to the state.

"Our team is drawn from a very carefully selected cadre of technically competent, imaginative and patriotic people," said Dr Namik Askerov, director of Baku-Invest's oil and petrochemical division. "But our motive is profit. We count every penny."

The concern's largest single project is an overhaul of the 22nd Party Congress refinery outside of Baku on the basis of a plan drawn up the San-Francisco based Bechtel International earlier this

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year. It goes without saying that Bechtel's fee was not paid in barter or kind but in cold cash currency.

"The level of hydro-carbons in the effluent of the 22nd Party Congress Refinery is phenomenally high. We figure we can save 30,000 tons of oil flushed out in waste water from the plant per month," said Askerov, "multiple that times the world price of oil and you can see the potential profit."

According to Askerov, the initial investment of \$20 million needed for the restructuring and modernizing of the refinery would return the initial investment within seven or eight months. The loan is being floated from an unnamed bank through the help of invisible partners.

Another area of keen interest is the clean up the squalid mess left behind by a century of frenetic drilling and pumping, especially during the long years of central planning, that has left the outskirts of Baku looking like an ecological nightmare.

Frustrated with the indifference of central authority, Baku Invest has now contracted with the leaders of local "Rayons", or district councils, to effect a clean-up of Buyuk Shor, or "Big Salty,"--a sea-swamp on the edge of town with a foot-deep oil scum floating on the surface and an estimated three-feet of hydro-carbon soaked sand on the bottom.

"We promised the district councils a lake so clean salmon will swim in it," said Askerov, "And in return for that, the oil is ours to market where we please. We figure on an investment of around \$2 million and a return of \$20 million."

That this curious mixture of ecological consciousness and profit motive is not ill-founded is expressed in the companies profit line this year: 80,000 tons of diesel fuel have been shipped via Latvian and Georgian ports for a profit of \$12 million since March of 1991, without the loss of a dime for delayed vessel fees while tankers stand idle at anchor waiting for the various parts of the Soyuz Export, the pan-Soviet oil exporting agency, start to mesh. In real terms, this means paying premiums, in dollars or imported goods, to all the various parts of the system starting from the refinery to the railway to port officials in Latvia.

Some might call it bribing; Askerov calls it business.

"Our most successful coup was on August 19th," Askerov related, "We had a shipment of 10,000 tons of diesel on hand when we heard news of the putsch and figured it might be our last sale, so we instantly got on the telex and telephone and found a customer. Then we looked for a vessel and found one booked by Soyuz Export, idling at anchor. We made our arrangements with all concerned and shipped within two days, making a wind-fall profit due to the rise in the world price of diesel because of the coup while Soyuz lost \$50,000 in anchorage fees for letting the vessle stand for five days."

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October 1st: Secret War Continues Despite Yeltsin Intervention

(Filed to Sunday Times in London)

Geranboy, Azerbaijan--A secret war continues unabated in the newly independent Republic of Azerbaijan--and far beyond the confines of the more familiar conflict in Mountainous Karabakh.

There, despite the recent Ten Point Peace Plan delivered by Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin, fighting has actually increased, with concentrated rocket and canon attacks mounted almost every night on the few remaining Azeri Turkish settlements in the predominantly Armenian province. More than 800 civilians and soldiers have been killed in inter-ethnic fighting in Karabakh since the majority Armenians announced their intention to join the enclave to the near-by Republic of Armenia. (Editor: no rpt not 'neighboring;' Karabakh and Armenia have no contiguous borders!)

Ironically, security sources in Karabakh say that the only peace they have known in the past year were the three days of the hard-liner putsch in Moscow on August 19th. With the restoration of Mikhael Gorbachev the violence began anew.

"We expected the attacks to continue despite the Yeltsin initiative by diehard Armenians or elements of the old guard in Moscow who want to promote chaos for their own ends," said Timurland Garayev, Vice President of the Azerbaijan Supreme Soviet, "But we did not expect to see fighting reach outside of Karabakh.

But that is exactly what appears to be happening, as fighting spreads north from Karabakh and into the sub-province of Shoumian from which all USSR troops were withdrawn six months ago. Here, Armenian armoured vehicles and artillery--allegedly obtained from abroad during the Leninian earthquake relief in 1989 or stolen, purchased or donated by pro-Armenian factions in the Soviet military, and brought into the region by air, have launched what can only be described as a major offensive against poorly armed Azeri militia men and their local cohorts. On the Azeri side, the main weapons are double-barrel shot-guns and a small rocket designed to cause rain when exploded in overlying clouds.

The recent offensive began on September 14th, and continued throughout the Yeltsin visit to the region. It continues today.

No accurate death toll is available, but casualties are thought to run into scores. Also, in direct violation of the Yeltsin peace plan, the Armenians are taking hostages in order to effect the release of common criminals held elsewhere or simply to raise money. In the wake of the upsurge of violence, some 4,000 Azeris--many of whom were refugees from Armenia--have now left their villages in the Geranboy region and have descended in panic on the district seat where they are now sheltered in schools, sanitoriums and city parks.

"I was woken by the sounds of the shooting at around six in the morning and got outside just before the rockets started to hit,"

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said Hasan Nagiyev, 38, a man from the village of Buzluk which has now fallen into Armenian hands, "We made for the road and flagged down a car but then they ambushed us had to crawl to Geranboy."

Two other passengers in the car were killed, Nagiyev said.

Azeri sources say the attack is designed to capture former Armenian towns in the area and associate them with a 'Greater Karabakh' which in turn is to be made a part of 'Greater Armenian.' Most Armenians were driven from the area during the expulsion of Azeris from Armenia and Armenians from Azerbaijan in 1988 and 1989.

"If this continues, there will be open war between Azerbaijan and Armenia," said regional governor Irsat Nadirev, "The purpose is to creat a Great Armenia and then turn on Turkey."

Nadirev and others say that the root cause of the current troubles goes back to the alleged genocide of Armenians at the hands of the Ottoman Turks in Eastern Anatolia in 1915. Turkey denies the claim, saying that an equal number of Muslim citizens died at Armenian hands in conditions of civil war. Many Armenians in Azerbaijan, however, are descendants of refugees from Anatolia and continue to harbor a bitter judgement against all things Turkish—including the Turkish speaking citizens of Azerbaijan.

But unlike Turkey, with a population 20 times as large Armenia's and with a huge army at its disposal, Azerbaijan has no military to speak of, relying on pan-Soviet forces for its territorial defense.

Now, in the wake of the attacks and the apparent reluctance of Moscow to send Russian boys to police a distant, ill-understood inter-ethnic conflict, strident voices are being raised in Baku that a national defense force be created immediately.

Recently, due to pressure from the Popular Front—a loose coalition of opposition parties and interest groups that demands the complete independence of Azerbaijan from what was once the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan President Ayaz Motalibov has called for the creation of a 'National Defense Council', a sort of defense ministry to be located in a building formerly occupied by the KGB.

But the force envisaged by Motalibov would appear to be more of an honor guard and not a proper army as demanded by the opposition.

"Motalibov's guard would be more appropriate for formal marches on national holidays in Britain or France," said Popular Front chairman Abulfaz Elchibey, "We need a real army of 50 to 60 thousand men, bound to a ministry of defense in order to secure our territorial integrity—only then will real peace come between Azerbaijan and Armenia."

To that end, the Front has called for the creation of an army-in-waiting of 10,000 volunteers. It is doubtful, though, that Motalibov will then deliver arms to exactly the sort of force he is now resisting—possibly because he fears that an independent army might well turn on the ex-communist government he heads.

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October 5th: Azerbaijan Moves to Create Own Army

(offered to NYT who declined interest and then filed to Post after word came from the Sunday Times that the above piece had not run)

Baku--The Republic of Azerbaijan has begun moves to create its own armed forces in order to counter recent Armenian gains within the disputed territory of Nagorno Karabakh as well as in Azerbaijan proper, government and opposition sources say.

"Soviet internal security is not up to the task of defending the country and no-one knows when (Russian Federation President Boris) Yeltsin might decide to pull all the Russian soldiers from the region," said Timurlang Garayev, vice chairman of the Azerbaijan Supreme Soviet and leader of the main opposition Popular Front parliamentary group.

Garayev, who participated in the Yeltsin mission to Karabakh in mid-September and who was cautiously optimistic the Yeltsin peace plan, has now joined others in calling for the return of all Azeri youths serving elsewhere in the Soviet Union to form the core of the new army, which is to number between 50 and 60 thousand men.

Last week the government of President Ayaz Mutasalibov met the opposition demand part way by creating a "national defense council" which includes five opposition deputies. The umbrella Popular Front had threatened to create its own 10,000 man 'army in waiting' unless Mutasalibov moved decisively on the matter. The president has consistently resisted the creation of a proper army, saying it would cost too much. Opposition figures say that Mutasalibov is simply afraid that a national army might one day turn on his unpopular, formerly communist regime.

Such fears seem well founded, for already, the president has begun relying on riot control units imported from outside Azerbaijan to patrol opposition rallies instead of using local police.

"The police are with the people," said an officer at a rally outside the Supreme Soviet attended by 5,000 people last week.

Despite his uniform it was clear the officer was at the rally more as a participant than as a servant of the state. Behind him, elements of a 300 man Russian force of the pan-Soviet MVD, or interior ministry soldiers, peered out from behind the camouflage curtains of their military trucks.

The subject of the creation of an independent military consistent with Azerbaijan's declaration of independence from the USSR on August 30th has taken on new urgency in the face of continued violence in the Armenian enclave of Nagorno Karabakh despite the much-heralded Ten Point Peace Plan of Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin signed by both Armenia and Azerbaijan in mid-September. The inter-ethnic conflict has already claimed more than 800 lives since 1988, when the majority Armenians

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announced their intention to secede from Azerbaijan and join the nearby Republic of Armenia.

Ironically, security forces in Karabakh say that the only peace they have known in the past year were the three days of the hard-liner putsch in Moscow on August 19th. With the restoration of Mikhail Gorbachev the violence began anew.

"We expected the attacks to continue despite the Yeltsin initiative by diehard Armenians or elements of the old guard in Moscow who want to promote chaos for their own ends," said Timurland Garayev, "But we did not expect to see fighting reach outside of Karabakh and into other parts of Azerbaijan."

But that is exactly what appears to be happening, as fighting spreads north from Karabakh and into the sub-province of Shoumian from which all USSR troops were withdrawn six months ago. Here, Armenian armoured vehicles and artillery--allegedly obtained from abroad during the Leninian earthquake relief in 1989 or stolen, purchased or donated by pro-Armenian factions in the Soviet military, and brought into the region by air--have launched what can only be described as a major offensive against poorly armed Azeri militia men and their local cohorts. On the Azeri side, the main weapons are double-barrell shot-guns and a small rocket designed to cause rain when exploded in overlying clouds.

The recent offensive began on September 14th, and continued throughout the Yeltsin visit to the region. It continues today.

No accurate death toll is available, but casualties are thought to run into scores. Also, in direct violation of the Yeltsin peace plan, the Armenians are taking hostages in order to effect the release of common criminals held elsewhere or simply to raise money. In the wake of the upsurge of violence, some 4,000 Azeris--many of whom were refugees from Armenia--have now left their villages in the Geranboy region and have descended in panic on the district seat where they are now sheltered in schools, sanitoriums and city parks.

"I was woken by the sounds of the shooting at around six in the morning and got outside just before the rockets started to hit," said Hasan Nagiyev, 38, a man from the village of Buzluk which has now fallen into Armenian hands, "We made for the main road and managed to flag down a car but then we ran into an ambush and had to make our way to Geranboy on foot."

Two other passengers in the car were killed, Nagiyev said.

Azeri sources say the attack is designed to capture former Armenian towns in the area and associate them with a 'Greater Karabakh' which in turn is to be made a part of 'Greater Armenia.' Most Armenians were driven from the area during the tit-for-tat expulsion of Azeris from Armenia and Armenians from Azerbaijan in 1988 and 1989.

"If this continues, there will be open war between Azerbaijan and Armenia," said regional governor Irsat Nadirev, "The purpose is to creat a Great Armenia and then turn on Turkey."

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Nadirev and others say that the root cause of the current troubles goes back to the alleged genocide of Armenians at the hands of the Ottoman Turks in Eastern Anatolia in 1915. Turkey denies the claim, saying that an equal number of Muslim citizens died at Armenian hands in conditions of civil war. Many Armenians in Azerbaijan, however, are descendents of refugees from Anatolia and continue to harbor a bitter judgement against all things Turkish--including the Turkic speaking citizens of Azerbaijan.

Meanwhile, in the enclave territory of Nahchivan, separated from Azerbaijan by the Armenian Zangazur corridor and now cut off from the rest of the country by a two month old blockade, former Brezhnev-era Politburo member (and now reborn democrat and Nahchivan parliamentary president) Haydar Aliyev has reportedly started a public subscription to arm his own local militia.

Whether that force will then be integrated into the putative Azeri army remains to be seen.

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Update

(New leading graphs filed on October 10th of previous story after Post Desk said still interested but had not run Azerbaijan Army file)

Baku--The Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan, or parliament, voted on Thursday to create an independent army in the face of recent gains by Armenian forces operating in the disputed province of Nagorno Karabakh and elsewhere in Azerbaijan.

The balloting was held in a closed session from which the press and observers were barred 'lest the Armenians learn about the proceedings'. But participants said that the results were unanimous after a long and bitter debate.

Information about the putative army remains sketchy, but sources in the opposition umbrella group known as the Popular Front who tabled the bill say that the force will include some 35,000 men with an initial core group drawn from the 100,000 Azeri nationals currently serving in various branches of the Soviet military outside Azerbaijan.

A sub-section of the bill is said to contain a clause barring Azeri nationals from serving outside of Azerbaijan in the future.

Fahmi Hajiev, shadow defense minister in the Popular Front organization, also suggested that Azerbaijan might appeal to Turkey and Iran for weapons in addition to claiming equipment belonging to the Soviet army currently in Azerbaijan.

The voting occurred on the third, rancorous day of a special session of parliament convened by the Popular Front that also included demands for parliament to dissolve itself and call for new elections while creating a National Salvation Council to govern the country in the interim.

There are 360 seats in the parliament, only 40 of which are held by the opposition and the rest by ex-communists.

But their smaller number belies the opposition's growing strength--especially as judged by support in the streets outside the parliament.

During the first session on Tuesday, the Front walked out in protest of the government's stonewalling to discuss the Front agenda and threatened to 'create a situation like in Georgia.' Cooler heads prevailed and the 40 Front deputies returned--only to watch the majority ex-communists storm out of the next session when the opposition lashed into the parliamentary chairperson, Mrs Almira Kafarova, for calling demonstrators outside the building 'a rabid mob of drug addicts and drunks.'

The same remarks were heard by the demonstrators outside the parliament who were watching the proceedings live on television. The crowd later physically attacked several former communist law makers when they emerged from the building.

"Traitors," they cried, "Down with the masked communist mafia!"

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Police initially refused to intervene, and order was only restored by the presence of special riot-control police brought in several days ago from outside Azerbaijan.

Many of the former communists reportedly refused to leave the parliamentary building last night for fear of the wrath of the crowd outside, who only dispersed after midnight upon the request of opposition leaders.

The issue of creating a national army to defend the territorial integrity of the country was initially seized upon by the Popular Front in the wake of perceived government ineptitude in dealing with the emotional matter of Nagorno Karabakh.

The government of President Ayaz Mutalibov, it was felt, was relying too heavily on pan-Soviet forces in Karabakh to maintain the peace, while at the same time it was feared that the ethnic-Russian dominated forces were tacitly aiding and abetting Armenian secessionist in the enclave territory.

(pick up with sixth graph of previous file, starting "The subject of the creation of an independent military consistent with Azerbaijan's declaration of independence from the USSR on August 30th has taken on new urgency in the face of continued violence in the Armenian enclave of Nagorno Karabakh despite the much-heralded Ten Point Peace Plan of Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin, etc" for more colors and quotes)

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Aftermath:

Well, Peter--I think you get the gist of it.

And the worst is that when stories start finding their way into print, as they inevitably will, then I will be obliged to start at square one information-wise. There is no cumulative understanding of this place and all references will have to be explained again for the first time: that there is an opposition in Azerbaijan; that it is more than symbolic; that there is a parliament; that there is a problem with the Armenians; that there is unhappiness and hope, hand in hand, in the land...(I expressed this wrap up much better last night and then again this morning, but laptop problems have put me in the position of writing it now for the third time and I have rather lost the spirit. The Almost News Blues is nearly a blessing when compared to Corruption in the Computer Cruelty...)

But today is my birthday (37 or statistically half a life; probably more the way I smoke and drink) and I was clearly deserving of good news, and it appears to have arrived via a clean-line conversation to DC. Apparently, the above story ran at unknown length in the Post today. Better news was that the 'Riding Shotgun with Sergii' ran in last Sunday's Outlook section).

I will thus have to eat some of my self-righteous words, but I think I should let this report fly anyway, come what may.

For local news, a sad update:

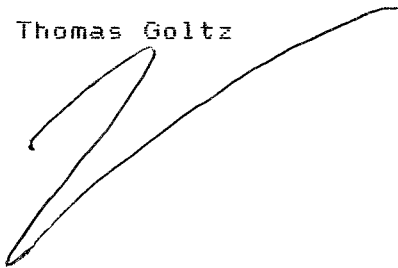
Thieves stole my cheap radio and expensive camera when I was out.

The radio was my news link to the world and the camera my eyes, the former more easily replaced than the latter. My only consolation is that the camera takes special batteries found nowhere in the USSR, and will thus soon become a useless hunk of alloy and glass for the thief or the person who buys it out of hawk. Worse, I think it was an inside job aboard my favored good ship Turkistan and it is difficult to maintain the same, old cordial relations with the staff while they remain under suspicion.

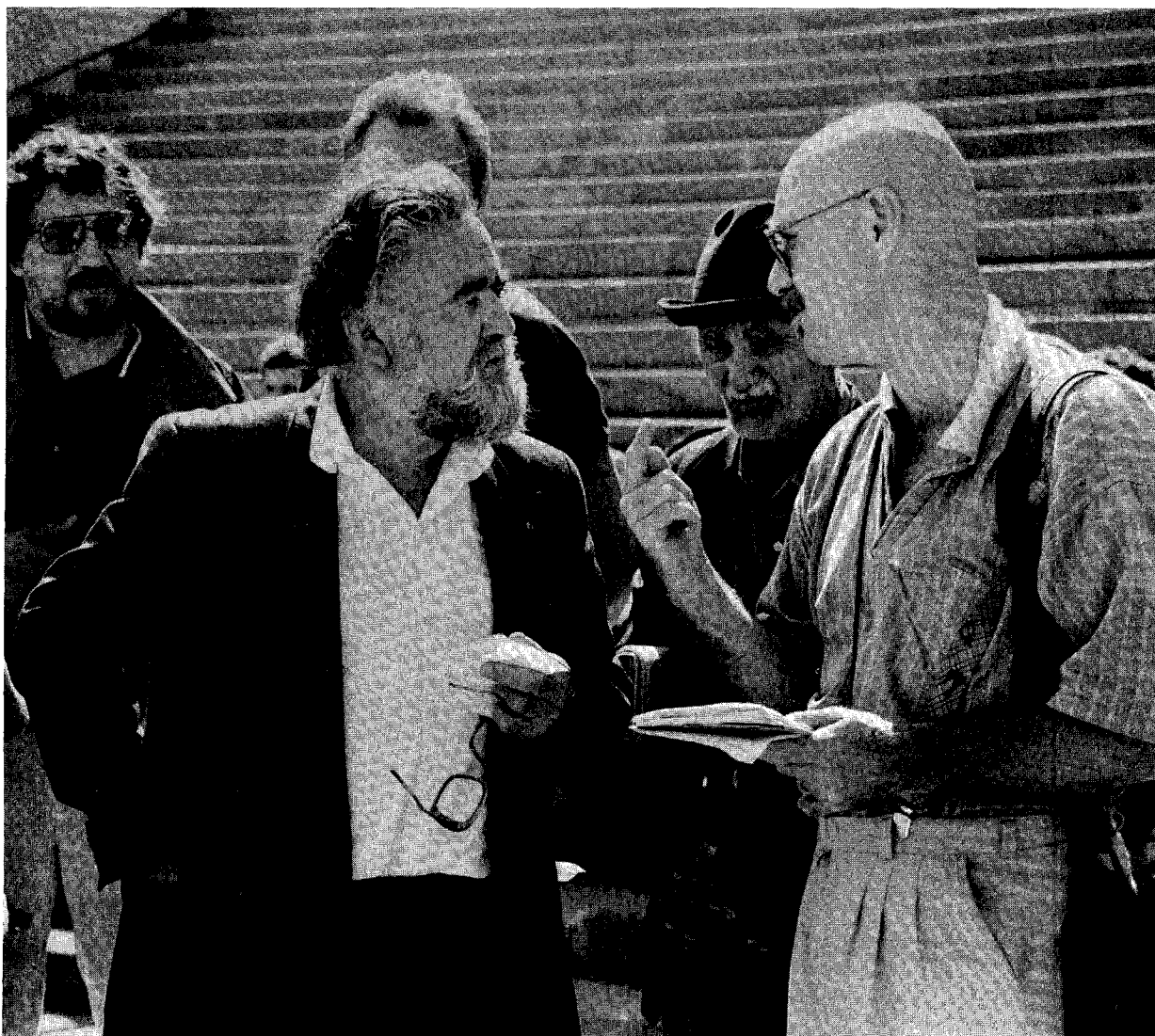
Enough for now,

Baku, October 11th 1991

Thomas Goltz



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All dressed up with nowhere to file: Your Man On The News Front
with Pan-Turanist Poet Halil Uluturk at Popular Front Rally in Baku

Received in Hanover 10/22/91