

# **Ethnic Cleansing in Progress**

## **War in Nagorno Karabakh**



**Caroline Cox**  
and  
**John Eibner**

with a preface by

**Elena Bonner Sakharov**

The **Institute for Religious Minorities in the Islamic World** is a division of **Christian Solidarity International (CSI)**, an inter-confessional human rights organization working for the implementation of the United Nations' Declaration on Human Rights.

**Board of Reference**

(partial listing)

Dr. Carl Armending  
David Atkinson MP  
The Baroness Cox of Queensbury  
Rt. Rev. Richard Hare  
Rt. Rev. Florian Kunter  
Prof. Dr. Hans Künzi  
Prof. Dr. Robert Leuenberger  
Abbot Wilhelm Neuwirth  
Rev. Ernst Sieber NR  
The Hon. Christopher Smith  
The Hon. Frank Wolf  
Otto Zwygart NR

**Int. Executive Board**

Rev. Hans Stückelberger  
(President)  
Michael Farris  
Herbert Meier  
Mervyn Thomas

**Director**

John Eibner

Copies of this report are available from:

**Institute for Religious Minorities  
in the Islamic World**

*New address* Christian Solidarity International  
CSI-Schweiz  
Zelglistrasse 64 / PO Box 70  
CH-8122 Binz  
☎ 0041 1 980 47 00 📠 0041 1 980 47 15

Switzerland

CSI-UK  
P. O. Box 48  
Witney, Oxon  
England OX8 7DD

CSI-USA  
P.O. Box 70563  
Washington, DC  
USA 20024

# **Ethnic Cleansing in Progress**

## **War in Nagorno Karabakh**

by  
**Caroline Cox**  
and  
**John Eibner**

with a preface by  
**Elena Bonner Sakharov**

© **Institute for Religious Minorities in the Islamic World**

Zürich, London, Washington

1993

# Contents

Preface .....	3
Introduction .....	6
Basic Facts .....	8
A Conflict of Civilizations .....	14
The Genocide .....	20
The Pincers of Pan-Turkism .....	25
Soviet Rule .....	31
The Karabakh Question Revived .....	34
Operation Ring .....	45
The Post-Soviet Conflict .....	51
The Characteristics of the People of Nagorno Karabakh .....	62
The Prognosis: Continuing Bloodshed .....	64
Conclusions.....	66
Recommendations.....	68

## Preface

*One of the authors of this report, Lady Caroline Cox, has for the last two years concentrated her attention on helping the population of Karabakh and refugees from Karabakh and Azerbaijan. In doing so she displays the highest degree of personal courage under gunfire and bombardment, risking her life to deliver humanitarian aid directly to the war zones. It is not from the words of others or from press reports that she knows the misfortunes and suffering of the peaceful inhabitants of this region, women, children and old people: she has seen their suffering with her own eyes, spent nights with them in air-raid shelters and cellars and out in the villages in their homes*



*Elena Bonner Sakharov*

*(Keystone)*

*which might have been destroyed at any moment by a bomb or an artillery shell. She has shared their bread, when they had any, and wept with them for their dead sons and husbands. I do not know anybody in the West who is so deeply acquainted with everything that is happening in this region. Therefore it is a great honour for me to write a preface to the report, although I do not entirely share its historical perspective: I believe that basically the present tragedy is caused not by the specific religious or cultural features of the two peoples, but by insistence on the priority of the principle of territorial integrity, which is the right of a state, over the principle of national self-determination, which is a part of human rights.*

*Five years have passed since the beginning of the Karabakh conflict. In response to the peaceful appeal of the full session of the regional soviet of Nagorno Karabakh for the region to be transferred from the administrative jurisdiction of Azerbaijan either directly to the government of the USSR, as it still was, or to Armenia, there began pogroms against Armenians which were provoked by the Azerbaijani authorities (in Sumgait, Ganja, Baku etc.). There followed the forcible deportation of the people of Karabakh by armed forces of the Soviet Army and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Azerbaijan. This was accompanied by the destruction of villages and towns, the burning of crops, theft of livestock, murders, rapes and the taking of hostages and their torture in Azerbaijani jails. This ethnic cleansing, which left Azerbaijan virtually devoid of Armenians and which also threatened to turn the entire population of Karabakh into refugees, was ignored by the world community and the UN, despite numerous appeals from the western and Russian public. It was this ethnic cleansing which escalated the conflict to open war.*

*Furthermore, in the autumn of 1989 Azerbaijan began a blockade of Armenia. At that time Andrei Sakharov appealed to western countries to establish an air bridge. His*

*appeal was based on the obligation of the UN and the European Community to defend international laws, in particular the Geneva Conventions of 1948 which forbid a blockade against a peaceful country. Since then there has been an almost continuous blockade. It has completely destroyed the country's economy, bringing 3.5 million Armenians to the brink of national disaster and threatening to kill thousands through cold, hunger and disease. Today Armenia is reminiscent of Leningrad under siege from Hitler's army during the Second World War. There is no electricity; television and radio are not operating; telephone communication has been interrupted; newspapers are not published; there is no heating or water supply; bread is rationed to 200 grams per person per day; refugees are living in cold metal tanks, which were previously used for the transport of petrol; and packs of hungry dogs roam the streets so that when people leave their houses they have to arm themselves with sticks to defend themselves and it is better for people who are weak not to go out at all. It is impossible to send a parcel or transfer money from Moscow because there are no regular flights. The blockade (and also the bombardment and shelling of Armenia's border towns and villages) continues despite the fact that Armenia has declared on numerous occasions that it has no territorial claims on its neighbours.*

*Western countries, the UN and the CSCE have since February 1988 had a remarkably indifferent attitude to the Karabakh conflict and have done nothing to bring about its peaceful resolution – not even the CSCE commission led by Mario Rafaelli. Nor have they done anything to stop the blockade of Armenia and Karabakh or to help over 350,00 refugees. Adequate use was not made even of diplomatic and political opportunities to compel Azerbaijan to lift the blockade and to oblige Turkey to open up a humanitarian corridor to Armenia.*

*The Armenian president Levon Ter-Petrosian appealed to all the countries of the CIS to exert influence on Azerbaijan. I know that the President of Kirgystan, Askar Akayev, responded to his letter by himself appealing to the leaders of these countries and also to President Elchibey of Azerbaijan and the Turkish president Turgut Ozal. But what can a little country like Kirgystan do, if countries like the USA and Germany do not understand that the blockade of Armenia is a new form of racism: its people are being subjected to great suffering because they are of the same nationality as the people of Karabakh who are fighting for their independence.*

*One more aspect of the present policy of western countries should be mentioned: their failure to appreciate the importance of helping those new states whose governments are trying despite all the difficulties to create democratic states, in particular Kirgystan, which is in great need of humanitarian aid after last year's natural disasters, but which receives far less than its totalitarian-communist neighbours.*

*In the past, US international aid was specifically directed to helping countries where human rights were not violated and whose governments acted in accordance with democratic principles. Today the USA under a new president should reaffirm these basic principles.*

*Armenia does not need US soldiers or their weapons. It has a government and a parliament elected democratically and honestly and without any falsification. Its government is*



*not engaged in a civil war with its own people or any section of it. Nor are American troops needed in Karabakh which established a humanitarian corridor linking it with Armenia at the cost of its own blood. But Karabakh and its people do need diplomatic recognition of its right to exist, which is entirely legitimate following the referendum held there in January 1992. What Armenia needs are diplomatic and political efforts on the part of western countries to end the blockade and temporary, but massive, humanitarian aid.*

*If western countries, and first and foremost the USA, do not achieve this now and instead retreat into isolationism, mankind will soon not only witness yet another shameful capitulation of democracy to force but will face war, destruction and atrocities on the same scale as in the former Yugoslavia.*

*Today it is still possible to find a solution to the Karabakh conflict and to save Armenia on the basis of the principles of defending human rights.*

*Elena Bonner Sakharov*

*11 March 1993*

# Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet Union has given fresh impetus to the long-stifled aspirations of a myriad of repressed nationalities. The five-year-old conflict in Nagorno Karabakh poses great danger. The Commander-in-Chief of CIS troops, Marshal Y. Shaposhnikov, has warned that it has the potential to ignite a major regional conflagration. These warnings have gone largely unheeded by western statesmen.

This tiny, largely Armenian Christian enclave straddles a deep political and religious divide that separates not only the historically Christian world from the Muslim, but also the Turks of Anatolia from their Turkic cousins in Transcaucasia and Central Asia, Turkey's 'secular' Islam from Iran's revolutionary Islamic fundamentalism, and NATO from CIS forces. This divide forms an axis of instability running from the Balkans, through Turkey and Transcaucasia to Central Asia. The security interests of three regional powers – Turkey, Russia and Iran – collide in Nagorno Karabakh. The region is bristling with conventional and possibly chemical weapons. Conflict in the region brings additional danger of a Chernobyl-type catastrophe at Armenia's defective Medzamor nuclear reactor.

Meanwhile the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh has already produced catastrophic results similar to those now taking place at the western end of this axis of instability in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The toll for the 180,000 inhabitants of Nagorno Karabakh, both Armenian and Azeri-Turk, has been heavy: over 2,000 civilians dead, many more grievously injured and tens of thousands homeless. Atrocities abound: massacres, torture, rape, mutilations. The war has driven virtually all of Nagorno Karabakh's 40,000 Azeri-Turks out of the war zone to the relative safety of Azerbaijan. An estimated 90,000 Armenians from Nagorno Karabakh have been displaced. Most have found refuge in Armenia. About 20,000 have been resettled behind Armenian lines inside Nagorno Karabakh. These displaced people plus the remainder of the Armenian community have been trapped in the war zone by Azerbaijan's blockade of the enclave or have chosen not to abandon their native land. Their desperate pleas for humanitarian aid and protection have been largely ignored by the western world. Unless assistance is offered rapidly this community cannot be expected to survive.

The war in Nagorno Karabakh is but an episode in an epic struggle between the traditions and institutions of the Turkic and Armenian nations. This report will present contemporary events in Nagorno Karabakh in a historical context and will focus on the divergent religious, political and cultural traditions of the protagonists which give momentum to the conflict. The sections dealing with contemporary events are based mainly on 13 fact-finding trips to Nagorno Karabakh since 1991, visits to Armenia and Azerbaijan and numerous published documents.

The authors are of course aware that historical analysis is capable of different interpretations and that in a short publication we cannot do full justice to the complexity of all the issues. However, we present this report in the hope that both the historical context and the incontrovertible empirical evidence will provide a useful basis for increasing



understanding of the complex tragedy of the people of Nagorno Karabakh and the genocide process that is now under way.

### **Note on names**

The authors have tried to use consistently what they believe to be the standard English spelling for place names. They have therefore opted to use 'Nagorno Karabakh' instead of the grammatically correct Russian form 'Nagorny Karabakh'; the Armenian name 'Artsakh', and 'Shusha' instead of the Armenian name 'Shushi'.



*Armenian children of Stepanakert: Seeking safety in crowded communal basement shelter during Azerbaijani rocket attack in 1992. (CSI)*

A standard English name for the Turkic people of Azerbaijan has not yet emerged. In older works they were generally placed together with all the other Turkic and Muslim peoples of the Russian empire under the heading 'Tatars'. These days they are normally referred to as 'Azeris' or 'Azerbaijanis' in the press. In academic works they are often called 'Azeri-Turks' or 'Azerbaijani Turks'.

# Basic Facts

## The Land

The contested territory of Nagorno Karabakh is a patch of fertile, mountainous land on the eastern rim of the Armenian plateau overlooking the broad Azerbaijani plain to the east. To the west lies the Republic of Armenia, less than 5 miles away at the nearest point. The Islamic Republic of Iran is less than 15 miles to the south. The two major towns of the enclave, Stepanakert and Shusha, are but a few miles from each other, with the mountain fortress of Shusha towering over the more modern Stepanakert below. Before the current war the towns were centres of light industry. In the countryside the economy was based on subsistence farming. In times of peace the land provided the people of Nagorno Karabakh with a good supply of the basic necessities of life.

The name Nagorno Karabakh, meaning mountainous black garden, came into currency in this form in the 19th century and reflects linguistically the major imperial political powers that ruled the region during the past 1,000 years. *Nagorno* means mountainous in Russian, while *Karabakh* is a compound of the Turkish word for black (*kara*) and a Persian word for garden (*bakh*). The use of the adjective '*Nagorno*' distinguishes the mountainous part of the former Turkic and Persian ruled province of Karabakh, largely populated by Armenians, from the lowland part, inhabited mainly by Azeri-Turks. Artsakh, an ancient Armenian name for the region, which predates the name Karabakh, is the official name of the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh and is used within the Armenian community and in some western publications.

Ancient Greek and Roman sources indicate that Nagorno Karabakh constituted a part of larger Armenian political entities from at least the 2nd century B.C. until the partition of the kingdom of Armenia by the Romans and Sasanid Persians at the beginning of the 5th century A.D. Thereafter Nagorno Karabakh was no longer in political union with the Armenian lands to the west. Nagorno Karabakh fell under the rule of the now extinct Caucasian Albanians, the Seljuk and Ottoman Turks, the Mongols and the Persians before being conquered by the Russian Empire in 1805. Russian rule lasted unbroken until the collapse of Tsarist Russia in 1917. Ottoman Turkey's attempt in 1918 to conquer Nagorno Karabakh was foiled by its World War I defeat. Turkey's failure was immediately followed by an attempt at conquest by the newly-independent Azerbaijani Republic, which was cut short by the occupation of Azerbaijan, Nagorno Karabakh and Armenia by the Red Army in 1920. Both the Armenian SSR and the Azerbaijani SSR placed claims on Nagorno Karabakh. In 1921, the region's Bolshevik leaders first assigned Nagorno Karabakh to Armenia. But on July 5, 1921, they reversed their decision – apparently upon the orders of Stalin – and awarded Nagorno Karabakh to Azerbaijan.

Most of Nagorno Karabakh was granted the status of an Autonomous Region of Azerbaijan in 1923, with Stepanakert as its capital. But the Bolshevik authorities severed the northern tip of the Armenian enclave, known as the Shaumyan district, from the new Autonomous Region. Thus the Shaumyan district was fully integrated administratively with the Azerbaijani SSR. The borders established by the Bolsheviks left Nagorno

# Shaumyan ◊



Karabakh separated by a few miles from the Armenian SSR. With the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, Armenia and Azerbaijan became independent republics. On December 10, 1992, the majority of people of Nagorno Karabakh, as well as the Shaumyan district, voted to establish an independent republic. The current President of Nagorno Karabakh is Gevorg Petrossian.

## **The Armenians**

The modern Armenians are a mixture of the indigenous inhabitants of the ancient kingdom of Urartu straddling northeastern Anatolia and southwestern Transcaucasia and Indo-Europeans who entered the region at the end of the 8th century B.C. These Indo-European newcomers provided the basis of the distinctive Armenian language. The Armenians are a peculiarly sedentary people. Mass emigration from the ancient Armenian homeland has been the result of flight from, or deportation by, foreign powers. It was not until the 1st century B.C. that an Armenian kingdom was able to become a major regional power. This proved to be shortlived. Before the end of the century the might of the Kingdom of Greater Armenia had been whittled away in the crossfire between the more powerful Roman and Persian empires, and in 387 A.D. the Armenian Kingdom was divided between them. For centuries thereafter fragmented Armenian political entities struggled with varying success to preserve whatever autonomy they could in relation to the region's imperial powers. At the beginning of the 4th century the Armenians embraced Christianity, thus making them the oldest Christian nation.

The Armenians suffered their greatest national tragedy at the hands of the Turks during the massacres of 1894-96 and the great genocide of 1915-16. Altogether nearly 2 million Armenians perished, thus virtually eliminating Turkey's Armenian population. A mere 30,000 Armenians, according to official statistics, live there now, mainly in Istanbul and its environs. Most survivors of the genocide found refuge beyond the borders of present-day Turkey. Their descendants form the basis of the significant Armenian communities of North and South America, Western Europe and Australia. Hundreds of thousands of Armenians also live in Iran, Lebanon and Syria. Today the Republic of Armenia has a population of 3.6 million, 95% of which is Armenian. In 1988, before the conflict in Karabakh began in earnest, about 500,000 Armenians lived in the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan. 140,000 of these Armenians lived in the Autonomous Region of Nagorno Karabakh, where they made up 75% of the population.

The national characteristics of the Armenians have been shaped largely by centuries of struggle to preserve their culture against great odds. Those familiar with Armenians anywhere in the world are bound to recognize truth in Prof. David Marshall Lang's description of them:

"Originally proud and warlike, they have often had to bow to an alien yoke, and cultivate qualities of diplomacy and guile to ensure physical survival. They are first-rate farmers, and outstanding craftsmen, excelling in every branch of handicraft, sculpture, and fine work in precious metals and textiles. Sober and industrious, they will work without respite for long hours. Armenians are extremely sociable and hospitable, and faithful to family and community ties. They have a truly Scottish regard for thrift and honesty, though they know how to drive a hard bargain." (Lang, p.39-40)

Among the less flattering features noted by Prof. Lang is the tendency to argue and quarrel. This characteristic may figure in the Armenians' historic inability to sustain united and independent statehood.

## **The Azeri-Turks**

The prehistoric homeland of the Turks lies east of the Altai Mountains in present-day Mongolia and southern Siberia. Turkic tribes began to penetrate eastern Transcaucasia as early as the 5th century A.D. But it was not until the Seljuk Turks conquered the region in the 11th century that the Turkic element of the population of eastern Transcaucasia became preponderant. Most Turkic tribes converted to Islam as a result of the Arab conquest of Transcaucasia and Central Asia in the 7th century A.D.

The present-day Azeri-Turks have evolved from the assimilated indigenous population of eastern Transcaucasia and the many Turkic tribes that invaded and settled there over the centuries. Until the 20th century the identity of the Turks of Azerbaijan was linked primarily to Islam rather than the Turks as an ethnic group. Under Russian rule they understood themselves to be Tatars – the term used to classify all the Muslim peoples of the Russian empire, most of whom were Turks. An Azeri-Turk national consciousness began to coalesce at the end of the 19th century, gradually undermining their identity as Tatars. The language of the Azeri-Turks belongs to the southwestern, or Oghuz, group of Turkic languages. It is intelligible to their Turkish cousins in Anatolia. The traditional nomadic and semi-nomadic lifestyle of the Azeri-Turks was severely eroded in the 19th century under Russian rule. But their nomadic tradition continues to have a powerful influence on their political culture. The prominent Azeri-Turk ethnologist Aidin Mamedov states:

“All Turkish culture is based on nomadic culture. The Turkish races are distinguished by the nomad's warlike quickness of mind and temper. They're very swift and impetuous. It's a natural gift. The Turks move fast and decide strategy on the run, unlike the Europeans, who sit and plot strategy. The Turks have always had the *blitzkrieg*.” (Cullen, p. 63)

Since abandoning the nomadic lifestyle most Azeri-Turks have been drawn into the sedentary peasantry and the urban proletariat. Today more than 5 million Azeri-Turks live in the Republic of Azerbaijan, the total population of which is 7 million. Three times as many Azeri-Turks – approximately 15 million – live in the Azerbaijani provinces of northeastern Iran. In 1988, when the current conflict in Nagorno Karabakh was in its early stages, about 40,000 Azeri-Turks resided in the enclave.

## **Christianity**

No institution has had a greater impact on shaping the national culture of Armenians than the Armenian Apostolic Church. In c. 301 AD the Armenian King Tiridates III responded positively to the mission of St. Gregory the Illuminator and embraced Christianity, as did his nation. Thus the Armenians have the distinction of having become the first nation to turn to Christianity. Despite enormous and sustained pressure to convert to Zoroastrianism, Islam, and more recently to Marxism, the Armenian people have retained their



*Shusha  
Cathedral:  
Bombed by  
Azerbaijani  
SU 25 (CSI)*

Christian faith. Since the loss of political independence the Armenian Apostolic Church served for centuries as the institutional focal point for Armenian nationhood. The Armenian Church has been independent of the Greco-Roman Church since the 6th century A.D. when, following the example of the Coptic and Syrian Orthodox Churches, it refused to accept the definition by the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) of the relationship between the divine and human natures of Christ. Rejecting what it regarded as an unacceptable doctrinal innovation, the Armenian Church adhered to the pre-Chalcedonian doctrine of the Greco-Roman Church.

The present supreme spiritual head of the Armenian Apostolic Church is Catholicos Vazgen I of the Ararat Diocese. The Catholicos' see is at Echmiadzin in the Republic of Armenia. In the 18th century an Armenian Catholic Church loyal to Rome was established and in the 19th century Protestant missions began to win converts amongst Armenians. While the Catholic and Protestant churches have exercised a powerful western influence on Armenian culture, the ancient Armenian Apostolic Church continues to enjoy the allegiance of an overwhelming majority of Armenians.

Nagorno Karabakh became a part of Christendom in the early 4th century as a result of the missionary activity of St. Gregory the Illuminator. The enclave's oldest church was built at the monastery at Amaras in c. 330. The scores of monasteries built in Nagorno Karabakh over the centuries attest to the historic vibrancy of Armenian church life there. Bishop Parkev Martirosian is the current head of the diocese of Nagorno Karabakh.

## Islam

Islam is central to the national identity of the Azeri-Turks. To be an Azeri-Turk is to be a Muslim. The concept of a Christian Turk is regarded as contradictory by the Azeri-Turkic community. However, the first Turks to penetrate Transcaucasia were not Muslims. Islam was imposed on much of eastern Transcaucasia by Arab invaders in the 7th century, when most of the non-Armenian population of the region became Muslim. Islam and the Turkic population were bolstered by the invasion in the 11th century of the Islamized Seljuk Turks and subsequent waves of Turks from Central Asia. The Islam of the invading Turks was that of the frontier rather than that of strict orthodoxy or of lax urban life. "Theirs was a militant faith, still full of the pristine fire and directness of the first Muslims, a religion of warriors, whose creed was a battle-cry, whose dogma was a call to arms," according to Prof. Bernard Lewis, the doyen western historian of the Turks. (Lewis, p. 12) The Azeri-Turks became predominantly Shiite Muslims under the influence of Persia in the 15th and 16th centuries, though today roughly 25% of the Azeri-Turks remain Sunni Muslims. The Russian conquest of Transcaucasia in the early 19th century placed the Azeri-Turks in the position of a disadvantaged religious minority. In the 20th century severe persecution of Islam followed the Sovietization of Azerbaijan. By the mid-1980's there were only sixteen open mosques in the Azerbaijani SSR and none at all in Nagorno Karabakh. The number of functioning mosques has increased as a result of Gorbachev's *glasnost* and Azerbaijani independence. The spiritual head of the Azeri-Turkic Muslims is Sheikh-ul-Islam Pasha-Zadeh, who is the chairman of the Baku-based Muslim Spiritual Board of Transcaucasia.

Nagorno Karabakh fell under Islamic rule with the Arab conquest of the 7th and 8th centuries. However, the population remained Christian and the Church retained considerable autonomy. Islam has remained confined to the enclave's Azeri-Turk community. As with Christianity, official Islam ceased to exist in Nagorno Karabakh during the Stalinist persecution of religion, but it continued to exist underground. A mosque in Shusha was reopened during the dying days of communist rule.



# **A Conflict of Civilizations**

The roots of the war in Nagorno Karabakh are embedded in a fundamental conflict of civilizations. The ancient Armenian homeland has been a strategically important battlefield of competing civilizations since the dawn of history. In the 4th century Armenia decisively cast its lot with the Christian faith. As a result, Armenia subsequently became linked to the Greco-Roman world. Yet, while cherishing its cultural and spiritual lifeline to the west, the country strove to retain autonomous Armenian political and religious institutions. For centuries thereafter Armenia was caught in the middle of an often bloody tug-of-war between the Greek Byzantine Empire and Zoroastrian Persia. In the 7th century the Arab Empire of the Abbasid dynasty brought Armenians their first exposure to Islamic domination. But since the conquest of Transcaucasia and Anatolia by the Seljuk Turks in the 11th century, the main theme of Armenian history has been the struggle for survival against the encroachment of Turkic power.

## **Turkification**

The Turkic domination of Anatolia and Transcaucasia, first by the Seljuk and then by the Ottoman Empire, has resulted in the Turkification and Islamization of most of the region. This process of ethnic and religious cleansing has virtually extinguished the historic non-Turkic Christian population of Anatolia. When the Seljuk Turks defeated the Byzantines at the decisive battle of Manzikert in 1071 A.D. the population of western and central Anatolia was overwhelmingly Greek, while the Armenians and Aramaic-speaking Syrian Orthodox were predominant in the East. By the 15th century the gradual process of Turkification and Islamization had produced a Turkic majority. Since the expulsion of 1.25 million Greek Orthodox Christians between 1923 and 1930, which marked the last major phase of the virtual ‘cleansing’ of the Christian population from Turkey, only numerically insignificant communities of Greeks, Armenians and Syrian Orthodox have remained there. The Muslim Kurds, against whom the Turkish state is now waging war in southeastern Anatolia, currently stands alone as Turkey’s sole surviving numerically significant ethnic minority.

Turkic civilization is based largely on a synthesis of the Turks’ nomadic heritage and their Islamic faith. While Islam is ostensibly a supra-national faith, it served as an effective vehicle for Turkish national interests. The Turks have drawn liberally from both their nomadic traditions and Islam as they pursued their national and imperial aspirations.

## **Holy War**

Both the Seljuk and the Ottoman dynasties understood themselves as ‘soldiers of Islam’ and their mission as the establishment of a world Islamic empire. For the Seljuk and Ottoman Turks, the conquest of Anatolia and Transcaucasia was Holy War – or *ghaza* in Turkish. The Turkish historian Dr. Halil Inalcik has underlined the central position this Islamic institution played in the culture of the Turkic invaders:

“This culture was dominated by the Islamic conception of Holy War or *ghaza*. By God’s command the *ghaza* had to be fought against the infidels’ dominions, *dar al-harb* (the abode of war), ceaselessly and relentlessly until they submitted. According to the *Shari’a* the property of the infidels, captured in these raids, could be kept as booty, their country could be destroyed, and the population taken into captivity or killed. The actions of the *ghazis* (Turkic holy warriors – ed.) were regulated by the *Shari’a* to which they paid heed.” (Inalcik, Halil, “The Emergence of the Ottomans”, in Holt, p. 263.)

The holy wars of the Turks in Anatolia and Transcaucasia were followed by the mass immigration of Turkic nomads from the East.

## **Herdsmen and Herd**

The ancient nomadic traditions shaped the political instincts of the Turkic tribes and determined, perhaps subliminally, the pattern for imperial administration. Toynbee and Kirkwood observed that the relationship between the rulers and the ruled of the Turkic empires was strikingly similar to the relationship between the nomadic herdsman, the watch-dog and the herd:

“The nomad’s energies are suddenly diverted from herding cattle to governing an empire; and, like all human beings, he sets out to solve the new problem with which he is confronted by applying to it his own particular experience of the past. He thinks of himself as still a herdsman, though no longer of animals but of men, and, in order to keep these ‘human cattle’ (a less docile herd than sheep and cows) under control, he selects and trains ‘human watch-dogs’ to help him and takes greater pains over their breeding and education than his ancestors took, on the steppes, in providing themselves with animal auxiliaries . . . In detail the method of nomadic empires has been to treat the majority of their sedentary subjects as ‘human cattle’ who are to be periodically milked and shorn and are to be kept in order by a ferocious repression at the first symptoms of insubordination, but are otherwise allowed to live their own lives in their own way; and to control these ‘human cattle’ through the agency of a small, select body of ‘watch-dog’ slaves recruited partly from prisoners-of-war, partly from the victims of professional slave-raiders and slave-dealers, and partly from children who are rounded-up periodically from the ‘human herd’ in order to be broken-in by their master, with no more compunction than a shepherd feels in separating the lamb from its mother or the calf from the cow.” (Toynbee & Kirkwood, p. 19-21)

Borrowing from classical Islam, the Turks differentiated the members of the ‘human herd’ – to continue with Toynbee and Kirkwood’s analogy – not on the basis of language or ethnic group, but on the basis of *millet* – i.e. religious community. Muslims, Jews, Greek Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic and all other recognized religious communities constituted separate *millets*. The *millets* formed the basic units of Ottoman local government. The Muslim *millet* was equivalent to the *umma*, the community of Islamic believers, and represented the supreme religious community, enjoying rights and privileges denied to the non-Muslim *millets*. Christians and Jews had a subordinate legal status as *dhimmi*, meaning protected persons in Arabic. The Turks, however, often used the word *rayah* – i.e. herd of cattle – rather than the somewhat more dignified expression, *dhimmi*.

The *dhimmi*, or *rayah*, doctrine of Islam is rooted in Muhammed’s practice of forging pacts with conquered Jewish and Christian communities. These pacts enabled the conquered *dhimmi* communities to avoid extinction. The Islamic state would allow the *dhimmi* to practice their faith and to enjoy limited autonomous self-administration. In return the *dhimmi* were expected to offer political loyalty to the Islamic state, accept a second-class status in society and pay the *jizya* – a poll tax. Arab jurists subsequently developed

elaborate regulations for the restriction and humiliation of Christians and Jews, which were then implemented in the Ottoman Empire.

In Ottoman Turkey Christians and Jews were strictly segregated from the Muslim community. They had to pay higher taxes and wear distinctive clothing. The ability of the non-Muslim communities to defend themselves from violence was impaired by the prohibition on the *rayah* from bearing arms. Their communities were periodically subjected to the Ottoman institution of *devshirme* – that is to say, the harvesting of the boys, whereby physically attractive and intelligent *rayah* boys were taken from their families, forced to convert to Islam and obliged to serve the Sultan as slaves in the military or administration. Legal disputes between Muslims and non-Muslims were normally settled in a religious court where non-Muslim testimony was forbidden. The Armenians suffered a special disadvantage, from which the other Christians of the empire were exempt. Armenians were required to provide free winter quarters to nomadic Kurds and their cattle during the winter season. Some individual *rayah* were permitted to acquire great wealth by serving the Ottoman state in banking and commerce. But the privileges of these few were not extended to their communities as a whole. The regulations imposed on the *rayah* were intended to render the Christian and Jewish communities incapable of posing a political threat and to make them serve the interests of the Ottoman state.

## **Turkey in Decline**

The well-established Islamic framework for relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in Turkey underwent radical change in the 100 years immediately preceding the collapse of the Ottoman empire in 1922. This change was determined by the decline of the Ottoman empire, and had a profound effect on the Armenians and other minorities of Turkey. Since the failure of the Ottoman armies to occupy Vienna in 1683, the power of the Ottoman empire declined rapidly in relation to the great Christian powers of Europe. By the 19th century the empire of the mighty *Ghazi* warriors had become the ‘sick man of Europe’, propped up by its adversaries – the Christian states of Europe. Under intense pressure from the European powers, the Ottoman authorities were obliged to graft certain western institutions, such as a parliamentary form of government and the equality of citizens before the law, onto the essentially Islamic constitutional framework of the empire.

The implementation of the liberal reforms proved to be largely superficial. They were intended to satisfy western governments, and in many cases were not implemented in the provinces. Prof. Uriel Heyd notes that the mid-19th century reform of the status of Turkey’s non-Muslims “was brought about by western pressure, not an increasingly liberal public opinion in Turkey”. The Islamic tradition proved to be incompatible with the concept of the legal equality of religions. Prof. Heyd states:

“The religious axiom of the superiority of Islam and the centuries-old tradition of Muslim domination over unbelievers, had created an attitude that did not easily lend itself to change. The transformation of the Ottoman empire, spearhead of Islam, into a secular state where non-Muslims were granted complete equality was inconceivable.” (Uriel Heyd, “The Later Ottoman Empire in Rumelia and Anatolia,” in Holt, p. 366)

Nevertheless, the reforms had an important impact on the non-Muslim communities of Ottoman Turkey. By signalling the desperate weakness of the Islamic empire, they stimulated a cultural renaissance amongst the Christian population and an associated longing for freedom from Ottoman oppression. Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, Ottoman Turkey lost nearly all of its provinces in the Balkans one by one to the Greek, Serbian, Romanian and Bulgarian independence movements. The success of these nationalist movements emboldened political leaders of the Armenian community – which had earned the reputation of the ‘loyal millet’ – to strive for the realization of long-repressed national aspirations.

The success of the Christian nationalities of the Balkans in achieving independence also had the effect of stimulating the dynamic growth of Turkish nationalism. Supra-national classical Islam was increasingly viewed as an outmoded vehicle for the fulfilment of Turkish national aspirations. Conservative Islam and modern Turkish nationalism became engaged in a brutal tug of war for political ascendancy as the Ottoman Empire approached its end. By the eve of the First World War, militant Turkish nationalism in the form of ‘pan-Turkism’ had replaced classical Islam as the ideology of state.

## **Pan-Turkism**

Pan-Turkism, like the ideology of the founders of the Ottoman Empire, drew for inspiration on two familiar sources: ancient Turkic tradition and Islam. But in pan-Turkism the emphasis shifted radically away from classical Islam towards Turkic tradition. The grey-wolf, or *Bozkurt*, which was worshipped by the pre-Islamic Turks as the mother of their race, became venerated as a symbol of the common pan-Turkic nation. Attila the Hun and Jenghiz Khan were elevated to the pan-Turkic pantheon as heroic prototypes of modern Turkic man. While Islam as a spiritual and cultural force remained an integral component of pan-Turkism, the political and social aspects of Islamic law were regarded by the pan-Turkists as dispensable. Pan-Turkism also drew two elements from the West: firstly modern scientific and technological means to material progress; and secondly the 19th-century concept of national statehood based on language. The Judeo-Christian cultural tradition of the western world remained entirely alien to pan-Turkism.

Pan-Turkism had two principal aims. The first was the elimination of the non-Turkic nationalities of Turkey. The Turkish Minister of War and disciple of pan-Turkism, Nazim Bey, openly declared on the eve of the First World War:

“Our state must be purely Turkish, because the existence of other nationalities inside our borders gives only an excuse to foreign powers for intervention on their behalf. We must Turkify non-Turkish nationalities by force.” (Hostler, p. 99)

The proponents of pan-Turkism were not dogmatic about the means to this end. The ‘Young Turks’, who came to power in 1908, at first naively believed the Turkification of the non-Turks of the Empire could be achieved non-violently within the framework of constitutional government. But when it became apparent that the non-Turkic peoples would not willingly submit to non-violent assimilation policies, massacre and forced

deportation – the time-honoured means of the ancient Turkic warriors – were seen as justifiable, according to pan-Turkist political thought.

The second aim of pan-Turkism was the political union of all Turkic peoples. More Turks lived outside the Ottoman Empire under Russian and Persian rule than within. Historically the Ottomans had greater success expanding their empire westwards into Europe than eastwards towards Transcaucasia and Central Asia. But by the 19th century the Ottoman Empire in Europe was in rapid retreat. The first generation of pan-Turkists looked primarily to the East for the restoration of Ottoman glory. The territory inhabited by Turkic peoples stretched from the Balkans to the Great Wall of China. This vast territory was called *Turan* by the pan-Turkists – the Persian name for the pseudo-mythological birthplace of the Turkic peoples. The most prominent of the ideologists of pan-Turkism, Ziya Gökalp, defined the imperial ambition of the ideology in his poem *Turan*:

“The country of the Turks is not Turkey, nor yet Turkistan, Their country is a vast and eternal land: Turan!” (Lewis, p.345)

And again at the outbreak of World War I, Gökalp wrote:

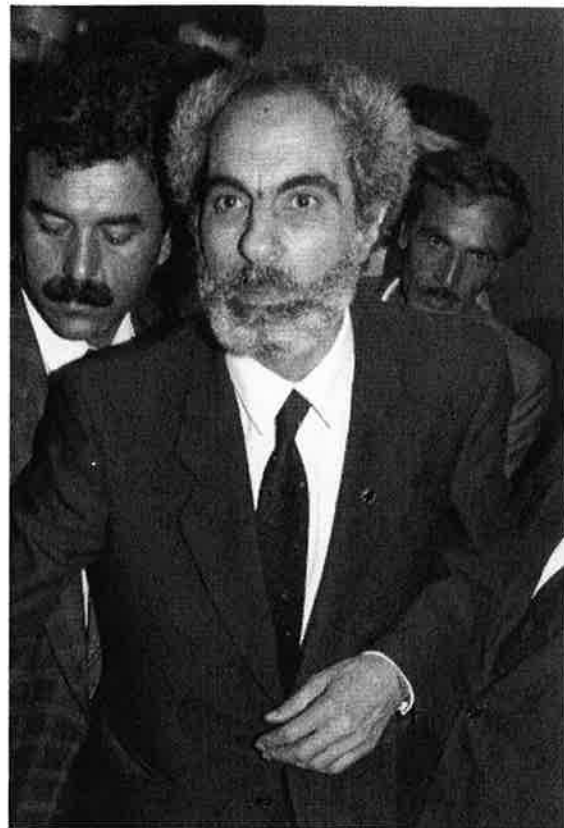
“The land of the enemy shall be devastated, Turkey shall be enlarged and become Turan.” (Lewis, p.345)

Pan-Turkism in Turkey and Azerbaijan developed in tandem. The decades preceding World War I witnessed a Turkish cultural renaissance among Azeri-Turks. The Azeri-Turk intellectual elite strove to create the cultural conditions for the political union of Turks. Turkish replaced Persian as the Azeri-Turks’ literary language. The writer and member of the ‘Young Turk’ leadership, Ali bey Huseynzadä of Baku, was the first of the Azeri-Turk intellectuals to carry pan-Turkism from the cultural to the political sphere. Huseynzadä, who wrote under the pseudonym *Turan*, was one of the great formative influences on his friend Ziya Gökalp. Huseynzadä’s slogan “Turkism, Islam and European civilization” was adopted by Gökalp and the pan-Turkist movement. By the eve of World War I, pan-Turkism was the strongest undercurrent of political life amongst the Turks in both the Ottoman Empire and Azerbaijan.



The power of the pan-Turkic vision continues to be a powerful factor in the political life of Turkey and Azerbaijan. The leaders Turkey's Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel: Striving to integrate the Turkish world extending from the Adriatic to China. (Keystone)

of both countries do not publicly embrace the term pan-Turkism, which creates unease amongst their neighbours and allies. But their rhetoric and policies reveal strong pan-Turkic tendencies. Turkey has seized the opportunity created by the collapse of the Soviet Union to work towards the establishment of a Turkic commonwealth, comprising Turkey, Azerbaijan and the Turkic republics of Central Asia. At the first pan-Turkic summit in October 1992, Turkey's Prime Minister, Suleyman Demirel, declared according to Turkish TV: "The Turkic world, which... stretches from the Adriatic Sea to China, has now emerged as a concrete reality. This is the realisation of our 100-year-old dream." Throughout 1992, Turkey has taken the lead in laying the foundations for the economic, cultural and political integration of the Turkic states. An Ankara-led Turkic bloc has emerged to promote Turkic interests in international forums, such as the United Nations, the CSCE and the Islamic Conference Organ-



*Azerbaijan's President Abulfaz Elchibey: Imprisoned for two years for promoting "pan-Turkism". (Keystone)*

isation. Turkey has achieved the greatest results with Azerbaijan, her nearest Turkic neighbour both geographically and linguistically. Since independence from the Soviet Union Azerbaijan has moved steadily toward Turkey. Azerbaijan's President Abulfaz Elchibey, who had been imprisoned by the Soviets for 'pan-Turkic' activity, was elected in June 1992 on the basis of a programme calling for the adoption of the Turkish model for the new Azeri-Turk state. Azerbaijan's principal opposition groups are also in favour of the Turkish model. In January 1993, Turkish was made the official language of Azerbaijan. The naming of Azerbaijan's press agency and network of trade unions 'Turan' points to the prevalence of pan-Turkic ideals in Azeri-Turk society. The extreme nationalism and anti-Armenianism of Azerbaijan's political leadership was made strikingly clear when the country's Interior Minister, Iskandar Gamidov, threatened Armenia with a nuclear attack and advocated the creation of a pan-Turkic state at a political rally in Baku in November 1992. Azerbaijan and Turkey now have well-established common foreign policy goals and a military alliance. The consequences of the ascendancy of pan-Turkism have been historically, and continue today to be tragic for the Armenians and other non-Turkic communities of Turkey and Transcaucasia.

# The Genocide



"Who speaks today about the Armenians?"  
Adolf Hitler, August 22, 1939. (Keystone)

The genocide of the Armenian community in Turkey provided the 20th century with its first example of 'ethnic cleansing' on a massive scale. The success of this exercise in virtually eliminating the Armenian population of Anatolia inspired Hitler. Addressing his army generals in 1939 the *Führer* declared that he had sent to the East his 'Death's Head Units, with orders to kill without pity or mercy all men, women and children of the Polish race', and then rhetorically asked: "Who speaks today about (the extermination of – ed.) the Armenians?" He answered: "The world respects nothing other than successful results." As 'ethnic cleansing' has again become a feature of European politics – e.g. in northern Cyprus, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Nagorno Karabakh – Hitler's conclusion rings horribly true.

## The Pogroms of the 1890s

The ethnic cleansing of Armenians from Turkey reached its peak in 1914-16. But the process began to gain momentum more than thirty years beforehand. The Sultan Abdul Hamid, fearing the growing power of non-Muslim independence movements in the Balkans, set out to reinforce the Islamic fabric of his empire. He therefore made peace with the Muslim Kurds, who had been in revolt, and organized them into cavalry regiments to keep the Armenians in check. The regiments terrorized the Armenian community, committing murder, looting and pillaging. The effect of this repression was to give impetus to the development of underground Armenian political organizations with the aim of emancipation from the degrading status of *rayah*. Several of them such as the Hunchak and Dashnak parties believed that freedom could be obtained in Ottoman Turkey only by the intervention of Russia and by the use of revolutionary means. The Dashnaks organized self-defense units whose members were called *fedayis* – an Arabic term signifying one committed to die for one's faith. Armenian political activity intensified.

The response of Sultan Abdul Hamid's government was swift. In 1893 more than 1,800 Christians, mainly Armenians, were arbitrarily imprisoned. Most were tortured. Amongst those arrested were two Armenian Protestant pastors who were released on account of protests from Great Britain. The following year the wave of arrests snow-balled into government-sponsored pogroms. Throughout central and eastern Anatolia Armenian communities were subjected to brutal assaults. The pattern of the pogroms was remarkably uniform. Members of the Armenian Apostolic Church, as opposed to Armenian Catholics and Protestants, were singled out for attack. Catholics and Protestants were warned in advance to remain in their churches on Sundays. At an appointed time the



Muslim population backed by Turkish troops would rise against the Armenian Apostolic Christians, murdering, mutilating and plundering.

The French consul in the southeastern town of Diabarkir reported to his embassy on November 3, 1895 his own eyewitness account of the massacre of Armenians there:

“The Muslims of the city have begun a massacre of the Armenians, without any provocation from them. The Vali, the Military Commander and the Police Chief have seen the atrocities and have not done the least to put a stop to them. I have seen with my own eyes that soldiers and gendarmerie took the side of the Muslims and Kurds and have shot the Christians, and that the Christians used their weapons only when they saw no other way to save their lives.” (Koutcharian, p. 97)

In the southeastern town of Urfa 3,000 Armenians took refuge in their cathedral on December 28-29, 1895. Turkish troops broke down the doors and shot many of the refugees. They then used kerosene and kindling to set the cathedral alight. The British consul subsequently described the scene:

“The gallery beams and wooden framework soon caught fire, whereupon, blocking up the staircase leading to the gallery with similar inflammable materials, they left the mass of struggling human beings to become the prey of flames. During several hours the sickening odour of roasting flesh pervaded the town, and even today, two months and a half after the massacre, the smell of putrescent and charred remains in the church is unbearable.” (Walker, 1991, p. 24)

The massacres were not restricted to the central and eastern provinces. In a desperate attempt to encourage the European powers to intervene, the Hunchak party organized a demonstration from the Armenian Cathedral to the seat of government. The Armenian Patriarch Matteos Izmirlian was asked by victims of the pogroms to convey a simple message to European diplomats: “The annihilation of an entire Christian nation will be a shame to Europe, if it does not intervene on our behalf!” (Koutcharian, p. 101) The result of the demonstration was blood in the streets of the Turkish capital. Soldiers and police attacked the mainly unarmed demonstrators. 20 Armenians were shot dead and 100 were wounded.

This attack on Armenian demonstrators was but a prelude to a broader assault on Constantinople’s Armenian community. On August 26, 1896 a group of young Armenians occupied Constantinople’s Ottoman Bank – apparently with the knowledge of the Turkish authorities – and threatened to blow it up together with the bank’s 160 employees. This desperate terrorist act was intended to prompt the European powers to offer protection to Turkey’s Armenian provinces and to extort reforms. After 16 hours the hostages were released and the Turkish authorities allowed the Armenian terrorists safe passage to France. But the act of terrorism was used as a pretext for reprisals against Constantinople’s innocent Armenian community. For the next two days uniformed policemen, religious fanatics and Kurdish tribesmen brought in for the occasion massacred the Armenian population of Constantinople. Approximately 10,000 Armenians were murdered, and at least 6,000 were imprisoned. A further 20,000 Armenians were forcibly deported from Constantinople to central and eastern Anatolia. The Armenian community in the Turkish capital was now greatly diminished.

Three collective European diplomatic protests eventually had their effect. The wave of massacres subsided. But not before somewhere between 100,000 and 300,000 Armenian men, women and children had perished. Approximately 100,000 fled the country. Tens of thousands escaped death only by conversion to Islam. Many Armenian women and children were sold into slavery.

### **The 'Young Turks'**

Hopes for the peaceful coexistence of Armenians and Turks in the Ottoman Empire were raised in 1908. The 'Young Turk' revolution swept away the conservative Islamic autocracy of the Sultan Abdul Hamid and held out the promise of liberal constitutional government. The 'Young Turks' were supported by Armenian political groups. A British diplomat in Constantinople wrote to the Foreign Office two days after the 'Young Turks' seized power: "The crowd is animated with good humour, and it is remarkable to see the fraternisation of Muslims and Christians, especially the Armenians." (Walker, 1980, p. 181) But the tolerance and liberalism of the 'Young Turk' masters of Constantinople proved superficial. The rule of the 'Young Turks' degenerated into a ruthless dictatorship with pan-Turkism as its ideology. Their dual aims were the forcible Turkification of Turkey's ethnic minorities and political union with the Turks of Azerbaijan and Central Asia.

The outbreak of World War I provided the 'Young Turks' with an opportunity to fulfil their aims. On the one hand, the war diverted the attention of the European powers from Turkey's domestic affairs. The 'Young Turks' were now in a position to treat the Armenians and other non-Turkic minorities as they wished without fear of reprisals from the Great Powers. On the other hand, Turkey's alliance with Germany in the war against Russia held the promise of union with the Turks of Azerbaijan and Central Asia, then under Russian rule. The 'Young Turks' seized the opportunity. In November 1914 they drafted a proclamation signed by the Caliph calling for a Holy War against the enemies of Islam, in particular Russia, Great Britain and France. By mid-February 1915 the 'Young Turk' leadership had committed itself to a plan for the extermination of the Armenians – a plan strikingly similar to that put into operation against the Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh in the spring and summer of 1991.

The first move of the Turkish authorities was designed to deny the Armenian community the possibility of self-defense. In February 1915, Armenians were purged from the state administration and from combat positions in the army. Armenian officers in the Turkish army and tens of thousands of able-bodied civilian men were taken as hostages. Then Armenian communities throughout Turkey were subjected to searches for arms conducted by special detachments of heavily armed Turks and Kurds – in many cases criminals released from prison to perform this task. The searches were accompanied by barbarous atrocities, such as rape, roasting women and children to death, the Turkish *falaka* – hanging the victim upside down while beating the soles of the feet – and crucifixions. This was followed by orders for the deportation of the entire Armenian population of Turkey. The Turkish authorities took the trouble to provide a legal basis for this action – "The Provisional Law for the Deportation of Suspicious People" of May 5, 1915:

“When military necessity requires, the commanders of the army, those of the army corps and the divisions, can deport the inhabitants of towns and villages, individually or collectively and resettle them elsewhere, if suspected of treason or espionage.” (Koutcharian, p. 118)

The deportations had a well-defined pattern. First, able-bodied Armenian men were ordered to report to their local government office, where they were arrested. They were then shot or stabbed to death. Left entirely leaderless, the old men, women and children were forced to make the long death march across the desert of northern Syria to Aleppo from where they were sent east into the Mesopotamian desert or south in the direction of Damascus. The trail was littered with corpses. The survivors were placed in concentration camps. The camps were teeming with emaciated women and children, ravaged by starvation, dysentery and typhus. The Turkish authorities obstructed efforts to provide relief. Western diplomats and missionaries were prevented from offering assistance. Respectable Turks and Kurds too were sickened by the horrors. But help offered to the Armenians by members of the Muslim community was punishable by death. The Governor of Van issued an order declaring: “The Armenians must be exterminated. If any Muslim protect a Christian, first his house shall be burnt; then the Christian killed before his eyes, then his (the Muslim’s – ed.) family and himself.” (Walker, 1980, p. 207) Some, nevertheless, could do no other than take this risk.

The Italian consul at Trebizond, Signor Gorrini was one of many western diplomats and missionaries to provide shocking eyewitness accounts of the forced deportations:

“I was given over to nerves and nausea, so terrible was the torment of having to look on at the wholesale execution of these defenceless, innocent creatures. The passing gangs of Armenian exiles beneath the windows and before the door of the consulate; their prayers for help, when neither I nor any other could do anything to answer them; the city in a state of siege, guarded at every point by 15,000 troops in complete war equipment, by thousands of police agents, by bands of volunteers and by members of the ‘Committee of Union and Progress’ (the ‘Young Turk’ leadership – ed.); the lamentations, the tears, the abandonments, the imprecations, the many suicides, the instantaneous deaths from sheer terror, the sudden unhinging of men’s reason, the conflagrations, the shootings of victims in the city, the ruthless searches through the houses and in the countryside; the hundreds of corpses found every day along the exile road; the young women converted by force to Islam or exiled like the rest; the children torn away from their families or from the Christian schools, and handed over by force to Muslim families, or else placed by hundreds on board ship in nothing but their shirts, and then capsized and drowned in the Black Sea and the river Deyirmen Dere – these are my last ineffaceable memories of Trebizond, memories which still, at a month’s distance, torment my soul and almost drive me frantic.” (Toynbee, 1916, pp. 291-2. The horrors of the genocide have been amply and meticulously documented by Lord Bryce and Prof. Toynbee in British Parliamentary Blue Book, Miscellaneous No. 31 (1916), reprinted and published under the title *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire*, and in the German language publications of Johannes Lepsius.)

The Turkish authorities sought to justify such atrocities by claiming that the Armenians were in rebellion. But the German liaison officer in Erzerum, Gen. Posselt, informed his embassy on April 26, 1914 that “the Armenians will stay calm if they are not pressured or molested by the Turks”, and that “the behaviour of the Armenians has been perfect”. (Walker, 1980, p. 214) In some locations, such as in Van and Sivas the Armenians managed to put up some armed resistance. But, greatly outnumbered and outgunned, they were overcome. By the end of World War I, Anatolian Turkey was virtually devoid of Armenians. Of Turkey’s 2 million-plus Armenians, 1.5 million perished. About 850,000 survived. Roughly 250,000 of the survivors escaped to Russia. An estimated 200,000

were forcibly Islamized and remained in Anatolia. Approximately 400,000 deported Armenians were discovered by the victorious allies in Turkey's Syrian provinces.

The plight of the Armenians of Turkey was known in Europe and North America. Western public opinion was powerfully moved. But the action of governments was determined by *Realpolitik*. The allied governments declared on May 23, 1915 that "for about the last month Kurds and the Turkish population of Armenia have been engaged in massacring



*Genocide 1915-16: Crucified Armenian women. (Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker)*

Armenians with the help and often the connivance of the Ottoman authorities" and promised to hold implicated Turkish government officials personally responsible (Walker, 1980, p. 231). In response to President Woodrow Wilson's request for a statement of war aims, the allies in January 1917 stated among others: "the liberation of the peoples who now lie beneath the murderous tyranny of the Turks; and the expulsion from Europe of the Ottoman Empire, which has

proved itself so radically alien to Western Civilisation". But Turkey's opponents in war, Britain, France and, after 1917, the United States, were in no position to fulfil these aims before the end of the War. On the other hand, Turkey's allies, Germany and the Habsburg Empire, were in a position to influence the government in Constantinople. The German Ambassador to Turkey, Baron von Wangenheim admitted to his government that "these measures are certainly very harsh for the Armenians". "However", he concluded, "I am of the opinion that we may only try to mitigate their form, but must not hinder them on principle." (Walker, 1980, p. 232) Subsequent German appeals for the 'mitigation' of the

form of the genocide went unheeded. Winning the war had far greater priority with the Central powers than stopping the genocide. After the war the victorious allies stopped short of the liberation of the oppressed non-Turkic peoples of Anatolia. Instead, the strengthening of Turkey against Europe's new menace, Bolshevik Russia, became the priority of Britain, France and the United States.



*Charred and decapitated remains of Armenian victim of Maragha massacre, April 10, 1992. (CSI)*

# The Pincers of Pan-Turkism

## The Seeds of Genocide in Transcaucasia

Nagorno Karabakh was spared the worst excesses of the genocide in Turkey. Together with the rest of Transcaucasia, Nagorno Karabakh had been under Russian rule since the early 19th century. It therefore had a measure of protection from the Turkish government's policy of ethnic cleansing. But not complete protection. In 1905, Czarist Russia was rocked by revolutionary turbulence. Baku, the principal industrial town of Transcaucasia, was the scene of strikes and labour agitation. The Russian government's strategy for dealing with the class conflict was to exacerbate interethnic tensions – a divide and rule policy *par excellence*. Azeri-Turks made up under half of the city's population. Armenians and Russians together formed the majority. Virtually all the leaders of the radical Social Democratic movement were Armenians or Russians. Intercommunal relations had been tense since the turn of the century. In early February 1905, the tit-for-tat murder of an Armenian and an Azeri-Turk was used as a pretext for an organized armed attack on Baku's Armenian community. On February 6, thousands of Azeri-Turks, encouraged by the Russian authorities, went on the rampage in the town's Armenian quarter, murdering and pillaging as they went. Baku's Armenians fled or defended themselves as best they could. About 1,500 people died: three Armenians to every two Azeri-Turks. After days of intercommunal violence, the killing gradually subsided, thanks in large measure to the cooperation of the spiritual leaders of the Armenian and Azeri-Turk communities.

The massacres in Baku sparked a chain reaction of violence. In the spring of 1905 a pogrom atmosphere hovered above the town of Nakhichevan, which then had a population of 6,000 Azeri-Turks to 2,000 Armenians. The Armenians appealed to the Russian authorities for protection, but it was not forthcoming. On May 25, organized gangs of Azeri-Turks attacked Nakhichevan's Armenians. In only three hours 50 Armenians were killed. The violence then spread to the surrounding countryside.

By late August 1905 clashes between Azeri-Turks and Armenians were underway in Nagorno Karabakh. The town of Shusha was the focal point of the trouble. The population of Shusha was then evenly divided between the two ethnic groups. The violence began when Azeri-Turks fired on a busload of Armenians. The Armenians of Shusha were better prepared than those of Baku and Nakhichevan. A spiral of killings ensued leaving 300 dead, two-thirds of whom were Azeri-Turks. The conflict in Shusha sparked another round of violence in Baku in September. The interethnic violence in Transcaucasia subsided as the Russian authorities subdued the forces of revolution at the end of 1905. But the situation continued to be uneasy until the outbreak of World War I, which acted as a catalyst for renewed violence on a mass scale.

## **The Pan-Turkic Offensive**

The 'Young Turk' regime plunged the Ottoman Empire into World War I on the side of Germany with a view to driving Russia out of Transcaucasia and Central Asia. Its ultimate war aim was the political unification of all Turkic peoples with Turkey. Priority was placed on union with the Azeri-Turks under Russian and Persian rule as the first stepping stone towards union with the Turkic peoples of Central Asia. The Armenians of Transcaucasia formed a barrier to the eastward expansion of the Turkish empire – a barrier that the regime of 'Young Turks' was determined to remove. Thus the process of genocide of Armenians was extended to Transcaucasia.

In the autumn of 1914 the 'Young Turk' regime hastily mobilized a Pan-Turkic army in eastern Anatolia facing Russian-ruled Armenia. In November the Pan-Turkic offensive was unleashed. The 'Young Turk' government then declared publicly its Pan-Turkic aim:

"Our participation in the world war represents the vindication of our national ideal. The ideal of our nation and people leads us towards the destruction of our Muscovite enemy, in order to obtain thereby a natural frontier to our empire, which should include and unite all branches of our race." (Walker, 1980, p. 198)

Once underway the offensive was personally led by the head of the 'Young Turk' leadership, Enver Pasha. Enver directed part of his army due east to engage the Russian army, while dispatching another part southeast into Persian Azerbaijan with the aim of conquering Baku from the south. He expected his troops would be aided along the way by uprisings of the Azeri-Turks against their Russian rulers. Enver's 'Pan-Turkic' army quickly penetrated Russian-ruled Armenia. But early Russian reverses proved short-lived. In mid-January 1915, the Russian army inflicted a massive defeat on Enver's troops 25 miles inside Russian Armenia at Sarikamish. 75,000 of Enver's 95,000 troops either died in combat or were frozen to death. The Ottoman troops dispatched to Azerbaijani Persia made greater headway. In southeastern Turkey and Persian Azerbaijan, the largest of the Christian communities was not the Armenians, but the Aramaic-speaking 'Assyrians'. Those that stood in the way of the advancing Ottoman army and its local Azeri-Turk supporters were subject to murder, rape and pillage. Thus began the great massacres of 'Assyrian' Christians, which ran parallel with the genocide of Armenians in Turkey. In January 1915 the Ottoman army occupied Tabriz. There the 'Young Turks' began to enlist the local Azeri-Turks for an assault on Baku. But in the spring the Ottoman troops in Persian Azerbaijan suffered a major defeat at the hands of the Russian army and beat a retreat to Anatolia.

The 'Young Turks' were able to resume the Pan-Turk offensive only when the Bolshevik revolution of November 1917 set in motion the decomposition of the Russian army in Transcaucasia. The Turkish government seized the opportunity to fulfil its Pan-Turkic war aims. Throughout the spring of 1918, while peace negotiations were in progress, Turkish troops advanced on Transcaucasia. An ineffectual and short-lived Confederation of Transcaucasia, made up of Georgian, Armenian and Azeri-Turk representatives, made a feeble attempt to fill the political vacuum left by the collapse of Russian power. The establishment of the independent Republics of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan followed in the wake of the disintegration of the Confederation of Transcaucasia at the end

of May 1918. The military vacuum was filled, on the one hand, by the invading Ottoman forces and, on the other, by newly formed Azeri-Turk, Armenian, and Baku-based Bolshevik armed units. All units were well armed from the appropriation of weapons of the disintegrating Russian army. The approaching Ottoman army was supported by Azeri-Turk military units. The 'Army of Islam' – a special mixed unit of Ottoman regulars and Azeri-Turk volunteers led by Enver Pasha's half-brother – was formed in the town of Ganja (Elizavetpol, Kirovabad), north of Nagorno Karabakh. The battle plan of the Ottoman and Azeri-Turks was to converge on Baku, then in the hands of the Bolshevik-led city Soviet. Wherever the Turkic army went the destruction of Armenian communities followed. Prof. Kazemzadeh writes of the Pan-Turk offensive:

"The greed of the conqueror knew no bounds. Drunk with their continued successes, aware of the helplessness of their victims, the Turks stopped at nothing to acquire as much territory as they could."  
(Kazemzadeh, p. 116)

The thrust towards Baku was designed to kill the new Armenian Republic at birth, not by a direct assault on the capital Yerevan, but by strangulation. Blockaded on all sides by the superior Turkic military forces, the remaining rump of Armenia grew steadily smaller and was deprived of the essentials for survival. A German diplomatic mission declared in August 1918:

"She (Armenia-ed.) is being deprived of her last productive area. The Turks have not given up their intention to exterminate the Armenians. The aim is to starve them out and to ruin them economically." (Sarkisyanz, p. 220)

The Pan-Turk offensive in Transcaucasia met with stiff organized resistance from the desperate Armenian troops. The Turks' policy of massacring Armenians was returned in kind. But such extreme measures were to no avail. The Armenians were hope-



*Mother and child: Armenian victims of the 1915-16 genocide.*  
(Keystone)

lessly outnumbered and outgunned. By September the combined Ottoman and Azeri-Turk forces were poised to take Baku. As the largest town in Azerbaijan and the centre of a rich oil industry, Baku was greatly coveted by the Turks. With memories of the atrocities of 1905 still fresh and with an acute awareness of the terrible fate of Armenian communities that stood in the path of the Pan-Turkic offensive, the Armenians and Russians



of Baku were alarmed by the approach of the largely Azeri-Turk 'Savage Division' in March 1918. The 'Savage Division' was a special Transcaucasian unit formed within the Russian army on the eve of World War I. It became one of Transcaucasia's competing national armed units following the collapse of the Russian army in 1917. Troops loyal to the leftist Baku Soviet went into battle against the 'Savage Division' and fired artillery shells at Azeri-Turk residential areas. Armenian units joined the fray on the side of the Baku Soviet. The conflict took on the character of "gigantic race riot". Kazemzadeh writes:

"The brutalities continued for weeks. No quarter was given by either side: neither age nor sex was respected. Enormous crowds roamed the streets, burning houses, killing every passer-by who was identified as an enemy, many innocent persons suffering death at the hands of both the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis." (Kazemzadeh, p. 73)

The death toll amounted to several thousand. On this occasion the victims among the Azeri-Turks far outnumbered those amongst the Armenians. Half Baku's Muslim population fled the city.

Despite the defeat of the 'Savage Division', The Pan-Turkic offensive continued to make progress towards Baku. By the end of June 1918, the city was under siege. The arrival by sea of a small contingent of British troops from Mesopotamia in mid-August gave some hope to the Armenian and Russian defenders of Baku. But sensing the inevitability of a Turkic triumph, the British sailed away on September 14, 1918. Azeri-Turk irregulars burst into Baku in the wake of the departing British, while the Ottoman regulars remained outside for two days. The customary massacre of civilians ensued. A Russian survivor, Khristofor Mikhailovich Evangulov, recorded:

"In the whole town massacres of the Armenian population and robberies of all non-Muslim peoples were going on. They broke the doors and windows, entered the living quarters, dragged out men, women and children and killed them in the street. From all the houses the yells of people who were being attacked were heard... In some spots there were mountains of dead bodies, and many had terrible wounds from dum-dum bullets. The most appalling picture was at the entrance to the Treasury Lane from Surukhanskoi Street. The whole street was covered with dead bodies of children not older than nine or ten years. About eighty bodies carried wounds inflicted by swords or bayonets, and many had their throats cut; it was obvious that the wretched ones had been slaughtered like lambs." (Walker, 1980, p. 261)

Conservative estimates place the number of Armenian dead at 9,000. The Pan-Turkic offensive reached its peak with the occupation of Baku in September 1918. The 'Young Turks' had succeeded in forging a corridor between Turkey and Azerbaijan through Armenia. Meanwhile, the vanquished and famine-stricken Armenian Republic was forced to sign the humiliating Treaty of Batum. The Treaty reduced Armenia to less than 12,000 square miles of largely barren land devoid of industry. 600,000 Armenians, half of whom were refugees, and 100,000 Azeri-Turks were crowded into the unproductive and unprotected territory around Yerevan and Echmiadzin. The Treaty deprived Armenia of railway links to the outside world and forbade her from maintaining an army. The truncated Armenian Republic became in effect a vassal of Turkey.

## **Battle for Nagorno Karabakh**

The devastating terms of the Treaty of Batum did not end Armenia's struggle for survival. It was carried on, not by the government in Yerevan, but by the Armenian *fedayi* leader, General Andranik. Contrary to the orders of his government, Andranik took up positions for the defense of Nagorno Karabakh, which became the last bastion of Armenian resistance to the Pan-Turk offensive. Nagorno Karabakh had at first been bypassed by the Ottoman-led 'Army of Islam' on its march to Baku. Nagorno Karabakh was then claimed by both the new Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan. But the territory became *de facto* independent. The policy of Nagorno Karabakh's elected government was to cooperate with General Andranik in the defense of the territory from the threatened Pan-Turkic offensive.

By September 1918, Enver Pasha's sights were fixed on Nagorno Karabakh. Turkish troops murdered or expelled the Armenians of the region lying between Karabakh and the Republic of Armenia, thus transforming Nagorno Karabakh into an enclave. On September 22, 5,000 Turkish troops began an offensive towards the capital of Nagorno Karabakh, Shusha. Eleven days later they occupied and plundered the town with the assistance of some of its Azeri-Turk residents. From Shusha Turkish troops fanned out to subjugate the rest of the enclave. Villages were razed and civilians massacred. But the Pan-Turkic offensive in Nagorno Karabakh was checked by the stiff resistance of Armenian locals, and was terminated by Turkey's surrender to the Allies at the end of October 1918.

Turkey's defeat in World War I provided the Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh with a glimmer of hope for survival. British troops under the command of Major-General W.M. Thomson replaced the Ottoman Army in Transcaucasia, in accordance with the armistice. But British interests were not in harmony with those of Nagorno Karabakh. The British, with one eye on the Baku oil fields and the other on the Bolshevik menace north of the Caucasus Mountains, were interested in bolstering Azerbaijan. At the close of World War I, Britain looked favourably upon the creation of a Muslim Turkic barrier to the expansion of communist Russia in the Transcaucasus and Central Asia. Thomson ordered the Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh to submit to the Azeri-Turk authorities and appointed as provisional governor of Nagorno Karabakh Dr. Khosrov Bek Sultanov, who was, in Walker's words, "an ardent pan-Turkist, a friend of the Ittihadists (Young Turks – ed.) of Constantinople, and a terror to all Armenians". (Walker, 1980, p. 270)

Notwithstanding British threats to apply force, the Armenians of Karabakh were not prepared to deliver themselves to the Azeri-Turks. The Fifth Congress of Karabakhi Armenians declared:

"Azerbaijan is and has always been an ally of the Turks, and has taken part in all the atrocities committed by the Turks against the Armenians, and in particular the Armenians of Karabakh." (Walker, 1991, p. 95)

Backed by Britain, Azerbaijan initiated a policy of famine and terror against Nagorno Karabakh. In the spring of 1919 the enclave was placed under an economic blockade. Kurdish irregulars were organized into terrorist brigades to destroy Armenian villages. Hundreds of Armenians were massacred in Shusha, Kerkjan, Pahlou and other villages.

This policy had the desired effect. The Seventh Congress of Karabakhi Armenians agreed on August 22 to recognize “provisionally” the authority of the Azerbaijani government until the final definition of Azerbaijan’s borders by the post-war Peace Conference. In return the Armenians received the promised “territorial autonomy for all Karabakh and national-cultural autonomy for its Armenian populations.” (Altstadt, p. 102) The agreement failed to bring peace. “Never had the Armenian population witnessed so many crimes, murders and economic offences”, Nagorno Karabakh’s leaders subsequently declared, “as after the signing of the agreement.” (Walker, 1991, p. 98) The Azeri-Turk authorities too were dissatisfied with provisional recognition. Most of Azerbaijan’s army, including troops from Turkey, was transferred to Karabakh. After the withdrawal of British troops from Azerbaijan, Sultanov demanded acceptance of the unconditional incorporation of Karabakh into Azerbaijan. On March 22, 1920 fearing an imminent attack, the Armenians of Karabakh rose in revolt. On April 4, the Azeri-Turk army entered and destroyed most of Shusha. Half the town’s residents were murdered. The heads of Bishop Vartan and other prominent Karabakhi Armenians were paraded on pikes in celebration of the Azeri-Turk triumph. Devoid of most of its Armenian residents, Shusha was effectively Turkified.



*6-year-old Armenian girl: Critically wounded in Azerbaijani rocket attack on Stepanakert in Dec. 1991. (CSI)*

## Soviet Rule

The genocide of Armenians in Transcaucasia was suspended by the Soviet occupation of the region in 1920. The heavy concentration of Azeri-Turk troops in Karabakh at the time of the destruction of Shusha enabled the Red Army to take Baku and topple the government of Azerbaijan at the end of April 1920 with relative ease. Within a month Soviet troops had occupied Karabakh. By the end of 1920 the Republic of Armenia, which had been subjected to yet another military offensive by Turkey that autumn, had also been conquered by the Red Army. The status of Nagorno Karabakh ceased to be a question of international law. Instead it became one of internal Soviet politics.

Armenian hopes soared when the Azeri-Turk communist leader Nariman Narimanov announced on November 30, 1920 that “Nagorno Karabakh, Zangezur and Nakhichevan (two disputed regions to the southwest of Karabakh – ed.) are recognized to be integral parts of the Socialist Republic of Armenia” (Walker, 1991, p. 105). But this was little more than a propaganda ploy to encourage Armenians to view the Red Army as a saviour on the eve of its occupation of the Republic of Armenia. Once the Republic of Armenia was firmly under communist control, Narimanov repudiated his concession and reasserted Azerbaijan’s claim to Nagorno Karabakh.

The Karabakh question went before the Transcaucasia Bureau of the Communist Party for settlement. The Bureau decreed on June 3, 1921 that Nagorno Karabakh belonged to Armenia. Narimanov threatened an upsurge of anti-Soviet activity from the side of Azeri-Turk nationalists if Nagorno Karabakh were given to the Armenian SSR. The Transcaucasian Bureau reaffirmed its decision on July 4, much to the dismay of the Azeri-Turks. But at this point Stalin, then Commissar for Nationality Affairs, intervened. On the next day, in Stalin’s presence, the Transcaucasian Bureau reversed its decision without debate. The Bureau resolved to “leave Nagorno Karabakh inside the frontiers of Azerbaijan, giving it a large measure of regional autonomy, and having as its centre the town of Shusha” (Walker, 1991, p. 108). This decision conformed to Stalin’s divide-and-rule policy for nationalities. By placing the Armenians of Karabakh inside Azerbaijan as ‘hostages’ the Armenian SSR would be less likely to act contrary to the wishes of the Kremlin. Likewise, an ‘autonomous’ Armenian enclave within Azerbaijan could be activated as a pro-Soviet fifth column in the event of disloyalty by the Azeri-Turks.

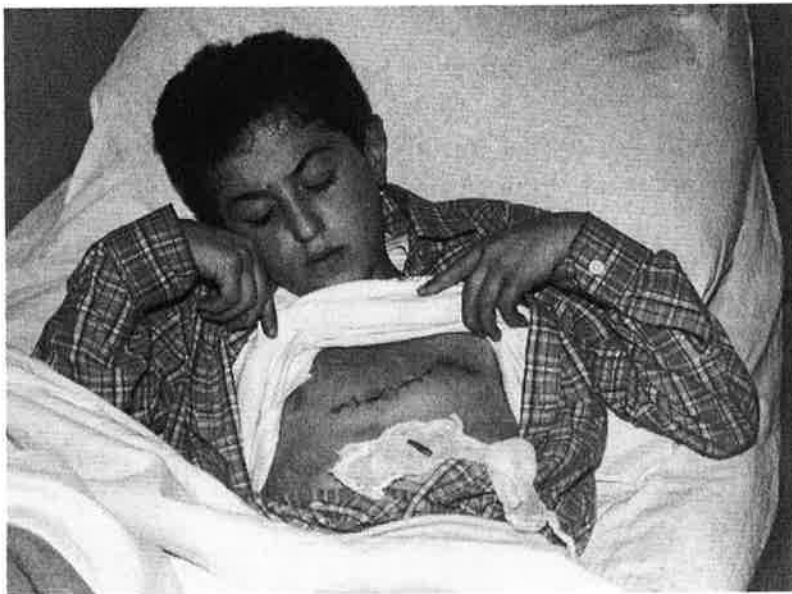
The “large measure of regional autonomy” promised to Nagorno Karabakh proved to be fictitious. The government of the Azerbaijani SSR defined the status of the Armenian enclave in the summer of 1923. It established an ‘Autonomous Region of Nagorno Karabakh’ with a local administration composed mainly of Armenian communist officials. But the northern tip of Karabakh – the Shaumyan district – whose population was 80% Armenian and the 4 mile wide Lachin corridor leading to the Armenian SSR were detached from the Autonomous Region and placed under direct Azerbaijani rule. The government of the Autonomous Region was entirely dependent on Baku and Moscow.

Soviet terror produced a precarious balance between the Armenians and Azeri-Turks. Manifestations of national aspirations were ruthlessly suppressed. Soviet policy aimed at the evolution of a new socialist man, devoid of nationalist yearnings. One of the key

aspects of this policy was the campaign against religion. Marxist-Leninist ideology identified religion as one of the vital cultural roots of nationalism which had to be severed. Both the Armenian and Azeri-Turk communities in Karabakh suffered grievously from the communists' anti-religious policies. During the Stalinist era the Armenian church was obliterated. The Christians of Karabakh were left without a priest or bishop, who had all been murdered, imprisoned, or sent into exile. All of the enclave's churches and monasteries were closed. Any public manifestation of the Christian faith became a punishable offense. The bravest of the faithful risked their lives and liberty by meeting in small groups in private homes. Official Islam also ceased to exist in Nagorno Karabakh. The closure of Shusha's three mosques left the enclave's Muslim minority without a public place of worship. The only option for Muslims wishing to practice their faith communally was to do so within the framework of semi-secret sufi orders.

Under Soviet rule the Turkification of Nagorno Karabakh continued. While the Kremlin was no more hostile towards Armenian than Azeri-Turk nationalism, the Azeri-Turk authorities in Baku were successful in fulfilling nationalist aims under the cover of communism. During the Soviet era the demographic balance shifted markedly in favour of the Azeri-Turks. The main factors were the emigration of Armenians, the immigration of Azeri-Turks and the Azeri-Turks' high birth-rate. In 1921 when the enclave was awarded to Azerbaijan, 94.4% of the population was Armenian. Since then the percentage of Armenians has steadily diminished. By 1979, it was down to 75.9%. The shift of the demographic balance in Nagorno Karabakh was linked to the parallel process of Turkification in the rest of the Azerbaijani SSR where the non-Turkic communities have been rapidly shrinking. In 1959, the Azeri-Turk population of Azerbaijan was 2.5 million or 67.5% of the population, while in 1979 it had increased to 4.7 million or 78.1% of the population. During the same period the Armenian population of Azerbaijan decreased from 11.9% to 7.9%. Particularly worrying to the Armenians of Karabakh was the depopulation of Nakhichevan of Armenians. Nakhichevan – a disputed region wedged between Iran, Armenia

and Turkey – was granted by the Soviets to Azerbaijan, with which it has no common border. Armenians made up 40% of Nakhichevan's population in 1917. By 1987 Nakhichevan was virtually devoid of Armenians with only two Armenian villages remaining. The Armenians feared that within a generation the Azeri-Turk authorities would succeed in rendering their community in Nagorno Karabakh unvi-



*12-year-old Armenian boy shot by Azeri-Turk gunmen on outskirts of Stepankert on October 18, 1991. (CSI)*



*Wreckage of Armenian Yak 40 civilian jet aircraft: Shot down while ferrying humanitarian aid to besieged Stepanakert in May 1992. (CSI)*

able as they had done in Nakhichevan. The weakening of the demographic position of Azerbaijan's national minorities, according to Profs. Bennigsen and Wimbush, gives Azeri-Turk nationalists "the feeling that 'we' (the Muslims) are stronger than 'they' (the aliens) and that 'time is working for us'." (Bennigsen & Wimbush, p. 145)

The Armenians of Karabakh never accepted the settlement imposed on them by Stalin in 1921. A slow death for the community was all that could be reasonably expected from it. The 1920s witnessed the operation of a clandestine organization called 'Karabakh for Armenia'. It distributed tracts throughout the enclave protesting against the oppressive policies of the Soviet and Azeri-Turk authorities and calling for unification with Armenia. Stalin's secret police successfully liquidated the organization in 1927. In the 30s and 40s prominent Armenian communist figures would periodically lobby the Kremlin on behalf of Nagorno Karabakh, but without significant result.



*Remains of Azerbaijani rocket fired at civilian population of Stepanakert on Jan. 8, 1993. (CSI)*

The relaxation of Soviet terror following the death of Stalin resulted in more frequent and more open appeals to the Soviet leadership in Moscow. In 1963, 2,500 Karabakhi Armenians boldly signed a petition accusing Azeri-Turk officials of trying to destroy the Armenian community and asking for annexation to either Armenia or the Russian Federation. Eighteen Armenian residents of Karabakh were murdered by Azeri-Turks as a reprisal. Many Armenian intellectuals were forced to flee the enclave under the threat of death.

# The Karabakh Question Revived

## Glasnost and Perestroika

Mikhail Gorbachev's slogans '*glasnost*' and '*perestroika*' – openness and restructuring – had enormous repercussions throughout the world. In the West they were viewed as signals of an end to over four decades of cold war. Within the Soviet Union they were seen as signs that the Kremlin was prepared to make substantial readjustments to the rigid totalitarian system devised by Lenin and Stalin. The prospect of restructuring encouraged the belief that the injustices imposed upon the repressed Soviet nationalities could be put right. Throughout the Soviet Union *glasnost* and *perestroika* unleashed powerful centrifugal forces. Gorbachev aimed to strengthen and revitalize the Soviet empire by means of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. But in the end he lost control over the forces of nationalism that he unleashed. The Soviet President's efforts at restructuring failed to overcome the innate conservatism of the system and keep pace with the glasnost-fueled explosion of national sentiment. Nowhere was this stronger than amongst the Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh. The response of the Soviet and Azeri-Turk authorities in Azerbaijan was strikingly reminiscent of the traditional Turkic reaction to Armenian aspirations for freedom. The genocide process once more gained pace.



*Bishop of Nagorno Karabakh, Parkev Martirosian: Narrowly escaped death when his home was hit by an Azerbaijani Alazan rocket in December 1991. (CSI)*

The Armenians, together with the Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians, were amongst the first of the national minorities to use the freedom offered by *glasnost* to press for the overthrow of settlements arbitrarily imposed by Stalin. Throughout 1987 Armenian leaders sent protest after protest to Moscow. In October several Karabakhi Armenians instituted legal proceedings against the Azeri-Turk authorities in Baku for having “perpetrated genocide against the Armenian population between 1920 and 1987” (Walker, 1991, p. 121). Sensing a historic opportunity to escape from the stranglehold of Azerbaijan, the normally docile Supreme Soviet of the Autonomous Region of Nagorno Karabakh passed a resolution on February 20, 1988 calling on Armenia and Azerbaijan to strive to reach “a positive decision concerning the transfer of the region from the SSR of Azerbaijan to the SSR of Armenia” (Walker, 1991, p. 123). The resolution had an electric effect both within and outside the enclave.



The Armenians of Karabakh were ecstatic. The Azeri-Turks were angered. Interethnic relations rapidly deteriorated. Several days after the passing of the resolution for unification, furious Azeri-Turk demonstrators marched on Stepanakert where they encountered a crowd of Armenians and the police. Two Azeri-Turks died in the confrontation. One was hit by a stone and the other was shot by an Azeri-Turk policeman.

Armenia overwhelmingly supported the wishes of the Armenian majority of Nagorno Karabakh. Massive demonstrations took place in support of the resolution, with the number of participants ranging from 700,000 to one million. Fifteen prominent intellectuals in Yerevan formed a 'Karabakh Committee', which, in addition to campaigning on behalf of Karabakh, gradually assumed the role of leading Armenia's opposition to communist rule. Two Armenian writers, Sylvia Kaputikian and Dr. Zori Balayan – a native of Karabakh – were dispatched to Moscow for meetings with Gorbachev and other senior officials.

### **Anti-Armenian Violence**

**Sumgait:** The vigorous but mainly peaceful political activity in Karabakh and Yerevan was accompanied by a resumption of killings. On February 27, fanatical Azeri-Turks went on a three day rampage in Sumgait, a new industrial town 20 miles from Baku, murdering members of the town's large Armenian minority and destroying their property. According to the official Soviet account 32 died, but eyewitness reports strongly suggest the true figure runs into the hundreds. Marina Pogosyan, a young survivor of the Sumgait massacre, testified:

"On the twenty-sixth, a Friday, a friend of mine warned me to stay inside over the weekend. Still, I went to work – I taught in a nursery school – and walked home at noon. That afternoon, there was another Azerbaijani rally, in downtown Sumgait, and then crowds of people went through the shopping area where Armenians worked, and broke windows and smashed things. I heard cries of 'Death to Armenians! Blood for blood!' It was mostly young people, and the police didn't stop them. Late that night, after we had gone to bed, we heard yelling on the street, and through the window I saw thousands of people in a mob marching through the street, most dressed in black, carrying clubs and Turkish flags with the half-moon. They were yelling, 'Get out! Armenians are killing our people and you're sitting here! We must purge our city! The next day, we went to a neighbor's in the building for her birthday party. We talked about what we had seen, but we thought it was just young hooligans. Then a neighbor boy came in, looking pale. We asked him what was happening, and he said: 'You don't know? They're killing and burning people out there, breaking into people's apartments.' We called the police, and they said: 'Stay where you are. You're not the only ones. We can't help you.' A Russian neighbor came to us and invited us to wait in her apartment. There were about three families with her – fifteen people. We spent the whole night there. The mob came and knocked on our door, and she went outside and told them that we were not there – that we'd moved a week ago. A few times after that, they passed by and broke into neighbors' apartments. By that time, no Armenians were home. So there were no killings (in her building – ed.), but there was a lot of destruction. They threw the chairs and the dishes out of the window. I had absolutely no hope that we'd survive. I figured they'd kill us all sooner or later. The mob came again, but on Monday soldiers came in tanks and took us to the Party committee building." (Cullen, 1991, pp. 66-7)

Marina Pogosyan and her family were allowed to collect money and a few possessions before being flown to Yerevan. Most of Sumgait's Armenian community survived the attacks. Many, like Miss Pogosyan, were sheltered by brave Russian and Azeri-Turk neighbours. But the fate of those who fell into the hands of the mob was cruel. Lola Avak-

yan, a 37-year-old Armenian resident of Sumgait was one of the unfortunate. Seized by an Azeri-Turk crowd, she was stripped and forced to dance before having her breasts slashed and body burned with cigarettes. She was raped and then killed. Several Azeri-Turks were arrested and convicted for their involvement in the mayhem.

**Sumgait postscript:** On March 2, 1993, the Office of Azerbaijan's Procurator announced that it had recommended that President Elchibey grant an amnesty to those convicted of violent offenses against Armenians during the Sumgait pogrom. The Procurator's Office reported that it expected the President to act according to its recommendation. On the same day, a proposal for the amnesty to be announced on May 28, 1993 – the 74th anniversary of the founding of the first Republic of Azerbaijan – was made in Azerbaijan's parliament.

**Kirovabad:** The Sumgait massacre was but the first of a series of anti-Armenian pogroms in Azerbaijan. On November 21, 1988 the 40,000 Armenians of Azerbaijan's second largest city, Kirovabad (Elizavetpol, Ganja), were driven out of their homes and forced to flee to Armenia by Azeri-Turk mobs. The Kirovabad pogrom was apparently sparked by false reports in Azerbaijan's press that Armenians in Karabakh had desecrated a sacred grove and were building on it an environmentally hazardous factory. In one incident in Kirovabad, hundreds of Armenian women and children were forced to seek refuge in a church, which some courageous, unarmed Soviet soldiers tried to defend. Several of the soldiers were killed. The Soviet media censored all information about the pogrom in Kirovabad.

**Baku:** The Kirovabad pogrom coincided with an upsurge of anti-Armenian activity in Baku. On November 18, 1988 an Azeri-Turk was sentenced to death in Moscow for his role in the Sumgait massacre. The next day a mass demonstration took place in Baku, protesting against the death sentence. For the next three weeks such nationalist demonstrations were regular occurrences in Baku. The rallies involved over 500,000 Azeri-Turks. 'Death to Armenians' and 'Armenians out of Azerbaijan' and other anti-Armenian slogans featured prominently. But it was not till January 1990 that Armenian blood was shed in Baku on a mass scale. On January 12, the eve of a mass rally in the city's Lenin Square, radical Azeri-Turk nationalists of Azerbaijan's anti-communist Popular Front were allowed to broadcast appeals for the defense of Azerbaijan's sovereignty from the demands of the Armenians. Meanwhile, groups of young Azeri-Turks began to roam the streets, terrorizing Armenians and warning them to leave town. On the 13th the murders got under way. The police failed to intervene. The Armenian Abram Kazaryan, a war veteran and resident of Baku since 1920 reported:

"The pogrom started on the tenth of January. A man came to my door and said: 'Leave, old man. Your time is up. Your people have left, and you should leave.' If he had been alone, I'd have chased him away. But there were three of them. I said: 'I'm an old man, I have no place to go.' On the twelfth, about twenty of them came, and they broke down the door. I tried to fight them, and yelled for help. On the morning of the thirteenth, I went to the police and filed a complaint. They said 'O.K.' and did nothing. I stayed at home and propped the door up as best I could, but there was nothing to repair it with. That evening, at six, they came again. They rang the bell and knocked. I could see there were a lot of them in the courtyard. I put my coat on and went to open the door. As I got there, it came down on me. It fell on me. I think they had an axe. There were four of them, and then it seemed like forty. They beat me

and threw me on the floor and started trampling me. They broke three ribs, right . . . and threw me down the stairs. I lost consciousness. When I opened my eyes, they were carrying my things away – the rugs, the TV, everything. My pockets and clothes were torn, and they'd taken my documents. Two of them stood guard over me to keep me from running away. I said to them: 'Why are you beating up an old man?' They didn't answer. They put me in a car and took me to a movie theatre and threw me into a basement with some others. We were there for a day and a half.' (Cullen, pp. 69-70)

Mr. Kazaryan was deported across the Caspian Sea to Turkmenistan on a steamer together with 1,500 other Armenians. Eventually he reached Yerevan.

Azaddin Gyulmamedov, a young Azeri-Turk who witnessed the outbreak of anti-Armenian violence while he attended the Popular Front rally in Baku on the 13th, gave the following account:

"We went to see what was happening. We saw these guys in the streets. I don't know who they were – drug addicts, maybe. They had sticks and clubs, and lists of Armenians and where they lived. They wanted to break down the doors of Armenian apartments and chase them out. The police didn't do anything. They just stood and watched. Same with the soldiers, who had weapons. We asked them to help. There were about a dozen soldiers and ten of us, and there were about twenty in the gang, but the soldiers wouldn't help. They said: 'You can do it yourself, Blackie. We're not getting involved.'" (Cullen, p. 70)

Soviet troops moved into Baku on January 19, leaving death and destruction in their wake. The anti-Armenian crowds had turned anti-Soviet and surrounded the building of the Central Committee of the Azerbaijani Communist Party. But the anti-Armenian pogrom had already run its course, leaving 68 dead, according to the customarily low official figures. A mere 1,800 Armenians remain in Baku. Most are believed to be married to Azeri-Turks or are the offspring of mixed marriages. Within months of the Baku pogrom, Azerbaijan had been virtually 'cleansed' of Armenians.

## **The Blockade**

The deportation of Armenians from Azerbaijan, if not orchestrated by the Azeri-Turk authorities, was undertaken with their tacit consent. The then First Secretary of Azerbaijan's Communist Party, Ayaz Mutalibov, has admitted that there were "a few thousand" Interior Ministry troops in Baku at the onset of the pogrom (Cullen, p. 71). The strategy of the Azerbaijani government was to use its own limited power gradually to intensify pressure on the Republic's Armenian community, while pressing the Kremlin to apply massive force against what it viewed as Armenian separatists in Karabakh. Violence against Armenian 'hostages' in Azerbaijani towns and villages was one method that did not depend on political or material support from Moscow. A blockade of the enclave was another. No sooner had Nagorno-Karabakh's Supreme Soviet expressed the wish to unite with Armenia than the government in Baku began to interrupt supply lines to Karabakh. Azeri-Turk armed bands attacked traffic on the two roads linking Armenia with Karabakh. By the summer of 1989 both were entirely blocked to traffic. So too were the enclave's rail links to the outside world. The Armenians of Karabakh became dependent almost entirely on their own meagre resources and aid flown in from Armenia. But the Azerbaijani authorities kept open the road from Azerbaijan to Shusha. Thus, while the Armenian community was deprived of food and basic medicines, essential supplies continued to reach the Azeri-Turk population and armed units. The noose around the

Armenians of Karabakh slowly tightened. Armenia too was punished economically. Azerbaijan reduced vital gas and oil deliveries to its western neighbour.

### **Armenian Retaliation**

The initial Armenian reaction to the Sumgait massacre and the blockade of Karabakh was muted. Hundreds of thousands of Armenians processed to Yerevan's monument to the victims of the 1915-16 genocide in honour of the Sumgait victims. Armenians in both Armenia and Karabakh looked to Moscow for a solution. The demonstrations and strikes of the Armenians remained essentially peaceful. But interethnic violence flared in Nagorno Karabakh in September 1988. The Azeri-Turk authorities were then in the process of 'cleansing' Shusha of Armenians by means of deportations. On September 18, Azeri-Turk terrorists ambushed a bus carrying Armenian school children near Stepanakert. Upon receiving news of the incident, a crowd of Armenians rushed to the scene. A gun battle ensued leaving one dead and more than 40 injured. The use of guns marked a major escalation of the conflict. Thereafter the pace of expulsions of Armenians and Azeri-Turks from each other's neighbourhoods quickened.

The mass deportations of Azeri-Turks from Armenia got under way in the autumn of 1988. The Armenians were not quick to retaliate in response to the Sumgait massacre. But Armenian restraint crumbled in response to the Kirovabad pogrom and the anti-Armenian demonstrations in Baku. Throughout Armenia Azeri-Turks were forced to leave their homes. Muzeib Imamaliev, an Azeri-Turk local government official in Armenia, recalled being told by his employer one day in November to leave the country immediately:

"He said I should leave right away. I said: 'What's happening? They have nothing against me.' And he said they would kill me, because they were angry about Armenians being expelled from Kirovabad. In a matter of hours, there were ten thousand people in the streets, yelling 'Get out, Turks!' I tried to call the police, the Central Committee in Yerevan, the Council of Ministers. My phones suddenly didn't work. I called together the people who had worked for me. They said I should go or they'd be killed, too. Then they took me out through a back door and put me in a car. It wasn't my black Volga – it was a Zhiguli. The deputy director of the Police Department was driving, and he took me home. A crowd of about a thousand people surrounded the house, yelling and throwing rocks. The police protected us, but they didn't disperse the crowd. It was like that for two days." (Cullen, p. 68)

Imamaliev was then driven by the police to Yerevan, where he bought a plane ticket to Baku. Eventually he sent a helicopter back to Armenia to retrieve his family.

On December 7, 1988 Armenia was rocked by a powerful earthquake. At least 25,000 people died and 500,000 were made homeless. 10,000 children became orphans. The massive death and destruction traumatized the Armenian people and exacerbated political tension. Many of the victims were refugees from Azerbaijan who had been resettled in northern Armenia near the epicentre of the earthquake. The emotional strain caused by the natural disaster quickened the pace of deportations of Azeri-Turks from Armenia. Over the next eighteen months virtually all of Armenia's 300,000-plus Azeri-Turks were driven out of Armenia.

## Moscow's Reaction

The eruption of the conflict in Karabakh in February 1988 caught the Soviet leadership off guard. Gorbachev's initial instinct was to buy time. In his meeting with the Armenian representatives Silva Kaputikyan and Zori Balayan on February 27, the General Secretary lent a sympathetic ear. He promised that he would personally supervise an implementation of reforms in Nagorno Karabakh as a part of a general solution to the Soviet Union's various nationality problems. Gorbachev promised, according to Kaputikyan, to make sure the "autonomous republics receive more freedom", and concluded by pledging to "create great conditions for the flourishing of culture and the economy" (Cullen, p. 65). But Gorbachev stopped short of promising a constitutional mechanism by which the desire of the people of Nagorno Karabakh for union with Armenia could be fulfilled.

Gorbachev's tactic succeeded. News of Gorbachev's commitment to unspecified reform was sufficient to cool the political temperature in Stepanakert and Yerevan. High hopes were pinned on Gorbachev and his commitment to *perestroika*.

When put to the test in Nagorno Karabakh, Gorbachev's concept of *perestroika* proved to be bankrupt. *Perestroika* had little to offer the Soviet Union's oppressed nationalities. On March 21, the number-two man in the Kremlin hierarchy and co-architect of Gorbachev's reforms, Alexander Yakovlev, revealed to Andrei Sakharov the limits of *perestroika*. When asked by the distinguished physicist and human rights activist why the Kremlin did not announce immediately that the wishes of the Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh were justified and would be fulfilled, Yakovlev replied:

"The national structure of the state can't be changed in any respect. Any revision would create a dangerous precedent; there are too many flash points where ethnic passions could explode. And besides, the particular case of Nagorno Karabakh is incredibly complex. The four hundred thousand Armenians living in Azerbaijan are to all intents and purposes hostages. The Caucasus is flooded with arms, they're being brought across the border in great quantities. One match would be sufficient to ignite a firestorm." (Sakharov, p. 49)

Two days after Sakharov's meeting with Yakovlev, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR passed a resolution rejecting the transfer of Nagorno Karabakh to Armenia. The resolution was standard Marxist-Leninist window dressing. The Presidium made a vague pledge to "solve the urgent problems of the economic, social and cultural development" of Nagorno Karabakh. But instead of looking for solutions based on the will of the people, the Presidium declared it "inadmissible to strive to solve complex national and territorial problems by exercising pressure on the organs of state power . . ." The Presidium also ominously threatened "administrative and penal proceedings" against those acting contrary to its policy. The Presidium's solution was for the Soviet Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan to "improve their mass political and educational work amongst the population, always using Leninist principles as the basis for the nationalities policy and for friendship and unity between the peoples of the USSR." (Walker, 1991, p. 131)

The Presidium's resolution had a powerful impact in Armenia and Azerbaijan. In Armenia the widely-held illusions about *perestroika* were shattered. Both in Karabakh and in Armenia it became clear that the deliverance of the Armenian enclave from Azerbaijan

would not come as a gift from the Soviet leadership. The Presidium's decision emboldened the leaders of the Azeri-Turks to intensify their efforts to crush the aspirations of the Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh. Henceforth the Azerbaijani authorities in Baku viewed the Soviet Union's conservative organs of repression – i.e. the KGB, the Interior Ministry and the army – as their natural allies against the Armenians who were striving to overturn Stalin's settlement of the Karabakh question.

The December 1988 earthquake forced Gorbachev to turn once again his attention to the Karabakh issue. The Soviet leader was forced to cut short a trip to the United States and visit the scene of the disaster. Instead of evoking sympathy, the tragedy of the Armenians had a negative effect on him. Andrei Sakharov recalled:

“Gorbachev's trip to the disaster area didn't go well. He was harangued by a desperate, grieving people with nothing left to lose. He may have hoped that the earthquake would at least dispose of the Karabakh issue, but that didn't happen. Unfortunately, Gorbachev's reaction was irritable – I would even call it childishly peevish – and not sufficiently sensitive to the tragic circumstances. He spoke about bearded men, but a beard in Armenia is a sign of mourning.” (Sakharov, II, p. 79)

Hard on the heels of Gorbachev's disagreeable visit to Armenia, the leaders of the opposition Karabakh Committee were arrested in a futile bid to bolster the plummeting authority of Armenia's Communist Party. Gorbachev's next move was to suspend the Supreme Soviet of Nagorno Karabakh. Following its resolution in favour of union with Armenia in February 1988, the enclave's Supreme Soviet had replaced its Baku-appointed leadership with one committed to ending its subservience to Azerbaijan. On July 12, it voted to secede from Azerbaijan, and henceforth govern the enclave without reference to the Azeri-Turk authorities in Baku. Thus on January 12, 1989 the Kremlin placed Nagorno Karabakh under its own direct rule. The administration of Karabakh was placed in the hands of a nine-member commission headed by the Russian Arkady Volsky. The commission was directly responsible to the central government in Moscow. But while the new arrangement bypassed Baku, the Soviet authorities re-emphasised that the Armenian enclave remained part of Azerbaijan.

Direct rule from Moscow failed to produce more than a temporary relaxation of tension between Armenians and Azeri-Turks. While the commission made some concessions to the Armenians – such as the return to the enclave of several priests – the people of Nagorno Karabakh were deprived of any form of democratic representation. On August 16, 1989, the representatives of the Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh held a constitutional convention and established a National Council to articulate the views of the community. The National Council stood as a rival to the Soviet-imposed special commission. The Kremlin tried to end the stalemate in Nagorno Karabakh by abolishing the special commission and returning Nagorno Karabakh to Azeri-Turk rule on November 28, 1989.

This decision to return Nagorno Karabakh to Azerbaijani rule marked the beginning of a coordinated effort by the KGB and Azerbaijan's communist leadership to destroy the Armenian community. The members of Nagorno Karabakh's National Council were arrested on January 19, 1990. Ten days later, a four-man delegation of Azerbaijani officials arrived in the enclave to establish their authority. The delegation was headed by Viktor Polianichko, the Second Secretary of Azerbaijan's Communist Party, a KGB officer

who reportedly supervised the destruction of villages in Afghanistan. On the day of Polianichko's arrival in Karabakh, strict censorship was imposed and the enclave's only Armenian daily was closed down. Within a week, dozens of Armenian leaders were behind bars on Polianichko's orders. On February 2, Azeri-Turk units attacked Armenian villages in the Shaumyan district. The next day Armenians of two villages in the district received an ultimatum from the Azerbaijani Popular Front to leave their homes so that Azeri-Turk refugees could be settled there. Polianichko's rule was backed by Soviet Interior Ministry troops under the command of Major-General Safonov and OMON units under the command of Azerbaijan's Interior Ministry. Attacks on Armenian villages increased in the guise of weapons searches. On May 25, 3,000 protested peacefully in Stepanakert against the strong-arm tactics of the Soviet and Azeri-Turk authorities. Soviet troops broke up the demonstration with batons. In August 2,000 armed Azeri-Turks entered Stepanakert and conducted house-to-house searches and made arbitrary arrests. On November 18, Azeri-Turk troops attacked four Armenian villages near the Lachin corridor.

At the end of 1990 an Armenian social worker reported on conditions in the enclave to the Helsinki Watch human rights organization in New York:

"The capital's (Stepanakert's -ed.) phone lines are turned off, and the water is systematically poisoned, with the Azeris putting sewer water and bacteria in the drinking water. In addition, the roads to the villages – the food lifeline to the capital – are cut off. The Azeri government does, but the Soviet government knows. The Soviet troops and the Azeri militia are working together... The Azeri depopulation program is systematically going on in Shaumyan, Khanlar, Gamo, Azad and Bertatzor, with already 10,000 Armenian refugees, most going to overburdened Stepanakert or Armenia. Simultaneously, houses for Azeris are mushrooming all over the area in an effort by Azeri authorities to change the demographics." (Balian, p. 55)

The year 1990 closed with the familiar spectre of genocide looming above Nagorno Karabakh's Armenian community.

### **The Sakharov Mission**

The eruption of the crisis in Nagorno Karabakh in February 1988 coincided with the first serious doubts entertained by the Nobel Peace Prize winner, Andrei Sakharov, about Gorbachev's *perestroika* policy. He saw in the Kremlin's Karabakh policy, which he regarded as "unjust, one-sided and provocative", the seeds of *perestroika*'s failure (Sakharov, p. 46). He was struck by its flagrant disregard for basic principles of human rights. If Gorbachev intended to restructure the Soviet Union on the basis of the principles that underpinned his policy on Nagorno Karabakh, the outlook would be very bleak indeed, Sakharov thought. Within a month of the Sumgait massacre, Sakharov wrote in protest to Gorbachev and presented the case for an end to Azerbaijani rule in Nagorno Karabakh at a meeting with the Politburo member Alexander Yakovlev.

In the run-up to the session of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet on Nagorno Karabakh scheduled for July 1988, Sakharov initiated a campaign to end the enclave's subordination to Azerbaijan, and, as an interim measure, place its administration directly under the supervision of the central authorities in Moscow. In his first Soviet television appearance

since his release from house arrest in 1986, the former dissident spoke about Nagorno Karabakh on the popular programme 'The Fifth Wheel'. But all his remarks about the conflict were cut from the broadcast. Yakovlev, who was the most progressive member of the Soviet leadership, confirmed to Sakharov that the party reserved the right under *glasnost* to censor information that it deemed "dangerous".

The inauspicious outcome of the July session of the Presidium did not deter Sakharov from working toward a just settlement of the Karabakh question, which he regarded as a litmus test of the viability of Gorbachev's reforms. The Kirovabad pogrom and the ensuing deportations from Azerbaijan and Armenia motivated him to intensify his efforts. While travelling in the United States in November 1988, Sakharov warned that the "Armenian people are again facing the threat of genocide", and called on the Soviet authorities to implement a four-point programme:

- 1) The publication of complete and objective information about events in Azerbaijan and Armenia and permission for journalists to work without restriction in the region – i.e. a genuine application of *glasnost*.
- 2) The stationing of sufficient troops in Azerbaijan to defend the Armenian population.
- 3) Permission for Armenians in Nagorno Karabakh and Azerbaijan to organize self-defense units.
- 4) The termination of Azerbaijan's control over the administration of Nagorno Karabakh and the introduction of provisional administrative supervision by the central government in Moscow. (Balian, 1991, p.22-23)

In December 1988, Sakharov briefed the UN Secretary General, Perez de Cuellar, and President Mitterand in Paris about Nagorno Karabakh and encouraged them to work for a just solution on the international level. At the end of the month Sakharov led a group of academics on a fact-finding mission to Azerbaijan, Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh. One of the aims of the group was to get reactions to a peace plan calling on both Armenia and Azerbaijan to trade territory on the basis of the nationality of the majority of inhabitants.

In Baku, Sakharov's group met with the members of Azerbaijan's Academy of Sciences and other prominent Azeri-Turk intellectuals. The meeting soon degenerated from a routine Soviet-style propaganda exercise to a shouting match. Sakharov recalled:

"The session was depressing. One after another, scientists and writers spoke at length, some sentimentally, others aggressively, about the friendship of peoples and its value. They assured us that no real problem existed in Nagorno Karabakh, that it had always been Azerbaijani territory and that the issue was invented by Abel Aganbegian (an Armenian, and one of Gorbachev's chief economic advisers) and the journalist Zori Balayan and kept alive by extremists. Moreover, any past mistakes had been corrected after the July session of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet: all that was needed for the restoration of complete peace was the imprisonment of Genrikh Pogonian, the recently-elected first secretary of Nagorno Karabakh.

The audience didn't want to listen to Batkin and Zubov (two of Sakharov's companions – ed.) when they spoke about holding a referendum. They were continually interrupted, and Academician Zia



Buniatov (a staunchly nationalistic Azeri-Turk historian – ed.) was particularly belligerent. In speaking of Sumgait, he tried to depict the pogrom there as a provocation initiated by Armenian extremists and black-market speculators seeking to exacerbate the situation. He emphasised the participation of some man with an Armenian surname. When he interrupted Batkin in an insulting manner, I called Buniatov to order . . . Lusia (Sakharov's wife, Elena Bonner – ed.) supported me energetically, and then Buniatov attacked her . . . shouting that (she – ed.) had been brought here to take notes. 'So sit and write, and don't talk'." (Sakharov, p. 81)

On the same day the Sakharov group had a highly-charged encounter with Azeri-Turk refugees from Armenia. Several hundred peasants had been assembled in an auditorium and the speakers among them, Sakharov noted, appeared to have been carefully screened. Their tragic stories were of beating, burning, looting and deportation. Many testified to the participation of the Armenian police and Communist Party officials. Sakharov concluded that, despite some obvious fabrications, a "great tragedy" had befallen the Azeri-Turk deportees.

The next day the group held talks with the newly-appointed First Secretary of the Azerbaijani Communist Party, Abdul-Rakhman Vezirov. The meeting was virtually a monologue with the verbose Vezirov claiming that he had improved interethnic relations and denying that there were any unresolved problems with Azerbaijan's Armenian minority. Towards the end of the meeting, Elena Bonner intervened and spoke from the heart:

"You speak of friendship with the Armenians", she said. "They've suffered a great national tragedy. Thousands of people lost relatives, their possessions. The very existence of the Armenian nation is threatened." Then she proposed: "Eastern people are famed for their generosity. Do something noble – give Karabakh to Armenia, a gift to a friend in need. The whole world will be awed by this act. It will be remembered for generations!" (Sakharov, p. 83-4)

Vezirov's answer revealed a powerful attitude that militates against a peaceful settlement of the conflict. Sakharov records: "'Land isn't given,' he said disdainfully. 'It's conquered.' (He may have added, 'by blood', but I'm not absolutely certain of that.)" (Sakharov, p. 84)

From Baku, Sakharov's group flew to Yerevan. They arrived a fortnight after the Armenian earthquake. This tragedy had a profound effect on the Armenians. Sakharov found them in "a state of shock and panic, almost mass psychosis" (Sakharov, p. 84). As in Baku, Sakharov met in Yerevan with prominent political leaders and academic figures. But it was the post-earthquake relief work and consultations about the safety of Armenia's Medzamor nuclear reactor rather than Karabakh that was the focus of Sakharov's attention there. Nevertheless, he was able to ascertain that the Armenians were not willing to consider abandoning Shusha to Azerbaijan as part of a compromise settlement, and that the Armenian deportees from Azerbaijan had been subjected to horrifying treatment.

Sakharov's group flew from Yerevan to Nagorno Karabakh. The pattern of meetings was similar to those in Baku and Yerevan. Two of Sakharov's companions, the ethnographer Galina Starovoitova and Zori Balayan, were not allowed to accompany him to a meeting with Azeri-Turks in Shusha because of fears for their safety. Sakharov's Soviet communist host, Arkady Volsky, skillfully managed to keep passions under control by periodi-

cally reminding the agitated Azeri-Turks of the misdeeds of members of their own community. After the meeting in Shusha, Sakharov and his group were taken to the resort at Topkhana to investigate the allegations that had contributed to the eruption of the Kirovabad pogrom and mass anti-Armenian demonstrations in Baku in November 1988. It was in Topkhana that the sacred grove had been allegedly desecrated by the Armenians and that an environmentally hazardous factory was due to be built, according to the Azerbaijani press. At Topkhana Sakharov viewed the lovely hills peppered with the dachas of the Azerbaijani elite and saw a “rather bare” hill where a camp for the children of the workers of a nearby metalworking factory was due to be built. Sakharov discovered “there was never talk of locating anything ecologically harmful in Topkhana or chopping down a nonexistent grove.” Sakharov was dismayed that such a malicious rumour could produce such deadly results. Sakharov concluded his visit to Nagorno Karabakh with a meeting with the local Armenian community leaders. They informed him that they were opposed to proposals for the separation of Shusha from Nagorno Karabakh, which, in their view, would be an acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the ‘cleansing’ of the town of Armenians. The Armenian community leaders also expressed misgivings about the



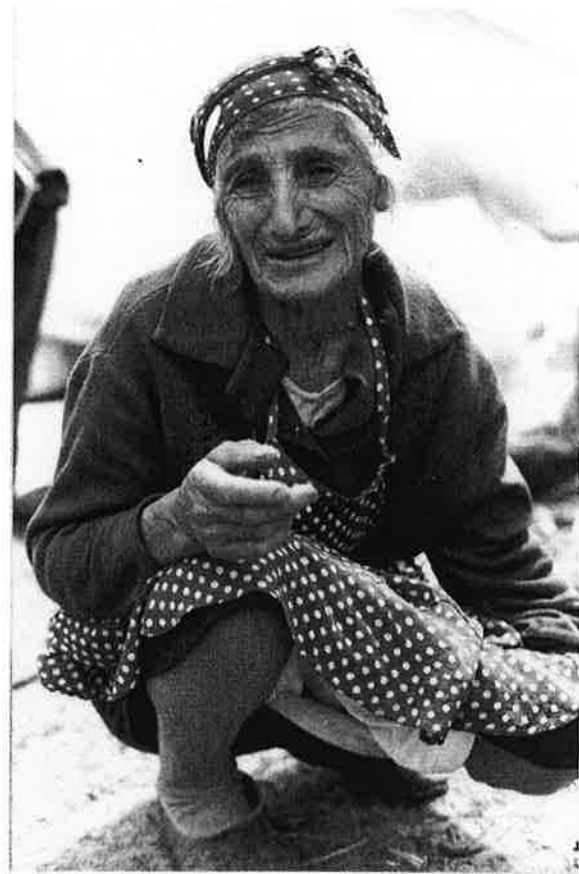
*Refugees from anti-Armenian pogroms in Azerbaijan in 1989. (CSI)*

proposal of direct rule from Moscow. The effect of such a measure, they argued, would be to undermine all the enclave’s existing representative political structures without providing any real guarantees for the defense of basic human rights. Back in Moscow, Sakharov briefed Yakovlev on his trip. But he found that “the authorities weren’t really interested”. (Sakharov, p. 91)

# Operation Ring

In the spring of 1991, the Azeri-Turks embarked on a new type of offensive against the Armenians living in the Autonomous Region of Nagorno Karabakh and in the Shaumyan district to the north. It was called 'Operation Ring'.

Military forces of the 23rd Division of the Soviet 4th Army stationed in Azerbaijan joined in combined operations with Azerbaijani Ministry of Interior (OMON, or 'black beret' forces) to undertake systematic deportations of Armenians. 'Operation Ring' started in late April 1991 with the villages of Getashen and Martunashen. These names will be seared onto the memory of Armenians alongside Baku and Sumgait for the brutality of the suffering inflicted on their people. The operations, carried out against vulnerable villagers, were remarkable for their ferocity. The pattern established in Getashen and Martunashen was later repeated against other villages in the Shaumyan district and elsewhere in Nagorno Karabakh.



*Destitute refugee from northern Nagorno Karabakh. (CSI)*

Typically, the deportation exercise would begin with Soviet 4th Army troops surrounding the villages with tanks and armoured personnel carriers; military helicopters would hover low overhead. Once the village was surrounded by Soviet troops, the Azerbaijani OMON would move in and start harassing the villagers. They would round up men, women and children, usually on a pretext such as a 'passport check'. Many acts of brutality were committed: men were assaulted and killed; women were raped, children maltreated; civilians abducted as hostages. Azeri-Turk citizens from nearby villages would come with pick-up trucks and cars, looting, pillaging and stealing everything from household goods to livestock. The Armenian villagers were then driven off their land, being forced to live as displaced people either elsewhere in Nagorno Karabakh or in Armenia.

## Sakharov Memorial Congress

The deportations of Operation Ring led to the first direct involvement of the international community in the Nagorno Karabakh crisis. For the tragedies of Getashen and Martunashen coincided with the First International Andrei Sakharov Memorial Congress being held in Moscow. One of the participants in the group of experts discussing 'Human Rights and Injustice on a Mass Scale' was Dr. Zori Balayan, who was the elected

representative for Nagorno Karabakh on the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. His account of the deportations was so convincing that the Memorial Congress was persuaded of the gravity of the violations of human rights which they entailed. It was therefore decided that an independent, international delegation should be sent by the Memorial Congress to the region to investigate the situation.

The delegation consisted of 15 members from the USA, Japan, Norway, the UK and Russia. It must be emphasised that each member embarked on the investigation with no preconceptions or prejudices. In so far as reports and subsequent activities have reflected a sympathy for the Armenians, this does not preclude a sympathy also for the Azeri-Turk victims of the conflict. Indeed, some members of the delegation work with organisations which have sent aid to Azeri-Turk refugees from the war in Nagorno Karabakh. However, following in the footsteps of Andrei Sakharov, most delegates have a commitment to his principle of 'being on the side of the victim'. It has generally been the experience of those of us who have visited Nagorno Karabakh that it is the Armenians of Karabakh who are the primary victims in this tragic situation.

The delegates were unanimous in their conclusions, published in a communique. Excerpts are reprinted here:

"Membership of Delegation: Anton Andresen, Norway; Robert Arsenault, USA; Baroness Caroline Cox, UK (Leader of Delegation); Caroline Croft, USA; Felice Gaer, USA; Alexander Goldin, USSR, Secretary of the Organizing Committee, First International Andrei Sakharov Memorial Congress; Scott Horton, USA; Miiko Kataoko, Japan; David Leopold, USA; Dr. John Marks, UK; Shin-ichi Masagaki, Japan; William Miller, USA; Yuri Samodurov, USSR, Executive Director of the Organizing Committee, First International Andrei Sakharov Memorial Congress; Alexej Semyonov, USA; Professor Richard Wilson, USA.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

On the basis of interviews and observations at 16 different sites in both Armenia and Azerbaijan (because of the complex situation we wished to hear the views of both the Armenians and the Azeris), and of interviews within Yerevan with hospital patients, relatives of prisoners, and Government officials, we believe that serious violations of human rights and of Soviet and international law have occurred and are still occurring. Our concerns include:

1. **Killings:** e.g. eye-witness accounts of a man shot in the throat 30 times in front of his pregnant wife whom he was trying to defend from a beating; a priest shot while remonstrating with soldiers, who accused him of paramilitary activities. We were also given accounts of multiple killings in several villages.
2. **Beatings, Torture and Physical Assault:** e.g. a paralysed, bed-ridden elderly man shot in the legs in front of his elderly wife (whom we met), who was forced to leave him behind; many instances of rape and beating. In the presence of Soviet soldiers, a frail elderly woman (whom we met), forced at gunpoint to stand in a barrel and beaten on the head, was asked to identify 'bandits' and threatened with decapitation. Soldiers mutilated ears of girls and young women while ripping off their ear-rings.
3. **Forced Deportation:** Hundreds of villagers were forced at gun point to leave all their belongings and sign letters of 'voluntary' consent to deportation. One whole village was deported at night and the people left over the border in the pouring rain at midnight with no possessions. We are concerned that new forced deportations may be imminent. We urge that they should not occur and that atrocities should not be repeated.
4. **Abduction and Imprisonment:** Many examples, including 2 doctors sent to provide medical care who were abducted, imprisoned and beaten daily (photographic evidence of maltreatment available).

**5. Destruction of Homes, Looting and Theft of Livestock:** Tanks, shell and helicopter fire used to destroy homes; gasoline used to burn property. An 80 year-old man was burnt in his home. Livestock, automobiles and other property were confiscated or taken with humiliating offers of derisory payment (such as 3 roubles for a car).

**6. Destruction of Churches, Schools and other Public Buildings.**

**7. Murder, Abduction and Accounts of Imprisonment of Law Enforcement Officers:** This has created a state of fear. We met relatives of many militiamen and civilians who had been abducted. We are concerned over their grief and urge that an immediate effort should be made to release those held or to assure that they stand trial according to fair legal procedures. This matter was raised with Marshal D. Yazov this morning who said he would look into it.

In a visit to Azerbaijan across the border from the northern Armenian village of Voskepar, a group of six delegates walked across the border to meet the Azeris there and to hear their version of events. No villager had walked this road for a month; the Armenians tried to discourage us because it was too dangerous. We had discussions with villagers on both sides, who had been friendly two years ago. The major on the Azeri side said there had been many family tragedies; but that is no excuse for revenge. All were happy that we took the effort to understand them.

On May 6, 1991, eleven Armenian militiamen were killed near Voskepar in Armenia by shots probably from a helicopter. About 14 were taken prisoner. There are other prisoners. The Azeris claim that the Armenian militiamen are bandits – the Armenians call them a legal local defence force. We do not want to interfere in internal affairs, but it is vital to notice the civil rights issues involved. The Armenian village has no one to defend them, we saw no guns and there was no Soviet army present – whereas in the Azeri village we counted over 6 submachine guns and many OMON troops, and there is also a Soviet Army headquarters. The recent damage all came from the Azeri side . . .

### **Additional Contribution to Press Conference**

Reports corroborated by official sources confirm that R. Mamedov, First Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs of Azerbaijan, chairmen of rayispolkoms (district council executives – ed.), district chiefs of militia and KGB, and other local officials were present (at the deportations – ed.) and directed aspects of the operation. Inhabitants' requests for military protection went unheeded. In particular, Colonel Zhukov, Soviet Military Commandant of Nagorno Karabakh, responded that he could do nothing. Before and during the operations residents were forced by the OMON to sign statements of 'voluntary' departure, often by torture, beatings and death threats. The evidence suggests that many were forced to depart without signing anything. Those who signed were often told to address their statements to Mr. Polianichko, Second Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan.

### **Conclusions**

Internal troops subordinated to the Soviet MVD (Interior Ministry) have conducted actions co-ordinated with Azerbaijani OMON forcibly to deport entire villages, often brutalizing civilians, including women, children, and elderly persons. Gross violation of internationally guaranteed human rights have been found, in clear violation of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights and other international agreements to which the USSR is a signatory. We found credible and compelling evidence that additional deportations and related abuses are being planned by Azerbaijani and Soviet authorities and are imminent unless immediate action is taken to prevent them."

### **Additional visit by some of the group of experts from the International Delegation to Baku, May 30 – June 1, 1991**

"On May 30, 1991 five persons (two staff members, two foreign participants, and one foreign journalist) travelled to Azerbaijan under the aegis of the First Andrei Sakharov Memorial Congress. In a letter presented to Azerbaijani leaders, we requested meetings with the the leaders of Azerbaijan, including the Azerbaijani President. We requested visits to the following areas: villages of the Shusha and Gadrut districts of Nagorno Karabakh, from which large numbers of Armenians have fled, villages of the Shaumyan district and to the cities of Stepanakert and Khodjaly. While our requests were presented repeatedly during our visit, including to Azerbaijani President A. Mutalibov and Dr. A. Dashdamirov, Chairman of the Permanent Commission on State Sovereignty of the Supreme Soviet of the Azerbaijani Republic, the only request that was met was a series of meetings with leaders and officials of Azerbaijan. Our request to visit specific areas of conflict was denied.

## Findings

In a meeting with President Mutalibov and Dr. Dashdamirov, we found these officials to be justifying current deportations and unwilling to exclude future deportations of Armenians from Nagorno Karabakh. The aim of this policy of deportation is to make Armenian authorities abolish a decree adopted by the Supreme Soviet of Armenia according to which 'Armenia agrees to incorporate the Autonomous Region of Nagorno Karabakh at the request of the latter'. The aim of the policy of forced deportations is to 'clear the area of bases used by Armenian paramilitary troops'.

We also had meetings with representatives of the Azerbaijani intelligentsia who expressed unanimous concern that public opinion in the USSR and abroad, which strongly condemned deportations of Armenians, was not strong enough in condemning the deportations of Azerbaijanis which took place in 1988. The President of Azerbaijan and members of the Azerbaijani intelligentsia are concerned that world public opinion had been unduly influenced by an 'Armenian lobby'.

No official with whom we met denied the possibility that Azerbaijani OMON forces are engaged in atrocities, including killing, looting and banditry, and brutality and violence directed against women, children, and the elderly.

David W Leopold Esq; Robert L Arsenault Jr; Yuri Samodurov; Alexander E Goldin"

## Follow-Up Visit to Azerbaijan, Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh, July 1991

Given the concern expressed by the Andrei Sakharov Memorial Congress delegation following the visit in May 1991, a follow-up mission was arranged in July. In keeping with the group's commitment to impartiality, it was agreed that this visit should start in Azerbaijan, in order to hear the Azeri-Turk version of events, before speaking to Armenians.

Excerpts of the report of this visit are presented here:

"For the first time an international delegation was admitted to Nagorno Karabakh, interviewed Armenian detainees in Azerbaijani prisons, visited villages where deportations have occurred, and met local population, republican and local officials, military officials, deportees and refugees. The delegation was flown from Baku to Yerevan on an Armenian plane; no plane has flown this route for three years.

Since our first visit, tension in the region has escalated, with current mass deportations of Armenians, especially from the Shaumyan district. The populations of three Armenian villages of Shaumyan district (Erketch, Buzlukh, Monachuk) have been deported during our stay in the area.

We conclude that grave violations of human rights are still occurring. We identified four major areas of concern: Forced Deportations; Detentions; Harrassment of Civilians; Azerbaijani Special Forces – OMON

### 1. Forced Deportations

Forced deportations continue in the Armenian villages in and around Nagorno Karabakh. Villages in the Shaumyan region are this week surrounded by soldiers and Azerbaijani OMON forces and the population is being forcibly deported.

Azerbaijani officials, including President Mutalibov, and Azerbaijani Communist Party Second Secretary Polyanichko continue to justify these deportations as voluntary departures. Evidence shows that the deportations are brutally enforced. They involve loss of life, property and physical injury.

In our travels to the formerly Armenian villages of Kirov (Bertadzor district) and Dolanlar (Gadrut district) we interviewed new residents and confirmed that the villages are now populated by Azeris. All those we interviewed were refugees from Armenia.

## 2. Detentions

We received reports of recent detentions of Armenians in Nagorno Karabakh. We were pleased to note that some Azerbaijanis and Armenians have been released.

We received direct testimony from recently released detainees and persons under current detention in Nagorno Karabakh. In Kirovakan, Armenia, we met eleven recently released Armenian militiamen who vividly described their detention by Soviet MVD troops, and their incarceration in Ganja (formerly Kirovabad) Prison in Azerbaijan. They suffered daily beating, displaying bruises and contusions. They described brutal prison conditions including the deprivation of water and the provision of excessively salty food to exacerbate thirst.

In Shusha Prison in Nagorno Karabakh we met eighteen ethnic Armenian prisoners, not of our choice. None of the detainees had had any contact with next-of-kin since their arrest, nor access to counsel. Some of the prisoners did not know why they were being held. At least one of the detainees had bruises and contusions on his back, which suggested the possibility of recent beatings.

In Baku we visited Bailovsky Prison where we spoke with four Armenians from Nagorno Karabakh. Detention far from home appears to limit access to counsel of choice and the ability of relatives and friends to attend trials.

Finally, in Stepanakert we received evidence of the detention of Armenians whose whereabouts are currently unknown.”

## 3. Abuse and Harassment of Civilians

(Not original text; a summary of evidence) Members of the delegation heard evidence of maltreatment of civilians in both Azeri-Turk and Armenian villages. They also visited one of the villages from which Armenians had been forcibly deported and which had been repopulated by Azeri civilians. Some expressed regret that they were living in homes which only six weeks previously had been inhabited by Armenians. Others expressed hatred of Armenians and claimed this was revenge for the treatment meted out to them by Armenians during the retaliatory actions in Yerevan following the Baku and Sumgait pogroms.

Examples of evidence taken from Armenian deportees in Stepanakert:

“An old lady, who gave her name as Agopion Yevgagna: On May 15, 1991 helicopters came to her village. There were only 11 villagers present. The soldiers rounded them up and asked to be shown the weapons that they were hiding. They replied that they had none. Some local Azerbaijani villagers then arrived and together they forced the 11 Armenians to go outside the village. They made the Armenians stand together pair by pair and then changed pairs so that husband and wife and mother and son were no longer standing together. They then shot dead two of the women and two men including Mrs. Agopion’s husband. When she and other survivors went to pick up the bodies, two more villagers were shot dead. Mrs. Agopion broke down and said she now had no husband and no property. The only thing in the world she had was a document, which she gave us, recording the property that she had lost. She could not return to her village.

A young woman aged 20, Mrs. Barsegian from the Berdadzor region: Mrs. Barsegian said that on May 13, 1991 at 6:00 a.m., Soviet Interior Ministry troops and Azerbaijani OMON surrounded and entered the village to check passports. They tied her husband and her brother-in-law’s hands and threw them into a bus. They gave her a document which they insisted she should sign saying she was ready to leave the village voluntarily. She signed because she was terrified. She has one 14 month-old child. A soldier approached her child and took hold of its head and said: ‘You are Armenian and therefore I must cut out your tongue.’ She attacked the soldier and fought him off. The interpreter asked her whether she had been raped and she remained silent. Several voices were raised in the hall to tell her to admit that she had been raped because we needed to know. She then admitted that the soldier had raped her but that they had left the baby alone. Her husband and brother-in-law are still in jail.

An old man from Medschen, an invalid: On May 14, 1991, helicopters and Azerbaijani OMON came to his village and struck him. He asked why and they said, ‘you’ll get worse soon’. All the men’s hands were tied together and they were thrown in a van and driven off. He had a friend in the room who was also old and an invalid who was also beaten. There were 20 men in the bus altogether. They beat the young men so that they can no longer have children. The other man then came and confirmed the story.”

## OMON

“We found evidence of much abuse by OMON troops during deportations. We (the delegation) were personally harrassed by OMON troops at Stepanakert airport. Five residents of Stepanakert on our plane from Yerevan on July 16 were arrested on arrival. When we protested troops threatened us.”

### **Another issue raised on both visits was concern over the Closure and Destruction of Churches.**

“One member of the delegation spoke in Yerevan on July 16 to Bishop Parkev Martirosian, Bishop of Karabakh (Artsakh) of the Armenian Apostolic Church. In 1805 when Karabakh was part of the Russian Empire there were 1,311 churches and monasteries. In 1923 Nagorno Karabakh was handed over to Azerbaijan. Churches began to be closed immediately. He has the last letter of the Bishop of Karabakh in 1931 to the church’s headquarters in Echmiadzin affirming that there were then 112 churches and 18 monasteries. Six months later all were closed. In 1989, he opened a few churches and monasteries with permission from Moscow (Baku said ‘no’). On 21 November, 1990 Baku took the decision to close all Karabakh churches. The decision was published in the Azerbaijani press. They claimed that Moscow was not entitled to authorise the opening of churches. The Catholicos (head) of the Armenian church had written to various bodies for more than 20 years seeking approval to open churches in Karabakh when there were none.

Last September came the attack on Amaras church, within two days of its official opening. The monastery of St. Grigoris dates from the 4th century. Even before then the church had been attacked. It was rendered unusable and finally closed on 15 May, 1991. Gandsasar Monastery (13th century) is the main Karabakh religious site and seat of the bishop. On 6 July it was raided by Soviet soldiers and OMON troops allegedly looking for guns. Papers were checked and a thorough search, including the raiding of graves, took place.”

## **Operation Ring Concludes**

The era of brutal deportations came to an end when the Soviet leadership changed in August 1991. Under President Yeltsin, the Soviet troops were required to adopt a more impartial peace-keeping role and their combined operations with Azerbaijani OMON forces consequently ceased. This gives credence to the view frequently put to the international delegations that the deportations had been used to serve two purposes. Firstly, they were a punishment imposed by President Gorbachev and the ‘centre’ of the USSR for Armenia’s stated wish to secede from the Union. Secondly, they served Azerbaijan’s purpose of beginning to clear Nagorno Karabakh of its Armenian population, as a preliminary to repopulating the land with Azeri-Turks. The Armenians viewed this policy with great alarm, seeing in it the beginnings of a process such as that which had occurred in Nakhichevan, whose substantial Armenian population had been forced out, leaving it an almost entirely Azeri-Turk territory.

The effects of the deportations did not end when the operation ceased. Many of the deportees are still homeless, living in conditions of great deprivation either in Nagorno Karabakh, still under siege, or in Armenia. Conditions in Armenia have since become desperate, with the blockades imposed by Azerbaijan and Turkey reducing the nation to its knees economically. There are also many hundreds of thousands still homeless from the earthquake of December 1988. Therefore, the plight of the people displaced by the 1991 deportations is very serious and the gross violations of human rights inflicted on them are still causing severe suffering. This is a factor in the contemporary political equation which cannot be ignored.



# The Post-Soviet Conflict

During the summer of 1991, the Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh, in an attempt to be conciliatory, indicated a willingness to rescind their appeal for reunification with Armenia and to agree to live within the territorial boundaries of Azerbaijan. Also in 1991, the situation looked temporarily more hopeful as the international community intervened with the constructive initiative culminating in the Zheleznovodsk Agreement of September 23, 1991. The signatories were the Presidents of Russia, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Among the agreements reached were an end to the blockades by Azerbaijan, a ceasefire, an exchange of hostages and an opening up of normal channels of communication and transport. Unfortunately, these peace-promoting proposals were not implemented: the blockades continued unabated and Nagorno Karabakh remained a besieged, bombarded little enclave. In the autumn, the political situation deteriorated when Azerbaijan, appearing to see conciliation as a sign of Armenian weakness, announced that it would formally rescind Nagorno Karabakh's long-established autonomous status, which had been imparted when it was placed as a region within Azerbaijan in the 1920's. Azerbaijan also proclaimed its intention of renaming the capital of Nagorno Karabakh, Stepanakert, with a Turkish name.

The Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh were intensely alarmed by these announcements and the intentions which they perceived lay behind them. The spectre of the great genocide in Turkey, the massacres in Transcaucasia and the 'ethnic cleansing' of Nakhichevan loomed menacingly near, with fear for the impending loss of their ancient homeland. Perceiving the imminent demise of any measure of autonomy and the associated threat to their viable existence, they felt obliged to resort to measures for self-protection and survival.

## Referendum and Elections in Nagorno Karabakh

The population of Nagorno Karabakh in the autumn of 1991 consisted of approximately 180,000 people, of whom about 75% were Armenians and 25% Azeri-Turks. When the leaders of Nagorno Karabakh perceived that their future as an autonomous enclave was in danger, the only democratic solution they could envisage was to hold a referendum, with a view to the possibility of declaring independence from Azerbaijan. Arrangements gave every citizen a chance to vote. The Azeri-Turks boycotted the vote, but the overwhelming majority of Armenians (over 90%) voted, and over 90% of these voted in favour of independence. With this mandate, the leaders went ahead with a General Election for a Parliament, which included a proportional representation of seats for the Azeri-Turkic population. Again the Azeri-Turks boycotted, but the rest of the seats were filled and the Parliament was opened, with prayers by the Bishop of Karabakh, Parkev Martirosian, in January 1992.

These developments were greeted with anger by the rulers of Azerbaijan, who proceeded to escalate military offensives in an attempt to quell this unilateral declaration of independence. Their task was made easier as the Soviet Army forces were being withdrawn by President Yeltsin. As they withdrew, Azerbaijani armed forces and OMON moved into

take their place. Karabakh became an open battlefield, with the civilians trapped inside, besieged, blockaded and bombarded.

### **Escalation of the Military Offensive**

The following account is based on first-hand evidence obtained during ten humanitarian missions to Nagorno Karabakh in 1992-93.

1992 was a year of unparalleled military onslaught against civilian populations. There has been massive bloodshed on both sides. For the Armenians of Karabakh, their predicament has been exacerbated by the tightening of the blockade, which cut off virtually all essential supplies, including water, energy, fuel, food and medicines.

**January 1992:** When the Andrei Sakharov Foundation combined with Christian Solidarity International (CSI) to mount two visits to Nagorno Karabakh in January 1992, delegates were shocked by the deterioration in the situation. Stepanakert was under constant bombardment by shelling and Alazan rockets from the Azeri-Turks based in Shusha, the hill-top fortress town towering above, only 3 miles away. The Armenians living in Stepanakert had to spend almost the whole time sheltering in basements and cellars in appalling conditions. With no light, heat or energy, they huddled in the dark, in sub-zero temperatures, with no running water, no sanitation, no proper ventilation. As the electricity had been cut off by the Azeri-Turks, the only water for the 82,000 inhabitants of Stepanakert was from 8 spring wells. It took up to 5 hours to walk to and from the wells and to wait with hundreds of others, in the bitter cold, under constant shelling, just to fill 2 buckets. Perhaps worst of all was the lack of adequate medical supplies. In the bombed hospital, we saw patients with severe injuries, such as extensive burns, bilateral amputations, glass in eyes and bullets in spines. The medical staff had no proper anaesthetics or pain-killing drugs; often vodka was all they could give to try to relieve pain. While the CSI team was holding talks with senior government officials in Stepanakert, a message was received from the Azeri-Turk commander based in Shusha announcing that his troops would soon use fearsome GRAD multiple-missile rocket launchers against the civilians of Stepanakert and surrounding villages. This news instilled real fear into the Armenians, for GRAD launchers fire 40 powerful rockets in one volley; and each rocket can devastate a multistorey building. The toll of civilian casualties would inevitably rise steeply.

**March 1992:** When the next CSI consignment of aid was taken to Karabakh in March, the situation had deteriorated further. Stepanakert was being steadily devastated. Many buildings were reduced to rubble. Others, still standing, with a facade of normality, were shattered inside when GRAD rockets penetrated a wall, imploding inside, often causing terrible casualties. On one typical day in that month, we counted 400 GRAD rockets raining down from Shusha onto the civilians of Stepanakert, between 7am and 4pm. Each day, casualties included women and children, lacerated by the razor-sharp shrapnel.

It was not only Stepanakert which was targeted. On one day, it was clear that a nearby village, Shosh, was under GRAD attack. As part of CSI's remit is to show solidarity with the victims of oppression, some of the delegation visited Shosh and witnessed at first hand

the destruction wrought by a GRAD attack. The village had been under fire since 7am. As we approached, we saw animals in farm-yards lying mutilated and dismembered by the rockets. In the village, there were human casualties among the rubble of homes demolished by direct hits in the showers of rockets (the weapon is aptly named 'GRAD' – the Russian word for 'hail').

**April 1992:** The Armenians had been subjected to continuing bombardment of their towns and villages. They had, however, captured enough weapons from the ill-disciplined Azeri-Turk troops to enable them to fight back. But, their forces were thinly spread and could not defend the whole of Nagorno Karabakh. Thus many villages were vulnerable to Azeri-Turk offensives and atrocities.



*Stepanakert apartment house: Destroyed by Azerbaijani GRAD rocket. (CSI)*

## **The Armenian Counter-Attack**

**May 1992:** The Karabakh forces achieved two military successes, both necessary for the survival of their people. The first was the capture of the Azeri-Turk stronghold in Shusha: a daunting military operation against a natural fortress set on a rugged mountain. This operation was essential if Stepanakert and all its inhabitants were not to be completely annihilated. With rockets from the GRAD launchers raining down on the Stepanakert, the level of civilian deaths and injuries was becoming increasingly intolerable; and the city was being reduced to rubble. The Armenians of Karabakh were inevitably apprehensive about the losses they would sustain in attacking the hill-top town. In the event, they left open a corridor through which the Azeri-Turks could escape. According to the Armenians, the Azeri-Turks used the escape route with alacrity, offering little resistance.

The second initiative was the opening of a corridor through Azerbaijan, linking Karabakh with Armenia. This was also necessary for survival, as the only lifeline of supplies had been by small 2-ton helicopters or Yak-40 twin-engine jet aircraft. As the Azeri-Turks had missiles which had successfully shot down one of the jet aircraft and several helicopters, the lifeline was becoming increasingly endangered. Consequently, the blockade was becoming more damaging and the people of Nagorno Karabakh faced death by the slow strangulation of essential supplies. Hence the necessity to open an overland route through the town of Lachin and the establishment of a corridor for the transport of food, fuel and medicines and the evacuation of casualties.

The war in Nagorno Karabakh continued to escalate as 1992 progressed. The Azeri-Turks unleashed new and mighty forces against the tiny population of Nagorno Karabakh. By now, the 40,000 Azeri-Turk civilian population had virtually all left, or been driven from, their homes in the enclave, and the remaining 140,000 Armenians were fighting for survival against increasing odds.

**June 1992:** Azerbaijan held a general election and a new government representing the extremist Azerbaijani Popular Front took power. A key feature of the manifesto was the 'settlement' of the Karabakh 'problem'. Hence it was no surprise when shortly after the election the new government unleashed a major military offensive against Nagorno Karabakh. It was aided by at least 40 senior Turkish army officers, who took early retirement to enable them to come to support their Azeri-Turk brothers.

The military offensive was formidable. Villagers from the Shaumyan and Mardakert districts, which were over-run in the offensive, described the attacks. Sudden, simultaneous, massive aerial, tank and GRAD bombardment forced them to flee their homes and villages, with no time to collect goods or livestock. Many left with just the clothes they were wearing, some still in carpet slippers. As they fled to the relative shelter of the mountains and forests, they were still shelled by GRAD and tank artillery fire. Many were killed as they tried to flee. Families were split up; old people died as they tried to make the long 50-mile march to Stepanakert.

A young Armenian mother from the north of Nagorno Karabakh, Mrs. Shoushanik told CSI of her experience during the Azeri-Turk offensive:

"They attacked the village and started cutting the villagers into pieces. I myself heard the screams of a man who was having his head cut off by a saw. Then we took our children and ran away. The next day we returned to the village. The scene was atrocious! People were cut into pieces, their eyes were gouged out, their ears were cut off. We then saw the man whom I had previously seen being decapitated by a saw. The saw was lying next to him and all the blood had flowed out of the body. Another man – our uncle – was tied to the back of a tank and was dragged 500 metres away. After that we fled to Shaumyan. Ten days later the Azeri-Turks did the same things. After that I took the children and fled. We walked for 40 miles. We arrived thirsty and hungry and our clothes in tatters. We couldn't take anything with us. I've seen all these atrocities with my own eyes."

In that military offensive, all Armenians were driven from the Shaumyan and Mardakert districts and the Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh lost 40% of their small enclave. The Azeri-Turk forces came within about 10 miles of Stepanakert, near the town of Askeran. If the tanks had broken through and rolled into Stepanakert, that would have been the end of life for the Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh. Somehow, the small, well-disciplined force representing the 140,000 Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh withstood the massed forces of 7-million-strong Azerbaijan, aided by Turkey.

**August 1992:** On another visit taking humanitarian aid to Nagorno Karabakh, a CSI delegation witnessed a new dimension to the offensive against the people of Nagorno Karabakh: the Azeri-Turks were now using aerial bombardment, with SU 25 bombers dropping 500 kg bombs on the civilians of Stepanakert and surrounding villages.

**October, 1992:** The Azeri-Turks had resorted to even greater violations of the human rights of the people of Nagorno Karabakh: the bombers were now dropping cluster bombs on civilians, with devastating effect and a steep rise in casualties. Many families fled from Stepanakert to join the growing number of refugees from Karabakh seeking haven in Armenia.

The military offensive continued unabated until the end of the year and into 1993. SU 24 and 25 fighter bombers, joined by MIGs continued to attack Stepanakert and villages from Vank in the north to Martuni in the south. Continuing ground offensives along the borders deployed tanks, artillery and GRAD, and new longer-range missiles came into operation, fired from bases beyond the reach of the Nagorno Karabakh defense forces.

### **1993: The Military Offensive Against Nagorno Karabakh Continues**

**January 1993:** A delegation from CSI accompanying another consignment of aid attempted to reach Nagorno Karabakh in order to spend the Armenian Christmas (January 6) with the people there. However a blizzard struck their bus in the mountains in southern Armenia and they were stranded in a snow drift at 7,000 ft. for 24 hours. They were not alone. Many cars were also trapped in that blizzard, in temperatures of -23 C (with the wind-chill factor, the real temperature was -50 C). It was possible to rescue these families from their cars and to enable them to spend that bitterly cold night on the bus; they could not have survived in their own vehicles.

This incident illustrates the fact that the corridor, essential for maintaining a supply route to Nagorno Karabakh, is used and maintained only with great difficulty and danger. It is constantly under attack, and those who use it do so at considerable risk. Vehicles have been hit by rockets from GRAD launchers; others (including a truck in an aid convoy from Elam Ministries, travelling at the same time as CSI in January) have hurtled to destruction over the precipitous edge of that perilous road.

On January 7, after eventually arriving in Stepanakert, the CSI delegation witnessed the latest device used by the Azerbaijanis against the people of Karabakh. At 11 am a loud explosion occurred, caused by a ground-to-air missile detonated to explode over the city. The massive tail-piece with the engine fell in a suburb; the rest of the 9-metre missile shed its potentially lethal shrapnel harmlessly on this occasion. But this new weapon is a deadly device: exploding without warning, its razor-sharp shrapnel can shred any civilians in its path. Azerbaijan has allegedly used about 30 of these weapons against the civilians of Stepanakert.

**February 1993:** An aid convoy sponsored by Elam Ministries took a consignment of food and other supplies to Nagorno Karabakh. They found the situation still critical. The Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh had recently retaken possession of several villages in The Mardakert district which had been overrun by the Azeri-Turks last year. But the casualty rate was high, with many wounded pouring into the field hospitals and into the main hospital in Stepanakert.

The delegation also visited parts of the Mardakert district, including the village of Vank and the mediaeval monastery at Gandsasar. Both places have been repeatedly, and recently, attacked by aerial bombardment. The village is devastated, and the hospital destroyed by bombs. The last air attack was five days prior to the delegation's visit, with repeated bombing by SU 25 fighter-bombers. The monastery has been specifically targeted; the outbuildings have been hit, but to date the monastery itself is intact. The Bishop of Nagorno Karabakh, Parkev Martirosian, described the attempts to destroy the ancient monastery as "an attack on our soul . . . the monastery represents the soul of our people."

However, the morale of the people was also high. The leadership of Nagorno Karabakh has adopted a policy of 'normalization': Stepanakert is being rebuilt, albeit in the context of a paradox. In the main street, opposite the rebuilt Music Academy, there are new air-raid trenches for refuge against the continuing aerial bombardment.

The Minister for Education and Culture affirmed that all children in Nagorno Karabakh now attend school, even though the school buildings have been devastated by GRAD missiles. A university has opened with 3,000 students and some faculty from Yerevan. Yet there is an urgent need for educational material of all kinds. Symbolic of the spirit of the people was the opening of an art exhibition in Stepanakert, displaying paintings and sculptures created during the recent, dark years. Many are powerful in their imagery as well as being aesthetically pleasing. Perhaps most symbolic of all was the play performed in the theatre – one of the few buildings left relatively unscathed by the sustained bombardment. It had been intended to put on one of Shakespeare's plays, but a light comedy had been chosen instead, in order "to bring light and laughter into the darkness". All who saw the comedy, even those visitors who do not understand Armenian, found it hilariously funny and were impressed by the spirit of a people who can create such humour in the midst of great danger and threats to their survival.

## **Atrocities**

One of the ugliest, most tragic aspects of the war in Nagorno Karabakh is the deliberate brutality inflicted over and above the deaths and injuries caused directly by military action.

**Khodjaly:** Many Azeri-Turk civilians died a tragic death during an Armenian assault on Khodjaly – 10 miles north of Stepanakert – on the night of February 25-26, 1992. Khodjaly is the site of Nagorno Karabakh's only airport. It was also, together with Shusha, the main base for Azeri-Turk military operations inside Nagorno Karabakh. It was from Khodjaly and Shusha that most of the GRAD rocket attacks on Stepanakert came. The civilian population of about 6,000 was made up of Azeri- and Mesketian-Turks, the latter having been resettled in Khodjaly after having been deported to Central Asia from northern Transcaucasia by Stalin.

On February 26, the Azerbaijani Interior Ministry released their casualty figures: 100 dead and 250 wounded (COVCAS Bulletin, March 5, 1992). But by the first week of

March the sensation-seeking western press elevated into headline news fresh Azerbaijani government claims that over 1,000 Azeri-Turk civilians had been massacred by the Armenians at Khodjaly (see the *The Times* of March 2, 1993, the *New York Times*, March 3, 1992, *Boston Globe* of March 3 & 5, 1992). There was apparently little effort by western journalists covering the aftermath of the battle to investigate the claims made by Azerbaijani officials or to give equal weight to the account issued by the Armenian authorities in Nagorno Karabakh.

As a result of this partial reporting, the Azeri-Turks and their allies in Turkey have repeatedly used the Khodjaly bloodshed as an excuse for barbarities committed by Azeri-Turks, with the justification that their behaviour is an understandable form of retaliation, given the Armenians' brutality at Khodjaly. When those events are themselves questioned, the reply given by the Azeri-Turk and Turkish officials is that they are only quoting information given in the western press.

Given these circumstances, delegates on a subsequent CSI mission tried to ascertain the Armenian version of events. Some aspects can be independently corroborated; others must always remain a question of the Armenians' word versus that of the Azeri-Turks, and whichever version is more consistent with facts which can be established.

According to the Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh to whom we spoke, it is acknowledged that they had decided to attack the Azeri-Turk town of Khodjaly, although they knew there were still some civilians there. They claim this attack was necessary to protect the civilians of Stepanakert, as Khodjaly was being used as a base for GRAD rocket launchers firing onto the city (this is true). They also claim that they did not want to harm civilians and so they issued advance warning of the attack, requesting the Azeri-Turks to allow any civilians to evacuate. This has been independently corroborated by Russians and by the testimony of Azeri-Turk survivors of the attack. Giving testimony to Helsinki Watch in Baku on April 28, 1992, A.H., an Azeri-Turk woman from Khodjaly stated:

"They (the Armenians – ed.) made an ultimatum... that the Khodjaly people had better leave with a white flag. Alif Gajiev (the head of the Azeri-Turk OMON in Khodjaly – ed.) told us this on February 15, but this didn't frighten me or other people. We never believed they could occupy Khodjaly." (Helsinki Watch, p. 20)

The Armenians claim that when they began to attack, they were concerned about civilians still in the town and tried to negotiate safe passage for them with the Azeri-Turk soldiers. They claim that the Azeri-Turk officers refused this. Moreover, they allege that, as the Azeri-Turk soldiers themselves evacuated, they intermingled with the civilians, firing at such close range that the women and children were caught in the cross-fire, receiving horrible injuries. The testimony of Azeri-Turk survivors corroborates the Armenian account. Twenty-three-year old Hijran Alekpera stated that the mass of civilians fleeing Khodjaly were "surrounded by a ring of defenders. They tried to defend us. They had guns and they would try to shoot back." S.A., a member of the Azeri-Turk OMON testified: "We (the OMON and civilian evacuees – ed.) were shooting and running in the pack, but it was not an organized retreat. We were all mixed together." Another young Azeri-Turk evacuee declared:

“When Armenians saw us they began to shoot. We hid. At the same time Azerbaijanis shot back. They were Azerbaijani OMON. Some of them were with us when we fled.”

Helsinki Watch concluded:

“All Azerbaijanis interviewed who were in this group reported that the militia, still in uniform, and some still carrying their guns, were interspersed with the masses of civilians.” (Helsinki Watch, p. 21)

Subsequently, the Armenians allowed the Azeri-Turk military to return to the area to collect their dead. This gave the Azeri-Turks the evidence of the civilian casualties which provided the basis for the allegations of cold-blooded, calculated Armenian ‘atrocities’. One of the few journalists to probe beneath the surface of what the Azerbaijani authorities presented to the media was T. Mazalova from Czechoslovakia. She had seen two videos of the same collection of Azeri-Turk bodies, one filmed on February 29 and the other on March 2. She observed that the heads had been scalped in the meantime. When she raised the question of this discrepancy with the ex-President of Azerbaijan, Ayaz Mutalibov in April 1992, he declared that the massacre at Khodjaly was “organized” by his political opponents to force his resignation. He found it doubtful that the Armenians would have allowed the Azeri-Turks to collect the bodies had the allegations of a massacre been true (COVCAS Bulletin, April 9, 1992, p. 4). Helsinki Watch published a list of 181 Azeri-Turks, 130 males and 51 females, including 13 children, who were reported by the Azerbaijani parliament to have died during the battle of Khodjaly. (Helsinki Watch, p.23).

**Maragha:** The name of this village is associated with a massacre which never reached the world’s headlines, although at least 45 Armenians died cruel deaths. During the CSI mission to Nagorno Karabakh in April, news came through that a village in the north, in Mardakert region, had been overrun by Azeri-Turks on April 10 and there had been a number of civilians killed. A group went to obtain evidence and found a village with survivors in a state of shock, their burnt-out homes still smouldering, charred remains of corpses and vertebrae still on the ground, where people had their heads sawn off, and their bodies burnt in front of their families. 45 people had been massacred and 100 were missing, possibly suffering a fate worse than death. In order to verify the stories, the delegation asked the villagers if they would exhume the bodies which they had already buried. In great anguish, they did so, allowing photographs to be taken of the decapitated, charred bodies. Later, when asked about publicising about this tragedy, they replied they were reluctant to do so as “we Armenians are not very good at showing our grief to the world”.

We believe it is important to put on record these events and the way in which they have, or have not, been interpreted and portrayed by the people themselves, and by the international media. International public opinion is inevitably shaped by media coverage and the Azeri-Turks certainly won great sympathy through their presentation of the ‘Khodjaly massacre’. Conversely, the Armenians received much criticism and lost a great deal of political support as a result of their alleged behaviour at Khodjaly. The international media did not cover the massacre of the Armenians at Maragha at all. Consequently, in the eyes of the world, the armed forces of the Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh have been made to appear more brutal than those of the Azeri-Turks; in reality, evidence suggests that the opposite is more likely to be true.



## Hostages

One disturbing effect noted by independent observers on several occasions has been the asymmetry between the Azeri-Turks and the Armenians in the treatment of hostages and prisoners of war. Of course observers cannot testify to the way in which all prisoners and hostages are treated. However, we have seen consistent first-hand evidence of gross maltreatment and torture of Armenian prisoners of war and hostages held by the Azeri-Turks.

We have not been shown any direct evidence of the maltreatment and torture of Azeri-Turks held by Armenians. We have been allowed to interview, on three occasions, Azeri-Turk prisoners of war held by the Armenians. All have been in reasonably good physical condition and kept in acceptable accommodation. The one exception to this rule was an Azeri-Turk army officer who, in our view, was not receiving adequate treatment to a serious injury sustained in conflict. We understand that surgical treatment was subsequently provided. We were allowed to interview prisoners of war according to the rules of the International Convention and have been satisfied with their treatment, apart from this one exception.



*Mrs. E.G. Bugakov and son Dmitri: Tortured in Azerbaijani captivity in Feb-March 1992. CSI)*

By contrast, the Armenians whom we have interviewed who have been in Azeri-Turk custody have been subjected to gross maltreatment and torture. We have seen at first-hand the treatment of a mother, 38-year-old Eleanor Grigorian Bugakov, and her 4-year-old son, Dmitri. The mother and son lived in Baku and had been held in captivity in the winter of 1992. During that time they had been passed from one place to another, including: being held in Baku by the ruling Azerbaijani Popular Front; in Lachin by a military unit; in Shusha where they were in the custody of the Azeri OMON & then in a tank regiment; then in Agdam in the custody of the Popular Front; then in an 'investigative prison'. A CSI delegation found her in an appalling condition upon her release in March 1992. She had recently been beaten and was still bleeding; she had suffered multiple rapes, including one occasion when she was raped by an entire platoon; malnourished (she claimed she and her son had received no food or water for 8 days and when water was brought for the boy, it had a rat floating in it). The boy had evidence of cigarette burns on his hands and his mother said that their captors had hit him on the head with a hammer; his fur hat had given him some protection and when she tried to prevent them from removing it, they had beaten her with a chain.

The delegation also interviewed a 40-year-old electrician who had just been released following a period of three years in Azerbaijani prisons. We saw on him physical evidence of past and recent beatings; his face was heavily scarred and there was evidence of recently clotted wounds on his face, legs and back of the head. His skull was damaged, he was malnourished, there were apparent joint injuries, and he was psychologically confused and disoriented.



*80-year old Mrs. Arevad Bogozian recounts being tortured and sold as a slave while in Azerbaijani captivity. (CSI)*

More recently, in January 1993, a delegation interviewed an elderly Armenian lady, Mrs. Arevad Bogozian, taken hostage by the Azeri-Turks during their offensive in northern Nagorno Karabakh in the summer of 1992. On the first day of her captivity, the fingernails on one of her hands had been pulled out by Azeri-Turk soldiers. Subsequently she had been sold from village to village as a slave, suffering repeated rapes and physical abuse. She has been separated from her husband since August 1992 and still does not know if he is alive.

One of the disturbing aspects of the treatment of these hostages is the message conveyed to the Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh: that this is the way the Azeri-Turks will treat all their women and children when they succeed in overrunning the enclave. Indeed, when five more women hostages were recently released from Azeri-Turk custody, having been maltreated, the last words said to them by their captors were reported to have been: "We cannot wait to get into Nagorno Karabakh and to kill every Armenian, especially the women and children."

## **Humanitarian Aid**

It was not possible for those who had seen the suffering of the people of Nagorno Karabakh to rest easy back at home. Attempts were made to persuade the International Committee of the Red Cross to take relief into Nagorno Karabakh, but they were prevented by their Charter from entering a country without permission from the host government – and Azerbaijan did not readily then grant this. The United Nations and other major relief organizations were similarly obstructed by the government of Azerbaijan. The difficulties of sending humanitarian aid to Nagorno Karabakh in cooperation with the Azerbaijani authorities were highlighted in March 1992 when the French Minister of Humanitarian Affairs, Bernard Kouchner and his convoy was harassed and robbed of most of their 22-ton consignment of emergency humanitarian aid before he was allowed to proceed

through Azerbaijan to Stepanakert. Because of such problems, it was incumbent on CSI to raise the money to take back essential medical supplies, and to run the gauntlet of the blockade to take them in. Since then CSI has been the major provider of medical supplies for Nagorno Karabakh, sending 11 consignments of essential drugs, equipment and other necessities to the people of the enclave. CSI has also cooperated with the Andrei Sakharov Foundation to send a consignment of supplies to Azeri-Turk refugees from Nagorno Karabakh. However the priority has been the Armenians in Karabakh, as they have been trapped behind the blockade, while Azerbaijan is not blockaded and can freely receive help from the major aid organizations.

### **Inviolability of Borders vs. Human Rights**

The peace initiatives of the international community have been hindered by an imbalance in the application of two principles: the inviolability of borders and the respect for human rights. The Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh are seen by the international community to have violated the principle of territorial integrity, to which bodies such as the CSCE (Conference for Cooperation and Security in Europe) are fundamentally committed; no matter that the blockades were a flagrant violation of human rights, causing incalculable suffering and death; no matter that the Azeri-Turks were using Shusha as a base from which to rain down death and destruction on the civilians of Stepanakert; no matter that the international community had done nothing effective to assist the people of Karabakh during the long months of acute suffering caused by the twin effects of blockade and bombardment. The international community, especially the CSCE, apparently put a primacy on the inviolability of territorial borders, even borders drawn arbitrarily or maliciously in the Stalin era. This was a principle to be respected above all others – even the protection of human life and health.

The apparent primacy of the principle of territorial integrity in the case of Nagorno Karabakh raises fundamental issues which, we suggest, will need to be considered in the longer term. Nagorno Karabakh is not the only territory to suffer a tragic destiny as part of the aftermath of Stalin's cruel reign of terror, including his brutal policies of forced relocation of entire peoples to alien lands or regimes. There may therefore be a case for reconsideration of the balance between the sometimes conflicting principles of respect for territorial integrity and the right to self-determination. Elena Bonner Sakharov, amongst others, suggests that, whereas the principle of respect for territorial integrity may appropriately command support in the longer-established states of western Europe and North America, it may be less appropriate for the sometimes cruelly drawn boundaries of the former Soviet Empire. She proposes that there may be a need for a period during which greater respect is given for the principle of self-determination, in some form, until some time has elapsed, allowing more congruence between ethnic, religious and territorial boundaries. In due course, when such boundaries have been established, then the principle of respect for territorial integrity may be more appropriately enforceable.

# The Characteristics of the People of Nagorno Karabakh

There is one important remaining factor which needs to be recognised: the characteristics of the people. These form a crucial part of the human dimension and of the political equation. Virtually all of the independent witnesses in international delegations who have visited the enclave have been profoundly impressed by the people, especially their generosity, courage, resilience, dignity and general lack of hatred, despite the suffering they have endured. Four examples are typical of innumerable encounters demonstrating these characteristics.

First, a nurse in Maragha who had just seen her son beheaded and lost 14 members of her family. After describing her anguish, she was asked if she would like to send a message to the world. With great dignity, she rose above her grief and said:

“Please say ‘Thank you’. As a nurse, I have been working in this hospital and have seen how the medicines you have brought have saved many lives and relieved much suffering. Thank you for not forgetting us in our dark days.”

This is surely a triumph of the human spirit: to rise above such anguish and to express gratitude.

Secondly, an old man in a village which had been overrun by the Azeri-Turks. He described how his son had been killed on the first night of fighting. Then on the next day, when the Azeris occupied the village, they saw a new grave and, knowing the Armenian custom of burying the dead in their best clothes, they dug up his son’s body, to remove his new suit and his gold teeth. The old man then invited the delegation to his home, which had been ransacked by the Azeri-Turks. He had nothing left with which to face the bitter winter, except, on the bare floor, a pile of walnuts and a pile of apples – and he insisted on giving us his apples.

Thirdly, the brave women and children in bombarded Stepanakert and the boy who, after waiting in line for 5 hours in bitter weather, returned to the apartment, slipped on the ice and spilt his two buckets of water. He made a joke and returned for another 5-hour trek, without complaining.

Fourthly, the Armenian from Shaumyan district who described his experiences during the deportations of Getashen and Martunashen in May 1992. He recalled how, after witnessing the deportations from Getashen, he escaped and climbed up the mountainside. He came to an apricot tree. On the tree was hanging a five-year-old Armenian girl, cut in two. He vowed revenge. Later, he described how, when the Armenians retook a village, he broke his vow, because he could not bring himself to harm a woman or a child. When one of the delegation commented on his compassion and his dignity, he simply replied: “Dignity is a crown of thorns.”

Finally, a quotation from the Bishop of Nagorno Karabakh:

“Our nation has again begun to find its faith and is praying in churches, cellars and in the field of battle, defending its life and the life of those who are near and dear. It is not only the perpetrators of crime and evil who commit sin, but also those who stand by – seeing and knowing – and who do not condemn it or try to avert it. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. We do not hate; we believe in God. If we want God’s victory, we must love. Even if there are demonic forces at work, not only in this conflict, but in other parts of the world, we must still love.”

## **The Prognosis: Continuing Bloodshed**

Given the escalation of the military offensive against the people of Nagorno Karabakh; given the recent attempts by the Armenians to retake villages lost in the Azerbaijani offensive last year so that they can rehouse some of their refugees; and given the current fear that the Azeri-Turks are preparing for a new, major offensive in the spring, it appears that the bloodshed is likely to continue unabated.

The Armenians of Karabakh repeatedly affirm that they will not leave their native land. The men at the frontline – typically farmers, grandfathers, boys and young students, or professionals such as doctors and lawyers – consistently repeat that they do not wish to fight. But they ask: “What can we do? We have to defend our families, our homes, our homeland and our heritage.” They claim they will fight to the last man – and woman. They explain their ability to defend their land against such superior odds in terms of differential motivation. They are fighting for everything they believe in – and for survival. They argue that the Azerbaijani troops and the mercenary soldiers fighting for them do not have the same conviction. One Karabakh commander alleged that the Azerbaijani commanders tend to put conscript members of their ethnic minority groups, such as Lesghins, Tallish and Kurds, in the front line during an offensive. This serves two purposes; if they are killed, this reduces the ‘nationalist elements’ within Azerbaijan; if they fight well, this reduces the number of Armenians in Nagorno Karabakh. The same commander also alleged that the Azerbaijani authorities do not take such trouble to recover the bodies of the slain ethnic minorities as they take to bring back Azeri-Turk dead.

We are not in a position to corroborate these statements, although the commander did offer to show a CSI delegation the evidence of passports taken from corpses, and what he described as “the killing fields”, where non-Azeri-Turk dead had been left uncollected.

However, what is incontrovertible is that both sides have suffered massive losses in dead and wounded. In February 1991, the commander of Armenian forces in Nagorno Karabakh, Serge Sarkisian, estimated that, since the Azerbaijani offensive in June 1992, the Azerbaijani armed forces have suffered 4,500 killed and 18-20,000 wounded; during the same period, the Azerbaijani forces had lost 12 fighter-bombers, 10 helicopters and 128 tanks, some of which were captured by the Armenians of Karabakh. Figures for casualties incurred by the Armenians were not given. But they have also suffered many dead and wounded, including high levels of civilian casualties. And a high price of a different kind is still being paid by refugees from both communities in Nagorno Karabakh, Azeri-Turk refugees who have fled their homes and the Armenian deportees and refugees from the Shaumyan and Mardakert districts, mostly now living in unavoidably harsh conditions in Armenia.

# Select Bibliography

- Allen, W.E.D., and Muratoff, Paul, *Caucasian Battlefields*, Cambridge, 1953.
- Altstadt, Audrey L., *The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and Identity under Russian Rule*, Stanford, 1992
- Atkin, Muriel, *Russia and Iran: 1780-1828*, Minneapolis, 1980.
- Balian, Hrair, *Nagorno-Karabakh and Soviet Nationalities-Conflicts: Human Rights*, Berkeley, July 17, 1991.
- BBC Monitoring, *SWB: Summary of World Broadcasts*, Part 1, Former USSR, Caversham.
- Bennigsen, Alexander & Wimbush, S. Enders, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire: A Guide*, Bloomington, 1986.
- Bournoutian, George A., *Eastern Armenia in the Last Decades of Persian Rule: 1807-1828*, Malibu, 1982.
- Braude, Benjamin & Lewis, Bernard eds., *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, Vol. I, *The Central Lands*, New York, 1982.
- Brook, Stephen, *Claws of the Crab: Georgia & Armenia in Crisis*, London, 1992.
- COVCAS Bulletin: *Human Rights Developments & Nationalities-Conflicts in the Trans-Caucasus*, Geneva, November 1991-
- Cullen, Robert, "A Reporter at Large: Roots", *The New Yorker*, April 15, 1991.
- Der Nessesian, *The Armenians*, (London), 1969.
- Helsinki Watch, *Bloodshed in the Caucasus: Escalation of the Armed Conflict in Nagorno Karabakh*, New York, September 1992.
- Hofmann, Tessa & Koutcharian, Gerayer, *Armenien, Völkermord, Vertreibung, Exil*, Göttingen, 1987.
- Holt, P.M., Lambton, Ann K., Lewis, Bernard eds., *Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol. I., *The Central Islamic Lands*, Cambridge, 1970.
- Hostler, C.W., *Turkism and the Soviets*, London, 1957.
- Hovannisian, Richard G., *Armenia on the Road to Independence, 1918*, Berkeley, 1969.
- Hovannisian, Richard G., *The Republic of Armenia*, Vols I & 2, Berkeley, 1971 & 1983.
- Kazemzadeh, Riruz, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia, 1917-1921*, New York, 1951.
- Koutcharian, Gerayer, *Der Siedlungsraum der Armenier unter dem Einfluss der Historisch-Politischen Ereignisse seit dem Berliner Kongress 1878: Eine Politisch-Geographische Analyse und Dokumentation*, Berlin, 1989.
- Lang, David Marshall, *Armenia: Cradle of Civilization*, London, 1970.
- Lepsius, Johannes, *Deutschland und Armenien, 1914-1918*, Potsdam, 1919.
- Lewis, Bernard, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, London, 1968.
- Luchterhandt, Otto, *Das Recht Berg-Karabaghs auf staatliche Unabhängigkeit aus völkerrechtlicher Sicht*, Hamburg, 1992
- Matossian, Mary Kilbourne., *The Impact of Soviet Policies in Armenia*, Leiden, 1962.
- Nalbandian, Louise, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties through the Nineteenth Century*, Berkeley, 1963.
- Ormanian, Malachia, *The Church of Armenia*, London, 1955.
- Pax Christi Netherlands, *Human Rights Violations in Armenia and Azerbaijan*, September 26, 1991, updated January 24, 1992.
- Röhrborn, Klaus Michael, *Provinzen und Zentralgewalt Persiens im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*, Berlin, 1966.
- Sakharov, Andrei, *Moscow and Beyond: 1986-1989*, London, 1990.
- Sarkisyanz, Manuel, *A Modern History of Transcaucasian Armenia*, Leiden, 1975.
- Suny, Ronald Grigor, "Nationalism and Democracy in Gorbachev's Soviet Union: The Case of Karabakh", in Denkev, R., *Soviet Nationality Reader*, Westview, 1992.
- Swietochowski, Tadeusz, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1915-1920: The Shaping of National Identity in a Muslim Community*, Cambridge, 1985.
- Toynbee, Arnold J., 'The Murderous Tyranny of the Turks', London, 1917.
- Toynbee, Arnold J., ed., *The treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire*, London, 1916. (Great Britain, Blue Book, Miscellaneous no. 31, 1916).
- Toynbee, Arnold J., *The Western Question in Greece and Turkey*, London, 1922.
- Toynbee, Arnold J. & Kirkwood, Kenneth P., *Turkey*, London, 1926.
- Walker, Christopher J., *Armenia*, New York, 1980.
- Walker, Christopher J., ed., *Armenia and Karabakh: The Struggle for Unity*, London, 1991.
- Zenkovsky, Serge A., *Pan-Turkism and Islam in Russia*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1960.

## Conclusions

- *The war in Nagorno Karabakh has cost the lives of thousands and has displaced tens of thousands. The spectres of famine, epidemic and genocide stalk the land.*
  
- *The war is characterized by an enormous asymmetry of violence. Azerbaijan has sought from the beginning of the conflict to achieve its aims by steadily escalating military means. The Armenian community of Nagorno Karabakh is the primary victim in this tragic conflict. We do not claim that they are beyond reproach or that they have not contributed to the toll of human suffering. But in at least five ways Azerbaijan is the primary aggressor:*
  1. *It was Azerbaijan, along with the Soviet 4th Army, which carried out the brutal deportations of entire Armenian villages from the Autonomous Region of Nagorno Karabakh and the adjacent Shaumyan district. Thousands of refugees from these deportations are now living in conditions of acute deprivation in Armenia or in Nagorno Karabakh.*
  2. *It was Azerbaijan which imposed the cruel blockades on Nagorno Karabakh and on Armenia, which have caused great damage to the Armenian economy and attempted to cause death by slow strangulation of essential supplies, including emergency humanitarian aid, to the people of Nagorno Karabakh. The blockades were even sustained during the Armenian earthquake catastrophe, hampering the access of urgently needed relief supplies.*
  3. *It was Azerbaijan which first used GRAD multiple-missile rocket launchers against the civilians of Nagorno Karabakh, escalating the rate of casualties, especially of women and children, and the destruction of essential facilities, such as hospitals.*
  4. *It is Azerbaijan which is currently using aerial bombardment against civilian targets, with massive 500 kg and cluster bombs.*



*5. It is Azerbaijan that is now using ground-to-air missiles against the civilians of Nagorno Karabakh, causing even further threat to life and limb, especially of women, children and the elderly.*

- *The sufferings of both the Armenian and Azeri-Turk communities could be alleviated if Azerbaijan were to desist from trying to impose a military solution.*
- *Turkey has emerged as Azerbaijan's principal ally in its war against the Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh, supplying senior 'retired' military advisors and maintaining an economic blockade on Armenia.*
- *The available evidence points to historic continuity between the genocide of ethnic minorities in Turkey and the war against Nagorno Karabakh.*

## Recommendations

- *There is an urgent need for constructive intervention by the international community, if this tragic conflict is not to escalate further, causing even more suffering to both sides.*
- *There is also a danger that it could spread beyond the immediate arena of war to become a regional conflagration. Already, Azerbaijan is maintaining frequent attacks on Armenian villages in Armenia itself, with many casualties. In some of these, non-Armenian civilians, such as Russians, have been killed and injured.*
- *Recently, the leaders of both Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh have requested an unconditional ceasefire. Azerbaijan, backed by its ally Turkey, has rejected the suggestion, insisting on a withdrawal of all defense forces from Nagorno Karabakh. This is clearly unrealistic, given the sustained attacks on the enclave, and the perceived need for the people of Nagorno Karabakh to maintain defense for survival.*
- *The CSCE initiatives have so far proved ineffective in achieving the necessary confidence-building measures to enable the parties to the conflict to agree to a cessation of hostilities. Given the intensity of the conflict and the resulting loss of any kind of trust, the international community will have to work hard to devise sufficient confidence-building measures to achieve a credible cease-fire.*
- *There is an urgent need for systematic humanitarian aid to be made available to meet the needs of all those suffering from the war, and especially the needs of the population of Nagorno Karabakh and refugees and deportees in Armenia.*

- *There is an urgent need for the lifting of the blockades imposed by Azerbaijan and exacerbated by Turkey. Not only are these violations of fundamental human rights; they are also hindering the delivery of much-needed humanitarian aid and crippling the economies of both Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh.*
- *There is an urgent need for international agencies to supervise the treatment of hostages and prisoners of war; and to try to achieve exchanges and releases as soon as possible. Many Armenians in Nagorno Karabakh have been taken hostage. In view of the evidence seen by international delegations of the maltreatment of hostages and prisoners, the urgency of this intervention cannot be over-emphasised.*
- *There is an urgent need for attempts to achieve clemency for five Armenian prisoners under sentence of death in Baku. Their names are Arno Mkrtchyan, Arvid Mangasaryan, Gagik Arutyunyan, Grachnik Petrosyan and Garnik Arustamyan.*
- *The longer-term political solution cannot be prejudged. The overriding imperative is to try to encourage both sides to the conflict to agree to an unconditional ceasefire, and to try to achieve a solution by civilized means of negotiation rather than by rockets, tanks, bullets and bombs. It is especially important to try to avert the current avowed intention of Azerbaijan to achieve a military solution, which could result in a genocide of the Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh.*
- ***Surely, the international community will not stand by and condone another Armenian genocide?***



# **Andrei Sakharov**

**(1921-1989)**

**Physicist, Human Rights Activist,  
Nobel Peace Prize Winner**

*“For Azerbaijan the issue of Karabakh is a  
matter of ambition, for the Armenians of  
Karabakh it is a matter of life and death.”*

**November 1989.**

