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The Case of Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)

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The Karabakh conflict, comparable to that in Yugoslavia in the scale of military action and the number of victims, has drawn much less attention from the world than it deserves. The conflict has not taken place in the heart of Europe, but in a remote corner of the world, of little interest to the general public. Its management was to a great extent turned over to Russia at a time when the West had illusions about democratic changes in that country. Now that the illusions concerning Russia's desire and ability to maintain peace and democracy in the newly independent states have diminished, the West is beginning to understand that without its interference the newly independent states may become sites of war and conflicts. The need for a greater involvement of international organisations is obvious. This chapter will characterise the development of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and Russia's role therein.

The Roots of the Conflict

Generally speaking, the conflict arose due to the presence of a densely packed Armenian minority in Nagorno-Karabakh, a part of Azerbaijan. Ethnic conflicts become a probability in any area where there is a lack of ethnic homogeneity. The probability remains theoretical, however, unless a number of other factors are also actively present: there are many instances where ethnic groups coexist peacefully and without tension.

For two main reasons, the case of the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh was significantly more prone to conflict than in the case of any other ethnic group in the USSR. The first reason was the relatively illegitimate

and randomly drawn border between Armenians and Azeris and the legally ambiguous status of Nagorno-Karabakh's autonomy. Nagorno-Karabakh was a conflict issue even during the short-lived independence of Armenia and Azerbaijan at the time of the civil war in Russia. The fact that Nagorno-Karabakh eventually became part of Azerbaijan within the USSR was decided in Moscow. The form of autonomy was quite peculiar: despite the fact that it was Armenian-populated, it did not have any reference to the name "Armenia" in its title. The existence in Azerbaijan of an Armenian autonomous area, adjacent to Armenia but for a narrow strip of land, a "corridor" obviously created for this specific purpose, would have indeed been absurd within the united USSR. Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh had every reason to consider the embodiment of Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan to be an error liable to amendment, especially since in previous instances territories were passed from one republic to another within the USSR or had their administrative status altered.

The second reason lies in the history of Azeri-Armenian relations.¹ There is nothing to indicate that Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh were particularly oppressed. Moreover, their position was almost doubtless better than that of the Azeris, who lived just as compactly in Zangezur, Armenia, but had no autonomy at all. The conflict-prone situation in Nagorno-Karabakh was due to the ambiguity of the Armenians' position rather than to greater oppression. The existence of autonomy for Nagorno-Karabakh was in itself a halfway recognition of the Armenians' rights to the land, something the Azeris in Armenia were not supposed to have. Still, Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh were obviously more bitter about their position than other ethnic groups, including the Azeris in Armenia.²

The Armenian nation has a unique ancient culture, which owes its singularity chiefly to religious and cultural isolation. The Armenian Church is a specific branch of Christianity; Armenians were always surrounded by non-Christians, and their history is full of episodes of religious and ethnic persecution. The result was an ideological and psychological complex of uniqueness, if not "chosenness". Armenians learned to feel a cultural superiority over neighbouring nations and at the same time to expect violence from those they regarded as less intelligent and cultured but more numerous neighbours. The complex was reinforced after the 1915 holocaust, when Turks exterminated the majority of the Armenian residents of Turkey. Armenian perspectives made little difference to the Azeris and Turks. The former were also Muslims and Turkic by language and ethnicity. They, too, had organised anti-Armenian pogroms and were allied with the Turks in 1918-1920. Being a part of Azerbaijan was more painful for Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh than if the

autonomy had been part of another republic with a different "titular nationality".³

It must be stated that the attitude of Azeris to Armenians did not mirror that of Armenians to Azeris. Azeris belong to a huge Turkic Muslim unity, and their feeling of ethnic singularity is much weaker than that of Armenians. Unlike Armenians, they have neither the superiority complex nor a feeling of isolation; they are not afraid that outnumbering neighbours might destroy them. Just as Armenians tend to exaggerate the Turks' tendency to violence, Azeris often fail to understand the Armenian psychology, which is very different from their own. They, too, believe Armenians to be an aggressive nation. They cannot perceive the "aggressiveness" as a trace of past psychological traumas, the like of which Azeris have never experienced. The coexistence of two nations of such different culture, history and psychology is certainly more difficult and prone to conflict than in the case of a different combination of nations, say, Azeris in Iran or Turkey, or Armenians in Georgia, or in Europe, or even in Muslim but not Turkic countries.

The broader reasons behind the Karabakh conflict lie in the existence of the Armenian minority in Azerbaijan. The opportunity was enhanced by administrative, legal, cultural, and psychological influences. These influences, however, were constant and were present in the 1940s as well as in the previous two decades. The conflict itself managed to surface only as recently as 1988. One must therefore look for some influential variable that increased over time and eventually led to the events of 1988. The most logical answer would be the deterioration of the Soviet system based on Communist ideology. During the first term of independence of Armenia and Azerbaijan, the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh was suppressed by force: the conflicting independent states were annulled and their armies were destroyed by the Red Army and the Red Terror, and by ideology: the Communist ideology obliterated ethnic differences. As long as the ideology and its system of oppression were young and strong, the conflict remained latent. It did not surface and did not increase in degree.

In the meantime, Communist ideology was decaying, giving way to nationalism in all the Soviet republics. Simultaneously, the repressive system was weakening. Every republic developed a bureaucratic intellectual elite. Nationalism, disguised, of course, by official Communist phrasing, became more and more important in elite ideology. The dissolution of the USSR appeared to advance every day. The process took various shapes in different republics, but in Armenia it was very particular. The intellectual and bureaucratic elite which had evolved in Armenia during the Soviet years was very powerful. Armenian ethnic consciousness was traditionally strong. It was natural to expect Armenia to be

among the first republics to try to disengage from Moscow. The processes unfolding in Armenia were modified by a range of factors: the trauma effected by the 1915 genocide, the typical Armenian feeling of isolation coupled with the Muslim threat, the historical role of Russia saving Armenia from ruin but at the price of independence, and memories of the failure and weakness of the first Armenian Republic in 1918-1920. Armenians' urge for independence and national selfhood did not take the shape of a desire to be free from Moscow's control, but resulted in an attempt to find "historical justice" in Armenia's relations with its neighbours. Anti-Turkic tendencies were stronger than anti-Russian ones. And even if the nationalistic mentality, with its tendency to self-deception and mythological constructs, regarded reclaiming Turkish Armenia as a distant and scarcely realistic prospect, attempting to retrieve Nagorno-Karabakh with the aid of Moscow appeared worthwhile. To a certain extent, in the Armenian mentality Azeris played the part of Turks, but as a weaker people who could be fought against with the help of influential powers within the USSR, whereas Nagorno-Karabakh was analogous to Turkish Armenia.

The Development of the Conflict

The "open" stage of the Karabakh conflict which began in 1988 was preceded by a latent stage, during which, under the cover of official rhetoric on the friendship of nations, the Karabakh issue gained importance in the Armenian mentality and eventually became a symbol that consolidated the nation. The "conflict potential" accumulated and was bound to break through. As previously stated, Azeri self-consciousness was much weaker than that of the Armenians. It was more difficult for Azeris to become united around an issue of national importance. It was thus predictable that the Azeris had not started a movement for autonomy or an interest in annexing Azeri-populated regions of Armenia to Azerbaijan. In general, the Azeris were the "passive" side in the Karabakh conflict, the side which reacted, although often very strongly, cruelly and irrationally, whereas Armenians could be considered the active side. Nevertheless, the decay of Communist ideology promoted a build-up of ethnic consciousness and nationalistic tendencies in Azerbaijan. Had Moscow decided to include Nagorno-Karabakh in Armenia in the period between World War I and World War II, Azeri resistance would have been weak. In the 1980s, the potential for resistance had substantially grown: while forces prepared to struggle for Nagorno-Karabakh were building up in Armenia, forces prepared to resist were becoming stronger in Azerbaijan. At the latent stage of the conflict before 1988, a conflict po-

tential was accumulating on both sides. This gradually increasing strain became more and more liable to result in a discharge.

Similar to numerous other "jinns" concealed in the Soviet Communist "bottle", the Karabakh conflict manifested itself at the very moment when perestroika reforms began to uncork the bottle. The circumstances which led to the notorious decision taken by the local Soviet of Nagorno-Karabakh in February 1988 are still unclear. The decision was certainly preceded by intensive preparations in Nagorno-Karabakh as well as in Armenia and Moscow. It was obvious that an influential group of Armenian leaders in Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia and the diaspora had decided it was time to react, feeling "yesterday was too early, tomorrow may be too late". Almost overnight, Armenia united around the Karabakh issue, a truly all-national movement which comprised Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia as well as Armenians in Moscow, France and the USA. Azeri society, totally unprepared to face such a powerful and unexpected enemy, found itself in dismay and hysteria, most irrationally evident in the anti-Armenian pogroms in Sumgait. The bloody wheel of ethnic conflict began to turn, and continues to do so to this day.

The outburst of the Karabakh conflict became the catalyst and in a way the framework for the Armenian and Azeri national revolutions. It has already been said that the first stage of the conflict was latent, characterised by the accumulation of conflict potential. At the second stage the potential emerged on the surface of social life, dramatically changing both the Armenian and Azeri societies. Prior to 1988, alongside the accumulation of conflict potential between Armenians and Azeris, a "difference of potentials" between deep ideological and social processes in the two countries and actual social life, between true and formal ideology, was rapidly increasing. On the exterior, there was the official Communist ideology with its formal "friendship of nations"; at a deeper level, national emotions had already been let loose. An outbreak of nationalist emotions aimed to destroy the Soviet shell, to adjust their societal structures according to their respective wills. The conflict persisted. A stage of meetings was followed by a stage of pogroms, armed groups, terrorism and guerrilla war. During this latter stage national armies were created eventually to engage in large-scale warfare which would include tanks and aviation. Both societies changed dramatically.

The Armenian All-National Movement was created during this period, and for a while succeeded in uniting all the active non-conformist forces within Armenian society; the Movement came to power as a result of the first free elections. The Karabakh movement led to an anti-communist revolution in Armenia, and to independence. Originally the movement was not directed against Moscow and did not have independence

as its goal: such an outlook appeared frightening and unrealistic to the majority of Armenians. The main goal was Nagorno-Karabakh, which the leaders of the movement believed Moscow would finally turn over to Armenia under pressure from the united Armenian nation and its allies. But the true evolution of the movement proved to be far from its leaders' intentions. Theoretically speaking, Moscow could have turned Nagorno-Karabakh over to Armenia had the unitary character of the USSR been enhanced and had centralisation and repressive structures been strong enough to prevent resistance on the part of Azerbaijan. But the Armenian movement had indeed uprooted the very conditions under which a transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh could have been possible. The democratic anti-communist Armenian movement, centred around the Karabakh issue, did not lead to a transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh, but to something which was not among its subjective aims: Soviet disintegration and Armenian independence. As it became obvious that the centre would not hand over Nagorno-Karabakh despite the enormous pressure exerted on it, the "objective goals" of the movement turned into subjective ones. The notion of independence, which had only been advocated by tiny dissident groups, was soon shared by most of the nation. In its struggle for Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia did not attain Nagorno-Karabakh, but independence. Moreover, independence made unification with Nagorno-Karabakh in a way impossible. "Unification" taking place under the conditions of inter-state conflict is interpreted by international law as annexation of occupied territories, something the world community was not about to tolerate. Once the independence of Armenia and the disintegration of the USSR actually came to pass, the idea of unification with Nagorno-Karabakh was forgotten and gave way to the notion of an independent Nagorno-Karabakh as the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic.

Events in Azerbaijan evolved in a different manner, but in the same direction. In 1988, no more than in Armenia did anyone expect Azerbaijan to be an independent state and the Communist Party to lose power by 1991. Here, too, a national movement arose, called the People's Front of Azerbaijan (PFA). Its rise was significantly more painful than that of the movement in Armenia, the latter being much more forward and prepared for democratic political life. The PFA came to power in June 1992, and obviously this date can be seen as the end of the second stage of the Karabakh conflict, when the conflict potential of both countries broke through, national and anti-communist revolutions took place, and the shape and contents of political life were brought into accord. Between 1988 and 1991, both Armenia and Azerbaijan underwent dramatic changes in a way that, as previously, could not have been foreseen. Moreover, the unfolding conflict was one of the forces that propelled the disintegration of the USSR.

In 1992, the conflict entered its third stage, a stage of open war between Azerbaijan and the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, supported by Armenia with depleting resources. Armenians abandoned or concealed the idea of unification with Armenia and an independent republic was declared in Nagorno-Karabakh. A further escalation was hardly possible unless other countries also entered the conflict, due to the fact that the entire conflict potential was already activated. Both societies changed, and what had once been only a conflict evolved into war.

A sequence of events after April 1993 pushed any peaceful outlook further away. The first event was the Armenian attack on Kelbajar, which presented the Armenians with new hopes for a military victory and which affected not only the Azeri army, but also peaceful tendencies in Armenia. The UN Security Council reacted with a resolution demanding withdrawal of Armenian troops from the occupied territories, with which, upon lengthy deliberation, even the Karabakh authorities agreed to comply. If the attack on Kelbajar was aimed to destroy any opportunity of peace, it was certainly a failure. The interference by the UN Security Council suddenly made peace a likelihood.

A new step towards escalation followed: a *coup d'etat* in Azerbaijan displaced the government of the People's Front. The instrument of the coup was a colonel in the Azeri army, S. Guseinov, who was both a national hero and also accused of having mafia connections. He was discharged from his post in the army by President Abulfaz Elchibei and took his troops to Gandja, a town where Russian troops had been located and only recently departed, leaving Guseinov with a large supply of arms. The "intellectual" leader of the scheme was G. Aliev, former head of the Azeri KGB and Communist Party and head of a powerful bureaucratic clan, who visited Moscow just before the coup. Given the generally weary and disillusioned state of Azeri society, the coup was easy to carry out. Meanwhile it dealt a heavy blow to the outlook for peaceful settlement.⁴

Hopes were renewed in Azerbaijan that Aliev would use his Moscow contacts to get Russian support and achieve a military breakthrough. This seemed to work at first, but eventually led to even greater losses on the part of Azerbaijan. Armenians, naturally enough, refused to start talks or withdraw their troops, since the legitimacy of the new authorities was more than questionable and it was not clear whether they had any real power. The world was at a loss and the resolution by the UN Security Council was duly forgotten.

The moment peace became a real opportunity, it was nullified. This cannot be explained only by the logical evolution of the conflict, but also by the emanation and promotion of forces benefiting from the conflict. The forces are very dissimilar, and their only commonality is interest in

the conflict, which is not exclusively financial. First, shipping arms and food supplies, ransoming captives, hiring mercenaries etc. to both armies have been a steady source of income to a large network of military "mafiosi", on both sides. The military themselves, army officials and heads of military plants in Russia, also have enjoyed enormous gains. The status and political authority of many people were won through the war and depend directly on it. Ordinary heads of factories gained political importance during the war and will sink into oblivion as soon as it is over. In addition, it is extremely difficult to find a way of regulating the conflict that would allow both sides to say that the conflict had some meaning.

A psychological turning-point of the conflict was reached sometime in late 1993.⁵ This point of view is corroborated by certain facts. Military combat had been ineffective. Both nations were exhausted and dispirited: there was mass emigration from economically disadvantaged Armenia and incidents of desertion from both armies. In addition, a strong peace movement was started in Armenia: the organisation New Way. It was created by A. Bleyan and K. Sardaryan, and is certainly just a radical symptom of a deeper and wider tendency. Official statements by Azeri authorities, even those made after the Armenian attack on Kelbajar in April 1993, contain peaceful intonations and "pro-Armenian nods". Furthermore, the easy *coup d'etat* in Azerbaijan gave rise to a popular hope that Geidar Aliev would guide the country out of the war.

The fourth and last stage, that of finding ways of resolving the conflict permanently, is now near although it has not yet begun.

The Russian Involvement

Moscow did not deliberately provoke the outbreak of the open conflict in 1988 following the principle of "divide and rule", as some in Armenia and Azerbaijan might believe. Gorbachev and his associates, working to "rebuild" the USSR, were simply unable to assist in a decisive manner. Moscow would not tolerate a unification of Armenia with Nagorno-Karabakh, for it would have encouraged uncontrollable processes throughout the USSR. Similar movements would not have numbered between ten and twenty, as they do now, but in figures closer to 100. Furthermore, the transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh insisted upon by Armenians and their numerous influential supporters among Moscow "democrats" would have been contrary to another popular demand, that of increasing the rights of republics, a means by which Moscow hoped to combine democratisation with the integrity of the USSR. Suppressing the Karabakh movement by force was something Moscow would also not attempt, both because that would have meant an end to liberalisation and

democracy, and because of the possibility that it might have failed: suppression by force meant Moscow would have had to face the entire Armenian nation, backed by important powers in Russia. Torn apart by contradictory motives and impulses, there was little Moscow could do once the conflict had broken out but to attempt to stand between the sides and to prevent further conflict, hoping they would eventually calm down. Appeals to reason were useless against such an outburst of accumulated energy and persuasion. Just as Armenians and Azeris believed in 1988 that they were struggling for Nagorno-Karabakh, while the true logic of the conflict led them to independence, Moscow, against its will, moved towards the independence of Armenia and Azerbaijan, and eventually to its own destruction.

Although not propelled by a pseudo-Machiavellian urge to aggravate the conflict, Moscow, on account of its wavering and inconsistency, gave the impression that the sides only needed to exert a little more pressure to win their case. Up to 5,000 Soviet troops were at times stationed in and around Nagorno-Karabakh in order to calm down the situation, but their ability to operate was made dependent on fuel and supplies coming from Baku. The outbreak of the conflict was to a large degree provoked by the lack of national policy in a disintegrating Soviet Union, and the continuation of the conflict was promoted by the lack of a policy about the "near abroad" in the new-born Russian Federation.

Before outlining how the present Russian policy in the Transcaucasus has taken shape, it should be noted that, contrary to most other conflicts in the former USSR, no significant ethnic Russian minorities are present in the region. This obviously poses a problem for the formulation of Russian policy *vis-a-vis* public opinion and the Duma. The view of the Transcaucasus as a "dagger pointed towards the heart of Russia" is more than an historical fact in that it is more or less openly used in the nationalist rhetoric of today. This view is intimately linked to the fear of Islam - and in particular fundamentalism - spreading into Russia. When in spring 1994 Defence Minister Grachev referred to the Azeri-Iranian border as Russia's "strategic border", he appealed to what many Russians regarded as a real threat. Iran is the natural symbol of these risks with about eight million ethnic Azeris living within its borders, but over one million Azeris also live within Russia's borders. Iran's declared policy of non-interference and its support to hundreds of thousands of displaced persons in camps in Azerbaijan along the border with Iran, in order to keep them from pouring into Iran, have not calmed Russian fears of the "Islamic factor" and Tehran is always present in the background in Moscow when the Caucasus is considered.

Traditional rivalry with Turkey and fears that Turkic peoples in the Caucasus and Central Asia would be used as a fifth column to destabilise

the Soviet Union are more or less equally valid for Russia today. Dissemination of Turkish literature, the establishment of schools and universities for the promotion of the Turkish language, and economic co-operation within the Black Sea Economic Council are viewed as directed against Russian interests.

Close links have existed between Russian military circles and Armenia at least since Armenian troops in the seventeenth century were recruited in order to protect the borders of Russia. Armenians in 1915 sought and received protection from Russia against the onslaught of the Young Turks. Armenians were strongly over-represented in the top ranks of the Red Army during World War II and Nagorno-Karabakh had a strong reputation for supplying competent officers, among them several marshals. A high proportion of KGB officers were ethnic Armenians. Perhaps as many as two million Armenians live and work in Russia, representing a powerful part of the Armenian diaspora and a source of income for economically crippled Armenia as well as an influential lobby in Russian national politics.

The military-industrial complex in Russia has been referred to above as having an interest in keeping the conflict alive in order to secure markets for military products. Of greater importance is Caspian oil. When Aliev took power in 1993, he could ride on public discontent with how the Karabakh issue had been handled and with Elchibei's "selling out" of Azerbaijan's rich but badly managed oil fields to foreign oil companies. A year later, Aliev signed the very same "contract of the century" for 8 billion dollars with the same companies, drawing sharp criticism from Russian circles refusing to lose control of the exploration of this oil. Russia's fears were not exactly alleviated by the fact that both Turkey and Iran received significant shares of the deal.

By the autumn of 1993, signs were accumulating that Russia had reformulated its foreign policy and was ready to reassert its role in the Transcaucasus. Aliev, who was initially viewed by Moscow as loyal, initiated a massive military build-up, probably with outside assistance. Russian-led talks on a cease-fire agreement, parallel to those of the CSCE, were initiated and produced an almost complete standstill in the multinational efforts. High officials from Moscow visited the region, carrying with them promises of assistance. Azerbaijan joined the CIS, which initiated peace efforts of its own. The CIS was, in particular in Baku, presented as the forum where a common background and understanding of the region's problems would favourably influence possibilities for a settlement. This increase in Moscow's activity was crowned by the CIS Bishkek protocol of 5 May 1994, which the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians were allowed to sign as a party to the conflict together with

Armenia and Azerbaijan, and in particular by the cease-fire agreement of 12 May 1994, between the defence ministers of the parties, co-signed by Grachev and linked to a confidential agreement on a Russian-dominated security force.

The Role of the UN and the CSCE

The dissolution of the USSR left the region not only with enormous stockpiles of arms, but also with the realisation that Moscow no longer could exercise its role as sole arbiter and mediator. In Azerbaijan, President Elchibei came to power on a pro-Western foreign policy and wanted to make full use of international fora to assert the nation's newly gained independence and balance Russia's influence. The UN and the CSCE, both based on principles which include the inviolability of borders and the territorial integrity of states, offered excellent opportunities. The CSCE, with all the participating states on an equal footing and without a security council where Russia could make use of a veto right, was perceived as the principal instrument. The CSCE, for its part, with the tacit support of the UN and on the verge of becoming accepted as a regional arrangement in the meaning of the UN Charter, had come to regard the former USSR as perhaps its principal field of action. Several influential European policy-makers realised that the CSCE had to prove its case in the former USSR if it was to be accepted as a major player in the post-bloc European security structure. Hence the rapidity with which the CSCE, with Germany's Genscher as one of the principal advocates, accepted the task of acting as the midwife to the settlement of the conflict.

In the early spring of 1992, a CSCE peace conference was proposed to be held in the capital of Belarus, constituting, apart from the parties, nine states deemed to have a particular interest in the peaceful resolution of the conflict. Russia was among them, as was the USA, France, Germany and Italy. Most believed then that it was a question of months before the conference could commence, but soon, after heavy fighting recommenced, the process was slowed down. Most probably, the military ability and determination of the Karabakh Armenians were underestimated, but the lack of a clearly formulated Russian foreign policy also contributed to the misjudgement. By the summer of 1992, prospects for an early conference were already bleaker and an informal group, the Minsk Group, under Italian and later Swedish chairmanship and regrouping the same nine states, was established in order to prepare the conference. In particular during its first two years of work, each time the Minsk Group achieved significant progress, military actions undercut its efforts. When-

ever political agreement seemed within reach, one side or another attempted to affirm its negotiating position by initiating military offensives. The reasons behind this are difficult to ascertain, but among the contributing factors were Karabakh Armenians' constant frustration at not being accepted as a full-fledged party to the conflict and over Armenian President Ter-Petrossian's "giving up" the cause of Karabakh independence, Armenia's refusal to be recognised as a party to the conflict, and the destabilisation of the Elchibei regime by pro-Moscow forces.

Azerbaijan then turned to the UN, clearly seeing that the involvement of the CSCE would not lead to the rapid results for which it had hoped, with Armenian forces occupying Fizuli, Djebrail and Kelbajar and with an increasingly unstable internal political situation due not least to the growing numbers of refugees. In the spring of 1993, the Security Council put the issue on its agenda, had the Secretary-General report on the situation, and demanded the immediate withdrawal of all foreign forces from Kelbajar but continued to let the CSCE play the main role in the peace process. In line with Boutros-Ghali's Agenda for Peace, the regional organisation was given primary responsibility, in particular as it had become more and more clear that the peacekeeping capacity of the world organisation was overstretched.

Frustrated, Azerbaijan in the autumn of 1993 seemed to turn to Russia and to the renewed use of military means but in the spring of 1994 found itself having lost perhaps 10,000 men and further territories, with the Karabakh Armenians even potentially threatening to cut off the Western part of the country from the rest. Both adversaries, visibly weakened by the ferocity of the fighting during the winter 1993-1994 and under heavy pressure from Moscow, agreed to the cease-fire of 12 May 1994. But the obvious inability and unwillingness of Moscow to promote a more comprehensive settlement, coupled with the parties' fears that a security force modelled along the lines wished for by Grachev and already at hand in Abkhazia was only intended to serve as an instrument for establishing a long-term Russian military presence in the region, again made all the parties turn back to the CSCE alternative. This turning of minds coincided with a growing Russian overriding interest in strengthening the CSCE as a means of balancing the process of the Partnership for Peace and possible NATO enlargement. After several CSCE states had declared their readiness to provide peacekeeping troops and Moscow had been brought under heavy political pressure, the CSCE heads of state and government in December 1994 took the political decision in principle to provide a peacekeeping contingent. Russia's acceptance of this decision and of the full integration of its efforts with those of the CSCE was finally achieved in exchange for Russia's co-chairing the Minsk Group and the future Minsk Conference.

A major difficulty in the international efforts has been that of inter-state organisations in dealing with intra-state conflicts. In this concrete case, the problem is aggravated by, in particular, Baku's limited diplomatic experience and for that matter presence at diplomatic gatherings, and is further complicated by the parties' lingering perception of peacekeeping as something closer to the Soviet notion of peace imposition. The latter perception is certainly not something Moscow and its actions have helped to invalidate.

Conclusions

In earlier days, the inconsistent attitude of Moscow caused additional aggravation of the conflict. The conflict promoted the disintegration of the USSR, added to the worries of Moscow, and was a nuisance to Gorbachev and his associates. The situation has since changed. In its early stages, the conflict pushed the republics further away from Moscow and was accompanied by movements for national independence. Now they are more or less obliged to turn to Moscow both in economic and military matters. If it were not for the war, the Russian army could not have stayed in Armenia and could not have hoped to have returned to Azerbaijan. There would be few hopes of receiving revenue from Baku oil, and Azerbaijan would not have rejoined the CIS. It appears as if the authorities, which talked about Gorbachev's "new thinking", are guided by the traditional concept that foreign policy must aim at "expanding influence areas". With such a notion of national interests, they would have little interest in stopping the conflict.

Perhaps never before had prospects for peace looked more favourable than in December 1994. A cease-fire had been respected for over six months, the CSCE (OSCE as of 1 January 1995) declared its readiness, given progress in the political process, to send peacekeeping troops to the region, and Russia accepted the integration of its mediating efforts. Repeated coup attempts against Aliiev and rumours of involvement from Moscow, deep-rooted mistrust between the parties, and principally the crisis in Chechnya have caused suspicion in the region about Moscow's ultimate objectives and have contributed to bringing the peace process to a new standstill. Signs of Turkey and Armenia positioning for closer ties, the formal self-proclamation of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic and speculations on where pipe-lines to export oil from the Baku fields would be placed are further elements that complicate the present situation.

The status of Nagorno-Karabakh remains the main problem but the range of possible solutions appears to be limited. The sovereignty of Nagorno-Karabakh, with recognition by the world community, is as improbable as the recognition of an independent Cyprus Turkish Republic.

Remaining options are but few, including various extents and types of Armenian autonomy in Nagorno-Karabakh, various ways of securing autonomy and assuring Nagorno-Karabakh of safe communications with Armenia as well as providing for a more or less symbolic authority of Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. There are also several ways of compensating losses. Providing Azeris expelled from Armenia, and Armenians expelled from Azerbaijan outside Nagorno-Karabakh, with the opportunity to return home is one of them. This realisation of the limited scope for political settlement has over time changed the motives for military actions. Karabakh Armenians more or less recognise that they have occupied territories not primarily as a means for guaranteeing their security, but in order to exchange them for the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Politically, Yerevan has so far been favoured by Baku's rather average performance on both the military and diplomatic levels. Armenia has managed to keep a very low profile, relying upon its special relationship with Russia and the apparently independent stance of Karabakh Armenians. Without having to take potentially unpopular stands on critical issues, Ter-Petrossian has been able to keep his grip on public opinion, but the increasingly disastrous economic and social situation and the ultra-nationalist Dashnak movement continuing to act through the Armenian diaspora could lead to a potentially volatile situation.

The greatest danger at this stage is a peace of respite, an armistice in the place of real peace. To avoid this danger, mediators and guarantors of peace should be countries and international organisations perceived by either side as truly neutral and not interested in strengthening their respective military, political or economic influence in the region. No lasting solution is conceivable without Russia's active involvement, but the part played by Russia in the regulation of the conflict should not impute to it exclusive rights or veto power. At present, Russia is obviously too much perceived as pursuing other aims than stopping the conflict, including trying to achieve a military standing in the Transcaucasus and being a major actor in peace regulation. The cases of Abkhazia and Chechnya have reinforced the worries and suspicions in the region. Before Moscow clearly discloses its proper agenda, no lasting peace will be achieved in the Caucasus.

Notes

1. Yu. Pompeev, *Krovavyy opyt Karabakha.*, (St. Petersburg, 1992).
2. Ch. Barsegyan, *Istina dorozhe.... (k probleme Nagornogo Karabakha)*, (Erevan, 1989).

3. M. Martirosyan, "Armyanskii mif i politicheskoe stanovlenie," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 18 May 1993.

4. T. Goltz, "The Hidden Russian Hand," *Foreign Policy*, No. 92 (Fall, 1993); See also S. Lezov, "Opyt interpretatsii miricheskogo myshleniya: v Nagornom Karabakhe i vokrug nego," *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 28 March 1992.

5. Yu. Barsegov, "Kontseptsiya vneshnei politiki respubliki Armeniya (neofitsialnaya versiya)," *Kentavr*, No. 6, 1994.