Ethnic Fears and Ethnic War In Karabagh

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The ethnic conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis over the region of Nagorno-Karabagh first exploded into violence—or at least, into the newspapers—with the Sumgait pogroms of 1988, during which hundreds of Christian Armenians were killed or injured at the hands of mobs of Muslim Azerbaijanis. The conflict placed the "nationality question" back near the top of the Soviet Union's political agenda, and it can be seen in retrospect as the death knell of the Soviet Union itself, representing the first indication of the capacity of nationalist conflicts inside the USSR to undermine Soviet rule. It also developed into the bloodiest and most destructive of the ethnic wars in the Gorbachev years, producing by one estimate some 10,000 dead after 5 years of conflict, and over 1 million refugees on the Azerbaijani side alone.[1] The Karabagh conflict therefore bears studying as an important episode in its own right.

It also bears studying as a case study in the theory of ethnic or nationalist conflict. Mark Saroyan, one of the most talented students of the Transcaucasus and its turmoil, posed the question of interpretation this way: "The Armenian Protests: Is it Passion or Politics?" Though Saroyan's polemic was aimed primarily at journalists, it was reprinted for a scholarly audience because most scholars agreed with the question, the majority also agreeing with Saroyan's answer that the conflict—and many others like it—was driven not by "deep-seated and seemingly immutable hostility," but rather by a rational drive to achieve ordinary political goals: "a rational response to contemporary institutional constraints."[2]

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[1] Suzanne Goldenberg, Pride of Small Nations: The Caucasus and Post-Soviet Disorder (London: Zed Books, 1994), p. 155.

[2] Mark Saroyan, *Minorities, Mullahs, and Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California at Berkeley, International and Areas Studies Research Series, no. 95: 1997), pp. 204, 179.

It is the argument of this paper that Saroyan's question is wrong, posing a false dichotomy. While the journalistic conceit that conflicts like that in Karabagh are the simple result of "ancient hatreds" is oversimplified, it is not entirely wrong. Conversely, the intellectual conceit that ethnic war is simply the logical result of the rational pursuit of group interests, is empirically wrong and theoretically misleading. The analytical question is not "is it passion or politics;" rather it is how to understand passionate politics. This paper, therefore, is about the passionate politics of ethnic war between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in, around, and about the disputed province of Nagorno-Karabagh.

An Emotive Theory of Ethnic War

My theoretical argument is divided into three main parts. I first discuss the nature of ethnicity, explaining how attention to the social psychology of ethnicity suggests the primacy of emotional and ideological motivations in driving ethnic violence. Next I justify my argument that ethnic war is driven primarily by fear, which in turn has its sources in prejudice rooted in nationalist ideology. Finally, I explain the political processes by which ethnic conflicts escalate to war, completing the account of the passionate politics of ethnic war. This final subsection also shows how conflicts like Nagorno-Karabagh, which was "mass-led," differ from "elite-led" conflicts such as those in the former Yugoslavia.

Before I begin, a word on nomenclature. Ethnicity and nationalism are not the same thing, and as a result they have spawned different literatures employing different terminologies. In the conflicts discussed in this paper, however, all of the ethnic groups are nationalist, and all of the nations are ethnically defined, more or less, so the logic both of ethnic conflict and of nationalism applies to them. As a result, I use the words "nationalist" and "ethnic" nearly interchangeably, mostly in order to be consistent with the sources of the concepts I am using. Similarly, the concept of a "myth-symbol complex" is broader than a "nationalist ideology," while a group's preferences flow from, but are not identical with, that ideology. If my use of the terms is confusing, it is the result of confusion in the field as a whole. [3]

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[3] My argument is most similar to those in Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); and Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986). Some other prominent recent attempts to sort out the meaning of nationalism include Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); and Ernst B. Haas, "What is nationalism and why should we study it?" *International Organization,* vol. 40, no. 3 (Summer 1986), pp. 707–744.

The Nature of Ethnicity

To understand ethnic conflict, and especially violent ethnic conflict, one must begin with an understanding of ethnic identity. As usual in social science, theorists of the subject are divided into two warring camps, each of which is partly right, but which offer an adequate explanation only in combination. "Primordialists" argue that the ethnic group, bound by a shared history, culture and a believed common descent, acts by evoking the loyalty ordinarily reserved for the kin group.[4] This view supports the interpretation of ethnic war as primarily about "passion." "Constructivists," in contrast, point out that ethnic identities are often new, often mutable, and always in existence exclusively as the result of some ideology which defines who is a member of an ethnic group—in short, that ethnicity is not "primordial" but "socially constructed."[5] This view is the one adopted by "instrumentalists" who argue that ethnic conflict and ethnic war are merely the result of cold political calculation.

The distinction is, however, an artificial one, and the debate a blind alley. No widely cited primordialist argues that ethnic groups are in fact kin groups, or that the groups are immutable; the argument is that the ethnic tie is *culturally* defined, with the presumption of common descent providing the emotional heft of kinship without any necessary blood relationship. Thus, they do not disagree with constructivists who argue, in Benedict Anderson's oft-quoted phrase, that ethnic or national groups are "imagined communities" defined ideologically.

The work of Anthony Smith and Paul C. Stern offers a useful synthesis of these perspectives. Stern begins by pointing out that loyalty to groups that include non-kin is by any definition primordial. Part of the argument is that the tendency toward such loyalty may be the result of natural selection: those who can in a crisis count on fellow group-members' loyalty—including such non-kin as in-laws—were presumably evolutionarily favored over strict egoists, who would have died when their groups would have fractured under stress. "Nationalism gets its force," Stern therefore argues, "by a drawing on [this] primordial sociality." Any particular national identification, however, is the result of a social construction that symbolically equates that national identity with

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[4] The classic statement of the "primordialist" position is Clifford Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States," in Clifford Geertz, ed., *Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa* (New York: Free Press, 1963), pp. 105-157. Cf. Harold R. Isaacs, *Idols of the Tribe* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975); Connor, *Ethnonationalism*; and Smith, *Ethnic Origins of Nationalism.*

[5] The "constructivist" label is proposed in Crawford Young, "The Dialectics of Cultural Pluralism," in Crawford Young, ed., *The Rising Tide of Cultural Pluralism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993); cf. Leroy Vail, *The Creation of Tribalism in Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

the family.[6] Smith's compatible account explains the core of an ethnic (not necessarily nationalist) identity as a constructivist would, ideologically, as a "myth-symbol complex," a combination of myths, memories, values and symbols which define not only who is a member of the group, but what it means to be a member.[7] Thus ethnic symbolism is at the heart of this conception: the existence, status and security of the group depends on the status of group symbols, which is why people are willing to fight and die for them—and why they are willing to follow leaders who manipulate those symbols for dubious or selfish purposes.

Not all theorists would accept this synthesis, of course. Radical instrumentalists argue that ethnic groups are merely coalitions formed in a rational attempt to compete for scarce goods in the context of social changes brought about by modernization.[8] The trouble with this formulation is that if one insists on the "merely," the theory is wrong. The evidence is overwhelming that many people do indeed have strong emotional attachments to their ethnic identity, and that they will sacrifice material goods over symbolic issues of group pride. They also frequently hold onto their group identity even when it is possible and beneficial to assimilate to another group. It is, of course, sometimes useful to make counterfactual assumptions of this kind in the interests of building better theory. But if ethnic identities were constructed merely for instrumental reasons, people would also be willing to abandon them for instrumental reasons. The fact that they rarely do so is just one indication that this particular counterfactual assumption leads to weak theory.

Necessary Conditions for Ethnic War

Fear. Ethnic war is driven primarily by fear. When ethnic conflicts escalate to war, they do so because first one side, then eventually both sides, come to fear that the existence of their group is at stake in their conflict with another group. Donald Horowitz points out that such fears are frequently "anxiety-laden"—that is, exaggerated by emotion.[9] Once such fears, exaggerated or not, become prevalent among the members of any ethnic group, they justify and motivate resort to violence in "self-defense." Such fears are a necessary condition for ethnic war because of the simple

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[6] Paul C. Stern, "Why do People Sacrifice for their Nations?" in John L. Comaroff and Paul C. Stern, eds., *Perspectives on Nationalism and War* (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breech, 1995), pp. 109, 115.

[7] Smith, *Ethnic Origins of Nations*, pp. 15–16 and *passim.*

[8] Robert Bates, "Modernization, Ethnic Competition, and the Rationality of Politics in Contemporary Africa," in Donald Rothchild and Victor A. Olorunsola, eds., *State vs. Ethnic Claims: African Policy Dilemmas* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983); cf. Ronald Rogowski, "Causes and Varieties of Nationalism: A Rationalist Account," in Edward A. Tiryakian and Ronald Rogowski, eds., *New Nationalisms of the Developed West: Toward Explanation* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1985).

[9] Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 179-180.

social/ psychological fact noted by Stern: people are much more concerned to avoid loss than to pursue gains, so they are usually mobilizable only when confronted by some threat.[10] This is why leaders of nations, even when they launch aggressive wars, always justify their actions by claiming they are aimed at averting some mortal danger. Even the Holocaust was justified by an ideology that Jews were not only inferior, but evil and dangerous.[11]

Prejudice. If ethnic fear is the key cause of ethnic conflict, then the source of that fear must be found in the myth-symbol complex of the ethnic group—the members' beliefs and feelings about the other group. The fear comes not from what the other group does, but from the one group's feelings and expectations regarding the other group. I define prejudice to include both negative stereotypes, which are cognitive beliefs about the traits characterizing groups; and negative affect, or negative feelings about other groups. Negative stereotypes and negative affect tend to be mutually reinforcing: "we" are inclined to dislike "them" because we think "them" aggressive or stupid, and the more "we" dislike "them," the more aggressive or stupid "we" think "they" are. Recent research supports the assumption that emotional feelings about other groups are even more important than cognitively based stereotypes in explaining prejudice.[12]

The significance of prejudice is that it helps determine group members' political preferences and behavior. If "we" dislike "them" and consider "them" aggressive, then they cannot be trusted with political or economic power, so the political and economic systems must be biased in favor of "us." Attitudes like this make compromise seem unacceptable—any concessions "we" make will be used against "us." The result is, at best, political deadlock. Since the emotional component of prejudice also makes people more likely to act on these attitudes, as noted above, it also makes possible the escalation to violence and ethnic war.

Political space. "Political space" refers to the opportunity to mobilize politically without being stopped by state coercion.[13] Ethnic prejudices can cause members of different ethnic groups to fear physical violence from each other, but effective policing can prevent violent episodes from escalating, and political repression can prevent ethnic leaders from articulating their demands and mobilizing their followers for conflict. Therefore, as long as a state maintains an effective apparatus of repression

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[10] Stern, "Why Do People Sacrifice for their Nations?" p. 117.

[11] Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

[12] Charles Stangor, Linda A. Sullivan, and Thomas E. Ford, "Affective and Cognitive Determinants of Prejudice," *Social Cognition* vol. 9, no. 4 (Winter 1991), pp. 359–380.

[13] Milton Esman includes this consideration in his concept of "political opportunity structure." See Milton J. Esman, *Ethnic Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 31.

and uses it to suppress ethnic mobilization, as the USSR did for most of its history, large-scale ethnic conflict cannot occur. Since the relaxation of political repression opens up political space for all sort of political entrepreneurs, such relaxation can make ethnic violence more likely. Of course, if a repressive state itself endorses prejudiced policies, then the needed political space is *a fortiori* present: it is the state that sets limits on political space, so it can initiate ethnic violence. If the result is to be ethnic war, both sides must have enough political space to organize and arm themselves to a roughly equivalent degree. If one side, most likely the state, has an overwhelming coercive advantage, the result is "ethnic cleansing" or genocide rather than war. Various other preconditions have been identified in the literature on ethnic violence, but these can be seen to be either logically derivable from the above, or else not necessary. [14]

"Rational grievances." The trouble with this category, the centerpiece of instrumentalist arguments, is that it is so general as to be meaningless. The fact is that such grievances can take any form— dissatisfaction with policies for economic distribution, linguistic policy, religious policy, or merely with the division of political power. None of these types of grievances is either necessary or sufficient for the outbreak of ethnic war. Furthermore, they can be invented: policies or trends that are unexceptionable at one time become unacceptable at another. The critical cause of grievance is not any particular policy or situation, but a decision that the policy or situation must change, and should be understood in ethnic terms. In short, the cause of "rational grievances" is—to use related terms from different theories—the ethnic group's ideology, or preference ordering, or "myth-symbol complex."

A better way to think about the motivation for ethnic violence is not the logic of grievance, but the psychology of anger. Political action such as ethnic violence is motivated, from this point of view, when a calculation of injustice (the result of criteria provided by nationalist ideology) is combined with emotional heat. [15] As Susan Fiske and Shelley Taylor put it, "emotions…divert people from pursuing one goal and point them toward another goal that has meanwhile increased in importance." Furthermore, "emotion commits one to action more than does the cost-benefit calculation of intellective cognition." [16] In other words, emotion is necessary to flip a kind of cognitive switch, impelling people to be active

[14] I endorsed one such list in Stuart J. Kaufman, "Spiraling to Ethnic War: Elites, Masses and Moscow in Moldova's Civil War," *International Security* vol. 21, no. 2 (Fall 1996), pp. 108–138. It was drived largely from the observations of Donald Horowitz, "Making Moderation Pay: The Comparative Politics of Ethnic Conflict Management," in Joseph V. Montville, ed., *Conflict and Peacemaking in Multiethnic Societies* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1990), pp. 455–456.

[15] Carol Tavris, *Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion*, rev. ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), p. 91.

[16] Susan T. Fiske and Shelley E. Taylor, *Social Cognition,* 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991), pp. 433, 456.

in defense of the group instead of pursuing private gain and free-riding on the self-defense efforts of others. Thus, in rational-choice terms, changeable emotions determine preferences.

Threatened ethnic symbols. The argument here is tautological. Since ethnic symbols are the ideological markers that determine ethnic group membership, status and values, any ethnically defined conflict will become a conflict over ethnic symbols. Indeed, the controversial policy often itself becomes an ethnic symbol: thus in the US, "busing" or "affirmative action" are not only policies, but symbols which evoke powerful emotions on both sides of the ethnic (in this case, racially defined) divide, tying into different parts of each group's "myth-symbol complex." In other words, ethnic conflict is, by definition, conflict over threatened ethnic symbols.

Threatening demographic situation. Demographic threats are neither necessary nor sufficient for ethnic violence; and they are, in any case, in the eye of the beholder. Groups that are truly threatened by demographic trends do not always resort to ethnic violence (e.g., Estonians or Latvians before 1991); and groups that resort to ethnic violence are not always threatened by any particular demographic trend. In this study, the Azerbaijanis were not: their numbers were growing absolutely and relatively in all parts of the conflict area. What is necessary is some sort of threat which raises the specter of ethnic extinction, but the threat need not be demographic: Azerbaijanis fear the dismemberment of their state will lead to the loss of their national identity. Relatedly, ethnically mixed settlement patterns may exacerbate other trends toward violence, but they are not necessary for the outbreak of war, either: Nigeria's civil war, for example, erupted after the minority Ibos had returned to their traditional homeland.

History of ethnic domination. This condition is very nearly universal, empirically, but that fact makes it meaningless. Virtually every group in the world has some history of having been dominated, and the few that do not can easily find reason to fear the revenge of those they previously dominated. It is not necessary that the previous history of domination be at the hands of the current adversary of one's group: a link, substantial or not, can always be constructed. Thus Serbs associate the Albanians of Kosovo—who never dominated Serbia—with the Turks, who did. Armenia never dominated Azerbaijan, but Azerbaijanis associate Armenians, some of whom were agents for the Tsar, with past Russian domination. Raw material as ubiquitous as this is not useful for distinguishing conflicts that become violent from those that do not.

Anarchy or structure. Instrumentalist accounts of ethnic violence tend to underestimate the role of prejudice-driven fear, and as a result, tend to make two mistakes: they assume what they are trying to explain, and paradoxically end by reversing the true direction of causality. The

instrumentalist argument, as expressed by David Lake and Donald Rothchild, is that "when states lose the ability to arbitrate between groups or provide credible guarantees of protection for groups…groups become fearful for their survival. They invest in and prepare for violence, and thereby make actual violence possible."[17] The supposed logic is that "the structure of the situation," defined by "emergent anarchy" or the absence of an arbiter, forces both sides to engage in a security competition. This structuralist logic is, however, driven entirely by the presumption that "emergent anarchy" by itself creates a threat of violence.

That presumption is wrong. It asserts, in effect, that only the existence of police prevents murder and other violence. But the law, which is built on some experience with domestic political behavior, considers murder likely only when the perpetrator has not only opportunity, but also motive sufficient to impel such extreme action (as well as the necessary means). If ethnic groups are not hostile toward each other—i.e., if each group defines its security and other vital needs in ways that allow the other group's needs to be met—the groups can resolve any disputes peacefully. If neither group sees preparations for violence by the other, neither need fear the other, and no security dilemma will arise. The structuralist argument that anarchy leads to conflict therefore only works if one assumes what needs to be explained: hostile intentions. When hostile intentions are absent, as they were in most parts of the collapsing Soviet Union, anarchy creates neither security dilemmas nor violence.[18]

The logic of instrumentalists like Lake and Rothchild is that ethnic disputes may be prisoners' dilemmas, in which cooperation is preferred to confrontation, but in which fears of violence by the other side — exacerbated by "information failures" and "problems of credible commitment" —may prevent the sides from reaching a cooperative solution. However, even if the situation is a prisoners' dilemma, it does not necessarily follow that confrontation is likely because, in game theory terms, the "games" are iterated—played repeatedly—and both players have reputations based on previous behavior. Those reputations—i.e., each group's image of the other—are encoded in each group's ideology or "myth-symbol complex." If one side takes the view, "we prefer compromise but they are too hostile to be trusted," then a security

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[17] David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild, "Containing Fear: The Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict," *International Security* vol. 21, no. 2 (Fall 1996), p. 43. Cf. Russell Hardin, *One for All: The Logic of Group Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

[18] The security dilemma is widespread in international relations because of the ubiquity of hostile images, most based on a history of violent conflicts. Absent hostile images, the security dilemma disappears, as it has among Western European and North American states, even though the situation of anarchy among sovereign states remains. For a rationalist explanation of why security dilemmas are not inevitable in interethnic anarchy, see James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Explaining Interethnic Cooperation," *American Political Science Review* vol. 90, no. 4 (December 1996), pp. 715–735.

dilemma will emerge, but it will do so because the hostile image of the "other" makes cooperation undesirable, not because of "emergent anarchy." If, conversely, past history creates the image of a non-hostile (or merely non-violent) "other," then the absence of initial hostile moves on each side becomes further evidence that cooperation is possible, and the result is the "evolution of cooperation" described by Axelrod.[19] Stronger instrumentalist accounts like Lake and Rothchild's concede the importance of historical experience in affecting the likelihood of conflict, but they overlook the implication: that it is not "structure" but images, partly derived from history, which determine whether conflict will erupt.

By adopting structuralist logic, instrumentalists blind themselves to evidence that they have the causal chain reversed: in ethnic conflict, the security dilemma causes anarchy to emerge, not vice versa. The collapses of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, for example, were not cases of state weakness creating uncertainty, then fear, preparations for violence, and finally violence. Rather, ideological and prejudice-driven ethnic fears caused conflict and violence that, over time, weakened and finally destroyed the state. In the Soviet case, there was little evidence of "emergent anarchy" before the Karabagh crisis exploded into violence in February 1988. It was, rather, the accumulation of ethnic and nationalist disputes across the Soviet Union that eroded the effectiveness of the Soviet state, until it finally collapsed under the strain. When violence erupted, especially in the Transcaucasus, the issue was not fear about what rival groups might do, but a deep determination to implement nationalist ideologies to change the status quo, or to prevent other groups from implementing threatening policies which had already been proposed. This understanding of the pattern explains why nationalism is, in Jack Snyder's words, the "default option" for identification when empires break up:[20] empires break up because the forces of nationalism are already in control.

Summary. The necessary preconditions for ethnic war are reducible to two: ethnic prejudice and political space. An intermediate requirement is that the prejudice must be of a type sufficient to justify the emergence of ethnic fears.

How Ethnic Conflicts Escalate to War

Ethnic war happens only if ethnic ideologues, given prejudice and political space, take political grievances and recast them as ethnic grievances; define the resulting ethnic dispute in emotive symbolic terms; and interpret historical, demographic or economic trends as constituting reason to fear that the existence of the ethnic group is in question. This

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[19] Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

[20] Jack Snyder, "Nationalism and the Crisis of the Post-Soviet State," in Michael E. Brown, ed., *Ethnic Conflict and International Security* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

process of extremist ideological interpretation, when coupled with political mobilization around the resulting ideology, is what I term "elite outbidding." If the elite outbidding and resulting fear of extinction take place on both sides, the result is a security dilemma that is likely to lead to war.

   Elite outbidding. Ethnic violence does not require elite activity, and indeed, ethnic riots can occur without any elite action at all. Ethnic war, however, means that both sides are organized and mobilized to fight, meaning that there must be leaders who organize and mobilize the group. Elite outbidding is a process in which ethnic leaders engage in a competition in extremism, promoting more and more extreme policies vis-à-vis other ethnic groups in an effort to gain recognition as the most "authentic" and legitimate representative of their group. Reinterpretation of the group's nationalist ideology (towards demanding more negative characterizations of competing groups) and mobilization of group members in support of the resulting political program are both components of that competition.

   The processes of ideological reinterpretation and nationalist mobilization may occur separately. In some cases, a group's "myth-symbol complex" can be reinterpreted in the popular culture, through novels, journalism, film or other arts, over a long period of time and without any immediate political agenda attached. In Sri Lanka for example, the cultural themes that justified Sinhalese extremism were first articulated in a Buddhist religious "revival" movement in the late nineteenth century. [21] This movement created the prejudices and ethnic fears which politicians used decades later to justify extremist political programs—i.e., to gain support in their efforts at elite outbidding. If one focuses on the process of political mobilization in these cases, one can say, in instrumentalist terms, that the masses already held extremist preferences before elite outbidding began. [22] In some cases, as in Nagorno-Karabakh, violence may erupt even before extremist elites start to mobilize people. I therefore term such conflicts "mass-led," since engaging in them reflects preexisting mass preferences.

   If the reinterpretation of nationalist ideology is promoted by incumbent political leaders engaged in elite outbidding, the result is a different process—elite-led conflict. Elite-led conflict is possible because incumbent political leaders have enormous influence, if not direct control, over the mass media, which they can use to feed any previously existing prejudices, creating negative images of other groups, and creating or

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[21] A brief synopsis is in William McGowan, "Mythconceptions," *The New Republic* (June 7, 1993), pp. 14–15.

[22] This is the situation assumed by Shepsle and Rabushka in their rationalist argument. See Alvin Rabushka and Kenneth A. Shepsle, *Politics and Plural Societies* (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1972).

promoting symbols of conflict. Such actions—for example, blaming the other group for causing economic hardships—help both to promote negative feelings toward the other groupand to reinforce negative stereotypes about the other group. Incumbent leaders can also provoke the other group into hostile actions to corroborate the negative characterization they are trying to build, and block compromises in order to blame the resulting deadlock on the other side. The outbreak of war in Yugoslavia is commonly considered an example of elite-led violence, provoked primarily by Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic.[23]

Security dilemma. According to neorealist international relations theory, the simple lack of any common authority over sovereign states creates a situation in which activities by any state aimed at improving its own security tend to threaten the security of others. As I argued above, the logic does not entirely apply in ethnic conflicts within states; parts of a multinational empire or state can sometimes separate peacefully without the slightest mutual fear, as the Czechs and Slovaks did; and multinational states can be assembled peacefully, as Yugoslavia was in 1918. The understanding of the security dilemma more appropriate for applying to ethnic conflict is the one suggested by Alexander Wendt's phrase, "anarchy is what states make of it:" anarchy may lead to the emergence of a security dilemma, but need not always do so.[24] This is particularly important since, in ethnic conflict, anarchy itself is made—the result, rather than the cause or precursor, of ethnic disputes.

Security dilemmas occur, internationally or within states, when both sides persist in trying to ensure their security in ways that threaten the other. Ethnic security dilemmas are therefore a function of each group's definition of its security needs, which is a function of nationalist (or state) ideology. If both sides believe that their security requires that they dominate the other, then there will be a security dilemma; if neither does, there need not be. Strong states can, if they choose, "resolve" internal security dilemmas with severe repression against one or both sides in an ethnic conflict (the Stalinist model), or manage them with a more modest use of repression (the Northern Ireland model). If the state is not able to do either, and no other state steps in to do so, an ethnic security dilemma will result in ethnic war if ethnic leaders do not themselves head it off.

Summary. Ethnic prejudice and political space are necessary preconditions for ethnic war. Also necessary for ethnic war are two processes: a security dilemma driven by reciprocal fears of group

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[23] Two arguments to this effect are Stuart J. Kaufman, "The Irresistible Force and the Imperceptible Object: The Yugoslav Breakup and Western Policy," *Security Studies* vol. 4, no. 2 (Winter 1994/95), pp. 281–329; and V. P. Gagnon, "Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict: The Case of Serbia," *International Security* vol. 19, no. 3 (Winter 1994/95), pp. 130–166.

[24] Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* vol. 46, no. 2 (Spring 1992), pp. 391–425.

extinction, and ethnic outbidding by extremist elites. These conditions are collectively sufficient for the outbreak of ethnic war if they cause leaders on both sides to prefer war to compromise (the elite-led path to war), or if prejudice and fear are strong enough to provoke spontaneous violence (the mass-led path).

Nationalism, Prejudice, and the Issue of Nagorno-Karabagh

The conflict in Nagorno-Karabagh is a clear example of mass-led violence. Ethnic violence began in spite of the determined opposition of the then-incumbent leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Soviet Union, and before the emergence of ethnic nationalist organizations in Armenia or Azerbaijan proper. Indeed, the failure of incumbent leaders to manage the conflict cost them their jobs. The conflict occurred because both Armenians and Azerbaijanis held such deep mutual prejudices that each side defined its security in ways that the other side considered threatening to its national existence. The result was first a security dilemma and violence, then elite outbidding and an escalation to war.

Historical Context

As with many contemporary ethnic conflicts, the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabagh (and other areas) has "historical roots" which include both some genuine precedents going back a century or two, plus some more dubious interpretations of much earlier history. The complexity of the conflict is implied even in the name of the region: "Kara" is the Turkish word for "black," and "bagh" is Persian for "garden;"[25] the "Nagorno" (Russian for "mountainous") signifies that "Karabagh" previously referred to a larger area. Thus Nagorno-Karabagh is the mountainous portion of Karabagh, a region with a mixed Persian, Turkic, Russian—and Armenian—heritage.

The modern history of the conflict perhaps begins with the 1813 Treaty of Gulistan, which resulted in Persia's cession of most of the contemporary Republic of Azerbaijan, including Karabagh, to Russia.[26] From that time on, "Azerbaijan," the area west and southwest of the Caspian Sea mostly inhabited by Turkic-speaking Shi'ite Muslims, was divided in two: the northern portion (west of the Caspian) under Russian rule, and a southern section (southwest of the Caspian) which remains to this day under Persian rule. The 1828 Russian annexation of Nakhichevan and the Erevan area impelled further changes, sparking a century-long process of Armenian migration from Persia and the Ottoman Empire to Russian-held territory. The result, over the course of the century, was to

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[25] Goldenberg, *Pride of Small Nations,* p. 157.

[26] John P. LeDonne, *The Russian Empire and the World, 1700–1917: The Geopolitics of Expansion and Containment* (New York: Oxford, 1997), p. 116.

change the ethnic composition of what are now Armenia and Nagorno-Karabagh from predominantly Muslim to majority Armenian areas.[27]

The next major turning point was the "era of massacres:" the death at the hands of Turks (and to some extent of Azerbaijanis) of perhaps as many as a million Armenians between 1894 and 1920. The context was the first upsurge of Armenian nationalism, both in the Ottoman and Russian Empires, beginning in the 1880s, and causing both empires to be increasingly suspicious of the loyalty of their Armenian subjects. Thus in retaliation for an 1894 Armenian uprising in Sasun, in the old Armenian heartland of eastern Anatolia, the Ottoman government organized a series of massacres both in Istanbul and in eastern Anatolia over the course of two years which, according to Armenian sources, resulted in hundreds of thousands of Armenian deaths.[28] There followed, during and after the 1905 revolution in Russia, what came to be called the "Armeno-Tatar war" in which Armenians and "Tatars"—i.e., Muslims of the Transcaucasus, mostly Azerbaijanis—fought in clashes all across what are now Armenia and Azerbaijan, with hundreds of villages pillaged or razed and thousands of people killed on both sides.[29] The worst, of course, was yet to come: the genocide of 1915-17 when the Ottoman government, using as an excuse Armenian aid for Russia in World War I, "exiled" over a million Armenian civilians in conditions designed to ensure the deaths of most of them.

Those Armenians lucky enough to have escaped from Ottoman to Russian-held territory found themselves on the scene of further horrors as Russian authority in Transcaucasia evaporated in early 1918. A brief Transcaucasian Federation collapsed in May, after five weeks of independence, leaving the three separate successor states of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. As early as March, however, Armenians and Azerbaijanis had begun committing a series of massacres against each other in the Azerbaijani capital of Baku, Karabagh's then-capital Shusha, and all across Armenia and Azerbaijan, which soon found themselves at war. The Armenians in Karabagh were continuously in revolt against Azerbaijani authority, in spite of the assistance the Azerbaijanis received from Turkish troops in 1918 and British troops in 1919.[30] Shusha finally fell to Azerbaijani forces in March of 1920, and its entire Armenian population was killed or expelled.[31] The next month, however, with most

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[27] Goldenberg, *Pride of Small Nations,* p. 157-158.

[28] Christopher J. Walker, ed., *Armenia and Karabagh: The Struggle for Unity* (London: Minority Rights Publications, 1991), p. 24.

[29] Walker, *Armenia and Karabagh,* pp. 86–87; and Tadeusz Swietochowski, "National Consciousness and Political Orientatios in Azerbaijan, 1905–1920," in Ronald Grigor Suny, ed., *Transcaucasia, Nationalism and Social Change: Essays in the History of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia,* rev. ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), p. 215.

[30] Walker, *Armenia and Karabagh,* p. 91.

[31] Goldenberg, *Pride of Small Nations,* p. 159.

of the Azerbaijani army concentrated against Armenia, Soviet Russian troops marched into Baku and Azerbaijan was annexed; Armenia was next to fall, annexed by the Soviet Union in November. Even after the annexations, Karabagh remained a bone of contention, along with two other disputed territories, Nakhichevan and Zangezur. Soviet officials—meaning, ultimately, Stalin—eventually decided to award the first two areas to Azerbaijan, and the third to Armenia.

The Karabagh issue did not fade away in the next decades. Even under Stalin, there were sporadic Armenian efforts to raise the Karabagh issue. In 1926–1927, Armenian emigres circulated leaflets in Karabagh demanding that the Armenian leadership address the issue; and in 1945 and 1949, the First Secretary of the Armenian Communist Party, Harutunian, approached Moscow asking that the territory be united with Armenia. There were several petition drives on the issue in the mid-1960s, sparking violent demonstrations in Karabagh in 1963; in 1965 demonstrators in Erevan commemorating the 1915 genocide also began crying "Our land!"—referring in part to Karabagh.[32] Other appeals were issued in 1967 and 1977.[33] In the early 1980s, Ronald Suny could still report that Karabagh remained "the single most volatile issue" for Armenians.[34]

Nationalist ideologies

Armenian nationalist ideology. Modern Armenian nationalist ideology is somewhat older and better-developed than its Azerbaijani counterpart, but both have roughly a century-long history. Further, both are deeply colored by the tragic history of their peoples, and the relationship between the two peoples, outlined above. The one point both ideologies have in common is, ironically, the one that divides them most deeply: deep attachment to their national lands including, in several cases, rival claims to the same land.

One critical difference between the two nationalisms—and a key reason for the greater maturity of Armenian nationalism—is that the latter has a long pre-modern history. Not satisfied with a well-established history of the Armenian people extending back to the sixth century BC, Armenian scholars and publicists frequently argue about how much further back one can trace proto-Armenian ancestor groups. The *reductio ad absurdum* of the debate is the view of Dr. Rafael Ishkhanian—both a scholar and, not incidentally, and activist on the Karabagh issue—who proffers dubious evidence that Armenians "were the aborigines of the

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[32] Walker, *Armenia and Karabagh,* pp. 117–119; Ronald Grigor Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 195.
[33] Gerard J. Libaridian, *The Karabagh File: Documents and Facts on the Region of Mountainous Karabagh, 1918–1988* (Cambridge, Mass.: Zoryan Institute, 1988), pp. 42–48.
[34] Suny quoted in Ben Fowkes, *The Disintegration of the Soviet Union: A Study in the Rise and Triumph of Nationalism* (New York: St. Martin's, 1997), p. 133.

Armenian plateau who have been living there continuously since the fourth millenium B.C. at the latest."[35] Ishkhanian also claims that the Biblical-era state of Urartu, widely considered the forerunner of the Armenian state, but known to be linguistically unrelated, was actually Armenian. Similar claims were promoted in nationalist novels such as those of Sero Khanzatian published in the 1970s.[36] Regardless of the specific date they set for the beginning of their history, however, Armenians agree that their long-time habitation of certain territories, including Karabagh and Nakhichevan, entitles them to possession of those territories regardless of the ethnicity of their current populations.

To return to better-attested history, the first century BC saw the rise, and quick decline, of a great-power Armenian state, though sociologically speaking, the Armenian people were at the time deeply divided along clan lines. By the fifth century AD, however, Armenians clearly formed a single ethnic group, with a written language, distinctive church, and even a written history. The Armenian ethos as a martyr nation was also set at that time, with the defeat of the Armenian leader St. Vardan by a Persian army at the Battle of Avarayr in 451 AD. That ancient tradition was nearly lost over the course of a long medieval decline, but was revived in slow stages beginning in the late eighteenth century.[37]

The awakening of modern mass nationalism among Armenians can be traced to the late nineteenth century, when a number of Armenian nationalist organizations, most prominently the Dashnaktsutiun (or "Dashnaks" for short), began mobilizing the Armenian population in both the Russian and Ottoman Empires. The Turkish backlash against that mobilization eventually led to the Genocide of 1915, with dramatic effects on Armenian national identity. The Armenians' traditional self-image as a martyr nation was vastly strengthened, with "Turks" (broadly defined) now cast in the role of victimizer. Publicist Rafael Ishkhanian, mentioned above in his role as an ancient historian, characterized the thinking this way:

> [T]o curse at Muslims and especially at Turks, to talk much about the Armenian Genocide, and to remind others constantly of the brutality of the Turks are all regarded as expressions of patriotism. Among the leaders of the past we consider those who curse Turks and killed Turks to be the most patriotic. Our most recent heroes are those who

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[35] Stephan H. Astourian, "In Search of their Forefathers: National Identity and the Historiography and Politics of Armenian and Azerbaijani Ethnogeneses," in Donald V. Schwartz and Razmik Panossian, eds., *Nationalism and History: The Politics of Nation Building in Post-Soviet Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Centre for Russian and East European Studies, 1994), p. 47.

[36] Fowkes, *Disintegration of the Soviet Union*, p. 116.

[37] Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, pp. 5–9.

>assassinated Turkish diplomats in European cities... [this] is
>the dominant mentality.[38]

The writer Zori Balayan, who represents this thinking, sees all activities by Turkic peoples (though not other Muslims) as aimed at the extinction of the Armenian nation and the creation of a pan-Turkic state, using for evidence the statements of World War I-era Turkish leaders.[39]

Such thinking resulted in repeated Armenian expressions of hostile attitudes toward Azerbaijanis in Soviet-era political discourse. The 1964 petition to Khrushchev on the Karabagh issue complained of a "chauvinistic, pan-Turk policy," giving examples of Armenian workers being fired and replaced by Azerbaijanis, and concluding that "the policy of discrimination and oppression is engendering justifiable hatred against…the Azerbaijani republic…[U]ndesirable relationships between nationalities are developing in consequence." The 1967 appeal by Karabagh activists to Armenian authorities lists several cases of ethnically motivated murders of Armenians by Azerbaijanis, including one allegation of mutilation of the body of a murdered ten-year-old boy, and concludes by calling Azerbaijan's leaders "chauvinist" and "traitors, spies and their like."[40] There were also reports in samizdat of what amounted to ethnic riots in Karabakh.[41]

A particular fear of Armenians was the threat of losing more traditionally Armenian land. The enclave of Nakhichevan, part of Azerbaijan but considered by the Armenians to be theirs, had had a large Armenian minority in the 1920s; by the 1980s it was almost entirely Azerbaijani. Armenians feared that the same thing would happen to other areas—first ethnic Armenian territories near Karabagh, but outside its borders, and finally in Karabagh itself. They referred to the removal of ancient Armenian monuments in Karabagh as a "white genocide" aimed at eradicating their claim to the territory. All Azerbaijani policies that Armenians saw as discriminatory were viewed in this light. Alarmists like Balayan tied such a "plot" to an alleged larger Azerbaijani plan to revive the pan-Turkic movement that would, in the end, annihilate Armenia entirely.[42]

The most recent turning point for Armenian nationalism came when thinkers began arguing, "The Genocide, its exploitation, and its denial by Turkey have paralyzed the collective psyche of the Armenian people. A

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[38] Rafael Ishkhanian, "The Law of Excluding the Third Force," in Gerard J. Libaridian, ed., *Armenia at the Crossroads: Democracy and Nationhood in the Post-Soviet Era* (Watertown, Mass: Blue Crane Books, 1991), p. 10.

[39] Zori Balayan, "The Threat of Pan-Turanism," in Libaridian, ed., *Armenia at the Crossroads,* pp. 151–154.

[40] Libaridian, ed., *The Karabagh File,* pp. 44–48.

[41] Ludmilla Alexeyeva, *Soviet Dissent: Contemporary Movements for National, Religious, and Human Rights* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), p. 122.

[42] Balayan, "The Threat of Pan-Turanism."

nation of victims…is incapable of sustaining a rational discourse. A nation cannot imagine a future if the only thing it can imagine the future bringing is further victimization."[43] When leaders began imagining a different future for Armenia, their program, as formulated by then-premier of Armenia Vazgen Manukian, came down essentially to two items: independence (including democratization), and the "territorial question."[44]

The ideological importance of the "territorial question"—above all Karabagh—was expressed as follows: "Soon it became obvious that Armenians saw in Artsakh [the Armenian name for Karabagh] the symbol for the political, cultural, spiritual and economic revival of our nation; and the people of Artsakh saw in the movement a vehicle for the generation of the popular will to determine their own future."[45] This sentiment, again, was not new: in 1977, for example, the writer Sero Khanzadian attributed to Karabagh Armenians the sentiment, "Let me be poor but be part of Armenia."[46] The power of such sentiments was the reason why the Armenian nationalist movement was led, at first, by a group calling itself the "Karabagh Committee."

The nature of Armenian fears is illustrated by the tenor of a petition addressed by the Armenian Academy of Science to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987—before the outbreak of violence. The Armenian scholars claimed that Azerbaijan was implementing a "Turkish Pan-Islamist" plan to take back land captured from Turkey by Catherine the Great. "They're not only kicking out Armenian and Russian inhabitants from Nakhichevan and Karabagh, but also, by realizing the plans of NATO member Turkey, they have created a string of Muslim villages which consider themselves Turkish along the Soviet frontier," the appeal insists.[47] In another appeal, Armenians from Azerbaijan claimed that the government in Baku had "perpetrated genocide against the Armenian population between 1920 and 1987."[48] Such rhetoric, soon employed publicly, linked the symbol of the 1915 genocide—the most potent part of the Armenian myth-symbol complex—with the government in Baku and the Nagorno-Karabagh dispute. That symbolism was a major part of the reason Armenians were to be so easy to mobilize on the issue.

Azerbaijani nationalist ideology. In contrast with the Armenians, the Azerbaijanis' national identity is very recent. In fact, the very name

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[43] Libaridian, *Armenia at the Crossroads,* p. 2.

[44] Vazgen Manukian, "Four Questions to Vazgen Manukian," in Libaridian, ed., *Armenia at the Crossroads,* p. 40.

[45] Libaridian, *Armenia at the Crossroads,* p. 158.

[46] Sero Khanzadian, "Letter by Sero Khanzadian to Leonid E. Brezhnev," in Libaridian, ed., *The Karabagh File,* p. 50.

[47] "Armenians Petition Gorbachev on Karabagh and Nakhichevan," in Libaridian, ed. *The Karabagh File,* p. 87.

[48] Walker, ed., *Armenia and Karabagh,* p. 121.

"Azerbaijani" is an invention of the 1930s—in the late nineteenth century, Azerbaijani intellectuals were unsure about whether they should call themselves Caucasian Turks or Muslims, Tatars, or something else; the term "Azerbaijani Turks" was suggested for the first time only in the 1880s.[49] Today, Azerbaijani scholars are inclined to trace their past not by ethnic criteria, but according to the history of the political structures which in the past ruled the territory now known as Azerbaijan. Thus for them, the question is whether Azerbaijani history should be traced to the Median (linguistically Iranian) kingdom of Atropatene, which became autonomous from the Persian empire in the fourth century B.C.; or whether their predecessors in Azerbaijani territory, the linguistically Caucasian people known as Albanians (unrelated to modern Albanians), should be considered their ancestors—which would make the "Azerbaijani" presence in the region even older than the Armenian, though the first Albanian state emerged only in the second century A.D.[50] Other scholars might argue, however, that Azerbaijani distinctiveness comes from its Shi'ite religion, which was introduced under Arab rule beginning in the seventh century; or from its Turkic language, which became widespread in the region only after the eleventh-century invasion by the Seljuk Turks.

According to one account, modern Azerbaijani nationalist mobilization began in reaction to the "Tatar-Armenian War" of 1905–1906.[51] In the late nineteenth century, Muslim intellectuals in the region were variously interested in Pan-Islamist, Pan-Turkic, or liberal reformist ideas rather than Azerbaijani nationalist ones. In the Tatar-Armenian War, however, Azerbaijanis were faced with a well-organized opponent in the Dashnaks, giving them the impetus to form their own organization aptly named *"Difai"* ("Defense"). *Difai* was not specifically anti-Armenian, however: its political direction was as much anti-Russian, to some degree sympathetic to the idea of collaboration among Armenians, Georgians and Muslims against Russia—the idea which was to lead to the short-lived Transcaucasian Federation in the spring of 1918. Only in 1913, with the formation of the first *Musavat* ("Equality") party led by Mammad Amin Rasulzada, did there emerge the first secular Azerbaijani nationalist group—though they still did not use the name "Azerbaijan."

In the years 1915–1920, all of the competing ideologies in Azerbaijan were tried—most of them twice—and all at first failed. The Ottomans tried to implement a pan-Turkic or "Turanian" strategy in 1915, but Ottoman military weakness left the Azerbaijani pan-Turkists abandoned and impotent.[52] Plans for liberal reforms, Muslim religious revival or

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[49] Saroyan, *Minorities, Mullahs and Modernity,* pp. 177–178; Swietochowski, "National Consciousness and Political Orientations," p. 213.

[50] Astourian, "In Search of their Forefathers."

[51] Swietochowski, "National Consciousness and Political Orientations," pp. 212–216.

[52] *Ibid.,* p. 221.

socialist revolution throughout the Russian empire were shattered by the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Transcaucasus, which led to the abortive Transcaucasian Republic of April–May 1918. The "March Days" of 1918 represented the betrayal of Azerbaijani socialists by the Bolsheviks, who allied themselves with the chauvinist Dashnaks and allowed the Armenians to carry out pogroms against Muslims. The pan-Turkists then had their second chance during the Ottomans' summer 1918 resurgence, but the Ottomans' informal control was proving unpopular even before they were forced to surrender to the Entente and withdraw from the Transcaucasus. The Azerbaijani nationalists' second chance, with the independent republic of Azerbaijan under the leadership of a new *Musavat* party, was lost when Russia's Red Army marched into Baku in 1920, ending that republic's brief history. The "winners" were therefore the few remaining Azerbaijani socialists willing to collaborate in Bolshevik rule.

This historical experience created a deeply negative attitude toward Armenians in Azerbaijani nationalist thinking. A traveler remarked in 1906 that "the Tatar hatred is directed against Armenians more than against Russians," as Armenians were viewed as agents of the tsar, threatening competitors for Azerbaijani traders, and aggressors in the "Tatar-Armenian War."[53] All of these ideas coalesced into a general feeling that the "backward" Azerbaijanis were threatened by the "advanced" Armenians, who dominated the urban professions, civil service and skilled labor positions, became barons of industry and commerce who out-competed Azerbaijani competitors, and had influence in the developed West.[54] These attitudes remained in the 1980s, evidenced by one Azerbaijani writer's remarks that Armenians "have better connections," that they "want to annex parts of Georgia, Iran and Turkey," and that "The Armenians have always been the first to start conflicts."[55]

After 1920, Azerbaijani national identity was fundamentally reshaped by the context of Soviet nationality policy. Seventy years of official atheism largely destroyed traditional Muslim beliefs and institutions, fatally weakening prospects for any pan-Islamist resurgence. Instead, Soviet dabbling with creation of an autonomous Azerbaijani region on Iranian territory in 1946 injected a dose of pan-Azerbaijani sentiment into the politics of Soviet Azerbaijan. This irridentist sentiment was

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[53] *Ibid.,* p. 214.

[54] The importance of the "backward" vs. "advanced" stereotypes is suggested in Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict.* Azerbaijani stereotypes are described in Tadeusz Swietochowski, "Azerbaijan: Between Ethnic Conflict and Irredentism," *Armenian Review,* vol. 43, no. 2–3 (Summer/Autumn 1990), p. 36.

[55] Quoted in Ronald Grigor Suny, "Nationalism and Democracy in Gorbachev's Soviet Union: The Case of Karabagh," in Rachel Denber, ed., *The Soviet Nationality Reader: The Disintegration in Context* (Boulder: Westivew Press, 1992), pp. 492–493.

strengthened in the 1980s when Azerbaijani party boss Heidar Aliev, searching for a legitimizing idea to replace a moribund Communism, began promoting a "poetry of longing"—longing, that is, for union with the Azerbaijani portions of Iran.[56] At the same time, the central symbol of Azerbaijani nationalism became its "statehood" as embodied in the political unit and specific territory of Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic. Thus threats to the Azerbaijani Republic's autonomy or "sovereignty," or to the territorial integrity of the republic, were construed as mortal threats to national existence.[57] Such attitudes set the stage for the violent reactions against Armenian demands and Soviet authority that came to characterize the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Mass-Led Nationalist Mobilization in Nagorno-Karabagh

In spite of the intermittent demands for transfer of Nagorno-Karabagh Autonomous Province to Armenian control—or, rather, perhaps, because of them—the party boss of the region in early 1988, Boris Kevorkov, was a man slavishly loyal to his superiors in Baku, and therefore despised by his constitutents as a stooge of the Azerbaijanis. He vigorously opposed all efforts to raise anew the question of a territorial transfer, and indeed in 1975 he fired a young official who mentioned in a poem the issue of the other "lost Armenian lands"—the ones in Turkey.[58]

Kevorkov and the Azerbaijani leadership allowed resentment to build up in Nagorno-Karabagh on a host of other issues as well. Armenian-language education was not easily available in Nagorno-Karabagh—there was a shortage of textbooks, and Armenian history was not taught at all—but those who went to Armenia for training were discriminated against in competing for jobs in the province, since even routine hiring had to be cleared with Baku.[59] Underinvestment in the region also meant less economic development, poor infrastructure (e.g., roads and water supply) even by Soviet standards, and therefore fewer jobs overall, especially for Armenians.[60] Cultural ties with Armenia were strangled in red tape in Baku, and even a decision to make Armenian-language television available in the region was left unimplemented.[61] One result of these policies was a continuing exodus of Armenians from the region, in search of greener pastures.

In spite of Kevorkov's position, therefore, the first faint breath of *glasnost* reaching Nagorno-Karabagh seems to have prompted a slow, mass mobilization on the issue of transfer of the province to Armenia. One

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[56]   Fowkes, *Disintegration of the Soviet Union,* p. 117.
[57]   Saroyan, *Minorities, Mullahs and Modernity,* p. 190.
[58]   Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat,* p. 189.
[59]   *Komsomolskaya Pravda,* March 26, 1988, tr. in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* (hereafter CDSP) vol. 40, no. 14, p. 13.
[60]   *Izvestia,* March 15, 1988, tr. in *CDSP* vol. 40, no 13, p. 8.
[61]   *Pravda,* March 21, 1988, tr. in *CDSP* vol. 40, no. 12, p. 9.

petition on the subject is reported to have been handed to Politburo member Alexander Yakovlev in late 1986; in January of 1988, he is said to have received it, or a similar one, with 75,000 signatures of Karabagh Armenians appended—a significant feat implying a petition drive over a year long, which gained the support of some 60 percent of all Armenians in the region.[62] The organizing seems to have been done by a group called the "Krunk (crane) society:" the crane is, in Armenian tradition, a symbol of longing for one's homeland. "Krunk" was reportedly organized by Arkadii Manucharov, a veteran of the 1965 petition drive who had fled to Armenia during the crackdown that followed, but who returned in the 1970s.[63] Krunk's membership reportedly included a number of Stepanakert intellectuals and at least one retired military officer.[64]

When a senior Communist Party official in Moscow announced in early February of 1988 that the petition for transfer had been rejected, Nagorno-Karabagh mobilized to fight. First, protest placards were posted, then students began boycotting classes.[65] Protest rallies in the central square of Stepanakert, the provincial capital, began and grew daily. Responding to the massive grass-roots pressure, district soviets (councils) in Nagorno-Karabagh began passing resolutions calling for the transfer of the province to Armenia. On February 20, 1988, the Supreme Soviet (legislature) of Nagorno-Karabagh Autonomous Province—or at least that majority of its members who were Armenians—bowed to the pressure and made the same request.[66]

Popular attitudes seem to have been ripe for the emergence of open elite outbidding. "Krunk" activists expressed views suggesting that pursuit of the grail of joining their territory to Armenia was more important than any other issue. Appalled journalists for *Izvestia*, apparently looking for signs of moderation, heard instead threats to abandon the ruling Communist Party, reject *perestroika*, and to begin a guerrilla war. When they suggested consideration of the material costs of such a campaign, the journalists were informed that the issue was a "sacred cause."[67] Given that these activists were able to garner the signatures of the majority of Armenian adults in the province on their petition for transfer, it appears that such extreme views were widespread at the time. Meanwhile, Kevorkov was ousted in late February; his replacement Genrikh Pogosian was to prove willing to argue the case of his constituents before the Soviet leadership.

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[62] Elizabeth Fuller, "Moscow Rejects Armenian Demands for Return of Nagorno-Karabagh," *Radio Liberty Research Bulletin* (hereafter *RL*) 91/88, February 29, 1988, p. 2.

[63] Walker, *Armenia and Karabagh,* p. 119.

[64] *Izvestia,* March 24, 1988, tr. in *CDSP* vol. 40, no. 13, p. 7.

[65] Fuller, "Moscow Rejects Armenian Demands," *RL* 91/88.

[66] Vera Tolz, "USSR This Week," *RL* 90/88, February 26, 1988.

[67] *Izvestia,* March 24, 1988, tr. in *CDSP* vol. 40, no. 13, p. 7.

Outbreak of Violent Conflict

Like the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabagh, the population of Azerbaijan proper had substantial cause for the grievances they were to express in violence beginning in 1988. Azerbaijan ranked nearly last among Soviet republics in virtually every measure of standard of living, consuming only 62 percent of the average per capita income, and only 59 percent of the consumer goods per capita as compared with the Soviet Union's average. The average monthly income in Azerbaijan was below the wage level of 87 percent of the Soviet population, and it was supplemented by social funds at only 65 percent of the all-union average per capita rate.[68] Not reflected in the statistics was the additional fact that large numbers of urban Azerbaijanis lived in dismal shantytowns and amid appalling pollution, the detritus of a century of oil production. While Azerbaijan was not quite uniquely disadvantaged—much of Central Asia was as badly off or worse, and the pollution problem was country-wide—its populace did have much to complain about.

With this hardship and the pattern of past ethnic violence in Karabagh as backdrop, the first violence of the late 1980s occurred in the Armenian-populated village of Chardakhlu in northwestern Azerbaijan, outside Karabagh. In October 1987, a local (Azerbaijani) party boss punished a show of dissent from villagers with a "punitive raid" in which women, children and the elderly were beaten up.[69] Perhaps believing that the Chardakhlu incident and others signified a new Azerbaijani effort at "ethnic cleansing," Armenians around this time began driving ethnic Azerbaijanis from their homes in villages in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabagh. Whatever the reason, large numbers of Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia had accumulated in Sumgait and other towns by February of 1988. These refugees were to be the catalyst for the deadly violence that soon erupted.

The first to be killed came from the Agdam region just outside Nagorno-Karabagh, which was housing some Azerbaijani refugees from Karabagh.[70] On February 22, a crowd of Azerbaijanis surrounded the local Communist Party headquarters, demanding information about rumors of an Azerbaijani having been killed in Stepanakert. Dissatisfied with what they were told—presumably they were informed that no such incident had occurred, but refused to believe it—thousands began marching toward Nagorno-Karabagh, "wreaking destruction en route." The authorities mobilized roughly a thousand police to stop the riot; the result was a clash in the Askeran region of Nagorno-Karabagh that left two

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[68] Tamara Dragadze, "Azerbaijanis," in Graham Smith, ed., *The Nationalities question in the Soviet Union* (London: Longman, 1990), p. 169.

[69] Claire Mouradian, "The Mountainous Karabakh Question: Inter-Ethnic Conflict or Decolonization Crisis?" *Armenian Review*, vol. 43, no. 2-3/170–171 (Summer/Autumn 1990), p. 15.

[70] *Komsomolskaya pravda*, March 25 1988, tr. in *CDSP* vol. 40, no. 14, p. 14.

Azerbaijanis dead, and 50 Armenian villagers, plus an unknown number of Azerbaijanis and police, injured.[71]

The Askeran clash was the prelude to Sumgait. The announcement on Azerbaijani radio of the two deaths at Askeran was the spark—or the signal—for over two days of pogroms by Azerbaijanis against Armenian residents in the city. The violence was led, to some degree, by refugees from Armenia, perhaps as many as 2000,[72] many of them made even more desperate by being forced to take shelter in the appalling conditions of Sumgait's shantytown.[73] Some degree of planning seems evident: Armenians were besieged in their homes for hours, some finding their phones dead, others' pleas for police help ignored for hours, still others being told to remain in their homes in spite of obvious dangers.[74] Official connivance was also manifest: neither police nor "druzhiny" (volunteer security forces) took effective action, and the disconnected telephones hints at collaboration elsewhere. The city's party boss stayed out of the city on vacation for the first day of the rioting, and then began leading the mob—supposedly away from the Armenian district—instead of calling for a crackdown to stop the ongoing rampage by an armed mob.[75] The officially announced death toll was 32 people, six of them Azerbaijani, but Armenians claim that evidence from death certificates shows the true number to be at least 360 dead from the rioting.[76]

The Sumgait pogroms marked a major escalation in the Karabagh conflict, but its origins remain mysterious. To the extent that it was organized, who did so and why? The participation of Azerbaijani refugees is easily explicable—their prejudices would surely have been reinforced and made salient by hardships so directly attributable to Armenians, so the announcement of Azerbaijani deaths could easily have served as a pretext, or the "final straw" before venting their emotions. Their equally deprived shantytown neighbors, who constituted the bulk of those arrested in the aftermath, would have found it easy to join in.[77] But how to explain the official connivance? One source suggests that it might have been the local "mafia," and that thesis has merit.[78] The riots may have begun as efforts to get rid of ethnic Armenian "business competitors," and that "mafia" certainly must have had influence with the city leadership,

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[71] Elizabeth Fuller, "Nagorno-Karabakh: The Death and Casualty Toll to Date," *RL* 531/88, Dec. 14, 1988, pp. 1–2.

[72] Tamara Dragadze, "Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijanis," in Graham Smith, ed., *The Nationalities Question in the Soviet Union* (London: Longman, 1990), p. 175.

[73] *Moskovskie novosti*, April 17, 1988, tr. in *CDSP* vol. 40, no. 17, pp. 12–13.

[74] *Moskovskiye novosti* no 21, May 22, 1988, tr. in *CDSP* vol. 40, no. 23, p. 10.

[75] *Komsomolskaya pravda*, March 25, 1988, tr. in *CDSP* vol. 40, no. 14, p. 14.

[76] Elizabeth Fuller, "Nagorno-Karabakh: The Death and Casualty Toll to Date," *RL* 531/88, December 14, 1988, pp. 1–2.

[77] *Moskovskie novosti,* no. 21, May 22, 1988, tr. in *CDSP* vol. 40, no. 23, p. 10.

[78] Richard Sakwa, *Gorbachev and his Reforms, 1985–1990* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1990), p. 244.

who may have been persuaded to look the other way. City leaders may not have realized the extent of the violence at first, and when they did realize it, they would have found themselves unprepared to react—or to ask for help, which would have involved admitting their error. Whatever the cause, the effects of the pogroms were much clearer. One of the most important was to dramatically escalate the degree of popular mobilization in Armenia.

Mass-Led Mobilization in Armenia

While Nagorno-Karabagh was mobilizing around the nationalist issue as early as 1986 or 1987, activists in Armenia were taking a more cautious approach. At first, popular mobilization was limited to issues that were more or less "approved" for discussion in the early years of glasnost. Thus the first major issue to be raised was the safety of the nuclear power plant outside the Armenian capital of Erevan: in March of 1986, 350 Armenian intellectuals signed a letter urging Gorbachev to order the shutdown of plant, which is situated in an earthquake zone.[79] Protest rallies began on that and other environmental issues in October of 1987, drawing at first a few thousand people,[80] but when news reached one such rally of the clashes at Chardakhlu, it quickly turned into a rally on the Karabagh issue—and was soon broken up by police.[81] The streets of Erevan were calmer for some months thereafter.

The Karabagh issue was heating up, however. October was when the Armenian Academy of Sciences petition on Karabagh was sent to Gorbachev. Throughout the fall, a series of prominent Armenians— scholar Sergei Mikoyan, Gorbachev advisor Abel Aganbeygan, and writer Zori Balayan—publicly speculated that the Karabagh issue would soon be resolved, raising expectations among Armenians.[82] Then, as Karabagh was beginning its protests, the environmental issue resurfaced in Armenia, as the republic government reneged on a commitment to close some of the most dangerous sources of pollution. The result was a series of demonstrations in Erevan beginning February 18 on the environmental issue, with Karabagh also being mentioned.[83] February 20 was the day the Nagorno-Karabagh soviet requested transfer to Armenia; on the 21st the Politburo in Moscow rejected the demand.

Now it was Erevan's turn to explode—peacefully. The day after the Politburo decision, 50,000 or more demonstrated in Erevan in protest. The next day, the crowds were twice as large, and they continued to grow

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[79] Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat,* p. 196.
[80] Elizabeth Fuller, "Mass Demonstration in Armenia Against Environmental Pollution," *RL* 421/87, p. 1.
[81] Elizabeth Fuller, "Armenians Demonstrate for Return of Territories form Azerbaijan," *RL* 441/87, October 20, 1987, p. 1.
[82] Libaridian, ed., *The Karabagh File,* pp. 69–73.
[83] Elizabeth Fuller, "Mass Demonstrations in Armenia," *RL* 79/88, February 22, 1988.

daily.[84] Trying to warn of the dangers of nationalist action, Politburo candidate member Dolgikh announced on Armenian television on the 24th that there had been "casualties" from clashes in Nagorno-Karabagh, presumably referring to the Askeran incident. The tactic backfired. The 25th saw villagers beginning to converge on Erevan in large numbers; on the 26th came demonstrations in Erevan estimated as including as many as a million people; other Armenian cities also demonstrated.[85] Bowing to the pressure, Gorbachev met that day with Armenian nationalist leaders Zori Balayan and Silva Kaputikian, promising a "just solution" to the problem on the condition that the demonstrations stopped. The demonstrations stopped at their leaders' urging.[86]

As in Stepanakert, these demonstrations were organized, but organized from below, in spite of opposition from Armenia's old guard Party First Secretary Karen Demirchyan.[87] Thus when the demonstrations were stopped on February 27, the decision was announced on behalf of an "organizing committee" headed by Victor Ambartsumyan, President of the Armenian Academy of Sciences. *Pravda* reported that organizers appeared at enterprises, institutes and schools, with timetables for when and where to march, that the crowds were kept calm and orderly (in spite of the inflammatory issues they were protesting), and that there was a system for providing food and drink to the enormous crowds, with a fund of money to pay the costs.[88] *Pravda's* story was aimed at delegitimizing the demonstrations as the result of plotting by provocateurs, but it actually has the opposite effect. The organizational efforts *Pravda* described were necessary to make gatherings of hundreds of thousands of people physically possible.

The impressive fact is that leaders managed to recruit so many organizers—not only from the ranks of the intelligentsia, the group which led the charge, but also in the factories—and that they were able so quickly to raise the money to provide food, to find transportation for people in the countryside, and so on. Furthermore, according to Nora Dudwick, who was present at the time, a coherent network of factory and institute committees did not emerge until March, after the February rallies.[89] Thus the February rallies were organized before the Karabagh Committee had taken any kind of organized shape. For its members to

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[84] Vera Tolz, "USSR This Week," RL 90/88, February 26, 1988.

[85] Elizabeth Fuller, "A Preliminary Chronology of Recent Events in Armenia and Azerbaijan," RL 101/88, March 15, 1988.

[86] Elizabeth Fuller, "Moscow Rejects Armenian Demands for Return of Nagorno-Karabagh," RL 91/88, February 29, 1988.

[87] For an example of Demirchyan's rhetoric, see, *Kommunist* (Erevan), February 23, 1988, tr. in CDSP 40, no. 8, p. 4.

[88] *Pravda*, March 21, 1988, tr. in *CDSP* vol. 40, no. 12, p. 8.

[89] Nora Dudwick, "Armenia: the nation awakens," in Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras, eds., *Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 276.

have managed to organize the rallies before they were well-organized themselves, and to do so in the teeth of a hostile government, is strong evidence of the mass-led nature of the enterprise.

Erevan's reaction to the events at Sumgait was relatively calm. The moratorium on rallies held, except for a single funeral demonstration that attracted hundreds of thousands.[90] But the conflict escalated, producing a continuing stream of refugees fleeing from areas where they were the ethnic minority.[91] After the Politburo's March decision to offer Nagorno-Karabagh a package of economic and cultural concessions instead of transfer to Armenia, new demonstrations were averted only by the deployment of thousands of troops in Erevan before the announcement. Even then, the decision was the Karabagh Committee's, which decided on passive resistance, proclaiming Erevan a "dead city," instead.[92] New demonstrations in Erevan—and, for the first time, in Baku—came in May, after the sentencing of a few Sumgait rioters: Azerbaijanis believed the 15-year sentence (of an Azerbaijani convicted of murder) too harsh, while Armenians protested that the organizers of the riots were not even on trial.[93] In Nagorno-Karabagh, May also saw members of local minorities (Armenians in Shusha, Azerbaijanis in Stepanakert) being fired from their jobs, the appearance of "self-defense sentries" on the streets of Stepanakert, and continued sporadic violence.[94]

The May protests ended Gorbachev's patience with the old-style Communist Party First Secretaries in Armenia (Demirchyan) and Azerbaijan (Bagirov). They were replaced by more flexible figures—Suren Artutiunian in Armenia and Abdul-Rakhman Vezirov in Azerbaijan—but the new leaders, pressured from below, had precious little room for maneuver. This situation gave the Karabagh Committee the opening it had been looking for: it mobilized a crowd estimated at 700,000 people to demonstrate on June 13, two days before a planned meeting of Armenia's Supreme Soviet. The Armenian legislators bowed to the pressure, voting to endorse Nagorno-Karabagh's February request that it be joined to

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[90] Fuller, "A Preliminary Chronology," *RL* 101/88.

[91] In late March, reports suggested there were only about 1000 Azerbaijani and 2000 Armenian refugees (*Kommunist,* March 23, 1988, tr. in *CDSP* vol. 40, no. 12, p 11.)—for the Armenians, primarily the victims of Sumgait; by mid-April, there were over 5000 Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia in Azerbaijan (*Moskovskiye novosti,* April 17, 1988, tr. in *CDSP* vol. 40, no. 17, p. 13), and over 3000 Armenians refugees from Sumgait (*Kommunist*, June 1, 1988, tr. in *CDSP* vol. 40, no. 23, p. 10). In mid-July, an Azerbaijani official reported over 20,000 Azerbaijani refugees (*Pravda,* July 20, 1988, tr. in *CDSP* vol. 40, no. 29, p. 3).

[92] Elizabeth Fuller, "Whither the Nagorno-Karabagh Campaign?" RL 133/88.

[93] Elizabeth Fuller, "New Demonstrations in Armenia and Azerbaijan Exemplify Polarization of Views over Nagorno-Karabagh," RL 220/88, May 20, 1988.

[94] *Pravda*, June 10, 1988, tr. in *CDSP* vol. 40, no. 23, p. 11.

Armenia; the Azerbaijani legislature quickly renewed its denial of the request.[95]

July completed the Armenian nationalists' disillusionment with the Gorbachev-Arutiunian leadership. Early in the month, the Karabagh Committee called for rallies and a general strike on the issues of Karabagh and the Sumgait trials. But one radical group of protestors occupied and shut down Erevan's airport; and after Interior Ministry troops killed a protestor (and provoked a fatal heart attack in another) in the act of breaking up the demonstration on July 5, anti-Soviet slogans began appearing in crowds that had been carrying Gorbachev's portrait merely five months earlier.[96]

Pressure from below had by now forced Armenia's leaders to begin articulating their constitutents' core demands, beginning the process of elite outbidding in earnest. Thus Armenian Supreme Soviet chairman G. M Voskanyan went to the mid-July meeting of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet to argue for the transfer of Nagorno-Karabagh.[97] Gorbachev, at the urging of other Presidium members, rejected the demand. The reaction of the Karabagh Committee and the Armenian crowds was to turn toward more radical nationalism, demanding democracy and independence from the USSR.[98]

Mass-Led Mobilization in Azerbaijan

While some actions by Azerbaijani officials played an important role in the escalation of the Karabagh conflict, the actions were not specifically nationalist in intent—the Chardakhlu incident, for example, was meant to be routine Soviet-style repression. The Azerbaijani population, in contrast, was galvanized by the Karabagh issue from the start, as the Askeran clash shows. The Sumgait pogrom illustrates both tendencies: the crowd clearly was pursuing a quarrel with the Armenians, while local leaders played along for reasons of their own. The first hint of a political agenda did not emerge until May, when protests about the Sumgait trials mushroomed from about one thousand people to about one hundred thousand in a few days.[99] Azerbaijani intellectuals also first began mobilizing at this time, opposing Armenian scholars' arguments about Karabagh in a document signed by 250 Azerbaijani scholars. The tone of the Azerbaijani media that spring did not differ drastically from the central media in Moscow:

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[95] Edmund M. Herzig, "Armenians," in Smith, ed., *The Nationalities Question in the Soviet Union* (1990), p. 156.

[96] Elizabeth Fuller, "Recent Developments in the Nagorno-Karabagh Dispute," RL 312/88, July 11, 1988.

[97] *Pravda,* July 20, 1988, tr. in *CDSP* vol. 40, no. 29, p. 1.

[98] Edmund M. Herzig, "Armenia and the Armenians," in Graham Smith, ed., *The nationalities question in the post-Soviet states* (London: Longman, 1996), pp. 257–258.

[99] Fuller, "New Demonstrations in Armenia and Azerbaijan," *RL* 220/88, May 20, 1988.

Sumgait officials were to be held responsible for the violence there;[100] most Azerbaijanis were not chauvinists—rather, many in Sumgait risked themselves to save Armenian friends or neighbors;[101] and Armenian activist organizations such as "Krunk" were troublemakers who were causing the rise in ethnic tensions.[102] The attitude of the republic's political leaders was covertly discriminatory rather than openly chauvinistic.

The May protests changed the scale of Azerbaijani popular participation, but not its mostly unorganized character. Thus the virtual "siege" of Nagorno-Karabagh began with the habit of Azerbaijanis in towns between Karabagh and Armenia of attacking vehicles and convoys carrying supplies to Stepanakert. These attacks occasionally escalated into larger clashes, such as one in September 1988 in the town of Khodzhaly, which resulted in the death of an elderly Armenian.[103] (The attacks would later become a systematic blockade, for which the Armenians would eventually exact a savage revenge, massacring perhaps as many as a thousand Khodzhaly men, women, and children after their 1992 capture of the town.)[104]

Evidence of an organized Azerbaijani popular movement did not emerge until the dramatic events of November 1988, which also marked a major increase in the severity of violence and the scale of population transfers. The events began with rallies in Baku on November 17, protesting against a reported construction project in the Topkhana area of Nagorno-Karabagh. A nonviolent issue could hardly have been more inflammatory: the project was reportedly being carried out by Armenians without the approval of Baku, thus violating Azerbaijani sovereignty; it was allegedly a (highly polluting) aluminum workshop, to be situated in a nature preserve; and its location was sacred to Azerbaijanis because it was the site of an historic eighteenth-century battle by local forces against Iran.[105] Hundreds of thousands of people began rallying in Baku daily, and for the first time a leader emerged: a charismatic young machinist named Nemat Panakhov. Panakhov's rhetoric was nationalist and reformist rather than chauvinist, focused on the return of Azerbaijani authority—and refugees—to Nagorno-Karabagh, but denouncing the Sumgait riots and the appearance of Islamic symbols, and supportive of *perestroika,* calling for "social justice and human rights," cultural reforms,

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[100] *Bakinskii Rabochii,* March 19, 1988, tr. in *CDSP* vol. 40, no. 11, p. 8.

[101] *Bakinskii Rabochii,* March 24, 1988, tr. in *CDSP* vol. 40, no. 12, p. 7.

[102] *Bakinskii Rabochii,* March 26, 1988, tr. in *CDSP* vol. 40, no. 13, p. 9; and *Bakinskii Rabochii,* April 2, 1988, tr. in *CDSP* vol. 40, no. 16, p. 12.

[103] Elizabeth Fuller, "Further Fatality Reported as New Violence Flares Up in Nagorno-Karabagh," *RL* 428/88, October 15, 1988.

[104] A startling account of the Khodzhaly massacre is in Thomas Goltz, *Requiem for a Would-be Republic: The Rise and Demise of the Former Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan; A Personal Account of the Years 1991-1993* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1994), pp. 173–184.

[105] Elizabeth Fuller, "Nagorno-Karabagh: An Ulster in the Caucasus?" *RL* 534/88, December 14, 1988; Saroyan, *Minorities, Mullahs and Modernity,* p. 185.

and so on.[106] The city was not entirely peaceful, however: there were large numbers of attacks on Armenians, and slogans such as "freedom for the heroes [sic] of Sumgait" were shouted at rallies.[107]

While Baku was demonstrating, other parts of Azerbaijan exploded into even more extreme violence, in response to the announcement on November 21 of a death sentence for one of the Sumgait rioters.[108] The day after the announcement, Azerbaijani mobs began attacking Armenians in the widely separated cities of Kirovabad and Nakhichevan, and protest rallies spread across the republic. Troops quickly moved to stem the violence, imposing a strict curfew and killing three people who violated it in Kirovabad. Meanwhile, violent clashes spread across Armenia as well, resulting in deaths on both sides, with most victims among the locally outnumbered Azerbaijanis.[109] Over the course of a month, 180,000 Armenians fled Azerbaijan, primarily from cities such as Kirovabad and Baku, while 160,000 mostly rural Azerbaijanis left their homes in Armenia, creating a combined refugee population of over a third of a million people.[110] In the midst of the violence came reports of a first, abortive attempt to organize an Azerbaijani Popular Front: an agenda including cultural, political, human rights and other issues was published in a literary weekly,[111] but government repression prevented the organization from starting its work until months later.[112]

What changed more quickly was the tone of the press. One report lyrically and sympathetically asserted, "Topkhana was the final drop that made the cup of patience overflow;" while another accused the Armenian press of fuelling the "rampant flame of extremism."[113] The newspaper *Pioneer of Azerbaijan* theoretically an organ for the equivalent of girl scouts and cub scouts, wrote in a similar vein: "when the homeland is in distress and its soil is encroached upon, the descendants of…[Azerbaijani heroes] are ready to fight and perform heroic deeds in the name of their people."[114] From this point on, stolid calls for restraint were replaced, on

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[106] William Reese, "The Role of the Religious Revival and Nationalism in Transcaucasia," RL 535/88, December 14, 1988; Mirza Michaeli and William Reese, "Azerbaijani Dissident Reveals Arrest of Nemat Panakhov," *Radio Liberty Report on the USSR* (Hereafter *Report on the USSR)* vol. 1, no. 2, January 13, 1989, p. 14; and Elizabeth Fuller, "The Nemat Panakhov Phenomenon—As Reflected in the Azerbaijani Press," *Report on the USSR* vol. 1, no. 7, February 17, 1989, p. 4.

[107] Fuller, "Nagorno-Karabagh: An Ulster in the Caucasus?" *RL* 534/88, p. 4.

[108] Saroyan, *Minorities, Mullahs and Modernity,* p. 185.

[109] Elizabeth Fuller, "Nagorno-Karabagh: The Death and Casualty Toll to Date," *RL* 531/88, December 14, 1988.

[110] Goldenberg, *Pride of Small Nations,* p. 163; Walker, *Armenia and Karabagh,* p. 128.

[111] Mirza Michaeli, "Formation of Popoular Front in Azerbaijan," *RL* 558/88, December 28, 1988.

[112] Saroyan, *Minorities, Mullahs and Modernity,* p. 189.

[113] Fuller, "Nagorno-Karabagh: An Ulster in the Caucasus?" *RL* 534/88.

[114] Reese, "The Role of the Religious Revival," *RL* 535/88.

both sides, by increasingly shrill nationalist rhetoric—which was, if anything, even more extreme on the Armenian side. Arkadii Volskii, Moscow's representative in the region, quoted one Armenian press report as stating that the riots in Azerbaijan showed "the true nature, the psychology of the Azerbaijanis. There is nothing in their souls besides murder and bestiality."[115]

Victory of Outbidding Elites

With the mass publics in Azerbaijan and Armenia so radicalized and so highly mobilized, and with the media providing biased reports when they were not overtly chauvinistic, the eventual victory of nationalist elites became inevitable unless the regime had resorted to repression of Stalinesque proportions. Leaders instead attempted more modest crackdowns that at best delayed the nationalists' victory. Nora Dudwick describes what happened in Armenia as follows:

> In the immediate aftermath of the disastrous earthquake of December 7, as the Karabagh Committee was organizing relief efforts, eleven [of its] members were arrested and transferred to prisons in Moscow by the Armenian authorities, now headed by First Secretary Suren Harutiunian, in a last-ditch effort to retrieve their crumbling legitimacy. For the next six months, the most salient aspect of political life in Armenia was their detention, which itself triggered further protests and political organization. They were released six months later, in May 1989, virtually sanctified in the eyes of most Armenians. Under their leadership, the dozens of groups, parties, and political activists who had entered the political scene since February 1988 came together in autumn 1989 to form the Armenian National Movement (ANM). By spring, 1990, ANM-sponsored candidates had been elected to the Armenian parliament, and Levon Ter-Petrosian, one of the Karabagh Committee members, was elected president of the Parliament.[116]

The years 1989 and 1990 were eventful in Armenian politics, but little more than this need be said for the purposes of this paper. The chance for the Armenian Communist leadership to regain control was irretrievably lost, and even the ANM was unable to restrain the escalating violence—attacks on trains going to Nakhichevan, which spurred a rail blockade against Armenia, and attacks on Azerbaijanis which eventually completed the "ethnic cleansing" of Armenia's ethnic Azerbaijani population. Ter-Petrosian inherited a government machine so enfeebled that even as president he found it difficult to establish order.

The story in Azerbaijan was roughly parallel, though rather less direct. The special administration under Arkadii Volskii, set up in January 1989 to administer Nagorno-Karabagh on Moscow's behalf, never satisfied

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[115] Quoted in Fuller, "Nagorno-Karabagh: An Ulster in the Caucasus?" *RL* 534/88.
[116] Dudwick, "Armenia: the nation awakens," pp. 276-277.

either side: by May ethnic Armenian officials in the region were accusing it of pro-Azerbaijani bias, and renewing their calls for transfer of the territory to Armenia.[117] Azerbaijanis, unhappy about the loss of sovereignty, finally succeeded in launching the Azerbaijani Popular Front (APF), which had its founding conference in July, announcing a program demanding democratization and sovereignty over Nagorno-Karabagh.[118] Azerbaijan's party first secretary Vezirov tried simply to ignore the APF, but events quickly spun out of his control. August and September saw huge APF-led rallies in Baku, and in a reflection of its increasing radicalization, the APF also organized a rail blockade of Armenia, severely hampering Armenia's ability to recover from the earthquake, not to mention continue normal economic activity. In response, Vezirov's leadership began to bend, accommodating APF nationalist ambitions with a package of laws to increase the Azerbaijani Republic's sovereignty—including an assertion of the right to disband Nagorno-Karabagh's autonomous status. In return, the APF was to have lifted the rail blockade of Armenia, but it found itself unable to deliver on that promise.[119]

The final loss of Vezirov's and the Communist Party's authority in Azerbaijan came, ironically, as a result of Moscow's November 1989 decision to return Nagorno-Karabagh to Azerbaijani authority. Armenia responded with a decision to annex Nagorno-Karabagh, and on January 8 it announced a budget for the region. The latter step touched off a revolution in Azerbaijan: activists claiming to represent the APF took over government building in the city of Lenkoran on January 11, announcing the dissolution of all government and Communist Party organizations.[120] The next day, a massive wave of attacks on Armenians in Baku got underway, with strong evidence of government involvement[121]—but also with evidence of material motivations, as many rioters appear to have been homeless refugees who occupied Armenians' apartments immediately after ejecting them.[122] The APF eventually managed to get the riots stopped in spite of police indifference (or worse), and to escort the remaining Armenians out of the city. The riots thus completed the "ethnic cleansing" of Baku, and left the APF as virtually the only authority remaining in much of Azerbaijan. At that point, on January 20, came a second bloodbath: Soviet troops moved into Baku under orders from

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[117] Elizabeth Fuller, "Nagorno-Karabagh and the Rail Blockade," *Report on the USSR* vol. 1, no. 41, (October 13, 1989), p. 23.

[118] Mirza Michaeli and William Reese, "The Popular Front in Azerbaijan and its Program," *Report on the USSR* vol. 1, no. 34 (August 25, 1989), p. 31.

[119] Saroyan, *Minorities, Mullahs and Modernity,* p. 194-6.

[120] Vera Tolz and Melanie Newton, "USSR This Week," in *Report on the USSR* vol. 2, no.3 (January 19, 1990), pp. 31–35.

[121] Tamara Dragadze, "Armenia and the Armenians," in Smith, ed., *The nationalities question in the post-Soviet states* (1996), p. 281.

[122] Elizabeth Fuller and Mark Deich, "Inerview with Gary Kasparov," *Report on the USSR* vol. 2, no. 5, (February 2, 1990), p. 19.

Gorbachev,[123] killing hundreds of civilians, imposing martial law, and arresting remaining APF activists in an attempt to re-establish Soviet authority. Vezirov was replaced by then-premier Ayaz Mutalibov.

Mutalibov's year was 1991. His authority was dubious due to the circumstances of his accession to power—i.e. his reliance on the brutal Soviet crackdown to re-establish Communist Party authority. But with the APF weakened by the crackdown, and by accusations that APF actions had provoked it, Mutalibov was able to consolidate power, and to orchestrate his own election to Azebaijan's presidency in an unopposed September balloting. The final turn in the process of elite outbidding, Mutalibov's ouster and replacement by APF leader Abulfez Elchibey in June 1992, did not come until after the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict had already escalated to full-scale war.[124]

Escalation to War

The notable fact about the escalation to full-scale war over Nagorno-Karabagh is the degree to which it came about in the absence of leadership decisions: neither Mutalibov nor Ter-Petrosian had much control over the paramilitary forces that turned the conflict into conventional armed combat. The first stage in the escalation, from sporadic violence to sustained guerrilla war, came in response to the abolition in November 1989 of the special commission that had been ruling Nagorno-Karabagh. The special commission, regardless of its other failings, had at least managed to limit the degree of violence: by one count, only forty people were killed in Azerbaijani-Armenian clashes in 1989—a far better record than that of 1988, and incomparably better than what was to follow.

As noted above, the abolition of the special commission sparked a political escalation, as Armenia moved to annex the territory while Azerbaijan worked to establish de facto as well as de jure rule. The result was to exacerbate the security dilemma: the ethnic cleansing of most of Azerbaijan in 1988, and the Baku pogrom of January 1990, led Armenians to fear that Azerbaijani control over Nagorno-Karabagh would lead to ethnic cleansing there, as well—fear that was reinforced in July 1990 when a high Azerbaijani official allegedly proposed such a measure.[125] The Armenian response, the move to unite Karabagh with Armenia, threatened the critical Azerbaijani national values—sovereignty and territorial integrity—raising the specter for Azerbaijanis of the dismemberment of their state and the annihilation of their identity. At the same time, of course, Armenian fears of ethnic cleansing and pan-Turkism sharpened memories of the 1915 genocide—and fears of a new one. Fear

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[123] Fowkes, *Disintegration of the Soviet Union,* p. 160.

[124] Shireen Hunter, "Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijanis," in Smith, ed., *The Nationalities Question in the Post-Soviet States* (1996), p. 253.

[125] Walker, *Armenia and Karabagh,* p. 130.

of group extinction thus began prompting both sides to turn to violence in "self-defense."

The escalation in violence came quickly. Armenian activists accused Azerbaijanis of attacking Armenian villages in November 1989, and responded with repeated attacks on military depots and patrols aimed at acquiring weapons.[126] A wave of attacks across the Armenia-Nakhichevan border in January 1990 marked what might be called the first guerrilla campaign, killing over 200, by one count, in that month alone.[127] It became largely a war of informal sieges, attacks on convoys, hostage-taking, sniping and the occasional terrorist bombing, reminiscent of the early stages of Israel's war for independence. By September, heavy weapons had been introduced, with both sides using artillery and rocket launchers to attack "enemy" towns and villages.[128] In August the Armenian government tried, with little success, to suppress or gain control of the Armenian paramilitary groups doing the fighting in Armenia proper.[129] Its failure meant that, even with the nationalist Ter-Petrosian in charge, the Armenian government was unable to control the pace of the conflict.

The absence of central command notwithstanding, guerrilla conflict intensified in 1991. Cross-border raids continued, but now Azerbaijani authorities, backed by Soviet troops, also embarked on a more or less open campaign of ethnic cleansing against Armenians in Nagorno-Karabagh and other areas of Azerbaijan.[130] The abortive Soviet coup in August, heralding the final collapse of the Soviet Union, then sparked the final escalation to full-scale conventional war. With independence on the horizon, the Azerbaijani government moved to create an army beginning in September, while the Popular Front imposed some sort of organization on the irregular forces doing most of the fighting. Around the same time, Armenian forces in Karabakh "united under the banner of the Armenian Popular Liberation Army of Artsakh."[131]

More significantly, however, the impending Soviet collapse gave the militia commanders means, motive and opportunity to step up the fighting. The means came from the disintegrating Soviet army, many of whose members joined one side, or else sold their weapons. For example, of the men in the 366th Motorized Rifle Regiment stationed in Stepanakert, all three battalion commanders and at least 60 men defected

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[126] *Kommunist* June 5, 1990, tr. in *CDSP* vol. 42, no. 22, p. 10; *Pravda,* April 13, 1990, tr. in *CDSP* vol. 42, no. 15, p. 27.

[127] Edgar O'Ballance, *Wars in the Caucasus, 1990–95* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1997), p. 46.

[128] See, e.g., *Izvestia* August 22 and 23, 1990, tr. in *CDSP* vol. 42, no. 34 p. 14; and O'Ballance, *Wars in the Caucasus,* p. 54.

[129] *Izvestia,* August 5, 1990, tr. in *CDSP* vol. 42, no. 31, pp. 28–29.

[130] Levon Chorbajian, "Introduction to the English Language Edition," in Levon Chorbajian, Patrick Donabedian and Claude Mutafian, *The Caucasian Knot: The History and Geo-Politics of Nagorno-Karabagh* (London: Zed Books, 1994), pp. 37–38.

[131] Goldenberg, *Pride of Small Nations,* p. 164–165.

to the Armenian side, bringing 80 tanks and other equipment. At the same time, the fluid political situation created incentives for military commanders to gain as much territory as possible while the opportunity lasted. [132] These events made possible the first conventional battles of the Karabagh war: the capture of Khadzhaly, and the massacre of its Azerbaijani population, by Armenian troops in February 1992; and the capture and "ethnic cleansing" of Shusha in early April. Azerbaijan never did create a disciplined army, which is why it rarely achieved much success in the fighting, but from this point on, the war was one of conventional ground combat, nominally between Azerbaijan and the Karabagh Armenians, but with Armenia playing a key role in support of Karabagh.

Conclusion

The evidence for the mass-led character of the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict, and for its escalation to war, is overwhelming. Armenians in Nagorno-Karabagh and in Armenia organized mass appeals for the transfer of Karabagh in spite of the determined, if ineffective, opposition of the Communist Party first secretaries in both places, Kevorkov in Karabagh and Demirchyan in Armenia. Clashes such as the one at Askeran in February 1988 were equally clearly the result of dissatisfaction with official actions, not of obedience to official orders. Despite the obvious evidence of official collusion in the great pogroms against Armenians at Sumgait and elsewhere, that violence, too, was clearly driven by popular passions: the most important official acts involved simply standing aside. That these pogroms went beyond whatever goals leaders might have had for them is demonstrated by the consequences: city First Secretary Muslim-zade lost his post after the Sumgait riots, and Azerbaijan's First Secretary Vezirov was ousted after the Baku riots. The escalations to guerrilla and then to conventional war resulted from the major steps toward disengagement of Soviet authority in a situation where a severe security dilemma had already emerged. Specifically, the abolition of the special commission led the Armenians to launch a guerrilla war against the imposition of Azerbaijani authority; and the later dissolution of the Soviet Union provided the weapons needed for conventional war while removing the last practical constraint on launching one.

The evidence also supports the emotive model's emphasis on ethnic prejudice and nationalist ideology as the motivations for ethnic violence, suggesting a more limited role for material concerns. While Nagorno-Karabagh did suffer from economic and cultural deprivation, its situation was no more severe than that of a hundred other out-of-the-way regions in what was then the Soviet Union—which is why Soviet officials, good materialists all, were convinced that a generous package of economic and

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[132] *Ibid.,* pp. 165–167.

cultural concessions would "resolve" the problem. But in Nagorno-Karabagh, people were easily mobilizable because of ethnic prejudice—longstanding stereotypes of Azerbaijanis as oppressors aiming ultimately at genocide against Armenians, plus the emotional hostility against any group with such perceived goals. These attitudes were called to support a long-standing nationalist ideology that promoted a simple solution to all of their perceived problems: transfer to the jurisdiction of Armenia. These attitudes and ideological views had existed throughout the Soviet period; all that was required for them to be expressed was the political space afforded by Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of glasnost.

Azerbaijanis responded violently to the Armenian demands in accordance with their own prejudices and ideology. Azerbaijanis had long viewed Armenians as "troublemakers," while they resented Armenians for their power and economic success—and those who fled Armenian areas obviously had cause to fear them as well, even before massive violence erupted. At the same time, Azerbaijanis' fragile sense of nationhood was bound up tightly with defense of their territorial integrity—and the Armenian demands were doubly frightening because of the perception of Armenian influence or "connections" in high places.

The reaction of the Azerbaijani government to Armenian demands was ordinary: all Soviet republics opposed secessionist movements within their borders, which several of them faced. The extraordinary intensity and immediacy of the Azerbaijani people's response resulted not from material deprivation—other parts of the Soviet Union had comparably bad standards of living—but from a longstanding prejudice increasingly harnessed by a nationalist ideology emphasizing the importance of action in defense of the nation's integrity. Again, the ill-housed refugees who led the pogroms in Sumgait, Baku and elsewhere were clearly motivated by their material conditions—both to seek revenge, and hopefully to occupy their victims' apartments. But it is just as clear that such motivations are not sufficient to explain such violence, because there were ill-housed refugees all over the Soviet Union by 1990, but only in Azerbaijan did they indulge in pogroms. Only in Azerbaijan was the sense of deprivation fuelled by prejudice, harnessed by a nationalist ideology that justified violence against the hated group, and impelled by an interethnic security dilemma.

What is striking about the Karabagh case is the relative unimportance of ethnic outbidding by elites on both sides. Since the nationalist ideology, especially on the Armenian side, was widely understood and of long standing, neither a long period of time nor wide exposure in the media was required to persuade people of the rightness of Nagorno-Karabagh's cause: a few leaflets or dissident speeches were enough to convince most Armenians. Even more strikingly, however, outbidding elites at the national level were not even important in mobilizing people once their preferences were set. Guerrilla war was well underway in the spring of

1990, before nationalists had come to power in either Armenia or Azerbaijan. Only in Nagorno-Karabagh did nationalists consolidate their power early, with the February 1988 appointment of Genrikh Pogosian as the province's First Secretary. Elsewhere, government structures were not necessary for popular mobilization: unofficial organizations found it easy to create militia groups and motivate them to fight in spite of opposition from republic leaders.

This is the most important finding of this study. Prejudice, fear, and extremist ideology can create interethnic security dilemmas even in apparently stable states, even if there is no previous hint of emergent anarchy, and even in spite of leaders' efforts to calm the situation. Ethnic politics and war are sometimes driven by hate and fear. No theory focused on elite calculations or material interests can capture that dynamic.

About the Author

Stuart J. Kaufman is associate professor of political science at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, KY, where he has taught since 1990. In 1999, Dr. Kaufman served as director for Russian, Ukrainian and Eurasian Affairs on the National Security Council (NSC), while holding a Council on Foreign Relations international affairs fellowship. His portfolio included U.S. relations with countries of Central Asia, the Caucasus and Moldova, with a focus on the peace processes for Nagorno-Karabagh, Abkhazia, Moldova and Tajikistan; conventional arms control; and issues relating to the conflicts in Kosovo and Chechnya.

After his tour at the NSC, Dr. Kaufman has continued his research on ethnic war, with a focus on the value of nongovernmental organizations' peace-building programs as a tool for conflict resolution after ethnic civil wars. His earlier work on ethnic war was published in several journals including *International Security*, *Security Studies*, and *Review of International Studies*. Another focus of Dr. Kaufman's research is changes in the international system from ancient times to today.

Dr. Kaufman earned a B.A. in government from Harvard University (1983), and an M.A. (1985) and Ph.D. (1991) in political science from the University of Michigan. His past academic affiliations include Harvard's Center for International Affairs and the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies. His research has included fieldwork in Russia, Georgia, and Moldova, as well as briefer trips to other parts of Europe and Asia.

An award-winning teacher, Dr. Kaufman is also the author of more than 20 publications on ethnic conflict, Russian security policy, and broader issues of international security affairs and international relations theory. His recent book *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War* (Cornell University Press, 2001) examines the causes of ethnic wars and options for conflict resolution in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, focusing on the conflicts in Mountainous Karabagh, Abkhazia, Moldova, and the former Yugoslavia.