

Chapter I

Ethnic Conflicts in the Caucasus 1988-1994

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Introduction

Since 1988, Transcaucasia and parts of the North Caucasus have been the scene of turmoil. There have been numerous latent and overt claims and counterclaims concerning national statehood, administrative status, ethnic identity and borders. Never before, since the turbulent period of 1918-21 which followed the fall of the Russian empire, have conflicts raged with such deadly animosity. Old ethnic wounds have reopened, leading in some cases to sustained warfare, in others to ethnic strife punctuated by intermittent clashes.

Geopolitical changes in the region have been one of the main underlying causes of ethnic conflicts. Just as in 1918-21, when the Caucasian conflicts followed the demise of the Russian empire, these have come on the heels of the weakening and then break-up of the USSR. Geopolitics is a function of the vital interests of states and societies. Thus the Warsaw Pact served the purpose of preserving the social system and securing the socio-economic development of the coalition, by repelling the perceived threat from the West. With the defeat of the Soviet Union in the Cold War, these interests changed abruptly, and a reorientation of the Eastern bloc's ruling elites to Western-type free-market economies ensued. The weakening of communist control from the Centre put an end to common ideological interests shared between the different national elites. These persuaded public opinion in their countries that a transition to a free-market economy, personal freedom and Western aid could better be ensured by economic and political sovereignty. For the elites of the titular nationalities of the Transcaucasian republics (Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan), breaking loose from the influence of Moscow became a priority. The federal division of the USSR - in particular, the existence of higher- and lower-ranking administrative units based on ethnic and territorial principles - became an impediment to the titular elites' national projects. These projects manifested themselves in attempts to create (or, in the case of Armenia, which was nearly 90% Armenian-populated by 1988, to consolidate) statehood on an ethnic basis. In Georgia, this national project collided with the separate statehood, language and cultural interests of the Abkhazian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (Abkhazian ASSR) and of the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast (South Ossetian AO). Azerbaijan was confronted with the problem of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) region, populated mainly by Armenians. In Armenia, the perceived injustice of the international treaties of the early 1920s, which ensured border divisions within the region,⁽¹⁾ reinforced the Armenian determination to hold on to Karabakh, viewed as the only part of historic Armenia outside the republic's borders still populated by an Armenian majority. Thus Karabakh represented both a *raison d'être* of the Armenian national project and a centre-piece of the Azeri one. It might be added that, in both Armenia and Azerbaijan, the national movements did not start out as anti-Soviet, but initially included demands for the Kremlin to ensure the validity of their respective national claims: in the case of Armenia, for the NKAO to be attached to it, and in the case of Azerbaijan, to prevent this. It was the inability of the Kremlin to satisfy these demands that set the movements in both republics on a path of independence.

An institutional vacuum was created as titular nations asserted their rights. The nationalism of larger nationalities found a counterpart in the nationalism of national minorities. National minorities, concerned for their security and survival, mobilized their own populations, tried to ensure exclusive administrative control over their territory and appealed for help to the Centre, to kindred ethnicities across the border and/or to neighbouring republics; they set up paramilitary formations, and expelled "foreign" nationals along with government troops sent to subdue the "rebels".

The Ossetian-Ingushi conflict stands apart from the basic pattern we have just outlined. This is not a case of a national minority struggling to preserve its existing autonomy within a dominant titular nation, but a dispute over parts of the region which have seen repeated border changes and forcible population transfers within them. In other words, it is not a conflict over ethnic status, but a purely territorial dispute.

The interests involved in gaining sovereignty and statehood can submerge socio-economic interests. In Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, no price seemed too high in the national cause. The Georgian president, Gamsakhurdia, isolated his country from the international community; the Azeri president, Elçibey, reoriented his country towards Turkey, risking the loss of the Russian market, while Armenian leaders were willing to endure an oil, gas and transport blockade by Baku for years rather than stop supporting Karabakh. The predominance within national elites of particular groups, such as leaders of military formations, criminal mafias and war profiteers, did little to favour a peaceful solution to ethnic conflicts.

Some regional leaders realized that the price paid for sovereignty had been too high. Shevardnadze and Aliyev stopped ignoring economic and military factors and turned to their traditional partner, Russia. They did so while, at the same time, preserving other, newly-found regional partners and striving to avoid the less palatable elements of their former relationship with their northern neighbour. This new opening up to Russia, together with the political activities of new regional states like Iran and Turkey and the policies of international organizations, have created new possibilities for crisis management in conflicts.

To explain why conflicts break out, geopolitics and socio-economic interests alone are not enough. A salient factor in the conflicts under discussion is the use of history in the service of particular nationalist demands. Thus, in Abkhaz literature, one finds references to the Abkhazian kingdom which existed in the 9th and 10th centuries. This is instrumental to the Abkhazian claim for sovereignty over the region, even though the same kingdom could equally be described as a common Georgian-Abkhazian state, with a predominance of Georgian language and culture. Georgian authors, in turn, stress the allegedly non-Abkhaz character of pre-17th-century Abkhazia to support their case. In a more extreme variant, a similar historical perspective gave rise to the theory of "hosts" (Georgians) and "guests" (all other minorities) on Georgian land. Thus both protagonists use "suitable" historic periods (antiquity and the Middle Ages for the Georgians, the Middle Ages and the Soviet period, when Abkhazia nominally had autonomy, for the Abkhaz). Ossetian politicians impute the decrease in population in South Ossetia during the Soviet era to Georgian policies, forgetting that it was partly due to the resettlement of South Ossetes in the former Ingushi-populated territory (itself a matter of historic dispute with the Russian Cossacks). An influential Armenian writer, Zori Balayan, presents a view of history which furthers Armenian interests by appealing to Russian imperial ambitions and denigrating the legitimate nationhood of Azerbaijan - that "tentative country with tentative Union borders", as he puts it.⁽²⁾ In

Balayan's view, when Russia fought her early 19th-century wars against Iran to annex Eastern Armenia to Russia, Azerbaijan did not exist as a state, nor did the Azeris exist as a nationality (here Balayan is alluding to the relatively late, 20th-century emergence of Azeri national identity, with Azerbaijan, in his opinion, forming part of ancient Armenia). The results of those wars were allegedly legitimized in international treaties "for all time". Thus Russia, according to Balayan, should continue to keep Azerbaijan within its sphere of influence and ward off Turkish influence. If Russia does not, it will be failing to see justice done to the Armenians, its loyal Christian subjects in the past, who had entrusted it with their fate. A reference to Azerbaijan as a formerly Armenian territory, made as it was in the wake of Karabakh Armenian victories in 1993, implicitly carried the message that the Armenians were entitled to annex as much of Azerbaijan as they could. Azerbaijani writers, for their part, have tried to refute the Armenian origins of the ancient inhabitants of Karabakh.

The validity of the right to self-determination, as against the principle of the territorial integrity of states, is a thorny issue, and one which finds no satisfactory solution among the protagonists in the conflicts within the former Soviet Union. Contemporary international law recognizes the right of independence for colonial peoples and annexed territories, but not for parts of such territories, nor for national minorities in internationally recognized states.⁽³⁾ This is designed to prevent wars between nations whose borders have been demarcated, often disregarding the ethnic composition of the territories in question, by former colonial and imperial powers. Another reason is to safeguard the rights of "minorities within minorities" and protect them from ethnic cleansing. Taken in the ex-Soviet context, the principle of territorial integrity has been invoked primarily by the countries newly admitted to membership of the UN, whose independence has been internationally recognized (Georgia, Azerbaijan) and by autonomous republics whose borders - and not status - are contested (North Ossetia). Georgia and Azerbaijan invoked this principle when they revoked the Soviet-era status of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh. The declarations of independence by the latter group of republics have not been recognized by the international community, although the UN de facto recognizes Abkhazia as a negotiating partner by sponsoring peace talks in Geneva between it and Georgia. The Abkhaz, South Ossetes and Karabakh Armenians, who do not "qualify" for independence according to UN principles, invoke the right to self-determination and consequently seek the support of regional players.

A major factor which will be discussed in this chapter is the position taken at various stages in the conflicts by the Soviet, and later Russian, leaders. For the Soviet authorities, and also under Gorbachev, the main political priority in dealing with events in Armenia and Azerbaijan (as in all the other republics) was to ensure the preservation of Communist Party control. This implied a different attitude to each of the national movements, depending on the degree to which they could be contained by local Party bodies, the relative weight of their respective leaders in Kremlin circles (thus Aliyev's friendship with Brezhnev, and his presence in the Politburo since the Andropov era, meant that Azeri claims would get a better hearing) and the economic leverage the republic in question was able to bring into play. The amount of pressure that could be applied by democrats or hard-liners in Moscow in any given case was also important. Of lesser importance was the intrinsic value attached to such considerations as the legality of ethnic claims and constitutional provisions regarding the rights of individual republics. Thus the Kremlin fought against separatism in Karabakh, where the movement was outside central control and could destabilize the communist regime in Armenia and Azerbaijan, but made no attempt to suppress separatism in Abkhazia, where the national movement was at odds with independence-minded Georgia.

The break-up of the USSR was accompanied by the wholesale plunder of Soviet military equipment by local paramilitary and criminal elements, often with the connivance of corrupt elements in the Soviet military. According to Valeri Simonov - former Chief of Intelligence of the 19th Independent Anti-Aircraft Army, stationed in Georgia until the break-up of the USSR - whereas, before 1992, the Soviet military grouping in Transcaucasia had had enough weapons and ammunition to make a thrust to the Persian Gulf and be able to wage, in autonomous fashion, a month-long full-scale war in that area, by 1993, Russian might in that region was less than 10 per cent of that of the former Transcaucasian Military District.(4)

Russian policies in the region have vacillated between the principle of non-intervention in the affairs of the warring sides and an assertive, interventionist policy, including the use of Russian troops for peacekeeping activities. In the analysis of these conflicts, we shall also deal with the efforts made by all sides to use the interests guiding Soviet and Russian policies (and in some cases, those of other powers as well) to their own advantage.

2. Nagorno-Karabakh and the Azeri-Armenian Conflict (1988-94)

Origins of the NKAO

The issue of Nagorno-Karabakh is linked to the origins of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast itself, and to the diplomatic history of the early 1920s, when it came into being. The Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (AONK or, since 1937, NKAO) within the AzSSR was formed in July 1923. Its formation followed more than two years of intense argument between the government of Soviet Azerbaijan (Nariman Narimanov), the government of Soviet Armenia (Alexander Miasnikian), the emissaries of Central Soviet power in the Caucasus (Sergo Ordzhonikidze, Sergei Kirov), the Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Georgi Chicherin, and, most important of all, Joseph Stalin, People's Commissar for the Affairs of Nationalities at the period.

The first stage in that dispute was marked by the declaration by the Azerbaijan Revolutionary Committee (Azrevkom) of 30 November 1920, recognizing the disputed regions of Zangezur and Nakhichevan as integral parts of Soviet Armenia and granting Nagorno-Karabakh, with a predominantly Armenian population, the right to self-determination. This decision was confirmed by Narimanov, on 1 December 1920, at a grand meeting of the Baku Soviet. At the same meeting, Ordzhonikidze spoke about directly ceding Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia, as did Stalin in the issue of Pravda of 4 December 1920. Ordzhonikidze's position was later called a "mistake" by Azerbaijani writers. The solution of the Karabakh question in favour of Armenia was further confirmed by a decision of the plenary session of the Caucasian Bureau of the Russian Communist Party Central Committee (Kavbiuro), taken on 3 June 1921. However, the final decision on the matter came at another plenary session of the same Kavbiuro, on 5 July 1921: to attach Karabakh to Azerbaijan, while "granting it broad regional autonomy".(5)

The decision in favour of Armenia, while probably designed to help the Armenian Bolsheviks on the eve of the projected Soviet takeover of Armenia, had no practical consequences, but it has nevertheless been deeply engrained in the minds of the Armenian population of Karabakh ever since, serving as a legitimation of their subsequent claims to unity with Armenia and sovereignty. The opposite decision was pivotal for Nagorno-Karabakh's subsequent fate. It is generally believed that the second Kavbiuro decision was taken under pressure from Stalin,(6) but it seemed to reflect wider Bolshevik concerns - to appease Kemal Ataturk and placate the restive Moslem population which was being subdued by Soviet Russia.

Azerbaijan, with its larger population and vital oil resources and which, like Kemalist Turkey, was regarded by the Bolsheviks as a beacon of revolution in the East, seemed more important than Armenia from the point of view of revolution.(7)

The formation of the NKAO satisfied neither the local Armenians nor the Azeris. The former considered the establishment of a separate autonomous district with an almost totally Armenian population, - adjacent to Armenia, but subordinated to Azerbaijan, - to be an anomaly. The Azeris objected to the carving out from Azerbaijan of a separate entity with ethnic Armenian administration and administrative borders where before there had been none. But as long as Communist rule held in the USSR, so did the uneasy but peaceful relationship between the two peoples of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Karabakh Armenians on the Eve of 1988: Grievances and Identity

For 65 years of the NKAO's existence, the Karabakh Armenians felt they were the object of various restrictions on the part of Azerbaijan. The essence of Armenian discontent lay in the fact that the Azerbaijani authorities deliberately severed the ties between the oblast and Armenia and pursued a policy of cultural de-Armenization in the region, of planned Azeri settlement, squeezing the Armenian population out of the NKAO and neglecting its economic needs. Among other ethnic groups, the Kurds and the Talysh, of Iranian stock, have been listed as Azeris in their internal passports and not counted as separate nationalities in the Azerbaijani population censuses for the last few decades.(8)

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that, had the above restrictions been lifted, the Karabakh Armenians would have been content to live under Azerbaijani rule. They possessed a sense of identity different from that of the Azeris. Grievances could be the subject of reform and negotiation - they could be rationally identified and eliminated. Differences of identity, on the other hand, have deeper, cultural origins. The fact that in the NKAO there were hundreds of ancient Armenian stone crosses (khachkars), but no Azeri cultural relics of any kind prior to the 18th century, spoke volumes to every Karabakh Armenian.

In Soviet times, any public expression of a political desire to join Armenia was fraught with the risk of arrest. Glasnost, limited though it was, opened up new possibilities for the Armenians in NKAO and Armenia to speak out. Masses of individual and collective letters from Armenians were sent off to the Kremlin, demanding a reattachment of the NKAO to Armenia. The Armenians accused Geidar Aliyev - a long-time first secretary of the AzCP Central Committee and a Politburo member since 1983 - of conducting an anti-Armenian policy. In Karabakh itself, a petition campaign in favour of reunification with Armenia was in progress since the second half of 1987. Highly-placed Armenian public figures like the Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers' Economic Bureau, Abel Aganbeghian, or writer Zori Balayan, author of "The Hearth", a novel about Nagorno-Karabakh, also pressed the Armenian case both in the USSR and abroad. All this Armenian activity, which continued for many months - the last stage in the Armenian struggle for Karabakh which had been waged in various forms for centuries - went unreported in the central press in Moscow and received absolutely no reaction from the higher Soviet authorities. The latter still thought that the national question in the USSR had been solved for good. Stronger pressure was needed to make them understand that Karabakh was still an issue. That pressure was not long in coming.

For their part, the Azeris, basing themselves on the hundreds of years of Moslem rule in the region, pointed out that Karabakh was their land, that many famous Azerbaijani poets and composers came from Karabakh and that the Armenian public had for years been taught an enemy image of the Azeris.⁽⁹⁾ The Azerbaijani authorities, indignant over what they viewed as a concerted Armenian drive to secure Karabakh for Armenia, responded with repression. At the end of 1987, a mass beating of protesting Armenians occurred in the village of Chardakhly in the north-west of the NKAO. The incident served as a premonition of even worse events to come, in 1988.

The Conflict Erupts: February 1988

On 20 February 1988, the Oblast Soviet of the NKAO weighed up the results of an unofficial referendum on the reattachment of Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia, held in the form of a petition signed by 80,000 people.⁽¹⁰⁾ In 1979, the entire population of the NKAO was 162,000, with 123,000 Armenians and 37,000 Azeris.⁽¹¹⁾ On the basis of that referendum, the session of the Oblast Soviet of Nagorno-Karabakh adopted the appeals to the Supreme Soviets of the USSR, Azerbaijan and Armenia, asking them to authorize the secession of Karabakh from Azerbaijan and its attachment to Armenia. Baku rejected the NKAO Oblast Soviet's decision. The line taken by the Centre seemed to be to wait and see, giving the Azerbaijani authorities the opportunity to resolve the crisis as they saw fit.

After the first direct clash between an Azeri crowd and Armenian residents, near Askeran, in which about 50 Armenians were wounded and two Azeri attackers killed, Deputy USSR Procurator-General A. Katusev, speaking on central TV on 27 February, told the audience about the killing of two young Azeris, specifically naming the nationality of those killed. This announcement may have acted as a catalyst. Within hours, a pogrom against Armenian residents began in the city of Sumgait, 25 km from Baku. The pogrom, obviously prepared months in advance and marked by forms of extreme cruelty, lasted for three days, with the Azeri police nowhere to be seen. Phone calls to the police or the ambulance service went unanswered. Leading AzCP functionaries took part in the meetings which preceded mob violence, and a local Party boss even led the crowds. Moreover, in 1988 the KGB machine with its network of informers was still functioning, from which it may be presumed that Baku, if not the KGB in Moscow, had known about the preparations for the pogrom. Soviet (Russian) troops, including those in Sumgait itself, apparently had strict orders not to shoot. It was not until the third day of the killings that Soviet troops finally intervened, arresting some small fry, mostly youngsters.⁽¹²⁾ On orders from Moscow, the Sumgait affair was judicially covered up and the press largely silenced.

The failure of Soviet leaders to use force to protect civilians was to have important repercussions in subsequent ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus and Central Asia: by making it appear that violence paid, it unleashed a cycle of violence. It was clear that there would be no punishment for ejecting a national minority under the threat of terror. For the Armenians, Sumgait conjured up memories of the genocide by Young Turks in 1915, ever present in the Armenian psyche. Gorbachev's failure to act, though apparently intended to prevent a wider outbreak of violence in Azerbaijan⁽¹³⁾, was viewed as a betrayal by the Armenians, for it was he who had inspired the hope that democracy would prevail on the national question as well.

***Soviet Reactions to the Armenian-Azeri Conflict* ⁽¹⁴⁾**

In the eyes of the Kremlin, what happened in Sumgait was "hooliganism", but what was going on in Armenia - mass mobilization, nationwide strikes and political demands - was much more dangerous. Protests on the scale of a Union republic constituted "pressure on government authority" which could not be tolerated. In contrast to Azerbaijan, where the local party leadership initially had the situation in the republic (apart from the NKAO) fully under control, in Armenia the Communist Party was quickly losing power in a nationwide campaign of civil disobedience. In these circumstances, the Kremlin used diverse tactics: promises of economic aid, propaganda and intimidation, political pressure exerted through the medium of other Union republics, direct rule from Moscow and the use of repressive measures - arrests of the leadership of national movements, the introduction of a state of emergency and, finally, military operations against illegal military formations and the deportation of whole communities.

Besides the destabilizing potential of the conflict for the communist system, the Soviet leaders were concerned at the possibility of an uncontrollable chain reaction of border claims and population transfers across the whole of the Soviet Union. Besides, Gorbachev was wary of antagonizing Azerbaijan, a Moslem republic which, to take just one economic factor, produced most of the Soviet oil-drilling equipment.

The Russian democrats, for their part, gauged the significance of the Karabakh issue for their struggle against the Soviet imperial system. For Andrei Sakharov, the Karabakh issue was a "touchstone of perestroika", the test of the Soviet leadership's ability to settle problems democratically. Sakharov, his wife Yelena Bonner and others argued for priority to be given to the right to self-determination over the principle of inviolability of frontiers. Such a position, underestimating the destructive potential of even the most just of national causes, was dominant among the Russian democrats roughly until the August 1991 coup and the final break-up of the USSR in December of the same year, when the Russian "democrats in power" confronted the problem of dealing with the ex-Soviet republics and Russia's own autonomous entities.

1988-91: Meetings, Ethnic Strife and Soviet Repression

In late March 1988, additional Soviet troops were moved to Yerevan as mass meetings, sit-ins and hunger strikes continued in the city. In Armenia, the Karabakh Committee was formed, soon to be headed by Levon Ter-Petrosian, the future Armenian president. In Karabakh, its counterpart was the Krunk Committee (from the Armenian for crane, a symbol of longing for the homeland). On 15 June, the Armenian SSR Supreme Soviet passed a resolution granting the request of the NKAO Oblast Soviet to reunite the NKAO with Armenia. Two days later, its Azerbaijani counterpart refused the NKAO request. Thus the Soviet leaders were faced with a constitutional crisis: litigation between the two Union republics.

In Yerevan, an attempt by pickets to disrupt air traffic at Zvartnots airport prompted Moscow to decide on a military operation. On 4 July 1988, a landing-party commanded by General Albert Makashov (later notorious for his part in the Moscow parliamentary revolt in October 1993) forcibly dispersed the pickets, killing a student who tried to film the event. Another young man managed to make the film, which was shown on Yerevan TV. The official Moscow press blamed the incident on "Armenian extremists". The whole national movement was said to have been initiated by corrupt "clans", mafia elements that threatened

perestroika.⁽¹⁵⁾ In Karabakh and Armenia, people boycotted journalists and publicly burned copies of Pravda and Izvestia.

On 12 July 1988, a session of the NKAO Oblast Soviet took a decision to leave Azerbaijan and rejoin Armenia. The AzSSR Supreme Soviet annulled it the same day. Thus the decision of 12 July marked the start of the "war of laws" throughout the USSR. By that time, the NKAO had already broken off all economic and political links with Baku. From then on, the NKAO could only be reunited with Azerbaijan by force.

In Azerbaijan, the social dynamic was characterized by an interplay of three distinct strata of the population. The Russian researcher Dmitri Furman characterized them as follows. Firstly, there was the marginalized city "mob" - the plebs torn from a rural, traditional Islamic way of life and plunged into crime-ridden factory towns. Prone to revolt and fanaticism when aroused by some external jolt (such as Armenian actions), at quieter times it was passive and indifferent to whatever authority held sway over it. These "lower depths" were soon to increase in number with the influx of refugees. Secondly, there was the Baku intellectual and bureaucratic elite, increasingly Russified in the 1960s and 1970s (some bureaucrats and intellectuals spoke excellent Russian, but their Azeri was less good). The CP and CP-related elites feared the benighted plebs and not infrequently channelled their anger into pogroms against the Armenians and, later, into the national war effort in Karabakh. Thirdly, there was the pan-Turkist and pro-Western stratum of the Azeri intelligentsia - often provincial and village-born - inspired by the example of the short-lived Azerbaijani Republic of 1918-1920. These strata would find their exponents in the political turmoil of the years to come.⁽¹⁶⁾

Starting in May 1988, mass meetings in Baku were led by the inflammatory and fanatical Varlyg (Reality) organization headed by a worker, Neimat Panakhov (Panakhly). The Baku intelligentsia grouped around the Baku Scientists' Club, which in summer 1988 formed an initiative group to set up the Azerbaijani Popular Front (APF). The two groups did not succeed in finding common ground until early 1989. The AzCP leader, Abdurrakhman Vesirov, drifted helplessly between the masses and the intelligentsia, despised by both.⁽¹⁷⁾ In late autumn 1988, unrest in Azerbaijan was sparked by the projected construction by an Armenian factory of a boarding-house and houses for refugees in the Topkhana (Khachin Tap) area in the NKAO: a blatant case of a "creeping Armenian annexation", in Azeri eyes. A permanent mass meeting started in Baku on 17 November. The CC CPSU (Central Committee, Communist Party of the Soviet Union) representative in the NKAO, Arkadi Volsky, gave orders to stop the construction. But the Baku meeting continued. The demands soon ranged from the abolition of the autonomous status of Karabakh to the creation of an Azerbaijani autonomous region in Armenia, the arrest of the Krunk and Karabakh committees and the removal of Genrikh Pogosian as NKAO party leader. Slogans like "Glory to the heroes of Sumgait" also appeared. They were followed by acts of violence, particularly in Kirovabad (Ganja). In late November, 1988, a mass exodus of Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan started; within two weeks, more than 200,000 Armenians had left the republic, mostly for Armenia. By January 1989, only a small number of the Baku Armenians still remained there.

During the night of 24-25 November, Soviet troops entered Baku and a state of emergency was declared. On 5 December, on orders from Vezirov, the troops - using force - dispersed and arrested those taking part in the meeting. The next day, thousands of workers went on strike in Baku.⁽¹⁸⁾ A state of emergency was to continue in Azerbaijan for months.

As the Baku meeting and acts of violence continued, tension was growing in Yerevan. On 22 November, the Armenian parliament was virtually dissolved and a state of emergency imposed in the Armenian capital. The aim of the state of emergency was clear: to crush the Karabakh Committee and bolster the communist leadership. Significantly, the emergency regime was installed in Yerevan - although there was no ethnic violence there - but not in Armenian mixed-population districts, from where the Azeri population began to be expelled. In most cases, the expulsion was organized by Armenian CP leaders and other officials. Azeri writers put the number of those expelled at 165,000 and those killed at 216, including 57 women, 5 infants and 18 children of different ages.⁽¹⁹⁾ Armenians dispute these figures.

On 7 December 1988, an earthquake hit Armenia, killing 25,000. The Soviet leadership took advantage of the earthquake to arrest and jail members of the Karabakh Committee. These were brought to Moscow and kept in jail for half a year (until the first Congress of the USSR People's Deputies), as were several members of the Azerbaijani opposition movement (Neimat Panakhov and Mohammed Gatami, among others) who were arrested in Baku. Having arrested the "instigators" of the Armenian and Azeri national movements, the Kremlin tried to conciliate both peoples by adopting some of the demands made by each of the different sides. Thus, it seemed to meet Azeri demands by removing Pogosian as NKAO party leader (January 1989), postponing indefinitely the election of a new head of the Oblast Party Committee and liquidating the elected bodies in the autonomous region. At the same time, from 12 January 1989, the task of ruling Nagorno-Karabakh was entrusted to the newly-founded NKAO Special Administration Committee (SAC), headed by Arkadi Volsky. This could be interpreted as a concession to Armenian demands for the NKAO to leave Azerbaijan's jurisdiction *de facto* and for direct rule by Moscow. Volsky's programme⁽²⁰⁾ included forging economic and cultural links between the NKAO and Armenia. In Azerbaijan, the very existence of the SAC, set up on orders from Moscow, generated suspicions that the region was being annexed by Armenia by stealth.⁽²¹⁾

In February-March 1989, Varlyg and the initiative group which was to found the APF formed an APF Co-ordination Committee (5 people from each group). Soon the leadership of the fledgling APF was taken by Abulfaz Elcibey, a pan-Turkist, pro-Western Orientalist who did not belong to either grouping. The APF was a body geared to single-issue mass protest actions and it sporadically grew in strength in crisis situations, especially those created by the Armenian pressure on Azerbaijan. Vezirov stubbornly refused to register the APF throughout 1988 and most of 1989.

By summer 1989, Gorbachev's perestroika had led to a softening of policy in the Caucasus. In Armenia, the emergency regime was lifted, members of the Karabakh Committee returned to the republic, and the Armenian Pan-National Movement (APNM), with a programme of broad political reform, began to be formed. As Volsky's committee failed to fulfil the aspirations of the Karabakh Armenians, a movement for the re-establishment of elected bodies at all levels started in Nagorno-Karabakh.

In July 1989, the APF was finally formed. APF leaders criticized the republican leadership for failing to secure Nagorno-Karabakh for Azerbaijan. AzCP leader Vezirov, unable to bring the NKAO under Azeri control or to impress on the Centre the need to do so, softened his stand on the APF by allowing it giant meetings in Baku in late July and August 1989, which demanded that the SAC be abolished and the APF allowed to register. For Vezirov, this was a means of putting pressure on Moscow. For its part, the APF intensified its struggle, resorting to strikes in late August. Finally, on 29 September 1989, the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan

adopted a resolution on the SAC at the request of the APF, which was registered soon afterwards. The months that followed saw Azerbaijan sliding into anarchy, with Vezirov's power weakening and that of the APF growing.(22) By organizing the blockade of Armenia, the APF gained considerable authority in the eyes of the people of Azerbaijan. On 28 November 1989, the USSR Supreme Soviet abolished Volsky's Committee.

In December 1989, the futile efforts by the Centre to resolve the crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh, together with the inability of the republic's leadership to defend Azerbaijan's perceived national interests, the helpless condition of the refugees and an assortment of local grievances, led to a popular explosion spearheaded by the APF. A decision by the Armenian Supreme Soviet to incorporate Nagorno-Karabakh, taken on 1 December 1989, seemed to be the last straw. In Lenkoran, power passed into APF hands in an effort to "draw Moscow's attention to the need for a speedy resolution of the NKAO problem".(23) In Nakhichevan and elsewhere on the Soviet-Iranian border, the APF organized a mass campaign to destroy border installations (almost 700 km of the border was smashed). The APF viewed the movement which started in Nakhichevan as part of the drive for Azeri independence, inspired by the fall of the Berlin wall. Soviet Army units began to be forced out of the Nakhichevan ASSR.

The Soviet authorities feared that the forthcoming elections to local power structures would give the APF a clear majority. In these conditions, the anti-Armenian pogroms that started in Baku provided the Soviets with a much-needed pretext for a military crackdown on the APF. From 13 January, the pogroms in Baku took on an organized character: the city was methodically cleared of Armenians, house by house. There is a wealth of data on murders committed with extreme brutality.(24) The exact number of victims is unknown, as no investigation into anti-Armenian pogroms has ever been carried out.(25) Again, Moscow did not order the troops (a large Baku garrison) to help the victims. The APF issued a statement strongly condemning the pogroms, but said they were the result of the Armenian aggression, which had provoked the 200,000 Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia and Karabakh into acts of desperation.(26) The role of the APF in the ethnic violence was ambiguous: on the one hand, it had whipped up the anti-Armenian hysteria that had made the pogroms possible, on the other, when these actually broke out, it assumed the task of evacuating people from Azerbaijan to safety.

It was not until 15 January that the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet imposed a state of emergency - not in Baku, where the pogroms had taken place, but in Karabakh and the areas adjoining Iran. Four days later, failing to get approval from the Supreme Soviet of the republic for such a move, it declared one in Baku as well, ordering Soviet troops to enter the city the next day. The Azerbaijani parliament condemned both the state of emergency in Baku and the arrival of the troops. The Soviet military push into Baku was marked by multiple acts of wilful murder of civilians. The tanks and armoured cars of the Soviet Army had to remove barricades which were often defended by unarmed Azeri youths. The army fired automatic weapons and machine-guns at random, causing many civilian deaths. In a fact-finding visit to Baku, observers from the Shield Union - a Moscow-based group of former army officers and jurists monitoring human rights in and relating to the army - failed to discover the "armed APF militants" whose presence was said to have justified the Soviet Army shooting.(27) Nor was Islamic fundamentalism involved in the crisis as a destabilizing factor. The official Soviet versions regarding the "Islamic factor" were probably directed at the West, whose sympathy for Gorbachev in those days prevented many from seeing the

situation as it was. US President Bush, for example, saw the intervention in Baku as justified by Gorbachev's need to "keep order".(28)

After the "Black January" tragedy, tens of thousands of Azeri communists burned their party cards, as a million-strong crowd in Baku followed the funeral procession. Many APF leaders were arrested; however, they were soon released and were able to continue their activity. Vezirov fled to Moscow; Ayaz Mutalibov replaced him as party leader in Azerbaijan. Mutalibov's reign from 1990 to August 1991 was "quiet" by Azerbaijani standards. His rule was marked by the "enlightened authoritarianism" of the local nomenklatura, which traded communist ideology for national symbols and traditions in order to consolidate its power. 28 May, the anniversary of the first Azerbaijani Democratic Republic of 1918-20, became a national holiday, and official homage was paid to the Islamic religion. Furman notes that the Baku intelligentsia supported Mutalibov in that period. A consultative council with the participation of opposition leaders was set up, and it was with the consent of this council that Mutalibov was first elected President by the Supreme Soviet in May 1990. In autumn 1990, Mutalibov organized elections to the Supreme Soviet. Of the 360 delegates, only 7 were workers, 2 were collective farmers and 22 intellectuals. The rest were members of the party and government elite, managers and police officials. The APF received 31 mandates (10%) and, in Furman's view, it had little chance of getting more in a situation of relative stability.(29)

In the wake of the "Black January" crisis in Azerbaijan, which led to military clashes between Soviet and APF units in Nakhichevan, a sort of compromise was reached between Mutalibov's regime and the Union leadership: CP rule in Azerbaijan would be restored, but the Centre would render Mutalibov political assistance - at the expense of Armenia and the Armenian movement in Nagorno-Karabakh. The Soviet leadership, in turn, wanted to shore up Mutalibov for fear of losing not only Georgia and Armenia, but the whole of Transcaucasia. The former's attitude towards Nagorno-Karabakh became all the more negative as the APNM won the election in Armenia in summer 1990. In Nagorno-Karabakh, the state of emergency regime was, in fact, one of military occupation. 157 out of 162 "passport control" operations in 1990 - which, in reality, were intended to terrorize the population - were made in ethnic Armenian villages.(30)

Towards autumn 1990, after the elections in all three Transcaucasian republics, communists retained power in Azerbaijan alone. Support for the Mutalibov regime was acquiring added significance for the Kremlin, which aimed at safeguarding the unity of the USSR (Azerbaijan voted "in favour" of the preservation of the USSR in March 1991). The blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh was more stringently enforced. The strategy worked out jointly between Azerbaijan and the high-ranking Soviet military and political leaders (especially those who would later stage a coup in August 1991) provided for the deportation of at least part of the population from the NKAO and adjoining Armenian settlements.

The deportation operation received the code name "Operation Ring". It unfolded for four months, until the putsch of August 1991. During that period, about 10,000 people were deported from Karabakh to Armenia, with the army and OMON riot police depopulating 26 villages and killing 140-170 Armenian civilians in the process (37 of whom were killed in the villages of Ghetashen and Martunashen).(31) Azeri villagers from the NKAO, speaking to independent observers, also spoke of massive human rights violations at the hands of Armenian militias. The Soviet army operations in Karabakh only led to the progressive

demoralization of the troops themselves. Nor did they stop the armed struggle from proliferating in the region.

Nagorno-Karabakh: Proclamation of Independence

After the August 1991 putsch in Moscow, almost all the organizers and direct executors of Operation Ring lost their power and influence. Still in August, army units in the Shaumian (Azeri name: Geranboy) Raion (raion in Russian is the equivalent of a county) received an order to stop fighting and withdraw to their permanent quarters. On 31 August, the Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet passed a declaration on the re-establishment of the independent Republic of Azerbaijan, i.e., the one which had existed in 1918-20. For the Armenians, this meant that the legal foundation for the Soviet-era autonomous status of the NKAO was now revoked. The Karabakh side countered the proclamation of Azeri independence by proclaiming the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR) on 2 September 1991, at a joint session of the NKAO Oblast Soviet and the Soviet of the Armenian-populated Shaumian Raion. The NKR was proclaimed within the borders of the former autonomous oblast and of the Shaumian Raion (which had not been part of the former NKAO).

On 26 November 1991, the Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet passed a law abolishing the autonomy of Nagorno-Karabakh. On 10 December, the NKR Supreme Soviet, consisting solely of Armenian representatives, proclaimed the independence and separation of Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan on the basis of a referendum of the Armenian population. The Armenian legislators have so far not acted upon the apparent contradiction between the proclamation of NKR independence and the still unrevoked ruling by the Armenian Supreme Soviet of 1 December 1989, which had proclaimed that Nagorno-Karabakh was reunited with Armenia proper. Armenia stated that it had no territorial claims on Azerbaijan. Such a position allows Armenia to interpret the conflict as one between Karabakh and Azerbaijan, in which Armenia is taking no direct part. Armenia failed officially to recognize NKR independence by the same logic and for fear of worsening its international position. In recent years, debate in Armenia has continued on the question: would the repeal by the Armenian parliament of its "annexationist" ruling of 1 December 1989 and a recognition of the NKR make formal, all-out war with Azerbaijan inevitable (Ter-Petrosian), or would such recognition help persuade the world community that Armenia is not an aggressor-nation? The latter line, among others, was advocated in June 1993 by the secretary of the commission on Artsakh (Karabakh) of the Armenian Supreme Soviet, Suren Zolian, who argued that unless the NKR is recognized as a subject of international relations, entire responsibility for it rests with Armenia, and the point made about Armenian aggression gains a certain amount of credit.⁽³²⁾ In Nagorno-Karabakh itself, a degree of ambivalence about being independent, being part of Armenia or applying to be admitted into Russia is underscored by the fact that, at the end of 1991, NKR Supreme Soviet Chairman Georgi Petrosian sent a letter to Yeltsin, asking for the NKR to be incorporated into Russia. He received no reply.⁽³³⁾ On 22 December 1994, the parliament of the NKR elected Robert Kocharian, former chairman of the State Defence Committee, as President of the NKR until 1996.

Armenia and Azerbaijan: the Dynamics of the Political Process

In autumn 1990, Ter-Petrosian of the APNM won the presidency in a general election. The APNM differs from the Armenian opposition parties in trying to prevent Armenia from being directly involved in the Karabakh conflict and trying to contain the conflict in every possible way. A major APNM concern is to foster good relations with the West. The Armenian APNM

leadership takes account of the fact that Turkey is a NATO member and the main US ally in the region. It accepts reality by refraining from laying claims to the lands of historic Armenia (now in Turkey), and it wishes to develop Armenian-Turkish contacts.

In contrast to the APNM, the Dashnaksutiun Party (Armenian Revolutionary Federation) - mainly based abroad, among the Armenian diaspora - is essentially an anti-Turkish party. At present, its efforts are centred on organizing public pressure in the West to make Turkey officially condemn the 1915 genocide. The party has a strong position in Karabakh due to its tough, heroic and uncompromising historical image, the emphasis on military discipline, extensive connections and substantial funds abroad. However, there is intense rivalry between Dashnaksutiun and President Ter-Petrosian. In 1992, the latter expelled Dashnak leader Grair Marukhian from Armenia; in December 1994, he banned the party, accusing it of terrorism.

Nonetheless, efforts by the Armenian diaspora have borne fruit. Its lobbying in the US Congress in 1992 led to the enactment of a provision banning all non-humanitarian aid to Azerbaijan until it takes "demonstrable steps" to lift its embargo against Armenia. In 1993, the US allocated \$195 million in aid to Armenia (second only to Russia among all ex-Soviet states); Azerbaijan got \$30 million.[\(34\)](#)

The seven opposition parties - including, besides the Dashnaks, the Union for National Self-Determination headed by the former dissident Paruyr Ayrikian and Ramkavar-Azatakan (the Liberals) - criticize what they see as Ter-Petrosian's high-handed methods in running the country and the concessions made by the Armenian leadership under pressure from foreign powers and the UN (non-recognition of the NKR, agreement in principle to the NKR's withdrawal from occupied ethnic Azeri areas). Despite the relative political stability in Armenia, the popularity of the APNM is dwindling, mostly due to the economic hardship caused by the Azeri blockade. The overall volume of industrial production in the first nine months of 1993 was down by 38% on the corresponding period in 1992.[\(35\)](#) The miseries of living in blockaded Armenia have led to massive emigration, estimated at 300 to 800 thousand in 1993, mostly to southern Russia and to Moscow. The wide discrepancy in the figures on emigres is due to the fact that many of those leaving retained the legal permit (propiska) to reside in Armenia.[\(36\)](#)

In Azerbaijan, the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh also determines the ups and downs of the politicians' fortunes. Until mid-1993, defeats in battle or political crises accompanying the struggle for Karabakh spelt downfall for four successive CP general secretaries and presidents: Bagirov, Vezirov, Mutalibov (with interim presidencies of Mamedov and Gambar in May-June 1992), Mutalibov again, and Elcibey.

During the August 1991 putsch in Moscow, President Mutalibov made a statement condemning Gorbachev and indirectly supporting the Moscow putschists. The APF staged meetings and demonstrations demanding new parliamentary and presidential elections. Mutalibov promptly organized presidential elections (8 September 1991); 85.7% of the voters turned out, with 98.5% in favour of Mutalibov. This outcome was widely believed to have been rigged. The CP was officially disbanded, and on 30 October the Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet, under APF pressure, was compelled to hand over part of its powers to the 50-member Milli Majlis (National Council), half of which was composed of former communists and another half of the opposition.[\(37\)](#) The APF campaign to oust Mutalibov continued, with the latter blaming Russia for deserting him. A final blow to Mutalibov came

on 26-27 February 1992, when the Karabakh forces captured the village of Khojaly near Stepanakert, killing many civilians in the process. Azeri sources claim that the massacre, allegedly perpetrated with the help of Russian troops (a fact denied by the Armenian side), resulted in the death of 450 people, with 400 wounded. That the massacre really took place was later confirmed, among others, by the fact-finding mission of the Moscow Memorial Human Rights Centre.⁽³⁸⁾ On 6 March 1992, Mutalibov resigned. Soon afterwards, ex-President Mutalibov cast doubt on Armenian responsibility for Khojaly, hinting that some of the Azeri civilians may have actually been killed by Azeri forces in order to discredit him.⁽³⁹⁾ Yagub Mamedov, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, became an interim head of state. An election campaign was in progress when news came of the fall of Shusha on 9 May 1992. This gave the opportunity to the ex-Communist Supreme Soviet to annul Mutalibov's resignation, absolving him of guilt for Khojaly (14 May). The Milli Majlis was disbanded. The next day, APF supporters stormed the building of the Supreme Soviet and took the presidential palace, causing Mutalibov to flee to Moscow. On 18 May, the Supreme Soviet accepted Mamedov's resignation, elected APF member Isa Gambar as interim President and handed its powers back to the Milli Majlis it had abolished three days before. Fresh elections held in June 1992 conferred the presidency on the APF leader, Abulfaz Elcibey (turnout: 76.3% with 67.9% in his favour).⁽⁴⁰⁾

Elcibey promised to solve the Karabakh problem for the Azeris by September 1992. The main features of the APF programme were: a pro-Turkish, anti-Russian and pro-independence stance, a refusal to join the CIS and the advocacy of an eventual merger with Iranian Azerbaijan (a tendency that worried Iran). Although Elcibey's government included a large number of brilliant intellectuals who had never joined the nomenklatura, an attempt to purge the government apparatus of the old corrupted officials failed, and the new people brought to power by Elcibey became isolated and some of them corrupted in their turn. Popular discontent led to anti-government meetings at the beginning of May 1993 in a number of cities, including Ganja, after which many members of the opposition Milli Istiglal (National Independence) Party were arrested. Geidar Aliyev, a former Politburo member and later leader of Nakhichevan, who had managed to preserve peace at the border between this autonomous republic and Armenia, saw his popularity increased. Aliyev's party, New Azerbaijan, set up in September 1992, became a focus for opposition, rallying a range of groupings from neo-communists to smaller national parties and societies. Defeats in battle and tacit Russian manoeuvres against Elcibey led to an uprising in June 1993, led by a wealthy wool manufacturer and commander, Suret Guseinov (a hero of Azerbaijan). The latter's triumphant, peaceful march on Baku led to Elcibey's being ousted from power and his replacement by Aliyev. Suret Guseinov became prime minister. Aliyev reversed APF policy by bringing Azerbaijan into the CIS, arresting the drive towards a unilateral pro-Turkish stance, restoring ties with Moscow and strengthening Azerbaijan's international position (contacts with Iran, Britain and France). He also suppressed separatism in the south of Azerbaijan (the proclamation of Talysh autonomy by Colonel Aliakram Gumbatov in summer 1993).⁽⁴¹⁾

However, Azerbaijan's internal instability did not end when Aliyev assumed power. The latter's relations with Guseinov soon soured. Aliyev prevented Guseinov from handling the oil talks (and, hence, from appropriating future oil income). Guseinov also seemed to oppose Aliyev's moving out of the Russian orbit during the course of 1994. In early October 1994, after the signing of the oil contract with the Western consortium on 20 September, there was an attempt to stage a coup in Baku and Ganja, some of the plotters being supporters of Suret Guseinov. Aliyev suppressed the coup attempt (if such it was: some observers in Baku

describe it as an intrigue by Aliyev himself) and soon afterwards relieved Guseinov of all responsibilities.

Russian Policy (August 1991 - Mid-1994)

As the disintegration of the USSR was becoming more and more of a reality from August 1991, and was consummated in December, Russia found itself without either a common border or a clearcut mission to perform in the war-torn region of Nagorno-Karabakh. The end of 1991 was marked by a (temporary?) collapse of the imperial ideology and a weakening of control over the army. Among the Soviet/Russian troops in conflict zones, it was now an individual officer, at most a general, who took almost all the decisions. The processes let loose in the army by the dismantling of the Warsaw Pact, the break-up of the USSR and the Gaidar reforms - mass demobilization, withdrawal from "far and near abroad" (including Azerbaijan, from which the last Russian troops withdrew at the end of May 1993), the division of both military contingents and weapons among various republics and the conversion of the war industry to peaceful uses - all this has aggravated the general chaos in the conflict zones. Ex-Soviet mercenaries and freebooters appeared on both sides of the battle lines in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and Moldova. In these conditions, what could be called Russian policy in the region had a haphazard, reactive character and remained so until, in 1992-93, a slow increase in the manageability of the state apparatus led to a certain resurgence of Russia's ability to formulate and achieve its aims in relations with the "near abroad" regions (although "hungry and bitter" officers fighting their local wars "at the edge of the ex-Soviet empire" still remains a factor).

From August 1991 on, Russia's policies regarding the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh were pursued in several directions: mediation efforts such as the one made in September 1991 by Boris Yeltsin and Kazakhstan's leader, Nursultan Nazarbaev, and, later, participation in the work of the Minsk Group of the CSCE, the Tripartite Initiative (Russia, the US and Turkey) and single-handed missions like those undertaken by Ambassador-at-Large Vladimir Kazimirov in 1993 and 1994; disengaging Russia's military units from the conflict zone and dividing the spoils of weaponry between the newly independent republics; trying to preserve the military balance in the region and keeping outside players (Turkey and Iran) away from its Caucasian zone of influence. As the economic reforms in Russia progressed, the economic factor in its relations with the new republics grew in importance. In 1993, Russia was increasingly interested in drawing Azerbaijan as well as Georgia into the CIS, and in playing the role of sole peacekeeper in the former Soviet republics.

As the Russian forces in Karabakh which lost their combat role after August 1991 were in serious danger of becoming demoralized, starting in November, Soviet internal troops began to be withdrawn from Karabakh (except for the 366th regiment in Stepanakert). In March 1992, the 366th regiment literally fell to pieces, with part of its non-Armenian contingent deserting and another part (especially Armenian officers and men) seizing the light and heavy weapons and joining NKR's forces.[\(42\)](#)

In the diplomatic field, Russia tried to keep a balance between Armenia and Azerbaijan, preventing a significant shift in favour of either. A 1992 bilateral Russo-Armenian treaty provided that Russia would safeguard Armenia from outside (implicitly Turkish) aggression, but the treaty was never ratified by the Russian Supreme Soviet, which feared Russia's becoming entangled in Caucasian conflicts.

According to the Tashkent Treaty of 15 May 1992 on collective security - signed by Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, among others - an attack on one member would be regarded as an attack on all. In less than a month, power in Azerbaijan passed into the hands of a pro-Turkish Elcibey government. When Armenia was threatened by Turkey during a crisis over Nakhichevan in mid-May 1992, Russia's State Secretary Gennadi Burbulis and Defence Minister Pavel Grachev paid a visit to Yerevan to discuss ways of implementing the collective security treaty: this was a clear sign that Russia was not going to leave Armenia all on its own. The US cautioned Turkey, while the Russian authorities warned Armenia against attacking Nakhichevan. Turkey's plans to intervene were called off.(43)

Another incident, in September 1993, led to a dramatic enhancement of Russia's role in the region. When fighting again broke out in Nakhichevan, Iranian troops entered this autonomous republic to guard the jointly-managed water reservoir, as well as Goradiz in "continental" Azerbaijan, ostensibly to aid Azeri refugees. In the opinion of Armen Khalatian, an analyst at the Institute for Humanitarian and Political Studies in Moscow, a request by Azerbaijan for Turkish military aid might have provoked a conflict between Turkey and the Russian troops guarding the Armenian border, as well as a clash with the Iranians who had already moved to Nakhichevan. Baku was thus faced with the choice between letting the conflict escalate to uncontrollable proportions and turning to Moscow. Aliyev opted for the latter, thereby allowing Russia to restore its influence along the Transcaucasian border of the CIS to the virtual exclusion of Turkey and Iran.(44)

On the other hand, while condemning every successive NKR move to occupy more Azeri territory, Russia continued to supply arms to Azerbaijan, at the same time subtly taking advantage of Armenian victories in the field to help instal a government in Azerbaijan which would be more amenable to Russia's interests (i.e., that of Aliyev rather than that of Elcibey) - a gamble which proved to be an initial but not a long-term success. At the end of June 1993, Aliyev suspended a deal between Baku and a consortium of eight leading Western firms (including BP, Amoco and Pennzoil) to develop three Azerbaijani oil deposits. The route of the proposed pipeline, which was to go to the Turkish Mediterranean coast, would probably now pass through Novorossiysk (in Russia) - or so the Russians hoped. The Russian press suggested that the construction of the pipeline, if this were to bypass Russia, might effectively free Central Asia, Kazakhstan and possibly even the oil-rich Moslem republics of Russia itself from Russian influence, whereas, before, the oil riches of these regions came onto the world market through Russia alone.(45) The agreement between Azerbaijan and the mostly Western oil consortium (with 10 per cent of the shares to belong to the Russian Lukoil company) on the production of oil from the three offshore deposits in the Caspian sea was finally signed on 20 September 1994. Russia opposed the agreement, citing as its reason the unresolved question of the delimitation of the Caspian shelf.

At a meeting between Aliyev and Yeltsin in September 1993, an understanding was reached that Russia would guard Azerbaijan's borders with Turkey and Iran. However, by the end of 1994 Aliyev was still refusing to let Russian border guards in. For Russia, an unguarded border in Transcaucasia coupled with a transparent border between Russia and Azerbaijan meant that illegal immigrants, drug dealers or armed criminals might freely travel from, say, Iran straight to Moscow if they so wished. Afghan Mujahedeen reportedly appeared in the breakaway republic of Chechnya in the North Caucasus. This is the rationale behind Moscow's demands on Baku which, in the event of a refusal, could face the prospect of a closure of the Russian-Azerbaijani border, an act that would effectively divide the Lezghin people living in Dagestan, on the Russian side, from their kinsfolk south of the border in

Azerbaijan. Thus a new ethnic crisis in Azerbaijan, now involving the Lezghins, could be sparked off.

At the Bishkek CIS summit in May 1994, the NKR was for the first time recognized de facto as a warring party. An agreement approved in Bishkek by the Azeri and Russian delegations on the deployment of Russian troops in Azerbaijan as peacekeepers from 24 May 1994, was, however, never signed by the Azeri government, due to internal and Western opposition. The Azeri opposition felt that Russian peacekeepers might endanger the independence of Azerbaijan, while the West would have preferred a CSCE-brokered settlement. After the signing of the historic oil deal in September 1994, the most likely prospect was that the Western states which acquired tangible interests in the region would take concrete steps to ensure stability in the area, including the sending of international peacekeepers.

Methods of Army-Building in Armenia and Azerbaijan (1992-94)

Armenia started to form army units earlier than Azerbaijan which, under Mutalibov, relied more on Soviet troops. At an initial stage, in 1989-90, a dozen self-styled military organizations and self-defence units appeared, the largest of which bore the name of the Armenian National Army (ANA, commander: Razmik Vasilian). Their chief occupation was raiding Soviet Army depots in search of arms and waging a power struggle against the APNM.⁽⁴⁶⁾ From 1 January 1990 to June 1992, large quantities of arms were seized by raiding the Soviet and then Russian military depots and posts (356 raids in the whole of Transcaucasia, of which 164 were in the territory of Azerbaijan and 130 in that of Armenia).⁽⁴⁷⁾ In Armenia, "informal" units were largely brought under control after Ter-Petrosian was elected president. In Azerbaijan, the formative stage of the national army lasted well into 1992 and 1993.

The methods of army-building used by the two republics on gaining independence were different. Armenia preferred to keep the 7th Russian Army stationed on its territory under Russian jurisdiction, thus guaranteeing its security. Russia has continued to finance and equip this nominal Russian Army which, lacking new conscripts from Russia, has been increasingly staffed by Armenian officers and men. Armenian officers returned from other parts of the Soviet Union to serve in the 7th Army. In contrast, the 4th CIS/Russian Army in Azerbaijan was staffed by Russian officers and men and more strictly controlled by the CIS, then Russian command. Azeri officers returning to their native republic had to serve in the disparate units which comprised the 20-thousand strong Azerbaijani Army: APF units, the OMON and the National Army (a separate military formation), all without a unified command.⁽⁴⁸⁾ The lack of co-ordination began to be eliminated under Elcibey and the process continued under Aliyev. The logistical support and combat missions accomplished by the Russian 4th Army's officers for the Azerbaijani army proceeded on a mercenary basis, not as regular service. Besides Turkish instructors, the Azeris were helped by Afghan Mujahedeen. The Azerbaijani Army's weak spot was the use of national minorities: Lezghins, Kurds and others, who had their own national aspirations and were reluctant to fight.

The brunt of the fighting on the Armenian side was borne by the Armenian forces of Nagorno-Karabakh. By the end of 1992, the NKR forces numbered no less than 7,000. In August 1992, the NKR leadership called a general mobilization of the citizens of Nagorno-Karabakh, a move that could have brought 30,000 under the colours.⁽⁴⁹⁾ In fact, this is the maximum the Karabakh Armenian forces could muster, and their actual number was probably smaller. The NKR Army was assisted (especially until summer 1992) by small

voluntary contingents from Armenia proper, sent to Karabakh on a rotational basis. Armenian authorities flatly deny official involvement of forces from Armenia proper in the Karabakh conflict, and there is little evidence to prove otherwise. A general mobilization in Armenia has not been announced to this day. Until summer 1992, Armenia was officially against the formation of individual armies in the CIS republics and in favour of unified CIS armed forces under Moscow's command. When this stance found no backing in other CIS states, the formation of separate Armenian armed forces was announced in summer 1992. This period also marks the watershed between purely voluntary Armenian Karabakh forces reinforced by volunteers from Armenia (of which an unspecified number, by some accounts the majority, came from Armenians of Karabakh origin living outside Karabakh) and an organized NKR Army with its central command and military structure distinct from the Armenian Army in Armenia proper.

In keeping with the Tashkent Treaty, which provided for the distribution of the military hardware of the former USSR among CIS members, Armenia and Azerbaijan were to receive an equal share of tanks, armoured cars, ordnance items, attack planes and helicopters, although in practice weapons were divided according to the amounts stored in army dumps on each republic's territory. This explains Azerbaijan's greater share of weapons allocated.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Later, the Armenians made good the discrepancy by diplomatic means: by allowing the Russian Army to be stationed in Armenia to ward off the Turkish threat, the Armenians poured materiel and volunteers (but, they claim, not conscripts) into the well-equipped and experienced army of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The extent of Armenia's (and Russia's) involvement in the Karabakh war is still unclear. Armenian sources claimed that in 1994 the NKR accounted for 40 per cent of its budget, the same proportion as before the conflict, with the rest provided by Armenia (formerly, Azerbaijan had made up the difference).⁽⁵¹⁾ Furman recalls that, at a meeting between the Azeri and Armenian representatives shown on Russian TV in 1993, the then Azeri ambassador to Russia, Hikmet Gaji-zadeh, accused the Russian Army of being engaged on the Armenian side during the capture of Kelbajar in spring 1993. His Armenian counterpart did not deny his statement, but reminded the audience that Russia had also helped Azerbaijan during the Azeri offensive in summer 1992.⁽⁵²⁾

The war in Nagorno-Karabakh is a low-intensity one, with relatively little manpower and almost no aviation used in combat. This has enabled the Armenians to offset the superior numbers and equipment of their adversary's disorganized units by greater cohesion, discipline and morale. The superior quality of Armenian soldiers was largely responsible for their success in battle, resulting in the capture of Khojaly (February 1992), Shusha and the Lachin corridor (May). Despite setbacks in July (the capture of Mardakert Raion by Azerbaijani troops commanded by Suret Guseinov), the NKR units recaptured the Mardakert Raion in early 1993, then striking deep into Azeri-populated territory: they took Kelbajar (March), Agdam (July), Jebrail and Fizuli (August). In September 1993, they took Kubatly and approached the Iranian border at Goradiz, taking control of 160 km of the Azeri-Iranian border. Further fighting took place in October 1993 (when the Armenians took the Zanghelan Raion) and December 1993-January 1994, this time with the Azerbaijani Army reorganized by Turkish instructors and reinforced by Russian mercenaries and Afghan Mujahedeen (1,500 at the end of 1993, according to the Armenians). Despite heavy losses, the Azerbaijani Army achieved only limited territorial gains, although it recaptured Goradiz and some

territory in the Mardakert Raion and Kelbajar Raions. In April 1994, the Karabakh side again scored a victory, posing a threat to Ganja.

The Armenian gamble in the war has apparently been to use their military victories to compel Azerbaijan to recognize the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh, and then to return most of the captured Azeri-populated regions (probably excepting Shusha and the Lachin corridor) in return for peace, possibly brokered by some sort of Pax Russica. So far, the Armenian victories, gained at a cost of at least one person dead in every Karabakh family, have achieved only one goal: the NKR has survived, although Armenia's economy is largely inoperative and the population nearing starvation, while the NKR is still far from being recognized by the outside world. As hundreds of thousands of Azeri refugees have lost their homes and livelihood, the aims set by Azerbaijan are equally far from being reached. A cease-fire, in effect from 12 May 1994, was still holding in December 1994, and the scene was set for new peacemaking efforts.

3. Ethnic Conflicts in Georgia (1989-1994)

Abkhazia (Apsny, "a Country of the Soul" in the Abkhaz language, Abkhazeti in Georgian), an autonomous republic in Georgia situated on the Black Sea coast, had, as of 1 January 1990, a population of 537,000, of which 44% were Georgians, 17% Abkhaz, 16% Russians and 15% Armenians.⁽⁵³⁾ The Abkhaz are a people close in language and origin to the North Caucasian peoples of the Adyghe group. Although they lived under Turkish rule from the late 15th to the early 19th centuries and some of them were converted to Islam during that period, there are few Moslems now left in Abkhazia. The Abkhaz population underwent Christianization in the late 19th century, under Russian rule. The territory of the present-day republic was once part of Ancient Rome, Byzantium and Persia. Later, Arabs, Genoese colonists, Turks and Russians sought to control it. Until Abkhazia's absorption by Russia in 1810, Abkhazian rulers were in nominal or effective vassalage or union with various (although often separate) Georgian kingdoms and princedoms. So the historical evidence is ambiguous: both unity with Georgia and autonomy can be argued on historical grounds.

On 31 March 1921, an independent Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia was proclaimed. Abkhazia kept that status until December 1921, when the SSR Abkhazia joined the Georgian SSR under a Treaty of Union. This status lasted until 1931, when the Abkhazian Republic was incorporated into Georgia as an autonomy (the Abkhazian ASSR). The Georgian side, contradicting Abkhaz claims, denies that these changes of status were made under pressure.

Abkhaz authors lay particular emphasis on their people's plight in Stalin's era. Stalinist repression hit Abkhazia like the rest of the USSR, but here it had an additional ethnic colouring, as it was carried out by Georgians. From the late 1930s to the early 1950s, a policy of the Georgianization of Abkhazia and its native people was in progress. The tragedy suffered by the Abkhaz during the Russian conquest in the 19th century - the forced emigration to Turkey of the Moslem sector of the Abkhaz population who had inhabited half the Abkhazian territory - was compounded by a Georgian policy, conducted in Stalin's times, of planned resettlement of Georgians into Abkhazia. The Abkhaz intellectuals and party leaders repeatedly (in 1956, 1967 and 1978) petitioned the Centre to separate Abkhazia from Georgia and attach it to Russia. In response to this pressure, the Centre made a number of concessions to the Abkhaz in personnel and cultural policy. Thus, by 1988, Abkhazia had its own radio and TV, which were outside Tbilisi's control. Abkhaz party cadres represented a

prominent - and, in Georgian eyes, disproportionate - proportion of the republic's administrative personnel. Nevertheless, the fact that the Abkhaz - a people with two thousand years of recorded history - were reduced by that history to 17% of the republic's population, and were enduring what they viewed as the smouldering enmity of the less tolerant part of the Georgian population towards their national aspirations, was taking its toll. Niko Chavchavadze, a Georgian MP and director of the Institute of Philosophy, writing in 1994, recalled that only a minority of Georgian intellectuals were prepared to take Abkhaz interests into account, as they feared for Georgia's territorial integrity.⁽⁵⁴⁾ In 1989, the objective of the Abkhaz separatists, as a first step towards complete independence from Georgia, was to secure a return to the status of Abkhazia prior to 1931.⁽⁵⁵⁾

As of 1989, the autonomous oblast of South Ossetia within Georgia had a population of nearly 100,000, of whom 66.2% were Ossetes and 29% Georgians.⁽⁵⁶⁾ Half of the families in the region were of mixed Georgian-Ossetian descent. The Ossetes are descendants of the ancient Alan tribes of Iranian stock. Some of them are Orthodox Christians and some (in certain regions of North Ossetia) are Moslems. On 20 April 1922, after the Sovietization of Georgia in 1921, the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast (AO) was formed. Georgian-Ossetian strife dates back to 1918-21, when the Menshevik government of Georgia ruthlessly (the Ossetes say: genocidally) suppressed a Bolshevik-supported South Ossetian insurgency (the Ossetes were largely landless peasants, living on lands owned by Georgian aristocrats). South Ossetian leaders, such as Torez Kulumbegov, claimed that South Ossetia was the only autonomous entity in the USSR whose population was now lower in absolute numbers than before the 1917 revolution.⁽⁵⁷⁾ Even if this is an exaggeration (the data available to us for 1897 and 1926 do not bear it out), a Soviet demographic dictionary confirms that the AO's population had decreased in 1984 (98,000 inhabitants) by comparison with 1939 (106,000).⁽⁵⁸⁾ The decrease might be explained partly by heavy losses in World War II and partly by the resettlement of South Ossetes (on orders from the Kremlin) on former Ingush lands after the Ingush deportation in 1944. According to Kulumbegov, Ossetes in the AO were barred from entering higher education establishments and restricted in filling administrative posts, a fact the Georgians deny. Georgian writers have claimed that, like the Abkhazian ASSR, the South Ossetian AO had been formed by the Bolsheviks to create permanent sources of tension, so as to enable the Kremlin to control Georgia more easily. Both Abkhazia and South Ossetia were said to be run on an ethnocratic basis, to the detriment of Georgian national interests.⁽⁵⁹⁾ Hence the perceived Georgian need to curtail if not abolish these autonomous entities. The response from the South Ossetes was either to try to secure federal status within Georgia or, failing that, to seek to be reunited with North Ossetia, forming part of Russia.⁽⁶⁰⁾

The 9 April 1989 Tragedy and the Abkhazian Question

On 18 March 1989, an Abkhaz assembly in the village of Lykhny proposed that Abkhazia should secede from Georgia and that the status of a Union republic be restored to it. 30 thousand participants in the Lykhny assembly - including all the party and government leaders of the ASSR, but also five thousand Armenians, Greeks, Russians and even Georgians - signed an appeal published in all local papers on 24 March, stating their position on the causes of the conflict as outlined above.

Georgian outrage at the Abkhaz demands was expressed in unsanctioned meetings organized by "informal movements" across the republic, which combined anti-communist and anti-Soviet slogans with calls to "punish" the Abkhaz and abolish their autonomy. Especially

active in these meetings (the 12,000-strong meeting in Gali on 25 March, Leselidze on 1 April, Sukhumi and other cities) was Abkhazia's Georgian population. The long-suppressed Georgian yearning for independence became irrepressible after the violent outcome of the Tbilisi hunger strike and demonstrations of early April 1989. These demonstrations, prompted by the Lykhny meeting, started out under anti-Abkhaz slogans, but quickly acquired a broader, pro-independence character. On 9 April they were brutally dispersed by Soviet (Russian) troops (21 people, mostly girls and old women, were killed with sharpened digging tools and toxic gas).

In Moscow, besides causing loud public outcry, the bloody incident led to lengthy recriminations among the party and military elite over who should take the blame for the event. The debates were especially heated at the first Congress of the USSR People's Deputies (May-June 1989).⁽⁶¹⁾ Gorbachev disclaimed all responsibility, shifting it on the army. The revelations in the liberal Soviet media as well as the findings of the "pro-perestroika" Deputy Anatoli Sobchak's commission of enquiry into the Tbilisi events, made known at the second Congress in December 1989, resulted in a massive "loss of face" by the Soviet hardliners and army leadership implicated in the event.⁽⁶²⁾ After that, the army was gripped by the so-called "Tbilisi syndrome": an unwillingness to involve itself in internal military ventures of any kind, much less ethnic feuds.

A session of the Georgian Supreme Soviet, held on 17-18 November 1989, officially condemned Soviet Russia's infringement of the Russo-Georgian Treaty of 7 May 1920 in annexing Georgia in February 1921, thus paving the way for the republic's independence. Politically, in the wake of the events of 9 April Georgia was almost left alone by the Union Centre; the latter was quite content to see the republic in the throes of ethnic conflicts. However, there is not enough evidence, in our view, to suggest that the Centre actually engineered these conflicts. At most, it can be said that, as they flared up for local reasons and in pursuance of local interests, the Centre used them to its own advantage.

By the second half of 1989, as news of chauvinistic pronouncements and policies by Georgian politicians became known, a rift appeared between the Georgian nationalists and Russian democrats, after Andrei Sakharov wrote his passage where he described the Union republics (including Georgia) as "minor empires".⁽⁶³⁾ This drew a storm of protest in Georgian political circles.

Conflicts in Abkhazia: 1989 - End of 1991

The dynamics of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict were influenced by a number of factors: the extreme positions taken by Georgian nationalists in 1989 (no to Abkhazian autonomy); Gamsakhurdia's chauvinism; the Abkhaz leadership's reliance on hardline forces in Russia, and the autonomist movement in the North Caucasus. The situation was further complicated by the break-up of the USSR and the continued instability in Georgia after the fall of Gamsakhurdia (in particular, the Zviadist insurgency in Megrelia and divisions in the Georgian leadership on the subject of Abkhazia).

On 15-16 July 1989, intercommunal violence erupted in the city of Sukhumi over the establishment of a department of Tbilisi State University in the city. The Georgian part of Sukhumi University refused to stay as long as Abkhaz and Russian lecturers remained there. The Abkhaz then attacked a school which was expected to house the Georgian university. At that time, neither side was strong enough to force the issue militarily. The battles between

the Georgians and the Abkhaz over the Abkhazian question were relegated to the legislatures of the two republics.

In August 1990, the Georgian Supreme Soviet passed an election law banning regionally-based parties from taking part in elections to the Georgian parliament.⁽⁶⁴⁾ This was intended, in part, to prevent the Abkhaz Aydgylara (Unification) movement (the Abkhaz People's Forum) from fielding its candidates. On 25 August 1990, Abkhaz delegates to the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet, separately from their Georgian colleagues, passed a Declaration on the Sovereignty of Abkhazia. Justification for the move was provided by the adoption by the Georgian Supreme Soviet, in 1989-1990, of legislation annulling all the treaties concluded by the Soviet Georgian government since February 1921 which had served as a legal foundation for the existence of the Georgian autonomies - those of Ajaria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The Abkhaz declaration was annulled by the Georgian Supreme Soviet a few days later.

After Gamsakhurdia's Round Table bloc had won the Georgian parliamentary elections in October 1990, the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet started on a course of defying Gamsakhurdia's authority. In December 1990, Vladislav Ardzinba, whom the Georgian leaders had accused of fanning Abkhaz separatism and of belonging to the Soyuz Group - a group of hardline deputies to the Soviet parliament - was elected chairman of the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet. At the same session, the Abkhazian parliament voted to prepare a draft law on new parliamentary elections.⁽⁶⁵⁾

In March 1991, Gamsakhurdia issued an "Appeal to the Abkhazian People". While professing respect for the age-old friendship between the Georgians and the Abkhaz, he called Ardzinba a "traitor" and a tool in the hands of Moscow. For his part, Ardzinba declared that the Abkhazian parliament still considered Abkhazia part of the USSR, while the newly issued draft of the Union treaty granted equal rights to Union and autonomous republics; finally, the Georgian parliament had enacted a law on the prefects (published on 27 April 1991) which violated Abkhazian constitutional rights.⁽⁶⁶⁾

In defiance of a Georgia-wide ban on its holding imposed by Gamsakhurdia, Abkhazia voted in the referendum on the preservation of the Union, which was held on 17 March 1991. 52.4% of the electorate took part, with a 98.4% "yes" vote.⁽⁶⁷⁾ Gamsakhurdia threatened to disband the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet and abolish the Abkhazian autonomy.

In a counter-move, Ardzinba arranged for the redeployment of a Russian airborne assault battalion from the Baltic republics to Sukhumi. The battalion has been quartered in Sukhumi ever since, while Ardzinba has established friendly contacts with the Russian military.⁽⁶⁸⁾ A reinforced Russian military presence compelled Gamsakhurdia to make concessions and allow the elections to the Abkhazian parliament to proceed on a quota basis: 28 seats to the Abkhaz, 26 to the Georgians and 11 to all the remaining ethnic groups. The elections were duly held, in two stages, in October-December 1991.

Conflicts in South Ossetia, 1989-92

In contrast to Abkhazia - whose autonomous status was only briefly challenged in Georgia in 1989, while the Abkhaz were mostly considered to be an autochthonous people - the Ossetes were regarded as relative newcomers to Georgian land and their claims were, in Georgian eyes, even less valid than those of the Abkhaz. Even the term "South Ossetia" has been

"wiped out" of Georgian publications and replaced with "Samachablo" (Land of the Machabeli, from the name of the Georgian feudal family which allegedly ruled it), Shida Kartli (Inner Kartli) or, later, the Tskhinvali region.⁽⁶⁹⁾ South Ossetia's geographical position (a mountainous region surrounded on three sides by Georgian settlements) made the Ossetes more vulnerable than the Abkhaz in the event of hostilities.

Conflicts in South Ossetia became a political issue as a result of an attempt by the South Ossetian Supreme Soviet to upgrade the status of the AO. On 10 November 1989, it approved a decision to transform the AO into the South Ossetian ASSR, which would form part of Georgia. In a day, the Georgian parliament revoked the South Ossetian parliament's decision. The first stage of the conflict lasted from November 1989 to January 1990, and started with a march of more than 20,000 Georgians to Tskhinvali, organized on 23 November 1989 by Gamsakhurdia and the Georgian CP leader, Givi Gumbaridze, "to defend the Georgian population". The marchers were prevented from entering the town by the armoured cars of the Soviet Ministry of the Interior. Some of the Georgian paramilitary troops stayed in nearby Georgian villages, engaging in clashes with the Ossetian population. The first blood was spilt. Talks between Gamsakhurdia and his Ossetian counterpart, General Kim Tsagolov, brought no result. Gamsakhurdia was quoted as saying to Tsagolov: "I shall bring a 200,000-strong army. Not a single Ossete will remain in the land of Samachablo. I demand that the Soviet flags be removed!"⁽⁷⁰⁾ The conflict stabilized in 1990, largely thanks to differences within the Georgian national movement. A number of parties that later formed the National Congress (e.g., Giorgi Chanturia's National Democratic Party of Georgia, the NDPG) criticized the role played by the parties allied to Gamsakhurdia in ethnic crises. An Ossetian source quotes Chanturia as saying: "It was a great mistake to go to Tskhinvali, and a double one to return".⁽⁷¹⁾

On 26 April 1990, the USSR Supreme Soviet passed a law providing for a notable enhancement of the rights of Soviet autonomies. By so doing, the Centre encouraged the autonomies to fight for their sovereignty against the majority in some multinational Union republics striving for independence (Moldova, Georgia). But instead of giving the autonomies effective protection, it merely played them against the nationalistic currents in those republics, thus paving the way for political and military interference in their affairs by the Kremlin.⁽⁷²⁾

The August 1990 ban preventing regional parties from running for election for the Georgian parliament, mentioned above in connection with Abkhazia, was likewise aimed at preventing South Ossetia's Adamon Nykhas (Popular Assembly) movement from taking part in the Georgian election. The South Ossetian Oblast Soviet countered the move by declaring the oblast the South Ossetian Soviet Democratic Republic (YuOSDR) and appealing to Moscow to recognize it as an independent subject of the Soviet federation.⁽⁷³⁾ South Ossetia boycotted the October elections to the Georgian parliament.

After Gamsakhurdia's Round Table bloc won the elections in Georgia in October 1990, he declared that the autonomies in Georgia would be preserved. Nevertheless, on 9 December 1990 elections were held to the Supreme Soviet of the YuOSDR. On 11 December, the Supreme Soviet of Georgia reneged on the earlier promise and adopted a law abolishing the South Ossetian autonomy. The next day, the Kremlin imposed a state of emergency in the Ossetian-populated districts of South Ossetia. Chanturia described Gamsakhurdia's decision to abolish the South Ossetian autonomy as politically unjustified and premature until Georgia became fully independent, as the Kremlin might use it to foment national discord.⁽⁷⁴⁾ Still

in December 1990, Georgia started a blockade of South Ossetia which lasted until the end of July 1992. During the night of 6 January, Georgian police and paramilitary, Alsatians on the leash, entered Tskhinvali and carried out violent reprisals against the defenceless population, supposedly in search of arms. On 7 January, Gorbachev issued a decree repealing both the South Ossetian Supreme Soviet's decision to proclaim a secessionist republic and its Georgian counterpart's abolition of the South Ossetian autonomy. He ordered the two sides to withdraw all military formations - except those of the USSR Ministry of the Interior - from South Ossetia within three days.⁽⁷⁵⁾ The Georgian Supreme Soviet defied the order, and nothing happened. On 16 January, Rafik Nishanov, President of the Chamber of Nationalities of the USSR Supreme Soviet, paid a visit to Georgia. The result appeared to be a compromise between the higher Soviet and Georgian authorities: Georgia was supposed to acknowledge that its police was subordinated to the Soviet Ministry of the Interior, in return for an opportunity to deal with South Ossetia as it saw fit. That, in Ossetian eyes, signalled a go-ahead for more terror. The presence of Georgian policemen in Tskhinvali continued until early February 1991 when, by agreement with the South Ossetian authorities, they withdrew from the blockaded city.

On 29 January 1991, the chair of the Supreme Soviet of South Ossetia, Torez Kulumbegov, was arrested in the presence of Russian officers during talks with Georgian authorities. The South Ossetian public was angry that the central government took no steps to ensure his liberation. In a Tbilisi jail, Kulumbegov was kept together with Mkhedrioni leader Jaba Ioseliani, arrested by Gamsakhurdia in February 1991.⁽⁷⁶⁾ The YuOSDR took part in the all-Union referendum of 17 March 1991 on the fate of the Union, boycotted by Georgia, and ignored the Georgian referendum on independence held on 31 March of the same year. At the Union referendum, South Ossetes voted 99 per cent in favour of keeping the Union, hoping that such a vote would induce the Centre to take measures to protect them. As a result, Georgian atrocities only increased. Ossetes began to be expelled from their villages which, they said, were pillaged and burned with people still in them. Conversely, the Georgian public was indignant over instances of Ossetian atrocities, such as the burning alive of four Georgian peasants on 18 March 1991. About 10,000 Georgian civilians took refuge from the war in the inner regions of Georgia. The Kremlin showed no willingness to intervene, preoccupied as it was with other "hot spots" of the disintegrating Soviet Union and with political rivalries in Moscow. The fighting on the Georgian side was mostly done by Vazha Adamia's Merab Kostava Society, allied to Gamsakhurdia. Most of its membership consisted of Georgian residents of South Ossetia. They were opposed by Ossetian self-defence forces.

After Gamsakhurdia's fall, the Military Council of Georgia released Torez Kulumbegov from prison at the beginning of 1992. This served as an invitation to dialogue to the South Ossetian leaders. The latter, however, chose not to pursue a line of compromise. In a referendum held in South Ossetia on 19 January 1992, boycotted by local Georgians, more than 90% of those taking part voted to join Russia. The referendum had been initiated by a group of South Ossetian deputies favouring the line of the former party chief, Anatoli Chekhoev, that armed struggle was the only way out. The North Ossetian authorities disagreed with the move as unrealistic.⁽⁷⁷⁾ Among the Russian experts, it evoked a mixed, generally negative reaction. Galina Starovoytova, then adviser to President Yeltsin on the question of nationalities and a champion of minority rights, while admitting that it made things difficult for Russia, still tended to see the South Ossetian referendum ("the people's choice") as a precedent for the solution of such problems for the world community at large.⁽⁷⁸⁾ Political scientists Emile Pain and Arkadi Popov, on the contrary, considered the referendum as morally reprehensible (an attempt to take advantage of the turmoil in Georgia), legally dubious (conducted under

martial law and not following the correct procedure) and politically ineffective (if Russia supported it, it would be criticized by the ex-Soviet republics who suspected Russia of wanting to violate their territorial integrity; if it did not, the referendum would be met with reproaches from Russian hard-liners defending the "rights of the Russian-speaking population" in the "near abroad").(79)

South Ossetia refused to enter into negotiations with the new regime in Georgia until it pulled Georgian troops out of the region and lifted the blockade. There was a certain lessening of combat activity in the early months of 1992, explained by the fact that Mkhedrioni and the National Guard had their hands tied in Megrelia and parts of Abkhazia, fighting the Zviadists. In mid-April, however, Georgian artillery started daily missile attacks on the residential quarters of Tskhinvali.(80) A first cease-fire was agreed in Tskhinvali on 13 May, only to break down a few days later. On 20 May 1992, unidentified gunmen (Ossetes had no doubt that they were Georgians) massacred a busload of Ossetian refugees fleeing Tskhinvali near the Georgian village of Kekhvi. All political contact was broken off and North Ossetia cut the pipeline supplying Georgia with Russian gas.(81) A new cease-fire in early June again broke down within a few days. Two important factors then intervened to change the situation. One was the North Ossetian factor. Another was the increasingly important role played by the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus. As the influx of refugees from South Ossetia and the inner regions of Georgia grew, North Ossetia was forced to intervene, pressing the Russian leadership to take steps towards the resolution of the conflict. The North Ossetian leader, Akhsarbek Galazov, disagreed with the "radical tendency" among South Ossetian leaders (Head of Government Oleg Teziev and First Deputy Chairman of Parliament Alan Chochiev) and generally acted to defuse the conflict.

The Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus (KGNK), set up at the third Congress of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus on 1-2 November 1991 (chairman: Musa Shanibov) and successor to the Assembly of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus (AGNK), acted as an unofficial parliament of peoples of the North Caucasus and had its military formations drawn from the KGNK member republics. On 13 June 1992, Shanibov brought an Abkhaz KGNK battalion to Vladikavkaz, intending to send it to fight on the side of South Ossetia. Galazov refused to let it travel on to Tskhinvali.(82) A further development of the conflict (as later in Abkhazia) would threaten the involvement of the peoples of the North Caucasus and destabilization throughout the whole region.

Towards the middle of June 1992, Russia was on the brink of war with Georgia for South Ossetia. A number of Russian leaders, including RF Supreme Soviet Chairman Ruslan Khasbulatov, Vice President Alexander Rutskoi and Acting Premier Yegor Gaidar, made strongly-worded statements on Georgian behaviour in South Ossetia. Khasbulatov warned that if Georgia did not stop the bloodshed, the Russian parliament would consider granting South Ossetia's request to join Russia, while Rutskoi telephoned Shevardnadze and threatened to bomb Tbilisi.(83) The less warlike elements in the Russian elite pointed out that besides the principle of self-determination (invoked by South Ossetia), a principle of minimization of human suffering also had to be taken into account: they argued that the suffering could only be increased if, in retaliation for Georgia's "inhuman" siege of Tskhinvali, Russia launched an all-out war against Georgia.(84)

On 22 June 1992, Yeltsin and Shevardnadze met in Dagomys and, with North and South Ossetian representatives, signed the Sochi agreement on a cease-fire and the deployment of joint Russian, Georgian and Ossetian peacekeeping forces. These were moved into the region

on 14 July and the agreement has held since. The South Ossetian demand for the establishment of treaty relations between South Ossetia and Georgia was not accepted, though the Ossetian-populated districts have remained out of bounds for Georgia. The question of the status of South Ossetia has not been solved to this day.

The overall consequences of the war were devastating: according to Olga Vasilyeva, 93 villages (mostly Ossetian) were completely burned down; most of the thousand Ossetes killed in the war were civilians, only 100 among them members of the South Ossetian self-defence forces.⁽⁸⁵⁾ The number of South Ossetian refugees to North Ossetia varies according to different sources. While some writers, like Vasilyeva, have cited a figure of up to 100,000 (presumably including those expelled from the inner regions of Georgia - there were 160,000 Ossetes in the whole of Georgia in 1979), a Russian general, Alexander Kotenkov, then head of the provisional administration in the zone of the Ossetian-Ingush conflict, estimated their number at 30,000 in March 1993, plus another 7,000 Ossetes who became refugees from the Prigorodny Raion of North Ossetia during the Ossetian-Ingush conflict in autumn 1992.⁽⁸⁶⁾ A traveller to the region speaks of 40,000 Ossetes now remaining in South Ossetia plus up to 7,000 from the inner regions of Georgia. Part of this population periodically migrates from Tskhinvali to Vladikavkaz and back.⁽⁸⁷⁾

Since July 1992, little has changed in South Ossetia, a land that seems to have been forgotten by the outside world: no ties with Georgia, and hence no supplies from there; almost no attempt made (for lack of financial resources) to rebuild what has been destroyed in the war; factories idle, with the population engaged in subsistence farming. In September 1993, Ludvig Chibirov, a colleague of North Ossetian leader Galazov, became Chairman of the South Ossetian Supreme Soviet, later renamed State Nykhas (Council of Elders); elections to that body held in March 1994 gave the South Ossetian Communist Party 19 seats out of 36.⁽⁸⁸⁾ In October 1994, Shevardnadze admitted that the conflict in South Ossetia had been the grossest mistake of the former Georgian leadership, and diplomatic efforts to solve the refugee problem were stepped up by the Georgian and South Ossetian sides.⁽⁸⁹⁾

4. A Prelude to War and the Georgian Invasion of Abkhazia (August - September 1992)

As the war was raging in South Ossetia, the Abkhazian leadership sought to reinforce its political and military position. In the new Abkhazian Supreme Soviet - elected on a quota basis - which started to function in early 1992, Georgian deputies complained of discrimination; they expressed concern over Ardzinba's decision to form an Abkhaz-only National Guard. In early May, Georgian deputies began boycotting the sessions of the Abkhazian parliament; in June, they started a campaign of civil disobedience, followed by a Georgian strike in Sukhumi and attempts to set up parallel power structures. That same month, Abkhaz national guardsmen attacked the building of Abkhazia's Ministry of Internal Affairs in Sukhumi, controlled by the Georgian authorities. The minister, Givi Lominadze, was severely beaten. He was replaced by Ardzinba's supporter Alexander Ankvab.⁽⁹⁰⁾ This happened on the very day that Yeltsin and Shevardnadze were meeting in Dagomys to decide the question of South Ossetia.

On 23 July 1992, the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet ruled (with the Georgian Democratic Abkhazia faction abstaining) that the 1978 constitution of the Abkhazian ASSR was invalid and that, pending the adoption of a new constitution, the 1925 Abkhazian constitution which provided for a treaty relationship with Georgia was in force.⁽⁹¹⁾ The State Council of Georgia declared this decision null and void. In July, Zviadists in Megrelia took a number of

high-ranking Georgian officials hostage and kept them in the Georgian-populated Gali Raion of Abkhazia. In addition, they disrupted railway traffic. This was ostensibly the pretext for the Georgian march into Abkhazia which began on 14 August, when Kitovani's tank columns entered Sukhumi, joining battle with the Abkhaz National Guard. According to Georgian reports, the Abkhaz forces were the first to open fire. The Georgian government side later claimed that Ardzinba had been notified in advance of plans to move Georgian troops into Abkhazia to protect the railway and free the hostages (a fact denied by Ardzinba himself).

A cease-fire was negotiated, allowing Russian troops to evacuate holidaymakers and enabling Ardzinba's government to withdraw to Gudauta in the north of Abkhazia; the Georgian forces even withdrew from the centre of Sukhumi as part of the agreement. However, on 18 August Tengiz Kitovani's forces unexpectedly re-entered Sukhumi and captured it. They occupied the Abkhazian parliament and, amid cheers, removed the Abkhaz flag and symbols from the building. An eight-man military council was set up to run the republic's administration. An official Abkhaz publication, the White Book, later listed by name 2,000 Abkhaz and other non-Georgian civilians and military men (Russians, Armenians, North Caucasians and Greeks) killed by the Georgian forces either in battle or as a result of the harsh regime of occupation in Abkhazia, the data cited mainly covering the period from August 1992 until March 1993. The Abkhazian White Book estimated that figure at about 30 per cent of all non-Georgian war losses.⁽⁹²⁾ The Abkhaz forces continued stubbornly to hold their ground north of the Gumista River and in the blockaded Tkvarcheli, south-east of Sukhumi. Abkhazian public figures and intellectuals accused the Georgians of annihilating peaceful Abkhaz villages, relics of history and culture, museums, art galleries, scientific institutes and archives, and of conducting a policy of terror. Among the objects destroyed was the pantheon of Abkhazian writers and public figures and the Abkhazian Institute of Language, Literature and History in Sukhumi.⁽⁹³⁾

Afterwards, in an interview with US newsmen, Shevardnadze admitted that the attack on the Abkhazian parliament "had not been necessary", while his close aide, Sergei Tarasenko, termed Kitovani's actions as stupid and counter-productive.⁽⁹⁴⁾ Nevertheless, Shevardnadze chose to back the military campaign in public, declaring over the radio on 17 August: "Now we can say that Georgian authority has been restored throughout the entire territory of the republic".⁽⁹⁵⁾

It could be argued that, just before August 1992, Russia secured the military preponderance of Georgian forces over the Abkhaz ones, which invited the former to go on the offensive in Abkhazia. In autumn 1992, the Abkhaz had only eight tanks and 30 armoured cars, whereas just one Russian division handed over 108 tanks to Georgia.⁽⁹⁶⁾ The extent of Russian help to Abkhazian forces can be assessed from the fact that more than 100,000 land mines are estimated to have been planted during the war (earlier, there had been no arms industry or ammunition dumps in Abkhazia). Some of these mines were, of course, planted by the Georgian side, also supplied from Soviet/Russian army dumps.⁽⁹⁷⁾

Tactics of the Two Sides in the Abkhazian War

In the opinion of military professionals, the protagonists in the Abkhazian war had no strategic aims which, once achieved, would enable either side to break the other's resistance. Georgia's aim in the conflict - namely, to defeat the adversary's regime by a war of attrition - was unattainable because the Abkhaz made use of the potential of the North Caucasus (the KGNK) and, by extension, Russia.⁽⁹⁸⁾ Likewise, due to their lack of manpower, the Abkhaz

could only hope to win a short-term victory. With the benefit of hindsight, one could say that, given the internal disarray in Georgia, the lack of a unified Georgian army and the diplomatic pressure that would be exerted by Russia to prevent a Georgian military comeback after an Abkhaz victory, the Abkhaz did in fact have a chance of success, at least for a time. Clashes with small autonomous armed units rendered the deployment of heavy artillery and armoured vehicles relatively useless. On the tactical plane, the Georgians needed to take control of the only Adler - Gagra - Gudauta - Gali - Zugdidi road and the railway running parallel to it. Another task was to close the mountain passes leading from the North Caucasus. The Georgians also had to keep garrisons along the whole road up to their supply bases in Tbilisi and Kutaisi. The Abkhaz, on the contrary, had to keep the road under their own control and disrupt the enemy's communications with mobile units. On the whole, the Georgians failed to achieve their tactical objectives. The hostilities were marked by positional warfare interrupted by the capture of Gagra and the areas adjoining the Russian border by the Abkhaz forces (October 1992); Abkhaz offensives in March and July 1993, and the complete expulsion of the Georgian forces in late September 1993.

The North Caucasian Factor

The most immediate support for the Abkhaz cause came from the unofficial anti-Georgian movements in the North Caucasus and their military units. The conflict at once rebounded upon the whole region of the North Caucasus: all North Caucasian republics were swept by meetings called under the slogan "Hands off Abkhazia!". Such meetings were held in North Ossetia, Karachai-Circassia, Kabardino-Balkaria and elsewhere. On 17 August 1992, at a session of its parliament in Grozny, Chechnya, the KGNK (which was to be renamed KNK - Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus - in October 1992) drew up a platform of solidarity with Abkhazia. It was joined by such organizations as the International Circassian Association and the Congress of the Kabardan People. A registration of volunteers started. Each people of the North Caucasus was to form a detachment of 60 to 100 armed men. On 18 August, a session of the KGNK parliament adopted a decision that, if the Georgian troops were not withdrawn from Abkhazia within three days, the Confederation would declare war on Georgia. Three days later, KGNK president Musa Shanibov signed a decree on the start of hostilities on the territory of Abkhazia (which did start) and in Tbilisi (which proved to be bluff).

The confederates began to arrive in Abkhazia via mountain paths. The local authorities, much as they feared uncontrollable mass movements of North Caucasian peoples, could not stop the volunteers, risking a loss of power if they tried to do so. The example of Chechnya, where General Dudaev had taken control after overthrowing the local communist leadership in autumn 1991, was uncomfortably close. What the confederates saw as Russia's collusion with Georgia against Abkhazia infuriated the peoples of the North Caucasus, especially those ethnically related to the Abkhaz (the Kabards, Circassians and Adyghe).

Such a turn of events was extremely unwelcome to the Russian government, which on 18 August issued a statement on the "inadmissibility of intervention in the internal affairs of Georgia". The Russian authorities arrested Shanibov, but riots in late September in Nalchik, the capital of Kabarda, forced them to turn a blind eye when Shanibov escaped arrest and appeared in Nalchik before the crowds. Later he went to fight in Abkhazia. Politically, there were differences between the various Confederate leaders and ethnic groups. While Shanibov leaned towards such Russian nationalist hardliners as Sergei Baburin, the KNK commander

in Abkhazia - Shamil Basaev, a Chechen - spoke out against Russian domination in the Caucasus.

Besides the North Caucasian irregulars, the Abkhazian cause was furthered by Cossack elements, often hostile to non-Russian North Caucasians fighting in Abkhazia, especially Chechens. Cossacks patrolled the border between Russia and Georgia and took part in the conflict in support of the Abkhaz for the sake of "Great Russia". Mercenaries and volunteers were active on both sides. On the Abkhaz side, these were the Russian Trans-Dniester guardsmen fresh from the war in Moldova. On the Georgian side, there were the sportswomen snipers from the Baltic states who came to fight for mercenary reasons, and the volunteers from the extreme nationalist Ukrainian UNA-UNSO organization, motivated by anti-Russian feeling.

Russian Policies and the Georgian-Abkhazian War (1992-1993)

Throughout 1992 and 1993, Russia had no single policy with regard to the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. It was not clear which would best suit Russian interests - to see Georgia strong and united or weak and dismembered.⁽⁹⁹⁾ Andrei Kortunov, Head of the Foreign Policy department of the Institute for US and Canadian Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, described the Russian inconsistencies as follows: "For Russia, the problem is not how to prevent these conflicts or mediate them. It is too late for the former, and the latter may backfire. Russian diplomacy is not mature enough to keep the proper balance between the conflicting sides. It tends to be politically biased and subject to lobbying from ethnic-centered communities".⁽¹⁰⁰⁾

Still, it was impossible for Russia to keep away from the conflict. Russian garrisons were stationed both in Georgia proper and in the parts of Abkhazia controlled by both sides. Sections of the military were opposed to the line taken by Andrei Kozyrev's Foreign Ministry and to the support accorded Shevardnadze by Yeltsin and Kozyrev. The North Caucasian peoples were watching closely for any sign of a pro-Georgian trend in Russia's actions; in Moscow itself, the issue - as with South Ossetia - became a subject of dispute between Yeltsin and his hardline opponents in parliament. The "dovish" line in Russian policy, under attack from various quarters, could not hide the fact that even official Russian policy was drifting towards a more assertive and paternalistic style in relation to the "near abroad" areas, regarded as the "sphere of Russia's strategic interests" (Grachev's statement in February 1993), while it was claimed that Russia should be granted special powers to settle ethnic conflicts on the territory of the ex-USSR (Yeltsin in March the same year).

Kozyrev's efforts were felt in the attempts at mediation, which led to the talks held on 3 September 1992 between Georgia and Russia (Shevardnadze and Yeltsin) with the participation of Ardzinba. The latter, under pressure from Russia, was compelled to sign a document authorizing the presence of Georgian troops on Abkhazian territory and making no mention of a federal structure in Georgia.⁽¹⁰¹⁾ The agreement fell through with the Abkhaz capture of Gagra in October 1992, referred to earlier.

The Russian military, on the contrary, were less inclined to pressurize Abkhazia in favour of Shevardnadze. A source knowledgeable about the moods of the Russian generals was quoted as saying that "they don't like Shevardnadze and they are defending their sanatoria in Abkhazia. The war will go on until either Shevardnadze or Ardzinba joins Russia in some form or other. The generals have lost too much with the break-up of the USSR. Where there

is hope, they will try to regain it".(102) The Russian officers in Gudauta likewise sympathized with the Abkhaz. Besides their hostile attitude to Shevardnadze, whom they saw as the initiator of the break-up of the Soviet state, they were embittered against the Georgians for the "barbarous" pillage of the property of the Russian forces in Georgia and even the killing of Russian soldiers.(103) Although Grachev had given the Russian commanders a severe warning that they should not conduct military action in Abkhazia, their sympathy for the Abkhaz cause meant that they were always ready to offer the Abkhaz a professional consultation or to draw up a battle plan for them.(104) Incredible as it may seem (although it was in line with a consistent Russian policy of supplying both sides in a conflict), at a time when Russian-supplied warplanes were bombing Georgian-held Sukhumi, other Russian units continued to supply the Georgian Army. On 25 March 1993, at a press conference in the headquarters of the Transcaucasian Military District, Major-General Diukov said that the forces of the district were continuing to hand over weapons to Georgia (one division with full equipment so far) and were planning to turn over to them 34 military cantonments before the end of the year. No agreement on the status of Russian troops in Georgia had been signed by that date.(105)

The Georgian side reported a massive influx of volunteers from Trans-Dniester to Gudauta to reinforce the Abkhazian side.(106) Still, as a result of intensive diplomatic activity, operations to aid besieged Tkvarcheli as well as Sukhumi and to evacuate the refugees got under way in June. On 27 July, the agreement was signed in Sochi by the Georgian, Abkhazian and Russian sides. It provided for a ceasefire, the withdrawal of the Georgian army from Abkhazia and mutual demilitarization by the belligerents, to be followed by the "return of a legal government to Sukhumi". What that government would be was still to be agreed by the two sides. The agreement evoked mixed feelings in Georgia: although thousands of Georgian civilians returned to Sukhumi in anticipation of a peaceful life to come, large sections of the public were shocked and demoralized, which enabled Gamsakhurdia to emerge once more as a "saviour of Georgia". A third of the Georgian troops to be withdrawn from Abkhazia went over to the Zviadist side.(107) In late July, Zviadist forces, commanded by Loti Kobalia, briefly took Senaki in Western Georgia, ostensibly to prevent the withdrawal of the Georgian army from Abkhazia. In late August they again took Senaki, Abasha and Khobi. Soon afterwards, the Zviadist faction in the Georgian parliament elected in October 1990 convened in Zugdidi and appealed to Gamsakhurdia to return to Georgia and resume his duties as head of state. Disagreements in the Georgian parliament in Tbilisi led Shevardnadze to tender his resignation on 14 September. With the crowds outside parliament imploring him to stay, Shevardnadze agreed to do so, on condition that parliament be suspended for three months.

After the signing of the Sochi agreement, the Abkhaz side complained that the Georgians had failed to withdraw their heavy weapons. The latter said they were being obstructed by the Zviadists and impeded by a lack of logistics and fuel. To complete the operation, the Georgians had recourse to the Black Sea Fleet. According to Georgian accounts, in September its ships evacuated all Georgian hardware and 80 per cent of Georgian troops from Abkhazia.(108) Russia's Defence Minister Grachev, on the contrary, commented that most of the weapons the Georgians had withdrawn were useless.(109) It appears that the Georgian heavy weapons withdrawn to Poti fell into Zviadist hands, while the Abkhaz weapons were stored near the front line, and on the outbreak of hostilities were quickly handed back to the Abkhaz by Russian army units hostile to Shevardnadze.

After the Zviadists launched another offensive against Georgian government troops near Samtredia (15 September), the Abkhaz felt it was time to act. On 16 September, they launched an all-out attack on the Georgian forces. With the help of free-lance Russian soldiers and North Caucasian volunteers, they drove the Georgian army from Abkhazia, capturing Sukhumi on 27 September. Appeals by Shevardnadze to Russian leaders - calling on Russia, as a guarantor of the Sochi agreement, to restore the status-quo - fell on deaf ears. The fact that the Abkhaz had broken the agreement in starting their offensive drew a sharp, though ineffective, reaction from Russian leaders. On 20 September, the Russian government condemned the Abkhaz actions and imposed economic sanctions on Abkhazia, but Grachev refused to commit his troops to disengaging the two sides. Georgian sources reported massive atrocities against the civilian Georgian population, perpetrated by the Abkhaz and their allies.

Meanwhile, the Zviadist offensive in Megrelia continued. In early October, they captured Poti and Samtredia and blocked all rail traffic and food supplies to Tbilisi. At this juncture, Shevardnadze's regime, fearing a total rout by Kobalia's forces, desperately needed Russian help and made a number of important concessions to Russia. On 8 October, Georgia entered the CIS, a step widely seen as tantamount to entering into the Russian sphere of influence. On 9 October, a Georgian-Russian agreement on the status of Russian troops in Georgia was signed (a leasing of military bases, including Poti). The Russian army was called upon to guard strategic roads in Georgia as Georgian government forces were fighting Kobalia to the north. Since early October, Russian troops had been guarding the Poti-Samtredia-Tbilisi railway and on 3 November took Poti under their control, helping to make the port operational. It took most of October and early November for Georgian government troops to bring Megrelia back under control. Gamsakhurdia lost his life in obscure circumstances in a remote village in Western Georgia on 31 December 1993.

Russian/UN Mediation Efforts

After the capture of Zugdidi (6 November 1993), the Georgian forces again approached the borders of Abkhazia. A new period began. It has been characterized by a Georgian inability to resolve the issue by military means and by Russian efforts to get both sides - Georgia and Abkhazia - involved in direct talks. In the process, Russia put pressure on the belligerents in order to prevent a renewed Georgian march into Abkhazia, on the one hand, and, on the other, to compel the Abkhaz to let the Georgian refugees return home. The mediation effort allowed Russia to increase its influence on both sides and safeguard its own interests. Parallel to the Russian mediation, UN mediation was in progress, as the international community tried to monitor Russia's moves. Both belligerents jockeyed for position, trying to use Russian and UN leverage to vindicate their respective claims, which were hard to reconcile. In the end, a precarious peace managed to be achieved, not without problems for Russia's relations with either side. Abkhazia failed to secure an internationally recognized independent status, including recognition by Russia, with the result that it has been impossible to rebuild the war-ravaged republic, while Georgia has made little progress with constructing a coherent state machinery and a viable economy.

In early November 1993, some Georgian officials, Shevardnadze and Ioseliani among them, were making statements about the possibility of a renewed march into Abkhazia. In Tbilisi, Boris Kakubava, a Georgian MP and leader of the Organization for the Liberation of Abkhazia opposed to Shevardnadze's "conciliationist policies", was forming an expeditionary force composed of Georgian refugees in order to enter Abkhazia. In the Kodori

Gorge, the only part of Abkhazia outside Abkhaz control, clashes were taking place between local Georgian militias, reinforced by detachments of Georgian troops, and the Abkhaz forces. On 9 November, the Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement warning against the crossing of the Inguri River by either Georgian or Abkhazian troops.

On 1 December, the first round of talks between Georgia and Abkhazia under UN auspices and with the participation of the CSCE, with Russia as facilitator, ended in Geneva with the signing of a memorandum of understanding. Both sides pledged not to use force or the threat of force for the period of the negotiations, to exchange prisoners and create conditions for the voluntary, safe and swift return of the refugees.⁽¹¹⁰⁾ The latter clause sounded like an important concession on the part of Abkhazia. After the signing of the 1 December memorandum, Russia partially lifted the sanctions against Abkhazia imposed after its breach of the Sochi Agreement. Subsequent events showed, however, that, on the refugee problem, the memorandum would be honoured by Abkhazia more in the breach than in the observance.

Consultations on the future status of Abkhazia, which ended in Moscow on 21 December, revealed the parties' differing approaches to the issue. The Abkhaz side argued that Abkhazia's status should be determined by a referendum in which the population could choose between the following options: 1) autonomy for Abkhazia within Georgia; 2) confederation in which Abkhazia and Georgia would be equal members; 3) complete independence for Abkhazia. The Georgian side, conscious of the fact that in the absence of Georgian refugees the vote would be slanted in favour of the opposing side, refused to discuss the status of Abkhazia "as long as the policy of genocide continued".

Subsequently, the UN-sponsored talks continued in Geneva, New York and Moscow, the only progress being the absence of hostilities. The Abkhaz side delayed the solution of the refugee problem until Georgian troops were withdrawn from the Kodori Gorge. The Georgian side responded with accusations of genocide.

The Russian-Georgian Treaty of 3 February 1994

On 3 February, President Yeltsin of Russia paid a visit to Tbilisi and signed a Treaty on Friendship, Neighbourliness and Co-operation with Georgia. In addition, 25 intergovernmental agreements were signed, dealing with economic cooperation, science and technology, transport, communications, pensions, etc. The treaty provided for the establishment of five Russian military bases in Georgia and the stationing of Russian border guards along Georgia's borders with Turkey. Russia pledged to aid Georgia in organizing and re-equipping its army after the settlement of the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The ratification of the treaty by the Russian side was made conditional on the settlement of these conflicts. Russia reiterated its recognition of Georgia's territorial integrity. For Georgia, economic agreements with Russia were especially urgent as the Georgian economy was tottering on the brink of collapse. In 1993, net national product was some 30.3% of that of 1990.⁽¹¹¹⁾

In Russia, the government camp was in favour of the treaty, but the Duma against. The 3 February statement by the Duma objected to the treaty on the grounds that 1) Georgia had unilaterally infringed international agreements on the settlement of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict; 2) Georgian aggression against Abkhazia was continuing, and to conclude a treaty with a warring country was to abet aggression; 3) the treaty would provoke negative reactions

in the North Caucasus, in Russia as a whole and in all the countries inhabited by the Circassian diaspora; 4) the treaty provided for assistance in the formation of Georgian armed forces, their equipment and the purchase of military hardware and technology, which contravened the law.(112) The statement was signed by all the factions in the Duma, including Russia's Choice, headed by Yegor Gaidar. The Duma's position was supported by the leaders of South Ossetia, the International Circassian Association and Abkhazia, where mass meetings in defence of the republic's sovereignty were held on 31 January 1994. The Abkhazian Supreme Soviet made a statement saying that the Russo-Georgian treaty had no effect on Abkhazia, as the latter was not a part of Georgia.

Diplomatic Moves

10 February 1994 was scheduled in January as the date for starting the return of the refugees. Instead, fresh hostilities erupted. The Abkhaz side accused the Georgians of firing on Abkhaz positions on the Inguri River on 6 February, and of using the process of the return of refugees as an excuse for an armed incursion onto the territory of Abkhazia to instigate guerrilla warfare. The Georgian side denied these charges. In March, the Georgian State Committee for Refugees and Displaced Persons reported that 188,970 refugees, some 160,000 of them from Abkhazia, had been officially registered and accommodated in 63 districts of Georgia.(113) The Georgian refugees, grouped near the Inguri, pressed desperately for the right to enter, staging marches and hunger strikes in the months that followed.

The precondition for starting the UN peacekeeping operation in Abkhazia was for the two sides to reach at least a semblance of progress in the talks. As no progress had been made, the Security Council did not deem it possible to deploy peacekeeping forces in Abkhazia. On 10 March, while Shevardnadze was in the United States, the Georgian parliament disbanded the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia and annulled all its decisions. The Abkhazian Supreme Soviet immediately cancelled all plans for the return of the refugees. Shevardnadze considered the Georgian parliament's move a mistake, as it blocked further progress in the negotiations. At the end of March, fighting in Abkhazian Svaneti flared up again. Russia issued an appeal to both sides to resume negotiations.

On 4 April, the Abkhaz and Georgian sides, with Russia's mediation and UN and CSCE participation, signed a quadripartite agreement in Moscow on the voluntary return of refugees and displaced persons.(114) The agreement stipulated that immunity from arrest, detainment, imprisonment and criminal prosecution did not apply to those who had perpetrated military crimes, crimes against humanity or serious common crimes. These people, as well as those who had earlier taken part in hostilities and were currently enrolled in military units preparing for military action in Abkhazia, were not eligible to return to Abkhazia. The agreement was bound to evoke opposition in Georgia, as it concerned only Georgian and not Abkhazian war criminals, not to mention the fact that most of the male Georgian population of Abkhazia had been enlisted to take part in the war on the Georgian side, even though not all actually fought. In addition, on 4 April a statement on measures for the solution of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict was signed.(115) This stipulated that Abkhazia would have its own constitution and legislation as well as its own national anthem, coat of arms and flag. The parties reached an understanding on "powers for common activity" in such fields as foreign policy and foreign trade, border service, customs, etc. This was interpreted by the Abkhaz side as a step towards the recognition of both sides as equal and sovereign subjects delegating powers to each other. "Georgia has in fact recognized the sovereignty of Abkhazia," said A. Jergenia, representing Abkhazia at the talks.(116) Shevardnadze and other Georgian leaders later pointed out that,

contrary to Abkhaz claims, the statement of 4 April did not speak of Abkhazia as a subject of international law. Nor did it contain any mention of a confederal status for Abkhazia.[\(117\)](#)

On 14 May, the two sides signed another agreement on a ceasefire and the disengagement of troops. Both sides would withdraw 12 km from the front lines along the Inguri River to form a sufficiently wide security zone. The Abkhaz side was to pull its artillery, tanks and armoured vehicles back as far as Sukhumi and the Georgian side to Zugdidi. In addition, the Georgians were to withdraw their troops from the Kodori Gorge and allow their military equipment there to be destroyed. Peacekeeping operations involving a 2,000-strong Russian contingent started on 20 June. However, it was not until the end of August that the first group of Georgian refugees was allowed into Gali Raion.

Russian pressure, exerted on Abkhazia in order to solve the refugee problem, led to a gradual worsening of Russian-Abkhaz relations. In early July, Ardzinba refused to meet Kozyrev during the latter's visit to the conflict zone, bringing sharp criticism from Kozyrev. On 25 August, the Russian peacekeepers set up road-blocks and briefly disarmed the Abkhaz police in Gudauta after a reported shooting at a Russian military sanatorium at a time when Russia's Deputy Defence Minister, General Georgi Kondratyev, was present.[\(118\)](#) In mid-September, the Abkhaz and the Russian peacekeepers were on the brink of open hostilities when General Vasily Yakushev, commander of the Russian peacekeeping forces in Abkhazia, promised to allow a mass crossing of Georgian refugees, due to start on 14 September. The Abkhaz mobilized their motorized infantry, tanks and anti-aircraft forces and moved them into the neutral zone. The crossing was cancelled. The crisis ended with a Russian-brokered meeting between Shevardnadze and Ardzinba in the presence of Yeltsin in Novy Afon, Abkhazia, on 16 September. The Georgian opposition criticized Shevardnadze for making this ostensibly peace-loving gesture, which, it said, was actually designed by the Russians to curtail Georgia's capability to conduct independent policy on the eve of the Georgian leader's projected visit to the UN General Assembly.

At the end of October, the joint commission, including representatives of the Russian peacekeepers and UN observers, ascertained the removal of Georgian units from the Kodori Gorge. The Georgian irregulars were disarmed and heavy equipment was destroyed by the Russian peacekeepers. The reasons earlier cited by the Abkhaz side for not allowing at least some refugees back seemed to have lost substance. By late autumn 1994, the Abkhaz had allowed several hundred Georgian families to move into the Gali Raion in addition to an unspecified number (40,000 people according to some accounts) who came there on their own, without any official security guarantees.

On 26 November, the Abkhaz parliament declared Abkhazia independent, a move that precluded any further talks between the Abkhazian and Georgian governments. The declaration was condemned both in Tbilisi and in Moscow. In the wake of events in Chechnya in December, both Abkhazia and Georgia mobilized their troops, and there were fears in Abkhazia that Georgia would use the opportunity presented by Russia's war on Chechnya to act likewise towards its breakaway republic. Sympathy for the Chechens and hostility to the Russian actions were strong in Abkhazia, which lodged an official protest to the Russian government when the latter closed the de facto border with Abkhazia on 20 December to prevent a possible flow of volunteers to Chechnya (as was done also with other stretches of the Russian borders with Georgia and Azerbaijan). In Georgia, the reaction to the Russian invasion of Chechnya, with some exceptions, was positive thanks to the Chechens' aid to the Abkhaz in 1992-93 and to the Zviadists in late 1993. On 21 December, the Chairman of the

Federation Council of the Russian parliament, Vladimir Shumeiko, wrote a letter to Yeltsin requesting the recall of the Russian peacekeepers from Abkhazia on account of what he called the establishment of bases for Chechen guerrillas in the Kodori Gorge in Abkhazia. The Abkhaz authorities denied this. The next day, Shumeiko's statement was denied in a TV interview by General Yakushev, who said there were no Chechen bases in the Kodori Gorge. Other high-ranking Russian commanders also said that no Abkhaz volunteers had been seen in Chechnya. Russia's war against separatism in Chechnya made Abkhazia's position less secure by making it appear that separatism in Abkhazia was equally illegitimate. At the beginning of 1995, this made the Abkhaz leaders more amenable to a negotiated solution of the conflict.

□ **The Ingushi-Ossetian Conflict**

The conflict between the two peoples of the North Caucasus - the Ingush and the Ossetes - over the Prigorodny Raion of North Ossetia and the city of Vladikavkaz was generated by the forced deportation in 1944, on Stalin's orders, of the Ingush from the lands they had hitherto occupied, and the settlement of the Ossetes in their place. It is further linked to the consequences of Tsarist Russia's colonial policy and the vagaries of administrative divisions in the region in Soviet times. Additional factors complicating the situation have been the conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia (which prompted a minimum of 30,000 refugees from South Ossetia and the inner regions of Georgia to settle in North Ossetia, including in the disputed region) and the virtual independence of Chechnya from Russia, as a result of which the Ingush found themselves at the end of 1991 without an administration or legal status.

The continuity of Ingush settlement in the area was broken for the first time in the mid-19th century, when the Tsarist government expelled these people from what is now the Prigorodny Raion. Russian troops destroyed all the Ingush settlements south of Vladikavkaz, adjoining the strategically important Military Georgian Road, and installed Cossack settlements in their place. Some of the Ingush of what is now the Prigorodny Raion were driven into the mountains, others emigrated to Turkey. Contemporary Ossetian publications stress that there was not a single Ingush resident in Vladikavkaz from the middle of the 19th century until the early 1920s. After their victory in the Civil War, the Bolsheviks allowed the Ingush to resettle in the disputed region, displacing the Cossacks. With the reappearance of the Cossacks on the political arena in the 1990s, the "Cossack factor" has been used in the contemporary regional balance of forces by the Ossetian side, although some Cossacks are on good terms with the Ingush.

After a brief spell as part of the Bolshevik-created Mountain Republic (1920-24), the Ingush were granted their national republic, which lasted until 1933. In the meantime, the city of Vladikavkaz was proclaimed a dual capital of Ingushetia and North Ossetia, as it was vital for the economic and cultural development of both republics. 1933 saw changes in their administrative status which the Ingush regarded as detrimental: the Ingush ASSR was merged with the Chechen ASSR to become the Checheno-Ingush Autonomous Republic. Vladikavkaz (renamed Orjonikidze in 1932 - the old name was not restored until 1990) was transferred to the sole jurisdiction of North Ossetia. In Ingush eyes, this meant the loss both of national, autonomous statehood and of a capital to stronger neighbours: the Chechens and the Ossetes. Losing the capital was all the more depressing to the Ingush as they had no other

city to replace it: Nazran (in Checheno-Ingushetia), the second largest Ingush settlement, was, and still remains, little more than a village.

On 7 March 1944, the USSR Supreme Soviet adopted a classified decree liquidating the Checheno-Ingush ASSR and providing for repressive measures against the Chechens and the Ingush. The reason advanced for such a step was that many of the latter had allegedly committed "treason at the front" and "had not been engaged in honest labour for a considerable time".⁽¹¹⁹⁾ The Ingush, like the other "punished peoples" of the USSR, were deported (permanently, as specified in a further decree of 1948) to outlying regions of the USSR and threatened with severe punishment if they left their places of exile. Part of the territory of Checheno-Ingushetia populated by the Ingush prior to deportation was incorporated into the North Ossetian ASSR and, together with the Prigorodny Raion and the formerly Ingush-populated part of Orjonikidze, settled (as the Ossetes now stress, forcibly and against their will) by the Ossetian population.

The restraints on free movement by the deportees were partially lifted by a classified decree by the USSR Supreme Soviet on 16 July 1956. The lifting of legal restraints did not entail a return of property confiscated during the deportation, nor did it provide for the deportees' resettlement in the places they had left. A classified letter from the Council of Ministers of North Ossetia in 1956 expressly forbade the sale or renting of houses to the Ingush returning from exile and annulled deeds of sale if they had been made before that time. On 9 January 1957, another decree by the USSR Supreme Soviet repealed the decree of 7 March 1944 on the liquidation of the Checheno-Ingush ASSR, hence restoring the republics' pre-1944 borders. In 1956-57, most of the Chechens and Ingush returned to their native places, while the Ossetes had to leave their homes and jobs in former Ingushetia (again under duress, as they emphasize). However, the corresponding decree promulgated in North Ossetia did not list the territory of the Prigorodny Raion or the Ingush part of Vladikavkaz among the territories to be reattached to the Checheno-Ingush ASSR.⁽¹²⁰⁾

Why were the Ossetes opposed to the Ingush recovery of and settlement in the disputed region? Economically, the Prigorodny Raion is the main source of food for the capital of North Ossetia. To counter the threat, the Ossetian leadership persuaded the Centre to adopt laws restraining the right of "new arrivals" to settle in the raion, arguing its overpopulation. Thus, on 5 March 1982, the USSR Council of Ministers restricted the issuing of residence permits (*propiska*) for those people who were newly arriving in the Prigorodny Raion for permanent residence.⁽¹²¹⁾ In the period after 1956, the area was increasingly settled with Ossetes from South Ossetia (22,000 settlers in 1956-59 alone).⁽¹²²⁾ According to Ingush claims, by the end of 1988 only 400 Ingush had received legal permission to reside in the Prigorodny Raion. By 1990, their number had reached 17,500, out of a population of 40,000. Prior to 1944, the population of the raion was said to number 34,000 (including 31,000 Ingush). The Ingush put the total population of Vladikavkaz at 310,000 in 1990 (48.5% of them Ossetes, 37.3% Russians and 4.8% Ingush).⁽¹²³⁾ The Ossetian sources paint a different picture. According to them, 2,254 Ingush were deported from Orjonikidze in 1944; as of 1990, they numbered 14,461 in the city; the corresponding figures for the whole of Prigorodny Raion plus Vladikavkaz were 26,019 in 1944 and 32,782 in 1990. Ossetian government sources claim that all the deported Ingush and their close and distant relatives had been reinstated in their former places of residence and all the proper living conditions secured for them.⁽¹²⁴⁾

During the perestroika years, there was mounting pressure from the Ingush and other "punished peoples" for their rights to be restored. The many Ingush who had become "illegal residents", and had to give bribes for their residence permits, now wanted to legalize their homes. The period when the Ingush possessed their own republic (1924-33), in their view, had given them the best opportunities for developing their economy and culture. Hence the demand for a return of the Prigorodny Raion.

In 1989-92, the Ingush put forward their demands at four many-thousand-strong pan-national meetings, at two Congresses of People's Deputies of Ingushetia, at the first Congress of Small Peoples, held in Moscow in October 1990, at two congresses of Peoples - victims of repression, held in Moscow and Nalchik in 1991 and 1992 and, finally, at the all-Ingushi referendum held at the end of 1991. Ossetian sources report that Ingush armed bands in the period were threatening Ossetian families with reprisals, ordering them to leave their homes and committing multiple acts of burglary and murder. In the opinion of Haji-Murat Ibrahimbeili, Chairman of the Committee on Interethnic Accord of the Confederation of the Peoples of the Caucasus (KNK), the Ingush demands for the return of the Prigorodny Raion were just, but the Ingushi leaders were to blame for "expressing these demands in a frankly rude manner, whipping up hysteria at mass meetings in the months preceding the catastrophe, and initiating the formation of forward-based armed detachments in the territory of the Prigorodny Raion".⁽¹²⁵⁾ Meanwhile, on taking power in autumn 1991, General Dudaev of Chechnya immediately proceeded to set up separate Chechen administrative bodies in the territory inhabited by the Chechens. Thus Ingushetia was left in a political vacuum, as the Ingush republic took longer to organize. The Ingush had no wish to secede from Russia, hoping that the latter would solve their territorial problem. The possibility of creating a separate Ingush republic within the Russian Federation brought the territorial issue immediately to the fore.

Soviet and Russian Policies on the Ingush Question

What was the reaction from the leading Soviet/Russian bodies to the Ingushi mass mobilization, and how far did the decisions adopted by the former influence the situation? In trying to unravel the issue of the legal rehabilitation of peoples deported in Stalin's era, the people representing the highest legislative bodies of the USSR and the RSFSR seemed to vie with one other in trying to show that each of them was "a better democrat" than their counterparts, in order to garner support from the ethnic groups concerned. In addition, the various legislative acts ran counter to each other and served only to exacerbate ethnic tension in the region.

As early as 14 November 1989, the second Congress of the USSR People's Deputies adopted a declaration by the USSR Supreme Soviet 'On the Recognition as Illegal and Criminal of All Acts Against the Peoples who have Suffered Forced Resettlement, and on Safeguarding their Rights'. The declaration failed to address the question of territorial rehabilitation for the "punished peoples". In its turn, the RSFSR Congress of People's Deputies passed a resolution "On the Victims of Political Repression in the RSFSR", on 11 December 1990. This provided for the "working out and adoption of legislative acts on the rehabilitation and full redressing of the rights of repressed peoples and citizens of the RSFSR". The provisions of these documents were never fully put into practice. On 26 March 1990, in response to appeals from the Ingush population, the Soviet of Nationalities of the USSR Supreme Soviet set up a commission which came to the conclusion that the Ingush demands for the restitution of the Prigorodny Raion, and some other territories that had formed part of Checheno-Ingushetia

prior to 1944, were well founded. In less than a month, a brawl between the Ingush and Ossetian residents of one of the villages in the disputed region led the Soviet authorities to impose a state of emergency in the whole region and in Vladikavkaz.

On 26 April 1991, the RSFSR Supreme Soviet adopted a law "On the Rehabilitation of Peoples who have Suffered Repression". Article 3 of the law provided for the "restoration of territorial integrity" as it had existed before deportation and compensation for damage caused by the state. Para. 6 stipulated the "implementation of legal and organizational measures" to restore the previous borders. The law, signed by Boris Yeltsin, then Chairman of Russia's parliament, was later criticized by political scientists and politicians, as it contravened Russia's constitution, which stated that the borders of the republics inside the Russian Federation could not be changed without the consent of the relevant subjects of the Federation. The same principle was enshrined in the Federative Treaty signed by the republics and regions of Russia in March 1992. Later, the Russian parliament ruled to impose a moratorium on border changes in the Russian Federation until the year 1995. However, during his 1991 presidential election campaign, Yeltsin had promised the Ingush to settle their problem by the end of that year, a pledge that was not honoured. The virtual secession of Chechnya from Russia prompted Russian lawmakers to legislate on the creation of a separate Ingush Republic. But the corresponding law adopted by the RF Supreme Soviet on 4 June 1992 neither laid down the borders of the republic, nor set up its administrative bodies. On 26 October 1992, the Russian parliament's leadership recommended a mixed Ossetian-Ingush committee to work out a negotiated solution to the crisis. It was then that the conflict (with Ossetian provocation?) moved into its acute phase.

The Tragedy of October-November 1992

Prior to October 1992, the Ossetian leadership effected a massive arms build-up, far exceeding the amount of arms the Ingush could accumulate.⁽¹²⁶⁾ According to Irina Dementieva's comprehensive account, events unfolded as follows. In late October, an Ossetian armoured car ran over a little Ingush girl. In a day, an Ossetian militiaman had killed two more Ingush men. He was released without trial by the Ossetian authorities. A crowd of angry Ingush residents gathered, and in a clash with Ossetian militia another three Ingush and two militiamen were killed. In response, on 24 October a joint session of three Ingush Raion Soviets passed a decision to block the entrances and exits to all Ingush-populated settlements in the Prigorodny Raion, to call up volunteers for self-defence units and to subordinate them to the Ingushi authorities and militia. Thus the Ossetian authorities were presented with a casus belli. They warned that the Ingush barricades were to be removed and all weapons handed in, or force would be used. All attempts made by an Ingushi representative to reach Yeltsin by phone failed. On 30 October, the Ossetes killed two more Ingush and shelled the Ingush quarters of two villages. On hearing about these events the following morning, a crowd of Ingush from Ingushetia itself advanced on the Prigorodny Raion, capturing an Ossetian militia guardpost at Chermen and some heavy weapons, and engaging in arson, burglaries and hostage-taking. With the help of their compatriots from the Prigorodny Raion, they quickly took control of all the Ingush settlements, chasing away their Ossetian neighbours, and started an all-out offensive against Vladikavkaz.

The Russian government dispatched troops to the raion, who repulsed the Ingushi attackers, killing many civilians. Acting behind their backs, Ossetian units destroyed Ingush homes, torturing and killing the civilian population and driving almost all Ingush residents to

Ingushetia. In late 1992, the Ingush authorities put the number of fugitives at 70,000 (65,000 refugees registered by the Russian Federal Migration Service).⁽¹²⁷⁾ The Russian Provisional Administration for the conflict zone had data showing that the total number of those killed was over 600 (171 Ossetes, 419 Ingush, 60 others). 3,397 houses were burned and destroyed (about 3,000 of them belonging to the Ingush).⁽¹²⁸⁾ There are grounds for believing that the object of the operation on the Russian side was not so much to punish the Ingush as to provoke General Dudaev of Chechnya into sending military aid to the Ingush, thus giving them an opportunity to destroy the self-proclaimed Chechen Republic. On 10 November, Russian troops occupied the whole of Ingushetia and stood across from the undemarcated border with Chechnya. But Dudaev proclaimed neutrality, blocking the border with oil tanks and declaring a state of emergency in his republic. The next day, acting Premier Yegor Gaidar signed an agreement with the Chechen and Ingush representatives that Russian troops would be pulled out.

Aftermath of the Conflict

For the two years since autumn 1992, the uprooted Ingush residents of the Prigorodny Raion have been living in caravans in Ingushetia, unable to return home. During this period, the people in the hotbed of the conflict have been living under a Provisional Administration appointed from Moscow, which has so far succeeded in freezing, though not solving, the conflict. Ingush President Ruslan Aushev, elected in January 1993, seems to have persuaded his people not to press the territorial issue for the duration of the Russian moratorium on border changes until 1995. The main Ingush demand at present is the return of the refugees.

Despite the regularly prolonged state of emergency in the conflict zone, between December 1992 and January 1994, 167 Ingush houses and 107 Ossetian ones were blown up.⁽¹²⁹⁾ Both sides continue to keep their military formations - "legal" in North Ossetia and "illegal" in Ingushetia. Those Ingush who dare to return to their homes in the district face attacks by Ossetian gunmen.

On 13 December 1993, President Yeltsin issued a decree allowing the return of Ingush refugees to four villages of the Prigorodny Raion. Russia proposed a condominium between North Ossetia and Ingushetia in the disputed region. This proposal was contained in the Russian government's resolution of 3 February 1994 on measures to implement the presidential decree mentioned above. The territory of the four settlements where the Ingush are to be resettled is to be legally constituted as an autonomous district.⁽¹³⁰⁾ On 2-3 April 1994, an Ingush-Ossetian agreement on implementing Yeltsin's decree was reached. The Ossetian leaders demanded: a) an official condemnation ("political evaluation") of the Ingush aggression; b) the trial of the (Ingush) initiators of the conflict; c) that the disputed region within North Ossetia be firmly secured; d) the demarcation of the borders with Ingushetia. The main thesis of the Ossetian leaders is that it is impossible for the Ossetes and the Ingush to live together. The question of Ingush resettlement should, in their view, be linked to the resettlement of South Ossetian refugees and put to the Ossetian people in a referendum, while those who would like to come should be vetted to check their "criminal record" during the events of autumn 1992. The Ingush side favours direct rule from Moscow in the disputed zone, hoping that "pro-Ossetian" leanings in the Russian leadership will give way to "pro-Ingush" ones.

December 1994 and the war in Chechnya meant more victims for the Ingush people, who opposed the passage of Russian troops to Chechnya through their republic. Some of the

Ingush have fought on the Chechen side, and about 60,000 refugees from Chechnya had found refuge in Ingushetia by January 1995. The implications of Yeltsin's aggression in Chechnya for the stability of Russian rule in the North Caucasus have yet to be seen. The seeds of hate sown by the military oppression of North Caucasian peoples may bear bitter fruit in the future, leading to outcomes unforeseen by the planners in the Kremlin.

5. Conclusion

The ethnic territorial division of the USSR functioned as a decorative federal screen, behind which the Kremlin controlled the diverse peoples which comprised the USSR. Civic peace among the various ethnic groups was maintained thanks to the existence of the centrally-controlled apparatus of the Communist Party, which, in turn, controlled the repressive bodies. Repression as a means of dealing with outbreaks of nationalism, and even ethnic conflicts, as well as the propaganda of the "friendship of peoples" of the USSR and consistent steps to co-opt local ethnic bureaucracies in the republics, were a built-in feature of communist rule.

With the arrival of glasnost, the peoples of the USSR seized an opportunity to speak out and vent their pent-up grievances, while violence could not be used so readily by the state. In the Soviet bureaucratic system, ethnic grievances could legitimately be voiced only on the decisions of the corresponding authorities at the level of the different republics, addressed to the Centre. At the same time, by 1988, society lacked adequate means of give and take as well as a democratic political culture. Thus, with glasnost, the conflicting decisions of republican bodies, backed by popular mobilizations, with the party unable to gratify the relevant ethnic groups, not only flouted the communist internationalist doctrine ("friendship of peoples"), but made the party unable to govern. As the party was the cement binding together all of Soviet society and its institutions, the erosion of party rule - caused, in addition to ethnic disputes, by a host of political, economic and social problems - led to the collapse of not just the party, but also the USSR itself. Subsequent experience, especially in the Caucasus, has shown, however, that in a state of "disunion" the peoples of the ex-USSR have had even less chance of reconciling their national demands.

Notes

1. The 1921 Treaty of Moscow (among other districts) provided for the cession of Kars, regarded by the Armenians as another of their historic provinces, to Turkey; the 1921 Treaty of Kars stipulated the creation of the Nakhichevan ASSR as part of Azerbaijan (Nakhichevan, whose population in 1897 was 37 per cent Armenian, had been part of the Erivan Gubernia in Tsarist Russia - Erivan being then the name of Yerevan); and the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne finally closed the issue of Turkish Armenia. The latter treaty was also instrumental in dividing the Kurdish population of the former Ottoman Empire among Turkey, Iraq and Syria.
2. Urartu (Yerevan), 1993, No. 27, October 1993, p. 7.
3. See John Chipman, 'Managing the Politics of Parochialism', *Survival*, London, Vol. 35, No. 1, Spring 1993, p. 149.
4. See V. Simonov, 'Kavkaz: krov', slyozy i den'gi', *Sovershenno sekretno*, Moscow, No. 8, 1994, p. 3.
5. V. B. Arutiunian, *Sobytiya v Nagornom Karabakhe*, Yerevan, 1988, p. 14. The Azrevkom declaration of 30 November 1920, and other documents and portions of documents of the period dealing with the cession of various territories by Azerbaijan to Armenia, were omitted from Azerbaijani collections of materials relating to the Karabakh issue. Cf., on the one hand, *Nagorny Karabakh. Istoricheskaya spravka*, Yerevan, 1988, p.85; Kh. Barseghian, *Istina dorozhe... K probleme*

- Nagornogo Karabakha, Yerevan, 1989, p. 14, and, on the other, K Istorii obrazovaniya Nagorno-Karabakhskoy avtonomnoy oblasti Azerbajjanskoi SSR, Baku, 1989, p. 65.
6. A. Karsetsi, Konflikty mezhdru narodami i puti ikh preodoleniya. K probleme Nagornogo Karabakha, Yerevan, 1990, p. 31. See also A. D. Sakharov, 'Neizbezhnost' perestroiki', in: Inogo ne dano, Moscow, 1988, p. 131.
 7. Cf. an article by A. Skachko in a press organ of Stalin's Narkomnats in March 1921: "Armenia will doubtless have to let itself be guided by the Leninist principle of the greatest national sacrifices. It will have to renounce not only the imperialist Dashnak designs for a 'Greater Armenia', but possibly also a more modest desire to unify those lands which had always been considered Armenian" Zhizn' natsional'nostey, 4 March 1921. Quoted from: Pro-Armenia, No. 6, 1992, p. 44.
 8. I. Babanov, K. Voevodsky. Karabakhski krizis. St. Petersburg, 1992, pp. 3-5. For the history of the Armenian struggle for Karabakh prior to 1988, see also: H. R. Huttenbach, 'In Support of Nagorno-Karabakh: Social Components of the Armenian National Movement', Nationalities Papers, Vol. 18, No. 2, 1990, pp. 5-14.
 9. Cf. I. Aliyev, Nagorny Karabakh: istoriya, fakty, sobytiya, Baku, 1989.
 10. K. Voevodsky, 'Perestroika v karabakhskom zerkale', Pro-Armenia, 1993, No. 1, p. 3.
 11. S. Bruk. Naselenie mira, Moscow, 1986, p. 785.
 12. See Sumgait... Genotsid... Glasnost? Yerevan, 1989.
 13. See the transcript of the Politburo session in the wake of Sumgait in: Rodina, Moscow, No. 4, 1993, p. 85.
 14. See A. Sakharov, op. cit., p. 132; V. Sheinis, 'Uroki karabakhskogo krizisa', Vek XX i mir, No. 10, Moscow, 1988. G. Starovoytova, 'Gosudarstvo, obschestvo, natsiya', Cherez ternii, Moscow, 1990, p. 366; 'Samoopredelenie narodov i pozitsiya Rossii', Pro-Armenia, No. 4-5, 1992, pp. 5-7.
 15. Cf. Izvestia, 17 July 1988.
 16. D. Furman, 'Nesostoyavshayasya revolyutsia. Politicheskaya bor'ba v Azerbaidzhane (1988-1993 gody)', Druzhba narodov, 1994, No. 4, pp. 155-156.
 17. Ibid.
 18. K. Mikhailov, 'Trevozhnye dni Apsheronu', Sobesednik, No. 3, January 1989.
 19. Population figures cited by A. Mutalibov in: Soyuz, No. 39, 1990. See also Undeclared War, Baku, 1991, no pagination.
 20. A. Volsky, 'Mir zemle Karabakha', Pravda, 15 January 1989.
 21. Cf. the remarks made by CC AzCP Secretary (soon to be premier under Mutalibov) Gasan Gasanov in the wake of the Committee's disbandment on 8 January 1990, in: Vestnik Ganji, 20 January 1990. Quoted from: Cherny yanvar', Baku, 1990, pp. 51-59.
 22. Furman, op. cit., p. 157
 23. Bakinskii rabochii, 17 January 1990. Quoted from: Cherny yanvar', op. cit., pp. 70-74.
 24. See I. Mosesova, A. Ovnanian, Vandalizm v Baku, Yerevan, 1991.
 25. Izvestia (19 January 1990) reported 66 killed, 220 wounded and 210 cases of burglary and arson during the Baku pogroms in January 1990. 30,000 were evacuated from Baku to Krasnovodsk.
 26. Azadlyg, 18 January 1990. Quoted from: Cherny yanvar', op. cit., pp. 78-80.
 27. The Shield Union report is quoted from: Moskovskie novosti, 12 August, 1990.
 28. Quoted in: A. Altstadt, The Azerbaijani Turks, Stanford, 1992, p. 217.
 29. Furman, op. cit., p. 159.
 30. Babanov, Voevodsky, op. cit., p. 40.
 31. See R. Papayan. Maski terrora, Yerevan, 1992. G. Grigorian, 'Yest' li doroga iz ada?', Pro-Armenia, Nos. 7 and 8, 1992 (G. Grigorian was a doctor in Ghetashen). The figures are from: Babanov, Voevodsky, op. cit., p. 49.
 32. Vremya (Yerevan), 12 June 1993. Quoted in: A. Khalatian, Armeniya v iyune 1993. Politicheskii monitoring, Moscow, IGPI, No. 6, 1993.
 33. As admitted by NKR State Defence Committee Chairman, Robert Kocharian, in an interview with Andrei Karaulov, anchorman of the "Moment of Truth" broadcast on Russian TV, 10 January 1994.
 34. Newsweek, 8 August 1994.
 35. E. Fuller, 'The Transcaucasus: War, Turmoil, Economic Collapse', RFE/RL Research Report, Vol. 3, No. 1, 7 January 1994, p. 52.
 36. Izvestia, 22 April 1994.
 37. Furman, op. cit., p. 159.
 38. See Azerbaijan (Baku), 7 August 1993, for the findings of the Azerbaijani parliament's commission of enquiry into the Khojaly massacre. Memorial's findings were contained in a report published in May 1992 (copy in possession of the author).

39. See Mutalibov's interview with *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 2 April 1992.
40. Furman, op. cit., p. 163.
41. Colonel Aliakram Gumbatov, politically a supporter of Mutalibov and friend of Suret Guseinov, proclaimed Talysh autonomy (the Talysh-Mugan Republic, from the names of the Talysh nationality and Mugan province) in June 1993. The attempt failed, and Gumbatov was arrested. In the Azeri press, the episode was linked to Mutalibov's (and Moscow's) intrigues to bring Azerbaijan into the orbit of Moscow and Mutalibov back to power.
42. A. Kasatov, 'Sama ne svoya. Rossiiskaya armiya za rubezhom', *Stolitsa*, No. 48, 1992, pp. 1-4.
43. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 22 and 23 May 1993.
44. A. Khalatian, 'Armeniya v sentyabre 1993', *Politicheskii monitoring*, Moscow, IGPI, No. 10, 1993.
45. *Moskovskie novosti*, No. 38, 19 September 1993.
46. See interview with Vasilian in: *Kommersant*, No. 22, 4-11 June 1990, p. 11.
47. *We/My* (Moscow), June 1992
48. Kasatov, op. cit. (note 38).
49. *Moskovskie novosti*, No. 23, 6 June 1993.
50. According to one estimate, Azerbaijan received a total of 11,000 carloads of munitions. Given that the Azerbaijani army needs 1,000 carloads to wage intensive warfare for a year, the total number of weapons received is enough for 9 or 10 years. Soviet army dumps on Armenian territory were the equivalent of 500 carloads - 160 of these were destroyed in a blast at Balaovit, Armenia, in 1992, though partly compensated for since. See *Novaya yezhednevnyaya gazeta*, 10 November 1993. Of course, part of the Azerbaijani quota was "appropriated" by the NKR Army. Kocharian (op. cit.) estimated the odds in favour of Azerbaijan as opposed to Armenia at 3 to 1.
51. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 26 October 1994.
52. Furman, op. cit., p. 167.
53. The Abkhazian population statistics are quoted from: *Yezhegodnik Bol'shoy Sovetskoy Entsiklopedii*, 1990. Moscow, 1990, p. 118 (hereinafter cited as BSE Yearbook); the percentages of various nationalities in Abkhazia in 1989 are mentioned in: O. Vasilyeva, *Gruziya kak model' postkommunisticheskoi transformatsii*. Moscow, 1993, p. 31.
54. *Stolitsa* (Moscow), No. 22, 1994, pp. 10-11.
55. The Abkhaz political claims of the Gorbachev era were first made in the so-called "Abkhaz Letter" sent by a number of CP figures to the Presidium of the 19th Party Conference in Moscow on 17 June 1988. The letter was completely disproved afterwards by a team of Georgian scholars. See *Po povodu iskazheniya gruzino-abkhazskikh vzaimootnosheniy (otvet avtoram "abkhazskogo pis'ma")*, Tbilisi, 1991.
56. BSE Yearbook 1990, p. 119 and O. Vasilyeva, op. cit., p. 37.
57. See Torez Kulumbegov's interview with *Moskovskie novosti*, 28 June 1992, p.11.
58. *Demograficheskii entsiklopedicheskii slovar'*, Moscow, 1985, p. 545.
59. See *Iz istorii vzaimootnoshenii gruzinskogo i osetinskogo narodov*, Tbilisi, 1991.
60. Cf. *Yuzhnaya Osetiya: i krov', i pepel, Vladikavkaz*, 1991, pp. 26-27.
61. See debates at the 1st Congress of USSR People's Deputies in: *Pervyi s'ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR. Stenograficheskii otchet*, Moscow, 1989, Vol. I, pp. 517-549 (speeches by the Georgian deputies: Academician Tamaz Gamkrelidze and former Georgian CP chief Jumber Patiashvili, as well as denials by General Igor Rodionov who had commanded the troops on 9 April 1989).
62. Cf. A. Sobchak, *Khozhdenie vo vlast'*, Moscow, 1991, pp. 77-104. See also another book by the same author: *Tbilisskii izlom*, Moscow, 1993.
63. See Sakharov's comments in: *Ogonyok*, No. 31, 1989.
64. *Zarya Vostoka* (Tbilisi), 22 August 1990.
65. For a more detailed treatment of the Abkhazian election issue, see: E. Fuller, 'Abkhazia on the Brink of Civil War?', RFE/RL Research Report, 1992, Vol. 1, No. 35, pp. 1-5.
66. *Vestnik Gruzii*, 12 March 1991 and *Sovetskaya kultura*, 30 March 1991.
67. TASS, 21 March 1991 quoted by Fuller, op. cit., p. 2.
68. A. Mikadze, M. Shevelev, 'Vykhodets iz "Soyuza"', *Moskovskie novosti*, 1 August 1993.
69. The Ossetian scholar V. Abaev wrote that "Samachablo" was a term from the feudal past and not a synonym of "South Ossetia"; "Shida Kartli" meant the central part of Georgia and was a misnomer in relation to South Ossetia, while the name South Ossetia ("Samkhret Oseti") had in fact been used in earlier Georgian literature. See *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 22 January 1992.
70. *Gudok* (Moscow), 25 April 1991. Also cited without mentioning Tsagolov in: *Komsomolskaya pravda*, 31 January 1991.
71. Georgian newspaper *Kino* quoted without date in: *Yuzhnaya Osetia...*, p. 53.

72. This was the explanation for Soviet actions given by the Adamon Nykhas leader Alan Chochiev in: *Moskovskie novosti*, 18 November 1990.
73. *Zarya Vostoka*, 22 September 1990.
74. See Chanturia's interview with *Express-Khronika* (Moscow), 25 December 1990.
75. *Izvestia*, 8 and 9 January 1991.
76. *Yuzhnaya Osetiya*, p. 30.
77. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 21 January 1992.
78. *Ibid.*
79. See *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 23 January 1992.
80. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 17 April 1992.
81. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 15 and 22 May 1992.
82. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 16 June 1992
83. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 23 June 1992.
84. Cf. A. Popov's remarks in: *God posle avgusta. Gorech' i vybor*, Moscow, 1992, pp. 157-159.
85. O. Vasilyeva, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
86. *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 10 March 1993.
87. *Segodnia*, 20 December 1994, p. 9.
88. *Ibid.*
89. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 4 October 1994; 20 October 1994.
90. S. Chervonnaya, *Abkhazia-1992: postkommunisticheskaya Van deya*, Moscow, 1993, pp. 121-122.
91. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 25 and 28 July 1992.
92. *Belaya kniga Abkhazii. 1992-1993*, Moscow, 1993, pp. 143-147.
93. *Express-khronika*, 8 March 1993. Also *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 17 March 1993.
94. *The New York Times*, 25 August 1992, referred to in: Fuller, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
95. Shevardnadze quoted in: O. Vasilyeva, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
96. *Krasnaya zvezda*, 24 November 1992.
97. See Simonov, *op. cit.*
98. *Vektory* (Moscow), 4-17 March 1993, pp. 10-11.
99. The dilemma described by military expert Dmitri Trenin. See: *Novoe vremya*, No. 34, 1993, p. 14.
100. A. Kortunov, 'Relations between Former Soviet Republics', *Society*, Vol. 30, No. 3, 1993, p. 45.
101. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 4 September 1992.
102. *Vektory*, 1-7 April 1993, p. 1.
103. In 1991-92, there were 600 armed raids on Russian military installations in Georgia; 71 military personnel or members of their families were killed. In nine months of 1993 alone, there were 82 raids, 267 items of armaments and 54 items of hardware were stolen, and more than 10 people were killed and 20 wounded (*Vektory*, 22 October 1993).
104. *Moskovskie novosti*, 18 July 1993.
105. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 25 March 1993
106. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 10 June 1993.
107. *Krasnaya zvezda*, 10 September 1993.
108. Data from the *Georgian Chronicle* (Tbilisi), September 1993.
109. *Segodnia*, 21 September 1993.
110. *Diplomaticheskii vestnik*, No. 1-2, January 1994, p. 38.
111. *The Georgian Chronicle*, February-March 1994.
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