

# Aspects of Genocide in Azerbaijan

Yōko Hirose

## Introduction

Azerbaijan is not widely recognized in the international community as a victim of genocide, but within the country itself, March 31<sup>st</sup> of every year is known as the “Day of Genocide of Azerbaijanis”. This memorial day was established in 1998 by a presidential decree of the late President Heydar Aliyev, to ensure that the memory of the country’s tragic history of mass slaughter and forced expulsion would not be forgotten both within Azerbaijan and amongst the people of Azerbaijan worldwide, and to let the world know of these tragedies so that they may mourn them together. The reason for the choice of March 31<sup>st</sup> was, as will be explained below, that it was between March 30<sup>th</sup> and April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1918 that approximately half of the Muslims in Baku were slaughtered. Each year on this date, flags are flown at half-mast, and officials headed by the president and foreign dignitaries lead a parade up “Martyrs’ Lane” where the victims of the massacres lie (situated upon high ground affording the most beautiful view of the Caspian Sea in Baku, and formerly known during the Soviet era as Kirov Park), where a minute’s silence is observed in front of a memorial monument where an eternal flame burns. Speeches are also delivered by the president or in parliament, stressing to the United Nations and to the representatives of other nations in attendance, that the slaughter of Azeris at the hands of the Armenian military occupying Azerbaijan land continues still today, and that it is extreme Armenian nationalism, as represented by the philosophy of “Greater Armenia”, that has always been the prevailing cause of mass slaughter against Azeris throughout history. Members of the Azeri diaspora also send letters to the heads of state of their resident countries, in an effort to make known the history of the massacre of the people of Azerbaijan.<sup>1)</sup>

---

1) In Azerbaijan, many books have been published concerning the massacres at the hands of the Armenians, but those in which the government was involved are of a grandness of appearance not seen in other publications, and are written in two or all three of Russian, Azerbaijani and English (English is always included). However, these feature a great deal of nationalistic and propagandistic rhetoric, and it would be dangerous to use only these as resources. Here I will select three works from this group, and for ease of understanding will give their titles in English, and explain their content. ① Ramiz Mehdiyev, *The Reality of the Genocide of Azerbaijan People*, Baku: The Milli Mejlis of the Azerbaijan Republic, 2000. The author was the head of the President's Executive Office, and a famous “government-funded historian”. This work was published by the Azerbaijan National Assembly (Milli Mejlis), and written in Russian, Azerbaijani and English. ② Bagif Arzumani (ed.), *From Aggression to Aggression or Original Face of Armenian Racism*, Baku: Gartal, 2001. While the completion of this work was directed by the Azerbaijan Scientific Academy, it was funded in its entirety by the government. It is written in English and Russian.

## 1. The Armeno-Tatar War and the Armenian massacres as background events

Throughout their history, a number of events occurred to strengthen the antagonism between Azeris and Armenians. Further, when considering the relationship between these two ethnic groups, the slaughter of the Armenians must be taken into account.

Firstly, from 1895 to 1896, many Armenians in Ottoman Turk territory were massacred. This is known as the First Great Armenian Massacre, and served to suppress ethnic activity of Armenians in Turkish territory.

The scene of the next Armenian massacre was the Caucasus. The Armeno-Tatar War of 1905 to 1907 (the people of Azerbaijan were known as Tatars at the time) is often compared to the Sumgayit Pogrom of 1988, in that both events occurred suddenly, with no indication beforehand of what was to come.

In terms of subtext, one may point to the social tensions existing between the two ethnic groups, in that there were divisions between ① the wealthy merchant-class Armenians and poor Azeri labourers in the cities; ② the powerful Azeri nomads and the weaker Armenian crop farmers; and ③ Azeri landowners and Armenian peasants. However, none of these were truly at the level of inter-ethnic conflict.

Additionally, among Muslim citizens, the rumor spread that the Armenians, who were thought as the enemies of the Russian Emperor, were planning the slaughter of Muslims. It is believed that this rumor was intentionally spread by the governor of Caucasus, Golitsyn, and the governor of Baku, Nakashidze, as a means of avoiding the threat of revolution by encouraging ethnic conflict.

The most direct cause, however, was the murder of the Azerbaijani Haji Reza Babayev in Baku, after the quarrel with the Armenians. As the news of this incident spread, several thousand enraged Azerbaijanis, predominantly citizens of farming communities near Baku, launched an attack on the Armenian quarter of Baku, Armenikend, on February 6<sup>th</sup>, 1905, with violence and looting continuing for three days.

With these uprisings spreading throughout the Caucasus, to Yerevan in February, Nakhichevan in May, Shusha in June, and Ganja and Tbilisi in November, the Armenian Dashnak Party retaliated by launching indiscriminate attacks on Azeri villages. The governor of Baku, Nakashidze, was assassinated as the Dashnak continued its attacks on Azeri residential districts throughout the country. All told, 128 Armenian settlements and 158 Azeri settlements were attacked, and deaths numbered between 3,100 and 10,000. The reason for this high number, is that while the Azeris were ordinary civilians gathering into mobs, the Dashnak Party members had received proper military training.

---

③ Murtuz Aleskerov (responsible for edition), *Tragic Pages of Our History: Genocide*, Baku: The Milli Mejlis of the Azerbaijan Republic, 2002. Published by the Azerbaijan National Assembly (Milli Mejlis), the official editorial responsibility for this work lies with the speaker of parliament. It is written in English and Azerbaijani. The fullness of content, length, beauty of presentation, high number of copies printed and multi-language publication, indicate the size of the budget set aside by the Azerbaijan government for such publications, and their firm intent to diffuse knowledge concerning these events throughout the world.

In this way, while it was the Muslims who initiated the conflict in the Baku Incident, in the end the majority of the victims were Muslim. The leaders of Muslim society then formed the military organization known as “Dafe (repulsion)” in preparation for a counter-attack. Vorontsov-Dashkov, who took over from the deposed Golitsyn as governor, tried to ascertain the source of the conflict between the two ethnicities, but the Armenians continued pan-Islamic agitation, while the Azeris criticized the military intervention of the Dashnak Party. In the end, the new governor ended his close relationship with the Azeris in southern Caucasus, switching to an alliance with the Armenians, and even making use of the military force of the Dashak Party to maintain order, so much so that he even incurred the wrath of President Stolypin of the Russian Council of Ministers.<sup>2)</sup>

However, as a petition signed by the people of Goris in Armenia, sent to the governor of Caucasus on October 5<sup>th</sup>, 1906, indicates, the people caught in the middle of this ethnic conflict realized that it was being incited by czarism. As a result, many Armenian peasants in the province of Yerevan in Armenia, hid Azeris in their houses in preparation for any unforeseen eventuality. The reverse was also done in Azerbaijan, and in some regions both ethnic groups resolved to fight together against an external enemy. Further, in a number of regions, it was decided that action should be taken to suppress conflict, and a variety of measures were put into place, involving a number of events and meetings being held for the enjoyment of all ethnicities regardless of religion, and affirmative action policies of hiring Azeris to work in Armenian factories and vice versa, in order to end ethnic segregation in factories.<sup>3)</sup>

Despite these efforts, disorder continued for two years, and antagonism among Azeris toward Armenians developed still further. Eventually, on April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1915, the Second Great Armenian Massacre began, in Turkish territory. This is said to have continued until 1922, although this date is disputed, with one account putting the number of dead at one and a half million, with 600,000 forced into exile. The current Turkish government rejects the factuality of these massacres, and claims that as this was during World War One, any deaths were casualties of war or the result of the elimination of enemy Russian spies in the interests of maintaining civil order, and that these numbered no more than 300,000. In point of fact, massacre by means of execution and the like was confined to adult males, while women and children were exiled toward places such as Syria generally. However, as food supplies were insufficient and abuse was rife, a significant number died en route. Some records compiled by Germans stationed in Syria remain concerning these events, and it is a fact beyond doubt that large numbers of women and children were driven to their deaths.

The descendents of these Armenians who fled to the West continue to call for the governments of their new countries to recognize these massacres. The fact that the Armenian lobby is actively pursuing legal avenues towards official recognition of the Armenian massacres has become a diplomatic issue between Turkey and other nations. Additionally, some Armenians undertook what amounted to almost indiscriminate terrorist attacks on Turkish

---

2) Kitagawa, Sei'ichi, “Azerbaijan-Armenia no minzoku-kan funsou” in *Kaigai Jijou*, July-August 1988, pp. 69-71.

3) Kitagawa, Sei'ichi, “Heiwa no Karabakh”, *Soviet Kenkyūjo Bulletin*, No. 2, (1989) p. 10.

diplomats and key political figures both in Turkey and overseas, after World War One as retribution.

I do not mention the details of the Armenian massacres by limiting the width in this paper, but simply stress that these massacres led directly to the later massacre of Azeris at the hands of the Armenians.

The Azeri are an ethnic group speaking the Azerbaijani language, a member of the Turkic language group, and from the point of view of the Armenians, are not differentiated from Turks. The terms “Azeri” and “Azerbaijani” are new, having only come into use during the Soviet era. Until then, Azeris were not distinguished from other Turkic ethnic groups, and were simply known as Tatars. Therefore, as mentioned above, the conflict between the Azeris and Armenians is known as the “Armeno-Tatar War”.

For the Armenians, Turkey was too large an enemy, but they felt that they could triumph over the Azeris. This belief led the Armenians to attempt to reclaim the area of Nagorno-Karabakh.

## 2. The Baku massacre as an alternative to attacking Turkey

Tension between Azeris and Armenians remained high after the 1905 Armeno-Tatar War, and in April 1918, another massacre of Azeris took place in Baku. Baku was influenced by the Russian Revolution of 1917 more immediately and felt its effects more keenly than other areas of the Caucasus. Armenian labourers in the oil industry and urban Armenians prepared for a Bolshevik revolution and a heightening of Armenian nationalism. As a result, Baku was controlled by an uneasily politically balanced coalition of Soviet revolutionaries and Armenian Dashnaki. At the same time in Baku, the Bolsheviks and the ethnic Azeri Musavat Party were also in opposition. On March 14<sup>th</sup>, forces of the Dashnak Party attacked Agdere, Novhkanli, and Garkhunlu on their way to Shemakha. Further, clashes between “the barbarous Muslim forces”, with Muslim resident, and the Bolshevik Military Revolutionary Committee on the 24<sup>th</sup> led to the disarmament of “the barbarous Muslim forces” by the city’s Soviet executive committee. Hearing of this, militarized Muslim groups called for the return of the weapons and an apology, and the city’s Soviet authorities agreed to their return. However, on the evening of the 30<sup>th</sup>, soldiers of the Revolutionary Committee engaged in combat with the Muslims in the Muslim district of Shemakha. On the following day (March 31<sup>st</sup>, the Day of Genocide of Azerbaijanis), as this military conflict spread throughout the city of Baku, the city’s Soviet authorities ordered the withdrawal of “the barbarous Muslim forces”. While the Musavat Party heeded this final warning, as this was the first combat experience for the civilian Muslims involved, they did not know when to withdraw, and could not stop. On April 1<sup>st</sup>, when the fighting spread to the Armenian districts, the Dashnak Party, who had previously maintained their neutrality, led a band of Armenians and joined the battle on the side of the Revolutionary Committee’s military forces. As this Armenian force indiscriminately killed all Azeris it encountered, regardless of party affiliation and including non-combatants, a vast number of Muslims were killed between the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> of April. The death toll was between 8,000 and 12,000 in Baku alone, and some sources place it at between 15,000 and 20,000.

Furthermore, the Friday Mosque, highly sacred to Muslims, was burned to the ground.<sup>4)</sup> In the Shemakha region, 58 villages were razed, and between 7,000 and 10,000 were killed, including 1,653 women and 995 children. On the 14<sup>th</sup>, a military attack led by Lalayev inflicted massive damage to the Muslim population of Lenkoran. In Guba, 2,000 were killed by the Dashnak Party forces, and 105 houses gutted. It is estimated that all told, in March and April, around 50,000 were killed throughout Azerbaijan, including many women and children, and vast numbers of refugees were created.

Under the nationalistic slogan of “an Armenia without Turks”, Armenians conducted the massacre and forced expulsion of Azeris from within Armenia also. The 375,000 Azeris resident in the Yerevan area in 1916 had diminished to 70,000 by 1920. On April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1918, 3,000 Azeri households were destroyed in the Gyumri area, and in May, 600 Azeris were killed in Shishtepe and Duzkend near Kars. Further, in the ten days from April 25<sup>th</sup>, Subatan, Ilanli, Garagash, Derejik, Tekneli and more were the scenes of bloodshed.

So, why did these massacres take place? One contributing factor that must be taken into consideration is that pan-Turkism had permeated throughout the Musavat Party, making cooperative coexistence with the Bolsheviks problematic. However, the most direct cause is thought to be in the existence of an Armenian force of around 6,000 troops led by General Andranik which had withdrawn from Erzurum. These soldiers were battle-hardened veterans who had previously carried out slaughter in Anatolia in the east, in the name of ethnic retaliation. When considered in the light of the premise that the Azeris and Turks were seen as one and the same, then the mental processes behind the slaughter of Azeris by Armenians, as revenge for the great massacre of 1915, can perhaps be understood. However, the fact that this slaughter was carried out by an alliance of Russians and Armenians complicated the issue in terms of the sense of victimization felt by the Azeris. The Azeris historically came to form an inflexible image of themselves as the victims of slaughter from both the Armenians and Russians, despite having done nothing wrong.

However, the slaughter did not stop here. The Azeris did not silently accept this treatment, and the Armenians would eventually pay a high price for the April massacres. When the Ottoman army regained Baku from the British in September 1918, Azeri troops conducted indiscriminate massacres of Armenians, killing as many as 9,000. It should be noted, however, that in the execution of 100 of the perpetrators, the Azerbaijan government took clear responsibility for this particular incident.

The bloodshed between the two ethnic groups continued further. The Trans-Caucasian Federation of Soviet Republics, established on April 11<sup>th</sup>, 1918, as a result of the Russian Revolution in October 1917, was dissolved after just one month, forming the independent states of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. Armenian discontent with the distribution of territory in this process sparked more ethnic massacres. The Dashnak Party, ruling party of Armenia, called for “a greater Armenia from sea to sea”; that is, they desired the entire area from the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea as Armenian territory. This territory was historically Armenian land during

---

4) McCarthy, Justin, *Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims 1821-1922*, The Darwin Press, 1996, p. 214.

the rule of King Artaksi, and appears in the work "The Armenian Geography", of which the year of publication and content are largely unknown. To this end, Armenia made territorial demands of Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan. Details of the demands made of Turkey and Georgia will be omitted here, but in Azerbaijan, the western area of Nagorno-Karabakh came under dispute. However, as the Armenian army had its hands full with the war on the western front, it was not free to send any forces to Karabakh. As a result, tensions between the regional authorities of the Azerbaijan government and militarized Armenian citizens continued for an extended period of time.

Between 1918 and 1920, Armenians in Armenia proper killed all of the Azeris in sixty villages in the Igdir and Echmiadzin regions and 60,000 Azeris in the Goycha region, while 15,000 people from twenty-two villages were killed and another eighty-four villages ruined in Bayazid. All Muslim villages in the Yerevan region, and ninety-eight villages in the Surmalin region were sacked. In the Zangezur region, 115 villages were destroyed, with 10,000 killed.

On the other front, the Red Army suddenly occupied Azerbaijan in April 1920, and the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic was established under the leadership of Nariman Narimanov. However, bloody clashes between Armenians and Azerbaijani troops of the Red Army continued in Nagorno-Karabakh until the Armenians were completely suppressed.<sup>5)</sup>

Ultimately, it was Moscow which drew the national borders in the Caucasus. While there were many twists and turns on the way, of the territories it had demanded, Armenia was eventually granted only Zangezur from Azerbaijan, and lost Akhaltzikh (to Georgia), Nagorno-Karabakh (to Azerbaijan), Nakhichevan (allotted to Azerbaijan by Turkey) and Kars (to Turkey). Since then, Armenia has striven for the return of these lands.<sup>6)</sup>

### 3. The subtext of repeated acts of genocide

The power structure of the massacres of the early Soviet era, with Armenians and Azeris committing atrocities against one another, and Russia also becoming involved, continued unchanged.

During the Soviet era, ethnic issues were largely suppressed under Moscow's control, but even under these circumstances, they were not extinguished altogether. From 1948 to 1953, vast numbers of Azeris were expelled from Armenia, acts which have since been positioned by Azerbaijan as historical crimes against the Azerbaijani people. The special resolution adopted by the Soviet Committee of Ministers concerning the forced migration of Azeris from Armenian territory to Azerbaijan territory in 1947, boosted the Armenians, and led to the undertaking of state-level ethnic cleansing from 1948 onwards.

It is also important to take note of the official events commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Armenian massacres, which took place in 1965. Until this point, Kars, containing the

5) Concerning the massacres and political processes between 1905 and 1920, see Tadeusz Swetochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920: The Shaping of National Identity in a Muslim Community*, Cambridge University Press, 1985.

6) For details see Kitagawa Sei'ichi, "Nagorno-Karabakh kizoku ketteikKoushou" in *Kaigai Jijou*, April 1989, pp. 64-79.



sacred Mount Ararat, had been prioritized in the movement for the return of “unrecovered Armenian land”. However, the above events of 1965, in which the slogan “our land, our territory” was used in street marches, acted as a turning point in this respect, and Nagorno-Karabakh became the top priority in terms of territory to be reclaimed. The reason for this came in the realization that in the struggle for the return of “unrecovered Armenian land”, Turkey was too large an enemy, whereas Azerbaijan was much smaller and a fellow member of the Soviet Union, within which there was precedent for boundary changes.

Eventually, the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh broke out.<sup>7)</sup> The conflict flared up once more in late 1987, during the Perestroika period, when the Armenian residents of Nagorno-Karabakh, a self-governed province within Azerbaijan territory in southern Caucasus, demanded the area’s return to Armenia. With the Sumgayit Pogrom of 1988, tensions between the two groups escalated into violence, with sporadic military conflict between the two countries even before the collapse of the Soviet Union, and full-scale war once the collapse of the Soviet Union provided modern military weaponry to both sides. A Russian initiative led to the declaring of a ceasefire in May 1994, since when the Armenians in the region have formed an unrecognized “state” based on general elections, with its own military, known as the “Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh”. This area, making up twenty per cent of the territory of Azerbaijan, has joined the mainland of Armenia as “Armenian territory”, and the ceasefire has held under these conditions. There are several differing points of view as to the death toll from the war, but on average it is estimated at between 15,000 and 20,000, with 50,000 injured. As a result of ethnic cleansing, some 345,000 Armenians and one million Azeris have become refugees, or have been victims of forced migration within the country. The situation of the Azeri refugees has become a particularly serious social problem, in that over half of them are still being forced to live in refugee camps.

The conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh is usually seen as comprising political and military aspects, but the two cannot in fact be separated. During the conflict, both ethnic groups pressed forward with vicious policies of massacre and expulsion,<sup>8)</sup> but the two key events which are most often mentioned by each group in order to stress the brutality of their opponents, are the Sumgayit Pogrom (the massacre of Armenians in the industrial city of Sumgayit near Baku in Azerbaijan from the 27<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup> of February, 1988) and the Khojali Massacre in which Azeris living in the Azeri region of Nagorno-Karabakh were slaughtered from the 25<sup>th</sup> to the 26<sup>th</sup> of February, 1992.

The death toll of the Sumgayit Pogrom is put at twenty-six Armenians and six Azeris, but numerous conspiracy theories abound concerning the instigators – that the massacres were started by the Armenians, or by the Soviet authorities in collusion with the Armenians – and information regarding the incident remains uncertain.

---

7) With respect to the details of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, including the Sumgayit Pogrom and the Khojali Massacre, refer to this author’s previous work *Kyuu soren chiiki to funsou: sekiyu-minzoku-tero o meguru chiseigaku*, Keio University Press, 2005.

8) See the following work for details concerning massacres and terrorist acts committed by Armenians in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh: Rovshan, Novruzoglu, Yunis Oguz, *Karabakh: Uncontrolled Zone... [From the series of international terrorism: Armenian terror]*, Baku: Ozan, 2002.

The official figures released by the Azerbaijan government concerning the Khojali Massacre put the number of dead at 613, the seriously injured at 487, the missing at 112, and prisoners of war at 1,275.<sup>9)</sup> These last were given no food in freezing conditions and had all of their possessions stripped from them. The men were tortured and slaughtered in public view with children among those watching, and the bodies were defiled. Today, almost all prisoners have been returned to their respective countries via prisoner exchange thanks to the efforts of the Popular Front, but 180 remain in custody.

What these two incidents have in common, is the strange fact that both are described as “self-enacted” by the other side. In other words, the Azeris claim that the Sumgayit Pogrom was deliberately staged by Armenians in association with the KGB as a catalyst for inflaming international criticism of Azerbaijan and sparking military conflict. Indeed, there are a number of witnesses whose statements give such claims credence. At the same time, as this paper will suggest, Armenians (and some Azeris) claim that the Khojali Massacre was carried out by the Azeri Popular Front as a way of altering international opinion which at the time was sympathetic toward the Armenians. It is impossible to determine whether in fact these massacres were self-inflicted, but the irony inherent in these aspersions being cast as the cycle of slaughter intensified is evident.

In addition, an incident took place in which Russians slaughtered Azeris, ostensibly as a means of “stopping the Azeri slaughter of Armenians” (“Black January”). Further, by providing military aid during the intensified conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia was involved in the slaughter of Azeris at the practical level. This oppression at the hands of the Russians only served to strengthen the feelings of persecution that the people of Azerbaijan felt they were constantly subjected to at the hands of other ethnicities.

The geopolitical position of the nations and the international relations encompassing them, along with the manipulation of the conflict for internal political gains, served to exacerbate the cycle of hatred, conflict and massacre between the two ethnicities.<sup>10)</sup> In particular, the regimes of both generations of Aliyevs in Azerbaijan repeatedly emphasized incidents such as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Baku massacres as examples of the atrocities committed by Armenians throughout Azerbaijan’s history, and by saturating the television media with shocking images of the conflict, stirred up anti-Armenian sentiment in the general populace. This not only served to deflect discontent with the country’s internal political situation towards the Armenians, but by criticizing the previous Azerbaijan government’s handling of the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, they presented their own administration in a positive light, and helped secure governmental stability.<sup>11)</sup>

In this way, the Baku massacre of 1918 served as a subtext for later ethnic slaughter between the Azeris and Armenians.

9) Azerbaijan Government Home Page (<http://president.gov.az/azerbaijan/khojali/index.htm>). There are several other estimates which place the number of dead at a considerably higher number, such as in excess of 1,000. On the other hand, the official Armenian position is that “a mere 200” died.

10) For details, see the previously referenced title by this author.

11) The role of national memory in exacerbating conflict cannot be underestimated. See Ed Cairns and Michael D. Roe, *The Role of Memory in Ethnic Conflict*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2003 for examples.



Table 1: Repeated incidents of ethnic cleansing, and the process of the inversion of aggressor and victim

Year	Incident	Victim	Aggressor	Notes
1895-96	First Great Armenian Massacre	Armenians	Turks	
1905-07	Armeno-Tatar War	Azeris	Armenians	Azeris were known as Tatars at the time.
1915-22	Second Great Armenian Massacre	Armenians	Turks	
1918	Baku Massacre	Azeris	Armenians/Russians	Azeris and Turks seen as the same group by Armenians.
1918-20	Repeated cases of ethnic cleansing	Both Azeris and Armenians		
1948-53	Repeated cases of ethnic cleansing	Both Azeris and Armenians		
1988	Sumgayit Pogrom	Armenians	Azeris	From the Sumgayit Pogrom until the ceasefire in 1994, conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh continued, leading to massacres of enemy ethnic groups becoming common.
1988-1994	Repeated cases of ethnic cleansing	Both Azeris and Armenians		
1990	Black January Incident	Azeris	Russians (Soviet Army)	
1992	Khojali Massacre	Azeris	Armenians	

As Table 1 indicates, while the Turks and Russians were the aggressors in some cases, for the most part it is clear that the Azeris and the Armenians merely perpetrated the cycle of violence against one another. Furthermore, when we consider that the Turks and the Azeris were seen as one group by the Armenians, and the Azeris considered that the Russians and the Armenians were in collusion, this bipolar dynamic becomes still simpler. This dynamic enables the victims of one incident, imbued with a sense of injury, to commit large-scale atrocities with no sense of guilt. Viewed in this manner, the historical repetition of cycles of violence can be appreciated, in which perpetrator and victim switch places alternately, and in which the scale of the atrocities and hatred engendered between the two groups continues to grow.

#### 4. The involvement of the international community: The fear of accusations of interference in domestic politics

In this globalized era, the influence of the international community on these conflicts must be considered. In fact, it is not uncommon in this case for the existence of international “partners” to obstruct peace. For the Armenians it is the Armenian diaspora, for the Azeris the existence of the Caspian Sea oil fields which provides international support.

The Armenian diaspora extends the world over, and is particularly powerful in the United States, France, Syria and Russia. As many foreign-resident Armenians are wealthy, the diaspora is able to provide vast pecuniary aid to Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as dispersing favourable propaganda and conducting lobbying for Armenia in countries throughout the world. Among the lobbying conducted by this group, the most significant achievements have been the passing of S.907<sup>12)</sup> in the United States House of Representatives, and the official recognition achieved concerning the massacre of the Armenians by the Ottoman Empire through French legal channels.

Meanwhile, due to the fact that it is an oil-producing nation, Azerbaijan has benefited, albeit less powerfully, from the support of oil companies. For example, it is the United States oil lobby which has been working towards the repeal of S.907.

Further, with the stand-off between the United States, Russia and neighbouring countries in the south Caucasus region, the international situation is extremely complex, a fact which makes any third-party interference to prevent escalation of military conflict difficult. At the present time, the OSCE Minsk Group (co-chair nations: the United States, Russia, France) are acting as peace-brokers in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, but the reality is that their work is largely ineffective.

Due to that fact that one of the co-chairs Russia has long provided Armenia with aid, and the fact that the Armenian lobby in France and the United States is powerful, decisions favourable to the Armenians were passed by this group. This led Azerbaijan to see the OSCE as incapable of fair mediation, and to adopt a frosty attitude to their activities. They have also called for Germany to replace France as co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group.<sup>13)</sup>

While Armenians have been shown to view Azeris and Turks as one and the same, the Azeris too place themselves alongside the Turks in relation to their policy concerning Armenians. For example, Azerbaijan placed itself alongside Turkey in expressing its outrage against the nations which recognize the Great Armenia Massacres. However, Turkey and Azerbaijan are not in fact one and the same. When the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh broke

12) Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act – Public Law 102-511 (hereafter S.907), which the Armenian lobby helped to pass in the United States House of Representatives, criticized the Azerbaijani economic embargo of Armenia, and ensured that other than humanitarian aid, all government level aid from the United States would be cut until the lifting of the embargo. Azerbaijan repeatedly called for this act to be repealed, but due to the strength of the Armenian lobby, have remained unsuccessful. However, after the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, the act was temporarily suspended on a year-by-year basis in the interests of enabling the United States to counter terrorism smoothly. Since then, Azerbaijan has received considerable financial aid from the United States, enabling the improvement of its airport facilities, military and social situation, among other areas.

13) Билик Дунясы, 2 феврал 2001.

out, Turkey's intervention was widely expected, but Turkey provided no practical aid whatsoever. As a result, many Azeris feel betrayed by a Turkey more concerned with its international image in its efforts to enter the European Union. At the same time, by not agreeing with Turkey over the issue of Cyprus, Azerbaijan has been criticized by Turkey, to the extent of being labelled an "enemy state".<sup>14)</sup>

It is always difficult for third-party countries to intervene in the interests of ending any conflict, without being accused of meddling in domestic politics. As a result, no matter how inhuman the atrocities committed may be, foreign parties tend to avoid interference at all costs. The United Nations is no exception, and they appear to be more concerned with preventative diplomacy than acting after conflict has begun.

## In conclusion

An analysis of the framework of genocide in Azerbaijan can be summed up as follows.

Firstly, the twentieth century saw two separate waves of reciprocal ethnic slaughter, which strongly resembled one another. The factors they shared in common can be summarized in the following six points:

1. General disharmony preceded the incidents.
2. Conflict broke out during revolution, perestroika, or other times of state-level reform or confusion.
3. The massacres began with no real warning, sparked by extremely minor incidents.
4. It is generally believed that the authorities intentionally exacerbated the situation.
5. Once the killing began, it escalated rapidly to the scale of a massacre.
6. A process of inversion of aggressor and victim took place, leading to the magnification of hatred and animosity between the groups.

Secondly, as subtext of the massacres, history can be considered to be a contributing factor, but it must be noted that the tensions of the modern world are not merely a reflection of historical facts. Not only does a sense of victimization tend to exaggerate the "facts" discussed concerning conflict or atrocities, but international propaganda also plays a key role, as does the fact that this conflict has been manipulated for domestic political ends. Further, the struggle for power in Azerbaijan in the chaos created firstly by the overthrow of the Czarist regime, and secondly by the collapse of the Soviet Union, can be considered a factor contributing to the escalation of genocide between the Armenians (and Russians) and Azeris (and Turks). While it is true that these factors all led to a worsening of relations between the two groups, it is almost impossible to prove any of this conclusively, which in turn is a major roadblock on the path to peace.

Thirdly, International relations must also be taken into account when considering the conflict and atrocities of this region. Third-party states Russia and Turkey exerted powerful

---

14) *Azadliq*, 6 May 2004.

political and military pressure on the situation. The lack of any neutral arbiter, and the fact that this allowed each nation state to act purely out of concern for their own interests, can also be identified as a major issue in creating disharmony. At the same time, this prioritization of self-interests means that the “clash of civilizations” argument is not particularly relevant in this case. That is to say, that this conflict cannot be accounted for purely in terms of religious differences, as attested to by the fact that the Islamic Shiite state Iran has provided aid to Armenia.

Finally, it is important to note that until the fundamental causes of conflict and hatred between the two ethnic groups are resolved, the chances of atrocities continuing to be committed remain high. What chance of peace does the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh have, from its current tenuous ceasefire with Armenians occupying the region, and the potential for further atrocities being committed by both sides? Difficulty exists in deciding what a “resolution” to the conflict would mean, but it would probably involve the reaching of a satisfactory agreement after careful negotiations, the demilitarization of both sides, the removal of economic and transport embargoes, the peaceful return of refugees to their original domiciles, or to some other acceptable permanent residential zone, and the continuation of political stability in the region.

While the military situation is difficult, the key to the political side of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, is how to decide on the legal status of the disputed region. Put simply, there are four basic options: (a) to return the land to Azerbaijan, (b) independence, (c) to change the region to Armenian territory, or (d) return it to Azerbaijan but grant it a high level of autonomy and create a demilitarized buffer zone between Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, the first three of these are considered impractical.<sup>15)</sup>

In this difficult situation, movements towards peace include the arbitration of the OSCE Minsk Group and talks between the respective presidents of each country, but no results have been forthcoming, and it appears unlikely that any solution will be reached in the near future. If one were to optimistically search for possible advances, the following two would be desirable. Firstly, to discover the delicate balancing point that would satisfy both sides, via arbitration from neutral countries and compromise from both countries involved, to draw up a plan for peace that will satisfy both sides (requiring as prerequisites the end of all occupation and compromise on both sides), and to develop policies to resolve the issues of refugees (or IDPs – Internally Displaced Persons) and political and economic issues. Secondly, a solution to the problems in the area, and the development of an impetus to maximize profit, specifically by the development of common economic systems such as through federation or regional cooperation in various areas, and thereby increase the incentive for peace. As at the beginning of the twenty-first century, efforts by Europe and Russia for the construction of peace and the stabilization of the region through the ending of conflict in the Caucasus have not borne any fruit, but these areas are considered to be promising.

---

15) Audrey L. Altstadt, “Ethnic Conflict in Nagorno-Karabagh”, in Drobizheva, Gottemoller, Kelleher and Walker eds., *Conflict in the Post-Soviet World*, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1993.

The seriousness of the wounds inflicted upon one another over the course of history makes compromise difficult. However, in order to prevent the further perpetration of the cycle of violence, a swift and peaceful resolution to the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh is absolutely essential.