

For the independence of Karabakh

Beyond the fight between Armenians and Azeris, Turkey is making a grab for regional hegemony, which may backfire against it. Mr. Kechichian reports.

Mr. Kechichian, an Armenian living in France, made the following report available for a special supplement on Armenia that appeared in the May 1 issue of the French fortnightly Nouvelle Solidarité.

The Karabakh conflict which, along with Yugoslavia, dominates the news, must be situated within a more general context, including the countries of the Middle East—especially Turkey—Russia, and the western powers.

The unraveling of the Soviet empire, but above all the total economic ruin and years-long impossibility of restoring economic ties among the former Soviet republics, are forcing them to seek hope elsewhere. The Central Asian republics and Azerbaidzhan, Turkic and Muslim, are turning toward neighboring Muslim countries, Turkey being in the front rank. This latter has suddenly taken on an unexpected political, strategic, military, and economic importance. Some, especially the present government, cherish the dream of a restored Ottoman Empire, extending from the borders of China to the Balkans and Bosnia-Herzegovina. This dream takes on an appearance of reality even more, since the obsessive anti-Iraq and anti-Iran policies of some western countries, especially the United States (which does not hide its efforts to impose its world domination) persistently incites it.

The dangers of Turkish expansionism

This tendency is dangerous; it goes against the interests of the peoples of the region and against the West itself. It will result in pushing the countries most directly involved through these changes (especially Iran, where there are tentative efforts at democratization), toward an aggressive intransigence that they will seek to export.

It is also a utopian policy, because the Central Asian republics are close to Iran, Pakistan, India, and even China, and could be opened up to the Japanese and western markets by other means than exclusively via Turkey, keeping in mind that Russia, too, once its economy is restored, will become attractive. The Turkic countries of Central Asia, if they are not relegated, as is the tendency, to the rank of satellites or

milk cows, can be brother countries to Turkey. But an ambition purely guided by the lure of an easy domination threatens to be ruinous for Turkey itself, for, if the country is not underdeveloped, it is not yet—far from it—a high-technology, industrialized country. The western countries know that, by encouraging this “Grand Turkish” tendency, they take the risk of reinforcing the most totalitarian elements.

Today, there is again talk, in this context, of a “definitive” strategy for controlling the Armenian problem, in order to achieve the goal of the young Turks, in surrounding Iran and making the territorial junction to Azerbaidzhan, and thereby with Turkic Central Asia. The similarity between the situation today and that of 1915 is striking. Armenia territorially breaks up this junction: It must be eliminated, and then accounts will be settled with the Kurds. They are proceeding by stages, cleverly deploying the Azeris against the Armenians.

This is not an Armenian fantasy. The words of Turkey’s President Turgut Özal, that “we have to put a little fear into the Armenians,” needs no comment. The proposal of the former Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit and the current President, to cede a corridor to Karabakh to the Armenians in exchange for the south of Armenia which would be rejoined with Azerbaidzhan, is another element of this strategy, which has the appearance of pacifist realism. Thus, one would be able to cut Armenia from its short border with Iran and totally make it an enclave, in order to finish it at an opportune moment. The goal of this “proposal” is clearly enunciated: to have the gas and oil pipelines from Central Asia into Turkey avoid going through Iran and Armenia. Armenia, small and weak, thereby becomes hemmed in on all sides, without being able to take part, little as that may be, in the region’s economic life.

The problem of Karabakh is seen as a windfall, we have said, for some people in Turkey. But it is also a danger, because of the fierce and fiery determination of those Armenians of Karabakh to whom we owe the overthrow of the Soviet empire. Mehmet Ali Birant, a well-known Turkish journalist, recently revealed the opinion of a western diplomat, that the stake in Karabakh aroused the Turks and as much as the Azeris themselves.

Disinformation about Karabakh

Up to now, the Turkish and Azeri leadership have run up against a sizable obstacle: Public opinion was more favorable toward the Armenians, less out of respect for their right to self-determination than because of the regular massacres of Armenians by Azeris, with the complicity and, often, instigation and participation of Moscow. In order to change this perception, the Turkish secret services and the Azeri leadership have played up the pseudo-massacre of Khodjalou, attributed to Armenians, with tortures and mutilations. Every-

thing points to this incident as being staged (see box p. 43).

The diaspora Armenians did not react, thinking that a madman had done it. And the success of the Turkish plot surpassed what its authors expected—hardly surprising, is it? The West, embarrassed, wanted a favorable solution for Turkey. These “massacres” fell into their laps, especially at a time when the Armenians of Karabakh were racking up victory after victory. This could have weakened their position of strength, stopped their advance, and opened up arguments opposing their declaration of independence. It's under these

Armenians are determined to win

The assassination of the president of the Parliament of Nagorno-Karabakh and more or less intense sporadic fighting throughout the territory of the Armenian enclave are continuing signs of the great fragility of the cease-fire negotiated a few weeks ago through the mediation of the Iranian government. As of this writing, there are reports of renewed tension, with seven killed north of Choumian, whereas battles are raging around Shousha, which could be one terminus for a corridor between Armenia and Karabakh. Meantime, none of the fundamental problems have been resolved. The threat of genocide continues to weigh heavily on the people of Nagorno-Karabakh. It is in this context that we publish this special supplement on Armenia.

On the ground, the situation is more than precarious. The economic blockade imposed by Azerbaidzhan on Armenia and Karabakh is deeply felt by the population. Entirely dependent on Azerbaidzhan for all energy supplies, the population of Nagorno-Karabakh has lived for over a month without gasoline or electricity. Only natural gas is available, because, constrained to supply the Azeri province of Nakhichevan situated inside Armenia, the Azeri lines must cross Nagorno-Karabakh.

The war has forced half the population of Nagorno-Karabakh to live in caves. The people are crowded together underground, reported a source who recently returned from Karabakh. There physicians treat the ill, the wounded die, and others simply try to scrape by day and night. They try to survive, by the weak glimmer of a gas lamp.

While everyone is arrayed against them, the inhabitants of Nagorno-Karabakh show a determination and a will of iron. Like General Aoun in Lebanon, like the Lithuanians, like the forces of Croatia, it is now the turn

of tiny Armenia and the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh to defy the dictates of the new world order which everywhere applies the law of the strongest. For—it is an open secret—when Turkey's President Özal threatened Armenia with military intervention should it attempt to break the Azeri blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh, it was with the approval of Washington. Everywhere it is said that if Turkey hopes to extend its sphere of influence toward the Caucasus—going so far as to relieve itself of the problem of Nagorno-Karabakh with the help of the Azeris—and the republics of Central Asia, it will be with the support of the United States, as a way of thanking Turkey for its good offices during the Gulf war.

The Armenians no longer expect western aid, but the residents of this tiny Armenian enclave are determined to persevere. But the fact that there is no dearth of courage cannot be an excuse for not rendering aid. The 150,000 Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh are being massacred by a crushing majority of Azeris. Yet France, which has perhaps the largest Armenian diaspora community of any country except the United States, has only given crumbs. Whereas the United States sent Secretary of State James Baker for an official visit, and Margaret Thatcher went there herself while prime minister, France—Armenia's old friend—only sent Secretary of State for Humanitarian Affairs Bernard Kouchner. For a handful of medicines—two truckloads total, one of which remained with the Azeris—the official media set about trumpeting as if France, all alone, had saved the Armenian people from a second massacre!

France and the European Community have every means to persuade Turkey to withdraw its support from Azerbaidzhan and make the Azeris lift the economic blockade. Always trying to become integrated into the EC, Turkey is quite vulnerable to European pressure. That pressure must be brought to bear and, moreover, economic aid must be delivered to Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, within the framework of a new Marshall Plan for reconstructing the new democracies in the East.

—Christine Bierre

Transcaucasus crisis spot



circumstances that one can detail the mechanics of the complicity or incompetence of the political and media world. Not one western journalist, especially television, gave one word during this whole period to the Armenians of Karabakh, accused of such ignominy. Not one took the time to verify the authenticity of the images provided under shocking conditions, in such a hasty and orchestrated fashion, by one of the belligerents. As for the world of politics, how could they give the role of guardian of the peace to a Turkey which seeks to "put fear into the Armenians" and organizes military maneuvers on the border with Armenia (which has no army)? How can we explain it, except by what western countries perceive as their interest? Is it surprising that the laurel for disinformation goes to Antenne 2, the French government network?

When a member state of the U.N. threatens another state, also a member of the U.N., concentrates troops on its border, whereas the latter is incomparably weaker and presents no danger whatever to the security of the first, this is called terrorism and a camouflaged declaration of war. In this context, one can only be surprised by the proposal of the French

government to give Turkey responsibility for the peace mission for Karabakh. Is France making a higher bid to counter the American hold over Turkey, or is it to defend its economic-political interests?

The Turkish leaders are prepared to run the risk of reinforcing integrist Islamic tendencies (such as the integrist party "Refah" which organizes meetings where they burn Armenian, French and Israeli flags, and shout their anti-Armenian hatred). Without being overly compromised, they think, they could weaken Armenia. They also count on using the Azeris against the Armenians. If the Azeris exterminate the Armenians, no one will hold Turkey responsible. This has to do with an imperial and imperialist outlook that can affect both those non-Turkic peoples and the Turkic ones.

The immediate plan for Turkey, judging from the Turkish press, is to demand a cease-fire in Karabakh, for which they are all the more willing since the Azeris are utterly defeated. Once seen as a partisan of peace, it is counting on a proposal to send in the blue helmets and an arms embargo on the region. But this embargo, even though it seems to correspond to a logic of peace, can only be applied against Karabakh, a

tiny enclave cut off from outside, and in no way against Azerbaidzhan, which Turkey can re-arm as soon as the opportunity arises whereby it is in a position to attack Karabakh and Armenia.

Peace and the right to self-determination

That is why, against the well-advertised desire by international powers to isolate the republic of Karabakh from negotiations, and to accord its representatives the status of representative of the Armenian community, we must line up entirely behind the government of the republic of Karabakh.

Peace can only exist if the right of peoples to self-determination is respected. The lack of interest among the Azeri people in this war, despite all sorts of manipulations, shows

that they will easily accept the self-determination and independence of Karabakh. The fanatical Azeri leadership alone retains its interest in this conflict and clearly states its aim, which is the final solution: "We will give the Armenians the lesson they deserve," said Hassanov; and "we will not stop until we have kicked all the Armenians out of Karabakh," said the Azeri military chiefs, according to the March 10 issue of *Turkiye*.

The western powers must exert pressure on Turkey not to embark on an adventure that risks costing it greatly. Being firm with the Turkish government, they must support more lucid currents within Turkey. For, in the final analysis, that is who will lose: When a man has no means to fulfill his cravings, he loses what little he does have.

Staged massacre at Khodjalou

In its May 1 issue, the French newspaper Nouvelle Solidarité questioned the credibility of media claims that Armenians had committed a massacre against Azeris in Khodjalou, which have been used especially in France to justify the government's failure to defend Armenia:

- Khodjalou was the object of bitter battles for several weeks, and there were practically no civilians left (just read the press during this period), in any case infinitely less than the 1,400 civilians "savagely" massacred, according to Azeri accounts.

- When an army occupies a strategic position captured with difficulty, it above all tries to consolidate its control and does not go off in hot pursuit of women and children over kilometers in a mountainous, wooded region, where, behind every tree or rock, an enemy soldier might be hiding.

- The Armenians were in the process of also of winning the battle of Shousha, the last Azeri stronghold and a grave threat to the Armenians' safety. Perched on a mountain top, the town allowed the Karabakh capital of Stepanakert and its outskirts to be pounded into ruins by bombardments. With the sympathy of world public opinion, the Armenians had no interest whatever in tarnishing their image with such atrocities, never mind the fact that never in history have the Armenians acted that way.

Had Armenians committed such ignominious crimes, they would have had to hide the bodies, but not after the hysterical din that the world media outlets have conduct-

ed. However, four days later, these bodies were still there, in the mountains. The Azeris—who literally took an AFP reporter for an outing for only a few minutes—were the only ones who knew their location.

To these few reflections appealing to good sense, we add other indices to strengthen the thesis of a Turkish conspiracy: The pictures that horrified the world (in fact, it was the commentaries that accompanied the pictures, where only a few bloody bodies were seen) were instantaneously transmitted throughout the world beneath the Azeri agency's trademark. How were they able to get on the scene so fast, when the bodies were supposed to be found in a region controlled by the Armenian enemy?

Elsewhere there was a very important line, unnoticed in a March 6 article by the Turkish daily *Milliyet*, saying that information on the "massacres" had been transmitted for the first time direct from the Azeri town of Agdame by the Turkish reporter Elif Kaban, a Reuters correspondent who also covered the conflict for *Le Monde*. Another reporter, for the BBC, named Gotz, who is married to a Turkish woman, also played a ranking role, occasionally causing suspicion among foreign journalists.

Then Turkey threw its weight behind harassing the newspaper editors, activating all their networks among politicians, financiers, and friendly reporters to make the impact of this montage as great as possible. *Milliyet* published the text of a letter sent to the western heads of state at the U.N. in its European editions.

The aim is to destroy the struggle to survive and the freedom of the Armenians of Karabakh. The trip of French President François Mitterrand to Turkey shows how, last year, France was the first country to make investments in Turkey. This makes it all the more clear why the French government has been complicit mystifying the events at Khodjalou.