

'New world order' gang flirts with war in Caucasus

by Konstantin George

On Nov. 26, an extraordinary session of the Azerbaidzhan Parliament voted to eliminate the autonomous status of the Armenian-inhabited region of Karabakh, thus officially annexing Karabakh to Azerbaidzhan. This act set the stage for the imminent outbreak of war between the republics of Azerbaidzhan and Armenia. A last-minute agreement reached Nov. 27 after a session of the State Council in Moscow, attended by Azerbaidzhan President Ayaz Mutalibov and Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrossian and chaired by Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachov, produced an agreement from Mutalibov that the autonomous status of the Armenian-inhabited region of Karabakh would be restored. The potential of war has been postponed, but not halted.

The Azerbaidzhan Parliament also voted to create a national council, headed by communist-turned-rabid-nationalist President Mutalibov, to rule all Azerbaidzhan, including Karabakh, by dictatorship. As Mutalibov returns home to get the parliament to pass his agreement, it was expected that he would face demonstrations demanding war with Armenia.

On the same day, in the neighboring Transcaucasian republic of Georgia, the dictator-President Zviad Gamsakhurdia addressed a rally of fanatical nationalists in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi, repeating a call he first made on Nov. 21, for "all Georgians who can carry a gun . . . to take up arms" and march on South Ossetia, a region of Georgia bordering on the Russian Federation. South Ossetia has been racked by a bloody low-intensity conflict between its Georgian minority and Ossetian majority since a December 1990 edict by Gamsakhurdia revoking its autonomous status.

Within hours of Gamsakhurdia's fiery address, units of the Georgian National Guard, as its nascent army is called, equipped with tanks, armored vehicles, and artillery, were moving on several fronts into South Ossetia. Already on

Nov. 23, in a parallel to what Serbia had done against the Croatian city of Vukovar, Georgian units had surrounded and laid siege to the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali. In response, the local South Ossetian authorities ordered the immediate mobilization for all able-bodied males between the ages of 18 and 60.

Through the actions of these despots, Mutalibov and Gamsakhurdia, the nightmare of simultaneous bloody wars in the Transcaucasus and adjoining North Caucasus regions of the former U.S.S.R. has come closer. The grave danger of spillover also extends into the autonomous republics of the North Caucasus region of the Russian Federation. Thus, Russian military involvement at some point looms, and the danger of escalation to a global crisis.

The regional crisis spawned by these wars in the Transcaucasus will embrace, for starters, Iran and Turkey, both of which border the Transcaucasus. The crisis in the Caucasus is being manipulated as the primary tool of the Bush administration, British, and Israeli interests in order to keep Eurasia unstable and maintain their monopoly of power. But they are flirting with world war.

The pretext

The immediate trigger to the Nov. 26 events was the Nov. 21 downing of a Soviet helicopter containing high-ranking officials from Azerbaidzhan, Russia, and Kazakhstan, who were involved in trying to mediate the Azerbaidzhan-Armenia conflict. All 22 on board were killed. It occurred over Armenian-controlled territory, and immediately produced a flood of unproven and, given Armenia's predicament, absurd Azerbaidzhani allegations that the Armenian government had ordered the atrocity. The victims included a deputy prime minister and a state secretary from Azerbaidzhan, the deputy

commander of Soviet Interior troops in the North Caucasus, the chief prosecutor for Karabakh, a deputy interior minister of Kazakhstan, and a member of the Russian Parliament.

The helicopter crash gave Azerbaidzhan its pretext to demand what it had been preparing for—war against Armenia. Since October, the Mutalibov regime had imposed a crippling energy, rail, and road blockade against Armenia. After the helicopter crash, Mutalibov announced that the blockade would become “complete.” To date, all attempts by Armenia, which is landlocked, to reach understandings with its other neighbors to circumvent the blockade have failed. Georgia has, in a silent but deadly way, joined Azerbaidzhan in blockading Armenia. Turkey, the first foreign country to recognize Azerbaidzhan as an independent state, has also refused to allow goods into or out of Armenia. The only overland route which could be open to Armenia, which faces a dreadful winter, is through Iran, and that is a slim hope.

Urgent warnings to prevent an Azerbaidzhan-Armenia war were issued Nov. 23 by “Soviet” Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze. He called on both parties to “maintain the wisdom, self-control, and ability to listen to one another,” warning that “giving in to emotions leading to war between the republics” would be a “fatal danger.” His appeal concluded: “Only one step is lacking before a world conflict” emerges.

The appeal fell on deaf ears. On Nov. 24, as Mutalibov was proclaiming the completion of the blockade, Samed-Sade, head of the Azerbaidzhan delegation in the peace talks with Armenia, announced Azerbaidzhan was breaking off the talks. Then followed two days of orchestrated demonstrations on Nov. 24 and 25 in Baku, the Azerbaidzhan capital, by rabid nationalists who were demanding war against Armenia.

Global conflict and nuclear ‘proliferation’

Based on the signals appearing in the media, the United States, Britain, and Israel appear poised to enter the former U.S.S.R. and internationalize the conflict and even to send in troops, on the pretext of stopping the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Since August, there has been a drumbeat of “concern” voiced from these quarters, over the acquisition of nuclear weapons by former Soviet republics and by Iran.

- Establishment mouthpiece Leslie Gelb, in the context of urging Bush to send food and aid to the Soviet Union, in the Nov. 24 *New York Times* virtually called for U.S. military intervention to seize Soviet nuclear warheads. “The spread of Soviet nuclear weapons could present the greatest threat to world peace, and there is only one way to guard against their misuse, theft, or sale. This is a joint crash effort by U.S. and Soviet specialists to secure them,” he wrote. Gelb claimed that U.S. military forces are “ready to help their counterparts gather and destroy Soviet nuclear weapons.”

- The U.S. Congress allocated, in lieu of a \$1 billion food and medicine aid package to tide the former Soviet Union through the winter, a half-billion-dollar package to dismantle Soviet nuclear weapons.

- The Nov. 24 *London Times* revved up fears of nuclear proliferation in the ex-Soviet republics in an article headlined “Analysts Fear Soviet Nuclear Warfare.” It reported on a CIA analysis completed in November and submitted to George Bush and British Prime Minister John Major. The article warned of a “nuclear Yugoslavia” emerging in the Soviet Union. The problem is that people are very well-armed and hungry, and will likely want to sell off some 5,000 tactical nuclear weapons to those with the money and food to buy them, the paper said.

The *Times* quoted intelligence sources as saying that the crisis in the Soviet Union is far worse than anyone believed. It is expected that Soviet production will go down by 70% in 1992. Before, analysts believed there would “only” be pockets of starvation, but now it is clear that there will be a total food crisis. The “whole Soviet structure will implode,” the *Times* warned.

- British Defense Secretary Tom King voiced fears on Nov. 23 for the security of the vast nuclear arsenal scattered around a disintegrating Soviet Union, Reuters reported. He told the British Parliament he had been assured by Soviet authorities that missiles remained under sophisticated control systems. But, he said, Soviet republics were in a “confused” state and there were questions about the loyalty of elite troops assigned to guard nuclear weapons. A possibility exists that the West might find those forces “actually not paid, actually not fed, seemingly abandoned by their authorities, which has to be a risk.” King said the vast number of warheads meant that destroying them would take a considerable time. King also said that 15 countries around the world had a ballistic missile capability, and that there would soon be 20 including Pakistan, India, Libya, Iraq, and Iran.

- An editorial in the Nov. 21 *Jerusalem Post* showed that Israel is claiming a “right” to militarily intervene into this regional conflict: “As Science and Energy Minister Yuval Neeman warned in a message to President Gorbachov earlier this week, nuclear weapons which used to be under exclusive central control in the Soviet Union may now be in the hands of newly independent republics. It is of little comfort that some of these republics are signatories to an agreement which puts their arsenal under Moscow’s exclusive authority. As the Soviet Defense and Interior ministries announced on Soviet television [on Nov. 19]: ‘Steps taken by some of the republics’ leaders are endangering the authority of the central command in Moscow.’ In what threatens to be an anarchic situation, the chances of nuclear weapons falling into hands hostile to Israel are all too real.”

- Israeli defense analyst Alon Pinkas indicated that Israel would, for regional advantage, welcome a broader conflagration in order to stop Iran from becoming a nuclear power. “The eight-year war between [Iran and Iraq] was a strategic blessing in disguise for the region. When it was all over the two seemed to have weakened each other considerably,” he gloated in the Nov. 21 *Jerusalem Post*.