

BP Provokes Iran, To Attack Eurasia Progress

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Within the broader thrust toward religious warfare ignited in the Middle East, and slated to engulf the Islamic world throughout Central Asia and beyond, there have been flareups aimed at sabotaging regional forms of this growing "Eurasian Land-Bridge" cooperation for economic reconstruction.

Thus, the incident on July 25, involving British Petroleum (BP), Azerbaijan, and Iran. BP suspended research activities in the Caspian Sea, after an Iranian warship forced an Azeri vessel, used in BP's activities, out of the area. BP was conducting the geological survey in the Araz-Alov-Sharg area, which belongs to Iran, according to existing treaties on the Caspian Sea resources challenged by Azerbaijan.

The incident arose out of deliberate British intentions, along with their Azeri partners, to provoke Iran, in full knowledge of the country's claims over the area of research. Not by accident, the incident occurred just prior to a planned meeting of the Azeri President Heidar Aliyev and his Iranian counterpart Seyyed Mohammad Khatami; and just as construction started on a Russian-supported rail project linking Azerbaijan and Iran. Furthermore, the incident was a provocation against Russia, and Russian-Iranian cooperation, considering that the two countries are the signators to the only existing international treaties governing the exploitation of Caspian Sea.

Statements by Iranian officials made clear that Tehran knew what game was being played. Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid-Reza Assefi told the Iranian News Agency, "The Azeri republic and [foreign] oil companies have learned of Iran's diplomatic stances over the Alborz oil field," and added that the Azeris should "understand sympathetic advice given by the Islamic Republic and keep away from any action which may intensify misunderstandings." He said Iran would "defend its rights and interests."

The Rapporteur of the Iranian Parliament's Foreign Policy and National Security Commission, Elahe Koulaie, stressed that the Azeri action went against regional interests, warning, "Such measures will prepare the ground for increased influence of foreign countries." For his part, Azeri Foreign Minister Vilayat Guliyev said his country rejected Iran's claims. "We will not get into a war," he said, "but we will stand up for our rights."

There are two treaties, of 1921 and 1940, between the Soviet Union and Iran, which are the only juridical instruments regulating exploitation of Caspian Sea resources. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, attempts have been made to

draft a new treaty, among the littoral states, which include Russia, Iran, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and Kazakstan. Hopes have been high that at the next scheduled meeting of these nations, a draft agreement could be settled. Iran and Russia have been coordinating efforts in this direction. But until such an agreement comes into being, none of the countries concerned is to make contracts for exploitation of the resources. Individual states, especially Azerbaijan, have, however, done so.

On July 23, Iran warned the oil companies against working with states in areas that belong to Iran, stressing that contracts signed for such exploitation, were invalid. Iranian Ambassador to Azerbaijan Ahad Qazaie said on July 24, that none of the littoral states has the right to prospect for resources, until the legal status of the Caspian has been defined.

Why Such a Provocation?

One wonders, why Azerbaijan would risk fruitful cooperation with Iran, a major power in the region, at this time. The answer is to be found in the special relationship which Azeri President Aliyev has cultivated over the past years with what Russian press commentaries call "the Brzezinski group" in America. This is a network of think-tanks and oil companies, committed to the geopolitical madness associated with Zbigniew Brzezinski, Samuel Huntington, et al.: trying to break up nation-states, like Russia, China, India, Iran, through the use of religious and ethnic warfare.

Brzezinski reportedly met with Azeri government officials in Washington on July 11, in the context of a conference of the GUUAM, an association of Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Moldova. The main geopolitical organization in the United States which deals with the government in Baku, however, is the U.S.-Azerbaijan Chamber of Commerce (USACC), which may have been directly involved in the recent provocations.

According to its website, the USACC personnel represent a broad sampling of the Brzezinski group in the United States. Its "Honorary Board of Advisers" included James Baker III, Brzezinski, Henry Kissinger, and Vice President Dick Cheney, formerly with Halliburton. Its board of directors included Richard Armitage, now Assistant Secretary of State, and many leading oil company figures, including a regional president of the same BP-Amoco which staged the provocation. Its board of trustees has included two U.S. Congressmen, Greg Laughlin and Charlie Wilson, as well as President Aliyev's son Ilham Aliyev and "Prince of Darkness" Richard Perle. The USACC's legal counsel was listed as James Baker IV.

A second flareup in the region involves sabotage of Iran-Turkey cooperation. As reported in the July 23 *Turkish Daily News*, the Turkish government is seeking to delay the purchase of natural gas from Iran, called for in an agreement signed in August 1999. Turkey was to purchase 7 billion cubic meters per year for 25 years. Now, Turkey is under pressure from the United States to delay, if not suspend, the deal.