

# Fighting in the Transcaucasus threatens regional conflagration

by Konstantin George

An all-out war in the Transcaucasus between Azerbaidzhan and Armenia is probable, should last-minute Russian mediation efforts, which began on Feb. 20 in Moscow, fail. Such a war threatens one of the worst human tragedies of the 20th century, a potential genocide against hundreds of thousands of Armenians trapped in the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The consequences would extend beyond the borders of the Community of Independent States (CIS), to which both Azerbaidzhan and Armenia belong, to involve Turkey, Iran, and Russia. Turkey and Iran each border both Azerbaidzhan and Armenia, and, since the breakup of the Soviet Union, both nations have commenced a feverish competition, each intent on consolidating a sphere of influence in the region.

The international ramifications of all-out war in the Transcaucasus, however, extend beyond even this clash of Russian, Turkish, and Iranian interests. War would place the Transcaucasus on the U.N. Security Council agenda, raising the possibility of an Anglo-American-steered U.N. military intervention on the territory of the former Soviet Union, carrying with it incalculable political and strategic consequences.

## U.N. encourages aggression

The latest escalation of the crisis began Feb. 14 with a series of Azerbaidzhani attacks and bombardments of Armenian towns and villages in Karabakh, an Armenian-inhabited region inside Azerbaidzhan with no overland link to Armenia proper. The Azerbaidzhani offensive occurred on the same day that the Anglo-American-dominated U.N. Security Council unconditionally recommended that Azerbaidzhan become a U.N. member, making its formal membership certain when the U.N. General Assembly votes on the issue on Feb. 26.

The decision recommending membership for Azerbaidzhan was taken despite the fact that: 1) Azerbaidzhan has refused to grant the Armenian minority, concentrated in the Karabakh region, full ethnic autonomy and the local administrative and human rights to which it is entitled under the charter of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Azerbaidzhan, as a new member of the CSCE, is bound to respect such provisions. 2) In the week leading up to Feb. 14, contingents of Azerbaidzhani troops had been brought up to begin a big offensive aimed at wiping out Armenian resistance in Karabakh.

Over the weekend of Feb. 15-16, an escalation of violence began with a heavy Azerbaidzhani bombardment of Stepanakert, the capital of Karabakh. This bombardment, in

its first five days, killed scores of Armenian civilians and inflicted heavy damage. Stepanakert is in the depths of winter, which is bitter in this mountainous region. Stepanakert is a city without electricity and running water, is very low on food, and the only fuel is locally available firewood, which each family must carry several kilometers from where they chop it, to their homes. The city's hospital has taken direct hits from shells and rockets. These hits have destroyed the maternity clinic, which has been relocated in the basement. Karabakh is rapidly experiencing a repeat of the devastation suffered by the eastern Slavonia region of Croatia, with the Armenian population faced with the prospect of wholesale slaughter and expulsion.

The chances for peace, given the political situation inside Azerbaidzhan, are not high. The Azeri attack on Karabakh has forced an Armenian counter-drive to seize a land corridor in the Azerbaidzhan district of Agdam, which is Armenia's only hope to link up with the besieged Armenian population in Karabakh, and thus, hopefully, spare them from a slaughter. The Azerbaidzhani forces attacking Karabakh are commanded by one Musa Mehmedov, a fanatic Azeri nationalist who has publicly proclaimed his ambition to unseat Azerbaidzhan's President Ayaz Mutalibov, after having become the "hero" who "restored Karabakh" to Azerbaidzhan.

## Turkey threatens

How fast this war can escalate became obvious when on Feb. 17 the Armenian government charged Turkey with concentrating troops along the border with Armenia, and with having moved the headquarters of the Turkish Third Army forward to the Turkish city of Erzincan, a stone's throw from Armenia. The essence of the Armenian charges was true. The Turkish government did not even bother to deny them, and a Turkish general staff "denial" issued that evening merely said that reports of troop concentrations were "groundless," but ignored the question of the new forward-based Third Army headquarters.

The Armenian charges followed Turkish press coverage of a warning issued by Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel that Turkey would "not stand idly by" should war break out between Armenia and Azerbaidzhan, and especially should any "outside power" support Armenia. These Turkish moves reflect part of the Anglo-American hidden agenda for the Caucasus, Balkans, Cyprus, and elsewhere, discussed between Demirel and George Bush at their early February meet-

ings in Washington. The arrangements were finalized days before the fighting escalated, through the talks held in the Azerbaidzhani capital of Baku between Secretary of State James Baker and Azerbaidzhan President Mutalibov. In the phony piety typical of the Bush administration, Baker said that Washington would recognize Azerbaidzhan on condition that it "respect human rights." On Feb. 19, as Stepanakert was being bombarded, the Bush administration granted unconditional recognition to Azerbaidzhan.

The pretext concocted for an overt threat of a Turkish military intervention against Armenia came on the heels of a phony news story planted by Azerbaidzhan, that "ex-Soviet," i.e., Russian, units based in Azerbaidzhan had joined Armenian forces in attacking Azerbaidzhani positions. The story was quickly proven to be a pure invention.

The position of the Russian military was presented Feb. 18 in a Moscow press conference by Commander in Chief of CIS forces Marshal Yevgeni Shaposhnikov. Shaposhnikov proposed a CIS peacekeeping force, but only under conditions of

an effective cease-fire, where the CIS forces would separate the armed forces of both sides. Shaposhnikov insisted that only such a presence of CIS forces could prevent a general "blood-bath" from ensuing. However, he warned that his forces have no intention of becoming involved in the cross-fire of war, and should that danger arise, he personally will insist that all CIS forces be withdrawn from combat regions.

The Shaposhnikov proposals were coordinated with a Feb. 17 announcement by Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev inviting Armenian and Azeri officials to Moscow for talks under his mediation on Feb. 20, to try and settle the conflict. The foreign ministers of both Armenia and Azerbaidzhan arrived in Moscow, and the talks commenced on schedule. However, a Russian attempt to upgrade the talks to summit level and thus improve chances for some modest success, failed. The offer was immediately accepted by Armenia, and Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosian turned up in Moscow with the Armenian delegation. Azerbaidzhan President Mutalibov, however, refused to attend.

## 'Save Armenia,' says Schiller Institute

*Helga Zepp-LaRouche, president of the Schiller Institute in Germany, issued a call entitled "Armenia Must Not Be a Forgotten Country!" on Feb. 14.*

It is a tragic absurdity: Just at the moment when Armenia and Azerbaidzhan become full members of the CSCE, the international community of nations tolerates the brutal escalation of military assaults on Nagorno-Karabakh. If the territory and the independence of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh are not immediately provided effective protection, another holocaust threatens Armenia.

The collapse of the Soviet empire, the disintegration of Yugoslavia, and the deep depression in the Anglo-American part of the world are clear symptoms of the fact that the system of Versailles, and its redefinition after World War II in the Yalta agreements and the Bretton Woods system, is at an end.

But the forces of Versailles and Yalta do not give up so quickly, and they are willing to repeat the mistakes which led to two world wars in this century in order to preserve their own power. They are now attempting to deny the right of people to national sovereignty and self-determination, and they are ready to sacrifice entire nations to the dictates of their imperialist schemes.

Armenia has been the victim of this dynamic for some four months now, without world public opinion even wanting to admit it. President Ter-Petrosian has appealed

to all governments, but these governments have not even thought it necessary to reply.

Meanwhile, provision of the most basic necessities for the population has become catastrophic. People are living on bread and water, fuel is scarce because of the blockade, and homes are cold. There is no milk for children and, as always, elderly people and families with many children are the hardest hit. All shipments of aid bypass Armenia. The republics of the Community of Independent States are preoccupied with their own affairs, leaving the Azeri aggressor a free hand.

We appeal to the governments of the CSCE, to the parliaments, and the population to meet the following urgent demands:

1) Immediate and full recognition of the right to self-determination of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

2) An international mobilization of food, medicine, and other aid for the suffering population.

3) Immediate realization of the program for European infrastructure, as proposed by the economist Lyndon LaRouche, based on the "Paris-Berlin-Vienna Productive Triangle," in connection with development programs for the Transcaucasus, the only possibility for a lasting peace in this region. . . . Europe must bring the International Monetary Fund to an end . . . or something as bad as the two world wars of this century will happen again. . . . Our only alternative is to return to the policies of Alexander Hamilton and Friedrich List.

We appeal to governments, parliamentarians, and involved people the world over to join the mobilization of the Schiller Institute for these demands.

**Help save Armenia from an impending holocaust!**