CHAPTER - II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN AZERBAIJAN
Geopolitics of Transcaucasia kept on changing during past many centuries due to rivalry among different colonial powers. Azerbaijan has been one of the most important countries of the Transcaucasia region. It became a sovereign state in 1991 after the dissolution of the former Soviet Union. Historically, Azerbaijan was an integral part of Iran. It was grabbed by Tsarist Russia along with other countries of the region following two uneven treaties – the treaty of Gulistan and treaty of Turkomanchai signed in 1813 and 1828 respectively. These treaties deprived Iran of not only Azerbaijan but also interdicted her from navigation on her own shores along the Caspian Sea. When Bolshevisim was on the rise in Russia, the Transcaucasian people collaborated with Bolsheviks in anticipation that they would achieve national freedom from Tsarist Empire after the revolution as Bolsheviks had already promised so. However, their dreams could not be materialised after the revolution and all the Trascaucasian states became part of newly formed USSR in December 1922, which proved to be a full stop on the freedom of these states for about next 70 years till the collapse of Soviet Union in 1991.

It is a remarkable point to note that a few years before the Soviet collapse the most powerful leader Hyder Aliyev was removed from the leadership of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan in 1987 by Gorbachev following corruption charges in his administration. After his removal Azerbaijan plunged into serious crisis after Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with Armenia had become extremely bloody in 1988-89. As a result the Soviet government took direct control of this region. Despite continued efforts made by the government, the situation deteriorated rapidly. Ultimately, Gorbachev also dismissed Abdurrahman Vazirov, who had succeeded Aliyev. It was followed by another new appointment of Ayaz.N.Mutalibov as new Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan.

In the meantime, hardliners of the Soviet Communist Party staged coup d' etat on August 19, 1991 to oust Gorbachev from power. Azerbaijan's communist administration supported hard-liners. This attempt was foiled within three days. Immediately after the coup attempt failed, in a surprising move Azerbaijani Parliament declared independence of Azerbaijan on August 30, 1991 and the Communist Party was dissolved.
After dissolution of the Party its last secretary Ayaz N. Mutilibov was elected President of Azerbaijan in September 1991. His election was followed by acute crisis emerging from Nagorno-Karabakh dispute. The growing victory of Armenia in disputed area created major political instability in Azerbaijan, as a result of which Mutilibov was forced to resign in March 1992. Another former communist leader Yaqub Mammadov became the new President. However, he could not survive more than a few weeks due to expanding victory of Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh. This process caused a typical leadership vacuum in Azerbaijan due to which Mutilibov once again became President for a few days. During this crisis Presidential election was held on June 7th 1992 in which a nationalist leader Abulfaz Elchibey of Popular Front of Azerbaijan was elected President. Elchibey also could not survive Nagorno-Karabakh crisis for a long time due to continuous defeat of Azerbaijan. Above all, he had to face a mutiny in the army and was forced to run away in June 1993 providing an opportunity to deposed communist leader Hyder Aliyev to capture power in Baku. Aliyev fully utilised this opportunity in his favour and became a full-fledged President following new election held in October 1993 for a five-year term. After this election President Aliyev consolidated his power and succeeded in crushing his opponents. Aliyev's rule was marked by some kind of political stability in Azerbaijan mainly due to its becoming full member of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in September 1993.

In the field of foreign affairs, Azerbaijan became member of the Partnership of Peace Programme of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). During that period Azerbaijan's Position was strengthened on Nagorno-Karabakh front by recapturing some areas again. However, the old cease-fire agreement had already failed and armed conflict continued in Nagorno-Karabakh till May 1994 when a new cease-fire agreement was signed between Azerbaijan and Armenia. At the same time in domestic affairs the government of Aliyev had to face revolt in the army in 1994-1995. However, forces loyal to Aliyev succeeded in crushing this revolt and established full control over the situation. Following the emergence of such crisis Aliyev dismissed a large number of high level government and military officials including Prime Minister Huseinov who had been charged of supporting mutiny. After establishing full control over this crisis, Aliyev
conducted a referendum in 1995 through which the old Soviet constitution was replaced by a new constitution. The new constitution adopted a Presidential form of Government. At the same time parliamentary elections were held under multi-party system in November 1995 in which the New Azerbaijan Party of Aliyev got majority. Thus the first phase of political developments in Azerbaijan was completed by many important landmarks in the country.

The period, 1991-2005 was marked by typical dual situation. The first one was the achievement of independence and the second was continuance of civil war, which had emerged from Nagorno-Karabakh disputes between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The dispute had already created multiple socio-economic and political problems before Azerbaijan became an independent nation. This is why, during the period of this study, every political development in Azerbaijan was influenced by Nagorno-Karabakh dispute and civil war. It had created an acute ethnic unrest coupled by Islamic resurgence.

Behind this development Azerbaijan’s past history played an important role as it is obvious from the Tsarist annexation of Transcaucasia. In this regard, it is well known fact that originally Azerbaijan was an integral part of Iran. That is why this external factor always influenced most of the socio-political developments in Azerbaijan. Particularly after the collapse of Soviet Union one of the most dangerous events was the advent of Elchibey in Azerbaijani politics who had become President of the country. He was an Islamic fundamentalist. During his tenure, though for a short period it was felt that Azerbaijan would also follow the path of fundamentalist Iran. However, he failed in his mission due to his sudden removal from the power. After seventy-four years of long Soviet rule, it was very difficult for a historically traditional state like Azerbaijan to evolve a new democratic political system in an extremely turbulent situation. Under these circumstances Azerbaijan did come out with greater successes. It succeeded in evolving a political system based on constitutional democracy with multi-party system as its main pillar.
However if we go a little more in the past it will appear that this region had become a battleground of different conflicting religious and political ideas. In ancient and medieval period there had been struggle for supremacy of religious ideas while the modern period became a centre of colonial rivalry for the takeover of its land, endowed with rich natural resources. So far as, Russian adventure in this area is concerned, it all began with Peter the Great’s policy of ‘eastward’ expansion. As mentioned earlier, the Treaty of Gulistan and the Treaty of Turkmanchay, which had changed the face of this region, cast its shadow over a long time to come in the future. The Russia attacked Persia in 1813, with Persia in decline under Shah Fath Ali. The Azeri Khanate was ceded to the Russia by Tsar Alexander I, bringing the northern part of Azerbaijan to the European sphere of influence. In the treaty of Gulistan Persia and Russia agreed that Azerbaijan would be divided along the Araz River with Russian Azerbaijan north of the river and Iranian Azerbaijan to the south. In 1826 Persia again challenged Russian hold over the region, but was defeated in the decisive battle of Ganja, and soon Russian troops seized Tabriz. The arrangements that define today's borders were made in 1828 in the treaty of Turkmanchay, between Russia and Persia the Azeri land south of the Araz River remained part of Persia and now integrated the Islamic Republic of Iran. During 9th and 10th century, Russian influence over daily life in Azerbaijan was less pervasive than that of indigenous religious and political elites and the cultural and intellectual influences of Persia and Turkey (Takin 1980).

During most of the 19th century the Russian Empire extracted commodities from Azerbaijan and invested little in the economy. However, the exploitation of oil in Azerbaijan at the end of the nineteenth century brought an influx of Russians into Baku, increasing Russian influence and expanding the local economy. Although ethnic Russians came to dominate the oil business and government administration in the late 1880s, many Azeris became prominent in particular sectors of oil production, such as oil transport on the Caspian Sea. Armenians also became important as merchants and local officials of the Russian monarchy. The population of Baku increased from about 13,000 in the 1860s to 112000 in 1897 and 215000 in 1913, making Baku the largest city in the Caucasus region. At this point, more than one-third of Baku's population consisted of ethnic
Russians. In 1905 social tensions erupted in riots and other forms of death and destruction as Azeris and Armenians struggled for local control and Azeris resisted Russian sovereignty (Minassian 1989). The oil boom, transformed the capital of the northern part of Azerbaijan, Baku, into a cosmopolitan industrial centre, with a large proletariat population living and working in appalling conditions under Russian control. As such, the city was a respective target for both nationalist groups and the early Bolshevik movement. Activists, including the young Joseph Stalin, cut their political teeth fomenting discontent among Baku oil workers (Kinross 1977).

A leftist party calling itself Himmat (Courage), composed mainly of Azeri intellectuals, was formed in 1904 to champion Azeri culture and language against Tsarist and other foreign influences. A small social Democratic Party (which later split into Bolshevik and Menshevik factions) also existed, but that party was largely dominated by Russians and Armenians. Some members of Himmat broke away and formed the Musavat (Equality Party) in 1912. This organisation aimed at establishing an independent Azeri state, and its progressive and nationalist slogans gained wide appeal. Himmat's Marxist colouration involved it in wider ideological squabbles in the period leading up to the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. After several further splits, the remaining part of Himmat was later absorbed into the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) (Suny 1990).

Oil wealth precipitated a prolonged power struggle in Baku. Following the 1917 revolution, the nationalists initially seized control and enlisted the support of the British, who allegedly authorized the execution in 1918, of 26 leading local communist (the Baku Commissars), in an unsuccessful attempt to destroy the Bolshevik power base in the oil industry.

**The Bolshevik Revolution and Azerbaijan**

After the Bolshevik revolution, a mainly Russian and Armenian grouping of Baku Bolshevik declared a Marxist Republic in Azerbaijan. Muslim nationalists separately declared the establishment of the Azerbaijan people's Democratic Republic in May 1918 and formed the "Army of Islam", with substantial help from the Ottoman Turkish Army.
to defeat the Bolsheviks in Baku. The Army of Islam marched into the capital in September 1918. Meeting little resistance in the city, the new Azeri government, dominated by the Musavat, moved into its capital. Azerbaijan was occupied by Ottoman Turkish troops until the end of World War I in November 1918 (Watson&Hugh 1967).

British forces then replaced the defeated Turks and remained in Azerbaijan for most of that country's brief period of independence. Facing imminent subjugation by the Red Army, Azerbaijan attempted to negotiate a union with Persia, but this effort was mooted when the Red Army entered Azerbaijan in April 1920 to fight British forces which had occupied Baku. The Red Army met little resistance from Azeri forces because the Azeris were heavily involved in suppressing separatism among the Armenians that formed a majority in the Nagorno Karabakh area of south-central Azerbaijan. In September 1920, Azerbaijan signed a Treaty with Russia unifying its military forces, economy, and foreign trade with those of Russia, although the fiction of Azeri political independence was maintained (Donabedian 1994).

After Russian Revolution followed by civil war, the borders and formal status of Azerbaijan underwent a period of change and uncertainty in the 1920s and 1930s and then they remained stable through the end of the Soviet period in 1991. In late 1921, the Bolshevik Russia declared the formation of Transcaucasian Federated Republic, composed of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, which in 1922 became part of the newly proclaimed Soviet Union as the Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (TSFSR). In this new large republic, the three sub-units ceded their nominal power over foreign policy, finances, trade, transportation and other areas of the unwieldy and artificial authority of the TSFSR.

In 1936 the new "Stalin Constitution" abolished the TSFSR and the three constituent parts were proclaimed separate Soviet republics. In mid-1920 the Red Army occupied Nakhichevan, an Azeri enclave between Armenia and North-western Iran. The Red Army declared Nakhichevan a Soviet Socialist Republic having close ties with Azerbaijan. In early 1921, a referendum confirmed that most of the population of the enclave wanted to be included in Azerbaijan. Turkey also supported this solution. Nakhichevan's close ties
with Azerbaijan were confirmed by the Russo-Turkish Treaty of Moscow and the Treaty of Kars among the three Trans-Caucasian states. Lenin and his successor, Joseph V. Stalin, assigned pacification of Trans-Caucasia and delineation of borders in the region to the Caucasian Bureau of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik). In 1924 the bureau formally designated Nakhichevan an autonomous republic of Azerbaijan with wide local powers. (Porkhomovsky1994).

The first Communist President of Azerbaijan was the activist and writer Nariman Narimanov who became a popular leader. The 1930's brought an intensification of the purges under Stalin's paranoia. The crack-down on all forms of religion was particularly hard targeting not only the people but also the buildings. During this period the both magnificent Alexander Nevski Cathedral and the holiest Islamic site in Baku, the Bibi Heibat Shrine, were demolished. In the meantime when Soviet Union was attacked by Hitler in June 1941, the political situation became very sensitive in the Transcaucasian region. The new situation forced Soviet Union to sign and armistice over Iran with allied powers i.e., America, Britain, and France which allowed these powers to take over Iran in order to check Hitler from attacking Soviet Union through Transcaucasia as Iran under Reza Shah's rule had become very friendly with Hitler. However after the end of World War Two allied forces immediately withdrew their army from Iran while Soviet Union refused to do so. The reason behind this move was completely ideological because there was very strong presence of communist movement in Iranian Azerbaijan where the Soviet forces had been heavily deployed. It had its direct impact on Russian Azerbaijan from where the ideological support was coming to Iranian Azerbaijan. Later on international situation forced the Soviet Union to withdraw its forces from Iran which marked the end of Soviet ideological offensive in Iranian Azerbaijan. By this time political situation in Russian Azerbaijan had been completely stabilized. Therefore Soviet withdrawal from Iranian Azerbaijan could not put any adverse impact on its counterpart in Russia (Lemercier-Quelquejay 1984).

During Stalin's regime, Azerbaijan suffered, as did other Soviet republics, from forced collectivization and far-reaching purges. Yet during the same period, Azerbaijan also achieved significant gains in Industrialization and literacy levels that were
impressive in comparison with those of the other Muslim states of the Middle East at that time. After Stalin, Moscow's intrusions were less sweeping but nonetheless authoritarian. In 1959 Nikita S. Khrushchev, First Secretary to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), moved to purge leaders of the Azeri Communist Party (ACP) because of corruption and nationalist tendencies. Leonid I. Brezhnev, Khrushchev's successor, also removed ACP leaders for nationalist leanings, naming Heydar Aliyev in 1969 as the new ACP leader. Heydar Aliyev emerged as the most influential Azeri politician during the post war years. He was, successively head of the Azeri KGB (1967), head of the republic itself (1969), and then a full member of the Soviet Politburo (1982) and first deputy chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers. However Mikhail S. Gorbachev removed Aliyev in 1978, ostensibly for health reasons, although later Aliyev was accused of corruption. (Slezkine 1996)

Azerbaijan During 1980s

As the Soviet Union started to break up towards the end of the 1980s, it was the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh that proved decisive in Azerbaijan's political development. Popular discontent of the progress of the war led to the marginalization of the Communist Party in Azerbaijan and the rise of the nationalist popular front during the late 1980s. Encouraged by the mood of Perestroika and Glasnost, in February 1988 the Nagorno-Karabakh Regional assembly formally requested that the region be transferred to neighbouring Armenia. Moscow rejected this request. By the end of February 1988, the situation became worse with incidents between Armenians and Azeris in Sumgait. Soviet troops were called to restore order. In November 1988 violence once again broke out in several cities. In the fall of 1989, the nationalist opposition, Azeri popular front (APF) led a wave of protest strikes expressing growing political opposition to Azeri Communist Party rule. Under this pressure, the ACP authorities bowed to opposition calls to legalize the APF and proclaim Azeri Sovereignty. In September 1989, the Azeri Supreme Court passed a resolution of Sovereignty. Among the first such resolutions in the Soviet republics, the resolution proclaimed Azerbaijan's Sovereignty over its land, water, and natural resources and its right to secede from the Soviet Union following a popular
referendum. The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, the legislative body of the Soviet Union, declared this resolution invalid in November 1989 (Croissant 1998).

Another manifestation of nationalist fervour occurred at the end of 1989, when Azeris rioted along the Iranian border, destroying border checkpoints and crossing into Iranian provinces that had Azeri majorities. Azeri intellectuals also appealed to the Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union for relaxation of border controls between Soviet and Iranian Azerbaijan, comparing the "tragic" separation of the Azeri nation to the divisions of Korea and Vietnam. Thanks to the twin policy of Glasnost and Perestroika, adopted by Gorbachev in 1980s, nationalist forces came to the fore by 1989 as never before. The issue of Nagorno-Karabakh provided the rallying ground for Azeri nationalists. The animosity with Armenians reached a crescendo. Taking advantage of the weakening resolve of the Soviet Union to keep its flock together a variety of separatist forces took centre stage in Azerbaijan by late 1980s finally leading to the emergence of independent Azerbaijan. A series of cascading events took place in Azerbaijan, as in other parts of the then Soviet Union, in late 1980s and early 90s leading to the emergence of independent Azerbaijan (Karen and Bruce 1994).

The push towards an independent Azerbaijan came from the autonomy that spread to most parts of the Soviet Union under Gorbachev’s liberalised regime in the late 1980s. When Gorbachev launched Perestroika in 1985, the republics of Transcaucasia were mired in economic stagnation and corruption of the local authorities. The hardliners in the communist party were suspicious of Gorbachev’s intentions because his reform measures might jeopardise great privileges which nomenklatura enjoyed during previous decades. However, ordinary people in the region greeted the reforms with enthusiasm. They associated themselves with the restructuring in the hopes for the improvement of living standards, political atmosphere and national autonomy. Notwithstanding the popular support, because of the resistance of the conservatives, changes in Transcaucasia occurred slowly and the region lagged behind the renovation process in Moscow. Reluctance of the Party elites to follow Gorbachev’s reforms from above increased the tendencies for liberalisation from below. A number of ‘informal’ organisations were founded in Transcaucasia to promote the new political course. Due to
the favourable political environment created by glasnost, the old dissident groups came out of underground and joined the legal political activity. Whereas in Russia, the informal groups were aimed to encourage political and economic reforms in the USSR, these organisations had an additional task in the form of “national awakening” in Transcaucasia (Hunter 1988).

Azeri Nationalism in the 1980s

The first spark of national awakening appeared in Transcaucasia in the ecological field first. Examples are plenty. Informal organisations in Azerbaijan demanded from the authorities to close down the aluminium and chemical plants in Sumgait, one of the most polluted Soviet cities. A series of protest actions against the irresponsible projects in Armenia took place in 1987 in Yerevan. In Georgia, the rise of nationalism was facilitated by a strong campaign against the construction of the Transcaucasian railroad across the main Caucasian Range. The railroad might cause avalanches, landslides and a pollution of the river of Aragvi, the main source of the drinking water of Tbilisi. The protest movement was initiated by the Helsinki Union of Georgia led by a prominent dissident Zviad Gamsakhurdia.

However, the most striking example of the role of ecological movement in national awakening was the mass protest in autumn 1988, in Azerbaijan against the self-willed construction of the aluminium plant by Armenia in the place of Topkhan in Nagorno-Karabakh. The project envisaged clearing of a historical forest in Topkhan and destruction of a national relic, the Topkhan cave, which had been taken under the state protection. By the moment when the news reached Baku, the Armenians had already wiped out a significant area of forestry, including many species of unique plants and rare insects entered in the ‘Red Book’. The consequences of the Topkhan plans had been profound for the Azeri national rebirth. During the unprecedented three-week continuous meeting in Baku in 17 November-5 December, 1988, the demand to stop the construction had unexpectedly developed into a political agitation. People protested against the Armenian claims to Nagorno-Karabakh, and demanded to grant the Azeris in Armenia equal autonomy and to expand the Sovereignty of Azerbaijan within the union. They
criticised the republican authorities for the failure to defend national interests and to promote economic liberalisation and democratisation. As soon as the demand of autonomy reached Armenia, nearly 200,000 Azeris were forcibly expelled from there. The arrival of the refugees to Baku radicalised the Movement. Fearing a complete loss of control of the situation in Baku, the republican leaders appealed to Moscow for the introduction of the Soviet troops to the city. The violent dispersal of the peaceful meeting by the military on 5th December had shocked the Azeris and had profound effect on the rise of nationalism in Azerbaijan. Toward the end of 1988, large groups of Azerbaijanis began to openly express support for Azerbaijani-based issues, such as the use of the Azerbaijani language in the republic and concern for co-ethnics abroad, and challenged the legitimacy of Soviet rule in the republic. These topics were no longer the sole domain of intellectual circles, and demonstrations and protests began to draw large crowds from diverse socio-economic groups in Azerbaijan. From the second half of 1988, much of this activity was conducted under the leadership of the popular Front of Azerbaijan (APF). The organisation was formed as an umbrella group uniting individuals and groups of different political orientations under an agenda that: opposed any change in the republic's borders (chiefly the province of Nagorno-Karabakh); was concerned for Azerbaijanis living outside the republic; and supported the expansion of glasnost and Perestroika and greater use of the Azerbaijani language in the republic. The PFA operated in a decentralised fashion, with branches forming throughout Soviet Azerbaijan (Alstadt 1994).

Nagorno-Karabakh and Nationalistic Conflict

At this point it is not to be forgotten that one of the most important catalysts, for the national movement's transformation into a mass movement in Azerbaijan was Armenia's drive to control the province of Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenian sources claim that Karabakh was part of a great Armenian kingdom as far back as the fourth century B.C. Nevertheless, the area of present-day Azerbaijan, known as ancient Media, was invaded by Persians in the 6th century BC, by Alexander the Great in the fourth, and by Roman in

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1 The first public references to the organisation appeared on Radio Baku on November 23, 1988. For a detailed analysis, see Baku Domestic Service in Azerbaijan, November 28, 1988 (FBIS-SOV-88-230)
First (Alstadt 1992). However the area was a very early stage aligned with the kingdoms lying at the East that is what came to be Azeri-populated areas.

According to the Greek Historian Strabo and Armenian chronicles, the population of present-day Azerbaijan was until the fifth century divided between a western third populated by Armenians who to their East had the Caucasian Albanians (unrelated to the Balkan Albanians) from which the Azeris claim descent (Tololyan 1995). The Caucasian Albanian state emerged in the first half of the first Millennium, and occupied area between kartvelia (Georgia) in the West, the Caspian in the east, the Caucasus mountains in the North, and the river Araxes in the South. Hence its territory conforms roughly to present-day Azerbaijan. Caucasian Albania was basically a vassal of Sassanid Perisa, survived until the ninth century AD.

The time of the arrival of Turkic tribes from Central Asia is debated. Nevertheless it seems clear that by the eleventh century, the region had acquired a considerable Turkic population, which arrived with the Seljuk invasion and blended with the indigenous population (Swietcochowski 1995). Nevertheless, Azeri historians claim the Turkish element of population was strong already in the seventh century AD, citing various contemporary but controversial sources. According to Peter Golden, one can speak of ‘genuine interaction between the Turkic peoples and the populations of Transcausia’ since the fourth century AD (Golden 1996). The seventh century was the scene of major event, the invasion of the Arabs and their settlement in Albania. This event led to the Islamicization of the majority of the Albanians; those that remained cchistian area said to have orbited towards Armenia. The conversion to Islam also made the blending of the Albanians with the Seljuk Turkss easier.

In the beginning of the sixteenth century, Azerbaijan became the native power base of the Safavid dynasty which came to rule Persia. This time was also the time of confrontation between the Safvids and the Ottoman Empire, which naturally had an important direct effect on the Caucasus. In the beginning of the eighteenth century, Russia joined the struggle and by the 1840s Safavid rule had disintegrated in the
Caucasus and today's Azerbaijan and Armenia was partitioned into Khanates, semi-independent principalities.

As far as High Karabakh is concerned, until the fourteenth century, it switched between Arab, Mongol, Turkic and Persian control (Suzanne Goldenberg 1994). However, the population of the area remained largely Armenian. In the fourteenth century, a local Armenian leadership emerged, and the Safavid Empire granted a form of autonomy to Karabakh. This arrangement lasted for almost four centuries, and a small number of influential families emerged in Karabakh, leading to conflicts of power among them. In the middle of the eighteenth century, the internal conflicts between the ruling families destroyed the local Armenian elite. This led to the region slipping out of Armenian control, and an Azeri ruler managed to impose his rule and create a semi-independent dynastic rule, the Khanate of Karabakh, based in Shusha. Hence the Karabakh Khanate was comparable to the Khanates of Baku, Kuba, Sheki, Shirvan, Derbent, Nakhijivan, and Yerevan. All of these Khanates were ruled by Turkic Muslim families. The population components of these Khanates was mixed; in effect Armenians, Turks, and other groups lived scattered in the entire area, hence with overlapping settlement patterns. It is significant that the Yerevan Khanate itself was an area with a notable Muslim majority in 1826, a situation which been reversed already in 1832 (John 1969).

In the end of the eighteenth century, Russia's expansion in the Caucasus Georgia and the Georgian Gubernia or protectorate was formed in 1801, confirming Georgia's annexation to Russia. Simultaneously the first Azeri areas were included into Russia that is the Khanates of Kazakh and Shamshadil. In these first years of the nineteenth century, Russia tried to assert its influence over the Azerbaijani Khanates, and Karabakh was one of the first to accept Russian overlordship, (Swietochowski 1995) although insurrections against Russian rule occurred and Russian control was all but stable.

Russian attempts to assert control over the region led to the conquests of a number of Khanates in 1806-09, and ultimately to the first Russo-Persian war of 1812-13. The treaty
of Gulistan, which ended this war, in fact led to Karabakh officially passing from nominal Persian control to Russian rule.

Only about ten years later new insurrections took place in Karabakh and other Khanates, as the Khans or their descendants returned and tried to make use of the popular disaffection with Russian rule that the hoped could enable them to reclaim their respective thrones. These movements were supported by Iran, and thus the consequence was a second Russo-Persian war emanating in a new Persian defeat, institutionalized in the treaty of Turkmanchay of 1828. This was important as far as Karabakh is concerned since immediately after the treaty, Russia encouraged and organized a population exchange. Thus huge numbers of Armenians left Persian and Ottoman lands to settle in the Russian Caucasus, and respectively large numbers of Muslims left the South Caucasus for areas under Persian or Ottoman control.\(^2\) According to Russian census reports, the Armenian population in Karabakh represented 9% of the total in 1823 (the remaining 91% being registered as "Muslims"), 35% in 1832, and a majority of 53% in 1880. This shows the relative rapidity of the population exchange. The process accelerated after every Russo-Turkish war (1855-56 and 1877-78) as Russians saw the Azeris as generally unreliable and as potential allies to the Turks, given their ethno-linguistic affinities. By contrast, the Armenians were seen as Russia's natural allies in the region, devoted to the Czar, and reliable. In a sense, then, Armenians were favored by the authorities and even took up important positions in the administration of the region. Naturally, the opposite was true in the Ottoman Empire, where Armenians were seen as a potentially pro-Russian fifth column, leading to the massacres of 1890. Even before that, though, Armenians left Turkey whereas numerous Azeris, in particular Sunni Azeris, migrated from the Caucasus to the Ottoman Empire. By the turn of the century, there were over 1,200,000 Armenians in the South Caucasus, in what is called 'Eastern Armenia' to contrast with 'Western Armenia' which is located in modern-day Turkey. The Armenian population in the Western part is debated; Turkish sources speak of less than a million whereas Armenian sources often mention several million Armenians.

\(^2\) An interesting fact is that Sunni Azeris tended to migrate to the Ottoman empire a movement which initiated long before the Russian involvement whereas Shi'ite Azeris moved towards Shi'ite Persia.
In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Baku oil boom led to a concentration of Armenians in Baku, occupying the higher industrial and managerial position. As the Armenians were clearly favorized by the Russian rulers in terms of their benefiting from the oil riches, tensions with the natives arose, whereas the two populations had been able to live in peace earlier in spite of the population exchanges and the fact that Armenians had made use of the practice to buy out Azeris from their lands, a practice which could have been seen as leading to tensions.

These tensions remained covert until the first Russian revolution of 1905, which soon spread to the South Caucasus. Disturbances broke out in Baku first but soon spread to Shusha in Western Karabakh, where the first inter-ethnic riots erupted. It is still disputed how the clashes started. According to Erich Feigl, the Dashanksutium (The Armenian Revolutionary Federation) were very active in this period and terrorized the Azeri majority in Shusha, leading to the eruption of violence. Armenian or pro-Armenian sources such as (Walker 1991), on the other hand, argue that the Azeris (which he terms Tatars) provoked the fighting, leading to a strong Armenian response and eventually what he terms 'the victory of the Armenians'. Whatever the case, there were clashes all over Azerbaijan, notably in Baku, Ganja, Nakhijivan as well as in Yerevan. According to Feigl, over 10'000 Azeris were killed during this period, and high officials in the Russian provincial government were assassinated by the Dashnaks, including the Russian governor Nahagidze. Basically, it was a time of terror.

Following the Russian revolutions of 1917, the short-lived Transcaucasian Federation was born, as the leading political groupings (that is the Georgian Mensheviks, the Azerbaijani musavat party, and the Dashnaks) of the time agreed to form a federal government for South Caucasia. The South Caucasus became in most matters completely separated from Russia, and finally declared independence on 22 April 1918.

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3 In this respect the role of Armenians in Baku, or in Istanbul for that matter, can be compared to the Jews in Eastern Europe, the Indians in East Africa, or the Lebanese in West Africa. These population groups all form hard-working and intelligent communities, which are characterized by internal cohesion and mutual supports, which nevertheless live in isolation from the natives, form which they are distinguished in terms of language, ethnicity as well as religion. As these groups come to dominate business life, the tensions with the native population increase, as the latter see them as greedy, exploiting people who help each other but whose behaviour is alien to the local customs and traditions.
1991). However, it soon proved to be impossible to reconcile the three South Caucasian peoples, notably as the Armenians were interested in either a British or a Russian protectorate and the Georgians were favorably disposed towards German rule. At this point, the Bolsheviks were interested in the Baku oil fields, and thus the Armenians played perfectly in Lenin’s game.

In May of 1918 already, the Azerbaijani and Gerorgian Democratic Republics (AzDR and GDR) were declared, and soon enough an Armenian Democratic Republic (The ArDR) was proclaimed in Tbilisi, although at the time it had no territory. Towards the end of May, the AzDR yielded the Yerevan region to the ArDR. Meanwhile the Dashnaks moved to chase Muslim population out of the Nakhjivan, Karabakh and yervan regions which they saw as historically Armenian. Azerbaijan proclaimed its independence under Ottoman protection, and was forced to locate the capital temporarily at Ganja as Baku was in the hands of the Bolsheviks (the Baku Commune). Georgia became a sort of German military protectorate; and the Ottoman armies entered the Caucasus in the closing days of the First World War, which led to Ottoman armies and local Azeris initiating pogroms on Armenians, and the clashes went on in Karabakh between the Dashnaks and the Ottoman army, supported by local Azeris. Again opinions differ regarding the origins of the clashes. Without going into detail, it as a whole seems safe to agree with Tadeusz Swietochowski’s assessment that “massive eruptions of violence in the form of mutual intercommunal massacres began with the 1905 Russian Revolution, and would reemerge each time the Russian state was in a condition of crisis or overhaul—during the civil war in 1918 and during the perestroika from 1988 on” (Swietochowski 1994).

Nevertheless, the British who replaced the Ottomans after their withdrawal reaffirmed Karabakh’s belonging to Azerbaijan, by appointing Muslim governor in Shusha. This led to protests among the local Armenians, who only reluctantly accepted Azerbaijani jurisdiction in February of 1920. Meanwhile guerrilla fighting went on, especially in the mountains, as the Dashnaks never accepted this arrangement (Mutafian 1994).
British policy in South Caucasia seems to have been characterized by short-sightedness and a total disdain for the interests and future of the Caucasian peoples. Britain's main interest seems to have been to prevent Bolshevik, or even other Socialist forces such as the Georgian Mensheviks from acceding to powers; South Caucasia would return to Russian rule once the White armies had defeated the Bolsheviks. The background to the seemingly pro-Azeri positions or rather anti-Armenian position taken by the British on the question of Nagorno-Karabakh can be deducted from the condescending attitudes the British often had regarding Middle Eastern peoples. As is outlined by Artin Arslanian, the British had only contempt for Armenians and Georgians, just like they had Arabs, Jews, and Christians alike all over the Middle East. The one exception was the Turks. Due to their long history of administering Ottoman territories, the Turks enjoyed a certain level of respect in British eyes as 'brave and clean fighting Turks' despite their 'uncivilized' behaviour. As Arslanian quotes General George Milne, responsible for British military operations in South Caucasia, They (the local nationalities) are certainly not worth the life of one British soldier. The Georgians are merely disguised Bolsheviks. The Armenians have always been a despicable race. The best are the inhabitants of Azerbaijan; though they are in reality uncivilized (Arslanian 1996). It therefore does not seem far-fetched that the awarding of Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan, while intended only as a temporary phenomenon, was caused by British condescension for Armenians.

In the following years, three separate republics existed, but turmoil, continued, mainly as the Dashnaks pursued their irredentist claims on their neighbours. They had territorial claims on both Georgia (the Akhalkalaki and Gocharli regions which are still today predominantly Armenian-populated) and Azerbaijan (Karabakh, Zangezur, and Nakhjivan). Thus far from being peaceful, this era was characterized by inter-ethnic strife. By 1919, however, the Dashnaks were driven out of Nakhjivan and although they stayed in power in Zangezur until 1921, they were soon toppled in Yerevan as well.

The first republic to be sovietized was nevertheless Azerbaijan, probably due to the priority given by the Bolsheviks to secure the oil fields, and to the fact that Azerbaijan
was the only republic in the South Caucasus where there existed a widespread support for the Bolsheviks, notably among the workers Baku. Thus the Red army entered Baku in April 1920, as the Azerbaijani army was locked up in Karabakh fighting an Armenian uprising, and Azerbaijan became the first Soviet stronghold in South Caucasus. In November, Soviet power was established in Yerevan sacking the Dashanks, and the Red army proceeded to secure control over the whole of South Caucasus, with Georgia reconquered, as last of the three states, in April of 1921 (Suny 1990).

At this point, the political struggle for Karabakh began and would last long, as it took the Soviet leadership three years to settle the issue. Initially the pendulum seemed to swing in favour of Armenia, as the revolutionary committee of Soviet Azerbaijan in December 1920 under Soviet pressure from central authorities issued a statement that Karabakh, Zangezur and Nakhjivan were all transferred to Armenian control. Stalin (then commissar for nationalities) made the decision public on December 2, but the Azerbaijani leader Narimanov later denied the transfer. Four months later, the pendulum swung back.

The ‘Treaty of Brotherhood and Friendship’s between the Soviet Union and republican Turkey included a provision that both Nakhjivan and Karabakh were to be placed under the control of the Azerbaijani SSR. It seems as if this was a concession on the part of Stalin to newly founded Turkish republic in Ankara; Stalin was initially positively inclined to kemal ataturk, whom he saw as a potential ally at the time. Thus Ataturk was hostile to any territorial arrangements favoring Soviet Armenia, since a strong Armenia could have potential territorial claims on Turkey. Even given Statlin’s tendency to divide the Caucasian peoples to prevent resistance, (Alstadt 1992) the idea of separating the Armenians into two entities- the Armenian republic and Nagorno karabakh must have been welcome. Furthermore, by this decision not only the Armenians were divided but also the Azeris, into the Azerbaijani republic and Nakhjivan.

However, the game was not over yet. On 4 July, a meeting of the Kavburo, (Caucasian section of the Soviet communist party) voted in Stalin’s presence to include
Karabakh in the Armenian SSR. The very next day, Narimanov protested against this decision and the Kavburo once again reversed its decision, and agreed to karabkh's remaining in the Azerbaijani, SSR, although the region was to be granted substantial autonomy. During 1922, while unrest was still reported in Karabakh, discussions took place as to what the status of Karabakh would be within the Azerbaijani SSR. Finally, a decision was taken to give the region the rank of an autonomous Oblast, (the Oblasts included the mountainous part of Karabakh and consequently was called the *Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast*, hereafter the NKAO) and a decree from Baku on 7 July 1923 established this state of affairs. A month later, the capital of Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous Oblast was moved from Shusha to Khankendi, not ten Kilometers to the East, and the city was renamed Stepanakert, after Stefan Schaumian, the ‘great Armenian Bolshevik’ of the Baku commune. The NKAO was officially proclaimed in November 1924. Interestingly, a 1926 map in the first volume of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia had the NKAO touching upon Armenia at one point; however, one of the border changes of the Oblast that were made evidently cut the region of from the Armenian republic, and by 1930 maps had been adjusted accordingly, leaving the Lachine corridor under sovereign Azerbaijani territory, separating the NKAO from Armenia proper (Robert 1956).

In 1924, Nakhjivan received the status of an Autonomous Republic (ASSR) within the Azerbaijani SSR, despite the fact that the region had no land connection with mainland Azerbaijan. Nakhjivan's belonging to the Azerbaijani republic was actually decided at the same time as the discussions on Nagorno-Karabakh. Nakhjivan's status was, it seems, decided in talks between Soviet Russia and Kemalist Turkey, without involving any Armenians, at the treaty of Moscow in March 1921. This treaty stipulated that Nakhivan would remain an autonomous region of Azerbaijan, and that the region’s status could not be altered without Turkey’s explicit approval (Mutafian 1994). It is clear

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4 This policy of Stalin's is clear if one observes the national delimitations ins the Caucasus. An example is the regions of Karachai-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria. It seems indeed, as the delimitation isdesigned purely to cause dissent in the regions that would enable Russia to control the regins. Karchais and Balkars are in fact in most respect one people speaking the same Turkic language; similarly Kabardins and Cherkess are both Cricassian peoples. Thus the result of the national delimitation is that both regions include tow titular nationalities without ethno-linguistic affinities, which have mutual prejudices and historical antagonisms against each other.
that this deal was clinched by Turkey in view of Ankara's military offensive in the Caucasus immediately following the Ottoman signing of the Sevres treaty in August 1920. Turkey, aware of Soviet Russia's need for allies in the time of the civil war, successfully buried the Armenian question by the treaty of Moscow, followed by the treaty of Kars of 13 October 1921 between Turkey and three South Caucasian republics, which in principle was a ratification of the Moscow treaty by the three republics. There is a point in Richard Hovannisian's statement that 'Soviet Russia, on the international front, sacrificed the Armenian question to cement the Turkish alliance' (Suny 1996). Thus in end it seems clear that the Armenians in this particular instance were disfavored by the Soviets. This is in a sense surprising, given that the Armenians had historically been far more benevolently disposed towards-as well as favored by-Russian rulers than Azeris. In retrospect, this decision may been to Azerbaijan's immediate favour, but in the long run the Armenians' feeling of frustration with the loss of western Armenia despite western promises, and the loss of nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhjivan, despite Soviet promises, proved to be a catalyze of conflict.

The Armenians were naturally disappointed with this situation, especially given the fact that they had been promised Karabakh by the Soviets at earlier stages. Furthermore, parallel events in the early 1920s must be mentioned to elucidate the entirety of the Armenian question. In August 1920 the treaty of Sevres was signed, in which Woodrow Wilson himself had drawn the boundaries of a future Armenian state. This state was designed to include portions of Eastern Antolia, or what Armenians call Armenia. Moreover, it was designed to include Nakhjivan-despite its predominantly Turkic population-as well as most of the NKAO. (Mutafian1994).

Thus once under Soviet rule it became the persistent aim of Armenian elites to reverse the situation and persuade Moscow to turn Karabakh over to the Armenian SSR. It has to be noted, at these points, that the Soviet decision was actually quite arbitrary in servel ways. First of all, Nakhjivan received the status of an ASSr, and there is no reason why Nagorno Karabakh should not have been eligible for the same status. And in fact, an arrangement were the status of these two regions would have paralleled each other (such as a Nakhjivan ASSR under the Azerbaijani SSR, and a Nagorno Karabakh ASSR under
the Armenian SSR) would indeed have been more logically persuasive and prevented rather than catalyzed future conflict. Against this claim, the Azeris advance the face that there are sizable Azeri minorities in Armenia, Georgia as well as in Dagestan (especially in the Derbent region) which did not receive any autonomous status at all although geographically these populations are geographically concentrated in certain areas. Especially the loss of Derbent is inexplicable to the Azeris, who claim that it is this context it was not evident that the Armenians in Karabakh would even receive and Autonomous status at all. Nakhjivan is not encircled by Armenia, as Nagorno Karabakh is encircled by Azerbaijan: Nakhjivan has a border with Turkey (only seven Kilometers) as well as Iran (Cornell 1999). Moreover, that Nakhjivan is an integral part of Azerbaijan, its autonomous status being derived only form the fact that it is geographically separated from mainland Azerbaijan, as Kaliningrad was separated from the RSFSR. In any case, both Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhjivan were exceptions in the Soviet system of federalism: There is no other case of an Autonomous region or republic whose titular nationality is the same as the central state’s titular nationality, as is the case in Nakhjivan. Neither is there a case of a national group which was endowed with both a union republic and an autonomous region or republic in another union republic, as was Nagorno Karabakh’s case.

In general, only indigenous groups without a mother nation in another, Soviet or non-Soviet territory, were given autonomous status. The only other examples of a nation with two political entities are the Ossetians, with an Autonomous Republic in Russia and an Autonomous Region in Georgia. National minorities living outside of their national republic were normally not eligible for autonomous status. Systematic implementation of such a principle would have been impossible in practice as well, as the list of minorities on’ the wrong side of the border’ would be long. One only has to cite a few examples: Tajiks in Uzbekistan, Uzbeks in Tajikistan, Russians in Ukraine, Russians in Kazakhstan, Armenians and Azeris in Georgia, etc. Hence the peculiar construction that emerged out of perceived necessity in the Caucasus can in itself be termed a source of conflict (Cornell 1997). Whatever conclusion can be drawn from the territorial delimitation, the Armenians already in the 1930s attempted to regain control over both
Nagorno Karabakh and Nakhjivan, at a time when a number of territories saw their status changed from above, such as Abkhzia’s relation to Georgia. Indeed, changing the status of a territory was not an alien event to the Soviet leadership—consider Crimea’s 1954 transfer from Russia to Ukraine.

However, the Armenians found no support from the center. In 1936, the dissolution of the Transcaucasian Federative Socialist Soviet Republic, including the three Sough Caucasian republics, led to the further distancing of Nagorno-Karabakh from Armenia; the only administrative contact between the two was now their common appurtenance to the Soviet Union. Naturally, internal borders in the Soviet Union carried little significance; Karabakh Armenians seeking higher education could do so in Baku or Yerevan; the contacts with Armenia lived on. The Armenian leader of the time raised the Karabakh issue to the dismay of Stalin, only to be assassinated in 1936 (Mutafian 1994). Whether he was killed because of these demands or met the fate of so many others for arbitrary reasons is nevertheless unclear. In 1963, with the more open climate created by Krushchev’s destalinization, a petition signed by approximately 2’500 Karabakh Armenians was submitted to Krushchev, protesting the Azeri attitude towards the region and claiming the Azeris were intentionally neglecting the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast economically. Moscow kept its silence, acted as if nothing had happened, and unrest erupted in Karabakh, leaving 18 casualties. Tensions broke out in 1968 as well. In 1970, a census recorded 80% Armenians in Karabakh, whereas in 1939 they had composed 91% of the population. The Armenians blamed the change on the Azerbaijani government, claiming that the Azeris intentionally tried to manipulate the population of the region. Following this, the Armenian republic’s leadership became more vocal on the Karabakh issue and voiced their demands frequently at Union meetings. Thus the tensions remained using the whole Soviet era, still simmering but with small sporadic eruptions. All attempts to campaign for the unification of Karabakh and Armenia were branded as retrograde nationalist propaganda and suppressed.

From mid-1987 throughout 1988, ethnic Armenian delegations from Nagorno-Karabakh visited Moscow with the aim of convincing officials to transfer jurisdiction over the province to Armenia. In February 1988, two Azerbaijanis were killed in direct
clashes between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Nagorno-Karabakh. This incident triggered intense eruptions of violence in the town of Sumgait, near Baku. During February 27-29th, twenty-six Armenians and six Azerbaijanis were killed. These incidents led to the mass flight of Azerbaijanis from Armenia, and Armenians from Azerbaijan, creating immense refugee problems on both sides (Cox & John 1993). The refugee situation made political action seem urgent. The failure of Baku to effectively solve the refugee problems evoked public criticism, and many Azerbaijanis joined the opposition to the Communist regime in Baku, and reinforced their identification as Azerbaijanis and their desire for self-rule.

The Sumgait violence was a turning point in the self-identification of many Armenians throughout the region. However, many Azerbaijanis did not cast blame on themselves for the violence perpetrated against Armenians at Sumgait and related the Azerbaijani part in the events as the work of local hoodlums. This round of violence did not trigger much soul searching or significantly affect Azerbaijani collective identity in this period. Throughout February 1988, large demonstrations in support of the Karabakh Armenians’ drive to separate from Azerbaijan were held in Yerevan. In March 1988, Gorbachev formed a government commission to investigate the problem and make recommendations about the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh. In May 1988, the head of the Communist Parties of Azerbaijan and Armenia were dismissed, allegedly due to their failure to contain the conflict. Azerbaijani intellectuals responded to this perceived threat to Azerbaijani control of Nagorno-Karabakh. In February 1988, the poet Bakhtiyar Vahabzade and historian Suleiman Aliyarov co-authored an “open letter” rebutting Armenian claims to the disputed province. This letter, which went far beyond confronting the Armenian claims, was also an important treatise on Azerbaijani identity. The authors presented their view that the Azerbaijanis and Karabakh Armenians both emanate from the same ethnic stock: the Caucasian Albanians. They linked this ancient people and the contemporary Azerbaijanis. They drew a connection between the contemporary threat to their lands from Armenia and the 1828 division of Azerbaijan between Russia and Iran.

As far as the role of the ex-Soviet Union in this game is concerned, even prior to independence, the steady disintegration of the USSR had unleashed three dynamics that
greatly shaped the course of the coming events. These included a rapid rise in volatile ethno-nationalist sentiments in Azerbaijan, Armenia, and the Azeri region of Nagorno-Karabakh, whose population was made up mostly of ethnic Armenians; a concomitant and steady rise in the appeal of the newly formed popular Front Party (PF), around which many Azeris, especially in the Middle Classes and from intellectual circles, began to gather; and a relatively large scale transfer of arms and ammunition from departing, often undisciplined Soviet troops to civilians. Although in certain circumstances the combination of ethno-nationalism, a populist Political Party, and armed private militias can potentially work to strengthen the process of state building, as in Serbia, for example—in Azerbaijan the mix proved quite inimical to the consolidation of any form of central authority (Alstadt 1988).

It is important to take note of the fact the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was a product of, and in turn a catalyst for, the intensification of ethno-nationalist feelings on the part of all involved. For Azeris, the human drama unfolding in Karabakh crystallized, albeit in a raw and unrefined form, a strong sense of national and ideological identity which for many decades had not been allowed to evolve. The rapid demise of the Soviet system only deepened the compelling nature of the long dormant identity. In January 1989, the Soviet authorities removed Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan’s control, and placed it under direct rule of Moscow. Most Azerbaijanis perceived Moscow as being pro-Armenian, so this strengthened their desire to distance themselves from Moscow. The attack on Baku and indiscriminate killing of Azeri civilians by Soviet troops on January 20, 1990—ostensibly to protect the city’s remaining Armenians from rioting mobs—only reinforced the nativist, emergent nationalism sweeping across the Republic. By the time, independence came, “President” Mutalibov had already exhausted his legitimacy in the popular eye long ago, and his championing of Azeri nationalist interests was bought by few outside his immediate circle. During the period of glasnost, many groups in the Soviet Union made conflicting claims about the borders they shared. In all these conflicts, Moscow had adopted a Policy in this period not to change these borders between republics. The exception was Nagorno-Karabakh, where Moscow was willing to consider a change of jurisdiction. Azerbaijanis were incensed that only with regard to
"their territory" was Moscow willing to make a change. Azerbaijani perceived the Moscow media and intellectual community as being completely biased against them in this conflict. They felt that Moscow’s media generally portrayed them as threatening Muslims, while representing the Armenians as the victims. This perception of bias contributed to the Azerbaijani drive for self-rule, and further weakened the limited identity ties to Moscow. Describing these feelings, Bakhtiyar Vahabzade wrote:

“I can not imagine how long we will have to stand for the biased position of the central newspapers. How long will they write that we are wrong, when we are right, and they are right when they are wrong, and how long will they remain silent about our just demands” (Shaffer 2002).

As part of the cultural and political trend of distancing themselves from Moscow, many Azerbaijanis decided to drop the Russian name endings, such as “-OV” and “-sky” from their surnames, and replace them with more traditional Azerbaijani endings, such as “-li”, “-lu”, and “-oglu”. The threat to Azerbaijani territorial integrity posed by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict influenced national unity in Soviet Azerbaijan in two ways: First, Azerbaijanis from different sectors of the population many of whom had relatives in Nagorno-Karabakh and in Armenia, who was directly affected by the strife, opposed any change in the status of the province and condemned Moscow’s handling of the conflict.

Second, since most of the population felt that the communist leadership of the Republic blundered in the Nagorno-Karabakh issue and had failed to maintain control over the disputed province, many joined the opposition forces at this time. (Cornell 1999).

The intensification of the struggle over Nagorno-Karabakh also persuaded many Azerbaijanis to participate in political demonstrations and join Azerbaijani national political movement. This activity built on the attachment and the awareness of Azerbaijani identity, which existed prior to this perceived threat.

In 1989, the Popular Front–led opposition in Azerbaijan became more aggressive in challenging the Communist-associated leadership of the republic and demanded that
Baku retain control over Nagorno-Karabakh. At this time, it began to articulate the goal of Sovereignty for Azerbaijan. The movement promoted the preservation of Azerbaijani culture and language and voiced concern for Azerbaijani living outside the republic, including those in Iran. In January and February 1989, PFA activists began circulating a draft of their Political Platform. In its final version, the platform stated that the name of the people of Azerbaijan is the “Azerbaijani Turks”. It refrained from calling for the independence of Azerbaijan, advocating instead for “Sovereignty within the USSR” yet demanding representation in the United Nations. Stressing its belief that Azerbaijani identity is tied to the Middle East, and the need to develop connections in particular with the peoples who historically formed the cultural region of the Near and Middle East, “PFA programme” supported decisive steps towards the development of understanding and cooperation with Islam. The programme also emphasized the need to strengthen relations with the Azerbaijani in Iran, calling for the abolition of all political barriers to the development of cultural and economic ties with southern Azerbaijan.

An interesting and curious turn came in the approach of the republican communist leadership by late 80s. The Communist leadership in Azerbaijan, which was affected by Moscow’s progressive loss of central control and evidently hoped to preempt the growing support for the PFA, took the lead from the opposition and began to respond in 1989 to demands for increased local Azerbaijani control over the republic and the promotion of Azerbaijani culture. For instance, the official media in Baku announced in March 1989 that “taking into consideration the wish of the people, the Azerbaijan SSR supreme Soviet Presidium has returned the names of Zhdanov Town and Zhdanov Rayon back to Beylagan Town and Beylagan Rayon.” In December 1989, the city of Kirovabad reverted to its ancient name, Ganja. An interesting change appeared in the symbols used at the protests that took place. Throughout fall 1989, the flag of the Azerbaijan SSR, which had been flown at protests in the preceding year, was replaced by the Tricolour Flag of the short-lived Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, linking the demonstrators to the independent, pre-Soviet state from 1918-20. Yet, the PFA’s attitude toward full independence was ambiguous throughout the intense political activity of fall 1989. In its

5 Baku domestic Service in Azerbaijan, March 18, 1989 (FBIS-SOV-89-057).
formal statements, the PFA consistently claimed that its goal was to achieve Sovereignty within the framework of the Soviet Union. Yet they described “Sovereignty” as including the right to issue passports, conclude international treaties, and send representatives to international organization (Richard 1993). Moscow’s failure to acquiesce to the Azerbaijani demands for the return of control over Nagorno-Karabakh prompted the PFA activists to expand their concept of Sovereignty to include the right to vote any legislation emanating from the Soviet capital.

On September 10th, 1989, the PFA announced that it would halt the strikes and protests after an agreement had been reached with the republic’s leadership. It included formal recognition of the movement and the convening of a parliamentary session to discuss the expansion of the republic’s political and economic Sovereignty. On September 23, the Parliament of Soviet Azerbaijan formally declared the republic “Sovereign within the USSR”. The government, though, delayed the publication of the content of the declaration of Sovereignty until October 5th. The formal statement asserted that “the competence of Azerbaijan is limited only in matters which have voluntarily been delegated by the Republic itself to the USSR, that it “retains for itself the right to withdraw freely from the USSR”, and that it “has the right to enter into direct relations with foreign states”. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict’s impact on the declaration was clear: It emphasised “the Sovereignty of Azerbaijan extends over all its territory, including the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic and the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous oblast that are inalienable parts of the union republic. The territory of the republic, declared, cannot be changed without Azerbaijan’s agreement, expressed in a referendum of the whole population conducted by a decision of the Supreme Soviet. Frontiers with other union republics can be changed only by mutual agreement”. The law stated that “the land, its soils, forests, waters, and other natural resources are national riches and the property of the republic, and belong to its people”, and that the Azerbaijani language is declared the state language. However, the free use and development of Russian and other language used by the population was ensured. Despite the PFA’s recognition by the authorities in Baku and the formal declaration of the republic’s Sovereignty, confrontation between the Azerbaijani PFA-led opposition and the
communist establishment continued through the fall and winter of 1989. Crippling strikes and demonstrations demanding true Sovereignty and the return of Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijani rule persisted through the end of 1989. Violent confrontations surged in a number of locations between Armenians and Azerbaijanis; the worst was on the weekend of January 13th-14th, 1990 in Baku. Which left up to ninety Armenians and a number of Azerbaijanis dead?6

After January 1990 the APF led a semi clandestine existence whilst Aiaz Mutalibov, the new Communist Party First Secretary, tried to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with Soviet military help and so neutralise the nationalist appeal of the APF.7 The attempted coup in Moscow in August 1991, which Mutalibov was one of the few republican leaders to support openly, marked the collapse of this strategy and, in the autumn of 1991, the APF began to reemerge as a powerful political force. Although Mutalibov was elected unopposed as president in September 1991, not long after he was forced to replace the Supreme Soviet with a new fifty member National Assembly (Milli Mejlis) in which the opposition was given half the deputies. This appointed body did not have the legitimacy on which a constitutional regime could be consolidated and over the following three years Azerbaijani politics was characterised by a series of coups and, between 1991 and 1993, the country had four presidents.8

For the first six month of its existence as an independent state Azerbaijan was enveloped in political turmoil. At the beginning of March 1992 Mutalibov was forced to resign as president following the massacre of Azerbaijani civilians at Khojali in Nagorno-Karabakh Iaqub Mamedov, who served as the interim President, refused to make political concessions to the APF and include its nominees in the government and, after the failure of an attempt by Mutalibov to seize power at the beginning of May, the APF, took over

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6 The violence against the Baku Armenians led to their mass exodus from the city. In Armenian minds, "Black January" refers to these violent events, while in Azerbaijan the term refers to the subsequent violence by Moscow against the Azerbaijanis


8 Aiaz Mutalibov (September 1991 to March 1992); Iaqub Mamedov (March 1992 to May 1992); Abulfaz Elchibey (June 1992 to July 1993); and Heydar Aliev (October 1993 onwards).
the government. Abulfaz Elchibey, the leader of the APF and, like Gamsakhurdia, a former dissident, then won new Presidential elections at the beginning of June.⁹

Since Mutalibov's political strategy had counted on the continuing existence of the Soviet Union, very little progress had been made on the front of establishing state apparatus by the time Elchibey became President. Although an Azerbaijani National Army had formally been set up in October 1991, in mid-March 1992 the total strength of the army was only about 500 men.

**Challenges Before the New State**

After a series of carryover and caretaker governments, a Popular Front-led government, under the leadership of Abulfaz Elchibey, was elected in May 1992 in the first democratic elections in the new state. The period from independence to the fall of the Elchibey government was highly charged ideologically. The new regime imposed few restrictions on freedom of expression, and debates abounded in the media on the identity of the new state and its citizens. Independent Azerbaijan had no honeymoon period in which to determine its creeds and national priorities. Instead, it was born into a war with Armenia, an extensive refugee population, tense relations with most of its other neighbours, and a collapsed social welfare system. The ideological debates over the identity of the new state were fuelled by the urgent need to make policies. For instance, the new state had to determine state symbols and language. It faced challenges that demanded that it prioritize its values – such as stability versus civil liberties; the conflict of interests between the new state and the Azerbaijani ethnic group; defining who is a citizen; designating the rights of the non Azerbaijani citizens, both individually and collectively; determining the relations between religion and state; resolving the problem of how to consider historical lands outside the jurisdiction of the new state; and relations between the new state and co-ethnics beyond its borders (Swietochowski 1994).

⁹ The June 1992 Presidential elections were the most open of any held in Azerbaijan's recent history although Aliev was prevented from standing by the setting of an age limit of 65 for candidates just before the elections. In 1992, Aliev was aged 69.
Once in power, the PFA activists needed to find a balance between Azerbaijani ethnic identity and Azerbaijani state civic identity and to formulate a state identity that could encompass the Azerbaijani ethnic group as well as other ethnic groups in the new state. This created many dilemmas. Years of cultural oppression had instilled in the new government a drive to create a state that was a manifestation of Azerbaijani ethnic culture. Yet, the liberal values and practical considerations of the new ruling elite motivated them to search for accommodation with the non-Azerbaijani ethnic groups in the republic. Before their rise to power, the mainstream of the PFA leadership had emphasized Azerbaijani ethnic-based identity; upon assuming power, they attempted to formulate an additional territorial based civic and state identity that would encompass all the citizens of the new state. For example, the terms Azerbaijani and Azerbaijanism were used to refer to citizens of the state and patriotism toward it, while “Turk” or Azerbaijani Turk”, were used to designate ethnic Azerbaijanis. Tension persisted between territorial versus ethnic based identity in the new state, as well as the balance between civic and ethnic identity. These topics were debated throughout the post-independence period. This debate was complicated by the fact that the majority of the ethnic Azerbaijanis lived outside the borders of the new state.

The situation in the new state challenged many of the tenets of PFA ideology that it had espoused while in opposition. For instance, the movement and especially its leader, Elchibey, were committed to campaigning for expanded ties with the Azerbaijanis in Iran and championing their cultural and language rights. This cause severely complicated Azerbaijan’s relations with Iran. During the war with Armenia, and given the complicated relations with Russia, the new Republic could hardly afford hostile relations with its neighbours to the south; thus Elchibey, when serving as president, toned down his south Azerbaijan campaign. The wave of nationalism which marked the events in Transcaucasia in the dying days of Soviet Union got its epicenter stationed in Nagorno-Karabakh, where Armenian and Azerbaijani jingoism clashed head on. The fight for a separate identity by Azerbaijan vis-à-vis Soviet Union and Armenia, which began with the ecological issues in late 1980s did not subside much even after the independence of Azerbaijan. The confusion and chaos which marked the events leading to the