

1988: FINAL STAGE OF THE DEPORTATION OF AZERBAIJANIS FROM ARMENIA

Article 1

Thinking about the prospect of change in the Soviet Union in 1985, the architects of reform did not suspect how much importance the national question will have in the history of perestroika. Gorbachev's policies in many respects provided an impetus for ethno-national processes, the direction of which was pre-set by earlier contradictions. These contradictions had historical roots and stemmed from both ethnic and other social and political factors. Contradictions resulted in national movements that developed based on two classical models - the Baltic and Caucasus models. The first option was characterized by the growing tendency of the Baltic republics toward autonomy from the Union center until independence, which would change the external borders of the country. The second option was characterized by the versatility of conflicts (Union center - republic - autonomy) and an attempt to change internal Soviet borders. If the first option was characterized by relatively non-violent actions, in the second case, non-violent actions gradually escalated into violent clashes with significant casualties in the opposing forces. In the ethno-national conflicts of the perestroika period, there were two main forces: 1. Emotional mass people's element led by radical fringe elements and the national intelligentsia; 2. Republican nomenklatura that came under pressure from mass demonstrations, but was ready to use it to their advantage if need be. The situation became unprecedented because conflicts, once started, continued to develop. The protracted nature of conflicts gradually radicalized the masses. Perestroika changed the political climate in the country and set a higher bar for the

international image of the USSR, which did not allow it to use mass violence to crack down on unrest. Permission to use troops and make mass arrests of national movement activists had to be more thoroughly justified. Naturally, this facilitated the development of national movements.

The December 1986 events in Alma-Ata were a harbinger of the coming storm. They can be considered the first Gorbachev provocation in the field of "national and ethnic conflicts". Moscow then decried the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz for "their tendency toward national isolation and the mood of national conceit" and "nationalist individual manifestations". Later such accusations would be made against Azerbaijanis. Following the events in Kazakhstan, the Institute of Ethnography of the USSR established a Center for the Study of Interethnic Issues and Interethnic Relations. In autumn 1987, it prepared for the CPSU a special note on the national question, in which it named 19 "hot spots" in the country. Among them was also the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region (1).

The decision to establish an Armenian autonomy in Nagorno-Karabakh in the Azerbaijan SSR in 1923 was a compromise formula and put an end to the bloody clashes of previous years between Armenia and Azerbaijan. But, as subsequent events showed, in strategic terms the formation of a territorial autonomy for the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh within the Azerbaijan SSR despite the existence of a separate Armenian republic invariably preserved the threat of separatism and the potential for conflict between the two peoples. The existence of two identical ethnic

Armenian national entities within one state, i.e. the Soviet Union, near each other, was similar to a delayed-action mine, which definitely had to explode. In Soviet historical retrospect, one can highlight several most acute phases of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh in the post-Stalin period. The first phase belongs to the period of the “Khrushchev thaw” and was associated with the decisions of the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU Central Committee to address the serious consequences of Stalin’s personality cult, which put the idea of territorial claims to neighboring republics and Turkey on the agenda in Armenia. The second phase of the exacerbation of the situation relates to the 1965 events in Armenia connected with the anniversary of the so-called “Armenian genocide”, which allegedly took place in the Ottoman Empire during World War I. From 1965 when the Soviet authorities sanctioned the official cultivation of anti-Turkish (including anti-Azerbaijani) sentiment in the Armenian SSR, for which the communist leadership organized events to commemorate “the victims of genocide”, the seeds of hatred toward Azerbaijanis fell on already fertilized soil. From that time, the moral and psychological expulsion of Azerbaijanis who lived in their historical lands within Soviet Armenia became more intense. Until the 1980s, except for isolated cases of growing tension mainly initiated from Armenia and expressed in collecting signatures and addresses of Armenian intellectuals to the Soviet leadership, as well as at clashes at the domestic level, which took place between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Soviet authorities managed, keeping their hand on the pulse, not to allow information about these facts to go beyond the boundaries of the autonomy and get on the pages of the Soviet press. During the last phase of the conflict that began in the second half of the 1980s, the Armenian-Azerbaijani territorial conflict broke out on the pages of the Soviet and republican press for the first time, thereby getting out of the latent state and becoming a subject of extensive discussion. For the first time since the 1920s, a demand was put forward not in closed offices or during feasts but openly and officially to change the administrative-territorial structure of the Soviet state, which was one of the main truths on which the “unbreakable alliance” was based. At the same time, for the first time the Armenian leadership, along with political support for the separatist movement in Nagorno-Karabakh, took concrete legal steps to merge Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia.

The new phase of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh



Moscow denied housing, jobs and food to these Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia

began to flare up almost after Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in the USSR leadership. Moreover, the Kremlin was well-informed about the mood in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh and knew what was happening and what was being prepared there, especially since they did not hide their intentions and plans, carefully embedding radical separatist demands in the democratic rhetoric of perestroika. This is evidenced by the ideas expressed by Mikhail Gorbachev in his memoirs: “In three years (meaning the period from 1985 to 1987 – I.N.) the Central Committee received 500 letters about the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. Perestroika set in motion large internal forces and opened chronic abscesses. National feelings and national extremism revived alongside.” (2) Thus, Gorbachev was forced to admit that long before the bloody stage of the conflict in 1988, Moscow was aware of the complex processes that occurred around Nagorno-Karabakh associated with the growth of nationalist extremism among local Armenians. Moscow received this information primarily via special services. F. D. Bobkov, who was first deputy chairman of the KGB at that time, wrote about the looming conflict: “For two years we had sounded the alarm about the looming conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan... a brigade was sent to Armenia, which confirmed that ethnic conflicts

were brewing in the Transcaucasia and it was necessary to take urgent measures. The issue was brought up for discussion at the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the CPSU. However, all the conclusions and proposals of the brigade were removed from the decisions and the issue was smoothed over. Nobody wanted to openly admit the existence of conflicts on ethnic grounds and that social upheavals were brewing in some republics ... the CPSU Central Committee thwarted any attempts to reveal the truth.” (3)

Thus, the Kremlin believed that another Armenian intrigue around the idea of transferring Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia would be choked by traditional methods of preventive influence by local party and law enforcement bodies. The party leadership of the Azerbaijan SSR was also aware of the events taking place around Nagorno-Karabakh, and long before the beginning of the last bloody phase of the conflict, they systematically notified Moscow about that. The former chairman of the State Security Committee of the Azerbaijan SSR, Vagif Huseynov, writes about this in his book, citing the words of the former chairman of the NKAR regional department of the KGB, Colonel G. Sept: “Facts about intensifying nationalistic manifestations were regularly reported to the leadership and authorities. Arrivals of emissaries from Yerevan and the activity of groups that were within sight of the service were reported. It was reported and written to superiors, and arising problems were repeatedly discussed with Kevorkov. Muscovites watched it all through their fingers, saying we have something worse unfolding here. The Baku leadership never showed proper concern: neither in the case of the deliberate spread of the book ‘The Hearth’ by Z. Balayan, which actually became a call to ‘miatsum’ (incorporation of the region into Armenia), nor later when separatists cleverly covered themselves with slogans of greater democracy and glasnost. By February, it was all clear. Had there not been Sumgayit, it would have broken out elsewhere.” G. Sept, like many other holders of information about processes invisible to the outside view, is not talking about a broad conspiracy. But he raises the question that information about the true sentiments and aspirations in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh could not but flow to a single center - Moscow. Neither he nor the others felt concern by the Moscow leadership. The party authorities in Baku behaved inertly (4).

Meanwhile, in late 1987, an event occurred that really gave wings to the Armenian nationalists and made their actions confident. On 21 October 1987, Deputy Chairman

of the USSR Council of Ministers Heydar Aliyev was removed from the Politburo. According to the memoirs of Assistant Secretary-General I. Boldin, when Aliyev was forced to retire, Mikhail Gorbachev spoke fondly of him and his work at the plenum of the Central Committee, but when the transcript was published, he threw these words out (5). As determined by Thomas de Waal, the author of the book “The Black Garden”, Armenian nationalists had the most direct relation to the resignation of Heydar Aliyev. “They planned a campaign to discredit the Azerbaijani patriarch Heydar Aliyev, who, as it seemed, could become a major opponent of the idea of Karabakh’s secession and block the whole process. Karabakh activists even managed to garner the tacit support of the head of the Communist Party of Armenia, Karen Demirchyan, who, they say, was very pleased with the end of the political career of his opponent in the top party leadership of the USSR. Remembering that, the former first secretary of the Communist Party of Armenia K. S. Demirchyan said in 1990: ‘We managed to do the most important thing - remove Aliyev before the beginning of the (Karabakh) movement. It was very important’ (6). Undoubtedly, the presence of an Azerbaijani figure in the top political leadership of the Soviet Union, whoever he was, could have caused additional problems in the implementation of the separatists’ plan. However, we cannot assert that Aliyev’s removal was a decisive factor that gave an impetus to the new Armenian movement for Nagorno-Karabakh. Especially as such actions on their part were observed previously. Apparently, this event should be considered in conjunction with the processes that occurred in the country since 1985, namely, the new leadership of the country had no clear program of reform, no inability to predict the results of their actions and constantly moved at the tail of events.

The very absence of a specific response from the upper bodies of the CPSU and the Soviet state to signals coming by different channels provoked the Armenian side to more persistent, energetic territorial claims. According to some reports, in 1987 in Nagorno-Karabakh, 75,000 signatures were collected for a petition to transfer the autonomy to Armenia. Influential Armenians actively lobbied the Karabakh issue abroad. In interviews with Armenian diaspora newspapers in the United States, historian Sergey Mikoyan, son of the old party functionary Anastas Mikoyan, and writer and journalist Zori Balayan openly promoted the idea of annexing Nagorno-Karabakh. And in November 1987, Abel Aganbegyan, one of the leading economic advisers to Gorbachev, raised his

voice. On 16 November, Aganbegyan met with a group of French Armenians in the Hotel Intercontinental in Paris and offered them his own vision of the problem: "I would be glad if Nagorno-Karabakh was returned to Armenia. As an economist, I believe that they have much closer ties with Armenia than with Azerbaijan. I have already made such a proposal, and I hope that these ideas will be implemented in the spirit of democracy and perestroika" (7). Aganbegyan's views were set out in the newspaper of the French communists L'Humanite, which was also distributed in the Soviet Union. It was from these revelations of the academician that Azerbaijanis first learned about the ongoing Armenian campaign against them. Gorbachev did not deny his adviser's words directly or indirectly. Therefore, the Armenians believe that such a bold statement by the economic advisor to the general-secretary of the party was no accident and had probably been agreed with him. Aganbegyan's statement instantly became a central theme for Armenian foreign newspapers and magazines, Radio AYP in Paris, as well as the Armenian services of Radio Liberty, Voice of America and others. Many organizations of the Armenian diaspora

abroad became more active (8). Thus, the marked Karabakh card came into play. 🌟

To be continued

References:

1. Островский А.В. Глупость или измена? Расследование гибели СССР. М., 2001, с.193
2. Горбачев М.С. Жизнь и реформы. Кн. 1, М.,1995, с.506
3. Бобков Ф. КГБ и власть. М., 2009, с. 298-299.
4. Гусейнов В. Больше, чем одна жизнь. Кн.2, 2013, с.118-119
5. Болдин В.И. Крушение пьедестала. Штрихи к портрету М.С.Горбачева. М., 1995, с.220
6. Ваал Т.Черный сад. Армения и Азербайджан между миром и войной. М., 2005, с.38-39
7. Там же, с.21
8. Широнин В. Агенты перестройки. Рассекреченное досье КГБ. М.,2010, с.140

THERE IS NO AZERBAIJAN WITHOUT KARABAKH



Azerbaijani districts
occupied by Armenia
and dates of their occupation

Asgaran – 1991	Agdara – 07.07.1993
Hadrut – 1991	Agdam – 23.07.1993
Khojavand – 1991	Kalbajar – 02.04.1993
Khankandi – 1991	Fuzuli – 23.08.1993
Khojaly – 26.02.1992	Jabrayil – 23.08.1993
Shusha – 08.05.1992	Gubadli – 31.08.1993
Lachin – 18.05.1992	Zangilan – 29.10.1993