The Conflicting Theories of Ethnic Conflict:
The Case of Nagorno-Karabakh

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Introduction

Authoritarian and oppressive though their systems were, the socialist multiethnic states, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, managed to escape the nasty face of ethnic violence until the very last days of their existence. Beginning of the end was reached when the truly path-breaking reform package, *perestroika*, was proposed by Gorbachev subsequent to his reign as last Soviet leader to initiate democratization of the Soviet society. As irony of the history, shortly those states turned into the hub of ethnic violence that is characterized by extreme brutality.

This swift transformation of peacefully co-existed, at least seemingly, societies into atrocious adversaries became the center of scholarly attention throughout the last decade. Increasing numbers of scholars from various backgrounds devoted their time and energy in formulating theories to understand nature and underlying reasons recent ethnic violence.

In this thesis, I am going to look at theories offered by scholars as an explanation to prevalence of ethnic conflict in post-Soviet regions. However, due to the time and space limitation I will focus on only the most recent and notorious explanations. More specifically, the focus on the rational choice approaches of ethnic conflict will constitute the embryo of the present thesis. Rationalist theorists came to be believed in superiority of their explanations over the other literatures on ethnic conflict. Nonetheless, in my thesis I hypothesize that the rationalist theories are far from providing plausible explanations to post-Soviet violent ethnic conflicts. As I will turn in more detail, these theories can offer only partial explanations, due to their failure to appreciate the complexity of ethnic conflict and attribution of too much rationality to participants of the conflicts. Although my task in this thesis is to deconstruct rationalist theories and point out the shortcomings that preclude them from offering a complete explanation, I will also briefly

propose that those theories would benefit from integrative eclecticism and interaction with other currents of the ethnic conflict literature.

In order to assess the validity of the hypothesis I will take the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as the case study. Early skirmishes of 1988 turned into fully blown war in 1992 between ethnic Armenians and Azeris in Nagorno-Karabakh, dominantly populated by Armenians, but legally integral part of Azerbaijan, after Armenians claimed secession. Given that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is a clear example of post-Soviet ethnic conflict, it provides a solid basis for theories, particularly those assuming explanation for post-Soviet conflicts, to be applied and assess their validity. Among the many other ethnic conflicts in the Former Soviet Union (FSU) the Nagorno-Karabakh together with Abkhaz-Georgian conflict attracted most of the scholarly attention partly due to its scale and partly due to its potential spill-over effect.

To be able to present my argumentation in an effective way the thesis will be comprised from two main parts. In first part the complexity of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict will be demonstrated by thorough examination of different level actors and their interactions. By displaying the complexity of the conflict in the first part, somewhat different than the customary way, I hope to offer to reader a chance to evaluate the case and produce him/her own explanation before becoming familiar with the assumptions of the respective theories. Consequently, governments, military armies and fractions, external actors, communities, parties and fronts, media, and religious and political leaders will be separately focused. Without leaving any room for speculation, their decisions, policies, and interactions with each other will be shown. In subsequent sections of the first part the events, political and non-political, with significant effects on the escalation of the conflict will be portrayed. To make the reader to grasp the picture fully, the interpretations of the contending parties will be attached, and the impacts of these events on these parties will looked at. All the events and actors will be analyzed in the first part are those

that happened and existed between 1988 and early 1992. That is the time framework where the early skirmishes of 1988 turned into an all-out war by the first month of 1992.

In the second part of the thesis, the rationalist explanations and their main assumptions will be scrutinized deeply. Accordingly, they will briefly be applied to the Nagorno-Karabakh case in order to see whether they provide a plausible explanation. Assuming that they provide only partial explanation the common shortcomings of the rationalist approaches will be pointed out. Then, two different theories from other literatures of the ethnic conflict will be scrutinized and accordingly synthesized with the successful aspects of the rationalist aspects. Lastly, conclusions will be derived.

Literature Review

Numerous scholars and practitioners have attempted to understand the dynamics of ethnicity, ethnic nationalism, and ethnic violence. Hence a voluminous literature on ethnic conflict has been emerged. Review of current literature on ethnic violence reveals a lack of clarity and incoherence among theories in explaining the eruption of ethnic violence. Various assumptions, though with too little success, were put forward to understand ethnic violence.[1] Theories, when taken alone, can only provide partial elucidation and limited explanation for why ethnic violence occurs. For the sake of simplicity those theories can be categorized in two broad groups: macro-level theories of ethnic conflict, and theories on post-Soviet extreme ethnic violence – that is ethnic war.

General Theories: Approaches falling under this category assume explanations applicable to all ethnic conflicts, rather than focusing on particular conflicts in the areas of the Former Soviet Union or Yugoslavia. A number of international relations scholars have focused on territory's intrinsic value. According to the approach parties do not vary in valuing the territory, and envisage indivisibility of territory from their historical legacy.[2] Since the actors attach some historical or identity-based value to territory, they are more willing to use force to secure valuable

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[1] See, for example, Michael E. Brown, *Ethnic Conflict and International Security* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993); Michael E. Brown, ed. *International Dimensions of Internal Conflict* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996); Mikulas Tiech and Roy Portter, eds. *The National Question in Europe in Historical Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Charles A. Kupchan, ed. *Nationalism and Nationalities in the New Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995); David A. Lake and Donald Rothschild, eds. *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict: Fear, Diffusion, and Escalation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998); David Carment and Patrick James, eds. *Peace in the Midst of Wars: Preventing and Managing International Ethnic Conflicts* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998); Jack Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict* (London: W.W Norton & Company, 2000); Barbara F. Walter and Jack Snyder, *Civil Wars, Insecurity, and Intervention* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Thomas S. Szayna, ed. *Identifying Potential Ethnic Conflict: Application of a Process Model* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2000).
[2] For detailed account, see Paul F. Diehl and Gary Goertz, "Entering International Society: Military Conflict and National Independence, 1816 – 1980," *Comparative Political Studies* 23, no. 4 (January 1991): 497-518.

territory. Besides its intrinsic value, strategic worth of territory is another important part of the approach.[3] Strategic worth is of particular importance given that this very territory is essential for the security of a respective state, and loss of it allegedly threatens a state's survival.[4]

Although the intrinsic value argument has powerful logic, the same can not be said for the strategic value argument. Cases exist where states engaged in conflict over a piece of land, which is strategically and geographically worthless. With the same token state policies are not only economic or strategic, and not always materially based. Moreover, scholars who hold to this theory fail to explain why some ethnic groups are ready to face violent clashes over seemingly worthless territory, but others not.

Another group of scholars proposes political-development and economic-modernization arguments in their search for understanding ethnic violence. The explanations focus on the relative development of ethnic groups, particularly those who are living in compact, within a given state.[5] According to Horowitz the level of economic development of an ethnic group and of the region where they live in concentrated fashion contributes to separatism.[6] The main line of this group of explanations presumes that ethnic violence and conflict is the result of uneven development and modernization.[7] Parallel to these arguments, some prominent scholars argue

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[3] See Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991); Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in International Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), esp. chapter 3.

[4] See Peter Liberman, "The Spoils of Conquest," *International Security* 18, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 125-153: For the review of literature, see Paul F. Diehl, "Geography and War: A Review and Assessment of the Empirical Literature," *International Interactions* 17, no. 1 (1991): 11-27.

[5] For a general discussion of role of economic factors in ethnic conflict, see S.W.R de A. Samarasinghe and Reed Coughlan, eds., *Economic Dimension of Ethnic Conflict* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1991); On economic roots of the ethnic conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, see Susan L. Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After the Cold War* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1995).

[6] See Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Ethnic Conflict* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1995); LaPonce, on the other hand, argues that separatist claims can be forwarded by economically advanced as well as by economically backward groups. For more information, see Jean Laponce, *Languages and Their Territories* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1987).

[7] According to several scholars modernization makes people want the same, not different, things and this results in great fight over resources. For more discussion, see Ashley J. Tellis, Thomas S. Szayna, & James A. Winnefeld, *Anticipating Ethnic Conflict* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1998); Susan Olzak, & Joane Nagel,

that individuals should switch their loyalty from their ethnic groups toward the state as the economy and structures of state modernize.[8] Consequently, the literature predicts disappearance of ethnic violence provided economic development is equalized between groups and regions.[9]

The main criticism on this current of ethnic violence literature was its failure to explain the eruption of violence in countries where secessionists regions are economically well-developed and highly represented in the political life of country.[10] In many cases economic modernization and political development have not resulted in individuals' identification with the state.[11] Moreover, individuals participating in ethnic conflict, more or less, predict economic disaster will follow even if they gain independence. Approaches in this group are far from explaining these shortcomings.

The third group of approaches concentrates on interethnic resource competition as a catalyst to the outbreak of ethnic conflict. Declining economic conditions and obvious perception of relative deprivation by individuals belonging to same ethnic background encourage them form up groups based on the ethnic identity so that they can collectively compete for resources.[12] Perceiving mobilization of one group as a threat to themselves, the remaining groups follow the

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"Introduction," in *Competitive Ethnic Relations* eds. Susan Olzak & Joane Nagel (New York: Academic Press, 1986).

[8] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983); Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1870: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[9] For thorough review of literature, see Saul Newman, "Does Modernization Breed Ethnic Political Conflict?" *World Politics* 43, no. 3 (April 1991): 451-478; Paul Collier & Anke Hofeffler, "Justice-Seeking and Loot-Seeking in Civil Wars," *World Bank Conference on Civil War, Crime and Violence*. Washington, DC, (February 1999).

[10] Countries as Spain and Northern Ireland still face separatist claims and violence by ethnic groups despite their high level of economic development. Similarly, the first secessionist movements and clashes in Yugoslavia took place in richest part of the country.

[11] For deeper discussion of why economic development alone can not explain the emergence of ethnic violence and conflict, see Walker Connor, "Eco- or Ethno-Nationalism?" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 7, no. 3 (1984): 342-359.

[12] See James Davies, "The J-Curve of Rising and Declining Satisfaction as a Cause of Revolution and Rebellion," in *Violence in America: Historical and Comparative Perspectives,* eds. Ted Robert Gurr & Hugh Davis (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1979); Susan Olzak, *The Dynamics of Ethnic Competition and Conflict* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992).

path and mobilize through the establishment of their own military groups. Competition on a group level, in most cases territorially concentrated, causes ethnic conflict.[13]

Critics discredit this explanation because of the impossibility of adequate testing. In any given group or society individuals have subjective perceptions of relative deprivation.[14] These theories, however, do not provide any principle how to measure or compare those perceptions within and between groups. For that matter it is concluded that to predict violence based on relative deprivation is impossible. Additionally, this approach keeps silent when it comes to explain why some ethnic groups despite little or no deprivation choose rationally to start ethnic violence to secure their cultural and historical values.

Elite manipulation explanation is another approach in ethnic conflict literature that considerable numbers of scholars adhere to. Scholars of this current stress the role of political leaders and assume their ability to incite the masses to violence.[15] Political leaders lost legitimacy in the eyes of people appeal to popular nationalism to secure their stay at power.[16] Through the mass media, over which they have privileged control, they achieve mobilization of people around a nationalist goal, and "construct"[17] ethnic conflict. Besides de-legitimized leaders, fanatic nationalist leaders can easily exhort people to ethnic conflict. In several cases national mobilization is accomplished through presentation of scapegoats that is mostly another weaker

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[13] Frederick Barth, ed. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1969).
[14] See Timur Kuran, "Now Out of Nowhere: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989," *World Politics* 44, no. 1, (October 1991): 7-48.
[15] For developed discussion of elite manipulation, see Paul Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991); Valere P. Gagnon, Jr., "Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict: The Case of Serbia," *International Security* 19, no. 3, (Winter 1994/95): 130-166; For discussion of elite manipulation in democratization process in post-socialist countries, see Jack Snyder, *From Voting to Violence*.
[16] The recent version of theory is about the Communist leaders who tried to stay at office after the demise of Soviet Union. Thanks to their access to media and existence of scapegoats in each community, those leaders became the vanguards of new nationalism in their respective societies. For more information, see Jack Snyder & Karen Bellentine, "Nationalism and the Marketplace of Ideas," *International Security* 21, no. 2, (Fall 1996): 5-40.
[17] Paul R. Brass, *Theft of an Idol: Text and Context in the Representation of Collective Violence* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 26.

ethnic group. Hence, the eruption of ethnic violence, particularly in the post-Soviet geography, was believed to be in line with interests of elites.

Nonetheless, this approach assumes very small independent effect to nationalism, and underestimates the power of nationalism.[18] Secondly, this approach over-predicts ethnic conflict. For that matter, it fails to explain why political leaders are highly successful to stir people up for violence, but unsuccessful in dissuading an angry population from engaging in violence. Additionally, elite manipulation explanation is criticized for creating a façade "of evil politicians and innocent masses"[19] and assigning too little room to individual acts by ordinary people.[20] Lastly, this theory is silent when it comes to question why some leaders succeed in their goals, but others do not.

Theories of Extreme Ethnic Violence*:* Yugoslavia and the FSU, formerly models of coexistence, became epicenters of extreme ethnic violence following the Cold-War. A number of violent ethnic conflicts erupted in these formerly multiethnic states. Many scholars have developed theories and applied their theories to these specific cases to understand the extreme ethnic violence.

Early attempts to explain the post-Soviet violent ethnic conflicts assumed the presence of mutual hostility among competing ethnic groups in what eventually came to be labeled "ancient hatreds" argument. "Ancient hatreds", the most common but least analytical explanation, found its place in many newspapers and a few scholarly works. According to this approach the "age-old hatreds", suppressed by a temporary rule of communism, is now freed to be expressed by groups

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[18] For thorough discussion of literature, see Monica D. Toft, *The Geography of Ethnic Violence: Identity, Interests, and The Indivisibility of Territory* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003).
[19] Sudhi Kakar, *The Colors of Violence: Cultural Identities, Religion, and Conflict* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), 150-51.
[20] Pandey Gyanendra, "The Defense of the Fragment: Writing About Hindu-Muslim Riots in India Today," *Representations* 37, (1992): 27-55.

against their life-long enemies. As the hatred passes from generation to generation and an individual's identity is closely tied to that of a specific group, they feel threatened when their respective groups are threatened by historic enemies. Historical memories, myths against enemies are important factors in mobilization of a group against an age-old enemy.

A deep research into post-Soviet conflicts, however, reveals that this theory is not successful in explaining ethnic conflicts. First of all, many of the ethnic conflicts that erupted were not ancient. Secondly, theory can not explain why some ethnic groups with hatred against each other appealed to violence, but some others remained calm. Most would have expected Magyar-Romanian conflict rather than Georgian-Ossetin, but the opposite was the case.

Other, perhaps more complex and well analyzed, approaches to post-Soviet extreme ethnic conflicts comes from adherers of rational choice theory following the conflicts in Yugoslavia. This group of theorists incorporates some realist ideas from international relations theory into an explanation that assumes rationality of ethnic violence.[21] The leading rational choice theory was put forward by James Fearon. According to this approach violent ethnic conflict occurs when the commitment problem – that is two communities find themselves in a situation where third party no more assures agreements between them – takes places between the antagonistic groups. Consequently, the post-Socialist Eastern Europe and post-Soviet Transcaucasus has witnessed many violent ethnic conflicts, because majorities were no more able to commit themselves not to exploit ethnic minorities in newly independent states.[22] Barry Posen

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[21] For examples of this approach, see James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Explaining Interethnic Cooperation," *American Political Science Review* 90, no. 4 (December 1996): 715-735; Russel Hardin, *One for All: The logic of Group Conflict* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995); Lake and Rothchild, *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict*; Brown, *Ethnic Conflict and International Security*.

[22] For more information about the theory, see James D. Fearon, "Commitment Problem and the Spread of Ethnic Conflict," in *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict: Fear, Diffusion, and Escalation* edited by David Lake and Donald Rothchild, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998); James D. Fearon, "Ethnic War as a Commitment Problem", *Paper presented at the 1994 Annual Meetings of the American Political Science Association* (New York, August 30-September 2): 1-22.

proposed an alternative approach by applying "the security dilemma" concept of realist tradition of international relations theory post-Soviet ethnic conflicts. Ethnic conflict explodes when ethnic groups in a newly formed state find themselves responsible for their own security. When one of the groups takes necessary steps to ensure its security the same group triggers insecurity in another group. Violent ethnic conflict follows.[23] In third rationalist approach, proposed by David Lake and Donald Rothchild, the ethnic conflict perceived as the end result of information failures and commitment problem that prevent contending groups from reaching a peaceful resolution.[24] Rui de Figuerado and Barry Weingast presented another alternative explanation. In this approach the predatory elite, who invest on the rational fear of citizenry, regarded as the key cause of the ethnic war.[25]

The main contender of the rationalist theories is the socio-psychological approach. According to Stuart Kaufman's symbolic politics theory the real causes of violent ethnic conflict are group myths and "symbolic politics of chauvinist mobilization".[26] The treacherous leaders appeal to group myths and symbols that justify hostility to provoke ethnic conflict. Symbols and myths are important because they allow the elite to frame the conflict as a struggle against hostile and evil forces.

In the second part of thesis I will turn to a detailed discussion of post-Soviet case specific theories on ethnic conflicts. To assess the validity of my hypothesis I will apply those theories to

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[23] See Barry R. Posen, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict," in *Ethnic Conflict and International Security* edited by Michael E. Brown, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993).
[24] David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild, "Containing Fear: The Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict," *International Security* 21, no. 2 (Fall 1996): 41-75; See also David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild, *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict*.
[25] Rui JP de Figuerado and Barry Weingast, "The Rationality of Fear: Political Opportunism and Ethnic Conflict," in *Civil wars, Insecurity, and Intervention* edited by Barbara F. Water and Jack Snyder, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).
[26] Stuart J. Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2001); Stuart J. Kaufman, "Symbolic Politics or Rational Choice: Testing Theories of Extreme Ethnic Violence," *International Security* 30, no. 4 (Spring 2006): 45-86.

the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Accordingly, I will point out the shortcomings of each theory and argue how they can benefit from interaction. However, for the purpose of thesis I will first demonstrate the complexity of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with particular focus on years 1988-92: the period of escalation to full scale war.

PART I

Complexity of Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

In this part I will portray the complexity of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, in general overlooked by the theorists, through identification of different actors, their interactions with one another, within and between group relations. After defining the actor criteria the paper will focus on governmental, military, party and community level actors played key role in escalation of the conflict. In the following sections the events believed to be decisive in the development of the conflict will be examined together with analysis of interpretations of the immediate parties and impacts on the escalation. However, before proceeding to study of actors and vital events of the ethnic conflict in the course of 1988-1992 brief historical background of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict will be presented.

A Short History of Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh

Pre-Soviet Antagonism: Armenia and Azerbaijan, immediate parties to the conflict, establish their justifications and claims to Nagorno-Karabakh mainly on mutually exclusive historiographies[27] in which both groups were respectively exposed as early settlers and true owners of the region. Despite all disagreement the historiographies converge on the issue of arrival of new group of Armenians in Transcaucasus, particularly in today's Armenia, Baku, and

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[27] For elaborated historiographies of Armenians and Azeris, see Stpehen H. Astourian, "In Search of Their Forefathers: National Identity and the Historiography and Politics of Armenian and Azerbaijani Ethnogeneses," in *Nationalism and History – The Politics of Nation Building in Post-Soviet Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia* edited by Donald V. Scwartz and Razmik Panossian, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

Karabakh, following Tsarist Russia's wars against the Ottomans and Persians in the nineteenth century.[28]

When Baku oil boom was at its height in the early twentieth century the reliance of Russian authorities more on Armenians in distribution of higher managerial positions[29] set the roots of early animosities between affluent and urbanized Christian Armenians and peasant Muslim Azeris. The first inter-communal clashes, wherein sides classified each other for their respective social classes, erupted in Baku[30] as early as 1905[31], and eventually spread to Karabakh, Nakhchevan, and Yerevan[32], where ethnic groups lived in compact and identified one another with their ethnicity.

Until the bloody events of 1915 with all its causes and consequences[33] that started new wave of Armenian migration into Nagorno-Karabakh and Yerevan[34] relations between the

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[28] It is important to note that in all these regions Armenians were already present as separate ethnic group. The aforementioned migration only contributed to the increasing numbers of Armenians.

[29] See, Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus* (Richmond: Cruzon Press, 1999). Especially chapter on "The Armenian-Azerbaijani Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh".
According to the same author the role of Armenians in Baku can be compared to the Jews in Eastern Europe. Both groups are hard-working and intelligent communities with high cohesion and mutual support, and usually choose to live in isolation from natives. Linguistically, religiously, and ethnically different than the local populations, they dominate business life. Specifically, for that matter tensions with native population increases, since natives perceive them as exploiters.

[30] For detailed overview of conflict in Baku and its spread to regions, see Audrey Altstadt, "Baku: Transformation of Muslim City," in *The City in Late Imperial Russia* edited by Michael F. Hamm, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920: The Shaping of National Identity in a Muslim Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

[31] For thorough account of 1905 clashes, see Christopher J. Walker, *Armenia and Karabakh: The Struggle for Unity* (London: Minority Rights Publications, 1991); Also, see Caroline Cox and John Eibner, *Ethnic Cleansing in Progress: War in Nagorno-Karabakh* (London: Institute for Religious Minorities in the Islamic World, 1993).

[32] For the spread of clashes to regions, see Audrey Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and Identity under Russian Rule* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1992).

[33] The official Armenian view portrays the 1915 events as an organized genocide carried out by Ottoman Turks against Armenians. The official Turkish argument discredits the genocide claims and calls it expulsion of Armenians from Eastern Anatolia, which resulted in death of many due to harsh conditions. The present paper avoids taking parts and assumes it is not the objective of this paper to provide any insights. Hereafter 1915 events will be used as a reference to the known happenings of that year. For an Armenian account, see Richard Hovannisian ed., *The Armenian Genocide in Perspective* (New Brunnswick, N. J.: Transaction Publishers, 1988); For a Turkish account, see Kamuran Gurun, *The Armenian File: The Myth of Innocence Exposed* (New York, N.Y.: St. Martin's Press, 1985).

communities remained somewhat calm when the Russian empire re-established its firm control over the region. Amid the rising chaos out of the Bolshevik Revolution and turmoil of the World War Armenia and Azerbaijan declared their independence in 1918, when the latter, thanks to Ottoman support[35], achieved to ascertain the control of Nagorno-Karabakh, which was by now heavily dominated by Armenians.[36] With the material support of the Armenian Republic and radical *Dashnaktsutiun* organization, Armenians conducted continuous guerilla warfare and rebellions against Azerbaijan awaiting the actual collapse of the republic after the invasion of the Red Army.[37]

Uneasy, but peaceful coexistence until Gorbachev era: Subsequent to Soviet incorporation[38] of Republics in South Caucasus the struggle over Nagorno-Karabakh shifted from a military confrontation to a political debate. In their first meeting the revolutionary committee placed Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhchevan under Armenian administration and pressured Soviet Azerbaijan to confirm the decision by a statement. However, the transfer decision was denied by Azerbaijani authorities.[39] A year later the decision was completely reversed by the central authorities, and put both territories under the jurisdiction of Soviet Azerbaijan. Many believed the relationship of Soviet Union and Kemalist Turkey, then the closest ally of the Soviet Union,

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[34] Richard Hovannisian, "Caucasian Armenia between Imperial and Soviet Rule: The Interlude of National Indeppendece," in *Transcaucasia: Nationalism and Social Change* edited by Ronald G. Suny 261-262, (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publication, 1983).

[35] For advanced account of complex developments in the region during and after WWI, see Firuz Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951); Richard Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road to Independence* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1967); Richard Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia: The First Year, 1918-1919* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1971).

[36] See Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920*.

[37] For invasion of Transcaucasian Republics – Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia – by Bolsheviks, see Stephen Blank, "The Transcaucasian Federation and the Origins of the Soviet Union, 1921-22", *Central Asian Survey* no. 4, (1990).

[38] On invasion of the Red Army of Transcaucasian Republics, see Richard Pipes, *The Formation of Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917-1923* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964).

[39] On account of complicated developments of 1920, see & John Eibner, *Ethnic Cleansing in Progress*, 30-31; Walker, *Armenia and Karabakh*, 107-108.

played a key role in the making of that decision. The "Treaty of Brotherhood and Friendship" signed between the two finalized the *de jure* control of Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. Subsequently, in 1923 the region received autonomy status, and thereafter called Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO).[40]

Given that Karabakh was promised to Armenians by Bolsheviks before the invasion of the Red Army, the inclusion of it in Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) caused massive disappointment on the part of Armenians. As Armenian discontent remained high several political attempts were undertaken to achieve the transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenian jurisdiction. Due to various reasons tensions were alleviated till the 1960s, when new waves of protests on regard to Nagorno-Karabakh question were staged by Armenians. In the 1970s Armenians addressed thousands of petitions to Moscow without much success.[41] Equally important reason behind those petitions was the changing demographics of Nagorno-Karabakh in relation to the Armenian population: from 90% in 1939 to less than 80% in 1970.[42] Despite all calls from the Armenians, the successors of Stalin throughout Soviet history refused to revisit the Nagorno-Karabakh question.

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[40] In their articles Fraser et al., describes autonomous oblast as "An autonomous oblast (province) is supposed to have considerable cultural and administrative autonomy and is distinguished by a particular national composition and way of life, while an autonomous republic, which is structured as semisovereign state, is supposed to have greater political clout and prestige. In reality, both autonomous oblasts and autonomous republics are highly dependent on the republic to which they are subordinated", Niall M Fraser, Keith W. Hipel, John Jaworsky, and Ralph Zuljan, "A Conflict Analysis of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Dispute," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 34. no. 4 (December 1990), 656.

[41] On developments on Nagorno-Karabakh question during 1960s and 1970s, see Gerard J. Libaridian, ed., *The Karabakh File: Documents and Facts on the Question of Mountainous Karabakh, 1918-1988* (Cambridge: The Zoryan Institute, 1988), 42-46.

[42] For demography of Nagorno-Karabakh throughout twentieth century, see Alexandre Bennigsen and Enders Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire: A Guide* (Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 1986); David M. Lang, *The Armenians: A People in Exile* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988).

From Perestroika to 1992: In the second half of 1980s Armenian calls for the unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia were intensified, and mass rallies and protests[43] were organized besides petitioning the Central Committee of Communist Party of Soviet Union (CPSU) in Moscow. The intensification of the protest activities was attributed to Gorbachev's policy of *Glasnost*[44] that lessened the risk of expressing complaints and demands. The number of counter protests in Azerbaijan increased[45] in similar fashion, when Azeris began to utilize the opportunities emerged after *Glasnost*. [46] From then on, both sides intermittently engaged in small scale incidents that aroused animosity and complicated matters further.[47] Increasing minor incidents between the communities gradually urged the governments to pay more attention to the cries of their constituent populations.

On 20 February 1988 under the influence of the Armenian population the Soviet of Nagorno-Karabakh Oblast officially demanded from supreme soviets of Armenia, Azerbaijan and the USSR to be transferred to Armenian SSR. (See Appendix A) Two days later on 22 February CPSU Central Committee resolution refused the demand and stated that the transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia is not in the interest of the Armenian and Azerbaijani peoples.[48] On 26 February to protest the decision Armenians held strikes and demonstrations in Yerevan, in which more than one million people took part. Demonstrations were spread to Nagorno-Karabakh, where Azeri radio reported the murder of two Azeri youths by Armenians. After receiving news

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[43] See, Ronald G. Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 275-276.

[44] On provisions and implications of *Glasnost*, see Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917-1991* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 409-424.

[45] See Tadeusz Swietochowski, "Azerbaijan: Between Ethnic Conflict and Irredentism," *Armenian Review* 43, no. 2-3, (Summer-Autumn 1990): 35-49.

[46] For the reawakening of nationalities question as an unintended outcome of Gorbachev reforms, see Gail W. Lapidus, "Gorbachev's Nationalities Problem," *Foreign Affairs* 68, no.4, (Fall 1989): 92-108.

[47] In one of these incidents Armenians refused the candidacy of an Azeri village administrator in 1987. Clashes followed. When the news of inter-communal clash arrived in Yerevan new wave of violent protests against Azeris started. Claire Mouradian, "The Mountainous Karabakh Question: Inter-Ethnic Conflict or Decolonization Crisis?" *Armenian Review* 43, no. 2-3, (Summer-Autumn 1990): 1-34.

[48] See, Libaridian, *The Karabakh File*, 98.

Azeris, particularly those who were refugees from Yerevan, started to attack Armenians in Sumgait.[49] To escape possible inter-communal violence after the events of 27-28 February in Sumgait, refugee groups crossed border between Armenia[50] and Azerbaijan[51] in both directions.

In light of these developments and increasing chaos on 15 June the Armenian Supreme Soviet unanimously decided in favor unification with Nagorno-Karabakh. Two days later, however, in same the fashion, the Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet rejected the decision and declared that it is against the Constitution of the USSR. Similarly on 13 July NKAO the Soviet of Peoples Deputies declared its secession from Azerbaijan, but on the same day the Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet annulled the decision.[52] On 18 July USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium reaffirmed the attachment of Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan SSR. Tensions between these peoples continually increased until September, when authorities in Moscow declared a "state of emergency" in the NKAO. Later, on 12 January 1989, Gorbachev assigned a new interim government for the administration of Nagorno-Karabakh directly responsible to Moscow.[53] As we shall see, neither Armenians nor Azeris were content with the decision.[54] Meanwhile, the skirmishes and clashes between communities rose, since the interim government was not effective in finding permanent solutions to the problem at hand. Consequently, the interim government was called off and Nagorno-Karabakh was returned to Azerbaijan.[55] In response the Armenian government decided to incorporate the region and created a joint budget for Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.[56]

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[49] See Igor Nolyain, "Moscow's Initiation of the Azeri-Armenian Conflict," *Central Asian Survey* 13, no.4, (1994): 541-563.

[50] For exodus of Armenians from Azerbaijani cities, see Ronald G. Suny, "The Revenge of the Past: Socialism and Ethnic Conflict in Transcaucasia," *New Left Review* no. 184 (November-December 1990): 5-34.

[51] On flee of Azeris from Armenia, see Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, 197.

[52] For developments of 1988, see Walker, *Armenia and Karabakh*, 127.

[53] See Mouradian, "The Mountainous Karabakh Question," 24.

[54] On account of discontent in the part of communities, see Mark Saroyan, "The 'Karabakh Syndrome' and Azerbaijani Politics," *Problems of Communism* no. 39 (September-October 1990): 14-29.

[55] See Elizabeth Fuller, "Moscow Attempts New Solution to Nagorno-Karabakh Impasse," *Report on the USSR* Vol. 1, no. 49, (December 1990).

[56] See Audrey L. Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, p 212.

As the two sides started to believe in military solution both parties established paramilitary formations throughout 1989-90, and sporadically engaged in violence. As we shall see, during this period several crucial developments took place such as "Operation Ring", "Black January", and the Sumgait pogrom. Finally, on 26 November 1991, the Azerbaijani Soviet abolished the autonomous status of the region after Nagorno-Karabakh Soviet declared independence unilaterally on 2 September.[57] Within a month the official dissolution of USSR finalized, and parties were left on their own. Exactly that was the point of escalation from inter-communal clashes into full-scale war.[58]

Actors of the Conflict

As a general rule great majority of theories of ethnic conflict readily assume conflicting sides as a unitary actor unified around the same cause. Accordingly, government sits at the top of hierarchy with a clear command over military forces, which is regarded as a single body in most theories, and imposes its will on people, who are accepted as obedient and cooperative.

The present paper argues and will turn in detail in the second part that this kind of approach to ethnic conflict significantly overlooks the complexity of the conflicts and prevents to grasp the picture fully. Practice shows, particularly in post-Soviet conflicts, that in many cases governments have no control over military forces and can not impose their will on people during the violence. Military forces in their part are not unitary and fighting bodies are mostly comprised

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[57] See Svante E. Cornell, *Conflict Theory and the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Guidelines for a Political Solution* (Bromma, Sweden: Triton Publishers, 1997).

[58] The war, which left more than 30,000 dead and over a million refugees, ended with a ceasefire in 1994. Nagorno-Karabakh and seven other to which the Armenian side had claim came under control Armenian military forces. In the last thirteen years parties held more than 100 talks to reach a peaceful agreement. Although both sides developing their armies, most experts argue that none of the parties can undertake another war. Recent developments in 2007 rose the hopes for peaceful settlement. On 25 April 2007, Azeri FM and Co-chairs of Minsk group, responsible for peace talks on Nagorno-Karabakh for the first time declared the agreed principles of peace plan. According to peace plan Armenian forces will withdraw from five of seven occupied regions that surround Nagorno-Karabakh on a schedule made by Armenian military forces. In following periods, to be decided yet, Azeri community will be re-settled in Nagorno-Karabakh, whose final status will be determined through a referendum.

of unprofessional militias or paramilitary forces. In addition to actors events, political and nonpolitical and uncontrollable natural disasters, with diverse interpretations attached by parties have a serious impact on the further complication of the situation.

The case of Nagorno-Karabakh provides a sound basis to demonstrate the complexity of conflicts that is mainly neglected by the theories. The first step before analyzing the actors should be defining and deciding on the actors. At that point I will adopt actor definition of Fraser that follows:

> An actor, hereafter referred as a decision maker, may be an individual or a group of people represented by an organization. To be included as a decision maker in a conflict model; it must have some power to influence the conflict; the power of the decision maker is expressed in terms of options or courses of an action which are under its control to initiate in order to alter the conflict situation.[59]

Various actors ranging from governmental level to individual played a part during the evolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. From February 1988, when the early claims and first skirmishes have occurred, to the actual beginning of the full scale war in 1992, seven different governmental level actors can be identified. Their interactions with each other, concerns and interests, demands and decisions were crucial inputs to the complexity of the situation. Besides governments community level actors, amongst them Armenian and Azerbaijani communities in Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan and Armenian Diaspora elsewhere, participated in the process escalation. Most of the theories do not differentiate between the interests and demands of the communities who seemingly struggle for the same cause. The research into the interests of the respective communities makes it obvious that the argument that all Armenians uniformly supported the cause of independence, and all Azeri were for the suppression of these claims was a fallacy that entrapped most researchers who applied the theories to the case. Obviously, the most

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[59] Fraser et al., A Conflict Analysis of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Dispute", 653.

striking and foremost factor makes these communities separate players of the game is their ability to take up their arms and achieve the demands by self-enforcement. Here the issue of armies becomes part of explanation of the conflicts. Again the theories assume one central army fighting from each side. As will be established in following sections, in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh it is hard to talk about the unified armies fighting, especially in the period of early fights. Several army fractions fought from both sides not only against the enemy, but sometimes engaged in disarming one another or staging military coups against national governments. Lastly, the popular and nationalistic opposition groups in both countries contributed to the deterioration of the situation. From certain points of view they were playing more important and mostly negative role than the governments in evolution of the conflict. Therefore, those parties, fronts deserve special attention for the study of the conflict.

Governmental Level Actors

In theory governmental level actors are prime players in the evolution and the escalation of ethnic conflicts. Through decisions and policies governments possess a power to trigger or alleviate the worsening situation. To impose their will and enforce taken decisions governments hold enforcement units and budgets at their disposal, at least in theory. In most instances the same applies to Nagorno-Karabakh case with few exceptions, where governments lost control over the populations and military forces. As already mentioned, from 1988 to 1992 seven governmental level actors participated in the escalation. To understand the complexity of the conflict each of these governmental level actors should be examined separately.

Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic: From the start, the government of Soviet Azerbaijan was integral part of the process of escalation from non-violent political struggle to all-out war,

and played an imperative role in the early stages of the conflict through its occasionally controversial decisions. Throughout the evolution of the conflict the socialist government had several times changed its political course depending on the development of events.

Initially the response of the Azeri government to crowded Armenian rallies in Stepanakert[60], the dominantly Armenian populated capital of NKAO, was limited to complaining to Moscow on the grounds that these heated meetings with separatist messages threatened the territorial integrity of the republic. A defining moment in the course of events that pressed on the Azerbaijani government to take serious measures came when the Soviet of People's Deputies of Nagorno-Karabakh passed a resolution for the transfer of the oblast to the Armenian SSR on 20 February, 1988. From then on, starting with condemnation and rejection of resolution, Azerbaijani government could not stop the chain of events that radicalized both the measures the government had taken and responses from the Armenian population in Yerevan and Stepanakert. The Azerbaijani government's second resounding rejection, backed by the Article 78 of the USSR constitution[61], of the Armenian SSR request[62] for the unification notably exacerbated the inter-republican relations. In the last of peaceful bids by Nagorno-Karabakh, the Azerbaijani government followed the same course and immediately annulled the unilateral secession decision.[63]

Quite expected and objective to even nonchalant observers though were the moves of Soviet Azerbaijani government, which explicitly demonstrated to the Armenian side the impossibility of pursuing their goals in a peaceful and constitutional way. Although it was a

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[60] Ronald G. Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 197-198.

[61] The article was read: "The territory of a union republic may not be altered without its consent. The boundaries between republics may be altered by mutual agreement of the unon republics concerned, subkect to confirmation by the USSR". Francis Field, "Nagorno-Karabakh: A Constitutional Conundrum", *Radio Liberty Research*. (15 July 1988): 3.

[62] Marcus Gee & Anthony Wilson-Smith, "Enraged Republics," *Maclean's* 101, no. 27 (27 June 1988): 28.

[63] Michael P. Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict: Causes and Implications* (London: PRAEGER, 1998), 30.

conventional way for a traditional government claiming sovereignty over its borders to act, in other instances the vehement and controversial measures taken by the government radicalized both the Armenian and Azeri masses, and directly contributed to the steady escalation of conflict.

Particularly in two occasions the policies of government supplied the radicals from both sides a ready material to be used to mobilize more moderate people. Firstly, the fleeing Azeri masses from Armenia were channeled to Nagorno-Karabakh, which augmented the Armenian anger[64] since the population ratio was increasingly changing in favor of Azeris in last years. While all this was happening in Nagorno-Karabakh, the government in order to make its voice heard better and points taken serious by Moscow mobilized masses, some of them frustrated refugees, in Baku that soon turned into uncontrollable violent mobs ready to collide. In both these cases governments policies whether intentionally or not resulted in the inter-communal clashes in Nagorno-Karabakh and Baku. The spread of clashes to Sumgait, will be turned in due course, was particularly dramatic where official death toll was 32.[65]

When the mobilized masses, now under the leadership of the Azerbaijani Popular Front (APF), responded to Moscow's installment of "special administration" in Nagorno-Karabakh with the rail blockades[66], the Azerbaijani government found itself trapped between Moscow demanding cessation of the blockade and the APF pushing for withdrawal of support from Moscow's special administration in Nagorno-Karabakh[67] and passage of "law on the sovereignty of the republic".[68] The Azeri government chose to side with radical APF for popular goals and rushed to fill the administration and security organs of Nagorno-Karabakh, reinstated under

[64] Bill Keller, "Soviet Region Hit by New Ethnic Unrest and Strike", *New York Times*, (16 September 1988).
[65] Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 28.
[66] Elizabeth Fuller, "Nagorno-Karabakh and the Rail Blockade", *Report on the USSR*, no. 41 (13 October 1989): 23.
[67] Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, 206.
[68] The law confirmed Azerbaijani sovereignty over all parts of the country, including Nagorno-Karabakh, and any territorial changes became contingent to a national referendum. More importantly, however, the law provided Azerbaijan a right to withdraw freely form the USSR.

Azerbaijan SSR after the abolishment of NKAO "special administration", with those of Azeri ethnic background.[69] The installment of new administration mainly comprised of Azeris raised the anger of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians, who dominated the administration throughout the Soviet period, to an implacable level.

The relation of government with its own constituency was of significance to the escalation process. Its failure to forestall bloody Soviet intervention in Baku and attempt of newly installed government to assert authority with presence of Soviet troops in the capital[70] de-legitimized the communist government in the eyes of citizenry and facilitated creation of paramilitary groups. Sporadic clashes between Armenian and Azeri unprofessional paramilitary forces provided a prospect for the government to conduct a joint military operation with Soviet Army, called Operation 'Ring', to intimidate and dissuade Armenians from unification claims while at the same time boost government's popularity at home. Nonetheless, the policies backfired[71], when Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh came to see military war as the only solution and embarked on the creation of independent military forces with full force.

To sum up, the Azerbaijan SSR initially limited its actions to complaining to Moscow and enforcement of party discipline together with the dispatch of dissident party officials[72] to outer regions while trying to deal with the Nagorno-Karabakh question. Amid the official requests on unification by the Armenian SSR and NKAO, the Azeri government hardened its measures after rejecting the resolution in each case. However, handling the issue heavy-handedly backfired and Nagorno-Karabakh started to slide out from Azerbaijani control. Facing anger in the capital from

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[69] Saroyan, "The 'Karabakh Syndrome' and Azerbaijani Politics", 27; Elizabeth Fuller, "Moscow Attempts New Solution to Nagorno-Karabakh Impasse", 12.

[70] Saroyan, "The 'Karabakh Syndrome' and Azerbaijani Politics", 26; Anthony Wilson-Smith, "Explosive Protests," *Maclean's* 103, no. 3 (15 January 1990): 22.

[71] David E. Murphy, "Operation 'Ring': The Black Beret of Azerbaijan," *Journal of Soviet Military Studies*, 5, no. 1, (March 1992): 84-86.

[72] Mark Malkasian, *Gha-ra-bagh: The Emergence of the National Democratic Movement in Armenia* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996) 30.

masses who demanded resignation, government forced to take more radical steps which were far from achieving the objectives. Failure or apathy of government to stop the population from engaging in pogroms ended in the Russian military invasion of Baku, therefore the end of it. From 1988 till the official dissolution of the USSR the Azeri central government with the aim of maintaining possession over NKAO sided with the Moscow in settlement of issues.[73] In its relationship with radical APF and independent militia the government proved to be ineffective. With its involvement in the Sumgait pogrom and Operation 'Ring' government almost ruled out the possibility of a peaceful resolution.

Armenian SSR: Starting from the early days of establishment of the USSR until its demise the Armenian SSR in more than a few cases brought the Nagorno-Karabakh question before the central authorities despite its commitment to communism and close relations with Azerbaijan SSR. In the second part of the 1980s, when debates over Nagorno-Karabakh question overheated, the presence of the Armenian SSR as a constituent member of the USSR next to Azerbaijan encompassed dual effect on evolution of the conflict. For the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians, demanding secession from Azerbaijan, to have a neighboring kin-state with material and moral backing was always an elevating factor. As for the CPSU and the Azerbaijani SSR fact of another Soviet Republic as a patronage of secessionist claim changed the character of conflict from intra-republican to inter-republican.

The communist party of Armenia followed a diverging path during the escalation of the conflict. Remaining loyal to Moscow at the outset, the government was gradually pressed on to side with the population striving for unification of NKAO and Armenia SSR. Government's acceptance of nationalist program and issuing of resolutions that called the central authorities in

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[73] Shale Horowitz, "Explaining Post-Soviet Ethnic Conflicts: Using Regime Type to Discern the Impact and Relative Importance of Objective Antecedents," *Nationalities Paper* 29, no. 4, (2001): 640.

Moscow to approve unification[74] after pressures of the Karabakh Committee[75], unofficial leadership of mobilized population, exacerbated its relations with Baku and Moscow. Although initially endorsed[76] the appointment of "special administration" with rationale that it would exclude the NKAO from Baku's rule[77], the government officially recognized the National Council, created to replace Moscow appointed administration, on the expense of relations with Baku and Moscow. [78] In a retaliatory move the CPSU Central Committee abolished the special administration and reinstated NKAO under Azerbaijan SSR.[79] Outraged by the decision, the Armenian Supreme Soviet and the National Council declared the United Armenian Republic, which would be comprised of Armenia SSR and NKAO.[80] (See Appendix C) Although the proclamation almost immediately condemned by Azerbaijan SSR[81], the declaration accelerated antagonism at the republican level. (See Appendix D) Yet, the Armenian government, almost under complete control of the nationalist Armenian National Movement, continuation of Karabakh Committee, took one step further and included NKAO in its new unified budget.[82] Decision followed the fate of previous Armenian SSR decisions and refused not only by Baku, but this time also by Moscow.[83] The rapidly increasing militancy[84] that accelerated flee of Armenia's Azeri population[85] amid the accentuating duel between Armenia and Azerbaijan finally led to the replacement of the communist government with the nationalist government. The

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[74] Gee and Wilson-Smith, "Enraged Republics", 28.

[75] Ronald G. Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 202; Christopher J. Walker, *Armenia and Karabakh*, 129.

[76] Fraser et al,"A Conflict Analysis of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Dispute," 668.

[77] Saroyan, "The 'Karabakh Syndrome' and Azerbaijani Politics," 20-21.

[78] *Armenpress International Service*, 26 September 1989, in FBIS-SOV, #89-189 (2 October 1989): 63-64.

[79] *Baku Domestic Service*, 29 November 1989, in FBIS-SOV, #89-228 (29 November 1989): 89.

[80] *Moscow Domestic Service*, 2 December 1989, in FBIS-SOV, #89-231 (4 December 1989): 112-113.

[81] *Baku Domestic Service*, 6 December 1989, in FBIS-SOV, #89-234 (7 December 1989): 86-87.

[82] See Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, 212.

[83] For response of Azerbaijani SSR, see *Baku Domestic Service*, 10 January 1990, in FBIS-SOV, #90-008 (11 January 1990): 97; On the annulment of decision by Moscow, *TASS*, 10 January 1990, in FBIS-SOV, #90-009 (12 January 1990): 82.

[84] Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 39.

[85] Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, 197.

ultimate objective set out to be done by the newly elected government was disbandment of the disobedient militias[86], in which it proved to be quite ineffective, in order to stop raids on the Azeri settlements[87] and forestall Soviet intervention.

However, the relations with Moscow and Baku further strained when on 23 August, less than a month after elections, Armenian Supreme Soviet passed a document, called "Declaration on the Independence of Armenia", which openly started process of secession and renamed Armenian SSR as Armenia.[88] There were few clauses in the same document to agitate Baku: inclusion of Nagorno-Karabakh as an integral part of the United Armenia and establishment of independent armed forces.[89] The turning point in the course of events came when the Armenian Supreme Soviet voted to boycott Gorbachev organized all-Union referendum[90] and clearly declared that Armenia starts secession procedures from USSR.[91] For many these radical measures played to the hands of the Azeri and Soviet leaders to enforce the Operation 'Ring' as a punishment.

All in all, Armenia's existence as a neighboring kin-state changed the intrastate conflict into inter-republican one and gave confidence to the secessionist Nagorno-Karabakh, which was militarily and economically dependent on Armenia.[92] Initially loyal to the central authorities in Moscow, the government was forced to become closer to unification demanding population. In several acts, intended to boost popularity, the communist government arranged few popular

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[86] *Ibid.*, 239.
[87] On accounts of a number of events, see *TASS*, 3 September 1990, in FBIS-SOV, # 90-171 (4 September 1990): 110; *TASS*, 23 October 1990, in FBIS-SOV, #90-206 (24 October 1990): 116-117; *Moscow Domestic Service*, 3 December 1990, in FBIS-SOV, #90-233 (4 December 1990): 43-44; Jonas Bernstein, "A Big Brother Turns into a Foe," *Insight on the News*, Vol. 6, no. 34, (20 August 1990): 29.
[88] *Yerevan Domestic Service*, 24 August 1990, in FBIS-SOV, #90-166 (27 August 1990): 106-107.
[89] *Moscow Domestic Service*, 23 August 1990, in FBIS-SOV, #90-165 (24 August 1990): 100.
[90] *Yerevan Domestic Service*, 31 January 1991, in FBIS-SOV, #91-022 (1 February 1991): 57-58.
[91] *Yerevan Domestic Service*, 4 March 1991, in FBIS-SOV, #91-044 (6 March 1991): 69-70.
[92] Horowitz, "Explaining Post-Soviet Ethnic Conflicts," 641.

meetings[93] and replaced the flag of the communist republic with the 1918 Armenian tri-color banner.[94] In continuation of popular measures the government, by now under influence of the nationalist groups, passed several resolutions on unification of Armenia SSR and NKAO, which were detrimental to its relations with Baku and Moscow. However, more importantly, the situation deteriorated when the government failed to control mushroomed armed bands and therefore outflow of Azeri population. Hence, uneasy relations of the government with Moscow and Baku and its support to NKAO together with its failure to disband military groups, which continuously raided against the Azeri population, negatively contributed to the escalation of the conflict. At some point the government turned out to be completely ineffective to stop the reigning chaos and escalation.

CPSU: Reforms the late Soviet leader Gorbachev intended to implement eventually promoted, directly or indirectly, the rise of nationalism and in some cases irredentism.[95] The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which brought two Soviet Republics – Armenia and Azerbaijan – to the brisk of war, was one of such cases. From that point of view, the decisions made in Moscow even well-before the actual beginning of the hostilities had precipitating effect on evolution and escalation of the conflict. (See above)

Until the NKAO Supreme Soviet's official request for its transferal to Armenia SSR that left Gorbachev with no option but to take a clear position Moscow's response to Armenian petitions[96] and Azerbaijani calls to take an active role was complete disregard. Moscow's

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[93] Malkasian, *Gha-ra-bagh*, 72.
[94] *Ibid.*, 194.
[95] On the issue of rising nationalities problem as unintended outcome of Gorbachev's reforms, see Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, 409-424; Lapidus, "Gorbachev's Nationalities Problem," 100-102.
[96] Some analysts linked it Gorbachev's personal lack of knowledge on intensity and complexity of animosity between USSR's ethnic groups. Furthermore he had " no sympathy whatsoever for separates tendencies", see Richard Pipes, "The Soviet Union Adrift," *Foreign Affairs* 70, no. 1, America and the World, (1990/91): 77; other authors accused him for being unwilling to find a permanent solution but rather embarking on measure that aimed at calming populace, Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 29.

negative answer[97] to the official NKAO request was a total disappointment to the Armenians of the region. Instead, Moscow opted to appease Armenians of NKAO with indulgences such as investment in housing and social services.[98] When the Armenians in Armenia and NKAO took it streets to display their anger and discontent, Gorbachev called the activities as "extremism" and "anti-*perestroika* forces" [99] that were set to undermine his reforms. When the Armenian SSR requested with the resolution of Supreme Soviet the annexation of Nagorno-Karabakh Gorbachev labeled it as "attempts to abuse *glasnost* with the aim of re-carving state borders".[100] Gorbachev's rebuff of the Armenian claims in a very harsh fashion "marked the end of their support for the Soviet leader and his reforms."[101] The last remaining ties between Gorbachev and the Armenians who put their faith in *perestroika* and unification were broken when Soviet Ministry of Internal Affairs Troops (MVD) cracked down on protestors[102] who achieved to interrupt the working of Yerevan airport through a mass invasion.[103] Armenian alienation from Moscow was completed after Gorbachev ordered the arrest of the leaders of the Karabakh Movement and rejected the last peaceful attempt of NKAO for unification on 18 July 1988. (See Appendix B)

Although Kremlin's rejection of the Armenian demands was greeted with enthusiasm in the Azeri capital, Azeris in general were not content with all implications of Moscow's handling

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[97] The decision of the CPSU Central Committee was read as follow: "Having examined the information about the developments in the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region, the CPSU Central Committee holds that the actions and demands directed at revising the existing national and territorial structure contradict the interests of the working people in Soviet Azerbaijan and Armenian and damage inter-ethnic relations". "Response of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR to the demand by the government of Mountainous Karabakh", in Gerard J. Libardian, *The Karabagh File*, 98.

[98] Yuri Rost, *Armenian Tragedy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990): 2; "Party and Government Resolution on Nagorno-Karabakh", *BBC Summary of World Broadcast*, (4 April 1988).

[99] Philip Taubman, "Gorbachev Says Ethnic Unrest Could Destroy Restructuring Effort," *New York Times* (28 November 1988): 6.

[100] Quoted in Elizabeth Fuller, "Nagorno-Karabakh: No Closer to Compromise," *Radio Liberty Research* RL 295/88 (30 June 1988): 1.

[101] Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 29; also, see Walker, *Armenia and Karabakh*, 125-126.

[102] Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict* 30.

[103] Elizabeth Fuller, "Recent Developments in the Nagorno-Karabakh Dispute," *Radio Liberty Research* RL 312/88 (11 July 1988): 1.

of the Nagorno-Karabakh question. The population accused Moscow for its failure to carry out the requirements of the USSR constitution that presumed inviolability of the republican borders without consent of the concerned parties. Above and beyond all, Azeris were overwhelmingly concerned about the *de facto* loss of control over NKAO after Moscow's installment of the "special administration" as an interim solution to satisfy both parties.[104] Despite the endorsement of the measure by the Armenian[105] and Azeri[106] governments, the peoples in both republics remained unhappy with the short-term solution.[107] Moscow acceded to abolish the "special administration" and reinstate NKAO under Azerbaijan SSR[108] after series of costly long-term rail blockades by the APF[109], which was perceived by Armenians as Moscow's submission to Azeri demands.[110] However, the milestone event in relations of Moscow with Armenians, both radical and moderate, came when Gorbachev decided to collude with the Azeri authorities in the Operation 'Ring' to dissuade Armenia from its resolute drive for independence. Subsequently the relations between Moscow and Yerevan remained in a deadlock until the collapse of the USSR.

Paradoxically, the aggravation of relations between center and Armenia did not necessarily cause improvement in affairs of Azeris and Soviet leadership. The arrest of the heads of the APF[111] and military invasion of Baku by the Soviet Army that left more than hundred

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[104] Mouradian, "The Mountainous Karabakh Question," 24.
[105] *Pravda*, 19 January 1989, in FBIS-SOV, #89-013 (23 January 1989): 66.
[106] *Baku Domestic Service*, 15 January 1989, in FBIS-SOV, #89-010 (17 January 1989):52.
[107] Fraser et al., "A Conflict Analysis of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Dispute," 668.
[108] *Baku Domestic Service*, 29 November 1989, in FBIS-SOV, #89-228 (29 November 1989): 89.
[109] Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, 206.
[110] Several approaches were put forward to explain the rationale behind Gorbachev's decision to abolish interim government and reinstate Nagorno-Karabakh under Azerbaijani control. In first of these accounts it was argued that Gorbachev restored the status quo hoping to wash his hands of the matter. In second version, Moscow was preparing the groundwork for forceful settlement of the dispute. Assuming the resurgence of violence under Azerbaijani rule, Moscow would have legitimate reason to centrally imposed settlement. On the first version, see Mouradian, "The Mountainous Karabakh Question," 29-30; on the second approach, see Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 1998 36.
[111] Bill Keller, "Moscow Arrests Azerbaijani Rebels," *New York Times* (25 January 1990): 8.

Azeris dead[112] "broke whatever bonds of limited trust remained between the rulers in Moscow and their subjects in Azerbaijan."[113]

Having lost their faith in Moscow's handling of the Nagorno-Karabakh question, both groups, Armenians with considerable success, engaged in independent militias building race to defend themselves as well as further their cause. Besides raids against each other, Armenian and Azeri military formations employed several attacks against Soviet forces to revenge and acquire arms.[114] In fact Gorbachev's decree calling for immediate disbanding of military groups fell to def ears, and clearly demonstrated how ineffective the late Soviet Central authorities became.

Unquestionably, the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh posed not an easy problem to central authorities in Moscow, given that two Union republics were party to the dispute and constitutional provision on how to handle the conflict when constituent states clash over a disputed territory was in lack. The situation in Nagorno-Karabakh was not unique in Union territory, and Moscow had to be cautious not to set undesirable precedent. For that reason, Soviet leaders naturally opposed to Armenian demands[115] and sided with Baku[116] in its search for solution. Without doubt the Soviet state in 1988 still had the sufficient strength to suppress nationalistic demands and contain violence. Therefore to understand the reasons behind Moscow's refrain from using large-scale force, one should deeply analyze the ongoing politics behind the walls of Kremlin. Obviously, Gorbachev was aware that employing large-scale force to put down popular nationalistic demands would put his reform program at risk. More importantly he believed that conservative elements within Kremlin, who would attempt stage a

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[112] Bill Keller, "Soviet Troops Bogged Down by Azerbaijanis' Blockades of Railroads and Airfields," *New York Times* (19 January 1990): 1; Francis X. Clines, "Soviet Forces Said to Battle with Azerbaijani Militants: Call-up of Reserves Halted", *New York Times* (20 January 1990). p. 1.

[113] Saroyan, "The 'Karabakh Syndrome' and Azerbaijani Politics," 29.

[114] Malkasian, *Gha-ra-bagh*, 201.

[115] *Ibid.*, 120.

[116] *Ibid.*, 116.

coup against him later, would misuse eruption of civil unrest to discredit his reforms and eventually sack him out.

In the evolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict the central authorities "committed to a policy of reacting to developments rather than heading them off through the search for a suitable solution."[117] Hence, the measures that Gorbachev took during the process had mainly contributed to escalation rather than playing a calming role. Both sides believed that the policies pursued by the centre were not in their interests. Moscow's failure to persuade the parties for a peaceful settlement and "success" in aggravating anger in both sides directly played to hands of radicals to consolidate their ranks. The moderate voices assuming more active role for the center soon became under fire of radical segments. Decisions such as empowering Soviet troops to suppress unauthorized meetings, military crack downs in Baku and Yerevan, annulment of Armenian proclamations on independence, broke the ties between Moscow and respective capitals and had negative inputs to the escalation process.

Nagorno-Karabakh Soviet: The NKAO Soviet of People's Deputies was heavily dominated by Armenians and with an exception of handful the great majority of deputies were strongly advocating the unification ideas.[118] Various resolutions such as official request for transfer of the region to Armenia[119], unilateral secession from Azerbaijan SSR[120], and adoption of unified budget with Armenia SSR were adopted by the NKAO Soviet[121] that manifestly convoluted the

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[117] Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 29.

[118] Boris Yevrokov, first secretary of NKAO from 1973 to 1988, was a striking figure. Despite all cries of Armenian deputies he insistently refused to bring the question of Nagorno-Karabakh before Baku and Moscow. It was during his term cultural and academic exchanges between Armenia and region were in its worst. Ultimately, he was a sole representative of Baku's interests in the region. It is not coincidence after his resignation Armenian community expressed their demands more loudly, and legislative body proclaimed secession in many episodes.

[119] Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 27.

[120] *TASS*, 13 July 1988, in FBIS-SOV, #88-134 (13 July 1988): 55; *Baku Domestic Service*, 14 July 1988, in FBIS-SOV, #88-135 (14 July 1988): 41.

[121] In fact, with these decisions the powerless institution of a local Soviet had broken a taboo on the official level. For the first time in Soviet history the institution of that sort dared to place a nationalist demand bypassing executive control.

its relations Baku and heightened animosity between Armenians and Azeris of the autonomous region. The establishment the National Council of Nagorno-Karabakh as an alternative parallel government to the Gorbachev appointed "special administration" and creation of the Krunk Committee[122], coordinated the formation of paramilitary forces, by the deputies had significant impact in subsequent course of developments.[123] Among the governmental level actors the National Council of NKAO was the first to initiate the creation of military units in an organized manner. As decisive as Armenia and Azerbaijan SSR the Soviet NKAO through its creation of paramilitary forces, which slid out of hand soon, and passing of resolutions that perceived as provocative and antagonistic in Baku had substantial implications for escalation of the conflict. Along with the increasing violence the NKAO, as an actor, grew to be uncontrollable body neither by Moscow nor by Baku and Armenia.

Volskiy Committee: Perhaps the least crucial of all governmental level actors, though by no means insignificant, was the Nagorno-Karabakh's special administration headed by Gorbachev's personal convoy Arkady Volskiy. The USSR Supreme Soviet decree on 12 January 1989 placed the region under six-person committee which assumed the leadership of organs of the local state power and the administration of NKAO.[124]

As already mentioned, even though the Armenian and Azerbaijani Communist governments endorsed the measure seeing it as a one-time opportunity to consolidate their rule at home[125], the Armenian and Azeri people in the region greeted it with resentment. While the Armenians of the region saw it as a move to expunge the Armenian administration, the Nagorno-

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[122] For more information on *Krunk* Committee, see Malkasian, *Gha-ra-bagh*, 73-75.
[123] Mouradian, "The Nagorno-Karabakh Question," 26-27.
[124] *Ibid.,* 24.
[125] Saroyan, "The 'Karabakh Syndrome'," 20-21; For the Armenian response, see *Pravda*, 19 January 1989, in FBIS-SOV, #89-013 (23 January 1989); On Azerbaijan's official reply, see *Baku Domestic Service*, 15 January 1989, in FBIS-SOV, #89-010 (17 January 1989).

Karabakh Azeris interpreted it as *de facto* and *de jure* loss of Azerbaijani sovereignty over the autonomous region.[126]

During its short reign the six-person supervisory committee tried to arrest the popular leaders who were allegedly provoking violence in the region. The administration took the most decisive steps when it abolished the Krunk Committee[127], and achieved the installment of MVD troops, which engaged in abuses and harassment against population, into the region to strengthen its hold on to the power.

Despite its short life the Volskiy Committee had some significant inputs to the escalation of conflict. Firstly, both communities realized once more that Moscow was not capable of settling the dispute in accordance with their interests that ultimately necessitated them to seek self-enforced solutions. The endorsement of the measure by the communist governments in Armenia and Azerbaijan further alienated the populations from their respective governments. Positioning of new MVD troops in the region was another factor that contributed rather than eliminating violence. Particularly for the paramilitary groupings, prime actors behind the ever increasing inter-communal violence in the region, the MVD troops were fine source to meet their weapon deficit. Administration's oppressive approach to the popular leaders of the region endowed the radicals in both sides with a chance to strengthen their positions vis-à-vis the moderate.

National Armenian Government: Armenia's path to independence was through replacement of the communist government by an anti communist nationalistic movement.[128] After the devastation of the earthquake and catastrophic economic sanctions of Azerbaijan the perspectives and official position of Armenia on the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute underwent a notable

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[126] Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 207.
[127] Jan Koehler and Christoph Zurcher, "The Art of Loosing State: Weak Empire to Weak Nation-State around Nagorno-Karabakh," in *Potentials of Disorder* edited by Jan Koehler and Zurcher Christoph 21, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).
[128] David D. Laitin and Ronald G. Suny, "Armenia and Azerbaijan: Thinking a Way Out of Karabakh," *Middle East Policy* VII, no. 1 (October, 1999): 154.

change.[129] Armenian president, Ter-Petrossian, broadly championed concessions to Azerbaijan to evade the economic blockade[130] and tried to improve relations with Turkey[131] Moreover, he pressured the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians to give up the independence claims and limit their demands to greater autonomy. In a milestone event, which is generally overlooked in the literature and will be turned in following sections, Armenia officially renounced its claims on Nagorno-Karabakh on 22 September 1991.[132] And when Nagorno-Karabakh declared its independence Armenia refused to recognize it officially[133] and portrayed the ongoing conflict as one between Azerbaijan and the independence seeking Nagorno-Karabakh.[134]

Though the independent Armenian government devoted itself to avert the war, its incompetence to cop with the paramilitary forces in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh became a self-defeating factor. Due to his unpopular concessions to Azerbaijan the Ter-Petrossian government faced hardships in controlling the radical groups among the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians. Nevertheless, the government had left by no options but to support the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh, when they opted for all-out war against Azerbaijan to attain their goals. Presidential decree on the creation of a national army[135] was conceived as a sign of undeclared war in the military and political circles of the Azerbaijani government. On the one hand, government's policies promoted radicalization amongst the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians who came to believe on military solution even more. Then again, its efforts to build a national army damaged the somewhat ameliorated relations with Azerbaijan.

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[129] Horowitz, "Explaining Post-Soviet Ethnic Conflicts,", 641.
[130] *Ibid.*, 640.
[131] Laitin and Suny, "Armenia and Azerbaijan," 156.
[132] Bill Keller, "Armenia Yielding Claim on Enclave", *New York Times* (23 September 1991): 12; Elizabeth Fuller, "El'tsin Brokers Agreement on Nagorno-Karabakh", *Report on the USSR* 3, no. 40 (4 October 1991): 17; Fred Hiatt, "Armenia, Azerbaijan Agree to Cease-Fire", *Washington Post* (25 September 1991): 20.
[133] Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 69.
[134] For detailed discussion of the policy, see Horowitz, "Explaining Post-Soviet Ethnic Conflicts"; Koehler and Zurcher, "The Art of Loosing the State".
[135] Malkasian, *Gha-ra-bagh*, 201.

National Azerbaijani Government: While Armenia was entrenching its independence by the non-communist government, Azerbaijan declared its independence with the same apparatus of the previous communist government, which was eager to prevent dissolution of the USSR. To reverse its illegitimate perception the government took several popular measures[136] and promised to crack the Armenian separatism, provided that the Nagorno-Karabakh question was far the most sensitive issue. For this reason, unlike Armenia, Azerbaijan's official position on the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute was hardened and government for various reasons[137] moved swiftly to alter the regions autonomous status and place it under direct rule of Baku.[138]

In the air of rising violence the government embarked on oil[139] and rail blockades[140] that were deathly detrimental to Armenian and Nagorno-Karabakh economies. When the helicopter carrying the Azerbaijani Minister of Interior Affairs was downed by Armenian irregulars, government terminated autonomous status of Nagorno-Karabakh[141] and government forces demolished the power and water facilities running toward Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. [142] Within few days Azerbaijani presidential decree called all able-bodied citizens above eighteen to active military service.[143]

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[136] For more information, see Elizabeth Fuller, "The Transcaucasus: Real Independence Remains Elusive", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report* 1, no. 1 (3 January 1992): 48-49.

[137] Given that Azerbaijan was a multinational state and minorities were living in compact thanks to Soviet territorial gerrymandering, the first independent government was particularly inclined to take all necessary means to bring the Armenian separatism to an end before it set a precedent. Elizabeth Fuller, "Azerbaijan Rediscovers Its 'Vanished' Minorities", *Report on the USSR* 2, no. 52 (28 December 1990): 20; Shireen T. Hunter, *The Transcaucasus in Transition: Nation-Building and Conflict* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1994): 64.

[138] Koehler and Zurcher, "The Art of Loosing the State," 2.

[139] *Interfax*, 18 November 1991, in FBIS-SOV, #91-223 (19 November 1991): 82; *Radio Yerevan Network*, 20 November 1991, in FBIS-SOV, #91-225 (21 November 1991): 82.

[140] *Radio Moscow World Service*, 25 November 1991, in FBIS-SOV, #91-227 (25 November 1991): 93.

[141] *Radio Baku Network*, 27 November 1991, in FBIS-SOV, #91-229 (27 November 1991): 63-64; Koehler and Zurcher, "The Art of Loosing the State," 2.

[142] *TASS International Service*, 24 November 1991, in FBIS-SOV, #91-227 (25 November 1991): 93-94.

[143] *Radio Baku Network*, 5 December 1991, in FBIS-SOV, #91-235 (6 December 1991): 81.

Accordingly, the uncompromising independent Azerbaijani government significantly contributed to the escalation via its blockades, sporadic military offensives and economic sanctions against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Government's unyielding stance against the mild Ter-Petrossian government facilitated the eradication of the moderate groups in the favor the more radical ones that eventually achieved to persuade the population on the unfeasibility of the peaceful resolution.

Political Organization

The Karabakh Committee in Armenia and the APF in Azerbaijan were two nationalist and reformist organizations possessed more popularity than the communist governments. These popular groups were continuously radicalizing the masses, pushing the central governments to accede to their demands, and playing their cards against their own governments when their demands were neglected. In addition, they established militias, in some cases stronger than the government forces, to enforce their nationalist goals. From certain viewpoint these organizations, under the leadership of intelligentsia, were playing more important and mostly negative role than the governments in evolution of the conflict.

The Karabakh Committee: Birth of the Karabakh Committee, later renamed as Armenian National Movement (ANM)[144], was decisive in forging the subsequent course of the escalatory process. Originally found by young nationalist intellectuals to promote *perestroika*, gradually the committee diverged from its path and soon became the spearhead of the unification movement. Due to the mounting popularity of the group before long the Armenian Supreme Soviet became under huge influence of the ANM as a result of which several official proclamations on

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[144] Mouradian, "The Mountainous Karabakh Question," 26.

unification of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh were adopted.[145] (See Above) The ANM also committed to creation of paramilitary forces and organization of strikes and demonstrations to bring the downfall of the Volskiy Committee. [146]

The intricate dealings between the ANM and the Armenian government resulted in the deterioration of Yerevan and Baku relations and subsequent intensification of the inter-republican duel. The ANM created, but failed to control, paramilitary forces that continuously raided against the Azeri inhabitants of Armenia and Soviet troops. Moreover, the ANM not only played a prominent role in consolidating the radical bloc in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, but at the same time served to radicalize the opposition in Azerbaijan through its antagonistic stance. Although the position of the group on the Nagorno-Karabakh question changed significantly after it sweep to power, the lack of control over the independent militias excluded a peaceful resolution. Through its role in radicalizing masses, creating paramilitary groups, and urging the government to issue unilateral proclamations in expense of relations with Baku and Moscow the ANM played an utmost role in the escalation.

The Azerbaijani Popular Front: Like the Karabakh Committee, the APF drew its leadership from a handful of nationalist intellectuals and championed unquestioned Azerbaijani sovereignty over the autonomous Nagorno-Karabakh. After becoming an umbrella organization for the spectrum of groups in opposition to Communist regime, the APF first settled on to throw out the Volskiy Committee in NKAO. Having accomplished their first objective in a thriving way[147], the APF leadership without more ado pressured the government to rescind the autonomy Nagorno-Karabakh and establish a direct rule. The group's sponsorship and deployment of paramilitary

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[145] Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 33-35.
[146] *Ibid.*, 33.
[147] Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, 206; Elizabeth Fuller, "Nagorno-Karabakh and the Rail Blockade", *Report on the USSR* 1, no. 41 (13 October 1989): 23.

forces to Nagorno-Karabakh to drive out the Armenian population was yet another catalyst for the imminent escalation.

To a certain extent the APF played a similar role to the ANM, but in a more radical fashion. With complete support of people the APF organized series of blockades against in detriment of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh that amplified the animosity between the parties. Given that ordinary citizenry lost the faith in the communist government, it was not particularly a hard task for the APF to radicalize the people and the Azeri government as well. The reliance of the APF on the military forces unaccountable to the government was a major exasperating factor in the escalation process. As an independent actor unrestrained by the government, the APF from very beginning adopted an inflexible and radical position on the Nagorno-Karabakh question, which eventually weakened the prospect for the peace.

Community Level Actors

Besides governments and political organizations the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities in Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan and Armenian Diaspora elsewhere can be verified as actors with diverging goals. Simply put, interests of the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh, who radically demanded independence and were ready to face any retaliation, and the Armenians of Baku, who had fairly good living conditions, could hardly converge. Similarly, demands from the Azeris in Nagorno-Karabakh and in Azerbaijan to suppress the Armenian claims violently by using all necessary means would hardly be approved by the Azeris who live in Armenia.

Armenian Community: Most of the works done on Nagorno-Karabakh case portray Armenian community as more of a unity rather than differentiating between different communities with diverse attitudes toward the dispute. In fact three different Armenian communities and the Armenian Diaspora with diverging and sometimes conflicting interests could be identified.

The most radical of all, the Armenian community in Nagorno-Karabakh with the support of their leadership[148] was ready to fight for the secession, if the Azerbaijani government refused to consent for peaceful unification with Armenia. The Armenian citizens though were compassionate to the unification demands and organized strikes for that end[149], were not ready and willing to face a full-blown war by Azerbaijan. In fact, when Azerbaijan staged rail blockade and stopped providing gas to Armenia, already devastated by the earthquake, the Armenian citizens became more realistic and inclined to question the worth of unification through a military solution.[150] In tandem with the growing pessimism among the people, the leaders of ANM started to concentrate on democratization and depict it at least as important as the issue of unification.[151] Unlike the two other Armenian communities the Armenians resided in Baku, who enjoyed high life standards, had completely different approach to the unification question and largely played a calming rather than escalatory role until they became refugees. However, once were deported they happened to be as radical as the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians for their unification demands and initiation of violence against the Azeri civilians through joining the creation of the paramilitary.

Beyond Armenia there are three million members of the Armenian Diaspora. The collective memory of the 1915 events was the major defining factors behind Diaspora's unyielding and radical approach to the Nagorno-Karabakh question.[152] Hence, when the first independent government of Armenia chose to establish relations with Turkey to contain

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[148] Malkasian, *Gha-ra-bagh*, 87.

[149] Elizabeth Fuller, "Recent Developments in the Nagorno-Karabakh Dispute", *Radio Liberty Research* RL 312/88 (11 July 1988): 1.

[150] Steve Levine, "When Victim Becomes the Bully", *Newsweek* (29 November 1993): 1.

[151] The issue democratization brought a split between the leaders of popular movement. One group insisted on primacy of Nagorno-Karabakh and criticized others who saw the demonstrations as a vehicle for democratization. The second group perceived democratization as more important and seconded Nagorno-Karabakh issue. For more information, see Malkasian, *Gha-ra-bagh*, 72-74.

[152] Philip Gamaghelyan, "Intractability of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," *Peace and Conflict Monitor Special Report*, (July 2005):10.

culminating fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Diaspora castigated and indeed deterred Ter-Petrossian to refrain from making a deal.[153] Moreover, Diaspora played a key role in supplying arms[154] and in some cases voluntary fighters to the independent military formations. Its supranational character and access to media and other material resources makes Diaspora an important actor to be examined in the development of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Even though all those communities converged and were radicalized at some point, it is clearly established that initially they had diverging objectives. For that matter it is important to understand the dynamics of this convergence towards the radical camp, to which paper will turn in events part, to comprehend the complexity and causes of the conflict.

Azeri Community: The same categorization does not apply in the case of Azeri communities. Despite trifling differences, the goals of Nagorno-Karabakh Azeris and the citizens of Azerbaijan, mobilized in reaction to Armenian demands[155] and coerced the government to take radical measures, were in accord. The Azeri community in Armenia, however, was playing an analogous role to that of Armenians in Baku.

Given that neither the Nagorno-Karabakh Azeris nor citizens of Azerbaijan were economically or economically depended on Armenia, they easily insisted on the Azeri government to nullify the autonomous status of Nagorno-Karabakh. In addition to well-organized rail blockades, both of the communities staged haphazard violence against the Armenians in Baku and Nagorno-Karabakh at irregular intervals.[156]

On the other hand, the Azeri community of Armenia, weaker and depended on Armenia for its wellbeing, by no means interested in recalling the autonomous status of Nagorno-

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[153] Laitin and Suny, "Armenia and Azerbaijan," 155.
[154] "Nagorno-Karabakh 'N' Bash", *The Economist* (14 March 1992): 1.
[155] Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflct*, 131.
[156] Bill Keller, "Soviet Azerbaijan in Ethnic Turmoil: At least 25 Dead," *New York Times* (15 January 1990): 8; Bill Keller, "Troops Seek to Calm Azerbaijan: Soviet Debate Cause Violence," *New York Times*, (18 January 1990): 8; *Moscow Domestic Service*, 14 January 1990, in FBIS-SOV, #90-010 (16 January 1990): 64.

Karabakh by the Azerbaijani government. Ironically, the blockades and economic sanctions by Azerbaijanis had serious effects on their daily lives. They became no less violent than the Nagorno-Karabakh Azeris, once they were expelled from Armenia with frustration and intimidation. In one of the watershed events the group of refugees from Armenia staged a wide-scale but unsystematic violence[157] against Armenian inhabitants in Sumgait.

Azeri communities, out of control of the government, with their decision to start blockade and eagerness to engage in violence were critical actors contributed to the escalation process. Establishment on army units to be sent to Nagorno-Karabakh to defend their cause was another important input to the escalation. To analyze them in a systematic way as different rather than single actor and study reasons of convergence of their interests would demonstrate the complexity of the conflict and provide novel insights into it.

Military Actors

Perhaps in the escalation process the most prominent role was played by unprofessional military forces that dominated the politics and fighting until the 1994 ceasefire. Generally created by popular opposition leaders or by rich warlords to "defense" the people against enemy raids, military groups became uncontrollable by the governments. In fact it was the intractable militias to destroy the only and real chance for peaceful settlement when in 1991 the Armenian and Azeri governments made serious advancement for a peaceful resolution.[158] The armed groups from both sides were well aware that surrendering to Soviet authorities would be costly, given that they had

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[157] Laitin and Suny. "Armenia and Azerbaijan," 152.
[158] During the pinnacle of the peace talks the Azerbaijani Mi-8 helicopter, carrying Azeri Deputy Prime Minister, Russian and Kazakh representatives on peace talks, was shot down by Armenian fighters. As a result heavy fighting re-occurred. On the details of helicopter incident and activities of Armenian forces during and after peace talk, see Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 45.

attacked the Soviet troops in several episodes.[159] Indeed between January and May 1991, around 115 attacks on Soviet troops, military patrols, and enforcement officials took place.[160] Besides Armenian, Azeri, and Soviet forces, the mercenaries and volunteers from Chechnya, Afghanistan, CIS, and Armenian Diaspora started to be seen in the region when it became clear that the war was inevitable.

Armenian Armed Military Groups: The early independent Armenian paramilitary and military army groupings emerged in Nagorno-Karabakh[161] as a result of deadlock between NKAO, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Eventually establishment of independent military groups spread to Armenia, where these groups fought against each other[162] and also against the Soviet troops.[163] Even though the military groups in Nagorno-Karabakh named themselves as self-defense forces, their main activities were harassing Azeri population[164], raids against local police and Soviet troops to acquire arms[165], and fight against Azerbaijani military groups. Neither of the groups was under control of the government, but they were receiving considerable amount of material support from the Diaspora.[166] The decrees of Gorbachev and Ter-Petrosyan on disbanding unauthorized military units fell to deaf ears on the part of military units. (See above) With their self-enforced decisions and eagerness to commit violence the Armenian military groupings escalated the conflict into war.

National Army of Independent Armenia: The Armenian Military Forces was found on the basis of the Armenian National Army (ANA), the biggest of the unofficial independent military

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[159] Koehler and Zurhcer, "The Art of Loosing the State," 70-71.
[160] "Bloodshed in the Caucasus: Escalation of the Armed Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh", *Helsinki Watch*, (September 1992): 7.
[161] Melander, "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Revisited: Was the War Inevitable," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 3, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 60.
[162] Malkasian, *Gha-ra-bagh*, 201.
[163] Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 51; See also Jonas Bernstein "A Big Brother Turns into a Foe," 29.
[164] Melander, "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Revisited," 62.
[165] Koehler and Zurcher, "The Art of Loosing the State," 14.
[166] "Nagorno-Karabakh 'N' Bash", *The Economist* (14 March 1992), p. 1.

groups.[167] Ironically after taking the office the government spent huge effort to disarm the ANA.[168] While these were happening in Armenia, many of the military groups in Nagorno-Karabakh united to form the Armenian Popular Liberation Army of Artsakh (PLAA). Despite official Armenian position of non-interference, the close partnership between two semi-official armies played critical role in the escalation and course of subsequent developments in the battle ground. Regardless of the rationale behind its establishment, the creation of Armenian Army was received as a preparation for war by Azerbaijani leaders as well as people. Yet, it should be noted that neither the Armenian government nor the Nagorno-Karabakh government established full control over their respective armies until 1994 ceasefire.

Azerbaijani Independent Militias: In the wake of rising Armenian demands and militancy "Businessman-patriot" type warlords[169] started to dominate independent armed forces creation process. Ideologically ultra-nationalist and uncompromising Grey Wolves were in the front lines of paramilitary operations against the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians. Azeri villages in Nagorno-Karabakh usually had a "self-defense force", and during operations two or more villages combined their forces.[170] Independent militias were not under control of government, and employed lingering attacks on the Soviet troops to acquire weaponry. Those military groups immensely contributed to the increasing chaos and escalation via their employment of brutal means in handling of the conflict.

Azerbaijan National Army: Before the independence Azerbaijan possessed the units of well-trained and heavily equipped Special Function Militia Troops (OMON). Officially under the control of the government they acquired autonomy of action towards the end the Soviet Union.

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[167] Koehler and Zurcher, "The Art of Loosing the State," 14; Croisstan, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 38.
[168] Malkasian, *Gha-ra-bagh*, 201.
[169] Koehler and Zurcher, "The Art of Loosing the State," 13.
[170] "Bloodshed in the Caucasus: Escalation of the Armed Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh", *Helsinki Watch*, (September 1992): 10.

The joint operation of the OMON and the Soviet Troops, called Operation 'Ring', in Nagorno-Karabakh and other Armenian inhabited regions of Azerbaijan was turning point in the escalation process.[171] Indeed it was during the operation for the first time Armenian and Azeri military forces entered a big scale fighting.

Following the declaration of independence OMON together with the Azeri callbacks from Soviet conscript comprised the embryo of the National Azerbaijani Army. Supposedly it had established control over Azeri militant groups, but that is far from the truth.[172] Due to the low venality and limited sources at their disposal soldiers appropriated properties of Armenians in sporadic attacks. As a result the establishment and deployment of Army to the region increased rather than alleviating the escalation process.

Soviet and Other Military Forces: All through the conflict Soviet Military Forces of Ministry of Defense were present in both Armenia and Azerbaijan, seventh and fourth army respectively, as part Soviet defense system. Particularly, Soviet Army's 23rd Motorized Rifle Division was deployed to Nagorno-Karabakh to stop fighting among independent militias and play a buffer role.[173] In addition to the Soviet Army the MVD troops were dispatched to Armenia and Azerbaijan to control demonstrations from turning into an inter-communal violence. Despite their clearly ordered mission to stop violence the troops refrained from intervention, but on the other hand they sided with one of the parties depending on the circumstances.[174] In the Sumgait pogrom MVD troops refused to intervene and stop the violence[175]. Similarly, when Azeris of Nagorno-Karabakh were fleeing to escape the violence, MVD troops did not committed itself to

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[171] Murphy, "Operation 'Ring'," 82-83; Croissant, *The Armenia-Azrebaijan Conflict*, 41; "Bloodshed in the Caucasus: Escalation of the Armed Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh", *Helsinki Watch*, 8-10.
[172] *See* James Rupert, "Azerbaijani Town Left to Fighters," *The Washington Post* (15 April 1992).
[173] Murphy, "Operation 'Ring'," 68.
[174] Razmik Panossian, "The Irony of Nagorno-Karabakh: Formal Institutions versus Informal Politics," *Regional and Federal Studies* 11, no. 3 (2001): 145.
[175] Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan* Conflict, 38.

stop the violence.[176] The apex of military contribution to the escalation reached when the Soviet Military Forces and MVD troops joined Azeri OMON in massive attacks against Armenian villagers.[177] The January 1990 intervention of MVD in Baku resulted in more 130 dead, which stirred Azeri anger against Moscow and MVD in particular.

Although there was not an order to withdraw the Soviet Army started to withdraw showing the collapse of the USSR as a justification.[178] Amid their withdrawal from the region they either sold or left their weapons to the combating parties.[179] The position of the Soviet Forces was eventually filled with the more ill-disciplined Russian forces under the banner of CIS, who mainly took the side of Armenian fighters.[180] After the pressure of nationalists in Azerbaijan CIS armies were required to pull out, but they stayed until March 1992.[181] The 336th Regiment of CIS joined Armenian forces in the bloodiest massacre in Khojali in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.[182]

Mercenaries from Russia, CIS, Afghanistan, and Chechnya were argued to take part in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Although some experts include mercenaries in the escalation process, except the Russian and CIS mercenaries, others, Afghan Mujaheeden and Chechen fighters, took part after the start of the actual war in 1992.[183] From this viewpoint they had no serious contribution to the escalation process, but to conduct of war after 1992.

Consequently, the reluctance of well-equipped MVD and Soviet Army troops to stop fighting and disarm the militias despite the order from the above had significantly added to the deterioration of the situation. If they had completed the mission assigned to them rather than

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[176] Melander, "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Revisited," 64.
[177] *Ibid.*, 68.
[178] Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan* Conflict, 46.
[179] Koehler and Zurcher, "The Art of Loosing the State," 15.
[180] Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan* Conflict, 80.
[181] *Helsinki Watch*, 11.
[182] Although Moscow rejected the allegations, it has accepted that some Russian soldier could have taken part as a mercenary. See, Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 80.
[183] Suny and Laitin, "Armenia and Azerbaijan," 156; Levine, "When Victim Becomes the Bully," 1; *Helsinki Watch*, 1.

taking parts depending on the prices the parties proposed, the end result could be completely different. Finally after the collapse of USSR, which left immense amount of weaponry for independent militias[184], many of them became warriors and mercenary killers rather than soldiers.

Regional Actors

To understand the conflict and escalation process one should look beyond the bilateral relations and positioning of the immediate actors, and examine the global and regional context in which the conflict evolved. The involvement of international actors in Nagorno-Karabakh dispute was irrelevant until the collapse of USSR, and was limited only to Iran, Russia, and Turkey afterwards. All these actors had national interested vested in the region of Transcaucasus, particularly after the collapse of the Soviet state. Indeed at some point it was feared that the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan could turn into region wide conflict including regional superpowers. Despite the fact that their intervention was obvious after the eruption of open warfare, it is still important to analyze their attitudes and contributions to the complexity and escalation of the conflict. Few scholars tended to include U.S as influential actor as well, but because of its commitment to Yugoslavian conflicts and leaving the prime role to Russia the role U.S particularly in escalation process was negligible.

Russia: In the eve of collapse of USSR Yeltsin, assumed the Russian presidency by that time, arranged several peace talks between Armenian and Azeri leaders for the cessation of the violence. Nevertheless, Russia's impartiality was to be changed when nationalist Azeri leader Elchibey swept into the power with totally new program portraying Turkey as the model and ally

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[184] According to figures the collapse of Soviet Union left 250 tanks, 350 armored personnel carriers, 350 artillery pieces, and 7 attack helicopters to Armenia; 400 tanks, 720 armored personnel carriers, 470 artillery pieces, 14 attack helicopters, and 90 fighter-bomber aircraft to Azerbaijan. Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 5.

in the expense of Russian interests.[185] In the midst of heavy debates on formulating new foreign policy Russian leaders decided to support Armenia to curb Turkish influence and keep Azerbaijan within Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).[186]

The role of Russia in the escalation process remains ambiguous to many who have done a research into the conflict.[187] Although few argued Russia became a party to the conflict after the actual start of war, other insist Moscow was active in speeding up and even in creating the conflict.[188] According to this group of scholars Russia was particularly interested in eruption of war after Azerbaijan would come out as a looser. The control over Azeri oil and Azeri membership in CIS was one of the fundamental ingredients of newly formulated Russian formula. Through it military presence in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh and its supply of Armenia with gas in the wake of Azerbaijani blockade Russia was crucial outside actor in the escalation of the conflict.

Iran: Initially interested in peace and stability in the region, Iran soon started to perceive Azeri policies with skepticism. Iran was awakened particularly after the reign of Elchibey, who made several statements about unification of all Azeris[189] that was numbered more that fifteen million

on that time.[190] Soon Iran came to the understanding that stronger Azeri state in North would sooner than later raise irredentism among its Azeri population.[191]

While it is debatable how Iran contributed to the escalation process, with its material support to Armenia[192] and alleged military support to military forces Iran was crucial element in the conflict after 1991.[193] The anti-Azeri messages starting from early days of Azerbaijani independence were a cheering factor for the Armenians.

Turkey: The collapse of Soviet Union was met with an enthusiasm and apprehension by Turkey's military and political circles.[194] Interested in stability in the region Turkey was eager to increase its influence in oil rich Azerbaijan and beyond to Central Asia Turkic Republics. Due to its complicated and bloody historical relations with Armenia any move to approach Azerbaijan in part of Turkey was perceived as another act of hostility by Armenians.

Despite Turkey's efforts to keep the delicate balance with NATO, several nationalist and pan-Turkic groups was continuously urging the government to take firmer stance in relation to Nagorno-Karabakh dispute. A number of voluntary units were mobilized to be sent to Azerbaijan in the eve of small scale fighting. Given its military might, Azeri side always calculated on the Turkey's military support. With its presence in the border of Armenia and Azerbaijan, Turkey's partiality toward Azeris was crucial in increasing animosities in the part of Armenians, who hardly forget the year of 1915.

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[190] Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 61.

[191] Dilip Hiro, *Between Marx and Muhammad: The Changing Face of Central Asia* (London: Harper-Collins, 1994): 293.

[192] James M. Dorsey, "The Growing Entente between Armenia and Iran", *Middle East International* (4 December 1992): 7.

[193] Cornell, "Undeclared War," 24.

[194] See Stephen J. Blank, "Turkey's Strategic Engagement in the Former USSR and U.S. Interests", in *Turkey's Strategic Position in Crossroads of World Affairs* edited by Stephen J. Blank, Stephen C. Pelletiere, and William T. Johnsen, 54-55 (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 1993); Graham E. Fuller, "Tukey's New Eastern Orientation", in *Turkey's New Geopolitics: From the Balkans to Western China* edited by Graham E. Fuller and Ian O. Lesser, 67-84 (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993).

Media, Religious Leaders, & Personalities

Obviously besides the above analyzed actors several other actors took part in the development of the conflict. Roles played by religious leaders, media, and key personalities are important to fully appreciate the complexity of the Nagorno-Karabakh. But due to time and space limitation the paper will look these actors only marginally.

The role of media increased toward the end of Soviet Union due to loss of firm control over media. By the coverage of brutal killings and mutilated corpses from battle points, media was playing a crucial role in the consolidation of radical wing among the people. In two events the negative role of media was clearly established. In the first of these events, TV programs framed Azeris as rejoicing on the earthquake that left thousands of Armenian dead.[195] Given the reverence attributed to the death in the Caucasian tradition, Azeri rejoicing perceived as another act of hatred to Armenians, and unavoidable increased the radicalism among the Armenian people. In another event demonstrators in Sumgait turned into violent masses immediately after the Azeri Radio news announcing murder of two Azeri youths by the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh.[196]

In international relations a voluminous literature exists on the prominent roles played by the charismatic and influential personalities in the emergence of crisis and conflict. One should not exclude crucial personalities while trying to explain the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In fact personalities such as Zori Balayan, Armenian intellectual and hard-line supporter of unification, and Elbulfez Elchibey, later Azerbaijani president, were extremely crucial figures arousing nationalism and hatred among their respective populations. Millions of adherents were giving ear

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[195] Fraser et al., "A Conflict Analysis of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Dispute," 668.
[196] Melander, "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Revisited," 59.

to their claims. Gorbachev for his personal dislike of nationalism is yet another interesting personality to be analyzed in the escalation of the conflict.[197]

Religious leaders played a crucial role particularly in the Armenian side, where leaders of the Armenian Grigorian Church were among the most vigorous supporters of unification. Besides radicalizing masses against the Muslim Azeris, they had organized several mass rallies in Yerevan.[198] At the beginning the Azeri religious leader, *Sheikh-ul-Islam*, urged the people and government to show a good faith and constraint. Yet as early as 1988-89 he called for a revenge on the "enemies of Islam", and urged the faithful to mobilize.[199] Interestingly enough in some episodes both religious leaders called for a peaceful settlement and even arranged a meeting to discuss the conflict.[200]

Events: Interpretations and Impacts

Throughout the escalation of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict numerous political, non-political, and natural events occurred. Assuming impossibility of including all these events in the paper I will examine the milestone events that were decisive in the escalation process. To analyze the events is important to have better insight to the conflict, because these specific events were interpreted differently by conflicting parties and therefore the consolidation of the radical groups in the societies was facilitated.

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[197] On Gorbachev attitude on nationalism issues, see Richard Pipes, "The Soviet Union Adrift," 77.
[198] Cornell, *Conflict Theory*, 35.
[199] Arie Vaserman and Rami Ginat, "National, Territorial or Religious Conflict? The Case of Nagorno-Karabakh," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 17, (1994): 357; Vigen Guroian, "Faith, Church, and Nationalism in Armenia," *Nationalities Paper* no. 1 (1992): 41.
[200] Lawrence E. Adams, "The Reemergence of Islam in Transcaucasus", *Religion, State, & Society – the Keston Journal* no. 2/3 (1996): 223.

Sumgait Pogrom*:* With the arrival of the news of murder of two Azeri youths turned the demonstrators into violent masses. The violence lasted two days, from 27 to 29 February 1988, with the official death toll 26 Armenians and 6 Azeris[201].

For Armenians the Sumgait pogrom was as a well-organized and successfully implemented anti-Armenian massacre to intimidate the Armenian population give up their demands on Nagorno-Karabakh[202] and caused mental reemergence of 1915 trauma.[203] Official Moscow attributed the bloody events to "hooligan elements"[204], which is also adopted as the official Azeri position on the issue. Ordinary Azeris blamed Armenians as instigators of the pogrom. Several other explanations were proposed for the 1988 Sumgait events.[205]

Earliest impact of the pogrom was mass departure of Armenians from Azerbaijan[206], and Azeris from Armenia[207] to escape victimization. Particularly fear among Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh and Baku was widespread.[208] Refugees from both sides became a fierce radicalizing force as soon as they arrived in their new places.[209] As a result formation of military

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[201] *TASS*, 4 March 1988, in FBIS-SOV, #88-044 (7 March 1988): 44. For unofficial claims, see See, Samvel Shahmuratian, ed., *The Sumgait Tragedy: Pogroms Against Armenians in Soviet Azerbaijan, Volume I: Eyewitness Acoounts* (Cambridge: The Zoryan Institute, 1990).

[202] Fraser et al., "A Conflict Analysis of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Dispute," 659.

[203] Malasian, *Gha-ra-bagh*, 56.

[204] *Ibid.*, 54.

[205] Igor Nolyan argues that the Kremlin, particularly Gorbachev with his unfulfilled *perestroika* promises, was behind the Sumgait events. Azeri mobs that ransacked through streets of Sumgait were criminals released from prison in Kafan and brought to the city for a clear purpose. Igor Nolyain, "Moscow's Initiation of the Azeri-Armenian Conflict," 561; Another competing view argues that the events in Sumgait was spontaneous, which republican and central authorities could not prevent because of ineffectiveness. Richard Sakwa, *Gorbachev and His Reforms 1985-1990* (Hempel Hempstead: Philip Alan, 1990): 244. Another variant argues that everything was organized by anti-perestroika forces to discredit Gorbachev and his reforms, which was also adopted by Gorbachev. Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 29; Another group claims that riots were instigated by Armenian provocateurs to justify their nationalist policies. Levon Chorbaijan, Patrick Donabedian, and Claude Mutafian, *The Caucasian Knot: The History and Geopolitics of Nagorno-Karabagh* (London: Zed Books, 1994): 189.

[206] Suny, "The Revenge of the Past," 29.

[207] Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, 197.

[208] Edmund M. Herzig, "Armenia and the Armenians," in *The Nationalities Question in the Post-Soviet States* edited by Graham Smith, 257 (London: Longman Group, 1996).

[209] Ronald G. Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993): 135-136.

forces to guarantee their security rose among Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh.[210] Ironically amid the increasing militancy the Armenian hopes that Gorbachev will grant unification were somewhat appraised.[211] Consequently, radical groups in both sides increased their ranks and moderates lost ground against them.

Earthquake in Spitak*: Natural events can be a turning point in the evolution of conflicts. The earthquake in Northwest of Armenia on December 1988, which left 25,000 people dead and hundreds of thousands homeless, was one of such natural events had impact on the evolution of the conflict.[212]

Given that Armenia was meeting almost entire energy needs through the gas and oil imports from Azerbaijan, the continuation of sporadic rail blockades and oil embargos from Azerbaijani side even after the earthquake galvanized Armenian antagonism against Azeris. Despite humanitarian aid, Armenian attitudes were further polarized[213] when media broadcasted Azeris rejoicing over Armenian pain.[214]

Low quality buildings, inadequacy of Soviet rescue teams aggravated Armenian anger to Moscow and Gorbachev in particular.[215] Faced with anger and resentment in Yerevan, Gorbachev accused Karabakh Committee members for seeking a political gain from human suffering.[216] Soon all eleven members of leaders of Karabakh Committee were jailed. Arrest of their beloved leaders and flow of new refugee groups that added more to the numbers of homeless, pushed moderate Armenians into the ranks of radicals.

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[210] Melander, "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Revisited," 59.
[211] *Ibid.*, 61.
[212] Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 210.
[213] Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 32.
[214] Fraser et al., "A Conflict Analysis of the Armenian Azerbaijani Dispute," 668.
[215] Bill Keller, "Amid the Rubble, Armenians Express Rage at Gorbachev", *New York Times*, (12 December 1988): 1.
[216] Malkasian, *Gha-ra-bagh*, 184.

Black January*:* Following the inter-ethnic violence in Baku, where 74 people from both sides died and 12, 000 Soviet MVD troops stationed in Baku did nothing to stop, Gorbachev decided on military intervention to Azeri capital.[217] Within few days Moscow mobilized and dispatched another 11,000 Soviet Army troops to Baku.[218] At the end of invasion[219] more than hundred was killed and over a thousand wounded.[220]

Azeri people perceived the invasion as an act of Soviet leadership to behead the rising APF. In fact the Soviet Minister of Defense and commander of the operation, Yazov, confirmed that the operation was for cracking down the APF.[221] The immediate result of the invasion was the breaking of limited bonds of trust between leaders in Moscow and citizens in Azerbaijan SSR.

The inaction of MVD troops during the violence reminded Armenians their vulnerability and decreased the legitimacy of Soviet Army, which in the eyes of Armenians was a protector since decades. Derived their lessons from the case, Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia immensely increased their campaigns for creation of military forces.

Operation 'Ring'*:* When Azeri militia units, joined by Soviet Army forces, attacked Armenian inhabited villages on 30 April 1991 the operation officially started.[222] Firstly Soviet tanks and helicopters surrounded the villages, and Azeri militias and MVD troops entered into the villages

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[217] Robert Kushen, *Conflict in the Soviet Union: Black January in Azerbaijan* (New York: Helsinki Watch, May 1991): 7.
[218] Bill Keller, "Moscow Dispatches 11,000 Troops to Azerbaijan", *New York Times* (17 January 1990): 1.
[219] Bill Keller, "Soviet Troops Bogged Down," 1; Francis X. Clines, "Soviet Forces Said to Battle," 1; Robert Kushen, *Conflict in the Soviet Union*, 3.
[220] Bill Keller, "Soviets Claim Control in Baku: Scores of Azerbaijani Killed: Coup Averted Gorbachev Says", *New York Times* (21 January 1990): 12.
[221] Koehler & Zurcher, "The Art of Loosing the State," 67.
[222] It is widely argued that the idea of operation was proposed by Mutallibov, then first secreaty of Azerbaijan SSR, although the details are not disclosed till today. He persuaded leadership in Moscow joint Soviet-Azerbaijani operation justifiable under the July 1990 presidential decree on the disbandment of military bands. For more discussion of the operation, see Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 41; also see Murphy, "Operation 'Ring'".

with vehement brutality.[223] Operations were continued until the summer while it has expanded in scope and brutality.[224]

Armenians living in Armenia received the operation as a move to dissuade them from their resolute drive for independence.[225] President Ter-Petrosyan immediately announced the operation as an "undeclared war" against Armenia to punish it for not taking part in the all union referendum that was designed by Gorbachev personally.[226] Several credulous Armenians in the regions argued that it was a well-calculated strategy to destroy the Armenian self-defense forces in Nagorno-Karabakh.[227]

Given that few months ago Gorbachev decreed on the disbanding of all unauthorized military formations, Baku and Moscow had a legal basis to enforce the operation. In reality, however, Moscow calculated to stop Armenia from becoming an independent state, while Azerbaijan expected Nagorno-Karabakh give up its claims for unification with Armenia.

None of the objectives were accomplished. The immediate impact of the operation was increase in the formation of military forces by Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians to defend themselves. As a result for the first time during escalation large-scale fighting between Azerbaijani and Armenian army fractions took place. Contrary to the objective Armenian desire for unification was increased out of fear of victimization and anger. To an ordinary Armenian the operation displayed impossibility of coexistence between two groups under Azerbaijan's rule.

August Coup and Dissolution of USSR: The coup of August 1991 initiated by the conservative elements of Soviet Union to overthrow Gorbachev and reverse his reforms was

[223] Michael Dobbs, "Armenia-Azerbaijan Clash Leaves at Least 25 Dead", *Washington Post* (2 May 1991): 26.
[224] David Remnick, "Soviet Troops Tighten Control on Villages along Armenian Border", *Washington Post* (9 May 1991): 32.
[225] David E. Murphy, "Operation 'Ring'," 84.
[226] Quoted in David Remnick, "Soviet Troops Tighten Control," 32.
[227] Elizabeth Fuller, "What Lies Behind the Current Armenian-Azerbaijani Tensions?" *Report on the USSR* Vol. 3, no. 21, (24 May 1991): 14.

failed. Had the coup was conducted successfully, the full-scale war could have been avoided from the outset.[228] In fact, contrary to its main goal coup had facilitated the collapse of Soviet Union, which officially stopped to function on 8 December 1991 after meeting of leaders of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus.[229]

From point of view of Nagorno-Karabakh it was one-time opportunity to realize their aim, given that USSR continuously repressed their demands. For Azerbaijanis it was not particularly a welcomed outcome, since they had expectations that Moscow will settle the dispute on their behalf and in the mobilization sphere they were in inferior position against Armenians.[230] In fact the immediate impact of the dissolution was felt in battlefield after both sides captured loads of weaponry from withdrawing units of Soviet Army. However, contrary to many arguments the collapse of system was neither the foremost nor the last catalyst for the eruption of the open warfare, although it had immensely decisive impact.

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[228] In his phone meetings with putsch leaders Armenian president Ter-Petrosian was told that Nagorno-Karabakh would be brought under special rule of Moscow. *Interfax*, 20 August 1991, in FBIS-SOV, #91-163 (21 August 1991), 85.

[229] Serge Schmemann, "Declearing Death of Soviet Union, Russia and 2 Republics From New Commonwealth," *New York Times* (9 December 1991): 81.

[230] Cornell, *Conflict Theory*, 9.

PART II

According to Brown ethnic conflict could result in three "broad types" of outcome: peaceful reconciliation, peaceful separation, and ethnic war.[231] When antagonistic ethnic groups can not agree on constitutional arrangement or a peaceful separation, disputes become violent and consequently turn into full-scale interethnic war. The theories that I will scrutinize in this section are particularly concerned with the outbreak of the extreme ethnic violence. Starting with the classification of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, I will move on to identify the main assumptions of the rationalist theories offered to explain ethnic war. In following sections I will briefly apply them to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and assess how successful they are in accounting for the eruption of all-out war in this case. Lastly, I will add some elements of the "ancient hatreds" and symbolic politics approaches to the previously appraised theories in order to contribute to the present literature.

Categorization of the conflict

Before proceeding into the analyses of the theories on ethnic conflict, it is necessary establish that Nagorno-Karabakh case fits into the narrative of the ethnic conflict. Without a clear classification of the conflict one could hardly comprehend the primary causes of the conflict. A number of scholars have portrayed the Nagorno-Karabakh as an interstate conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.[232] Dispute over the parameters of the conflict is also primary source of the unrest between Armenia and Azerbaijan.[233] Scholars arguing for international character of the dispute

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[231] Michael E. Brown, "Causes and Implications of Ethnic Conflict," in *Ethnic Conflict and International Security* edited by Michael E. Brown 13, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[232] Laitin and Suny, "Armenia and Azerbaijan," 149; Koehler and Zurcher, "The Art of Loosing the State," 1; Gamaghelyan, "Intractability of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," 1; Cornell, "Undeclared War," 1-2.

[233] According to the position of the Azerbaijani government, part of its territory is occupied by the neighboring state of Armenia and the conflict is therefore a problem between two sovereign states. To official Armenia and also to

points to twofold direct involvement of Armenian Republic: direct troop deployment to Azerbaijani territory and Armenian official claim on the territory of Azerbaijan.[234] (See above) International organizations and major powers, however, defined the conflict in line with Armenian position.[235]

Despite the ongoing debate large number of scholars have regarded Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as an ethnic conflict, whether between two sovereigns or between a minority and majority. For the purpose of this paper the definition of ethnic conflict will be adopted from work of Cornell: "[ethnic conflict is] a political, social or military confrontation in which the parties identify themselves and each other in terms of nationality, religion, race culture, language, or by a combination of some or all of these criteria."[236] In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict the parties have identified each other on the basis of their ethnic background, rather than their citizenship. Therefore, despite the strong international character of the conflict, the conflict should be classified as an ethnic conflict to which application of the below theories by all means justified.

Rationalist Explanations

The Commitment Problem*:* This theory was proposed and applied to the Yugoslavian case by James Fearon, who also argued that it could explain the surge of violent ethnic conflicts other post-Soviet regions, including Nagorno-Karabakh. According to the theory increasing

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unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh government, it is a struggle for independence and self-determination by the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh against Azerbaijan.

[234] Claims of Armenia against Azerbaijan in republican level underwent a huge change after Ter-Petrosuan acknowledgment of the changing regional and international dynamics. And eventually to avoid the accusations Armenia officially declared that the decision of Soviet Armenia does not bind Independent Armenian Republic.
[235] Svante Cornell argues that misconstruction of the conflict as internal ethnic conflict has allowed the major pwers to keep from taking a stand on the issue, leading, once again, to the implicit recognition of the ethnic cleansing and the use of force in the alteration of internationally recognized borders. See Cornell, "Undeclared War," 1.
[236] Cornell, *Conflict Theory*, 17.

commitment problem in the part of majority is the sole cause of the eruption of ethnic conflict. Problem arises "when two political communities find themselves without a third party that can guarantee agreements between them."[237] In other words, majorities can not guarantee minorities not to exploit them in the wake of creation of new republics or not to renege in the future when the majority has substantially consolidated itself in the newly emerged state.

The theory acknowledges that parties anticipate the costliness of the war, but due to the prevailing anarchy they fail to reach an agreement to contain the probable war. It should be noted that according to the theory anarchy by itself can not account for the violent ethnic conflict. For that reason, theory assumes anarchy as a precondition, and provides a mechanism how anarchy precludes the parties to overcome the commitment problem and therefore avoid war.[238] Fearon creates a game model to illustrate how the interactions and calculations between the minority and majority lead to a violent ethnic conflict – that is war.

According to that model the minority initially has two choices: acquiesce to state or stage a war against it. Assuming that the minority agrees to live together with the majority in the new state we arrive in the second stage of the tri-pillar model. The peculiarity of this stage is that the new majority government has already consolidated itself and minority has no guarantees that government will not curb or infringe their rights. Simply put, the minority does not posses any legal means to affect the policies and rulings of the central government. When it comes to the third stage minority faces the two previously available options: to acquiesce further or rebel – start war. The biggest difference between the first and third stages, however, is that in the third stage the new state will be stronger, militarily and economically, due to the implemented reforms in second stage. Consequently, as the majority fails to guarantee to commit itself to minority

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[237] Fearon, "Ethnic War as a Commitment Problem," 2.
[238] *Ibid.*, 3.

rights at the beginning, to start the war now, in first stage, is rationally superb choice for the minority, although minority forecasts the cost of war.

In this theory the conflicting parties are assumed as unitary actors, where leaders have control over the communities and military forces in a given situation.[239] For that reason general terms, such as Croats or Croat side, were employed while naming the contending parties. In congruent with that assumption it also presumes that the actors, including the communities and fighters[240], are acting rationally either to stop or escalate the conflict depending on the context.

This theory explains the violent ethnic conflict better when the minority is relatively strong and large, and when there is an external military support from a kin-state. However, strong economic interdependence between minority and majority might undermine the violent conflict from very beginning by raising costs. Moreover, the problem could be less acute, provided that the minority has substantial political autonomy.

The Security Dilemma: Barry Posen applies the basic concept of "the security dilemma", drawn from the realist tradition of international relations theory, to post-Soviet ethnic conflicts. In some aspects similar to the aforementioned theory of commitment problem, the security dilemma approach sees the ethnic conflict as a result of "emerging anarchy", which is defined as absence of the sovereign.[241] According to Posen the violent conflicts erupted in the territories of Former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, where the sovereign disappeared suddenly, can be explained by the security dilemma.[242]

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[239] *Ibid.*, 7.
[240] While talking about the shooting of the dead Bosnian bodies by Serbian soldiers, Fearon argues that it is a well-calculated and rational action intended to make the cohabitation between the two impossible. He leaves no room for emotionality, but see strategic calculations a clear rationale behind the shootings. See, *Ibid.*, 4
[241] Posen, "The Security Dilemma," 104.
[242] The classical realism school of international relations theory assumes that security dilemma arises when: what one does to enhance one's own security causes reactions that, in the end, can make one less secure. Cooperation among

With the collapse of a central state the groups, lived in a well entrenched state and were guaranteed that their rights would be protected through the state institutions, all of a sudden find themselves responsible from their own security. The survival becomes the most imperative of all concerns. When one of the groups takes measures to enhance its security that creates insecurity in the other group, who has no option but to increase its military might. Given the relative advantage of the state to increase its military might vis-à-vis the ethnic minority groups, the ethnic minority group appeal to military solution to secede while the "window of opportunity" is open.

The security dilemma between the minority and majority groups is particularly intense if it is hard to distinguish between offensive and defensive military forces and if offensive is establishes advantage over defensive strategy. In situations where it is extremely hard to differentiate between the offensive and defensive military forces it becomes impossible for the concerned groups to signal their completely defensive intentions. Technology and geography are the two key factors to define whether the offensive is superior to defensive strategy in a given conflict. Therefore, if one of the groups possesses to better geo-strategic position and better-quality military technology, it will choose to start fight when the intentions of the rival group is unclear.

According to the theory the parties are well aware that the war is the worst of the options even if one side has great chance to win. But because of the nature of the interactions and lack of trust between them, both of the parties eventually come to see the destructive war as only feasible solution. Equally important assumption of the theory is that both involved parties are rational and a hierarchical control, government at the top of hierarchy, prevails. Like any other rational choice

states to overcome the competition could prove to be hard, since there is no guarantee that the other party will not cheat.

theories the warring sides are regarded as unitary rational actors and general terms are employed while defining them.

Fear of Pure Uncertainty: The explanation proposed by Lake and Rothchild argues that violent ethnic conflict erupts because of the collective fear of the future.[243] Concerns on survival and collective fear arises when the state structures erode and loose ability to arbitrate between groups. Intricate interactions within and between groups create a context where one of the groups decides to invest in violence and eventually use force preemptively.

Competition for the scarce resources is one of the fundamental reasons of ethnic conflict. Property rights, jobs, educational admissions, language and cultural rights are among those scarce resources. However, competition alone does not lead to violent ethnic conflict. There should be several preconditions existent to escalate resource competition into a violent ethnic conflict. According to Lake and Rothshilcd the preconditions are information failures, commitment problem, and security dilemma. The emergence of these phenomenon as a result of between groups interactions, authors argue, successfully account how the resource competition turns into a violent conflict.

Accordingly the possibility of a peaceful agreement between groups is undermined in the atmosphere of information failures, commitment problem, and security dilemma. Since each group possesses private information and tends to misrepresent that information, groups become suspicious of each other and finally the information failures occur. The prevailing commitment problem, which emerged due to collapse of state institutions induced trust, makes the situation worse, since no one guarantees that the stronger group will not betray the reached agreement. On top of these, groups are now responsible for their own security, and prefer to increase its strength,

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[243] Lake and Rothchild, "Containing Fear," 41.

which leads to security dilemma. The end result of the between groups interactions is pure uncertainty that in turn leads to collective fear. Consequently, when the within group interactions polarize the societies further, the eruption of violent ethnic conflict becomes unavoidable.

As the pure uncertainties explanation borrows some features of the commitment problem and the security dilemma, parties participating in the conflict are regarded as unitary and rational actors. The general terms such as Serbs or Croats, once again, were used to name the groups. However, somewhat different that the previous two models, in this theory it is argued that the international assistance to the new states can successfully contain the eruption of violent ethnic conflict.

Politicization of Rational Fear*:* Figueiredo and Weingast propose an alternative theory, based on rationalist approach that claims to explain the ethnic war. In their model three factors interact to produce ethnic violence: predatory leaders, fear among the citizenry, and uncertainty about the true intentions of propagators of the violence.[244] In their approach they adopt elements from elite manipulation theory and rational choice theory, predatory elites and social dilemma of cooperation respectively.[245] They argue that "ethnic violence is a social dilemma triggered by the fear of victimization" and can be best understood "using the tools of rationality of individual behavior". In their view the security dilemma, for that matter pure uncertainty, explanation does not hold true, because they alone can not account why peaceful people easily mobilized around the hawkish groups.

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[244] See, Figueiredo and Wingast, "The Rationality of Fear."
[245] Because of their emphasis on the rationality of masses and individuals, initially against but at the end supporters of war, the theory generally regarded as within the borders of Rationalist camp, rather than Elite Manipulation. They argue their approach provides the missing link in Elite Manipulation in the explanation of how leaders engage average citizens who prefer peace over conflict. For them it is the individual rationality that at the end turns into war, which usually seems result of irrationality.

Instead they propose predatory elites as the key cause of ethnic war. The political leaders facing a high risk of loosing power pursue a strategy of "gambling for resurrection" that provisos the provocation of violence and misleading the masses to believe the other side as the source of the prevailing violence. Masses, on the other hand, initially do not want the violence to erupt put their faith in ongoing negotiations between the group leaders. The most striking point is that ordinary people are uncertain about the nature of the negotiation, and can only observe whether the negotiations succeeded or failed. However, parallel to ongoing negotiations the masses notice increasing violence. At this point predatory leaders persuade the uncertain masses that the source of the notices violence is the adversary. Soon the fear of becoming victim of extreme violence beyond their control drive masses to invest in violence to prevent victimization. Given that the choice is not between war and peace but also violent victimization that is worse than war, rational individuals, eventually turn into masses, start to support the predatory elites.

The model, however, argues that the ethnic violent is not inevitable, somewhat different than the first two approaches, provided that the leaders are reform minded and caring about the population. As a hallmark of rationalist approach, all actors defined in the model, leaders, masses, and particularly individuals, are extremely rational. In fact according to this theory rationality of an individual lays at the heart of the ethnic conflict.

Theories on Nagorno-Karabakh Case

In this section I will test four rationalist models of ethnic conflict by tracing the processes that led to ethnic war in Nagorno-Karabakh. The analyses focus on asking whether the processes posited in each theory occurs in this case, and do the theories accurately account for the outcome. The rationale of selecting this specific case, which is compatible with the scope of all four theories, was to ensure that it is fair to the rationalist theorists, who claim applicability of their models to

the case of that nature. While applying the theories to the conflict I will be keep in line with the language that is used by the same theorists in other cases. For that matter all actors would be described as rational and unitary and the general terms such Armenians and Azeris, or the Armenian side and Azeri would be employed.

Nagorno-Karabakh as a Commitment Problem*: To start with, as the theory conceives conflict as a result of rising commitment problem in the part of majority, then the central issue was the inability of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh to trust Azeri leaders' pronouncement that Armenians would have equal rights and equal protection in the new Azerbaijani state. Inability or problem of trust should have aroused when the aforementioned political parties found themselves without a third party, CPSU in that case, that could successfully guarantee agreement between them.[246] More specifically, Azeri side could not guarantee to Armenian minority not to renege the terms of agreement once it consolidated itself as a strong state.

Both of the sides, Armenian and Azeri, acknowledged the costliness of the probable war, but because of the prevailing anarchy, which was due to disappearance of the guarantor, parties failed to reach an agreement short of war.[247] Particularly, the cold calculations and sequencing of the events were the main reasons behind Armenian minority's stage of war in the first place. According to the model, first Armenian minority faced with two options, whether to acquiesce or start war. Presuming that Armenian minority in the Nagorno-Karabakh acquiesced to the Azeri majority we arrive in the second stage now, where Azerbaijan consolidated itself and imposed harsh conditions on Armenians. Once more in the third stage Armenians faced with the same options that were given to them in the first stage: to acquiesce or fight. Nonetheless, Armenians

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[246] Fearon, "Ethnic War As A Commitment Problem," 2.
[247] *Ibid*., p. 3.

had less chance to win at war in this stage, given that Azerbaijan became militarily and economically stronger. Following this rationale Armenians started the war in the first stage to achieve their ends.

Theory should work better in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, since it assumes Armenians are relatively strong and large minority living in a compact and possessing a military support from the external actor, Armenia. However, with the same token, strong economic interdependence between Armenian minority and Azerbaijan and substantial autonomy guaranteed to Nagorno-Karabakh should have played a key role to undermine the war by raising costs.

Systematic application of the model to the Nagorno-Karabakh case reveals that, Armenians and Azeris, as a minority and majority, were single actors unified around the same causes and base their actions on cold calculations.[248] Leaders of Azerbaijan were listened by the Azeri population and unified Azerbaijani army obediently applies the orders given to them. The same applies to the Armenian side, where command chain between political leaders, on the top of hierarchy, military, and people, was maintained.

Shortcomings of the Commitment problem*:* Despite the fact the Commitment Problem is regarded as one of the most developed explanations[249] of violent ethnic conflict, the model is far from displaying the underlying causes and offers only partial comprehension of the ethnic war. The same holds true for Nagorno-Karabakh case.

To start with, according to the model the calculations of Armenian minority, a rational entity, laid at the heart of the conflict. It was their main concern that the new Azeri government

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[248] *Ibid.*, 4, 7.
[249] Kaufman, "Symbolic Politics", 46

would curb their rights and life would be hard under new Azerbaijani state, since the guarantor of agreements, the CSPU, was disappeared.

Study of the case, however, shows that the sequencing of events is not particularly compatible with the argument. Putting back the events in the historical context reveals that Armenian claims for unification at the expense of Azerbaijan SSR started as early 1987-88, with the commencement of the *perestroika* reforms. Neither intellectuals nor ordinary people in Armenia and Azerbaijan anticipated the collapse of USSR within few years. Instead the most hard-line supporters of unification, the Karabakh Committee and Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, put their faith in the reforms to solve the unification question.[250] The spearhead of unification movement, the Karabakh Committee, was originally found to promote *perestroika* reforms in Armenia. Therefore, Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh should not had any concern about their rights be curbed, because they were expecting Soviet Union to be stronger after *perestroika* rather than being demised. Moreover, Moscow's installment of interim government in NKAO at the expense of *de facto* sovereignty of Azerbaijan should have been strong message to Armenian minority that there still existed a potent guarantor that would not tolerate Azerbaijan to infringe their rights. Indeed the measure was endorsed by the Azeri government, but met with resentment by Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenian minority.[251] The theory does not account why should the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians reject the interim government?

Another weak point in model's logical chain, which ultimately results in war, is to explain why Armenian minority believed that Azerbaijani state would infringe their rights, provided that Azerbaijani leaders in several cases confirmed to keep the autonomous status of the region. The other reason for Azerbaijan not to renege was the presence of neighboring Armenian Republic,

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[250] Mouradian, "The Mountainous Karabakh Question," 26.
[251] Saroyan, "The 'Karabakh Syndrome'," 20-21.

which possessed significant Azeri minority. Following the line of theory the Azeris in the Georgia should have made the same calculations and eventually staged a war, given that they were Georgia's biggest and repressed minority. Theory has no any explanation for that. Yet another question left unanswered by the model was why Azerbaijani government did not start advantageous offensive war, since it was regarded as rational actor that could easily predict Armenian attack. Although Azeri OMON units committed in brutality in Armenian villages, first wide-scale military operations were initiated by the Armenian military forces.

Looking from the lenses of the theory posits the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians as a chief and only instigator of the war that seemed to them as the best option after several rounds of cold calculations. The Armenian Republic and Azerbaijan were ignored in the escalation process, and particularly Azerbaijan was portrayed as a victim. However, as already displayed in the first part of the paper there were several Azeri militias, and leaders who were keen to start fight and call off autonomy of the NKAO.[252]

Anarchy played a key role in precluding parties to reach an agreement to contain war. Nevertheless above it is shown that in 1991, before collapse of the USSR, contending parties achieved to agree on a peace deal, which later sabotaged by the uncontrollable military groups. This clearly discredits the myth of anarchy and proves the still existent guarantor of agreements. Yet, the complexity of matter, overlooked by the model, did not let the central government to stop the conflict forever. Assuming that the anarchy was prevailing and nothing stopped states to appeal to force during anarchy, why did not Azerbaijan convene a massive attack against the small region?

As the hallmark of rationalist approach, all parties took part in the conflict visualized as rational actors. The Armenian community in the Nagorno-Karabakh had limited chance to win

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[252] Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*, 206.

the war against Azerbaijan for two reasons: Azerbaijan possessed more men and weapon, and Armenia's intervention was not guaranteed. In that case Nagorno-Karabakh Armenian community should have calculated the possibility of losing the war that would necessarily make everything worse. The model, however, overlooks to that factor, which could be a crucial deterrent.

Moreover, while talking about parties, in that case Armenians and Azeris, model did not distinguish between different groups belonged to the contending parties. For example, for Armenians who lived in Baku commitment problem was not a significant issue as it was for the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh. Azeris were also regarded as a unitary actor who in reality could be divided at least three aforementioned groups. Once again, the army fractions were paid no attention, and armies of both sides were assumed to be under the control of leaders. But the drawn picture of the conflict in the first part breaks down several armies, some of which in several episodes fought one another and against government. Even for the leadership it was hard to talk about a unified position. The Karabakh committee in itself was in split in regards to the Nagorno-Karabakh question.[253] In Azerbaijan and Moscow the leaders were in struggle of political legitimacy against their opposition. Hence, it is hard to portray even the leadership as a single actor.

Since the theory described the developments between the minority and majority the role of Armenia was significantly neglected in the escalation process. Armenia was continuously supporting the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, and sometimes was even threatening the Azeri government. For one thing, it was Armenian SSR who declared the unification of Armenia SSR with NKAO.

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[253] Malkasian, *Gha-ra-bagh*, 73-74.

Lastly, theory assumes that strong economic interdependence and political autonomy might play a role to stop war. Nagorno-Karabakh was almost exclusively depended on Azerbaijan for its economy and it had autonomous status. Yet none of these factors helped to prevent the war. On the other hand model strongly assumed the eruption of war if the minority was strong. If one takes into consideration that the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians constituted only 3% of the whole Azerbaijani population, then this assumption fails to explain why weak and small Armenian minority opted for war?

All in all, even though the theory furnishes insight in understanding some aspects of the ethnic war in Nagorno-Karabakh, it fails to propose a complete explanation. It does not deconstruct the various level actors and under-appreciate the role of external actors. The evolution of events in the Nagorno-Karabakh case does not comply with the assumptions of the theory. Above and beyond, the assumed anarchy does not prevail in the Nagorno-Karabakh case for two reasons. Firstly, the military fighting started as early as 1991 when Soviet Union was still existent and had military presence in the region. Secondly, despite heavy fighting Baku and Yerevan achieved to agree on a peaceful resolution though mediation of Moscow. Thus, the arguments on the prevailing anarchy should be discredited.

The Security Dilemma in Karabakh: The foremost underlying factor in the model is the "emerging anarchy" – absence of the sovereign – that causes extreme ethnic violence. In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh the sovereign without doubt should be regarded as Soviet Union with its guarantor and central role. Institutions of the state that allowed the Armenians and Azeris to live without a concern of security suddenly disappeared and left both groups on their own to secure their survival. Measures taken by one side to enhance its own security necessarily created insecurity for the other party.

The Armenian minority in Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan were well aware that the war was the worst of the options no matter what the result would be. However, the interactions between parties and lack of trust and sovereign finally dragged both parties into the war. Given that it was extremely hard to distinguish between offensive and defensive military forces and to signal their defensive intentions, Armenians opted to fight a preemptive war. Another reason for Armenians to start the war in the first hand was the established advantage of offensive over defensive, in which technology and geography were two most important factors.

Armenians and Azeris were rational actors who supported their leaders in a given situation. In fact it was their rational calculation and support that initiated the ethnic strife in the first place. Like the people, armies of both sides were professional and ready to carry out the orders of their political leaders.

Failure of Security Dilemma*:* In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh the fighting between armed military groups already started by 1990-91 when Soviet Union was still present as a sovereign to which both parties looked for a solution. As mentioned none of the parties were confident that the Soviet Union will collapse. On the contrary while moderate groups were expecting Moscow to find a permanent and peaceful solution, the radical were committing in violence to urge the CPSU to resolve the dispute on their behalf. Consequently, all groups were counting on Moscow as a potent actor. In fact Moscow proved to be a potent actor after bringing both parties around the table out of which the 1991 agreement emerged.

Secondly, theory significantly underestimates the malign intentions of the participating parties in the conflict. According to the theory it is the security concern that makes one of the groups to increase military power and it eventually causes insecurity in another group. However, as it is shown in the first part, parties were enhancing their military power through independent

military groups that were not under control of the governments and were eager to inflict damage to civilians and adversary military formations. Moreover, parties had no dilemma in finding out the intentions of their counterparts. Therefore, the argument that security dilemma is intense when it is hard to differentiate between offensive and defensive military forces does not hold valid for the Nagorno-Karabakh case.

In parallel to that it is not true to argue that in the Nagorno-Karabakh case offense had advantage over defense. Given that geography and technology were two key factors determining superiority of offense, Armenians were in particular disadvantage compared to Azerbaijan. Technologically Azerbaijan possessed more complex weaponry due to Soviet military defense plan in the case of possible NATO invasion. Secondly, the strategically most important heights, particularly Shusha, were under control of Azeris. Besides, Azerbaijan had well-equipped OMON units with high battle readiness at its disposal, while Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians possessed only unprofessional military groupings. Realistically, in the Nagorno-Karabakh case the military technology possessed by both sides was rudimentary and armies with the exception of Azeri OMON units were consisted of unprofessional soldiers. For that reasons, the ability to mobilize more number with high commitment were key factor parties should have included in their calculations. Given that Azerbaijani population was twice more than the combined populations of Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia and it possessed OMON units, Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians should have not started a preemptive war at the first hand. Those factors prove that the reasons the model proposes as the explanatory factors behind Armenian offense should discredited. At this point another question rises; why should a group possessing better military technology and better strategic position should start a preemptive war. The conventional wisdom assumes that offensive is more costly and requires a painstaking planning. Therefore, it

would be better for Armenians, assumed had better technology and blessed by geography, to fight a defensive war rather than engaging in offense. The theory does not take this facto into account.

Lastly, the role of external actors and the regional context were missed in the theory. Given that victory of one party would bear a potentiality to alter the delicate balance in the region, both of the parties should have taken it into account before getting into action. Obviously, Armenia played prominent role in the evolution of the conflict, particularly once it turned into a all-out war, but the presence of Iran and Turkey in the border with better military technology and ready army should have been a significant detail in the calculations of both sides. However, the completely ignores that fact.

Like any other rationalist approach model assumes all actors as rational with clearly set goals and mechanisms to implement them. Nonetheless, the peace agreement was doomed because leaders lost control over the army fractions on the people. The complexity of the conflict is necessarily passed over by the theory. Role of neighboring kin republic, regional powers, historical memories, political and non-political events with their impacts were overlooked. Theory pays no attentions to the dynamics of within and between groups that finally results in consolidation of radical and eradication of the moderate groups.

Pure Uncertainty in Nagorno-Karabakh*:* According to this model the collective fear of the Armenian minority in Nagorno-Karabakh was the single most important factor in eruption of ethnic war. Unlike the security dilemma that puts survival as the main source of concern, in this model the collective concern is mostly about scarce resources. For the collective fear to arise, however, declining central state is a precondition. Yet, according to the same model prevailing fear among Armenians alone could not account for the eruption of the violent ethnic conflict, because they had no guarantee to secure victory, even victory would had serious costs.

Three factors were extremely crucial in the escalation to war: informational failures, commitment problem, and security dilemma. Because of the information failures the Armenian and Azeri sides were uncertain about each other's present intentions and subsequently they overrated enemy's hostility. As a response both party triggered the escalation. Additionally, since the parties had no clear information about other's military might, neither side knew the outcome of the possible conflict, the likely loser could know to avoid catastrophe earlier through concessions. Even though Armenian and Azeri sides bargained with good faith, due to the prevailing commitment problem amid the declining central authorities neither side could commit itself to guarantee the implementation of the agreement in the future. Finally, given the high incentive for the offensive, the security dilemma between the parties emerged and inevitably pulled both parties into the war.

Parallel to previous model, this model also assumed the decline of USSR as a crucial catalyst and conceived the emerging anarchy as a necessary precondition. Both Armenian and Azeri sides were regarded two rational actors with the aim of avoiding war, which became impossible after series of interactions between the two.

Limitations of the Model: Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh should not have had collective fear about the resources such as education, political representation, or cultural rights, although they were concerned about the increasing numbers of Azeris. Given that Armenian MPs dominated the Supreme Soviet of NKAO and head of province was ethnic Armenian and Armenians were predicting strengthening USSR due to *perestroika*, it is implausible to assume that Armenians of NKAO had a collective fear about the share of resources at the time of inter-communal violence. On the other, the fact that Azerbaijan had huge oil riches and Nagorno-Karabakh was completely dependent on Azeri oil and gas Armenians would loose more in terms

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of resources, if they started a war. Additionally, since Nagorno-Karabakh was integral part of Azerbaijan's economy, the fear of loosing economic ties should have deterred the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians from staging ethnic war. Obviously, scarce resources alone can not explain the Nagorno-Karabakh war.

The Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh was sure about the intentions of Azerbaijan SSR – that was to stop unification by all means. By the same token Azerbaijan SSR had not had to do much to understand that Armenians of NKAO were ready to start ethnic violence to reach their end – unification with Armenia SSR. From that standpoint both sides were aware of others intention and information failures was not as acute as the theory assumes. More importantly, as already indicated the commitment problem between parties was overcome in 1991 by the agreement reached by the highest level of political leadership. Lastly, once again it is crucial to note that in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh offensive from part of Armenians of the region was not particularly advantageous from technological and geographical points of view. Therefore, neither the commitment problem nor the security dilemma held true in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh case. Since both of these explanations fail to account for eruption of ethnic war in Nagorno-Karabakh, the pure uncertainties approach doomed to failure.

The assumption that the violence should had occurred only after the demise of the USSR also does not hold for the case either, because the wide-scale violence was in the place well-before the actual dissolution of the Soviet Union. Once more, the complexity of the situation was necessarily overlooked, external and regional actors, differences among Armenian and Azerbaijani communities, and ineffectiveness of the leaders over the armies was necessarily neglected.

War in Karabakh as a Result of Politicization of Fear: From the lenses of the elite predation model, the war in Nagorno-Karabakh erupted because of the elites were facing a threat of loosing power. Nonetheless, intention of the leaders to start war would not be succeeded if there was not widespread fear among Armenians and Azeris. The source of fear was increasing violence. Since, ordinary people did not know the exact source of violence they attributed eruption of violence to the adversary group, but not to their treacherous leaders.

The Azerbaijani and Armenian ruling communist elite faced a high risk of loosing power and decided to pursue the "gambling for resurrection" strategy, which provisioned the provocation of violence and misleading Armenians and Azeris to believe that the other side was the source of violence. Ordinary Armenians and Azeris, on the other hand, uncertain and unsure about the source of the noticed violence initially did not desire the war to erupt. Amid the rising violence the negotiations between Azeri and Armenian leaders was going on, but constituencies were uncertain about the nature of negotiations and they could only observe whether the negotiations failed or succeeded. Theory assumes that it failed in Nagorno-Karabakh case, which was perceived as Armenian sabotage of the peace by Azeri people and vice versa. Started to fear in the face of ever increasing violence and perceived Armenian sabotage, Azeris at individual level started to support the predatory leaders to avoid victimization. Same applied to the rational Armenian individual. The rational Armenian and Azeri individuals conceived that the choices were not between war and peace, but worst of all violent victimization by adversary if not war or peace. Therefore, it was the rational fear of individual misused by the power loosing elites to keep their seats.

The model argues, however, somewhat different than the first two models, that the war could be avoided if leaders of Armenian and Azeri sides were reform minded and non-treacherous. Starting from the individual up to military forces, leaders, communities all

participants perceived as rational bodies. Accordingly, Armenian and Azeri leaders were extremely influential and had control over the army.

Shortcomings of the Model*:* From the first glance it seems the model is quite successful in explaining the case, since it was times when communist leaders were highly de-legitimized in the eyes of citizens. "Gambling for resurrection" would be optimum solution for the leaders to re-consolidate their positions. Nonetheless, closer look at the sequencing of historical developments and details reveals different outcomes. First of all, although communist leaders were increasingly loosing power they had no an option to invest in violence, given that they had superiors in Moscow to intervene. In fact at some point Moscow intervened and removed the heads of Armenian and Azerbaijani SSR. As already described in the first part of the paper, since the leaders perceived violence as a threat to their rule, they mainly tried to placate populations rather than stirring them to violence. Indeed leaders of both sides called the independent armies to disband themselves. Even the Armenian president issued an official decree for this end.

More importantly, the members of the Karabakh Committee, young popular nationalists, came to power as early as 1989. Given their immense popularity, they did not need to appeal violence to increase their popularity. As the evidence showed Ter-Petrosyan government, indeed, due to long-term goals employed measures to placate fanatics of unification. At one point the Armenian president called the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians to limit their claims to greater autonomy, which was quite unpopular. It is true that Azerbaijani leadership appealed to several popular measures, particularly after Black January, but in actuality those measures were symbolic in nature.

Yet another point noteworthy of discussion is the success of the 1991 negotiations, where both parties agreed on the parameters of the peace. First of all, it proves that both parties were

willing to reach to some kind of agreement. Secondly, it revealed that the leaders of both parties valued peace more than their rule. The theory assumed that the peace talks should collapse because the treacherous leaders are not willing something short of war. However, at the root of collapse of peace agreement were the violent military forces and to some extent populations themselves, but not the leaders.

The model portrayed ordinary people as innocent entity feared to be victimized. Although it is true that people were feared, it is a well established fact that despite the contrary ruling of their leaders, communities engaged in violence for various reasons. The idea of rationality of individual fear, therefore can not explain why individuals continuously used force to increase violence, even though leaders called them not to do so.

Lastly, according to the model leaders were strong personalities with firm control over media, military forces, and citizenry. The case of Nagorno-Karabakh however did not fit well into the picture. The opposition leaders were more popular and had more military men to listen their commands rather than the leaders. Populations of both parties had more respect and trust to reformist oppositions. Model also underestimated the role of centre, Moscow in that case, who could and indeed did intervene in the escalation process. Individuals and communities were regarded as rational actors and no room was left for emotionality. Armenians and Azeris were regarded as single actors without being broken down to smaller groups with different goals, therefore the complexity of conflict severely undermined.

Common Fallacies of the Rational Choice Theories

Few argued that ethnic conflict is as old as politics itself where majority governments struggled against minority oppositions – Whites against Blacks, Serbs against Croats, and Russians against

Chechens.[254] The pure rational choice theory perceives ethnic conflict as the result of "individuals' rational pursuit of universal interests such as wealth, power, and security"[255] From that point of view ethnic war caused by the rational pursuit of individual and group self-interest. Rationalist theorists attempting to explain extreme ethnic violence in Post-Soviet period particularly focus on ethnic groups and assume them as unitary actors unified around the same cause.

As ethnic groups are the central actors in ethnic conflict the rationalist theories of ethnic warfare that paper discussed above perceives the conflict between two groups. The four examined theories, all of which applied to the Yugoslavian case, insistently employed general terms such as Croats and Serbs or Croat side and Serb side, while naming the parties participating in the conflict. In other words it is readily assumed that the conflict is between Croats and Serbs, and both of these groups are unitary actors. It is far from the reality. Hence, to display the conflict between Serbs and Croats is too general and at the same too specific.

Application of the theories to the Nagorno-Karabakh case strongly supports the argument. It is indicated that Armenians and Azeris as peoples should be divided into three groups: Azeris and Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. The deep examination of the case revealed that each of these groups had different objectives and different attitudes towards the worsening relations. Even within the identified six groups one can go as deep as to differentiate between moderates and hard-liners. At some point the interests of the Armenian group living in Baku and the Azeri group inhabited in Armenia converged and together were poles apart from the interests of the Armenian minority in Nagorno-Karabakh or Azerbaijanis of the Republic. Adding to these radical military groups, nationalist and non-nationalist

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[254] Mark Lichbach and Chalinda Weerasinghe, "Mobilizing For Peace: Majority Credibility, Minority Power, and Ethnic Politics," *Unpublished Manuscrpipt*: 2.
[255] Kaufman, "Symbolic Politics," 49.

organization, and intellectuals with more friendly and very antagonistic approaches to the other side further complicates the composition of the groups. For that matter to describe the conflict between Armenians and Azeris is too general.

However, naming the participating parties as such is at the same time too specific. Given that several other actors such as CSPU, mercenaries from various origins, soldiers of Russian and Central Asian origin, were integral part of the conflict, it is too specific to identify the actors as Armenians and Azeris. Portraying these two groups as the only actors of the conflict leaves out several other ethnic groups, Kurds, Meskethians and Russians, that were important parts of events and were pushed out of region together with the Azeri groups. Another factor that overlooked while naming the groups as Armenians or Azeris was the involvement of the Chechen and Afghan volunteers and mercenaries as early as 1991. Nonetheless, rationalist theorists insist on describing the actors as single unified ethnic groups. Exactly for that reason the same theorists fail to deeply examine the within group dynamics, but mostly concentrate on inter-group interactions.

Since all theories regard the conflicting parties as unitary actors, it is assumed that both sides possess a single army under the control of leaders of conflicting sides. The Nagorno-Karabakh case clearly illustrated that in fact during the conflict, particularly in post-Soviet countries, more than few army fractions take part. Independent militias ranged from village level self-defense forces to military groupings with thousands of men with considerable amount of weapon under their disposal. Political leaders, however, proved to be powerless in dealing with them. Many of these army fractions started to dominate politics and from time to time made plans to overthrow the leaders. They did not refrain to fight each other when their interests conflicted. Even professional Soviet Army in several cases did not apply the orders of their superiors. In fact, the command chain between leaders and army was not as healthy as rationalist theorists

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presumed. Given the lack of unified army, whole calculations of leaders, therefore rationalist models, become under question. Opposition groups preferred to build their own paramilitary forces to successfully further their causes. Several mercenary groups were present in the region and were switching the sides depending on the amount of money offered. The failure of rationalist theories to identify army fractions with different interests occludes them from providing adequate explanation for the eruption of extreme ethnic violence.

The actors of conflict, including soldiers shooting dead corpses, were considered rational by the rationalist approaches. There is no room left for irrationality or cultural choices. But the scrutinized case of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict demonstrated how peacefully demonstrating masses can become a violent mob with a single spark. The news announcing murder of two youngsters could run the tensions and emotions high and could make irrationality to replace rationality for a moment, where the fateful events of Sumgait ran their course. Rationality would fail when it comes to explain the cut of ears and noses by Armenians and Azeris in the battlefield.

Since the rationalist models portray groups as unitary and rational actors, therefore, they pay inadequate attention to the events that are crucial in development of the conflict. The Nagorno-Karabakh case was an evidence to show how the watershed events were extremely decisive in interactions between and within the groups. In general most of the events described in the above case explain the dynamics of how the initially moderate segments of groups were slowly slid into the radical camp. In other words without analyzing the impacts of the events one could hardly comprehend the consolidation of radical while at the same time eradication of moderates in a given group. The rationalist theories mostly concentrate on the fear as the catalyst of mobilization of the masses. However, the event took place in Baku could easily arouse the Armenians in Yerevan to action, who should not had any kind of fear about the events taking place in Baku. Likewise, any given rational individual should fear more about being drafted in

front lines, rather. Hence, the fear of individual is not adequately accounting for the consolidation of the radical groups.

Lastly, the complexity of the ethnic conflicts was significantly overlooked by the rationalist theories. As already indicated theories mainly concentrate on immediate parties to the conflict that are usually collective bodies as Armenians or Azeris. Nonetheless, to provide an adequate explanation for the ethnic conflict it is not enough. Rather theories should take into account international context, external actors, changing regional dynamics. In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh the significant role of media, religious leaders, and key personalities were shortly discussed and demonstrated to be critical in escalation of process. Besides, the games of political legitimization and dynamics within the ruling circle should be examined closely. The mechanisms explaining how the more hawkish leaders achieve to overthrow the relatively moderates ones is missing in the rationalist theories. All of the rationalist theories analyzed above treat the collapse of central authorities in a determinist manner. Yet the case study proved how everything could be changed, given that the August putsch succeeded. Therefore, this deterministic treatment and assumption that parties to the conflict were certain on the break up of the central state is "scholarly provincialism".[256] The role played by the religion and religious leaders in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was completely ignored. However, given that Azeris are predominantly Muslim population and Islam highly values martyrs, the role of religion becomes important part of the mobilization of more fighters from Azerbaijan, but also several radical foreign military groups came to take part in the conflict. All in all, rationalist theories significantly underappreciate the complexity of the conflicts, and predominantly concentrate on the between group interactions where parties are regarded as unitary and rational.

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[256] Valery Tishkov, *Ethnicity Nationalism and Conflict in and After the Soviet Union* (London: SAGE Publications, 1997) p. 26.

Does Theory Help?

The separate application of each theory to the Nagorno-Karabakh case as well general overview of the rationalist theories proves their inability to account for the explanation of extreme ethnic violence. For that matter, the hypothesis of the paper holds to be valid. Having established that rationalist theories alone are far from explaining the ethnic warfare and my hypothesis is valid, the paper will turn to explore whether theory gives approximate understanding of extreme ethnic violence. I argue that rationalist theories have aspects successfully explain parts of ethnic conflict, but interaction and integration with other schools of ethnic conflict, namely symbolic choice and ancient hatreds, would furnish better insights to understand ethnic war. Although none of those schools alone is able to explain the ethnic conflict, eclecticism of successful elements of those schools would benefit all and would serve as a contribution to the literature. Hence, now paper will turn to demonstrate briefly what the successful elements of each rationalist model are, and how interaction between three schools provides better understanding of violent ethnic conflict.

Aspects of Rationalist Models: Although alone by itself is not the only cause of ethnic conflict, the problem of commitment on the part of majority state could play a key role in straining of links between hard-liners of each group. The inability, reluctance or malign intentionality of the majority government not to guarantee at least minimum standards for the coexistence of ethnic groups through state institutions could give a rise to ethnic violence. In fact some moves of the Azeri government and the Azeri community of Nagorno-Karabakh was perceived by the Armenians of region as the Azeri people are not willing to give them guarantee, which was important factor in further deterioration of the situation. Therefore, the problem of

commitment should be regarded as a successful element, since it unearths one of the many deep-lying causes of ethnic conflict.

Security regarded as the single most important factor in the security dilemma model. Despite the fact that application of the model to Nagorno-Karabakh yielded poor results, it clearly displayed how strong the Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh were concerned about their security, particularly after the Operation 'Ring'. After rounds of violence and particularly military operations the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh facilitated establishment of independent military forces to guarantee their own security, which eventually shifted to military raids. In fact those military formations negatively contributed to the escalation, but not in a way as model provisioned.

Although there was not information failure between Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijani central government as model assumed, in fact Armenian collective fear about their future share in scarce resources was augmenting. It was particularly due to changing population proportion in favor of Azeris of region. The earliest skirmishes and small scale violence were over the nomination of village directors. Once again, far from being the only reason to account for the eruption of conflict, collective fear of future on scarce resource could explain some aspects of conflict in interaction with elements of other theories.

Elite predation model attributed ethnic violence to predatory elites who misused individual fear, which gradually rose after series of violence with uncertain sources. Although elite predation part of theory fails to accurately account for the Nagorno-Karabakh case, the fears of individuals and attribution of violence to adversary could be serious contribution of the model to understand the case. In fact, both Armenian individuals living Azerbaijan and Azeris living in Armenia were afraid of being victimized. Without being sure about the sources of the violence, they each time point their finger at the adversary group members as instigators. Theory therefore

successfully contributes to understand the dynamics and within group interactions that finally work in the favor of radical elements. Increasing numbers of radical would unavoidably contribute to the aggravation of situation.

At the end, each of these theories has aspects that propose explanation for some parts of the conflict. Through the assumptions of the aforementioned rationalist theories readers can develop approximate understanding of the violent ethnic conflict. However, to my belief, the eclecticism and integration between the rationalist literature and other literatures of the ethnic conflict would provide better understanding. Scholars in general avoid and perceive eclecticism as a negative thing, but the paper argues the contrary. Therefore, combination of "ancient hatred", rationalist, and symbolic politics approaches should offer better understanding.

Adding Ancient Hatreds Theory*:* Perhaps it is the earliest and initially wide adopted explanation of the ethnic conflict that surged in the aftermath of Cold-War. However, soon scholarly works discredited the approach, because of its inability to explain the ethnic conflict and poor analytical methods. This paper joins to these scholars in their criticism of the theory. Yet several elements of theory could/should be interjected to rationalist camp for better understanding of the ethnic warfare. Particularly the Nagorno-Karabakh case is relevant.

According to the theory it was the "age-old hatreds" between Armenians and Azeris that resurfaced after collapse of the USSR and resulted in violent ethnic conflict. By no means has this argument provided clear explanation to understand the causes of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. But on the other hand there are several nuances that were emphasized in the theory, such as collective memories, narratives and myths against the adversary. Exactly it is the point where rational choice theorists could adopt several elements.

In the case Nagorno-Karabakh the memory of 1915 events for Armenians was extremely crucial in their attitudes towards Azeris whom they equated with Turks. Given that it has only been three generations and "genocide was more living reality than historical fact"[257], it would not be hard to imagine existence of hatred against Azeris. The perceptions and trauma of 1915 and the narrative that was created among Soviet Armenians, who "traced at least one branch of their family tree back to the genocide that began in 1915"[258], played crucial role during the escalation problem. In the aftermath of violence against Armenians, the radical elements of community could easily embark on the collective memory of 1915 events and portray Azeris as "age-old" enemies.

Azeris, on the other hand, created their own narratives out of these events. The inter-communal clashes in 1905 and 1918, which left thousands dead, allowed them to create a mutually exclusive narrative to that of Armenian. Also, events of 1915 had a crucial aspect for them which they believed started by the betrayal of Armenians to Turks. Making analogs between 1915 and 1988 by hard-liners was decisive in the perception of the Armenians of both Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia.

Consequently, the collective memories, mutually exclusive perceptions of the same events were crucial factors in the attitudes of both parties against each other. It is not coincidence that in early years of conflict Azeris were continuously called Turks by Armenians. For that matter, it is extremely crucial to examine how radical elements appealed to these historical narratives and consolidated their ranks.

Unfortunately, rationalist theories discredit the ancient hatreds theory from the outset, and search for the answer in the rationality of the group. As already displayed in the Nagorno-

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[257] Malkasian, *Gha-ra-bagh*, 55.
[258] *Ibid.*, 56.

Karabakh case "references to history, including to the distant past, reappear in the arguments of opposing sides" and "the commonly shared version of the past serves as a necessary resource for consolidating an ethnic group, and is frequently one of the main arguments used in formulating modern demands or claims."[259] From that standpoint, I argue that rationalist theories would benefit more and provide better explanations to the ethnic violence, if they adopt several measures from ancient hatreds theory.

The commitment problem model would shed better light by adding the role of 1915 trauma of Armenians, which would explain better why the policies and moves of the Azeri majority state met with suspicion. For many of the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians to live under the rule of Azerbaijan was equated to live under the rule of Ottoman Empire, where they faced with bloody events of 1915. In fact this very historical narrative, portraying Azeris as enemy, played crucial role in the emergence of the commitment problem, provided that violence was already on the place, which led the radical elements to consolidate their ranks. In other words, as we assumed commitment problem on the part of majority offers partial explanation for the ethnic conflict, the addition of the collective memory of the past events would augment the theories powers in explaining the eruption of war. The mutually exclusive historical narratives of the adversary groups can prevent the groups from trusting one another and committing themselves to the other group. The commitment problem fails to explain why the majority government should not guarantee the minority groups not to infringe their rights. Ancient hatred could provide partial answer and that would the historical narrative portraying the minority as the adversary. Also, the ancient hatreds approach could provide assistance to the commitment problem theory in its explanation why minority does not trust the majority state. Once again the partial answer would be the historical narrative.

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[259] Tishkov, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict*, 188.

In the security dilemma model the role of past histories could be incorporated to provide better explanation. Without doubt, the mutually exclusive popular narratives that portrayed sides as invaders were widespread on that time. Ultimately, at least in village and township level the narrative proved to be decisive in the establishment of military forces to defend themselves, which eventually became the one of the main reasons of the escalation. Parties participating in the conflict would use the historical record of the adversary group as prediction tools. In other words the narrative would become the main element in defining whether the adversary group constituted a threat or not? Consequently, they will look to history to see how the adversary group behaved when there was not constraint from above. Since the historical memory portrays the adversary group as invader and brutal killer, each of groups would take up arms to defend themselves against historical enemy.

The third model of rationalist approach argued that the collective fear of future that scarce resources would be lost was the main reason of ethnic conflict. The Armenian narrative continuously claimed the Eastern Anatolia and Nakhchevan as their historical homelands from which they had been driven out by force. Parallel to the rising violence Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh drew similarities between their exodus from Anatolia and "de-Armenianization" of Nakhchevan, called "white genocide"[260] and the ongoing dispute over the region. The argument that fears of the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians was boosted by the past historical memories and narratives would provide a plausible understanding. The radical groups in Armenian society would appeal to historical events to arouse the fears of the moderate citizens.

Lastly, the elite predation model would work better if it attains some role to past historical memory. "First a certain historical and socio-economic background is needed for the emotional

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[260] Nora Dudwick, "The Karabagh Movement: An Old Scenario Gets Rewritten," *Armenian Review* 43, no. 3 (1989): 64.

mobilization of rank-and-file fighters"[261] to make elite predation model work better. The collective memories of Armenians and Azeris could serve a ready material for the treacherous elite. Thus, the inclusion of historical narrative that usually portrayed the other group as adversary can be exploited by the elite. That would enhance the explanatory power of the model. Moreover, the individual fear could be augmented through the spread of popular narratives of bloody events. Therefore, theory would benefit more and offer better explanation if it adds powerful narratives to individual fear.

Synthesis of the Symbolist Model*:* Less known to readers, the model from very beginning, somewhat different than rationalist approach, recognizes that ethnic identity is more than a social category formed by rational individuals. The cause of extreme ethnic violence, according to the model, is "ethnic myths justify hostility, fears of group extinction, and a symbolic politics of chauvinist mobilization".[262] Although theory alone proposes incomplete explanation for violent ethnic conflict, it has aspects to be added to afore models to increase their explanatory power.

In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh the myths justified hostility were strong and led to hostile mass attitudes. In fact, those attitudes provided tools for radical segments in both societies to recruit moderates into their ranks. As Kaufman explains in his words: "Armenian nationalist orators drew a million Armenians to rallies on Karabakh issue in 1988 by tapping national pride, referring to national symbols such as Mount Ararat…."[263] According to him individual or group interests were not the biggest concern of Armenians as rationalists assumed.

The combined model of rationalist-ancient hatred-symbolist theories perhaps provides better explanation of ethnic conflict and latter two fills some of the gaps left by rationalist

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[261] Tishkov, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict* 244.
[262] Kaufman, "Symbolic Politics," 47 Also see Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds*.
[263] *Ibid.*,52.

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theorists. Symbolist and ancient hatred theories explain a "range of phenomena that rationalist theory cannot – why contending parties were defined as they were, why some ideas were more popular than others, and why politicians put so many resources into making symbolic appeals empty of real information".[264] Ancient hatreds and symbolist models propose history and myths, respectively, as a ready fore for radicals and treacherous leaders. Rationalist approaches, however, overpass that point and assigns the biggest role to fear. Same theories assume that it is only rational calculations that motivate people. However, the symbolist approach argues that emotions play more role than rationality in motivating people to act, which turns out to be true in the Nagorno-Karabakh case. The notion that mobilization of people was facilitated after framing of other group as hostile evil as myths define was not taken into account in rationalist theories.

In a sense the symbolic politics model provides the "how" part of the explanation. In the commitment problem theory the answer for the question of what causes the violent ethnic conflict would be the problem of commitment – that is "what" of the explanation. And the question of why the commitment problem emerged in first place could be partially accounted by the answer as historical narratives: that is "why" of the explanation. The remaining question would logically be how the commitment problem lead to ethnic war. The answer for this question would be: through radicalization and mobilization of the population, which is achieved through the mutually exclusive myth and popular symbols. Therefore, the symbolic politics model would offer the "how" part of the explanation, while "ancient hatreds" and rationalist approaches would offer, "why" and "what" parts respectively. The same applies to remaining rationalist approaches.

As a result assuming partial rationality in the part of leaders as well as people and adding the collective memory of past history and myths created during the process would bear better explanation for the understanding of ethnic conflicts. Literature on ethnic conflict would benefit

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[264] *Ibid.*, 48.

more if those models interact with each other. Eclecticism should not be regarded as particularly

a negative thing.

Conclusions

In this thesis one central argument and a theoretical claim were put forward. The central argument of the study is that the rationalist theories are far from providing plausible explanations to post-Soviet extreme ethnic violence-that is ethnic war. Therefore the main task of the present paper was to deconstruct rationalist theories and point out the shortcomings that preclude them from offering a complete explanation. The main theoretical claim, intended to contribute to the literature, states that rationalist theories would benefit from integrative eclecticism and interaction with other currents of the ethnic conflict literature.

The Nagorno-Karabakh case was selected as a case study to assess the explanatory of rationalist theories and for that matter the validity of my hypothesis. The rationale of selecting this specific case, which is compatible with the scope of all four theories, was to ensure that it is fair to the rationalist theorists, who claim applicability of their models to the case of that nature. While applying the theories to the conflict I spent special effort in keeping in line with the language that is used by the same theorists in other cases. The analyses focused on asking whether the processes posited in each theory occurs in this case, and do the theories accurately account for the outcome.

To contain a possible bias and avoid shaping the malleable case to fit it to the central argument, the thorough study of the Nagorno-Karabakh case was displayed in the first part of the paper. Through identification and examination of governmental, military, community level actors and scrutiny of their within and between groups actions the complexity of the case was demonstrated. Accordingly, the watershed events including non-political ones were visited and the interpretations of the immediate parties and the impacts of those events on them studied.

In the second part of the thesis the basic assumptions of four different rationalist approaches were discussed and subsequently evaluated after their individual application to the Nagorno-Karabakh case. Later the common shortcomings of the all rational choice explanations were briefly pointed out. Having accomplished the main task the paper moved to produce a theoretical claim as a contribution to the present literature. Consequently, the "ancient hatred" and symbolic politics explanations were incorporated to the rationalist approaches to see if they provide better explanation in the Nagorno-Karabakh case.

Although brief analyses of the theories and their application to the Nagorno-Karabakh case is not extensive enough to point out the whole scope of merits and shortcomings of theories in detail, a few well-established conclusions can be drawn.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is a clear example of ethnic conflict, although there several contending views. Due to its scope and parameters it provides a solid ground for the theorists to apply theories to appraise their explanatory power. The deep study of the conflict in first part of thesis showed how the complexity of the conflict is neglected by the literature. Rather than providing whole picture many scholars choose to provide only limited picture of the conflict.

Application of the rationalist theories to the Nagorno-Karabakh case revealed that the theories can not record success in explaining out-break the extreme ethnic violence. Firstly, development and sequencing of events in the Nagorno-Karabakh case did not comply with the logical chain of the theories. Secondly, theories are far from offering complete explanation.

Common fallacies of rational choice theories were rather numerous. Firstly, all four of the theories chose to employ general terms such as Croats and Armenians or Azerbaijani side and Serbian side, while naming the participants of the conflict. Limiting the actors to these groups necessarily left out other important participants of the conflict. Besides, naming groups that way

and assuming them as unitary actors leaves no room for discussion of the within group interactions. Hence, these theories over-passed the process where radical groups consolidated their ranks, while at the same time the moderate groups were eradicated. The assumption that the actors are unitary and hit the same point did not hold true, because it is shown that even the most professional armies did not follow the orders of their superiors. Secondly, all actors took place in the conflict were attributed rationality. Rationality did not account well, given that it kept silent to explain the mobility of masses. Lastly, these approaches overlooked to the complexity of the conflict, something not peculiar to the rational theorists. The role of external actors, religion and religious leaders, milestone events were overlooked.

Nonetheless, rational choice approaches posses some aspects that explain parts of extreme violent conflict. Addition of "ancient hatreds" and symbolic politics explanations to rationalist approaches offers better insights into the understanding of the ethnic war. For that matter incorporating aspects of other theories while offering an explanation should not be seen as necessarily a negative thing.

Appendixes

Appendix A

Text of Resolution by the Soviet of the Autonomous Region of Nagorno-Karabakh requesting incorporation into the Armenian SSR

Stepanakert, 20 February 1988

RESOLUTION:

Regarding mediation for the transfer of the Autonomous Region of Nagorno-Karabakh from the Azerbaijani SSR to the Armenian SSR:

After listening to and reviewing the statements of the people's deputies of the Autonomous Region of Nagorno-Karabakh Soviet "regarding the mediation of the SSR Supreme Soviet between the Azerbaijani SSR and Armenian SSR for the transfer of the Autonomous Region of Nagorno-Karabakh from the Azerbaijani SSR to the Armenian SSR," the special session of regional soviet of the 20th regional soviet of Nagorno-Karabakh resolves, Welcoming the wishes of the workers of the Autonomous Region of Nagorno-Karabakh to request the Supreme Soviets of Azerbaijani and Armenian SSRs that they appreciate the deep aspirations of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh and to transfer the Autonomous Region of Nagorno-Karabakh from the Azerbaijani SSR to the Armenian SSR, at the same time to intercede with the Supreme Soviet of USSR to reach a positive resolution regarding the transfer of the region from the Azerbaijani SSR to the Armenian SSR.

Appendix B

Resolution of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet regarding the decisions of the Supreme Soviets of Azerbaijan and Armenia on Nagorno-Karabakh

Moscow, 18 July 1988

The Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet, having examined the 15 June 1988 request from the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Armenia for the Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous region to be united with Armenia in conjunction with an application by the Soviet of People's Deputies of Nagorno-Karabakh and the 17 June 1988 decision of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Azerbaijan that making the Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous region part of Armenia is unacceptable, deems a change of borders and an ethnic-territorial division of Azerbaijan and Armenia on a constitutional basis impossible.

Making this ruling, the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet is guided by a provision in the Constitution of the USSR (Article 78), under which the territory of a union republic may not be altered without the latter's consent.

A different decision would contradict the fundamental interests of the peoples of both republics and cause serious harm to inter-ethnic relations in the area.

The Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet notes that over the years of Soviet Government the working people of Nagorno-Karabakh have achieved significant success in developing the economy and science and in other spheres of social life on the basis of implementing Lenin's nationalities policy and under the guidance of party and local government organizations.

At the same time no action has been taken in the autonomous region for a long time to solve many issues affecting the national interests of the Armenian population, especially in the fields of culture and education and in personnel policy. The autonomous region's constitutional rights have been breached.

The authorities of Azerbaijan, Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region have taken a superficial attitude to assessing the situation, failed to realize the political danger of unfounded calls for reviewing the existing ethnic-territorial arrangement in the area and adopted a passive, wait-and-see posture.

The situation in the republics has grown tense and heavy damage has been done to the economies and inter-ethnic relations of the peoples of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

With a view to rectifying the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and overcoming the serious shortcomings, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet and the USSR Council of Ministers have passed resolutions outlining far-reaching measures to further the economic and cultural development of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region, improve the well-being of its working people, strengthen socialist legality and public order, and intensify the education of the population of Azerbaijan and Armenia in a spirit of fraternal friendship and cooperation.

Appendix C

Joint resolution of Armenia SSR and Nagorno-Karabakh Oblast on reunification

1 December 1989

Proceeding from the universal principles of national self-determination and acceding to legal aspiration for reunification of the two segments of the Armenian people torn apart by force, the Armenian Supreme Soviet recognizes the fact of NKAO's self-determination, and the congress of the plenipotentiary representatives of the NKAO and the National Council it has elected as the sole legal authority in force in oblast. The Armenian Supreme Soviet and NKAO National Council declare the reunification of the Armenian Republic and the NKAO. The Armenian republic citizenship rights extends over the population of the NKAO. The Supreme Soviet and the National Council hereby set up a joint commission to formulate practical steps to realize reunification. They assume the obligation to represent the national interests of the Armenian population in northern Artsakh (NKAO), Shaumian rayon, and Getashen districts.

Appendix D

Decision of the Supreme Soviet of the Azerbaijan SSR in connection with the decision of the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR on uniting the Armenian SSR and the NKAO

Baku, 6 December 1989

The decision adopted by the Armenian SSR Supreme Soviet on 1 December 1989 to unite the Armenian SSR and NKAO is regarded as an impermissible interference in the Sovereign Azerbaijan SSR's affairs and a measure aimed at encroaching on the Azerbaijan SSR's territorial integrity, which does not contribute toward the effort made to stabilize the situation in the region and restore normal conditions.

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