

# **The Islamic Mercenaries in the Karabakh War:**

## **The Way International Terrorist Networks Penetrated Azerbaijan**

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## INTRODUCTION

Up to now there have been no attempts in academic circles to systematize or analyze documents and evidence concerning the recruitment of Chechen and Afghan mercenaries in the Karabakh war. In this regard, this volume is unique. I believe that facts presented in this book speak for themselves in terms of how terrorist structures emerged and developed in the Caucasus, and why Azerbaijani and Turkish government agencies patronize and regulate their activities.

The struggle of Karabakh Armenians for self-determination and self-preservation is often considered as an attempt to secession. The Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh, however, has been forced to fight not only against regular Azeri troops, which tried to expel Armenians from their homeland, but also against an impressive number of foreign mercenaries recruited by Azerbaijani authorities for the military operations. Later on, it became clear that some of the mercenaries joined the ranks of international terrorist organizations.

While working on this monograph, various sources in Armenian, Russian, English, French and Turkish were used. I tried to use sources in such a way that they balance each other, and thus to avoid one-sided conclusions.

The September 11 events in the USA showed the vulnerability of the international community against the threat of modern times - the terrorist activities of radical religious groups and the network of international terrorism. To perceive the formation process of contemporary extremist and terrorist groups, as well as the coordination of their activities in various regions of the Eurasian continent, one must investigate their origins and operation in the conflict zones, especially in those areas where conflicting parties have different civilizational i. e. historical, religious, linguistic and, cultural backgrounds. Undoubtedly, networking between radical Islamic and extremist groups in various countries became possible due to so-called "hot spots" that emerged on the territories of the former USSR and Yugoslavia. Among such "spots" the conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Tajikistan, Chechnya and Bosnia offered perfect arenas for collaboration both within radical religious groups and between these groups and local state leaderships that either harbored or coordinated their activities.

From this standpoint, the long-lasting conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh represents an interesting case for investigating the preconditions of broadening of such a collaborative network among international terrorist groups in the Caucasus, particularly in Azerbaijan, where these groups found safe haven among local authorities that regulated their further operations.

Even today, when a shaky cease-fire exists on the area of former bloody conflicts, the factor of one of militant components of Islamist ideology or *mujaheddin factor* is apparent. This is especially evident in the example of post-war Bosnia. Some of Arab volunteers, who arrived in Bosnia to fight against the Serbs and Croats in 1992-1995, settled here institutionalizing their presence by mixed marriages. Others took part in the Chechen war or joined in the forming *al-Qaeda* structures in Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup>

A similar process developed in Azerbaijan after the establishment of a cease-fire in Nagorno-Karabakh. The first cells of *al-Qaeda* in the territory of the former USSR appeared in Azerbaijan, when the organization opened its office in Baku and started to assist Azerbaijani forces in their struggle for control over Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>2</sup>

After the end of the Afghan war former Arab mujaheddins, who had fought against the Soviet troops in Afghanistan, made so-called "conflict-cruises" across the ethnic confrontation areas of the Eurasian continent, such as Tajikistan,

<sup>1</sup> Yaroslav Trofimov, 'Mujaheddin Factor: Militant Islam Gains in Postwar Bosnia', *The Wall Street Journal Europe*, March 19, 2002. See also Yossef Bodansky, 'Chechnia. The Mujaheddin Factor', Online edition, at [http://www.freeman.org/m\\_online/bodansky/chechnya.htm](http://www.freeman.org/m_online/bodansky/chechnya.htm)

<sup>2</sup> P. Polkovnikov, 'al-Qaeda in Caucasus. Hundreds of its fighters fought in Karabakh, Chechnya, and Central Asia', *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, No. 2 (317), January 24, 2003, (in Russian).

Nagorno-Karabakh, Chechnya, Bosnia and others. It is noteworthy that Turkey became and remains to be among countries harboring the transfer of Arab and other mujaheddin groups from one conflict zone to another. In the first half of the 1990s, this assistance was primarily an expression of Ankara's intention "to return" to the Balkans and "revive the Ottoman glory". The interest of Turkish secret services and military structures in collaboration with various Islamic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina was due to Turkey's objective to secure itself in the Balkans, as well as to recruit Islamic mercenaries as mediators and promoters of Turkish foreign policy goals in the Balkans and Caucasus as a whole<sup>3</sup>.

In the early 1990s, the president of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, Johar Dudaev, paid visits to Turkey, the unrecognized Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, and other Middle Eastern countries. These visits were successful in reaching agreements on arms supply to Chechnya. As early as in the fall of 1994, cargo aircraft of the Chechen National Aviation Company carried out flights on the route of Khartoum-Baku with unidentified cargo. Soviet-made weapons purchased by Turkey in East Germany were sent by air through the city of Bitlis, Turkey, and then to the Azeri military airport Nasosnaya located near the capital Baku. Simultaneously, the commandos of the Turkish and Azeri branches of the ultra-nationalist "Grey Wolves" organization launched their operation in Chechnya. Part of this operation included military training by the Turkish secret services<sup>4</sup>.

The main geopolitical goals of Chechen leaders in the Caucasian region were described by Johar Dudaev in the Turkish newspaper "Zaman" in March 1994: "My plan foresaw the creation of a union of Caucasus countries directed against Russian imperialism, signifying a united Caucasus. Our chief goal was the achievement of independence and liberation, acting together with the Caucasus republics, which have been oppressed by Russia over the course of 300 years. After that, we proposed together to exploit the rich natural resources and oil of the Caucasus and transport it across Turkey to world markets"<sup>5</sup>.

In late 1995, in the territory of the non-recognized Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, where the bases of the Turkish "National Intelligence Organization" (Turkish abbreviation: MIT) were established, several hundred Arab mercenaries were trained to participate in the military actions in the Balkans, on

<sup>3</sup> Yossef Bodansky, 'Some Call It Peace Waiting For in the Balkans', [http://members.tripod.com/Balkania/resources/geostrategy/bodansky\\_peace/index.html](http://members.tripod.com/Balkania/resources/geostrategy/bodansky_peace/index.html)

<sup>4</sup> See Viatcheslav Aviotiskii, 'The Northern Caucasus as Russia's "Internal Abroad"', *Central Asia and Caucasus*, No. 5 (23), (Stockholm: 2002): 64.

<sup>5</sup> See John B. Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnia. Roots of a Separatist Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 140.

the side of Bosnian Islamists. Other mujaheddins were trained for further transfer to Chechnya, Afghanistan and Eastern Turkey. On the Turkish, as well as in the Northern Iraqi territories they were used in fights against Kurdish guerrilla<sup>6</sup>.

Azerbaijan in turn made attempts to recruit mercenaries from Islamic states to involve them in its war against the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh.

It should be noted that terrorist and radical Islamist groups had settled down in Azerbaijan before the proclamation of state independence. However, it is accepted to think that these organizations found a fertile soil in Azerbaijan after Heydar Aliiev came to power and started to recruit foreign mercenaries from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkey and other states to fight against the Karabakh Armenians<sup>7</sup>. It is symptomatic that Aliiev continued the tradition of his predecessors. The presidents of Azerbaijan sought to solve the Karabakh problem and increase fighting efficiency of the Azerbaijani Army by using foreign military forces. For example, Ayaz Mutalibov, the first president of Azerbaijan, successfully used the Soviet internal troops for carrying out a policy of ethnic cleansing in Armenian populated regions of northern Karabakh. During Abulfaz Elçibey's presidency military advisers from Turkey, Russia and the USA instructed the Azerbaijani armed forces. Azerbaijan tried also to utilize links with Islamic states, as well as with radical Islamic organizations to diplomatically isolate Armenia and acquire financial and military assistance to continue its military campaign in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The recruitment of foreign mercenaries, in particular Chechen combatants and Afghan mujaheddins during the military campaigns of 1992-1994 against the Karabakh Armenians became one of these practicable ways for Azeri government.

### **Chechens in Karabakh**

In its policy of secession from Russia, Chechen leadership gave a great significance to gaining allies, especially in the Caucasian region. From this perspective, Grozny considered Azerbaijan the main buttress in the South Caucasian region, especially taking into consideration the fact that Baku did not join the CIS until late 1993. This solidarity was based also on the idea of a common "Caucasian home", which was supposed to consolidate Caucasian peoples and countries against the Russian influence. In the early 90s, the leader of

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> *Congressional Research Services*, (CRS, 9/10/2001).

Azerbaijani Popular Front Abulfaz Elçibey visited Grozny and established friendly relations with General Johar Dudaev<sup>8</sup>.

In the spring of 1992, a delegation of Muslim leaders of from Azerbaijan visited Chechnya and met with Gen. Dudaev. In the Azerbaijani delegation, according to some sources, *incognito* were presented also representatives of Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense. During bilateral meetings, apart from discussions of protocol character (such as establishment of bilateral friendly relations between both Azeri and Chechen nations and states, joint efforts on revival of Islam in the region, etc.), military cooperation was discussed, in particular the possible participation of Chechen armed forces in the military actions in Nagorno-Karabakh. Moreover, Azerbaijan side promised to equip Chechen detachments with armored vehicles and ammunition from its own stores.<sup>9</sup>

However, Johar Dudaev most apparently was not interested in open involvement of Chechnya in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. The sides agreed to recruit only Chechen volunteers for military operations with corresponding salaries. According to various sources, the salaries of Chechen mercenaries ranged from 600 to 1000 rubles per day.<sup>10</sup>

The recruitment of Chechen mercenaries took place on a former military base located on Boutirin Street in Grozny. Chechen fighters first arrived in Azerbaijan with the ideas of Islamic and Caucasian solidarity under the leadership of well-known commander Shamil Basaev. With the Chechen support, Baku authorities hoped to crash the fighting spirit of Karabakh Armenians at the expense of foreign blood. In early June of 1992 the number of Chechen mercenaries in Karabakh totalled approximately 300. During the first clashes with Karabakh Armenians, many casualties occurred among the Chechens. As a result, Armenian soldiers often found Russian citizens from Chechnya on the battlefields.<sup>11</sup>

Chechen mercenaries admitted that one of the decisive factors decisive for their involvement in the Karabakh battlefields was their sense of Islamic and Caucasian solidarity with Azerbaijan, as well as the proximity of the conflict region to Chechnya<sup>12</sup>. Taking into account the discipline and courage demonstrated by the Chechen fighters, the Azerbaijani army leadership appointed them as

commanders of platoons. Very often with the help of these fighters, barrage detachments were organized to shoot deserters and retreating Azeris.

Shamil Basaev was less successful this time compared with fighting against the Georgian troops in Abkhazia. After heavy losses, Chechen fighters left Karabakh battlefields, partially in connection with the inter-Chechen and Russian-Chechen problems. The Armenian forces of self-defense captured several Chechen soldiers during the military operations in Karabakh. A representative of Grozny authorities arrived in Stepanakert and reached an agreement on the extradition of Chechen POWs with the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic's Armenian authorities. The Chechens among the bodyguards of the Azeri president were also recalled. By a strange coincidence, this occurred just on the eve of the armed mutiny of Colonel Surat Huseynov in the city of Gence and his further march on Baku in June 1993. It should be noted that a group of Chechens was also among Surat Huseynov's militants<sup>13</sup>.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Chechen mercenaries played a certain role in the internal political rearrangements of Azerbaijan.

After the cease-fire agreement in Bishkek<sup>14</sup> in May of 1994, Chechen leaders frequently promised to support the Azeri side "to liberate Karabakh" from the Armenians as soon as domestic problems "will be settled"<sup>15</sup>.

In case of Chechen participation in Karabakh fighting, the motivation was a desire to get military experience in anticipation of armed conflict at home. On the other hand, the arrival of Chechens in Azerbaijan and their participation in the battles had been organized as a reaction to the inefficiency of the Azerbaijani Army.

The character of military operations, which by many parameters varied from those in Abkhazia, led to the inefficiency of Chechen units in the Karabakh war. In particular, "Chechen experience" was ineffective in the open places, where tactics of offensive and counteroffensive were used and more or less fixed frontlines and communications existed. The essence and advantage of "Chechen experience" of conducting military operations was based on the tactics of street fighting and combat in the highlands.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Sanobar Shermatova, 'Islamic Factor in the hands of Political Elites' in *Islam on the Post-Soviet space: The view from inside*, eds. A. Malashenko and Marta Brill Olcott, (Moscow: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2001): 221, (in Russian)

<sup>9</sup> *Ekspress Khronika*, No. 28. 1992.

<sup>10</sup> See *Spravedlivost*, No. 16, 1992; *Ichkeria*, No. 8, June 25, 1992; *Respublika Armenia*, August 1, 1992.

<sup>11</sup> *Ekspress khronika*, No. 28. 1992. See also *Journalists in the Karabakh war*, (Moscow: Prava Cheloveka, 2002): 63.

<sup>12</sup> *Respublika Armenia*, August 1, 1992.

<sup>13</sup> Sanobar Shermatova, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

<sup>14</sup> Ministers of Defense of Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh Republic with the mediation of Russian president's representative V. Kazimirov and the Head of Inter-Parliamentary Assembly on Nagorno-Karabakh M. Sherimkulov signed Bishkek Protocol in May 5 1994. Originally Armenian and Nagorno-Karabakh representatives signed this protocol. Azerbaijan joined it 3 days later.

<sup>15</sup> For example see *Obshchaya Gazeta*, Moscow, October 28, 1999.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with vice rector of Caucasus Media Institute, political analyst Mr. Alexander Iskandarian.

There is a pertinent question: what was the main attraction for Chechens to get into the Karabakh war? Material interest or religious solidarity? Most probably neither. By the assertion of "Ichkeria" newspaper, an agreement was reached with Azeri side to transfer armament from Azerbaijan to Chechnya. Apparently, this served as a good incentive for the Azeri-Chechen cooperation. Through this cooperation Grozny intended to reinforce its army arsenals.

In early July of 1992, a large quantity of arms and ammunition supplies formerly used in military actions in Nagorno-Karabakh was transported from Azerbaijan to Chechnya. The arms traffic to Chechnya passed by the following routes: Samur (Azerbaijan) – Kasumkent – Dulbugh – Khadjalmakhi – Glokh – Kharami pass (Daghestan). Taking into consideration the involvement of the National Guard of Chechnya in the process of recruitment of mercenaries and the fact that this was going to its military base, undoubtedly the officials in Grozny were also involved or at least were *au courant* of the arms traffic and mercenary recruitment<sup>17</sup>.

Assumedly, the armaments acquired by Chechens during the short-term Karabakh campaign were used against Russian federal forces during the very first days of the Chechen war. On many occasions, Russian military sources have indicated the existence of the mentioned route of arm supply from Azerbaijan and Turkey during the first Chechen campaign (1994-1996). Moreover, during the initial stage of the war, a transportation of military supplies by air from Azerbaijan to Chechnya was also organized.<sup>18</sup> Military supplies were also transported from Azerbaijan to Chechnya by sea through the territory of Daghestan. The Azeri branch of the Turkish ultra-nationalist organization of "Gray wolves" and its Azeri leader Iskender Hamidov played an active role in providing Chechen warriors with armament, logistical support and volunteers from Azerbaijan.<sup>19</sup>

Various kinds of support to Chechen guerrillas from the territory of Azerbaijan continued during the second stage of the Chechen campaign as well. As in the first stage, one of the main routes of ammunition, armament and mercenary supply from Turkey to Chechnya was organized through the territory of Azerbaijan.

### **Afghan Mujaheddins in Karabakh**

One of the main factors influencing the activation of radical-terrorist organizations in today's Azerbaijan is the collaboration of Azerbaijani authorities with Afghan mujaheddins during the Karabakh war. It was in this period that a number of radical Islamic organizations having multilevel links with international terrorist organizations, including Osama bin Laden's *al-Qaeda* at a later point, launched operations on the territory of Azerbaijan. For *al-Qaeda*, Azerbaijan became one of its strongholds to carry out terrorist activity.

Following the defeat of the Azerbaijani Army in the Karabakh frontlines in mid 1993, Baku turned to Afghan authorities for supply of Afghan mujaheddins to fight against the Armenian self-defense forces of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Deputy Interior Minister of Azerbaijan Rovshan Javadov visited Kabul in July 1993, where he met with Afghan Premier Minister Gulbeddin Hekmatyar, who at the same time was the leader of "Hizb-i Islami" (Islamic Party). The meeting was aimed at reaching an agreement on sending Afghani fighters to Azerbaijan.<sup>20</sup> Later, in mid December of the same year, the son-in-law of the Afghani Prime Minister visited Baku with the representative of his ally Gen. Rashid Dostum.

Hekmatyar's party of "Hizb-i Islami" "was one of axes of the "Afghani branch" of training of Algerian and Egypt mujaheddins".<sup>21</sup> It should be mentioned that at the beginning of the 1990s Hekmatyar, the main recipient of foreign aid, faced financial difficulties due to withdrawal of Soviet troops and considerable decrease of financial support from external donors, who started to look for new and more effective mediators for their interests in Afghanistan.<sup>22</sup> Most probably, these circumstances played an essential role in the consent of Afghan leaders to cooperate with Azeri officials by supplying manpower to support totally failed Azerbaijani army. One must suppose that the driving force for such a decision was not the sense of Islamic solidarity, but quite obviously financial interest. It should be noted that during the recruitment of the Afghans, a claim, by now a cliché, was made that the fight was in support of "Muslim Azerbaijan" against "the Christian Armenians who are backed by Russia."<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Azerbaijan Enlists Afghan Mercenaries, *RFE/RL Records*, November 8, 1993, SB&Eurasian Archive, Azerbaijan, HU-OSA, 300/80/6/3; Joseph A. Kechichian and Theodore W. Karasik, 'The Crisis in Azerbaijan: How the Clans Influence the Politics of an Emerging Republic', *Middle East Policy*, vol. IV, 1995, No. 1-2, p. 63.

<sup>21</sup> Rolan Jaqqar, 'In the name of Osama bin Laden' (Moscow: OLMA PRESS, 2002): 196, (Russian edition).

<sup>22</sup> Yuri. V. Bosin, 'The Role of Religious-Ethnic factor in internal Afghani Conflict', in *Afghanistan: the Problems of War and Peace*, (Moscow: Institute of Israeli and Middle East Studies, 2000): 71-72, (in Russian).

<sup>23</sup> David Filipov, 'For Afghan Everyman, War is in his Body, Soul', *The Boston Globe*, December 19, 2001.

<sup>17</sup> *Ekspress Khronika*, No. 28, 1992; *Respublika Armenia*, August 1, 1992.

<sup>18</sup> Sebastian Smith, 'Allah's Mountains. Politics and War in Russian Caucasus', (London-New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 1998): 186.

<sup>19</sup> Zurab Todua, 'Azerbaijani patience', (Moscow: KON Liga Press, 2000): 45, (in Russian).

As certain analysts have rightly noted, the recruitment of Afghan mujaheddins by Azerbaijan to fight in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict could be a precedent for a new wave of escalation. As a matter of fact, the Afghans could do nothing essential to bring changes in the further developments on the Karabakh battlefields except for drawing attention to the critical situation of Baku, which was "on its knees...grabbing for anything they can get".<sup>24</sup>

Afghan mujaheddins in Nagorno-Karabakh mainly represented Hekmatyar's faction. A person named Vaidallah started to act as a mediator between the Azerbaijani government and the mujaheddins, organising and coordinating the recruitment and deployment of Afghan mercenaries in Azerbaijan.<sup>25</sup>

According to American journalist Thomas Goltz, US citizens who were engaged in the Iran-Contra affair and formerly were members of the US Special Forces brought mujaheddins to Azerbaijan and at the same time instructed Azeri pilots in Texas for this mission. Moreover, American military instructors trained Azerbaijani army units to fight against Armenian forces.<sup>26</sup>

In fact Afghan mujaheddins were the first foreign military forces involved in inter-ethnic and inter-state conflicts on the territory of the former Soviet Union. Afghan militants fought in the Tajik civil war and Nagorno-Karabakh. However, if in the first case, mujaheddins made a common cause with Tajik opposition ethnically and ideologically, in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict material interests were paramount. Hattab, a Jordanian Arab with Chechen descent not so well known at that time, was among the first to arrive in Nagorno-Karabakh to fight Armenians. In mid the 1980s he was in Afghanistan together with many Arabs to join the struggle against the Soviet Army and later became known as "Arab Afghans".<sup>27</sup>

There were about 15,000 Arab veterans of the Afghan war. Their role was essential in the bloody civil war in Algeria. The presence of Arab religious fanatics in Bosnia in certain cases served as a cause for displeasure and discrepancy among secular Bosnians.<sup>28</sup> In Hekmatyar "Hizb-i Islami", the number of Arab Afghans

<sup>24</sup> Alexis Rowell, 'US Army Veterans "Drill" Azeris Under Cover of Oil Firm', *The Observer*, October 28, 1993; John Auerbach, 'Azerbaijan hires Afghan Troops to Bolster Army', *Boston Globe*, November 8, 1993.

<sup>25</sup> Up To 2500 Afghan May Be Fighting in Azeri Army, *RFE/RL Records*, April 27, 1994, Azerbaijan, HU-OSA, 300/80/6/2.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Goltz, *Azerbaijan Diary: A Rogue Reporter's Adventures in an Oil-Rich, War-Torn, Post-Soviet Republic*, (New York: Sharpe, 1998): 270-279.

<sup>27</sup> Sanobar Shermatova, *'Islamic Factor in the Hands of Political Elites'*, p. 221.

<sup>28</sup> James Bruce, 'Arab Veterans of the Afghan War', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, April 1, 1995, Vol. 7, No.4, p. 175.

reached about 3,500.<sup>29</sup> Undoubtedly, there were groups of "Arab veterans" of the Afghan war among the mujaheddins who arrived in Azerbaijan, especially since many of them were then ready to leave Afghanistan in search of new areas to use their military skills in the name of Islamic solidarity.

The Azeri side was well prepared to host the Afghan mujaheddins. Translators of Dari and Pushtu were hired for the army. Judging from Azerbaijani army officers' secret documents and reports captured by the Armenian forces, shortly after their arrival the Afghans became a serious burden for Azerbaijanis, since many of them were very demanding for food and medical service. According to Azeri Lieutenant Colonel D. Lyatifov, "it seems that they came here for taking treatment, rather than to fight".<sup>30</sup> Apart from this, the Armenian forces obtained evidences of "Afghani presence" in Azerbaijan, such as Islamic literature printed in Afghanistan and Pakistan, records and unsent letters in Dari and Pushtu languages, as well as military maps and instructions for organization of artillery crews. In addition, some photographs taken in Gence allowed identifying that some Afghan mujaheddins were deployed on the territory of the training center of the former Soviet Army's 104<sup>th</sup> Gence Airborne Division<sup>31</sup>.

In late August of 1993 on the battlefields of Fizuli and Zangelan regions of Karabakh frontlines and to the surprise of Armenian forces, some corps of Afghan mujaheddins were discovered dressed in traditional Afghani costumes. In reports of Azeri officers and commanders the Afghan detachments were named as a "special contingent." It is noteworthy that Azeri leaders spied on the mujaheddins to prevent agitation against the leadership of Azerbaijan.<sup>32</sup>

According to Karabakhi Armenians, mujaheddins fought persistently, but were unable to make any essential break-through in the Karabakh war. In spite of all attempts of Baku to refute the presence of Afghan soldiers in the Republic of Azerbaijan, some informed sources pointed to the presence of about 1,500-2,000 mujaheddins fighting against Armenians. Around two or three hundred out of them were participating in military actions on a permanent basis. The Afghans took part in military operations according to a prescribed schedule: one day per week they were in the positions and the remaining days they could have a rest. During their

<sup>29</sup> Shaul Shay and Yoram Schweitzer *'The "Afghan Alumni" Terrorism Islamic Militants against the Rest of the World'*, (The International Policy Institute For Counter Terrorism", November 6, 2000), at [www.ict.org.il](http://www.ict.org.il)

<sup>30</sup> The report of Lieutenant colonel D. Lyatifov addressed to the head of Azerbaijani Armed forces' headquarters. See attachment No. 3. See also Azg, January 13, 1994.

<sup>31</sup> Daniel Shneider, 'Afghan Fighters Join Azeri-Armenian War', *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 13, 1993; *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, January 29, 1994, see APPENDIXES.

<sup>32</sup> *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, January 15, 1994; *Conflict International*, April 1994, Shaul Shay and Yoram Schweitzer, *op. cit.*

days off, they were allowed to leave for Baku, Mingechaur or other cities of Azerbaijan. In some cases, special flights were organized for some of them to spend their days off in Afghanistan.<sup>33</sup>

Most Afghan mujaheddins were deployed in the southern part of the Karabakh frontline towards the Iranian border. One of the Afghan POWs, Bahtior Verballah Baberzai (from the tribe of Rashiddustan) from the city of Mazari Sharif fought on the side of Gen. Abdul-Rashid Dustum and participated in the armed operations in the Fizuli region. According to him, the Azeri side promised a bonus of up to 5,000 US dollars to each Afghani soldier upon the expiration of their contracts. During the first months in Azerbaijan, each Afghan mercenary received an honorarium of one 1,000 *manats* (1 manat is slightly more than 1 USD). Depending on their further performance and success in the frontlines, the Afghans were granted the right to get payment in foreign currency also<sup>34</sup>.

In Karabakh frontlines Afghan mujaheddins were mainly attached to the infantry, especially in assault detachments, taking advantage of their skills in conducting military operations in mountainous areas. Their skills of using various kinds of small arms, especially those of Soviet production, as well as their military experience against Soviet type armored vehicles acquired during the Afghan war, in the first stages of fighting forced the Armenian side to retreat, especially in the southern frontline, such as Fizuli. The "Afghan experience" of the struggle against tanks was the following: if one grenade thrower was unable to destroy a Soviet made infantry military vehicle (Russian abr. BMP), or a regular tank, then a simultaneous strike with several grenade throwers from all sides was able to detonate the ammunition of the tank and the latter exploded afterwards.<sup>35</sup>

It should be noted that the living conditions of Afghan mercenaries were much better compared with Azeri soldiers. At the same time, Afghans usually stayed isolated from the Azeri troops and rarely got in contact with them. There were several reasons for this. **First**, Azerbaijani soldiers did not follow the rules of Shari'a concerning abstention from alcohol. Afghans strictly observed all daily rituals prescribed by the Koran. Consequently, they had prepared and ate food separately.<sup>36</sup> Afghans destroyed the winery near the Azeri city of Agdam because of too excessive use of wine by Azeri soldiers. This resulted in casualties in the

<sup>33</sup> The deposition of Afghani prisoner of war Bakhtior Verballah Baberzai, see *Golos Armenii*, May 26, 1994.

<sup>34</sup> Afghan Mujahid Ready To Fight For Nagorno-Karabakh, *RFE/RL Records*, May 4, 1994, Slavic, Baltic&Eurasian Archive, Azerbaijan, IIU-OSA, 300/80/6/2.

<sup>35</sup> I am grateful to Mr. Levon Melik-Shahnazaryan for providing this information.

<sup>36</sup> Galina Kovalskaya, 'The war. During the time of Mutalibov, Elchibey and Aliiev', *Novoe vremia*, No. 11, 1994, p. 20.

Azeri side. Clashes between Afghans and local Azeri population regarding Islamic rituals and traditions were quite frequent. For example, there were some cases of beating of Azeri women by Afghans because they did not practice the wearing of headscarves and veils. **Secondly**, among Azerbaijani forces there were also many Slavic mercenaries, referred to as "shuravi" by Afghans. The clashes between Afghan mujaheddins and Slavic mercenaries sometimes resulted in losses on both sides. On several occasions, local Russian draftees (or Azeris with light hair and blue eyes) had to be removed from sectors dominated by Afghans to prevent confrontations between them.<sup>37</sup> Some clashes occurred among Afghans too, particularly because of affiliation with different Afghan parties. **Finally**, the Azerbaijani army leadership tried to avoid excessive advertising of Afghani involvement in Karabakh fighting by isolating them from the main contingents of the Azerbaijani army. To avoid scandals and anger of relatives of the killed mujaheddins, Azerbaijani officials thoroughly hid the actual number of losses among the "Afghan contingent". For this very reasons not all bodies of killed mujaheddins were sent back home.<sup>38</sup>

However, some Azerbaijanis did have contact with the Afghans. These were mainly the persons interested in establishment of links with Afghans to import drugs from Afghanistan and organize further drug-traffic.<sup>39</sup> In search for new funds the Hekmatyar group since 1991 started to specialize in the production of heroin. It was controlling more than 86 field labs. To make it clearer would suffice to note that during the period from 1992 to 1995 about 2,200-2,400 tons of drugs per year were produced in Afghanistan.<sup>40</sup>

Drug trade in Afghanistan and its further traffic to other regions was a very profitable business. At times the money gained by Afghans for military services could not be compared with that earned from drug traffic.

Despite Baku's continuous denial of Afghan involvement in the Karabakh war, the officials in Stepanakert have periodically declared that there are enough materials to dispel any doubts on this issue.

Facing existing realities, the President of the Republic of Armenia Levon Ter-Petrosyan was obliged to address to write to the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Burhanuddin Rabbani and Prime Minister Gulbeddin Hekmatyar. In his message, the Armenian President expressed his anxiety

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Goltz, *op. cit.*, p. 276.

<sup>38</sup> *Golos Armenii*, May 26, 1994.

<sup>39</sup> *Moscow News*, No. 23, May 5-12, 1994.

<sup>40</sup> Ahmed Rashid, 'Taliban. Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism', (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 119; R. Jaqqar, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

