

The Reemergence of Islam in the Transcaucasus

LAWRENCE E. ADAMS

The Transcaucasus region between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, now comprising three former Union republics of the USSR, sits at the intersection of the conflicting interests of three ancient empires – Russia, Turkey and Persia – and is their historical battleground. An element in the conflict is contention amongst three corresponding visions of spiritual life and of the sociopolitical role of religion: Orthodox Christianity, secularised Turkish Sunnism and Iranian Shiism. The current struggle to develop a viable national identity in Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia includes throwing off the vestiges of Soviet communism, reversing the effects of russification, and determining the degree to which Islam will influence national life. The guarantee of religious freedom and pluralism in the new constitutions of the republics is a novel experiment in the region. The recent regional conflicts in Transcaucasia, particularly the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the region of Nagorny Karabakh, have subjected the relationship between religion and the state to particular stresses. Religion has been used to reinforce national identity in each state in support of the conflict, and it is a source of division amongst all parties. Azerbaijan may prove to be an important laboratory for testing the durability of two concurrent developments: the regeneration of Islam after the demise of official ideological atheism, and the claim by such a state to tolerate religious diversity.

The Resurgence of Islam

While the intensity of religious fervour varies across the region, and the correlation of religious identity with political developments is not at the moment particularly strong, this strength is in fact increasing. Religious faith is an identifiable element in the conflicts in the region, and remains an influence in social change. Islam, in particular, is significant in a continuation of its role in the demise of the USSR.

In a 1980 paper the expert on Islam in the USSR Alexandre Bennigsen noted that:

The Marxist-Leninist position on Islam was as clear as it was on any religion: destroy it. Indeed, the 'totalitarian' character of Islamic doctrine and the cohesion of the Russian Muslim community made Russian Islam even more dangerous to the Bolsheviks as a competitor for the allegiance of a sizeable part of the new Soviet population. The Bolsheviks ... recognized that Islam is more than a religion; rather, it is an entire cultural system, a way of life, and, therefore, a direct barrier to absolute state power.¹

It could be argued that it was concern over Islam that led the Soviet leadership to some of the 'last-gasp' measures that contributed to their downfall. The failure of the southern republics to be a 'red beacon'² to Iran and Turkey, and the concern over the effect of the Iranian Revolution on those republics, were a primary factor in the invasion of Afghanistan which did so much to exhaust the USSR as it met the fervour of the *mujaheddin*. Even under Soviet repression Islam linked many peoples in the USSR to others outside it and threatened the solidarity of the empire. Mikhail Gorbachev recognised this problem as late as 1986, announcing in Tashkent that: 'We must declare a stringent and uncompromising struggle against all religious manifestations, and also strengthen our political work and our atheist propaganda.'³ The legitimacy of Islam was subsequently enhanced by its role in the collapse of communist rule, even though many of its leaders had sold out to Soviet privilege.⁴

Since the demise of Soviet power, Islamic identity has grown in importance in the former Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan and among Transcaucasian Muslims. As Azerbaijan continues to establish its post-Soviet independence and to encourage nationalist identity, Islamic symbols have been given greater public prominence.

With the help of funding from Saudi Arabia, a new Islamic University has been founded in Baku; it has strong ties to the Islamic University in Medina. This new 'Islamic University of the Transcaucasus' is actually a development of the small Islamic Institute (*madrassah*) which was allowed to exist under the Soviet regime. That institute taught Islamic literature and Quranic studies to fewer than a hundred students at a time. This new university expects to grow to 500 students within two years. It teaches Quran, Hadith (Traditions of the Prophet), Sharia law, and a course of secular subjects in science and literature. According to the rector Haji Sabir Hasanli, 'Students must learn about themselves and their world, as well as about God'.⁵ The university seeks to become a dominant influence in Azerbaijan and among Muslims in the three republics. The current practice of the university is to be 'ecumenical' in that it does not teach exclusively according to one of the major schools of Islamic interpretation, but draws from all. Both Sunni and Shia Muslims are on the faculty and in the leadership. The rector has a policy of expelling 'trouble-makers', meaning students who attempt to introduce radical interpretations or to organise 'fundamentalist' activities. The historically pluralist nature of Azerbaijani society reinforces this orientation. Rector Sabir also serves as deputy to the spiritual leader (mufti) of Transcaucasian Muslims. He stresses the importance of Islamic education for the development of values in the current process of social and political reconstruction. The Quran is now being taught throughout the Azerbaijani educational system, thanks to the provision of Turkish teachers. The Islamic University will train Azeris for the same work.

Islamic identity is important for the national effort in the war against Armenia, according to many Azeri leaders: what started as a conflict over the disputed territory of Nagorny Karabakh soon grew into a struggle in defence of Azeri culture against Christian opponents. There are at least 40 known functioning mosques in Baku today (as compared to four in the Soviet period) and 200 throughout Azerbaijan (as compared to 16). Considerable numbers of Azeris now undertake the *haj* (pilgrimage) to Mecca, many with great pride at their first opportunity to do so. Islamicisation of public life is seen in the institution of new forms of 'civil religion'. A parliamentary law passed in April 1994 requires the presidential oath to be taken while holding a copy of the Quran. The new Azerbaijani tricolour flag includes green for Islam. The daily call to prayer, silent for 70 years, can now be heard in the centre of the old city of Baku. The official publication *Yurd* (*Fatherland*) acknowledges that 'religion is

activities of the Russians, nor has this plenipotentiary good faith altered popular sentiment on either side.

Daniel Pipes has recently described the two contending models of Islamic political development.¹² They are well demonstrated in the Caucasus region. While the secularised Turkish model seems to be prevailing at the moment, the fundamentalist Iranian model is close at hand. The continued containment of Iran is seen by many western powers as critical in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula; it is now also perceived as necessary in the region bounded by the Caspian and Black Seas. The Iranians have been supplying the Armenians in the current war. This unlikely arrangement between a radical Shiite regime and a Christian nation seems to have been brought about by common animosity toward Turkey and in order to weaken the pro-Turkish Azerbaijani government. Iran may also want to discredit the liberal Islamic leadership in Baku. Meanwhile involvement bolsters Iran's claim to be a regional power with which other states must deal.

The Return of Russia

The primary concern of the Transcaucasian states, particularly Azerbaijan, leading them to appeal for western involvement, is the belief that Russia is now manoeuvring to dominate the region again in the pursuit of its 'near abroad' policy. Russian dominance predates the Soviet period by over a century. Ostensibly Russia wants to control the oil from the Caspian Sea and safeguard its traditional security concerns in the south. Russia has apparently been offering surreptitious support to the Armenian side in the war, and has clearly been the dominant force in settling the separatist dispute in Georgia. The Azeris know that Georgia paid a high cost in terms of its sovereignty in order to receive Russian aid. They also know that the settlement in Georgia was at the expense of the goals of the Muslim separatists in Abkhazia. The Azeris have seen the Russians strengthening the Armenians through direct military aid in order to bring the sides to a standoff, leaving Russia in the position to assert itself as power broker and to establish Russian troops in the war zone as enforcers of the truce. For the Azeris, this means potential loss of territory through imposed settlement and the return of hated forces which left the country in 1992 after independence from the USSR. Azeris remain especially bitter about the Russian crackdown on demonstrations in Baku in January 1990 when over 100 protestors were killed. They are buried in the Park of the Martyrs, a beautiful public park in a prominent position overlooking Baku harbour. It now also holds the graves of young men killed in the war with Armenia. It was Russia and Iran, but primarily Russia, to which Azerbaijani President Gaidar Aliyev was referring when he proclaimed in his 21 May 1994 *Qurban-bairam* (Feast of the Sacrifice) speech that his people:

... must realise that ... Armenia is not waging war by itself. You are well aware of the countries and forces that support it. Had it been only Armenia, Azerbaijan's military forces would have evicted them from the republic's territory, even though our forces are not yet at full strength. However, that is connected with international politics. We are unable to influence the policies of certain forces and countries in the world.¹³

The Azeris resisted the Russian-led Bishkek agreement of May 1994, according to which Russian troops would be installed as peacekeepers in the disputed territories. The Azeris believed that ultimately they would lose territory and sovereignty if Russia returned. They note that the Russian initiative in Bosnia involved the ethnic

partition of the state. The Azerbaijani government was in favour of pressure on Russia to fall in line with the OSCE effort to install a multilateral force. The US government announced its agreement with that position in May 1994 and called for Russia to conform its efforts to the multilateral position.¹⁴ The ceasefire reached in late 1994 has allowed Azeri fears to abate somewhat.

Azerbaijani officials insist privately that Russian neoimperial sentiments are held across the political spectrum, and are not limited to a few generals or ultranationalists. There is no difference between Yel'tsin or Chernomyrdin or Rutskoy or Zhirinovskiy on the matter of dominating the Transcaucasus, one official told me. No doubt such views are genuinely believed by those expressing them; but they are also calculated to elicit concern in the West over Russian designs. It must be noted that the image of a uniform desire for resurgence of Russian empire may not be the complete picture of Russian international intent. While many Russian officials, President Yel'tsin and former Foreign Minister Kozyrev included, have often engaged in proto-imperialist rhetoric, and the Zhirinovskiy faction subsists on chauvinism and racism, the aim of Russian international behaviour has in the end been integration into the global economic and political structure. In June 1994 Russia signed agreements with NATO to join the Partnership for Peace and cooperative agreements with the European Union. In a recent study John Dunlop noted that:

... as the various polls, plebiscites, and elections we have examined show, ethnic Russians [are] increasingly resigned to a loss of empire. Faced with a choice between empire saving and nation-building, Russians were firmly opting for a resuscitative program of nation-building. ... It was time, they appeared to believe, for Russia to get on with the task of solving its own severe economic, social, demographic, and spiritual problems.¹⁵

In other words, given the experience in Afghanistan and in the light of current conditions, Russian adventurism may be more a matter of words than of deeds. Russia is clearly involved in the Transcaucasus and actively asserting itself there, pursuing its security and interests, but as Dunlop concludes, 'Paradoxical as it may seem, the loss of the historic Tsarist and Soviet Empires could lead to the rebirth of Russia as a major Eurasian power with a successful economy and cultural achievements which would be the envy of the rest of the world.'¹⁶ Russian engagement may be the best the region can hope for, since the western world is so distant and considers relations with Russia of higher importance.

Azeris long for western recognition of their position in the regional conflict in which they are engaged. With some justification, they believe the West has been convinced primarily by the Armenian position, and influenced by Armenian groups in the West. They appeal for recognition of their struggle to maintain sovereignty and territorial integrity. President Aliyev has blamed his predecessors for the current state of affairs.

You are well aware that the dispute on Karabakh has a significant place in the policies of all the world's countries. Each and every country in the world has expressed its opinion on the Karabakh dispute. Regrettably, Azerbaijan maintained a weak policy and failed to put its weight down in international platforms over the past few years. Furthermore, the officials responsible for Azerbaijan's policy were unsuccessful. Consequently, the influential countries, mainly the European countries and the United States, were convinced that Azerbaijan had to be blamed and that the Armenians

in Karabakh were deprived of their rights. International opinion has supported the Armenian side. That is a fact ... had the officials – who supposedly governed Azerbaijan in the past and who now claim that they are great politicians – maintained a wise policy, Azerbaijan's relations with Russia, Iran and the United States would not have been disrupted and the US Congress would not have adopted that resolution [which banned aid] ...¹⁷

In the same speech Aliyev made much of his visits to France, China and Russia, his signing of the NATO Partnership for Peace arrangement, and the decision to rejoin the CIS. 'Can you imagine – a new and independent republic like Azerbaijan has established close relations with several countries that influence international politics. Official visits have taken place and fruitful agreements have been signed. All this has given Azerbaijan publicity in the international community.'¹⁸

Few dissenting voices are heard in Azerbaijan now, with near unanimity across the country that their cause is just and that the world is indifferent to their plight. The same sentiments are voiced in the street, in the academy, in the mosque and in government offices. Aliyev's pronouncements – 'The blood of martyrs will be avenged. Azerbaijan's people will maintain the struggle that the martyrs waged. They will reestablish Azerbaijan's territorial integrity!'¹⁹ – are widely supported. Yet the Azeri people have grown weary of the war, of the killing of their young men who are pressed into service with little training. They want their leaders and the great powers to reach a settlement which will satisfy their definition of justice while achieving peace. Such concerns are leading Azeris to grasp at any straw which indicates changing sentiment in the USA.

I can also inform you that President Clinton sent a letter to me a month ago. It indicated a positive shift in the US approach towards Azerbaijan. President Clinton described the resolution, which banned any US aid to Azerbaijan, as an unjust decision. That was the first time he did so. Furthermore, he informed me that he will work to have the Congress cancel the resolution. Considering Azerbaijan's present situation, I am convinced that this move is a very much appreciated step by President Clinton.²⁰

Aliyev longs for an official invitation to visit Washington; he had a brief meeting with President Clinton at the United Nations in October 1995.

Azeri demands are extensive and not achievable *in toto*: a final end to the war, complete restoration of territory, removal of Armenian forces, a non-Russian international force as peacekeepers, the establishment of a war crimes tribunal, full independence and sovereignty. On the other hand, the irredentist demands of the Armenians for ethnic integrity and completed nation-statehood are also too costly. Given the current level of demands, it is hard to envisage a solution fully satisfactory to both sides. The Armenian position is that they are operating to correct historical injustices regarding territory and ethnic integrity, and that more immediately they are merely responding to aggressive acts by the Azeri side. When the Armenian enclave of Nagorny Karabakh made further moves toward independence in 1992 the Azeris first responded not only with enforcement moves against the enclave but also with an embargo against Armenia. Armenia, still devastated by the 1988 earthquake, appealed in desperation to the West for help, and eventually to the Russians. Western nations responded to the appeals of Armenian interest groups. In the USA, section

907 of the 1992 Freedom Support Act forbade direct aid to Azerbaijan while encouraging aid to Armenia. The embargo and the infusion of aid enabled Armenia to strike back at the Azeris in 1993. This now international war eventually led to the downfall of the popularly elected president of Azerbaijan, Abulfaz Elchibey, a former dissident, in June 1993, and the accession to power of former Soviet Politburo member and former Azerbaijani KGB chief Gaidar Aliyev. For the Armenians this is a fight for their ethnic enclave within Azeri territory, against the challenges of Islamic civilisation, renascent Sovietism and a bullying potential regional power. With control of vast oil reserves and strong ties to Turkey, Azerbaijan is perceived as the greatest threat by the Armenians, with their fears of pan-Turkism.

The Return of the Turks

Azerbaijan has strong relations with Turkey, and the Azeris proudly acknowledge their ethnic ties with Turkic peoples. Turkey took an early initiative in 1992 with overtures to the region, creating the Black Sea Cooperative Council and working to develop its influence throughout this region and Central Asia. Much of the history of the region can be understood in the light of its role as a battleground between the Turkish and Russian empires.

While Armenians regard the Azeris as essentially the same as the Turks, with whom the Armenians have longstanding and well-known disputes over territory and earlier ethnic cleansing, the story is more complex. Azeris are indeed Turkic, and their language is essentially a variant of Turkish. They recently dropped the Cyrillic alphabet and adopted the Turkish form of the Latin alphabet (rather than Arabic or Farsi script) for their written language. Whilst most educated Azeris speak Russian, the national language has survived 70 years of russification, and is preferred at home and in commerce. The new Azerbaijani flag is a tricolour: green for Islam, blue for culture and the sea, and red for Turkish nationality. Pan-Turkic sentiments are indeed strong, though currently less strong than westward-looking tendencies. Deposed president Elchibey, for example, was associated with pan-Turkic ideas, and had been imprisoned by the Soviet authorities for advocating them. His incautious responses to the Karabakh situation bear much of the blame for the conflict, as well as explaining his removal after one year in office.

Ties to Turkey are strong, then; but the Azeris also have other dimensions to their identity. The form of Islam in Azerbaijan is predominantly Shiite, the religion of the Iranian regime, a result of the periods of Persian domination. The Azeri nation actually straddles state borders, with more Azeris living in northern Iran (10–15 million) than in the Azeri state (7 million).²¹ While Azeris fear and resist the militant form of state religion practised in Iran, commercial and diplomatic ties with Iran are important. Furthermore, the current leadership sees the country as potentially a western-oriented, secularised trading state not governed by a nationalistic irredentist ideology. Azerbaijan has quickly acceded to many treaties and international arrangements to show its intention to participate in the international arena – as has Armenia. Both states have, for example, joined the North Atlantic Consultative Council, and signed the Partnership for Peace proposal from NATO. Both have cooperated with OSCE efforts to mediate in their dispute.

There have been times, in the Soviet period and earlier, when these populations have lived in tension but in relative peace, even cooperating. They coexisted, for example, in a larger Transcaucasian Federative Republic, which was absorbed into the USSR in 1923, and finally obliterated when the three current states were set up

by the Soviet regime in 1936.²² Tragically, however, strife has regularly erupted, and legendary incidents of mutual recrimination are part of the several nationalist mythologies.²³ The situation as far as interethnic relations are concerned is somewhat analogous to that of Yugoslavia. Each of the three republics has traditionally included large populations of ethnic groups from the other states. Even today many Armenians and Georgians live in Azerbaijan, many Azeris live in Georgia. Most Azeris have now been expelled from Armenia, although the Azeri enclave of Nakhichevan, cut off by Armenian territory, remains more or less viable. Most Armenians who lived in Nakhichevan have been expelled.

Religious Pluralism or Peace?

What role will religious identity play in the future Transcaucasus? Apparently an important one: religion remains an essential element in national identity. The forms of this identity are not yet finally determined, however. The current liberal Islamic establishment in Baku should be encouraged through interaction with scholars and leaders from abroad, and aid to the region will help forestall the temptations to become more closely linked with Iran. Armenian groups in the West can encourage coexistence and condemn the ethnic cleansing campaign. Consistent monitoring by human rights groups will be necessary to support the development of religious freedom. Outside aid to the region and economic investment must be tied to a positive record on constitutional guarantees and democratic reforms.

In my opinion religious pluralism, on the basis of constitutionally guaranteed religious freedom, has a good chance of prevailing in the region, especially if a political federation or regional agreement is established among the three Transcaucasian states. The peoples of the region have a record of religious pluralism, and the three states have at times been joined in a single republic. Under current conditions the possibility of federation is a long way off, but with effective international involvement some type of regional arrangement may result. However, even a loosely structured system providing some autonomous arrangements for various groups will be difficult to achieve in the current environment. It was deliberate Stalinist policy to separate and make rivals of the three states. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union coexistence has been shattered by conflict. The meddling of adjacent powers is also to blame for fracturing the traditional consensus. Developments in South Africa, and the recent Palestinian solution, inspire hopes in the possibility of federation, but such an arrangement could result in another Yugoslavia. A regional security agreement with scheduled arms reduction and confidence building is a more achievable goal. Western investors are already showing great interest in the region and are poised for increased activity after the war ends and reforms are instituted. Since most of the oil reserves are in Azerbaijan, however, the benefits of investment could produce further imbalances in wealth and power, unless they are distributed throughout the region. This fact is further evidence of the need for a regional organisation or federation which supports the development of the entire Transcaucasus.

Democracy or Religious Freedom?

Under current conditions democratic developments have been minimal in the region. War has exaggerated the tendency to support strong men. In Azerbaijan popular elections have been held twice since 1992, including the referendum which affirmed the return to power of Aliyev. Opposition groups operate freely, and the parliament is

multi-party. The military is politically weak. A new constitution guarantees freedom of speech, religion and the press. The regime continues to proclaim its dedication to international standards necessary for full participation in international organisations. Aliyev is a popular strong man, however, who came to power through a coup which overthrew the elected Elchibey. Many people express willingness to forsake democracy because of the 'abnormal times'. Censorship operates and the state controls the broadcasting media. Security checkpoints and some restrictions on movement are encountered, though to a far lesser degree than in the Soviet period. Official corruption abounds. One hears expressions of nostalgia for Soviet times, when 'life was better', though little sentiment for a return to the Soviet regime. Many harsh measures have been documented in Nagorny Karabakh, carried out by the Azeri military, and there have been anti-Armenian riots. Armenia is more stable politically, and elections are scheduled for autumn 1996. The war with Azerbaijan, and the resultant extreme economic hardships, have reduced freedom. Armenia has also engaged in ethnic cleansing, expelling many Azeris, and has been guilty of war atrocities. Georgia, of course, is in economic collapse after its recent civil war; the policy of the West is to support the Shevardnadze regime and to provide aid for reconstruction and development.

The best that can be said is that the seeds of a democratic federation can be found and must be cultivated. Western and international aid agencies should demand democratic reforms and positive human rights practices as conditions for development aid. Religious freedom in particular should be promoted as a key to social peace in these pluralistic societies. The major powers also need to act fairly and consistently in regard to each of the three states. Each state is guilty of aggression and abuses, and each demonstrates potential for democracy and development. The West needs to avoid being seen to cultivate favourites. The USA, for example, should rescind Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act and provide aid impartially in the region, with stringent conditions of peaceful settlement and democratic development as described above. The states involved should be made dependent on each other as well as responsible for their individual actions.

The West cannot avoid dealing with the situation in the Transcaucasus, since the region puts world order at risk as the theatre of conflicting interests of major international powers and the struggle for control of major energy resources. Also at stake are democracy, pluralism and religious freedom. The Transcaucasus is a region which requires not massive intervention, but skilful diplomatic and humanitarian engagement in a world now defined by the competition of many powers each seeking its own security and economic advancement.

Notes and References

- ¹ Alexandre Bennigsen, 'Islam in the Soviet Union Today', Unpublished paper (Keston Institute archives, 1980).
- ² In 1967 Nariman Narimanov, First Secretary of the Azerbaijan SSR Communist Party, proclaimed that he 'wanted Azerbaijan to serve as a "duct for [the passage of] Bolshevik-style revolution into all the states and nationalities professing Islam"'. The 'red beacons' reference comes from a comment by Tatar communist leader Mir Said Sultan Galiyev regarding the effect of the Central Asian and Caucasian republics on Persia, Arabia and Turkey. See Alexandre Bennigsen, 'Soviet Muslims and the world of Islam', *Problems of Communism*, March/April 1980, pp. 38–51.
- ³ Cited by Martin Walker, 'Gorbachev launches strong attack on religion', *The Guardian*, 29 November 1986, p. 8. This speech was not reported as usual in the Moscow-based Soviet

papers, and appeared only in the Uzbek party paper. It was one of a series of speeches given by Gorbachev on the demographic problem and aimed at an 'uncompromising struggle against religious phenomena' and Islamic practices.

- ⁴ In 1980 Ziyauddin Khan Ibn Ishan Babakhanov, the chairman of the Muslim Board of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, wrote in *Muslims in the USSR* (Progress Publishers) that Muslims enjoyed absolute freedom of religious practice and the full benefits of the advanced Soviet system. By contrast M. Gapurov, first secretary of the Communist Party of the Turkmen SSR, in the same year expressed official concerns about the strength of Islam: 'Muslim quack-confessors, champions of old reactionary principles and rites, operating wilfully in the so-called holy places, are trying to rekindle religious fanaticism, fuel feelings of national narrow-mindedness and instil in family relations harmful feudal and kinship survivals and rituals'. His solution: 'We must learn purposefully to combine internationalist and atheist education in order to rob nationalism of its religious cover and religion of its claim to represent the nation'. Cited in Bohdan Nahajlo, 'The existence of an underground Islam in the USSR', *New Statesman*, 8 August 1980.
- ⁵ Interview with Haji Sabir Hasanli, 27 May 1994.
- ⁶ Ibragim Shurakov, 'Azerbaijan, Islam and politics', *Yurd* (English language edition), no. 1, January 1993, p. 14.
- ⁷ *ibid.*, p. 15.
- ⁸ Interview data, Haji Sabir and Abdullayev Alikram, Azerbaijan Institute of Social Management and Politology, 26 May 1994.
- ⁹ See Thomas D. Sisk, *Islam and Democracy* (United States Institute of Peace, Washington, DC, 1992), pp. 17–31.
- ¹⁰ Interview, 27 May 1994.
- ¹¹ Evaluations of the conflict in the region which also provide greater historical detail include: Helsinki Watch, *Bloodshed in the Caucasus: Escalation of the Armed Conflict in Nagorno Karabakh* (New York, September 1992); Caroline Cox and John Eibner, *Ethnic Cleansing in Progress: War in Nagorno Karabakh* (Institute for Religious Minorities in the Islamic World, Zurich, 1993).
- ¹² Daniel Pipes, 'Islam's intramural struggle', *The National Interest*, Spring 1994, pp. 84–86. Pipes proposes a simple choice in the Islamic world: 'On one side stand those Muslims confident to learn from outsiders, oriented toward democracy and ready to integrate into the world; on the other hand stand those who are fearful, who seek strong rule, and who hope to withdraw from the world. In a word, it's a battle between secularist and fundamentalist Muslims – to be more precise, a competition between two of the great countries of the Middle East, Turkey and Iran. It's likely to be a long, deep and difficult fight.' While this comparison is unsatisfying as far as explaining the complexities of Islam and of the politics of the region is concerned, it is a useful tool for comparing the broad political options facing states such as Azerbaijan and the general question of relations with the rest of the world.
- ¹³ Speech of Gaidar Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, at the Islamic Sacrifice Festival, Baku, 21 May 1994. BBC Monitoring, *SWB: Summary of World Broadcasts*, 31 May 1994, SU/2010, F/6.
- ¹⁴ *ibid.*, F/5. See also Statement of US Ambassador to Azerbaijan, 15 May 1994.
- ¹⁵ John B. Dunlop, 'Russia: confronting the loss of empire, 1987–1991', *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 108, no. 4, 1993–4, p. 634.
- ¹⁶ *ibid.*
- ¹⁷ Aliyev, *op. cit.*, F/4.
- ¹⁸ *ibid.*, F/5.
- ¹⁹ *ibid.*, F/2.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, F/4.
- ²¹ Shirin Akiner, *Islamic Peoples of the Soviet Union* (Keegan Paul International, London, 1983).
- ²² Akiner, *op. cit.* See also Mikhail Heller and Aleksandr Nekrich, *Utopia in Power: the History of the Soviet Union from 1917 to the Present* (Summit Books, New York, 1986).

- ²³ See, for example, the important book by Dilip Hiro, *Between Marx and Muhammed: the Changing Face of Central Asia* (Harper Collins, London, 1994). See also Christopher J. Walker, *Armenia and Karabakh: the Struggle for Unity* (Minority Rights Publications, London, 1991), and Cox and Eibner, *op. cit.*

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my gratitude for the support of grants from the Lilly Foundation and North Park College in this research. I would also like to express my gratitude to Anders Ecklund for his assistance in the preparation of this article, to Michael Bourdeaux and Malcolm Walker of Keston Institute, to Dr Rafik Zenalov of BSIPI, to Haji Sabir Hasanli of the Islamic University of Baku, to Dr Mamedov Bakhtiar for translation and hospitality, and to Dr Dan Clendenin of Moscow State University.