

## WORLD NEWS

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In Agdam, Azerbaijan, mourners grieve for a man they say was killed fleeing an attack last week by Armenian forces on the town of Khojaly.

## Survivors Describe Armenian Attack

Azerbaijanis Claim 1,000 Died While Fleeing Raid in Disputed Enclave

By Thomas Goltz  
Special to The Washington Post

BAKU, Azerbaijan, March 3—Reports from refugees arriving here of a massacre by Armenian forces last week in the town of Khojaly are adding new fuel to the fiery confrontation between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The precise death toll remains uncertain, but it is clear that many people were killed in the assault, when Armenian forces attacked the Azerbaijani town in the disputed area of Nagorno-Karabakh. The incident was the latest explosion in the four-year-old battle between the Christian Armenians who live in Karabakh and the Muslim Azerbaijanis who administer it. The conflict already has claimed more than 1,000 lives.

Azerbaijani police said today that they had recovered 120 bodies from the Khojaly area, but survivors have claimed that the death toll may be more than 1,000. Armenian officials in Moscow called the higher figure a "gross exaggeration," according to the Associated Press.

Eyewitnesses who flew to the disaster site by Azerbaijani military helicopter spoke of seeing scores of bodies, some mutilated. "We saw 30 bodies in the immediate vicinity of where our helicopter landed," said freelance photographer Costa Sakellariou. "Many of those we found, including women and children, had their hands raised above their heads as if shot after having surrendered. Several were scalped."

The mayor of Khojaly, Elman Mahmudov, gave reporters his version of what happened

after arriving here. He said the attack started on the evening of Feb. 25, the anniversary of the 1989 massacre of Armenians in the Azerbaijani city of Sumgait, in which an estimated 31 Armenians were killed.

The Armenian forces were backed by troops of the former Soviet Interior Ministry (MVD) when they attacked the town, which a few weeks ago had an estimated population of 6,000. "They opened their barrage at around 8:30 p.m. and then attacked from three sides about two hours later," Mahmudov said. "They wanted us to flee toward Askeron. We had no other choice."

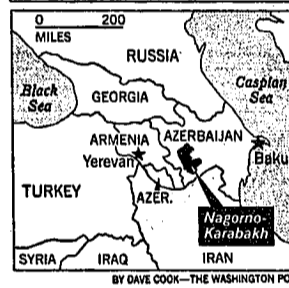
The alleged massacre occurred there, at the so-called "Askeron Gap," as refugees from Khojaly tried to make their way to the city of Agdam through what survivors described as a gantlet of Armenian fire.

Like many of the survivors, Mahmudov was critical of the government of Azerbaijani President Ayaz Mutalibov for not providing stronger support after Armenian militants cut off the road to Khojaly last October. "We thought the nation was behind us," he said. "We were deceived, utterly."

Officials in Yerevan, the Armenian capital, have said that the assault on Khojaly followed an attack that morning by Azerbaijani soldiers, backed by tanks and several helicopters, along the road between Khojaly and Agdam.

Another eyewitness account of the fighting came from Bahram Nigmatov, a draftee from Turkmenistan who had deserted the MVD

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## For the Survivors of Vukovar, Desperation Amid the Ruins

War-Flattened Danube Town Unsure It Will Rise Again

By Laura Silber  
Special to The Washington Post

VUKOVAR, Croatia—The Yugoslav army has cleared the corpses from the streets. Bulldozers have scraped much of the rubble into mountainous heaps. A few survivors scuttle among the ruins, foraging for potatoes or onions to eat raw in their cellar bunkers. Daily life in Vukovar, the army says, is returning to normal.

Not a single building in this once picturesque Danube River town escaped damage in the savage three-month battle for it that ended last November when Croat militia defenders surrendered to Serb insurgents and the Serb-led Yugoslav army.

Hundreds of residents died under the relentless pounding of the army's heavy artillery pieces, mortars and river gunboats; thousands more fled to the uncertain safety of the countryside or to nearby towns temporarily more fortunate. When it was over, Vukovar's prewar population of 50,000 had been reduced to a shell-shocked handful and their town to smoldering ruins. No city in Europe had seen the like of it since the urban firestorms of World War II.

Now, the altar of a Croat Roman Catholic church near the town center teeters at a steep angle under the open sky, its crucifix glinting in the sun. The rest of the building crumbled around it under the weight of steady shellfire. A Serb Orthodox church nearby is in little better condition; the priest says a bomb planted inside last fall tore away the roof and destroyed all but one of a cycle of 250-year-old frescoes.

Vukovar seems very far from God these days. On Sundays and saints days not long ago, Serb and Croat neighbors filled these churches with chants of Christian charity; now their ruins offer meager shelter against the winter wind for a few of the faithful.

"I have lost everything," says Jovan Njagic, a 63-year-old Serb, as he points from the Orthodox church to the blackened skeleton of a house that used to be his. Tears pour from his eyes as he shivers in rags that used to be clothing. "This is all I have," he says. "All I own are the clothes on my back." How did it come to this? Njagic asks. "Before the troubles started, we never asked about people's nationality. Now there is no one left to ask."

The "troubles" started last June when Croatia pulled out of the six-republic Yugoslav federation. Croatia's 600,000-member Serb minority, fearing repression or worse under the republic's new nationalist government, launched a guerrilla war with the powerful backing of the Yugoslav army and the neighboring republic of Serbia. Before the fighting abated two months ago under a U.N.-sponsored cease-fire, at least 10,000 people had been killed, more than a half-million were homeless, and a third of prewar Croatia—including the remains of Vukovar—was in Serb hands.

Njagic's wife, a Croat, fled to Croatian-held territory last fall; two of his three children are married to Croats, and they also abandoned Vukovar, fearing reprisals by Serbs who seized control of the local government. One of Njagic's sons, an architect, stayed behind for a time in the hope that he might help rebuild the town. But such hopes seem vain amid the town's roofless shells and toppled chimneys, and it appears that most of what is left of Vukovar will have to be razed before anything new can rise on the site.

Serbia has promised to help restore Vukovar, and Serbian news reports boast that renovation is underway, but there is little sign here of a coherent construction effort. Indeed, political observers say that neither Serbia nor Croatia seems in a position to help rebuild Vukovar—even if their battered economies could sustain the effort—



Helicopter hovers above scorched shell of Vukovar apartment house, in photo from December.

until the question of borders and regional sovereignty is determined in a comprehensive peace settlement. As Njagic, a retired accountant, observed: "No one will give any real aid until they decide who Vukovar belongs to. It will take billions of dollars, but it will never be the same."

A major international effort to force a peace settlement in the region is set to get underway in the next few weeks, as thousands of U.N. peace-keeping troops take up positions between the warring sides. Many of Vukovar's remaining residents—Serbs and Croats alike—say they look forward to the arrival of the U.N. troops, but they seem to know little about the terms of the U.N. operation, or, indeed, about the politics that led to the war.

Meanwhile, with no electricity, running water or cooking fuel, they survive on whatever shelter and sustenance they can find amid the wreckage of their lives.

Marija Lukic, a 51-year-old Croat factory worker, says she sent her children to safety but stayed in Vukovar as the battle raged around her because "it was my fate to protect the little we had." Lukic was wounded a

## Russian Troops Caught In Growing Ethnic Strife

Pullouts Spark Controversy in Karabakh, Moldova

By Michael Dobbs  
Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, March 3—Russian troops found themselves the target of rising ethnic violence in outlying regions of the former Soviet Union today, undermining the new Russian leadership's attempts to secure a peaceful retreat from empire.

The withdrawal of a regiment of former Soviet troops from the embattled southern enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh was temporarily halted after the unit was attacked by Armenian militants. The Defense Ministry in Moscow said one soldier was killed in the incident, which followed a surge in fighting between Christian Armenia and Muslim Azerbaijan. The Armenians reported the loss of a helicopter carrying about 30 people.

In the western republic of Moldova, armed clashes were reported for a second day after Moldovan activists seized weapons from a former Soviet army garrison. Bands of Russian Cossacks and Russian militiamen from a breakaway region of Moldova known as the Dniester republic came to the aid of the besieged army unit, and at least two people were killed during the ensuing battles, according to Russian news agency reports.

Soviet troops stationed in the Baltic republic of Lithuania, meanwhile, began a long-heralded pullout half a century after the region was annexed by Moscow in a wartime deal with Nazi Germany. But Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis complained that the Russian government was dragging its feet on the withdrawal, which he depicted as purely symbolic.

Taken together, today's developments were a dramatic illustration of the problems facing Russian President Boris Yeltsin as he attempts to disengage his vast nation from its centuries-long quest for military control of the Eurasian landmass. The latest attacks on predominantly Russian military units are bound to fuel the dissatisfaction of former Soviet officers already angry over the dismantling of the Soviet Union.

The rise in ethnic tensions in outlying republics also threatens the cohesion of the post-Soviet Commonwealth of Independent States. Two of its members, Armenia and Azerbaijan, are effectively at war. Moldova is wracked by civil strife between its ethnic Romanian majority and its Russian-speaking minority. The two most populous republics, Russia and Ukraine, are arguing over economic and military issues.

The sense that Russia is once again retreating from exposed positions was underlined today when it became known that Gen. Boris Gromov, the last commander of Soviet troops in Afghanistan, had been dispatched to Karabakh to supervise the withdrawal of the 366th Motorized Infantry Regiment. The regiment is stationed in Stepanakert, capital of the predominantly Armenian-inhabited Karabakh enclave, which is surrounded by Azerbaijani territory.

Armenian leaders have condemned the decision to withdraw the regiment, saying it could trigger an all-out attack on Karabakh by a 20,000-strong Azerbaijani army. In an apparent attempt to forestall such an operation, Armenian militiamen went on the offensive last week, attacking the Azerbaijani-populated Karabakh village of Khojaly and killing dozens, if not hundreds, of residents.

Videotape obtained by Western television networks showed more than three dozen bodies, including children, scattered on a hillside near Khojaly. Azerbaijanis say at least 1,000 people were killed, but Armenians insist that such figures are grossly exaggerated.

Armenian authorities reported tonight that an Mi-26 helicopter evacuating women and children from Stepanakert was shot down over Azerbaijani territory. Russian television said there were no survivors. The Azerbaijani news agency reported that Armenia is making 10 to 15 daily helicopter flights into Stepanakert to keep the city supplied with food and ammunition.

In Moldova, fighting continued Monday and Tuesday around the headquarters of a civilian defense regiment of the former Soviet army outside the town of Dubossary. According to the Tass-Rita news agency, Moldovan militiamen broke into the barracks Monday and seized 70 automatic rifles, about 2,000 rounds of ammunition and various hand weapons.

Tass said a bus evacuating servicemen's families from the military base came under fire early this morning. Moldovan activists have accused the former Soviet army of siding with Russian-speaking secessionists who have declared their own "Soviet republic" on the eastern bank of the Dniester River.

Today's initial pullout from Lithuania involved 100 members of an air defense division stationed near the capital, Vilnius, who left in a convoy of 36 mobile missile launchers. About 80,000 other former Soviet troops, including a crack paratroop division, are still stationed in the Baltic republic. Many say they will refuse to leave until their families are provided with proper accommodations in Russia, where there is a chronic housing shortage.

Former Soviet Communist legislators, meanwhile, announced that they will attempt to reconvene the full Soviet parliament in Moscow on March 17 in a calculated challenge to Yeltsin's authority. The 2,250-member Congress of People's Deputies was effectively liquidated last December following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

A member of the organizing committee, former Soviet prime minister Nikolai Ryzhkov, told journalists that the ex-Soviet republics cannot survive as independent states without "a new center to balance their interests." He depicted the 11-nation Commonwealth as "a stillborn baby" whose decisions are not binding on anyone.

## Bosnia Tense After Vote For Secession

By Laura Silber  
Special to The Washington Post

SARAJEVO, Yugoslavia, March 3—Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic proclaimed his republic's independence from the tattered Yugoslav federation today and denounced Monday's attempt by armed Serb nationalists to isolate and polarize this multi-ethnic Balkan capital.

"The referendum decided the question," Izetbegovic told reporters, referring to a weekend ballot in which voters here overwhelmingly supported creation of an independent Bosnia-Herzegovina within its current borders. "Bosnia is independent and wants to be an internationally recognized state."

Masked Serb gunmen opposed to Bosnian independence had thrown up roadblocks around this city of 600,000 as the results of Sunday's vote became apparent, paralyzing traffic for most of the day Monday and heightening fears that the bloody civil war between Serbs and Croats in neighboring Croatia was about to spread here.

Today, Izetbegovic declared that no further such incidents would be tolerated, and he threatened to call out the entire citizenry to counter a recurrence. "Two or three hundred thousand of them will come out, and they will secure all parts of Sarajevo," he said. "We will stop this blackmail."

The Serb militants agreed to dismantle the barricades Monday evening after negotiations with Bosnian officials, but Izetbegovic denied today that his government had made any concessions to the gunmen. Other officials sources, however, said that the Serbs were promised an increased representation on police forces around the republic and a greater voice in news programming on the republic's state-run television network.

New alarms were raised late tonight when Bosnian television reported that groups of angry Serbs from a town outside Sarajevo were marching toward the capital.

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