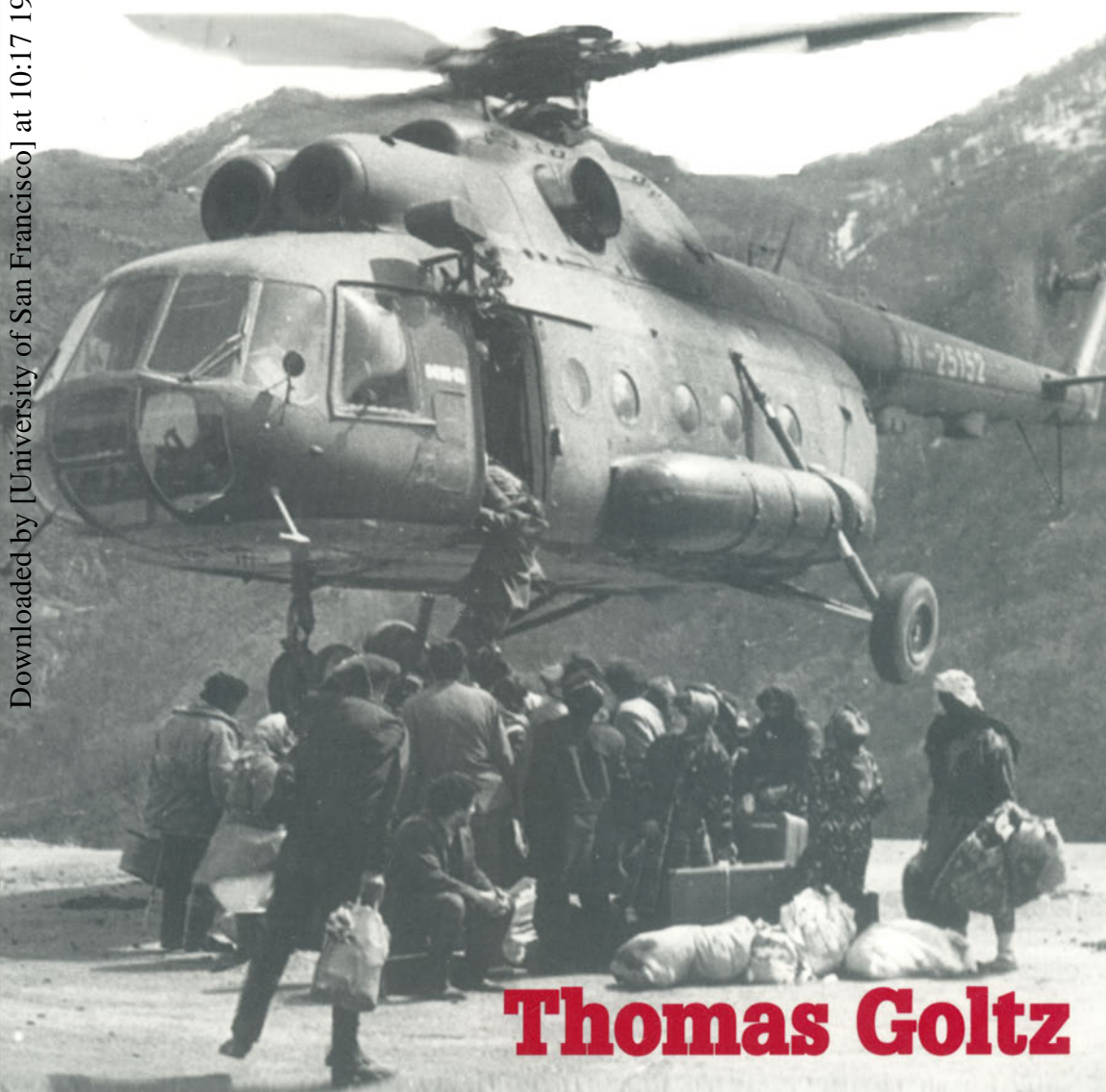


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Oil-Rich, War-Torn, Post-Soviet Republic**

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Thomas Goltz

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tial apparatus whom he could name. He would soon return to the capital to sort out exactly who had 'sold out' Shusha. He ended his interview with a vow not only to retake the fallen city but to root out the 'traitors in Baku' who had sullied his name. The roller coaster ride had begun, with Mamedov and Gaziev as the proxy players and the television studio the proxy venue.

Across the street at the Supreme Soviet, meanwhile, the pro-Iranian 'Repentance Society' had defied the ban on protest demonstrations and set up a tent and soup kitchens on the steps of the parliament, and were shouting *Allah ul-Akbar!* (God is Great!) on the hour, every hour, in order to restore the nation to the Islamic faith of its forefathers, and incidentally, President Mutalibov to his rightful place in power. When not chanting, the Repenters occupied themselves with threatening anyone who walked in or out of the parliament building, demanding that Acting President Yaqub Mamedov reconvene the full parliament and dissolve the National Council.

But if the steps of parliament were the loudest venue for remonstrance and protest, the most sentient site was right across the street at the *Shehidler Xiyabani*. Here, grim-faced, bearded friends of those fallen at Shusha were paying final tribute to their comrades in arms and asking themselves why the war was going so badly. In addition to the pro-forma honor guard whose task it was to let off a volley of blanks after bodies were laid in graves, the veterans would let off multiple rounds of their own weapons, simulating the fusillade of enemy fire that had killed their comrades. One such emotional burial was that of Albert Marum, a Baku Jew whose feats of bravery as a volunteer fighter in Shusha made him one of the most popular soldiers in the theater. His funeral, attended by hundreds of soldiers and friends, was an odd mixture of Shi'ite Muslim *Taziyeh* and Sephardic Jewish *Kaddish*. The rattle of live fire released from the weapons of those present sent casual observers scurrying for cover. Many thought the long-expected civil war had just broken out. It had not, but it was clearly only a matter of time. Skirmishes in the side streets already could be heard over the weekend of May 8 and 9: the late-night rattle of small arms fire and the thump of grenades in a distant alley.

* * *

Parliament reconvened on May 14th, on the pretext of hearing the preliminary report by the Xodjali Disaster Commission. The press was excluded from the hall but allowed to view the proceedings via an in-house television channel in a second-floor room usually used for press conferences. The acoustics in the room were bad, but the gist of the discussion was clear: a whitewash of Ayaz Mutalibov's role in the national disaster. . . .