

# “Invitation To Rain: A Story of the Road Taken Towards Freedom”

## Editorial Reviews

### Review

Army built on fear remembered by former soldier

Mitch Meador

Book REVIEW With his first sentence, Mahir Ibrahimov hurls his reader into a terrifying setting where being from the wrong region merits recruits a double helping of brutality from officers of the Soviet Army. He paints vivid word-pictures of the torments he and other young soldiers had to endure in a military built not on camaraderie but fear. Although his autobiography opens in Russia, the initial chapter heading is I am an American. Today, this native of Azerbaijan is a citizen of the United States. But the path here was not an easy one, as he tells us in his new book, Invitation to Rain: A Story of the Road Taken Towards Freedom (\$15, Global Scholarly Publications). The first half, shuttling back and forth between Azerbaijan and Moscow, explodes with haunting, dreamlike images that invite comparison with another writer who yearned to immigrate to America. Franz Kafka died of tuberculosis in 1924, at age 40, without either reaching America or finishing any of his three novels. The ethnic tensions that Ibrahimov describes in the former Soviet Union and Iraq call to mind the anti-Semitic riots that Kafka experienced in Prague in 1897 and 1920. The resemblance to Kafka ends when Ibrahimov fulfills what Kafka only dreamed about. By actually going to America, he changes the whole nature of the story, and his job as author is to tell what happens next. The more practical business of advancing the budding Republic of Azerbaijan intervenes.... to get Congress to repeal a pernicious section of law that is hindering progress in his homeland. It wasn't Section 907 that ultimately led Ibrahimov to seek his family's future in the U.S., but the failure of Azerbaijan to provide its youth an adequate livelihood and opportunities for advancement. The revenues from foreign investments in (oil and gas) were not reaching the ordinary people. There was a huge gap between the incredibly wealthy and the incredibly poor.... he writes. Ibrahimov is honest and up front about the problems of graft, nepotism and corruption that plague the entire region. He is not blind to the fact that bribery occurs elsewhere in the world, but he feels disgust when the offering and acceptance of bribes are interwoven into the fabric of society at all levels, and when having a relative in government carries more weight than professional ability. I know graft and corruption exist in all societies, but in the West and in the United States, it is not the glue that holds the economy together, he declares. It is this system that is holding back the diversification of Azerbaijan's economy and retarding progress in Iraq, he states.

The final section of Invitation to Rain details Ibrahimov's deployment to Iraq in 2004-05 as a multi-lingual interpreter and cultural adviser. These chapters constitute the book's real reason for being, as Ibrahimov initially set out to write about his time in Iraq and nothing else; it was his agent who convinced him to tell the story of his life instead.

His insights and observations on how the U.S. is perceived in the Middle East deserve the attention of American readers because they come from a near neighbor of Iraq who has a better understanding of the local culture and the regional and ethnic conflicts that have shaped it. He tells us a lot about a corner of the world where death is preferable to dishonor and honor is defined in a quite different way than in Western society.

The book concludes with a photo of Ibrahimov taken with U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-Okla., and an afterword written by retired Col. Nathan Slate of Medicine Park.

Mitch Meador is a military reporter for The Lawton Constitution. --The Lawton Constitution

## About the Author

About the Author

By COL (R) Nathan Slate, Former U.S. Army Brigade Commander who served in Iraq

Over the 4th of July weekend I could not help but think of Dr. Mahir Ibrahimov. I first met Mahir when I was working on the Joint Staff, at the Pentagon, in Washington, D.C. Mahir had just returned from a year long tour in Iraq, where he served as a cultural and regional awareness expert and an interpreter for Arabic and Turkish. He had volunteered to help out in Iraq as a heart felt obligation of patriotic duty. Mahir served in Iraq at Balad Airbase, just north of Baghdad. As fate would have it, he served with my former cultural adviser al-Dulaimi. They had become fast friends and shared many trials and tribulations together. Mahir looked me up when he returned to present me with a gift from al-Dulaimi a dishdaasha (customary man dress) with a Sunni headdress. Dr. Ibrahimov is from Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan is a rather small country in the Caucasus in the Persian Platto. In many ways, it is the ideal place to be born to become a cultural awareness expert. South of Russia, East of Turkey, West of Iran, and North of Iraq, Azerbaijan has been a cultural crossroads for centuries. The Azeri language that Mahir grew up with is Turkic. He was raised a secular Shi ite. Having been drafted into the Soviet (in those days) Army at a very young age, he learned about the abuses of communism first hand. Moreover, as an Azeri in the Soviet Army, he learned a great deal about the prejudices that exist in the region. Determined to make a better life, Mahir became an avid student taking every course available to him. He even became a dentist at one point. Not satisfied that this field of study would enable him to change his life, he went back to school, eventually obtaining a Ph.D. from the Academy of Social Sciences of Moscow in International Relations, specializing in Middle Eastern studies. Mahir, like so many young people, wanted to change the world for the better. In particular, he wanted to see his native Azerbaijan become a democracy. The oppression of the Russians, after the fall of the Soviet Union, and an ugly enduring war with Armenia, left Azerbaijan vitiated. Without hope of reaching his dream of freedom and opportunity, Mahir left Azerbaijan in 1993 and came to America. In the beginning, he served at his country s newly opened embassy in Washington. In time, he realized that he could not live in Azerbaijan anymore. His dream of democracy was in America. Mahir became an instructor of cultural awareness and languages at our State Department. For four years he helped prepare diplomats to serve in foreign countries. Mahir enjoyed this work, but did not feel that he was reaching his potential. He wanted to give more. The year in Iraq made him feel more satisfied. With the assistance of Senator Inhofe, who met Mahir in Washington, he finally received his U.S. citizenship. Mahir s personal philosophy has always been about results. Following the traditional Middle Eastern approach, Mahir says, Talk is talk; what matters is what happens. The result is the most important thing, he always says. A colorful personality, Mahir loves music and dance. Mahir s book is a wonderful tribute to strength of spirit. Although challenged with a multitude of obstacles throughout his life, Mahir enthusiastically engaged them all. Armed with faith in the one kind and loving God of all humanity, he fearlessly embarked upon a journey that would take him through some of the world s most fascinating history. His resulting life is a testament to change and adaptation. His book captures his warm personality, unfaltering determination, noble humility, and contagious optimism. I hope that everyone will enjoy Mahir s journey and learn, as I did, that wisdom is a never ending pursuit.

## Top Customer Reviews

...A deeply moving story of humanity that bridges the gap between cultures, political power, and our intrinsic need to thrive.

By [N. Stallings, Author of Shepherd Starseeker](#) on January 7, 2015

From the first paragraph of this book, I was drawn into the world that Mahir Ibrahimov so intimately conveys to the reader. The pages flew by as if I were sitting at the feet of the honored village elder, wide-eyed with wonder as stunning imagery pours from his weathered, smiling lips.

Dr. Ibrahimov is a bold soul, driven by a purpose so divinely guided that he himself often seems surprised by the spontaneous choices that forged his future. Here is a true story of what we humans can accomplish when we have a passion to learn, a yearning to pursue a better life, and an unwavering love for the ideology of our homeland. The author beautifully articulates his gratitude for small pleasures we so often take for granted. His calling to facilitate positive change for himself, his family, and humanity is evident in the bridges he built between many cultures. The reader takes away a heightened appreciation for the freedom and opportunities we enjoy, that will remain long after the narrative ends.

...Quick read!

By [Daniel Hrenchir](#) on January 31, 2015

Verified Purchase

I met Mahir about a year ago and he told me a little about his time in Iraq. Later he told me that he had written this book. Last month I finally ordered it. Dr. Ibrahimov has a gift, his ability to communicate fluently in at least 5 languages is nothing compared to his ability to write a compelling story that seems impossible to put down. I finished it in two days only because I started in the afternoon of the first. I made me proud to be an American, and happy that intelligent people like Mahir come to this country and make things better for all of us!

...A Gripping Read from Start to Finish

By [Joshua C. Neuman](#) on November 21, 2008

Mahir Ibrahimov's book, Invitation to Rain, is an absolute page turner. His warm personality and love of teaching comes across on every page with each new story he relates from his eventful life to date. Born in Soviet Azerbaijan, Dr. Ibrahimov has lived through and witnessed some of the most important events in late Soviet history and the violent ethnic wars that erupted in the post-Soviet Caucasus. Most readers will probably be more interested in Mahir's experiences in Iraq as a civilian contractor (he served as an Arabic linguist), but the most interesting parts of the book from my point of view were the chapters treating the Azeri-Armenian war over Nagorno Karabagh. This is a region of Azerbaijan which has always had a large Armenian population and therefore, Armenian irrendentists desired to claim it in the desire of reuniting "Greater Armenia." They succeeded in doing so after the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 90s. But they acheived this goal at the cost of violating Azerbaijan's sovereignty, committing war crimes to vent their frustration over centuries of Azeri repression of Armenians, and also laying waste the the land which Armenia claims is rightfully theirs. This war left the historic capital of Nagorno Karabagh, Shusha, in ruins.

Dr. Ibrahimov's maternal grandfather was a resident of Shusha, and at the beginning of the book, Mahir reminisces about idyllic childhood Summers spent their. While working for the Azeri Foreign Ministry during the years of the Azeri-Armenian War, he has the bitter task of guiding foreign journalists through the horrors of a part of his beloved land being torn apart. I thank Dr. Ibrahimov for giving me an Azeri face to put with the Azeri-Armenian conflict, because I have always been on the pro-Armenian side of this

conflict and have never read anything relating to Nagorno Karabagh written from an Azeri perspective.

Dr. Ibrahimov is a true humanist and though he is bold in defending Azerbaijan versus an overwhelmingly Armenian bias in world opinion, he harbors no enmity toward the Armenians, in fact, one of his best friends while he was a university student in the Soviet Union, was an Armenian. I believe that if there were cooler, more compassionate heads in both countries, Armenia and Azerbaijan could make peace. A student of cultures and languages, Dr. Ibrahimov is certainly not unaware of the close cultural bonds between Armenians and Azeris. They are both Caucasian peoples, and together suffered from ethnic bigotry at the hands of ethnic Russians, especially in the form of the brutal hazing of recruits in the Soviet Army, which continues in the Russian Army to this day.

Mahir's book opens with him being singled out for a particularly vicious beating because he is a Caucasian. God willing, in the future, the Armenians and the Azeris will be able to come together over what unites them rather than fight over their religious and ethnic differences.

#### [\\_Through the Eyes of a Teacher](#)

By [David F. Finch](#) on December 2, 2008

Read Mahir Ibrahimov's book, Invitation to Rain. The story is enjoyable and eye opening.

Dr. Ibrahimov uncovers a part of history long hidden from many of us in the United States. His first-hand accounts of duty in the Soviet Army and life in the Soviet Union and Azerbaijan are revealing. His openness and insight are refreshing. Throughout his story the author displays a clear example of civil responsibility in action. He serves his nations and fellow citizens prior to and immediately after the former Soviet Union upheaval and later in the U.S.A. His willingness to use his talents to serve his adopted country is an excellent example for us to follow. Dr. Ibrahimov's story will make the U.S. citizen proud that the Ibrahimov family chose our country for their new and permanent home.

Dr. Ibrahimov's book will help to rebuild a faith in America that seems to be lost in our current culture. Look through the eyes of a well travelled former Soviet soldier, a talented scholar and teacher, and an educated public servant. See that he finds the United States is still the land of possibilities and worthy to receive the service of its citizens. Read Dr. Ibrahimov's book Invitation to Rain.

#### [\\_Invitation to Rain](#)

By [William J. Kirby](#) on November 6, 2008

Dr. Ibrahimov's book is compelling and hopeful in an era in which hope has been in short supply. The spiritual journey it describes is both "epic" and "everyman"--though few of us have the formidable range of gifts, talents, and abilities that Dr. Ibrahimov has been given, the character we see, both in the narrative and in the style in which it is written, is unforgettable. The inside view of different cultures and issues over time will make this an invaluable resource for all who wish to gain greater understanding of multiple cultures. This is a "must-read!"

#### [Let it rain!](#)

By [Jimmy A. Gomez](#) on November 6, 2008

This is a remarkable book. Mahir provides a mesmerizing account of his life's journey which began as a conscript in the former Soviet Union, and continues today as a proud American Citizen.

Anyone who has ever wondered if faith, hope, education and love of family make a difference will be fascinated and encouraged by the inner-strength of his character and his indomitable spirit. A definite "must-read" for anyone that takes America for granted.