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NATO AND AZERBAIJAN

An Interview with Robert Simmons NATO Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia

March 8, 2008
Baku, Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan in the World: How would You rate the current level of relations between NATO and Azerbaijan?

Simmons: Our relations are quite good now. We are quite satisfied with the IPAP [Individual Partnership Action Plan], the second round of which has developed quite positively, and we have had a good political dialogue on issues of common interest.

AIW: What are the core of the relations between Azerbaijan and NATO? What are the main directions of cooperation?

Simmons: I would say, there are three. The first is the IPAP and mutual cooperation in the common goals it sets out. The second is the political dialogue, because IPAP provides an opportunity for that, both via your permanent mission in Brussels and during frequent visits by ministers and senior officials from Azerbaijan to NATO. And the third is Azerbaijan's contributions to NATO missions, as for instance in Afghanistan.

AIW: What role do You see NATO playing in the conflict resolution between Azerbaijan and Armenia at any stage of the negotiation process, today or tomorrow?

Simmons: At present, we believe that the Minsk Group Co-Chairs should take the lead, and it would be not correct for any other groups to involve themselves in. That is the negotiating process, and we support that. As that process goes forward, if there is potentially a role for NATO, that is something we could look at. But there must be first an agreement among the parties, and the decision by the UN Security Council that something that NATO can contribute with could be made. Those are, of course, hypothetical questions, for at the moment they are not really on the table.

AIW: How do You assess the commitment of Azerbaijani government to the Euro-Atlantic integration?

Simmons: Azerbaijani government has clearly a broad commitment to the Euro-Atlantic integration. Baku is working very extensively with both NATO within IPAP, and the European Union within its Neighborhood Program. Whether the Azerbaijanis want to take it to the next step and become a formal candidate for membership is a decision for them to take. For the moment, I don't have the sense that that is the decision they want to make, but obviously, we will be prepared to discuss that with them when they want to move in that direction.

AIW: How do You rate the evolution of Azerbaijan-NATO cooperation within the first stage of IPAP and what do you envisage at the second stage?

Simmons: First, in the first stage of IPAP, we had some very tentative goals in defense reform. What has impressed me both during that first stage and, importantly, in key details in the second stage is how the Azerbaijani Defense Ministry has expanded their goals into much more concrete and detailed work. Second, we have expanded our cooperation with other ministries as well on the basis of some specific goals. Border security is particularly important, and I have always been impressed by the work officials here have done in dealing with issues like terrorism, energy protection, and other things like that. All of this has been very good. The third dimension, which didn't even exist in the first round, involves Azerbaijan's new civil emergency planning ministry. NATO has long had an expertise in that area, and now we have a partner with the new civil emergency planning ministry. And obviously, that opens a whole new chapter in the IPAP which didn't exist – not because we disagreed, but because you didn't have a ministry.

AIW: How do You see the relationship between NATO and Azerbaijan developing after the second stage of IPAP? What are the next steps?

Simmons: Well, IPAP is a progressive and continuing document. I don't think we should always see steps ahead. I think what we should see is that we are moving forward on the goals, meeting successes and setting new goals into the future. I think we have done that very effectively, and we have to continue to do that. As I said, if at some stage your government wants to move towards intensified dialogue, that is something to discuss; but I don't think that should in any way call into question the good cooperation we have now.

AIW: What impact do You see the independence of Kosovo having on security dynamics in the South Caucasus region?

Simmons: I believe that Kosovo is a unique case. You must look back at the long and very complicated history of the break-up of Yugoslavia, at Serbia's dealings with Kosovo and all the rest of it. One should not draw any lessons from Kosovo and its independence for conflicts in the South Caucasus or anywhere else. Kosovo is a unique case, tied to a very unique situation of the former Yugoslavia, and that is the way it should remain.

AIW: How do You assess the expected withdrawal of Azerbaijan's 34-soldier contribution to the peacekeeping mission in Kosovo?

Simmons: Well, we welcome the contribution they made in the past. We accept the fact that given the changed circumstances, for its own reasons, Azerbaijan had a look at the issue again. And we understand that, and we appreciate that. But what should be emphasized is that it is critical that no one view this as calling into question [UN Security Council] Resolution 1244, which we all agree is the basis for the KFOR mission.

AIW: Azerbaijan has always presented itself as a model for the post-Soviet Muslim countries in Central Asia. What lessons do You think these countries may draw from Azerbaijan's experience?

Simmons: Well, I personally don't believe that the Islamic element is that big a factor. Obviously, you have an Islamic background, but I think what is more critical of the difference is how you have emerged from the former Soviet Union – both your good relations with Russia and your independence, and the fact that you can balance those. And that is a very important lesson for the countries in Central Asia, who also emerged from the Soviet Union and need to understand that you can have good relations with NATO while maintaining good relations with Russia. I think, frankly, that is more important than the Islamic element because, while I respect the Islamic faith of your citizens and citizens in Central Asia, that is not a big issue in policy.

AIW: What are the ways in which NATO-Azerbaijan cooperation may contribute to the European energy security?

Simmons: There are several aspects to that. One is a great deal of expertise you have in energy, and that is very important; you have off-shore platforms, you have pipelines, you have sea transportation across the Caspian, and you have significant infrastructure that needs to be protected. Second, you have built up some good capabilities for protecting them, and I think those are lessons that you can share with NATO countries and with other partners. And finally, we see this as an important part of political dialogue. When President Aliyev was in Brussels two years

ago, he devoted a key part of his speech to that issue, and I believe the Allies found his remarks extremely eloquent and instructive.

AIW: What issues of direct or indirect relevance to Azerbaijan are expected to be discussed at the forthcoming Bucharest summit?

Simmons: First is your participation in Afghanistan. You contribute troops to Afghanistan and also want to expand your contribution to other areas of cooperation. We are very interested in this comprehensive approach, and I think you have some very good lessons connected with that. Second is participation in the political dialogue about the conflict there so that a consensus can be maintained. That is always difficult when people are being killed. It is essential to understand that peace in Afghanistan is important not only for the security of Afghanistan itself, but for the whole Euro-Atlantic area. And I think Azerbaijan recognizes that, and it is important that you share that experience. Third is energy security and the new challenges of the 21st century, including non-proliferation. Iran will be discussed, and I know that your government and particularly your president have important views to share on that, and we hope that he does so. And fourth, as I already said, Azerbaijan has a key lesson of a country that balances good relations with Russia and good relations with the West. And I think that sharing that experience with other partners and showing that these are not inconsistent goals is an important thing you can do.

AIW: NATO has normally sought to offer incentives to Russia as the Alliance has expanded eastward. Are You thinking of any additional ones as NATO, for the first time, explores inclusion of post-USSR states like Georgia and Ukraine?

Simmons: Well, I have to say that I don't entirely understand some of the current Russian rhetoric on this. First, we said when the whole process began that we didn't see Russia as a threat, and we didn't threaten Russia. That policy hasn't changed. But suddenly Russia is trying to create a sense of a threat, which frankly doesn't exist. Second, we made commitments that would apply to any new Ally – that we will not station large numbers of conventional forces permanently on the territories of new Allies. Those would apply to the existing new Allies, and to any new Allies. That is an important commitment from us to Russia. I also think the notion of whether the country was or wasn't in the Soviet Union is irrelevant. What is relevant is the OSCE principle that every country has the choice and the right to make the choice of whether to belong or not to belong to an alliance. Russia should not see these steps as directed against it, and again, I find it difficult to understand why this rhetoric is suddenly coming back in the Russian lexicon.

AIW: What effect would the inclusion of Georgia and Ukraine have on Azerbaijan?

Simmons: You have very good relations with both of them; you belong to GUAM. Every indication that I have heard is that in the GUAM context, you support their territorial integrity and their activities. So, I presume you would support their membership. If it gives you an incentive to move forward on membership, that is for you to decide, as I said before. But I presume that you would support their moving forward, that your own balanced policy we discussed before will continue, and I would not see that their membership should either complicate or improve it.

AIW: Looking back at the evolution of the partnership institution and the role it has played, do you believe it has been a success?

Simmons: Absolutely! I've even written an article about it because I was involved in all three critical stages. I served in NATO HQ in the US delegation in the early 1990s when we set up the partnership. I was in Washington when we expanded this. And now I play a role in directing it. And I can say in all honesty that this is one of the things I am most proud of. When with the end of the Cold War, we reached out to countries that had been part of the Warsaw Pact, part of the former Soviet Union and said that we want you to be our partners and even some of you to even join the Alliance, we made an important commitment, not only demonstrating to everyone that NATO was not a threat but also that NATO wanted all of Europe to be whole and free and have the promise of belonging to these security institutions. I think we have been remarkably successful at that, and I am certainly proud of the role I have played in this.

Azerbaijan's Borders: The Shadow of the ADR's Experience Today

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As Azerbaijanis approach the 90th anniversary of the establishment of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) on May 28th, they are taking pride in the fact that their forefathers were the first in the entire Muslim world to launch a secular newspaper, a modern theater and opera, and a democratic state in which women were given the right to vote. But they are also thinking about that republic's experience with defining its territory and establishing its borders, reflections that could have an impact on Baku's policies in the future.

From the first day of its existence, the ADR had to deal with territorial claims from neighboring states. Indeed, these contested territories, which amounted to 114 000 square kilometers, were larger than its core uncontested area, 98 000 square kilometers. But after the Bolshevik invasion in April 1920 and the suppression of the ADR, Soviet Azerbaijan was able to keep only 86 600 square kilometers, a smaller territory than the uncontested one it had prior to that time.

Not surprisingly, and particularly given continued Armenian claims to Azerbaijani territory, many Azerbaijanis are focusing again on what happened in the period between the collapse of the Russian Empire which resulted in the independence of the ADR and the inclusion of a newly defined Azerbaijan SSR within the Soviet system. The history of this question is complicated and for various political reasons has frequently been distorted. But the basic facts are clear.

In May 1918, after the collapse of the *Zakavkaskiy Seym*, when the territories of the South Caucasus were moving toward full independent statehood, Azerbaijan agreed to yield Irevan (today known as Yerevan), a historically Azerbaijani city, to Armenia whose National Council argued that without Yerevan, Armenia would not have a real capital. In exchange, it agreed to drop all its claims on the mountainous section of *Yelizavetpol gubernia* (around Ganja).

When the Russian Empire conquered the Irevan khanate in the early 19th century, that area was populated primarily by "Turks," as the Azerbaijanis in that region were known at the time. According to one 1901 study, there were 49 875 Muslims (primarily Turks) and 20 073 Armenians at the time of the conquest. [1] Another Russian scholar concluded that the Armenian Province created by the tsar after the conquest had a population that was three-quarters Muslim and only one-quarter Armenian (Potto, p. 595).

That territory, the first created along ethnicity, left its titular nationality, the Armenians, in a minority. And in 1849, the tsarist government abolished it, putting in its place the non-ethnically-defined *Irevan gubernia*. Despite massive immigration of Armenians from the Ottoman Empire and Persia subsequently, the Muslims, that is, the Turks, that is, the Azerbaijanis, retained a majority throughout the imperial period, and it were ethnic Azerbaijanis who represented the *gubernia* in the State Duma beginning in 1906.

Nonetheless, on May 29, 1918, the ADR conceded that city to the Armenians, arguing that this was "a necessary evil" under the circumstances and pointing out that even with that grant, Armenia would remain a tiny country, with a territory of only 9 800 square kilometers, far smaller than Azerbaijan.

One region in the South Caucasus where dramatic changes in the ethnic composition of the population had begun even earlier was Karabakh. In none of the early 19th century treaties or decrees pertaining to this region is there a single reference to the presence of Armenians there. But after the Russian conquest, tsarist officials began to resettle Armenian immigrants from Persia and the Ottoman Empire in the Muslim provinces of the South Caucasus, including Karabakh. The first group of five thousand Armenian families arrived in Karabakh in March 1828, Potto reports, largely because the Armenian Province, their initial destination, was suffering from a drought (Potto, p. 591).

Later, even larger groups of Armenians arrived and chose to settle there. In 1854, Prince Mikhail Vorontsov, the Russian viceroy, pointedly observed that "Armenians will always be indebted to us for everything they have; they are loyal everywhere and are obliged to serve us." [2]

With the establishment of ADR, Azerbaijan reestablished its sovereignty over both the lowland and mountainous sections of Karabakh, something that the Armenian community acknowledged in a resolution of loyalty to Baku adopted at a congress which took place in that region during the summer of 1919. A.M. Topchubashov, the head of the Azerbaijani delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, pointed this out in a note distributed there. "Representatives of the Armenian population of Karabakh," the note read, "have adopted a decision subordinating their population to the Azerbaijani government." [3] But following the Soviet occupation of the South Caucasus, Moscow ignored this and made Karabakh an autonomous region within Azerbaijan, a step that was to prove so fateful later.

There is an equally important history concerning Nakhchivan. When the Russian Empire moved into that area, it was overwhelmingly Turkic (Azerbaijani). And even with the departure of many Muslims to Persia and the Ottoman Empire, there were still 17 138 followers of Islam as compared to only 2 690 Armenians. Following the collapse of the tsarist regime, Armenian forces drove more than

120 000 Muslims out of Zangezur, but these forces were not able to penetrate Nakhchivan or change the ethnic mix there to any significant degree.

An American plan to create a general governorship in Nakhchivan and Sharur in 1919 failed to materialize, and the ADR government did everything it could to defend the region. The Soviet authorities acknowledged this when on March 1, 1921, on the eve of the Soviet-Turkish treaty, a document among those in Lenin's secretariat noted that Turks (that is, Azerbaijanis) and not Armenians were the dominant populations in Nakhchivan and Sharur, and that in most parts of these regions there was not a single Armenian living there at that time. [4] The Moscow and Kars treaties concluded in 1921 confirmed Nakhchivan's belonging to Azerbaijan. That said, from the days of ADR's establishment until Armenia's sovietization in 1920, the border between Azerbaijan and Armenia run through the mid-point of Lake Goycha.

That means, of course, that the Mehri corridor that now separates Nakhchivan from Azerbaijan proper did not exist, but after the Soviet authorities absorbed both Armenia and Azerbaijan, they created it, thus establishing yet another neuralgic problem that continues to agitate the entire region.

Reference

Потто, Василий (1993). *Кавказская война* (в 5-ти томах), том 3, Ставрополь: Кавказский край.

Notes

[1] *Гражданское управление Закавказьем от присоединения Грузии до наместничества Великого Князя Михаила Николаевича*, Тифлис, 1901, с. 229.

[2] Акты Кавказской Археологической Комиссии [Acts of Caucasian Archaeological Commission], том 10, № 71.

[3] National Archive of Azerbaijan Republic [in Azerbaijani], stock 970, list 1, file 142, p. 77.

[4] Российский Государственный Архив Социально-Политической Истории [Russian National Archive of Social-Political History], фонд 5, список 1, дело 2796, с. 4.

Kosovo's Long-Term Impact on Europe: The Implications for Azerbaijan

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Many analysts have discussed the possible impact of Kosovo's declaration of independence and European recognition of that act on the so-called "frozen" conflicts in the post-Soviet space, including Nagorno-Karabakh. But there is a larger if longer term set of implications of these events for Azerbaijan that so far have attracted little attention. They involve the possible effect of the inclusion of the Muslim population of Kosovo and other parts of the Balkans on Europe's future willingness to accept Turkey and in the more distant future Azerbaijan as members of the European Union.

With Kosovo's declaration of independence and the EU's expressed willingness to consider it for possible membership even before it becomes a member of the United Nations and with the possibility that other Muslim areas in the Balkans will also be included in the EU, the peoples and governments of that international group will for the first time have direct experience with members that have a predominantly Muslim population. Moreover, Europeans will be dealing not with immigrants but with indigenous Muslim communities whose moral standing is likely to be fundamentally different in the minds of many. And this process could thus have the effect of undermining if not completely destroying the image and self-image of the EU as a "Christian club" and thus become the basis for extending the EU's fundamental principles of supremacy of law, respect for human rights, and equal treatment of all without regard to race, language or religion.

While such a development is certain to take time, the nature of the Muslim communities in the Balkans makes it especially likely. Muslims in that region have been traditionally among the most moderate in the world. Even during the Bosnian war of 1992-95 and despite the atrocities committed by Orthodox Serbs and Catholic Croatians, they were not radicalized.

Given how significant that longer term possibility could be for the future of Azerbaijan, it is important to give more attention to the Muslim populations in the Balkans than most analysts in Baku and elsewhere have done up to now. This article provides a brief introduction to the most important of these groups, less to point to any final conclusions about what is likely to happen in any particular case than to suggest the possibilities this remarkable set of communities may present for Azerbaijan.

Kosovo. According to the Kosovar statistics agency, the total population of that province in 2005 was between 1.9 and 2.2 million people, of whom 90 percent were Albanians, five percent Serbs, three percent Bosniaks and Goranis, one percent Gypsies, and one percent Turks. The Albanians, Turks, Bosniaks, and the Goranis, a Slavic group from the Gora region, are all followers of Islam. But most have a very relaxed attitude toward religion, and only about half practice their faith.

Albania. Following its declaration of independence in 1912, Albania became the first European Muslim country. Despite efforts by the communist regime to wipe out religion, approximately 70 percent of its 3.8 million people are Muslim, of whom some two-thirds are Sunni and one-third Shiia (the Bektashi). Christian missionaries made significant inroads in that country in the 1990s, a development that explains why most of the political elite is Christian and why even Tirana's airport is named after Mother Theresa.

Bosnia-Herzegovina. Until the Ottoman Empire conquered this area in 1463, most of the people in this region were Bogomils, a protestant response to both Catholicism and Orthodoxy. But after that time, many converted to Islam. By 1991, 41 percent of the population of this region was Islamic, 33 percent were Serbs, and 17 percent were Croats. Because the languages were so similar, religion was an important marker, but not so much of one as to prevent extensive intermarriage. Indeed, until the breakup of Yugoslavia, nearly a third of all marriages there were "mixed." That has now changed, but Islam there remains relatively moderate. Today, the Muslims form just over half of the 4.5 million people of this territory.

Macedonia. Following the civil war which ended with the Treaty of Ohrid in 2001, Muslims, who include Albanians, Turks, Bosnians, and the Torbesh, as the Slavic Muslims are known, form roughly a third of that country's two million people. Again, most of them practice a relatively moderate form of Islam.

Montenegro. Approximately 18 percent of Montenegrins today are Muslims, a group that includes Albanians, Bosniaks and some other converts. As elsewhere in the Balkans, the Muslims are extremely diverse and remarkably relaxed in their approach to their faith.

Serbia. Muslims form a little under five percent of Serbia's 7.5 million people, far fewer than before the break-up of Yugoslavia. But despite their experiences over the last 15 years, few have been radicalized.

Bulgaria. Despite many migrations, deportations and conflicts, slightly more than 12 percent of Bulgaria's eight million people are Muslims. Three-quarters of this religious group are Turks, whose ethnic relations with Bulgarians have been more troubled than their religious ones. The second largest Muslim group is the Pomaks, and the third are the Muslim Gypsies.

Romania. There are only a relatively few Muslims in Romania – some 58 000 or only three percent of the total population. Most are Turks and Tatars.

Croatia. There are some 60 000 autochthonian Slavic Muslims, 20 000 Bosniaks, and 10 000 Muslim Croats, who together form fewer than two percent of the country's 4.4 million people.

Slovenia. Muslims who identify themselves as Bosniaks or simply as members of a Muslim nation form approximately one percent of Slovenia's population.

That said, the inclusion of the Muslim communities of southeastern Europe either directly or through the membership of the countries of which they are a part in the EU would be an especially effective response to those who believe in the theory of the clash of civilizations. Once inside, their likely behavior would set the stage not only for the inclusion of Turkey as a member but also of Azerbaijan.

**New Book Documents:
Armenian Eradication of Azerbaijani Culture
in the Occupied Territories**

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The fighting between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Karabakh and adjoining areas has frequently been accompanied by charges made by one side always denied by the other that its opponents are engaging in acts of genocide. But because the actions that support such charges typically have involved deaths and expulsions which took place during the course of combat operations, each side has generally if not always convincingly invoked military necessity to justify what it has done, claims that should never be allowed to minimize the human suffering involved but ones that sufficiently muddy the issue that many outsiders are inclined to dismiss both the charges of genocide and those who make them.

Now, however, a remarkable new book documents a consistent and continuing pattern of action by Armenian officials in the occupied territories *since the cease fire went into effect more than a decade ago* to deface or destroy Christian and Muslim monuments of Azerbaijani culture and thus make it impossible for the Azerbaijani community to survive there.

And that, in the view of most experts on international law, is an act of genocide, one of the most heinous crimes that any government anywhere can commit because, as commentaries on the 1948 United Nations Convention on Genocide routinely note, "genocidal acts need not kill or cause the death of members of a group. Causing serious bodily or mental harm," including the destruction of the cultural environment in which a group lives, "are acts of genocide when committed as part of a policy to destroy a group's existence" either totally or on a particular territory. [1]

Prepared under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, the new book, "War Against Azerbaijan: Targeting Cultural Heritage," [2] in remarkably restrained and thus doubly impressive language – the book itself never mentions the word "genocide" or the provisions of the 1948 convention – documents that the Armenian authorities have destroyed far more Azerbaijani cultural institutions – including churches, mosques, museums, monuments and houses – since the ceasefire began than they did during actual combat operations (p. 9).

The book opens with a review of the complex history of the Azerbaijani nation generally and in the regions now occupied by the Armenians in particular. In the course of it, Kamala Imranly of the Foreign Ministry's Center for Strategic Studies and the book's compiler points out that Azerbaijani culture has deep roots in Christianity as well as Islam and that the Armenian destruction of Christian churches linked to the Azerbaijani rather than the Armenian community across the occupied territories shows that this is a campaign against an ethnic group rather than a

military effort or one, as some Armenians often seek to portray it, part of the clash of civilizations between the Christian West and Islam.

Moreover, this introduction reports and documents some truly disturbing actions, including the sale of irreplaceable Azerbaijani cultural artifacts through international art auction houses. The Azerbaijani government has been able to recover some of them by purchasing in these auctions items that the Armenians were selling but that never ceased to belong to Azerbaijan. How many other items of this kind may have been lost, however, remains unknown.

The remainder of the book is divided into chapters devoted to the various districts of Azerbaijan that are entirely or partially under Armenian occupation at the present time. The one about Kalbajar district (pp. 76-99) is typical. It includes a detailed map of that region, detailed information about the ethnic composition of its pre-war population, the date the occupation began, and the cultural resources within it, ground photographs of some of these institutions, and time series satellite photographs that show both which ones were destroyed and when at little more than a glance.

Those features, especially the photographs and maps, will be most impressive to the casual reader, but far more important to the expert community and to officials in various governments is the detailed list of historical and architectural monuments. In the case of the Kalbajar district, the book lists 255 such institutions, giving the dates of origin, the address, and in many cases, the geographical coordinates for each. Of these 217 have been destroyed, including many of the cemeteries, and all of the museums and memorial complexes in any way linked to Azerbaijan and Azerbaijani culture.

Impressively, the book acknowledges where the "current state" of this or that monument is "unknown," even though it is likely given that many of these in fact have been destroyed as well, especially since they tend to be smaller art objects, such as Medieval stone figures or Bronze Age rock drawings. The destruction of similar items by the Taliban in Afghanistan sparked international outrage; one can only hope that this book will do the same, either preventing the eradication of these cultural monuments or bringing to justice those responsible for defacing or destroying them.

In any military conflict, terrible things happen, including much loss of life and the obliteration of the natural and cultural environment which makes life possible. But when the shooting stops or even quiets down through an internationally arranged cease fire, then such actions represent not only a violation of one of the most important norms of contemporary international law but the kind of affront to the dignity not just of Azerbaijanis but of human beings everywhere.

The book reviewed here thus represents not only a bill of indictment of a terrible crime but a call to action for all people, governments and the international community.

Notes

[1] For the text of the convention and especially the definitions contained in its Article II, see <http://www.preventgenocide.org/genocide/officialtext.htm>.

[2] (in English; Baku, 2007), 280 pp., photographs, maps, and two CDs. The text of the book, originally issued in print run of 5 000 copies, is available online at <http://www.war-culture.az>.

A CHRONOLOGY OF AZERBAIJAN'S FOREIGN POLICY

I. Key Government Statements on Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy

Speaking in Khanlar, President Ilham Aliyev says that Azerbaijan is growing ever stronger, something he suggests Armenia should keep in mind (<http://www.br.az/site/main.htm>). He subsequently amplifies that statement by pointing out that Baku is ready for a military solution of the Karabakh problem if Yerevan is not forthcoming (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/110184.html>).

At the opening of a new Catholic church in Baku, President Ilham Aliyev says that Azerbaijan has a long tradition of inter-ethnic and inter-religious tolerance and that there are no major ethnic or religious problems in the republic at the present time (<http://www.day.az/news/society/110837.html>).

The Azerbaijan foreign ministry says that it sees relations between Baku and Moscow developing more rapidly in the future under incoming Russian president Dmitry Medvedev (<http://www.anspress.com/nid62492.html>).

II. Key Statements by Others about Azerbaijan

During a visit to Baku, Robert Simmons, NATO's special representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia, says that Kosovo is not a precedent for the resolution of the Karabakh dispute (<http://www.regionplus.az/news/index.php>).

Sheikh ul Islam Allashakhur Pashazade, chairman of the Muslim Spiritual Directorate of the Caucasus, condemns Armenia's destruction of religious sites in the occupied territories (<http://www.newsazerbaijan.ru/international/20080308/42199231.html>).

The Azerbaijan-American Council issues a statement decrying recent fighting on the Azerbaijan-Armenian ceasefire line and assigning responsibility for it to Yerevan (http://www.1news.az/articles.php?sec_id=4&item_id=20080305101609295).

A Turkish translation of an Azerbaijani scholar on the events of Black January 1990 is released in Istanbul (<http://www.zerkalo.az/rubric.php?id=30929>).

III. A Chronology of Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy

15 March

Azerbaijani foreign ministry officials indicate that Baku may modify its relationship with countries that voted against the UNGA resolution.

14 March

The UN General Assembly passes by a vote of 39 for to 7 against with 100 abstentions an Azerbaijani resolution about the situation in the occupied territories. Among those voting against are the three Minsk Group co-chairs. The text of the resolution is available at <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs//2008/ga10693.doc.htm> and <http://www.anspress.com/nid64536.html>.

Azerbaijan and the United Kingdom sign a cultural cooperation agreement during the Azerbaijani tourism minister's visit to London.

13 March

President Ilham Aliyev receives Georgian Prime Minister Vladimir Gurgenzidze.

12 March

President Ilham Aliyev receives a group of senior Turkish specialists on international affairs.

The Azerbaijan foreign ministry criticizes the findings about Azerbaijan in the U.S. Department of State's annual human rights report.

10 March

President Ilham Aliyev receives Bulgarian President Parvanov.

Azerbaijan's foreign minister leaves to attend the Organization of the Islamic Conference in Senegal.

Azerbaijan opposes an OIC resolution in support of Kosovo independence.

Azerbaijan and Bahrain sign a memorandum on military cooperation during the Azerbaijani defense minister's visit there.

7 March

President Ilham Aliyev receives Robert Simmons, NATO Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia.

President Ilham Aliyev receives Cardinal Bertone, Vatican Secretary of State.

Azerbaijan introduces to the United Nations General Assembly a document calling for the immediate release of women and children in any case of hostage taking.

Peter Semneby, the European Union's Special Representative for the South Caucasus and Central Asia, visits Baku.

6 March

President Ilham Aliyev receives the departing Pakistani ambassador and the incoming ambassadors of Kazakhstan and Turkey.

NATO Parliamentary Assembly meeting opens in Baku.

5 March

President Ilham Aliyev receives Jose Iallo, head of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

President Ilham Aliyev receives Turkmenistan's foreign minister who visited Baku to sign bilateral accords on financial settlements and cooperation.

President Ilham Aliyev receives Matthew Bryza, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary Of State in the latter's capacity as co-chair of the Minsk Group.

4 March

Azerbaijan's parliament votes to withdraw its contingent from the international peace-keeping force in Kosovo.

Azerbaijan's parliament seeks an explanation from Iran on why Tehran banned commemorations of the Hojali massacre this year.

3 March

President Ilham Aliyev telephones Dmitry Medvedev to congratulate him on his election as president of the Russian Federation.

Azerbaijan's foreign ministry receives parliamentary delegations from Bulgaria and the Czech Republic.

Azerbaijan military personnel take part in the first of four NATO exercises in March.

1 March

President Ilham Aliyev receives U.S. energy coordinator Steven Mann.

Note to Readers

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