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In this issue:

- Stephen Blank, "Democracy and Security in Azerbaijan: An American View"
- Etibar Najafov, "The Evolution of Azerbaijani Nationalism: Enlightenment, ADR, and Azerbaijanism"
- A Chronology of Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy
- Note to Readers

DEMOCRACY AND SECURITY IN AZERBAIJAN: AN AMERICAN VIEW*

Stephen Blank, Prof.
Strategic Study Institute
US Army War College

Virtually every analysis of security in the South Caucasus links the region's precarious situation in one way or another to the incompleteness or absence of democracy there. While none of the three South Caucasian states is totalitarian, it is clear that they all suffer from quite visible democratic deficits. And these deficits are particularly aggravated during presidential and parliamentary elections. The recent Georgian and Armenian presidential elections underscored the fragility of both democratic practices and of internal security in those states. Indeed, the explosion of unrest in both countries due to allegedly undemocratic elections showed once again quite clearly that it is the failure to advance democracy that is a fundamental structural "detonator" of unrest in the region and throughout the CIS. In view of the fact that Azerbaijan has upcoming presidential elections, foreign and particularly American concern about the prospects of violence and disorder in the state have now become a matter of the public record.

This forthrightly expressed concern clashes with that of Azerbaijan's government. Ramiz Mekhtiyev, chief of presidential apparatus, has stated that there is no force capable of upsetting stability in the country and that nobody will be strong enough to do in Azerbaijan what happened in Armenia, [1] where the government forcibly suppressed protesters after the recent election. While he may be right, recent history suggests that such statements may be rash and in some cases amount to whistling by the graveyard. US secretary of state Rice's public expression of concern about the status of democracy in Azerbaijan therefore created considerable irritation in official Azerbaijani circles. These circles are also offended by the fact that the United States has provided funding to help support the conduct of the upcoming (October, 2008) presidential elections. Those funds will be spent on boosting the activity of political parties, improving the election system, backing up efforts to monitor the elections, and on broadcasting debates in both the U.S. and Azerbaijan, and on overseeing the election results and on training policemen to guard the integrity of the elections. These allocations are consistent with U.S. policy elsewhere in the CIS and other countries and emphatically do not represent an effort to sponsor one or another candidate. Rather they are an attempt to enhance the likelihood of an open, fair, and free election.

Nevertheless and quite predictably these programs have triggered the anger of Azerbaijani officials who regard it as an open US intervention in Azerbaijan's domestic politics, and as demonstrating an American "bias" against Azerbaijan. Allegedly its program also signifies Washington's belief that Azerbaijan is supposedly more backward than other countries and cannot be trusted to conduct its own elections fairly, and as raising or evincing America's supposedly habitual inclinations to adopt "double standards" vis-à-vis other states' elections. It should not be lost on Azerbaijani audiences that such remarks and criticisms duplicate quite literally the attacks made in Moscow against US policy and Russia's ongoing campaign to misrepresent and discredit American support for democracy abroad. But as Ambassador Anne Derse observed, given what occurred in Armenia and Georgia and the current state of the Azerbaijani polity, unfortunately Washington's concern that something untoward might happen in Baku is by no means misplaced. If anything, its program to fund election processes is an attempt to ensure that nothing of the sort occurs in Azerbaijan and that its president is elected in an open and legitimate manner, an outcome that could only strengthen the new president's legitimacy and stability of the country as a whole.

These criticisms of US policy are hardly new or unexpected but they miss the point. If the president is elected amidst widespread charges of a corrupt election and fraud, or worse, violence, his tenure and Azerbaijan's security will be compromised from the start and quite possibly he will not be able to finish his term without resorting to the kind of repression and violence we have recently seen in Armenia. Nobody can plausibly argue that Armenia has become more stable as a result of its rejection of the criticisms of its election process. Indeed, the regime's base there has become narrower and self-serving and popular discontent will not likely be contained easily. Although one cannot call Azerbaijan's regime a full-fledged democracy, the upcoming presidential election does give it a chance to move forward along that trajectory. By doing so it will enhance its ability to stand on its own in a region surrounded by Iran and Russia and to enhance its role as an independent energy provider to Europe and as a state that ultimately can move towards joining Europe and fulfilling the requirements of doing so over time.

Therefore, while the criticisms about US policy are not surprising, they are shortsighted and myopic. It is highly unlikely that anyone in the Azerbaijani elite wishes to see a repeat of what happened in Tbilisi and Yerevan take place in Baku. But if they spurn the opportunity to endow the upcoming presidential elections with those attributes of openness, honesty, and most of all legitimacy, then such an outcome is all too likely. Given Azerbaijan's precarious security situation and the strong link between democratic deficits and weakened security, undermining the legitimacy of any future Azerbaijani government or its stability, is hardly calculated to move Azerbaijan's security forward.

** The views expressed in this article do not in any way represent those of the US Army, Defense Department, or the US Government.*

Note

[1] <http://www.regnum.ru/news/1000259.html>.

THE EVOLUTION OF AZERBAIJANI NATIONALISM: ENLIGHTENMENT, ADR, AND AZERBAIJANISM

Etibar Najafov
Head of European Studies Department
Baku Slavic University

Mainstream theories of international relations have long ignored ideological factors in their attempts to explain international outcomes. Reducing the history of international system to the history of class struggle (Marxism), or anarchy-induced global-level competition among major powers (Realism) resulted in missing the important role phenomenon such as nationalism played in the evolution of the international system.

The collapse of the Soviet empire has only reinforced the primacy of nationalism in shaping major international events. Nationalism has been a central factor in determining the content and direction of social development in post-Soviet states. An analysis of the modern history of non-Russian peoples of the former Soviet Union from the perspective of nationalism reveals a new conception of their history as a national liberation movement. This paper will analyze the history of the Azerbaijani people in the second half of the 19th century – early 20th century to demonstrate the importance of this methodological approach as the basis for a redefinition of the modern histories of non-Russian populations associated with the former Soviet empire.

Cultural Nationalism. Some scholars have historicized Eastern nationalist movements as passing through distinct cultural, political, and economic periods (Chavan 1973, p.448; Gokalp 1959, p. 65). In line with this approach, Azerbaijani nationalism initially manifested itself as a cultural movement beginning in the second half of the 19th century. At this time, Azerbaijan was a province of Tsarist Russia, which executed a policy of open Russification, discrimination and oppression of

national minorities. This experience shaped Azerbaijani nationalism as a struggle of the Azerbaijani people for national and cultural independence.

Such prominent Azerbaijani artists, writers and philosophers like Jalil Mammadgulu-zadeh, Hasanbey Zardabi, Mirza Alakbar Sabir, Abdulhasan Hagverdiyev, Najaf Vesirov constituted the foundation of this cultural movement. Drawing on Mirza Fath Ali Akhundov, they criticized the ignorance and religious fanaticism impeding greater progress and blamed Tsarist Russia for her national policy which they viewed as chauvinistic by nature.

The activity of these intellectuals assumed a variety of forms. They opened national schools espousing a new teaching methodology and secular education (Usul-u Cedid) (Saray 1987, p.12); they worked to reform the language and alphabet with the goal of forming the Azerbaijani literary language based on the living popular language (an idea first promoted by Akhundov in the first half of the 20th century); they opened national libraries and reading halls; they established charitable, cultural and public organizations, such as "Nijat", "Safa", "Edeb Yurdu", and "Jamiyyeti-Kheyriyye" (Baykara 1992, p.55), sustained by contributions from wealthy patrons and providing support to national newspapers, magazines, and Azerbaijani students who studied in Europe; and they published newspapers and magazines, such as "Hayat", "Yeni Hayat", "Fuyuzat", "Yeni Fuyuzat", "Irshad", "Tereggi", viewed as an effective means for disseminating the burgeoning national and cultural renaissance.

In addition, these activities promoted the awakening of an Azerbaijani national consciousness as Azerbaijanis increasingly perceived each other as united by cultural and ethnic bonds.

Political nationalism. The transformation of Azerbaijani nationalism from a cultural movement to a political one was rooted in scholarly and political activities of such prominent Azerbaijani intellectuals as Alibey Huseynzadeh, Ahmed Agaoglu, Ali Mardan bek Topchibashev, and Mammad Emin Rasolzadeh. For the first time, these individuals began to assert the social-political rights of the Azerbaijani people using all means available within the realm of law. Among their activities were writing petitions addressed to the Tsar and including demands for equal political, civil, religious, cultural, and property rights for Russian Muslims, as well as calls for the need to build a democratic society in Russia. Other activities included meetings with high governmental officials, convening a Pan-Russian Congress of Muslims and the active participation in the Russian Duma.

During this period, Pan-Islamism was viewed by representatives of the Azerbaijan intelligentsia as a major obstacle in the way of their national liberation movement. Rasolzadeh, one of the leaders of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, noted:

History has demonstrated that by promoting theocratic and clerical reactionary movements, on the one hand, and impeding the formation of the national ideology in the Muslim world, on the other hand, pan-Islamism does not allow for the Muslim peoples to be independent. We should strengthen the process of the development of the national consciousness in the entire Muslim world because the formation of national identity is the real cause of social progress and the basis for national independence (Rasolzadeh 1985, p.58).

Initially, representatives of Azerbaijani nationalism advocated the idea of pan-Turkism and called for unification with Turkey (Keykurun 1964, pp. 57-79). Yet the leaders of Azerbaijan's first democratic republic eventually rejected this idea in favor of a new political concept of Azerbaijanism, which would reflect the unique social, economic, political, and cultural development the Azerbaijani people had gone through. Also, it would unite Turkification, Islamization and modernization as three directions of social development. First suggested by Alibey Huseynzadeh in 1905 (Heyd 1950, p. 150), the concept of Azerbaijanism turned into the official doctrine of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic and found its symbolic expression in the three-colored flag of the Republic.

Until March 1918 proponents of Azerbaijanism adhered to *federalism* in their national liberation struggle and advocated national autonomy within the sovereign borders of Russia. But the events of March 1918, when the Bolsheviks allied with the Armenian paramilitary forces massacred over 10,000 Azerbaijanis in Baku and Shamakhy, forced the leadership of the Azerbaijani nationalist movement to reject federalism in favor of political independence. The result was the establishment of the first-ever Democratic Republic in the entire Muslim world on May 28, 1918.

The establishment of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) was an important milestone in the evolution of Azerbaijani nationalism because it set the groundwork for the emergence of economic nationalism. However, this stage did not materialize as the Bolshevik invasion and occupation of Azerbaijan on April 28, 1920 put an end to the ADR and interrupted the historical evolution of Azerbaijani nationalism, which would only begin to re-emerge in the late 1980s.

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A CHRONOLOGY OF AZERBAIJAN'S FOREIGN POLICY

I. Key Government Statements on Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy

Khazar Ibrahim, Azerbaijani foreign ministry spokesman, says Azerbaijan sees no threat for itself from Iran (<http://www.anspress.com/index.php?nid=80684>).

In his congratulation message to the French President Nicolas Sarkozy, President Ilham Aliyev described Azerbaijan-France relations as "successfully developing" (<http://www.anspress.com/index.php?nid=80679>).

Speaking at the third congress of heads of diplomatic missions and consulates of Azerbaijan on July 7, President Ilham Aliyev states that Azerbaijan's foreign policy on Nagorno-Karabakh conflict must be of offensive nature (<http://www.anspress.com/index.php?nid=79823>).

II. Key Statements by Others about Azerbaijan

Vasiliy Istratov, Russian ambassador to Baku, says Medvedev's visit to Azerbaijan boosted reliable and constructive cooperation Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev (<http://www.anspress.com/index.php?nid=79914>).

III. A Chronology of Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy

15 July

Steven Mann, the US deputy assistant secretary of state pays a visit to Baku.

14 July

President Ilham Aliyev receives Mr. Gianni Buquicchio, the secretary of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe.

President Ilham Aliyev receives Boyden Gray, US president's special envoy for Eurasian energy.

11 July

35 representatives of Azerbaijani diplomatic missions abroad visit the frontline area in Fizuli region (<http://www.today.az/news/politics/46359.html>).

President of Azerbaijan extends revolution day greetings to his Mongolian counterpart.

09 July

President Ilham Aliyev signs order on allocation of additional funds to the employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

08 July

President Ilham Aliyev attends the commissioning ceremony for the "Garabagh" dry cargo vessel to be used to carry cargo via the TRACECA transport corridor.

President Ilham Aliyev receives a delegation led by Mushahid Hussain Sayed, chairman of the foreign relations committee of the Senate of Pakistan.

GUAM introduces to the UN General Assembly a draft resolution called "The influence of frozen conflicts in GUAM countries on international peace, security and development."

07 July

President Ilham Aliyev receives the prime minister of Hungary Ferenc Gyurcsány.

President Ilham Aliyev attends the third meeting of heads of diplomatic missions and consulates of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

06 July

President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev attends the meeting on 10th anniversary of Astana in Kazakhstan
(http://www.president.az/articles.php?item_id=20080707044514829&sec_id=18).

President Ilham Aliyev and Turkish President Abdullah Gul meet in Astana.

05 July

President Ilham Aliyev meets with Jordanian King Abdullah II in Astana.

04 July

President Ilham Aliyev receives a delegation led by Karel Schwarzenberg, foreign minister of the Czech Republic.

President Ilham Aliyev receives the credentials of newly appointed ambassadors of the Czech Republic, France and Pakistan to Azerbaijan
(<http://www.anspress.com/index.php?nid=79543>).

President Ilham Aliyev extends Independence Day greetings to the US president.

03 July

Following the talks between Azerbaijani and Russian delegations chaired by Presidents Ilham Aliyev and Dmitry Medvedev, the parties sign several intergovernmental documents, including a joint declaration on friendship and strategic partnership between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation
(http://www.president.az/articles.php?item_id=20080707023530418&sec_id=12).

02 July

President Ilham Aliyev receives Lluís Maria de Puig, president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), and his accompanying delegation.

01 July

President Ilham Aliyev attends the GUAM leaders' plenary meeting in Batumi (http://www.president.az/articles.php?item_id=20080707033921682&sec_id=15).

President Ilham Aliyev meets in Batumi with David Merkel, US deputy assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs.

Note to Readers

The editors of "Azerbaijan in the World" hope that you find it useful and encourage you to submit your comments and articles via email (adabiweekly@ada.edu.az). The materials it contains reflect the personal views of their authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan.