

HEYDAR ALIYEV

A LIVING HISTORY

Elmira Akhundova



CONTENTS

Elmira Akhundova
Heydar Aliyev – A Living History
(translated from Russian)

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Preface	7
Foreword: Heydar Aliyev's Life and Struggle. <i>Olzhas Suleimenov</i>	11

Part 1 CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

Heydar Aliyev's Ancestry	15
A Tragic Outcome	19
The Ancient Gates to the East	25
Childhood Haunts	29
Childhood Games	35
School Years	39
Youthful Pursuits	49
Realising a Dream	55
Return to Nakhchivan	59
The First Years of the War	63
A Necessary Retreat	67
From Field Officer to Departmental Head	69
Choosing Between Two Evils	73
The Young Aliyev and His Friends	77

Part 2 CAREER IN THE SECURITY SERVICES

"Deserves Promotion"	81
On the Eastern Desk	85
Stalin's Death and Baghirov's Fall	91
Destalinisation	99
Head of Counterintelligence (1958 - 1964)	103
Chairman of the Azerbaijani Security Services (1965 - 1969)	125
Dissidents and the Creation of the KGB's 5 th Directorate	131
The KGB Chairman and the Creative Intelligentsia	143

KGB Major General	149
Special Operations and Missions	151
The Naturalist	159
Foreign Students and the Abdelghani Case	161
The KGB and Armenian Extremism	165
Heydar Aliyev and the Azerbaijani KGB's Domestic Personnel	173
"He Left Us with a Heavy Heart"	181
The KGB Chairman's Private Life	185
Part 3 BURDENS OF POWER AND RESPONSIBILITY	
High Time for a Change	193
Unanimously Elected	203
5 th August 1969	207
Meanwhile, in the Kremlin	211
Incognito Visits	217
"Baku is a Beautiful City!"	219
The Staff Are Everything!	223
Heydar Aliyev's Principles in Selecting Personnel	225
"I Was Always Against Liberalism"	233
The Rasizadeh "Rebellion"	239
The Bakhishev Incident	249
Alish Lambaranski	257
A Gifted Orator	259
A Policy of Checks and Balances	265
The KGB Versus Abulfaz Aliyev	283
"We Did Not Restrict the Activites of the Intelligentsia"	287
"Ships of Every Flag, Welcome!"	297
The Meeting Between Heydar Aliyev and Luis Corvalán	303
The New Constitution	307
Heydar Aliyev's Correspondence with the Intelligentsia	311
"This is My Belief"	315
"The People All Supported Them"	325
"We Are Not Idealists..."	329
Diamonds	335
Is the Mafia Indestructible?	341
Part 4 NATIONAL RECOGNITION	
Heydar Aliyev and Leonid Brezhnev	343
A New Strategy for Azerbaijan's Economic Development	359
Social Problems	375
The Rural Crisis	379
The Battle for Large-scale Grape Production	383
The Soviet Union's Vegetable Garden	387
"Did False Reporting Take Place in Azerbaijan?"	395
The Worsening Economic Crisis	399
Armenian Separatism	405
Heydar Aliyev, Karen Demirchyan and Eduard Shevardnadze	421
"I Have Great Respect for the Military Profession"	425
The Construction of the Gabala Radar Station	431
Military Education in the 1970s	435
Training the Komsomol	439
"In Baku, Children Studied in Four Shifts"	441
Heydar Aliyev and the Students	443
Fighting Corruption in the Universities	447
The Development of Sport in Azerbaijan	449
Heydar Aliyev and the Change in the Tudeh Party's Leadership	451
The Failure of the Kremlin's Policy in Iran	461
"We Need You Here, Heydar!"	471
A Difficult Choice	481
In the Foreign Media Spotlight	487
Saying Goodbye	491
In a Casual Setting	495
Leader	507
Bibliography	515
Index	521

NOTE ON NAMES

Russians have three parts to their name: a first name, a patronymic, which is based on their father's name, and a surname. The polite form of address uses the first name and patronymic, so Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev is referred to simply as "Leonid Ilyich", while Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov becomes "Yuri Vladimirovich". The Russified version of Heydar Aliyev's full name is Heydar Aliyevich Aliyev, so many of his former colleagues and employees simply refer to him as "Heydar Aliyevich", which is a mark of respect.

PREFACE

At the beginning of April 2003 the phone rang in my office. It was the president's assistant, Tariel Aghayev, telling me that I was being put through to Heydar Aliyevich. After a few seconds I heard a familiar voice greeting me. We exchanged some pleasantries, and then the president said: "I recently got your new book. Well done! I knew that you wrote a lot about my trips; I read your articles in the Moscow and local press, but it was a pleasant surprise that you retained and systematically processed everything, putting it so neatly into your book. Thank you!"

The book in question was my collection of analytical articles and essays on the president of Azerbaijan's foreign policy, commemorating his 80th birthday. I was fortunate enough to accompany Heydar Aliyevich on almost all his foreign visits and to attend his most important meetings with various international leaders. In this book, *Moments of Truth*, I decided to focus on the major historic moments in the young republic's first decade. The book's design was beautiful, with interesting photographs – many published for the first time – which sparked the president's interest.

I would like to add, without false modesty, that Heydar Aliyevich always treated my journalistic efforts with considerable attention, repeatedly sharing his positive assessment of my work during our many conversations. He very much appreciated the book *Ubystvo Poligrafista* [A publisher's murder], which I had co-written with Isa Najafov and which reflected on one of the most dramatic periods of his life.

I remember that when I first met Heydar Aliyev in Nakhchivan in the autumn of 1990, I noted what a great storyteller he was, and asked him why he had not written his memoirs. "I am working on it, making rough drafts," he replied. "I have lived a long life, and it has been full of great experiences. I have seen a lot and have been through a lot. I was both a witness and a participant in some of the most important historical events of my time. So, I think my memoirs would be useful for my contemporaries, and for those who attempt to write an objective history of this period sometime in the future. Now in Nakhchivan I often meet with young enterprising politicians who are 20 to 25 years old, and there is a lot they do not know: they are just getting started in politics. Many facts are presented to them in a rather distorted way, giving precedence to whatever

is the flavour of the month. Therefore, my memoirs are not necessary to prove anything to anyone; instead, they are needed to clarify the truth."

As the president of Azerbaijan during such a difficult and fateful age, Heydar Aliyev never managed to find the time to complete his memoirs. I know first-hand, however, that some of the most famous writers and journalists of the former USSR offered him their services and assistance – and so did I. I would repeatedly remind him of the need to embark on the project. Sometimes to provoke him I would say that Yeltsin was in the process of publishing his fifth book and that Gorbachev's memoirs had been translated into all languages, yet we were still only approaching the matter. He would brush me off, saying, "Other people write on Yeltsin's behalf, but I am used to doing everything myself. To do this properly I would need to find the time, which I simply cannot do."

During that memorable conversation in April 2003, which, unfortunately, was our last, I told Heydar Aliyev that I had begun collecting material for his political biography. He replied, "Write, Elmira, write. You do it rather well, and I ... you see how little time I have." It was a farewell, a kind of carte blanche given to me by Heydar Aliyevich. In the autumn of 2003 I started work on this monumental project, perhaps the most important one of my life.

Despite the fact that Heydar Aliyev did not leave behind a single book of memoirs, there are a variety of sources where researchers can find a wealth of autobiographical information. These primarily consist of his public speeches, his interviews and conversations with eminent cultural figures. This is, perhaps, the most valuable source of material for any Aliyev expert today.

The president was very photogenic – and was most likely aware of this – so he rarely refused a photo shoot. As a consequence there are several dozen professional photo albums of Heydar Aliyev (not to mention a number of portraits painted by famous artists) that captured his outward appearance very well. Yet his inner world, the particularities of his personality and character – hidden for the time being from contemporaries of the events that he witnessed and participated in – have still not been studied in depth.

"For all his openness, as a person Aliyev still remains a mystery to his contemporaries," says Ramiz Mehdiyev, who worked on his team for many years. "Today many people write about Heydar Aliyev phenomenon. The authors of these books, articles and pamphlets reveal his qualities as a citizen, individual and leader. And yet, I believe, these articles and books have failed to fully uncover the unique aspects of his character, ultimately lacking depth of insight into his talents and his striking personality. Of course, a complete portrayal of Aliyev's political significance requires more than a thorough and complete analysis of his career, but an analysis of an entire period of history, which is an extremely difficult job."

And yet it is this very task I face in writing this trilogy: the task of creating a political biography of Heydar Aliyev as mapped against the

background of the 20th century. The book features two equally important protagonists: Heydar Aliyev and his epoch. It details the political and social climate in which Aliyev grew up and which ultimately shaped his personality; the environment in which he lived and worked, and the friends and acquaintances he associated with. There are literally hundreds and thousands of such people, ranging from ordinary workers and farmers to politicians at the highest international level. I believe that their vivid recollections, reflections, comments and diverse interpretations of events create a polyphonic effect in this book, eradicating any tendency for bias and uncompromising judgements.

In the post-Soviet world of the last few decades there has been an explosion of memoir journalism. There is plenty of fictional literature, as well as poetic and journalistic reflections, dealing with the Stalin era and its legacy, but there is a conspicuous lack of real biographical data for that time. In an attempt to explain why this is the case, political scientist Georgy Arbatov notes: "Extensive letter-writing, as well as the tradition of keeping diaries barely existed during the harsh Stalin epoch, and all of these have always been invaluable sources of information for historians of the past. The primary reason for this was universal fear, but the fast pace of the time, with its corresponding way of living and thinking, also took its toll."

Therefore, another objective of my research for this book was to find and interview witnesses and participants of historic events, give them a chance to express their views on this important and difficult period in our history while they were still alive and had clear memories. Theirs is the voice of History itself, of a bygone age.

The three volumes incorporate a variety of sources, such as documents, vivid first-hand accounts, archival materials, political memoirs, media reports and the author's own observations and comments. The quality of the information was taken very seriously, and the evidence was analysed and validated very carefully. Where information could not be matched against multiple sources, it was rejected. I have only incorporated facts confirmed by several sources or given by sources that can be fully trusted – for example, the accounts of Heydar Aliyev's brothers, sisters and daughter. However, at times I found it useful to share some documented and published rumours and speculation, either to refute them or demonstrate Aliyev's popularity among the general public, since an unpopular leader would not enjoy legendary status in his lifetime. And Heydar Aliyev was a living legend.

The book is a historical account of scholarly value, containing memoirs, historical and political literature, materials from the State Archives of both the Russian Federation and the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Archives of the Ministry of National Security, as well from Heydar Aliyev's personal archive. It has certain elements of creative writing, which I believe are justified, and it presents and refines some biographical facts about Heydar Aliyev that have never been

published before. Indeed, the book could be called *The Unknown Aliyev*, had this title not been so overused in Russian political historiography already.

Following Heydar Aliyev's advice, I have tried to remain as objective as possible and have not smoothed off any sharp edges. The life of a man, especially a man of such prominence, is defined by setbacks and tactical pauses as well as victories, what is known as "taking two steps back" before beginning a new ascent. A true leader, a principled politician has as many friends as he has enemies. Aliyev's life was dotted with rapid successes and great achievements pitted against lies, conflicts, fierce envy from his enemies and outright betrayal by members of his carefully nurtured team. And yet, despite all these trials and tribulations, he returned triumphant to the apex of political power.

Based on my personal interaction with Heydar Aliyevich, I know that he took even the most critical publications in his stride, including mine. His views on my criticism in no way affected the friendly nature of our relationship. The only thing he did not take well was malicious slander and misrepresentation. "Write the truth, write the truth," he would repeat like a mantra during his encounters with journalists. It seems we should all listen to this advice. In the end, as Leo Tolstoy aptly noted, "a man's degree of honesty indicates the degree of his moral excellence."

I am well aware that my thoughts about Aliyev and my interpretation of his destiny are not indisputable. I allow for the fact that some information could be incomplete or imprecise. Nonetheless, the groundwork that has been laid down for future historians and biographers of his character should be substantial enough to compensate for this. I am sure that interest in this complex, multi-faceted and brilliant figure will only increase over time. I am hopeful that my book will prove useful to everyone who is interested in our past, present and future.

Elmira Akhundova

FOREWORD

HEYDAR ALIYEV'S LIFE AND STRUGGLE

It so happened that I finished reading Elmira Akhundova's manuscript on 10th May – the day of Heydar Aliyev's birthday. Realising the symbolism in this coincidence, I made a point of completing the review of my colleague's work on that very day.

What follows is neither an internal review for a publishing house, nor an article for a literary paper. Instead, it reflects the personal impressions I formed after reading the work.

On 10th May 2003 I arrived in Baku for Heydar Aliyevich's 80th birthday celebrations, but they had been cancelled. Heydar Aliyevich was preparing to leave for a Turkish military hospital. After the plane took off, a few of us gathered to raise a glass to his recovery, but the toasts did not improve our mood. It was then that Elmira shared her idea of writing a complete encyclopaedic and biographical work about Aliyev, a man who came to power twice (the second time well into his advanced years), without fear of conflict or of acquiring new enemies. Generations owe a debt of thanks to this man, who elevated Azerbaijan during the Soviet decades – and saved a wounded state on the verge of losing its newly won independence.

I happened to be one of the first readers of this trilogy. Elmira Akhundova has been sending me individual chapters by email since the beginning of the year. I have been reading through them and storing the thick folders on a special Azerbaijani bookshelf in my library in Paris, next to other books by Azerbaijani writers (including Elmira Akhundova's own books – *Ubrystvo Poligrafista* [A publisher's murder], *Eto My* [This is us], *Steklyanniy Dvorets* [Glass Palace]).

There is some justice in the opinion, accepted among writers, that writing a biography about people whose greatness was recognised in their lifetime is an easy, yet rather thankless job. It is easy because it does not require the writer to come up with drama: the protagonist's life experience is intense and the times are interesting as it is. For such books, a wealth of documentary information has usually been accumulated, thousands of pages of archives and miles of film reel. The protagonist's peers (colleagues, associates, employees) are alive and forthcoming with their memories of both historically important episodes and trivial everyday

events, which an author can nevertheless examine through the magnifying lens of the person's significance in search of the extraordinary.

A professional writer would not find it difficult to write a biography in such fortuitous circumstances, just as a tourist can easily describe an exotic country. But one's *homeland* is always harder to describe. If the author lived in the country and witnessed the events firsthand, it is likely that the affections of such a writer's heart would weigh down on their pen, making it harder to write.

An awful lot gets written about great people, often during their lifetime. My experience as a reader and a writer has always helped me determine whether an author's pen is guided by a respect for their protagonist or by an ordinary servility. In this case, I can say that *love* inspired Elmira Akhundova's book. Occasionally it feels that the author is too cautious in her use of the chiaroscuro effect, which tends to lighten up and "overexpose" Aliyev's image, and supplies too many facts; however, if I were editing it, I would keep it as is. Books like this one evolve over time, as does the readership. As years pass, seemingly insignificant trivia and anecdotes gain historical significance, highlighting the protagonist's personality, as well as the nature and peculiarities of the epoch, in a much more credible way than the more obvious modern-day details. Biographers have no right to an artistic depiction of truth; they work in the realm of real life (although the latter is not always closer to the truth than a talented author's artistic liberties). Elmira Akhundova, though, stays close to the facts on principle.

She carefully traces the development of a man with natural organisational skills as he began his climb up the uneven social ladder to prominence, all the while gaining experience dealing with various individuals, political authorities and fellow countrymen, until, at the pinnacle of his ascent, he became a national leader. Books like this biography help new generations of leaders, and Aliyev's unique example and experience in leading two different states within the same country is especially valuable.

Heydar Aliyev received many awards and honours during his lifetime. However, in my opinion, the most accurate compliment paid to him is the one commonly featured in school essays that calls him, in reference to Lermontov's timeless novel, "A Hero of our Time".

Not all of the outstanding people of the 20th century became great in the 21st century. Those who lived in the "transitional period", when the ties between peoples were severed, had to maintain sharpness of mind, strength of will and spirit of character, as it was up to them to reunite the shreds of space and time that had been tragically ripped apart. There were few people of such stature in Eurasia, but Heydar Aliyev certainly numbers among them – he, who is a true hero of our broken time.

For obvious reasons, in Azerbaijan this period brings to mind the image of a map that has been torn up and a country that has been ripped apart. For one-and-a-half decades the republic has endured bloody occupation that is like an open wound in the minds and hearts of every Azerbaijani and all those who love this country. The Karabakh tragedy is a reminder that novices have no place in politics.

In the countries where revolutionary changes took place after the collapse of the USSR, skilled leaders were replaced by inexperienced politicians futilely trying to navigate the wheel of power. These countries included Georgia, Moldova, Tajikistan and Azerbaijan, and this could have resulted in an even worse outcome had the people not returned the experienced Heydar Aliyev to power in 1993. During the 10 years of his presidency, Azerbaijan got back on its feet, gained economic strength and acquired international supporters who understood the challenges the young state faced.

Heydar Aliyev never – not even for a moment – forgot about the main challenge. He believed that the reunification of the country's territory would happen as a result of common sense prevailing, and would become a triumph of the joint peace efforts of the countries in the South Caucasus, Russia, Turkey, Iran, the United States and Europe.

He never stopped talking about this at all political levels. Symbolically, his last public speech was delivered to cadets at the Azerbaijan Military Academy. This speech should now be seen as an essential part of his desire to achieve the restoration of the territorial integrity of his homeland – by force of arms, if necessary.

Visiting Azerbaijan and seeing that the country's development statistics are well ahead of the global standards, I am convinced that Heydar Aliyevich's vision is gradually coming to life thanks to the work of Ilham Aliyev's team. Each and every new developmental milestone brings the country closer to the point of its full recovery. Now what is most important is to maintain this momentum so that this progress does not stop in its tracks just as it is gaining strength.

In ancient times a chronicler was required to save the ruler's name and his good deeds for posterity, and the sovereign ruler was required to protect his state, to strengthen it, turn it into a welcoming home for all people and each and every individual. A welcoming and warm home, not one that was on fire. This reminder is necessary because the so-called "transitional period" is not yet over, and each country has no lack of individuals willing to light the torch of freedom in gunpowder cellars.

We casually use the term "sovereign state", forgetting about the fundamental meaning of the word "sovereign" as "supreme ruler". We replace it with euphemisms such as "president", "head of state", "leader".

But day-to-day life, especially life in the East, forces us to see through the fog of politically correct terminology to the true meaning of these ancient concepts. *A sovereign state primarily implies a strong sovereign ruler.* Strong leaders create and protect the state, while weak and incompetent ones destroy it. This is the meaning that may be taken from Aliyev's life and struggle, as he laid down the foundations for a new, independent Azerbaijan – the first difficult step of many on the way to its future.



Olzhas Suleimenov
Paris, 10th May 2007

Part 1

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

HEYDAR ALIYEV'S ANCESTRY

Heydar Alirza oghlu Aliyev was born on 10th May 1923 in the Azerbaijani city of Nakhchivan. He was the first generation of the Aliyev family to be born there; his parents – Alirza muallim and Izzet khanim¹ – were from Western Azerbaijan.

We know little about the progenitors of Heydar Aliyev's family who settled on the slopes of the ancient Zangezur Mountains.² There were two brothers, Djomart and Alagez Muhammad.³ According to Musa Urud,⁴ the brothers were from Ardebil and held high positions in the army of Nader Shah Afshar, who ruled as shah of Iran from 1736 to 1747. He brought about the end of Safavid dynasty and conquered the whole of Iran and almost all of the Caucasus, including Azerbaijan.⁵

One of Nader Shah's most respected military leaders was Panah Ali Khan Javanshir. His rivals sparked a conflict between him and the shah, which forced Panah Ali to flee from Khorasan to Karabakh in 1738. After Nader Shah's death, Panah Ali founded the independent Karabakh Khanate, which had its seat at Shahbulag Castle. In 1751 the seat was moved to a new fortress rebuilt on the ruins of the ancient city of Shusha and named Panakhabad after its founder.⁶

¹ Khanim and muallim are honorific forms of address for women and men respectively in Azerbaijani.

² The Zangezur Mountains (historically known as Syuniq Mountains) comprise a mountain range that defines the border between the province of Syuniq (now Armenia) and Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic.

³ Alagez means "grey-eyed".

⁴ Musa Urud, a poet and journalist who specialises in the history of the Zangezur, told me an interesting version of the brothers' origin, which he had heard from its oldest local inhabitants.

⁵ Mahmud Ismayil, *Istoriya Azerbaydzhana* [The history of Azerbaijan], (Baku: 1995), 257

⁶ Ismayil, 263 and *Azerbaydzhanskaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya* [The Azerbaijani Soviet encyclopaedia], vol. 7, (Baku: 1983), 521

The brothers Djomart and Alagez Muhammed took the side of Panah Ali Khan and secured many dramatic military victories during his reign, which expanded the Karabakh Khanate by annexing Azerbaijani territories. Grateful for their loyal service Panah Ali Khan presented his officers with land in the Sisian *maballa* (region), which was part of the Karabakh Khanate in the mid-18th century. On retiring, the brothers founded Djomartly and Muhammedli, two villages named after them on the south-eastern slopes of the Zangezur Mountains.

"Djomartly's roots go back to the time of Ibrahim Khan, who ruled Karabakh," writes Professor Budag Budagov. "Separated from Ibrahim Khan's army, a group of officers and soldiers sought a suitable area of land to settle in. The place had to be agriculturally viable and safe. Hence, the village of Djomartly was founded on a steep mountainside, providing a clear view of the surrounding valleys and the meadows."¹

The fact that one of Heydar Aliyev's ancestors was a major military figure, who "retired to the Zangezur Mountains as a result of political conspiracies", is confirmed in a short biography by Fatma Abdullazade called *Vremya Rozhdat'ya* [The time to be born].²

Two centuries later, the genes bequeathed by his militaristic ancestors manifested in the broad-shouldered, handsome Heydar Aliyev, and a general's uniform went particularly well with his eyes – the same colour as his distant ancestor, the grey-eyed Alagez.

Heydar Aliyev's ancient family line boasts many brave men who were not afraid to go in battle. In the early 20th century, more than half of the family's male members died fighting Armenian gangs in Zangezur, and at the end of the 20th century, their descendants fought on the front lines during the Karabakh war. Two officers, Agil Guliyev and Fakhraddin Najafov, were posthumously awarded the republic's highest honour, the title of National Hero of Azerbaijan.

* * *

Alirza's grandfather and father were known to be well-off. They were *kerbelai*,³ and only prosperous Muslims could afford a pilgrimage to Karbala at the time. Suleyman Aliyev, Heydar Aliyev's cousin and son of his uncle Zeynalabdin, shares some interesting details of the lives of their prominent ancestors. "Our grandfather Jafar made the pilgrimage to Karbala twice, and

so he was known as *Kyalbei Jafar*.⁴ He was a handsome, tall man. Heydar and his brother Jalal inherited their looks from him.

Grandfather's family was considered to be wealthy; they had large flocks of sheep and cattle. Djomartly is a mountain village, where land is scarce, so the villagers mainly kept livestock. My father, Zeynalabdin, looked after the animals.

Kyalbei Jafar and his wife Gyuldjan Kerbelai Abbasgulu kyz, who was from the village of Urud, had a large family of five sons and a daughter called Nargiz. The oldest was Alirza, followed by my father Zeynalabdin, and then there were Gurban, Arsuvar and Gafar."

The events of 1905 and 1906 brought an end to their relative wealth. It was then that Armenian gangs ravaged the Sisian region, robbing the villagers, burning their homes and stealing their cattle. Kerbelai Jafar's large family was badly affected. It was difficult to restore their former prosperity following these attacks, and so the young Alirza was forced to travel to Baku for work.

Baku was experiencing an oil boom in those years, and workers were in demand. Alirza was more than happy to oblige; he loved to work. Soon after the attacks he married Naringul, a girl from his village. In 1907 they had their firstborn son, Hasan, followed in 1911 by Hussein, which meant Alirza now had four mouths to feed.

Fortunately, economic and cultural ties between Baku and Western Azerbaijan, including Nakhchivan, were strong at this time. Thanks to the Baku-Nakhchivan railway that opened in 1897, Alirza along with hundreds of other young Sisian men could travel to Baku for work.

The October Revolution of 1917, which sparked the collapse of the Russian Empire, echoed across the region like thunder. The once calm and peaceful life of Djomartly village was thrown into turmoil by a bloody civil war that engulfed the whole of Zangezur.

¹ Budag Budagov, *Zhizn, Burlyashchaya kak Reka* [Life is a raging river], (Baku: 2002), 18

² Fatma Abdullazade, *Vremya Rozhdat'ya* [The time to be born], *Azerbaijan-IRS*, 2003, 43

³ An honorific prefix given to the name of a Shia Muslim who has completed a pilgrimage to the city of Karbala (Iraq), where Muhammad's grandson Imam Hussein is buried.

⁴ *Kyalbei* is short for *Kerbəla*.⁵

A TRAGIC OUTCOME

Under the Azerbaijani Khanates, the majority of Zangezur belonged to the Karabakh Khanate, while the rest was part of the Nakhchivan Khanate. After Russia conquered the North Caucasus and signed the Treaty of Turkmenchay in 1828, Zangezur was divided between Baku and Yerevan governorates. On 25th February 1868 the Elizabethpol Governorate was formed from parts of the Baku, Tbilisi and Yerevan governorates, and Zangezur became its largest county; it included Qafan, Gorus, Sisian, Mehri, Zangilan, Qubadly and Lachin. As Musa Urud notes in his book: "In 1920 Zangezur's population was 224,197 people, with 2,233 households. 70% of them were Azerbaijani. In the early 20th century Zangezur's largest area was Sisian with its 76 settlements, of which 58 were populated by Azerbaijanis."¹ According to numerous historical documents, Armenians were not among the native population of Zangezur. The local population has its roots in the Turkic tribes of the Saks, who came there 2,700 years ago from the shores of the Black Sea.

Nonetheless, following the short-lived Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic and the establishment of the three independent states of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia, the government of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaksutyun) decided to change the status quo by forcefully deporting Azerbaijanis from Zangezur. Attempts were made to stop the Dashnaks. The Azerbaijani government offered to establish a special committee to resolve territorial disputes, and the Azerbaijani National Council officially recognised Yerevan as the capital of the Armenian Republic, but even this failed to satisfy the Dashnaks, intoxicated as they were by the idea of the "Greater United Armenia".

According to *The History of Azerbaijan*: "By putting forward territorial claims against Azerbaijan, Armenians began the implementation of a policy of ethnic cleansing in Nakhchivan, Karabakh and Zangezur. Lawless groups led by Andranik, Dro and Nzhdeh targeted local civilians for genocide."²

Mikhailov, a member of the Azerbaijani Special Investigative Commission who studied the Armenian massacres in various Muslim villages in the Javanshir, Shusha, Jabrayil and Zangezur counties, reported that an exceptionally difficult situation was created in Zangezur. "Compared to other Azerbaijani provinces, the situation of the local Muslims in this county was particularly poor – in addition to attacks by armed gangs of Armenian villagers, the county also served as the military base for a large and well-trained Armenian unit led by General Andranik. With a large fighting force of trained soldiers and armed Armenian villagers at his disposal, General Andranik invaded Azerbaijani territory.

¹ Musa Urud, *Urud*, (Baku: 2000), 18

² Ismayil, vol. 5, 2000 edition, 406

Probably acting under the direction of the Armenian government, he gave the local Muslim population an ultimatum to choose between submitting to the Armenian authorities and leaving the county so he could claim it for Armenia.

Despite being outnumbered, poorly armed and isolated, the local Muslims refused to submit to the Armenians. The latter responded with monstrous cruelty. Seeking to expand their territory, they spared no one. Even when Muslims seeking refuge voluntarily left their native lands, the Armenians still burned down and destroyed their villages, damaged their property, drove away cattle and massacred the remaining inhabitants.¹

During the summer and autumn of 1918, 115 Zangezur villages were destroyed, among them Djomarty, Heydar Aliyev's ancestral home. On 13th November 1918, *The Azerbaijan Newspaper* reported on the devastation wrought there by the Armenian gangs.

Unfortunately, the Azerbaijani Special Investigative Commission was not destined to complete its work. The Bolsheviks kept the plethora of historical documents and testimonies collected by the commission hidden in their special archives for many decades. But the truth about the tragedy of the razed villages and the heroism of Zangezur people, who defended their families' hearths and homes until their last breath, lived on in folklore passed down from generation to generation.

For example, the Dashnak fighters took two whole days to capture Djomarty. Most of its male population was away in the summer highland pastures (*yaylaks*), and the remaining men fiercely resisted the attacks. Heydar Aliyev's elder brother, Hasan, was 11 years old, and those distant days in August 1918 were embedded in his childhood memory in all their horror. He later shared his recollections with his friend, Professor Budag Budagov, who wrote about them in one of his books.

"The tragedy of 1918 hit Zangezur. The news that an armed Armenian detachment was moving from the south towards the village reached Djomarty. At night, armed villagers surrounded the Dashnak troops and killed them. A short while later the Dashnaks responded by raiding the village with redoubled force. Somebody managed to bring word to the shepherds in the mountains that the Armenians were on the march, so they had time to move their flocks over to the village of Abrakunis in Nakhchivan.

"The Dashnaks' second raid brought unspeakable horror upon Djomarty. Many villagers died or went missing in the fighting. One of Hasan's uncles found his 10-year-old son in the village and managed to saddle him onto a horse to be taken to safety, but an unforgiving Dashnak bullet shot the child dead before they could get away. Another of Hasan's uncles and his wife carrying their infant son tried to hide

in a cave just outside the village. [According to Suleyman Aliyev, this was Alirza's younger brother, Gafar.] The cave where they were hiding protruded over the edge of a gorge, which made it an excellent vantage point and allowed the couple to shoot down the attackers while their ammunition lasted. When the Dashnaks finally reached the cave, they killed Gafar, bayoneted his young wife and beheaded their baby."¹

Agil Aliyev (Heydar Aliyev's brother) recalls the tragedy from his mother's words: "Our village was surrounded by mountains on one side, like an amphitheatre, so there was only one way to escape to the lowlands, and from there to the river. My mother told me that in 1918 Andranik's troops had the village completely surrounded. Only a few managed to break out and escape. All the elders in our family died, including my grandfather, Jafar, and my grandmother, Guljahan. My mother had seven brothers, none of whom survived, and Zeynalabdin was my father's sole surviving brother."

Those who had gone to the highland pastures had better luck. Residents of the Zangezur villages fled to Iran and Nakhchivan. Zeynalabdin escorted the surviving members of Alirza's family to safety: Naringul with her baby, and his older nephews, Hasan and Huseyn. They collected the cattle, loaded what they could onto a cart, and followed mountain paths to Nakhchivan. All the surrounding villages – Arafsa, Saltag, Milakh and Gazanchi – were crowded with refugees. According to Suleyman Aliyev: "There was a larger village called Norashen located above Saltag, and that was where they settled. Alirza and Naringul's baby daughter died during the terrible, tough escape through the mountain passes. Soon after, unable to bear the suffering and loss of her loved ones, Naringul passed away like a candle burning out."

Alirza did not witness his family's tragedy, because he was away working in Baku's oilfields. According to Agil Aliyev: "[our] father had heard the rumours that a conflict with the Armenians had broken out in Zangezur, and that people were fleeing from their homes. Father rushed back home, but by then our family and friends had already fled the area. With great difficulty father arrived in Nakhchivan. He intended to walk the rest of the way, but was told that there was nobody left in Djomarty, and that the surrounding roads were being harassed by Andranik's thugs. So he was forced to turn back halfway. Father then came to an Armenian village where one of his friends lived, and this Armenian friend hid him and saved him from being killed. My father returned to Nakhchivan the following morning; it took him quite some time to find his family and friends."

Suleyman Aliyev recalls Zeynalabdin's story, describing the same events. "Uncle Alirza was in Baku at that time. Trains between Baku and Nakhchivan went via Tiflis [now Tbilisi] and Yerevan. He had heard that there were pogroms in Zangezur and that Andranik's troops were

¹ Ziya Musaevich Bunyadov, *Istoriya Azerbaydzhana po Dokumentam i Publikatsiyam* [The history of Azerbaijan in documents and publications], (Baku: 1990), 205

¹ Budagov, 44

committing atrocities in our area. Armenian gangs controlled all the roads home. Uncle Alirza boarded the train and reached Tiflis without issues, but he was detained in Yerevan. They questioned him for a long time, tormenting him until he was finally released. He then reached Nakhchivan, where he spent a lot of time searching for his family. He eventually found his brother, but it was not until Soviet power was established and there was less violence in the South Caucasus – nearly two years later – that he managed to find the other surviving members of his family.¹

One can imagine the feelings that overwhelmed Alirza when he listened to his brother's stories about the extermination of almost his entire family and the escape from Djomartly. His joy at a long-awaited meeting with his children was diminished by the news about the death of his dear wife and baby daughter. This terribly vicious time took its toll on Alirza's health. Strained by the hard work and the heavy burden of memories, his heart would give out in 1943. Heydar Aliyev's father would die before his 60th birthday.

But at the time he had to continue living for the sake of his two surviving teenage sons, who he had miraculously found after a lengthy separation. By the time he was reunited with them, his younger brother, Zeynalabdin, had begun to settle in Norashen. He had married a distant relative named Norasta, acquired a few mules and had become a *charvadar* (cargo carrier). Zeynalabdin tried to persuade Alirza to stay in Norashen and take up farming, but he did not want to be a burden. After years of work in the Baku oilfields Alirza had lost interest in farming and found comfort in more familiar work. Together with his children he moved to the regional capital, Nakhchivan, hoping to find a job he was more accustomed to as a worker.

Alirza and the children found it difficult at first. They stayed in other people's homes, eking out a living doing odd jobs. In an attempt to ease the load on his father's shoulders, Hasan, the eldest son, took on some work. "When Hasan brought home his first wages, Alirza wept. While telling me this, Hasan wept, too," Professor Budag Budagov would subsequently recall.

At the time, refugees from Zangezur practically flooded Nakhchivan. Occasionally, while walking down the street, Alirza would meet someone who had lived in a neighbouring village. A few greeting words would be followed by hopeful questions about relatives. Everyone was searching for their families, still hoping for a miracle – what if someone else had managed to escape?

Once, while shopping at the market, Alirza shed tears of joy when he met Izzet, his distant relative (in Djomartly everybody was related). He offered to walk her home. As they walked slowly through the narrow cobbled streets of the ancient city, Alirza listened to Izzet's story about her ordeals, constantly having to swallow a lump in his throat. He had known Abulfaz, the husband of this pretty round-faced woman with big

greyish-green eyes. The oldest residents from Djomartly and Urud recall that Alirza and Abulfaz were friends and even worked together for some time in Baku's oilfields. Abulfaz felt homesick and went back home to Djomartly just before the Armenian incursion into Zangezur. In the heat of that bloody conflict Izzet lost virtually all of her relatives, including her father, mother, husband and brothers. Heydar Aliyev's sister, Shafiga Aliyeva, writes in her book that it was not until 15 years later that her mother found her nieces and nephews Mesme, Sakin, Rzagulu and Khumay. She accepted them into her family, and loved them like her own – they replaced the brothers and sisters she had lost.²

Alirza began visiting Izzet. Although things were not easy for him, he helped the widow as much as he could and occasionally brought sweets for her daughter Sura. A year later, he proposed to unite their two small families. Izzet had grown attached to this quiet, calm man with a proud visage and large worker's hands. She loved his sons, Hasan and Huseyn, as her own. In the summer of 1922 Alirza and Izzet rented a small room from a Nakhchivani named Najafali, and began to live as a family in hope of a better life.

On 10th May 1923 the fourth child in the Aliyev family was born. Alirza would call him Heydar in memory of Izzet's beloved brother who had died in Zangezur. Heydar was their first child together, which predetermined his special role in the family. Heydar's younger sister, Rafiga khanim, wrote: "My mother was very fond of Heydar. He had always had a special place in her heart, but this didn't make us jealous. Quite the opposite: her love for Heydar naturally spread to us too, and we truly adored him." In her biographical essay "Vremya Rozhdatsya" [The time to be born], Fatma Abdullazade goes on to add: "Heydar was not Izzet khanim's firstborn. But the birth of this boy gave her more than the joy of motherhood. It gave her an intuitive understanding of her higher mission, which supported her in difficult times."²

And that higher mission was to continue the family line in spite of fate's unrelenting blows. Heydar's birth drew a line under Alirza and Izzet's tragic experiences, giving them the strength for a new life and new challenges.

¹ Shafiga Aliyeva, *Moya Mat* [My mother], (Baku: 2002), 25

² Abdullazade, 44

¹ Ibid., 38

THE ANCIENT GATES TO THE EAST

The future president of independent Azerbaijan was born in a place with more than 3,500 years of history. Nakhchivan was first mentioned as a city in Ptolemy's *Geography* as early as 150 AD. Owing to its location at the intersection of trade routes connecting East and West, this region has always been coveted by neighbouring states. Nakhchivan survived the devastating invasion of Alexander the Great's army and the rule of the Byzantine emperors; it endured the dominion of both Persia and the Arab powers. In the 11th century the city was sacked by Seljuq Turks, and in the 13th and 14th centuries by the Mongols. It was during those years that the Alinja Tower was gradually reinforced and strengthened until it became a truly impregnable fortress and the symbol of Nakhchivan's strength. Even the great medieval conqueror Tamerlane was said to have been impressed. Many encyclopaedias make mention of this fortress and the valour of its defenders; for example, the *Soviet Historical Encyclopaedia* states that "[the] combined forces of the peoples of Georgia and Azerbaijan resisted Tamerlane's army for 14 years in the fortress of Alinja-Kala."¹

Following the collapse of Nadir Shah's Empire in the mid-18th century, an independent Nakhchivan Khanate was established. It comprised Nakhchivan, Sharur, Ordubad, Mehri, Kafan, and other provinces. In 1828, Nakhchivan Khanate became part of Russia under the Treaty of Turkmenchay, which concluded the Russo-Persian war.

A little less than a century later, between 1917 and 1920, the region would come to experience perhaps one of the most intense periods in its history. Civil war raged in the South Caucasus, and power was continually changing hands. Nakhchivan's situation was further compounded by the expansionist aspirations of the Dashnaktsutyun government in Armenia.

The situation worsened dramatically in the summer of 1918, when General Andranik's armed forces moved through Zangezur with fire and sword, approaching Nakhchivan. Latif Huseynzade, the oldest resident in Nakhchivan and Heydar Aliyev's favourite teacher, recalls these events vividly. "If the Turks had not reached Nakhchivan in July 1918, there would have been literally no Azerbaijanis left. Andranik came to the river Julfa from South Azerbaijan via Hoi and Salmas, leaving nothing behind but desolation. He destroyed the Julfa bridge to prevent the Turkish army from catching him.

His troops surrounded the city. He issued an ultimatum, claiming that Lenin and Shaumyan had instructed and authorised him to assume power in Nakhchivan. He demanded that all arms be surrendered and began to fire his cannons at the city's districts. It would be a matter of days until he

¹ Dmitri Petrushevsky, *Sovetskaya Istoricheskaya Entsiklopediya* [The Soviet historical encyclopaedia], vol. 10, (Moscow: 1967), 14

captured the city. The local Muslims sent messengers to Kazim Karabekir Pasha and Enver Pasha, the commanders of the Turkish Eastern Army. They replied that help was on the way, so the city's defenders must hold their ground and not let the Armenians enter the city. Local militiamen fought Andranik's forces for two days – the time that the 11th division of the Turkish Caucasian Army needed to arrive and sweep Andranik's positions with artillery fire, causing him to flee in panic. Nakhchivan was saved, and its people went out into the streets to greet and cheer the Turkish military.¹

In few months Turkey would accept defeat in World War I and sign the Armistice of Mudros. Its terms would require Turkey to withdraw its troops from Azerbaijan and leave Nakhchivan without protection. The region proclaimed the Republic of Araz on its territory, but it was a short-lived state that ended when British troops arrived in Nakhchivan.

Soviet power was established in Baku on 28th April 1920, and in Nakhchivan some three months later, on 28th July 1920. The region's supreme power became the Nakhchivan Revolutionary Committee, which proclaimed Nakhchivan part of Azerbaijan. However, on 1st December 1920, the Bolsheviks officially recognised the western part of Zangezur, including Gafan, Gorus, Sisian and Mehri, as part of Armenia. This decision meant that Nakhchivan was cut off from the rest of Azerbaijan, and its territorial autonomy became a concern of utmost importance.

In early 1921, a survey conducted by representatives from Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia showed that 90% of the residents of Nakhchivan Region were in favour of autonomy as an enclave of Azerbaijan.² This status was confirmed *de jure* by two international agreements, the Treaty of Moscow (March 1921) and the Treaty of Kars (October 1921), signed by the heads of the three states in the South Caucasus and by Russian and Turkish representatives.³

In February 1924, Nakhchivan Region became the Nakhchivan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, and in April 1926 it adopted its first constitution. Nonetheless, the Armenian leadership, supported by the powerful Armenian lobby in Moscow, did not abandon their territorial claims.

"In 1929, by a resolution of the Transcaucasian Central Executive Committee 650 square kilometres [250 square miles] of Nakhchivan's territory were ceded to Armenia. These Azerbaijani lands became the Mehri Republic of Armenia

¹ *Entsiklopediya Nakhchivana* [The encyclopaedia of Nakhchivan], (Baku: Azerneshr, 2002), 433

² In the spring of 1992, the autonomy of Nakhchivan was threatened again by a blockade organised by Armenian aggressors. Drawing on the treaties that had established the republic's autonomy 70 years previously, Heydar Aliyev sought Turkey's support in settling the conflict as one of the treaties' guarantors. I interviewed him as a staff reporter for *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, and he said that he "[hopes] to extinguish the fire of the conflict by diplomatic means," adding that the government of Turkey deserved credit for fulfilling the obligations under the Treaty of Kars.

in 1930. As a result, Nakhchivan became a landlocked enclave with no land route to Azerbaijan. In effect, the Armenians laid the foundation of the current blockade of Nakhchivan in the 1920s and 1930s."⁴

However, these territorial disputes were put on hold for the time being when the republics became part of the Soviet Union, which was officially established on 30th December 1922, setting in motion an immense historical experiment to create a new society. And it was in those turbulent times, in a country with less than five months of history, that Heydar Aliyev was destined to be born.

⁴ From a speech by Chairman of the Supreme Majlis of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic V. Talibov at a ceremony marking the 80th anniversary of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. Cited in *Bakinskii Rabochii*, 18th May (2004)

CHILDHOOD HAUNTS

Soon after the births of Heydar and Agil, Alirza returned to work in Baku. Until 1930 he worked as a driller in the oilfields, sending money to his family. When the couple had managed to save up enough money, they purchased a small house in the Zaviya *mahalla* (neighbourhood) where young Heydar spent his adolescent years. Even toward the end of his life he would recall the streets of his childhood and describe them fondly: "Here is Pushkin Street, running through Alikhan Quarter to the end of Shakhab Quarter. The name is a tribute to the great Russian poet, of course. Nakhchivan's intelligentsia wanted to show their appreciation and name the street in commemoration of his centenary. Go down Pushkin Street, and you will turn into a small alleyway, so narrow that two people could scarcely pass each other there, and vehicles simply wouldn't fit, not even an arba cart. It was called, fittingly, Uzkaya Ulitsa (narrow street), and that was where my father had his small household and where I was born. Pushkin Street is dear to me – it's where I spent my youth."¹

In the 1930s the small alleyway got its "Soviet" name. It became Papanin Street, in honour of the famous polar explorer; and more recently still it was renamed Samed Movlavi Street, after a once-famous Nakhchivan actor. However, locals, old and young alike, still call it Uzkaya Ulitsa. I had the occasion to walk down this alleyway, talking to its inhabitants. I took young Aliyev's favourite route – from Alikhan to Shakhab and up along the broad Pushkin Street. The Russian poet is still revered in Nakhchivan, and the street has kept its name, although everything else in the area has changed beyond recognition. The small house where Heydar Aliyev was born did not survive; it was replaced by a more modern building in his lifetime.

Nonetheless, the recollections of Heydar Aliyev's friends and relatives have helped me recreate the appearance of the house where he spent the first 27 years of his life. The squat, one-storey building jutted out into the street, so that its front door opened directly into the hallway. There were two rooms on either side of the hallway. The left one was smaller, and the right one, the living room, was larger. There was a basement under the window, where food was kept in the summer. The door at the end of the hallway led to a small courtyard surrounded by a wattle and daub wall. The house itself, to one side of the yard, was also made of wattle and daub, but red brickwork decorated its street-facing facade.

According to Agil Aliyev, there had been three brick-producing factories in Nakhchivan since before the Revolution, and red fired brick remained the primary building material in that region even in the 1920s. Incidentally,

¹ *Bakinskiy Rabochiy*, 20th June (2002)

the same brick was used to build the Momine Khatun Mausoleum,¹ a masterpiece of 12th-century Azerbaijani architecture.

Later, in the early 1940s, Heydar Aliyev made an addition to the house, carving out a very small room for himself. Fikrat Gadimov, one of the oldest residents of Nakhchivan, remembers the story of its construction, as his wife, Muzayyan, lived next door, and Muzayyan's mother, Aleviya, was friends with Izzet. As Gadimov recalls with a smile: "In 1942 or 1943, Heydar decided to attach a separate room to the house. By then he was already an important man, he worked in the NKVD, and friends would often come to visit him. However, there wasn't enough space to build anything in the courtyard. They had a neighbour, an old woman called Sakina. All the neighbours, including my wife and mother-in-law, begged her to give Heydar some land so his room would be a little bigger. She just wouldn't have it, such a pernicious old woman she was. She wouldn't give him anything, not even a single square metre. Nonetheless, Heydar accorded her the respect due her age, and when he began earning money, he would often buy her gifts."

The floor in the Aliyevs' house was made of earth. Earthen floors in the houses of that time were usually overlaid with alabaster, which was painted and covered with mats, rugs and carpets. The occupants of a house would sit on the floor on special pads, or *mutakkabs*. According to Dovlat Mammadov, who lived in the Aliyevs' home for about a month before enrolling in college, all the adults, including Heydar, ate at the table, like in the big city, which was an unusual custom for Nakhchivan. The bed in the large room was covered with quilts, mattresses and pillows, piled up almost to the ceiling. Everyone who visited the Aliyevs' house recalls its iron stove. It stood in the middle of the room, spreading warmth and delicious smells to everyone inside.

Ibrahim Ismayilov notes: "Sometimes, after running around and playing outside all day, we would visit their house. His mum always fed us. She never let anyone leave hungry, and we loved her *kyoka*."²

A cat lived in the yard of the Aliyevs' house. Nakhchivanis traditionally preferred to keep cats as pets, since they helped keep the rodent population down. Almost none of the households had dogs. Ibrahim recalls that stories about dogs were used to scare children. Parents would tell their children to stay away from dogs for fear that tiny hairs would get inside their bodies and make them sick. According to Ibrahim Ismayilov, when little Heydar was five or six years old, a stray dog bit him, and he was wary of dogs ever since. Izzet also kept poultry, and chickens walked

¹ The Mausoleum was commissioned by the ruler of the Eldiguzids, Ildegizid Atabeg Jahan Pahlawan in honour of his first wife, Momine Khatun, in 1186. The tomb is considered to be the pinnacle of creative achievement of the architect Ajami Nakhchivani, who founded an architectural school renowned all throughout the Middle East.

² A cheaper version of *baklava* and a dish local to Nakhchivan.

around the courtyard, while a noisy rooster would wake the household up every morning.

The Aliyevs' courtyard was small but neat. Izzet broke it down into small garden beds for fresh greens like spring onions, dill and parsley. Shafiga khanim, Izzet's daughter, remembers that her mother planted roses along one wall. The house always smelled of dried rose petals and rose water (*gyulab*). She also made pink petal jam. Sometimes she would grind up rose petals with sugar, adding ginger and cinnamon, which would be used as a remedy for colds and stomach cramps.

Heydar Aliyev would retain a love for roses throughout his life. When he became the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, one of his first acts was to instruct the city head to plant more rosebushes in Baku. The chairman of the Baku City Executive Committee, Aydin Mammadov, complained to Heydar Aliyev that people kept damaging the bushes and stealing the flowers from the city's squares and parks, to which Heydar replied, "Continue planting the flowers to get people used to the beauty, and eventually they will get bored of ruining the parks."

Apricots, goyas, plums and cherry plums grew in the Aliyevs' courtyard. Nakhchivan goya is famous throughout the Caucasus. Its juicy, sweet and sour berries are ready for picking in May, when the goya is still green. Heydar Aliyev loved it; once he even succeeded in grafting a plum tree branch to the stem of a goya tree.

Aliyev's mother, Izzet khanim, was a thrifty and zealous homemaker who put everything to good use. According to Shafiga Aliyeva: "We grew grapes in our courtyard, and uncle would often send us grapes from the village too. Mother used them to make vinegar in large clay vats, a process that took 40 days. She would pour out some for later, and then fill those vats with the vegetables and fruit from the courtyard. Peaches, plums, cucumbers, green tomatoes – everything was turned into a kind of pickle. I can't remember my mother ever throwing food away, not even a single fruit or vegetable. We always had a hoard of food at home."

When Alirza finally got a job at the Nakhchivan train station, as a railway worker he was given a large plot of land where the family sowed wheat and oats, and planted melons and watermelons. Grains and legumes were stocked for the winter. Agil Aliyev remembers: "Anyone that could afford it would usually buy one, two, or even three sheep in summer or autumn. We'd roast the meat, fill up clay containers with it, top them off with mutton fat and store them in the basement, where it was cooler than in a fridge. We would begin stockpiling food in late October, and it would last us all winter. We would cook all sorts of dishes out of our reserves, and this stored lamb tasted better than its fresh counterpart. I remember

¹ Aliyeva, 55

my mother heating up some meat, adding fried onions and potatoes, or mixing some lamb with beans and peas out of a stoneware jug, and serving it for breakfast. It was delicious! Other than that, we always prepared a few dozen kilograms of fried noodles, which we stored in sacks. We made porridge and crushed cereal from grains, too. And, of course, we bought 50 to 100 kilograms of potatoes. This way we had no lack of any kind of food in winter."

Heydar Aliyev really loved Nakhchivan cuisine. His relatives say that he often asked them to cook him something Nakhchivan-style. When he later transferred to work in Moscow, he truly missed Nakhchivan food. Vasif Talibov, the chairman of the Supreme Majlis of Nakhchivan, told me about a remarkable occasion that happened during the last years of Heydar Aliyev's life. The doctors were keeping him on a strict diet. In 2002, he arrived in his native Nakhchivan for a series of events. On the first day, as he was served lunch, he looked at Vasif Talibov and asked sternly, "What is this supposed to be?" Vasif explained that doctors had advised to only serve Aliyev food from his special dietary regime. The president pushed the plate away and said, "Damn them! What do they know? Cook me a proper Nakhchivan meal." Against all the doctors' recommendations and to their utter dismay, the president got his Nakhchivan meal. A few days later the doctors ran some tests and could not believe what they found: according to every measure, Aliyev's overall health and the condition of his heart had improved. The doctors could only shrug – it was a miracle without a scientific explanation. However, in truth it wasn't a miracle at all: Heydar Aliyev had walked in his homeland, breathed its pure mountain air, and eaten the food he had grown accustomed to since childhood. That was why he felt so good.

Nakhchivan has a harsh continental climate, and the temperature ranges from -30 °C to 40 °C (-22 °F to 104 °F). Agil Aliyev recalls that in their childhood the snow would not melt in Nakhchivan until the very spring. But during the hot summers everyone would move out to their courtyards, where they cooked dinner and even slept side by side on wide couches covered with rugs.

The courtyard of the Aliyevs' house had a well with clean though slightly salty water. In the mornings, Heydar, who had gained a reputation within the family for being well-dressed and well-presented, would pour a bucket of fresh cold water over himself with great pleasure. The well would sometimes dry up, and the family would call in a well sinker who would descend to the bottom of the well on a thick rope. The children would crowd around the edges of the well and breathlessly watch him at work. They would cheer loudly the moment the water reappeared and the first refreshing bucket of it was hauled up.

Decades later, nearing the end of his life, Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev met with Nakhchivanis and recounted these cherished childhood

memories, adding new details to them. "Good water could also be found at the top of Pushkin Street, and my mother and elder sister would bring it home in buckets. Besides, in those days in Nakhchivan we also used special stones as water filters. Not many know about them now. Water poured over these stones would seep through and drip into a bucket placed below. This water was only used for making tea and cooking."¹

The Aliyevs' house, like all the other houses in the neighbourhood, had a postal address: 28 Papanin Street. However, Nakhchivan residents would not take to the new names of their streets for a long time yet, preferring to use neighbourhood (*maballa*) names instead. Thus, the Aliyevs lived in the *Zaviya maballa*. The oldest resident of Nakhchivan, Latif Huseynzade explained the origins of its name: this *maballa* used to be populated by Bektashi people,² most of whom had come from Turkey. The Bektashi led a very secluded lifestyle, keeping away from those who did not share their views, and it earned them the name *munzavilyar* (from the word "Zaviya" meaning "corner"), i.e. "those who cower in the corner", "those who are distanced from other people". They did not want to go to the usual Shia mosques, so they decided to build one for themselves. However, the beautiful redbrick building, called *Zaviya meschidi*, remained unfinished. It had been abandoned for some time, until the Soviets turned it into a Young Pioneer Palace for children.

Later the building was named the Ernst Thälmann Club, in memory of that German communist. No one really knew just who Herr Thälmann or what connection he had to Nakhchivan, but everyone enjoyed going to the club, especially to watch films. In the mid-1930s "talking pictures" gradually superseded the great silent cinema, and in 1936 the first sound film was screened in Nakhchivan. Ibrahim Ismayilov, Aliyev's best childhood friend, recalls: "Heydar and I used to go there all the time to watch American films with Douglas Fairbanks, Charlie Chaplin's films, and, of course, all the Soviet classics like *Volga-Volga* and *Jolly Fellows*. It was all thanks to Agil, Heydar's brother, who worked there as an assistant projectionist and was able to get us in for free. He'd tell us what movie would be screened that day, and we'd go watch it. Poor as we were, we couldn't afford the tickets, which cost 25 to 50 kopecks back then." In the mid-1930s this club would become a children's amateur theatre, where Heydar Aliyev's remarkable acting talent would take centre stage.

¹ *Bakinskiy Rabochiy*, 20th June (2002)

² The Bektashi were followers of the Sufi movement of Islam that emerged in the 12th and 13th centuries, widespread in Turkey and the Balkans.

CHILDHOOD GAMES

I questioned Heydar Aliyev's brothers and his childhood friends in depth about the games they used to play in their spare time and what they did during the summer and winter holidays. Many recalled Heydar as a boy who was mature beyond his years and spent the majority of his time reading books. He had other hobbies too, of course. After all, he was still a boy – cheeky, lively, adventuresome, and, as all boys do, he often got himself in situations that left him with grazes and bruises.

Ibrahim Ismayilov recalls fondly: "Heydar Aliyev told you how he and I would go on plum-stealing raids, remember? There was a professor called Farzalibeyov, a well-known urologist, and his father, Muslim bey, who was Heydar's neighbour, owned a big orchard with vines and fruit trees. This orchard was located next to the college which Heydar was attending, and the giyoja trees grew right by the fence. It was easy to pick the plums by climbing over the wall. Muslim bey caught us a couple of times – once he even beat us and then complained to our parents."¹

Children didn't have toys back then, so they improvised a lot. For example, they would play a game called *gyazyanya dash* using round river pebbles. While tossing one pebble in the air, they had to pick up another pebble, then catch the first one, toss the second one up, and pick up the third pebble, and so on. Or they played *chiling-agach*, a game in which two small sticks were balanced on top of each other, and then were hit with a larger stick. The winner was the one whose stick flew the most distance. And then there was *alchiki*, which was played with lamb bones, similarly to the Russian game *gorodki* (knucklebones).

The children in Nakhchivan were quite inventive in general. Agil Aliyev says that they loved making their own scooters, as well as sleds and even skates out of wood and tin cans. "Unlike today, winters were harsh in Nakhchivan back then – we had snowfalls from October till March, like in Russia, so every time mum sent me to the market, I would skate there."

Boys also mastered the art of catching pigeons. Ibrahim Ismayilov recalls that pigeons nested a mile from the city, on the banks of the Nakhchivanchai River. "We would make our own traps and go there to catch pigeons and bring them home. We would even compete to see who could catch the most. Back then every boy had a pigeon loft. We would put eggs there and the pigeons would incubate them."

¹ Yunis Gasimov told me that once, during one of Heydar Aliyev's regular visits to his hometown, as he was talking with the locals, the chairman of the Veteran Committee introduced himself as Muslim bey's grandson. The president laughed in response: "You had a terribly grumpy grandfather. He scolded us for the whole street to hear, and all over a single bunch of grapes!"

In summer the teenagers would spend entire days on the banks of the Nakhchivanchai or Lake Adilagh, a two-mile walk from town. Back then the lake was deep and the river was full-flowing. That was where the young Heydar learned to swim. But there was another river in his life – the famous Arazchay. It would become the most important river of Heydar Aliyev's life, connected to some of his main political achievements.

At the beginning of the 19th century the river became a natural border, dividing Azerbaijan into northern and southern (Iranian) parts. It runs along 101 miles (163 kilometres) of Nakhchivan's borders with Iran and seven miles (11 kilometres) of the border with Turkey.

Following the establishment of Soviet power, Iran and Turkey became the USSR's implacable ideological and political opponents, and the Arazchay suddenly became off-limits to the people who had lived on its banks for centuries. "For the young Heydar, the Arazchay was the world's most mysterious place; it came to be associated with something taboo,"¹ – a taboo he would try to overcome throughout his life. When he became head of the Azerbaijani KGB and then the republic's party leader, he devoted a lot of time to border management and to the economic and social issues faced by people living in border areas.

One of Heydar Aliyev's greatest achievements is the joint construction (with Iran) of a unique hydroelectric dam in Julfa Region, and the creation of Arpachay and Khanbulanchay water reservoirs, which played an important role in the economic development of the border regions. In the 1990s, as the head of Nakhchivan parliament, Heydar Aliyev had a bridge built across the Arazchay. The bridge was called the Bridge of Hope, and thus, finally, the longstanding "curse of the enchanted river" was lifted.

In the summer of 1937 Heydar Aliyev came to the village Urud to spend the summer holidays with his aunt Nargis. She was his father's sister. Heydar Aliyev's grandmother, Gyullyujahan, was born in Urud, and her numerous relatives – brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces – lived there. Heydar enjoyed this wonderful part of the world – almost untouched as it was by civilisation – so much that he would return three summers in a row, staying for a long time each visit. Besides, his good friend from college, Gasim Hajiyev, would also often go to Urud to visit his own relatives. While working on a book about the village, the writer Musa Urud, who was born there, recorded the recollections of Heydar's peers who had spent those summers with him.²

Almost all the villagers mention young Heydar Aliyev's passion for water, especially the rivers. The boys spent most of the summer on the shores of the Bazarchay, a small, fast mountain river that flowed right through the heart of the village. Heydar's peers tell us some details. Farrukh Gahramanov: "[Heydar

Aliyev] was more confident in the water than we were on land. Sometimes he would jump off the Bozgay cliff into the river and stay under water for a few minutes without surfacing." Kamran Ganjaliyev: "Heydar was a fine swimmer. Come noon he'd be at the river with the rest of the village boys. He taught some of the boys to swim, too." Rafi Tahirov, aunt Nargis's son and one of the boys Heydar Aliyev taught to swim: "[During a swimming lesson] I was floundering around in the cold water, scared of drowning. Heydar held me in his hands, calming me down, telling me not to worry, that he'd save me if I started to drown. Then he'd let go of me, and gradually I learned how to swim."

Apart from swimming, Rafi Tahirov recalls Aliyev's love of fishing. The boys would fish for carp, barbels and shiny salmon, and would feast on their catch right on the shore. They would bring cottage cheese, herbs and *yuba'* from home, and pick cucumbers and sweet tomatoes, renowned throughout the area, from nearby gardens. Then they would roast the fish on an open fire, and feast on it to their heart's content.

Ibrahim Ismayilov recalls that Heydar Aliyev loved to walk barefoot along the river shore and on the green grass. He was a nature lover and took a great deal of pleasure from being in it. He especially adored Nakhchivan's surrounding areas, harsh semi-desert regions with their mountainous slopes and thickets of thorny bushes lining foamy mountain rivers. In his later years, he would often profess his love for Nakhchivan's nature during visits to his native republic. He once gave Nakhchivan a wonderfully apt description, saying that "it has a special, masculine beauty," and one can say that this is the same kind of beauty Heydar Aliyev himself possessed.

* * *

Life in Nakhchivan remained traditionally patriarchal throughout Aliyev's childhood. With the Soviets came changes in daily life, including new public holidays, but they did not take root immediately. However, the locals celebrated the arrival of spring, a traditional holiday called *Novruz bayram*, with great solemnity and passion. In her book Shafiga Aliyeva (Heydar Aliyev's sister) writes: "In preparation for Novruz we whitewashed the house walls anew, thoroughly cleaned all the windows and doors, and took all the rugs, mats and dishes out into the courtyard for cleaning. In March there was still snow on the ground, and I remember how after spreading out the carpets and sprinkling each with the snow, we would sweep all the half-melted snowflakes off and take the carpets back inside. We would wash and fix up all the clothes in the house too. This ritual of thorough cleaning took place a week prior to the last Tuesday before Novruz. On this day, all family members had to go to the steam house and put on clean clothes. Mother was very strict about this. In the

¹ Abdullazade, 35

² Urud, 118-139

¹ Thinly rolled bread baked without yeast.

evening she would cook two kinds of *pilaf*: one with tarragon and leeks, called *sebzi*, and another with chicken, called *uchar*. The name derives from 'uchan', which means 'flying', i.e. poultry. Even the poorest people in Nakhchivan bought a chicken or a rooster especially for this, stuffing them with raisins, prunes, dried apricots, and covering them with rice. This is, perhaps, why some Nakhchivanis called the last Tuesday before Novruz 'Uchar'.

Mother would lovingly decorate the festive table with puff cakes and cheese puffs with nuts (*chechyas*). We had a bonfire in the courtyard. Everyone spent that day at home: It went against tradition to celebrate this holiday with friends or neighbours.¹

As Soviet power took hold, however, the Soviet holidays began to have an increasingly prominent place in the lives of the locals. According to Heydar Aliyev's brother: "All school children would go to the May Day feast. In the lower part of the town, where the factories are now, there used to be large orchards with vineyards and apricot trees. Rams were slaughtered and a brass band played for our entertainment. Celebrations took place by Lake Adilagha, and if it was warm enough, the children would go swimming. It was a lot of fun."

However, children had to grow up quickly in those days. Heydar Aliyev's friend, Ibrahim Ismayilov, who studied and lived in Baku with his uncle, had to return to the capital for the winter months, and he travelled alone from the age of nine. Heydar always saw his friend off at the station, waving at his departing train. Ibrahim recalls that in the early 1930s he and Heydar would often run off to the train station, where Heydar's father Alirza worked. There, they would watch trains departing for Baku and take long walks along the railway tracks. "Trains, cars, rails, railways, we found all these things very interesting, as they conjured the romance of journeying to distant places for us. I still feel a certain longing every time I hear the sound of a locomotive whistle."

Heydar was a little envious of Ibrahim's lifestyle: the latter lived in a big city with well-off relatives who provided for him and saw to all his needs. But this envy would quickly fade, as Heydar was sure he would graduate from school with the best marks, get into university and, in time, make this beautiful city his own.

SCHOOL YEARS

All the children of the large Aliyev family were talented and passionate about learning. The eldest son, Hasan Aliyev, started his schooling quite late, at the age of 17 (!), but in a mere 10 years he progressed from being an evening-school student to a graduate assistant at the Scientific Research Institute for Cotton Production. By the 1940s he was already considered one of the most prominent soil scientists in the country. He played an active part in creating the Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan and became one of its first full members. Hasan's younger brother, Huseyn (Alirza's second son), realised his childhood dream of becoming an artist. In 1932, he graduated from Azimzade College of Art, and in 1935 he became the first Azerbaijani to graduate from the Leningrad Academy of Art. Indeed, everybody in the family loved to draw, including Heydar himself.

The people of Nakhchivan took education very seriously. No one was particularly well-off, so the only way to get ahead in life was through a good education. This was particularly true after the revolution, when the Soviets abolished discrimination against the non-Orthodox population, enabling the political, cultural and educational development of even the former Russian Empire's most marginal peoples.

During the Middle Ages, Nakhchivan was a major centre of culture and education in the Islamic East. "According to medieval sources, at the end of the 13th century there were four *madrasas*¹ in Nakhchivan where you could receive higher religious education. In the local mosques there were about 60 *madrasas* for younger children (*mollabana*). In that era young people would come from many Middle Eastern countries to study in Nakhchivan and Ordubad, where they would receive secular as well as religious education. The first secular Russian-Tatar district school was established in the city by Ehsan khan Kengerli in the 1830s."²

In the late 19th century, new types of schools began opening in Nakhchivan and other Azerbaijani regions. Mohammad Taghi Sidgi, a renowned educator and proponent of Enlightenment ideas, founded the Akhtar School in Ordubad, as well as the Terbiya School and the College for Women in Nakhchivan. Along with their traditional emphasis on oriental languages and literature, these schools also devoted particular attention to teaching Russian and the exact sciences.

By the beginning of 1920, there were about 45 schools in Nakhchivan. The teachers included some prominent members of the Azerbaijani intelligentsia of the time, like Taghi Sidgi, graduates from the South Caucasus Teachers' Seminary (Goriyskaya) and the Yerevan Teachers' Seminary, and

¹ Madrasa is an Arabic word for any kind of educational institution.

² Entsiklopediya Nakhchivana, 400

the distinguished writer and social commentator Jalil Mammadguluzadeh,¹ who taught in Nehram and other villages.

Latif Huseynzade, Heydar Aliyev's favourite college teacher, was a graduate of one of the new schools, the Rushdiya School. He taught Heydar Azerbaijani language and literature. Born in Nakhchivan in 1903, the old teacher had an astounding clarity of mind even in 2005, at the age of 102. During our meeting he recounted many fascinating details about the nature of Nakhchivan's educational institutions at that time. "The locals, and especially the local intelligentsia, refused to accept Soviet rule for a long time. The Turkish army had been stationed here for a long time, and their government had sent a lot of Turkish books to the area, forming a large library. Even in the Rushdiya School half of the books were in Turkish. Huseyn Javid² taught literary theory at our school, introducing us to classical Turkish poetry. He inspired us to learn poems by Tofiq Fikrat, Namiq Kermal and Abdülhak Hamit. All this kindled our patriotic spirit and sense of identity. We had a well-developed appreciation of Pan-Turkism at that time, and I must say that before the mid-1920s, or even the end of the 1920s, Soviet culture did not really influence the local community. Instead, Soviet and local cultures co-existed, without interacting as such."

Prior to the Revolution, Tsarist Russia had separate schooling systems – educating the elite apart from the masses. By the early 1930s, however, the USSR had developed its own educational system. "Old Russian schools for the elite equipped their students with comprehensive holistic knowledge taught as disciplines, as universities do, while the general schools provided only 'practically useful' knowledge in a fragmentary way. The Soviet school, however, merged both methodologies, aiming to educate everyone without distinction. It was an unprecedented social luxury for all the peoples of the USSR, although it was not entirely without difficulties and local failures."³

Coupled with the Nakhchivanian proverbial love for learning, Soviet education bore inspiring – and fairly unexpected – fruit in this region. Agil Aliyev and Ibrahim Ismayilov both agree that when they were young, schools and colleges in Nakhchivan were famous for their academic successes. "Unlike youngsters from other regions, who preferred the humanities, young people in Nakhchivan were interested in the exact sciences and wanted to continue their education in those subjects. When we went to enrol into universities, competition was high for the history and law departments, while the

¹ Jalil Mammadguluzadeh (1866–1932) was an Azerbaijani satirical writer from Nakhchivan.

² Huseyn Javid was a great Azerbaijani poet and playwright (1882–1941). He died in a Stalinist concentration camp near Irkutsk. In 1982, thanks to a project set up by Heydar Aliyev, Javid's remains were exhumed and reburied in Nakhchivan.

³ Sergei Valyansky & Dmitri Kaluzhny, *Russkiye Gorki: Konets Rossiyiskogo Gosudarstva* [Russian rollercoaster: the end of the Russian state], (Moscow: AST-Astrel, 2004), 150

physics, mathematics and chemistry departments accepted anyone who applied. 90 percent of applicants were from Nakhchivan."

(From Agil Aliyev's recollections.)

This explains why a number of prominent scientists in Azerbaijan come from Nakhchivan; according to a recent calculation, about half of the country's academicians are from Nakhchivan, including five out of seven presidents of the National Academy of Sciences.

The family played a great role in Heydar Aliyev's development. Although rather poor, the parents never forced their children to work, instead, they made all their children value education.

Heydar Aliyev's mother played a special role in his life. The children almost never saw their father, who worked day and night, especially during the war. Their mother kept the household in order, while educating their numerous children. The fact that children "studied so diligently during the hardest times of the war, without missing a single lesson, was mother's achievement," recalls Shafiga Aliyeva. "It was her firmness and the sense of order and discipline that drove us to study. She taught us to be content with little and lead a modest but fulfilled life. She always encouraged us to take care of ourselves, be presentable and dressed us well. She never showed anger, nor did she scold or punish us. She simply required us to follow our duties diligently, because she dreamed of seeing her children becoming educated and refined people."¹

Rafiq, Aliyev's younger sister, adds that although the family was "far from rich, we more than made up for it in comfort and warmth. Winters were very cold in Nakhchivan, but the spirit of optimism, hard work and love warmed our family home. We lived in a small house, but we always found space for studying and a friendly family gathering. At the obligatory 5 o'clock tea, for instance, we always engaged in lively, interesting conversations."

All the oldest Nakhchivanis speak very fondly and respectfully of Alirza's family.² According to Dovlat Mammadov, who lived in Aliyev's house for about two weeks before taking his exams and entering technical college: "Izzet treated me like her own child. I was very grateful, since my own mother, Zahra, died prematurely, and I had been deprived of motherly love since then. Living with the Aliyevs helped my future career as a teacher. I observed their behaviour, their composure in conversation and their neat appearance. They never tolerated a mess in the house. I tried to imitate Heydar." Fikrat Gadimov added, "Izzet was very neat, always wearing very clean, ironed clothes, and she taught her children to do the same."

¹ Aliyeva, 25–26

² I could be reproached for painting an unnecessarily idealised picture of the Aliyev family; however, my interviewees, who are completely independent in their judgments, support this description.

This quiet household surprised its neighbours, who knew how many children there were in the family. It wasn't in their custom to laugh, talk or do anything very loudly at home. "The family was very friendly. I never heard a bad word about them. I also never heard of any conflicts or scandals; they all were very calm and well-mannered," said Latif Huseynzade.

Aliyev carried his childhood memories deep within his heart and they would resurface during each of his visits to his home republic. Kamran Rahimov¹ noted: "During his tours around the country Aliyev avoided hotels, eating and sleeping in his personal train carriage. Nakhchivan was the exception, however, and he would always stay in a superb guesthouse we had there. Heydar Aliyevich would say to me: 'I just can't stay anywhere else. When I hear the whistles of the trains in the mornings, I can't help but remember my childhood and my father. I remember how he used to put on his uniform and leave for work, and how, as young boys, we used to run to the station to meet him. These memories put me in such a good mood: no words can describe this feeling.'

Or when we were on our way to Batabat, we passed through the village of Kolani, and he suddenly asked the driver to stop. His face grew sad; tears welled up in his eyes. I asked him why he was upset. 'When I was a kid,' he replied, 'my mother and I went to visit my uncle Zeynalabdin in the Sisan area. You could only travel on the back of a truck back then, so we boarded one in Nakhchivan, reaching Kolani at dusk. Our driver went home to sleep, leaving us in his truck. The entire night, my mother and I sat in a tight embrace, keeping each other warm. Thank God neither of us got sick that night.'

* * *

When the time came to send Heydar to school, his parents chose School Number 1, which was considered an international school. It was split into three branches: Azerbaijani, Russian and Armenian. Heydar Aliyev attended the Azerbaijani campus. However, thanks to his ongoing interaction with his Russian-speaking classmates and reading books in Russian, it was only a few years before he spoke fluent Russian.

Agil Aliyev believes that reading fiction was key to his brother's success in mastering the Russian language: "Heydar read a lot of books. He read all the fiction available at the time. Our bookcase could barely hold all of his books. He kept buying and borrowing them from the library. First, they were in Azerbaijani, but by the time he was in secondary school, he was already reading Russian works. I remember him bringing a copy of Goethe's *Faust* in Russian home. I saw how much it captivated him and decided to give it a go too, but I gave up before long, because I couldn't understand it." Reading, however, was challenging and required a lot of perseverance. There were

¹ The former first secretary of the Regional Party Committee in Nakhchivan.

major issues with electricity in the 1930s in Nakhchivan – all electricity was cut off at 1 a.m. In the evenings people had to settle for the weak light of a kerosene lamp. "When I was a child, I had to sit at a windowsill to do my homework using street lights," Aliyev later recalled.

Many of his classmates became famous scientists, teachers and artists. Among them was Zaros Hamzayeva, a famous Azerbaijani actress, who occasionally shared a desk with Aliyev. "We attended an international school, which selected the most gifted students from the nearby cities and villages. We studied very hard, read a lot and learned a lot of poetry – from Nizami to Samad Vurghun and Suleyman Rustam, who were very popular among young people. We took an interest in art, loved nature and knew about our region and Azerbaijan."

"Heydar was our leader. With the best grades, he knew everything better than any of us. Once he came to school wearing his father's work overcoat, part of the uniform railway workers were issued in the 1930s. He cut an impressive figure in it, and one of our classmates admiringly said he looked like a proper general. From then on, we all called him 'the general'. He lived up to this flattering nickname."¹

Fikrat Gadimov, who attended the same school and later became a famous doctor in Nakhchivan, never forgot the impression that Heydar Aliyev made on his classmates:

"He stood out because of his clothes. He only had one suit, but it was always ironed to perfection, so he looked almost like a dandy. His clothes were always neat – he never wore a wrinkled or dirty shirt. You could see him coming from a distance on the way to school – you couldn't confuse him with anybody else."

According to Agil Aliyev: "Even while still at school, he carried himself with gravitas. Everyone knew him in the city and would often ask him to mediate in arguments. I remember once when we were at the cinema and couldn't agree how to translate the title of a film, we went to check with Heydar."

In the early 1930s, Aliyev and the other students even took part in a campaign against illiteracy. By this time, Azerbaijan had completed its transition to the new, Latin alphabet, so many of the older people, who could only write in the Arabic alphabet, became illiterate almost overnight.

Ten years later, just before the war, Heydar Aliyev would start to learn the new, Cyrillic alphabet, which was not onerous for him as he could already write in Russian. And at the end of the 20th century, like the rest of the population, he would have to go through the learning process again, as the country returned to the Latin alphabet. Aliyev's policies made that possible: he signed two language-related edicts in 2001 and set in motion the enormous process of republishing the entire cultural heritage of Azerbaijan in Latinate form.

¹ Svetlana Mirzoyeva, *Geydar Aliyev: Iskusstvo Proshlo Cherez vsyu moyu Zhizn* [Heydar Aliyev:Art passed through my whole life], (Baku: OKA Ofset, 2004), 77

After completing seven years at school, Aliyev wanted to become a teacher and applied to The Nakhchivan Teachers' College,¹ although he could have easily completed his full secondary education. His decision was most likely influenced by the fact that the college was very highly regarded, and teaching was one of the most popular professions at the time. In 1930, a special Soviet decree for compulsory primary education had "abruptly increased the demand for teaching staff. As a result, the number of educational institutions, technical colleges and short-term courses for primary school teachers increased. These teaching institutions also began allowing students to graduate ahead of schedule."²

"Heydar's father was a respected man in Nakhchivan," recalls Latif Huseynzadeh. "He knew my father, Haji Talib, who was a shoemaker and had his own workshop, where they would often have lengthy chats. Alirza visited with his son at the beginning of the 1936 academic year and said that Heydar wanted to become a teacher, which was his dream as well. But they were 10 days late: the lectures had already started. At that time we had a competitive entry system with interviews and examinations.

Heydar seemed like a well-presented man, affable, and had all the qualities of a good teacher. So I asked him a few questions about language and literature. He replied in perfect Azerbaijani, without using a single Russian word – as people who mix up the two languages do. I liked him and said that he would make a wonderful teacher. I took them to see the institute's director, Kazim Talib. He also knew Alirza but doubted whether we could accept his son after the classes had already started. But I stood my ground. Then the director decided to test his maths skills. My son-in-law, Tofiq Bektashi, was a tough maths teacher, but even he was satisfied with Heydar's level of knowledge. Once the question of Heydar's admission had been decided, I introduced him to the students and the teachers."

The college prepared teachers for working in primary schools, so there was no subject specialisation. Students had to master all subjects including their mother tongue and literature, physics, mathematics, history as well as teaching theory. On graduation, students were allocated jobs in accordance with subjects they had a particular aptitude for.

There was a shortage of textbooks. The old ones had been declared unfit by the Soviet authorities, and the new ones were yet to be published. Students, therefore, learned from their lecture notes. They were taught in Azerbaijani, while Russian was a separate subject. Thanks to the superb abilities of Hasanbey Gaziyev, Russian was taught in an excellent way. He was proud of Aliyev – his best student – and always used him as an example.

¹ The Soviet name is the Pedagogical Institute, a non-university level higher education institution for teachers.

² Shamil Munchaev & Viktor Ustinov, *Istoriya Sovetskogo Gosudarstva* [A history of the Soviet state] (Moscow: Norma, 2002), 374

According to Latif Huseynzadeh, there were frequent arguments among the teachers about what subject Aliyev would teach in the future: mathematicians argued he would make a splendid maths teacher, historians wanted him to become a historian, and literature teachers said he was a natural in their subject. "He was definitely the best among us all," says Ibrahim Ismayilov. "Allah really did endow him with everything: looks, height, mind and memory."

Dovlat Mammadov, Aliyev's former classmate, recalls: "Heydar was the youngest among us, but we elected him our class president." His age was never an issue. He "enjoyed talking to older people. He talked to teachers equally well," said Zargalam Huseynova, who also went to college with Aliyev.

He also impressed his physical education and military preparation teachers with his endurance and fitness. Senior Lieutenant Akim Abbasov¹ was the military training instructor at Heydar Aliyev's college. Under his supervision, students learned to assemble and disassemble rifles and to shoot at the range. They also learned how to distinguish between insignia: from sergeant to senior commanders. "Akim Abbasov kept repeating that Aliyev would become a general. "If the teacher was called out of class, he would leave Heydar to lead the lesson," added Zargalam Huseynova.

Between 1937 and 1938, people could sense the war approaching. Schools and other educational institutions in the USSR began paying more attention to military education. Young people were consequently enrolled en masse into paramilitary organisations such as the Society for Assistance to Defence, Aviation and Chemical Construction. Older Nakhchivanis told me that its members would organise walking and skiing trips for the local teenagers. Heydar Aliyev was often the instigator of these events.

The 1930s was an era of mass physical culture and sports in the USSR, an element of Soviet culture that is often mocked today. What we remember now are the pompous sporting parades during Soviet holidays and plaster sculptures of sportspeople flooding the parks and squares. But a healthy, sporty lifestyle became the norm for the youngsters at the time. Aliyev, for instance, was physically active his entire life: he walked, ran and swam. His love for sport stemmed from his college days, when his fellow students enjoyed engaging in physical activity, such as the long jump, high jump, lifting weights, doing spins on the horizontal bar or playing volleyball. Once they had met certain requirements they were awarded prestigious badges.² Aliyev often represented the college in the city's sports competitions. According to his relatives, he loved cross-country skiing and would organise skiing trips to the mountains with his classmates Akber Najafov and Gasim Hajiyev, among others.

¹ Akim Abbasov became a major general during World War II, and was famed for his actions at the battle of Mozdok.

² Examples include Ready for Labour and the Defence of the USSR, Ready for Sanitary Defence and Ready for Antiaircraft and Chemical Defence.

Aliyev inspired his younger brothers and other children from his neighbourhood to exercise regularly and even created a sports ground for them. As Agil Aliyev recalls: "The River Bazarchay flowed through the centre of town. The water was quite deep and a large open space led up to the riverbank. A brick factory towered over one of the banks, near Akber Najafov's home. That is where Heydar and his friends built a sports ground. They put up a horizontal bar for exercising, made a runway for the long jump and a volleyball court. Many football matches between teams from different neighbourhoods took place there too."

In addition to sports, Aliyev had a life-long passion for the outdoors. He loved to plant trees and was an enthusiastic advocate of greener cities and villages.

In the mid-1930s, Nakhchivan's streets barely had any trees. Mulberry, gijoja and apricot trees mainly grew in the courtyards between houses, and the only place locals could enjoy the rustling of weeping willows was along the city's main thoroughfare, Pushkin Street. So Heydar Aliyev and his classmates began planting trees in the streets of their hometown. Together with other college students, he travelled far into the mountains to bring back saplings of forest trees. The students all went on so-called *subbotniki*,¹ laying the groundwork for Nakhchivan's future gardens and parks.

In the late 1950s together with his father-in-law, Aziz Aliyev, Heydar Aliyev bought a country home in Zaghulba, which he turned into a flourishing garden. Suleyman Aliyev recalls helping his cousin plant apricots, plums and grapevines. In the 1970s, Aliyev was struck by the idea of turning the entire Absheron peninsula into a blossoming, green environment. He was personally involved in planting trees and creating new parks in Baku, giving up his own time for *subbotniki*. He would tirelessly speak of the importance of environmental work at almost all party conferences and plenums, scolding anyone who allowed the felling of valuable trees in Azerbaijan's forests.

Heydar Aliyev would spend his entire day in the college, as it had so many interesting extracurricular activities on offer. There were societies for literature, drama, natural history and the Arts, and he tried to attend them all. According to his classmates, the young Heydar had excellent elocution, and the audience would listen in total silence during his recitations of Sabir or Suleyman Rustam's poetry.

Students also had access to a large library, with many books from Turkey. The Soviet authorities also established good public libraries in Nakhchivan, so young people could read as much Azerbaijani literature and world classics as they liked. According to Latif Huseynzadeh, Aliyev always had a book in his hands. He even reread *The Wren*, a famous love story by Rashad Nuri Guntekin, several times.

¹ Saturday of obligatory community volunteer work in the Soviet period.

Latif Huseynzadeh introduced his students to the best examples of Turkish poetry, and so the young Heydar became familiar with poetry by Namiq Kamal, Ziya Gokalp, Yahya Kamal and Tofiq Fikrat. The latter would become his favourite poet.

This youthful enthusiasm for Turkish literature and poetry became quite useful later on when Heydar Aliyev worked for the KGB, and he always ticked "Turkish" as his foreign language in all official forms. Much later, on 2nd November 1994, the Turkish Parliament hosted a celebratory event in commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the birth of the great Azerbaijani poet Mohammed Fuzuli. Heydar Aliyev gave a speech in which he described how he had been very fond of the Turkish language, literature and poetry since his youth. "Today, I can openly say that I had a Turkish dictionary and a textbook for learning the language. I can even admit that I had a teacher who taught me Turkish for two or three years. I studied Turkish history and literature."

However, it was two of Heydar Aliyev's great fellow countrymen who left the deepest impression on Heydar Aliyev's cultural development. Jalil Mammadguluzadeh won Aliyev's admiration with his uncompromising literary fight against indolence and ignorance. At college, Aliyev was captivated by his play *The Dead*. Mammadguluzadeh was an outstanding playwright and the master of the novella genre. He also founded and edited the satirical magazine *Molla Nasreddin*, which was famous across the Middle East. According to Agil Aliyev, his elder brothers Hasan and Huseyn used to buy dozens of these magazines.

Aliyev also related to the deep philosophical searches of another outstanding poet and playwright, Huseyn Javid. According to Latif Huseynzadeh, Aliyev could effortlessly recite anything from Javid's plays including *Iblis* (the devil) and *Sheikh Sanan*. In his quest for understanding the nature of good and evil, and the meaning of life, Javid conquered many young hearts. Unfortunately, not for long. In September 1937, the Stalinist repressions caught up with Javid, and his works were banned for years. But this did not stop Nakhchivanis from secretly storing the works of the last Azerbaijani romanticist – risking their personal safety, and sometimes even their lives.

Later, in the mid-1950s, Aliyev worked for the 2nd Directorate of the Azerbaijani KGB, where he dug up thousands of documents concerning victims of the Stalinist repressions and submitted them to the prosecutor. According to Ibrahim Ismayilov, Azerbaijani deputy prosecutor at the time, Aliyev "displayed a particular satisfaction" in signing reports rehabilitating Azerbaijani writers victimised by the repressions. One of them was, indeed, Huseyn Javid.

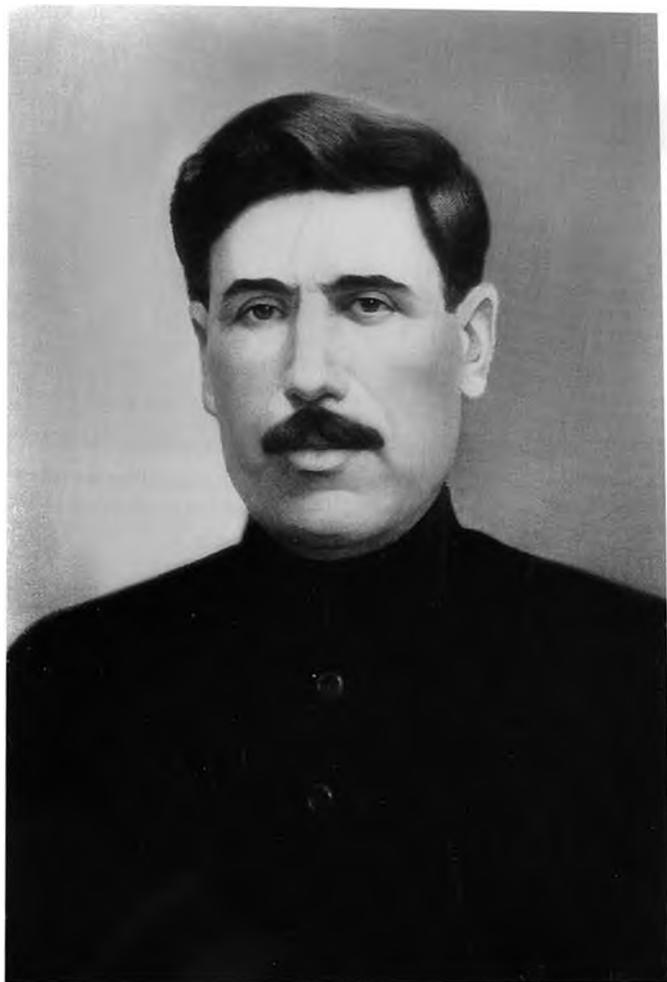
¹ Heydar Aliyev, *Na Strazbe Kulturnogo Naslediya* [Guarding cultural heritage], vol. 1, (Baku: 2001), 94



Heydar Aliyev as a young man, Nakhchivan



Heydar Aliyev's mother, Izzet



Heydar Aliyev's father, Alirza



Alirza and Izzet with their family. Young Heydar is second from the left



Heydar Aliyev with his mother, brother Agil and sister Rafiga



From left to right: Heydar Aliyev's cousin, Rzagulu Guliyev, Ibrahim Ismayilov and Heydar Aliyev, Nakhchivan, 1946



Heydar Aliyev, Ismayil Gasimov and Ibrahim Ismayilov, Nakhchivan, 1948



Heydar Aliyev during his Nakhchivan period, 1930s-40s

...to major general in the KGB





The USSR Ministry of State Security School, Leningrad, 1950



Suleyman Demirel and his wife arrive in Baku;
on the far right, the head of the Counter-Intelligence Department
of the Azerbaijani KGB, Heydar Aliyev



Nikolai Podgorny of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the
Soviet Union visits Baku; Heydar Aliyev is on the right, 1964



The young married couple Zarifa and Heydar Aliyev



Heydar Aliyev was delighted to become a father in 1955



Zarifa and Heydar Aliyev with their children



The children grew up so fast

YOUTHFUL PURSUITS

Despite being the obvious leader amongst his peers, Aliyev never bragged. On the contrary, everybody remembers him as a very considerate young man who helped students from the poorer families. Zargalam Huseynova, who Aliyev supported, was a good student born in the village of Nurs, in Shahbuz District. "My parents didn't want me to go to college, but my uncle persuaded them that in the Soviet Union, girls also needed education and took me to sit my exams. I met Heydar in the college yard, and my uncle asked him to look after me. When I came to the class for the first time he offered his help.

Heydar looked after me, and once his mum invited us to pick mulberries in their garden. But we were too shy to go!

Actually, he was a bit naughty – he might let a bird into a lesson, tease a teacher he found boring or make fun of the girls. At that time the boys liked to pick green apricots (*chakala*), bringing them to school to play *tsk ya cüt*. Heydar made us guess which hand he was holding the apricot in. He would usually win, but he would still give us the fruit. On 8th March, International Women's Day, Heydar and the others would bring us gifts, however small. Heydar also took us to the theatre for free, giving us the best seats, because Ibrahim Hamzayev was his friend."

(From a story by Zargalam Huseynova)

His teachers claim that Heydar was a non-confrontational boy and never got into fights. He would always try to resolve any argument peacefully, and made sure that the situation never descended into fistcuffs. Both his classmates and teachers recall one particular incident when he put an end to a conflict between boys from different neighbourhoods. "After their lectures the boys would start picking fights and throwing stones at kids from other neighbourhoods," recalls Latif Huseynzadeh. "Try as we might, we failed to stop this, but Heydar persuaded his classmates to go home to their neighbourhoods and talk with local elders, parents and children, explaining that this pointless fighting would not end well. Gradually, over the course of a few days, he managed to calm the boys down and reconcile the two sides. To use Javid's words: 'Only he who is able to stop bloodshed on Earth can be truly Great.' At that moment we all became convinced that this young man had extraordinary abilities. He was already a true leader at the tender age of 16."

* * *

In addition to being an excellent student, at college Heydar Aliyev was known as a promising artist and an actor.

"He had a very good voice, a baritone, and always enjoyed singing. He painted beautifully and had an undoubted talent. He would draw with coloured pencils, and I saw his work. It is a shame that his drawings were lost."

(From Ibrahim Ismayilov's recollections)

"Heydar Aliyev was especially drawn to literature and drawing. He once told me that the happiest event in his life was his own drawing of Tolstoy that turned out splendidly."

(From a conversation with the writer Elchin)

"He was a superb artist. The history teachers and I often took students on the little trips to nearby historical or architectural sites, which were numerous in Nakhchivan. After the trips we set the students compositions about what they had seen. Some wrote short stories, others submitted poems or scholarly essays, but Heydar always complemented his work with wonderful sketches of the sites. His classmates and teachers still remember his outstanding drawings of the Momine Khatun Mausoleum, a selection of the Alinja-Gala peaks, Ilandagh Mountains and sunny rural landscapes. Everyone thought he would become an artist."

(From Latif Huseynzadeh's recollections)

"We became friends thanks to our love of drawing. We had a Russian teacher, Hasanbey Gaziyev, whose son, Shamil, was an artist, and so was Huseyn, Aliyev's elder brother. Their work inspired us. We would walk up to the Momine Khatun Mausoleum to paint the views of the station or Lake Adilagha and Ilandagh (Snake Mountain). We especially liked to draw approaching trains with smoke pouring over the carriages behind. We painted Yusuf ibn Kuseyr's tomb, among others. I remember how Heydar painted a picture of the duel between Pushkin and Baron d'Anthès and Natalya Goncharova's portrait. Our paintings were exhibited at the college. Heydar's always got the first prize, while I would take second or third place. His prizes included a new uniform, shiny shoes or new watercolours. Heydar and I painted decorations, posters and invitations for the theatre at the Telman Club invitation cards, too. We dreamed about becoming artists."

(From Dovlat Mammadov's recollections)

Unfortunately, since almost everyone in Aliyev's family could paint well, his parents did not attach too much significance to his artistic skills, and his drawings were lost.

Aliyev was fond of the theatre his entire life. In his youth the Azerbaijani theatre enjoyed a great renaissance, becoming a way of life for many intellectuals. Theatre productions blossomed – in professional theatres, schools, colleges, clubs and even people's homes. The theatre transformed teachers and students, technicians and office clerks into eager stage decorators and artists, costume designers and actors.

The Nakhchivan theatrical tradition originated in 1883, when some local intellectuals, led by E. Sultanov, founded the Muslim Shi'ite Dramatic Art Society. They staged *Monsieur Jordan*,¹ the famous comedy by Mirza Fatali Akhundov. A year later, Sultanov wrote a two-act comedy, *Tatarku*, which successfully ran in local theatres. In 1890, Jalil Mammadguluzadeh also joined the local theatrical scene. His play *The Tea Party* was first performed at a local school.²

By the mid-1920s, the Nakhchivan Workers' and Peasants' Theatre had become a well-established theatrical collective with talented creative individuals. Heydar Aliyev's brother said that it was almost impossible to get tickets to their performances. However, using his connections in the theatrical world, Heydar could get tickets for his younger brothers, who he would take to the theatre almost every night. In the 1930s, the theatre staged Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Hamlet*, Schiller's *The Robbers* and Gogol's *The Government Inspector*.

Azerbaijani plays by Jalil Mammadguluzadeh and Jafar Jabbarli, had an enormous influence on Nakhchivan's younger generation. Jabbarli's characters – Sevil, Almas, Oktay and Aydin – represented the new world, forging a new life. Inspired by their faith and commitment, the youth wished to transform the society. Heydar's favourite character was Sevil, who rebelled against the archaic division of household labour (*domostroi*). 20 years later, as a young and happy father, he would name his firstborn daughter Sevil, after Jabbarli's brave heroine.

Young people from Aliyev's neighbourhood liked to spend their spare time in a basement of a two-storey townhouse known as *Humay Khanum*. This treasured house belonged to the family of the local justice minister, Abdul Manaf Hajiyev, whose children were friendly with Aliyev and his siblings. Thanks to the initiative of Heydar and his friend Gasim, the minister's son, basement was converted into an amateur theatre, where the teenagers staged various plays and recited poetry. Agil Aliyev remembers that they installed a kind of stage and a proper theatre curtain. They even had a band with handmade brass instruments.

Even during their holidays in the mountain village of Urud, Heydar and Gasim put on shows together with the local children. Roza Hajiyeva, Gasim's sister, also acted in the theatre. "Heydar and I acted together a few times. We had a rather serious repertoire including *The Robbers*, *The Vizier of Lankaran Khanate*, *Vagif* and *Hayat*.³ I remember Heydar acting as Shah Qajar; he was so believable! He also directed the shows."⁴

¹ The full title is *Monsieur Jordan the Botanist and Famous Sorcerer Dervish Mastali Shah*

² Latif Huseynzadeh, *Iz Istorii Teatra Nakhchivana* [From the history of theatre in Nakhchivan], book 1, (Baku: 2001), 12-22

³ Plays by Schiller, Akhundov, Samad Vurghun and Ibrahimov.

⁴ Urud, 129

Local intellectual Idris Salimov ran The Telman Club and organised a wonderful drama society, led by professional actors and directors. Once, a drama teacher noticed a slender teenager with subtle expressive features, who had been a regular there, and asked him to recite a passage. The teenager's clear voice and excellent articulation impressed him so much that he immediately chose him for one of the main parts in his play. This is how Aliyev became one of the main actors in Hamzayev's amateur troupe and Ibrahim Hamzayev, in turn, became Heydar's new role model.

Many years later Heydar Aliyev would share his recollections of this remarkable individual in an interview with the journalist Svetlana Mirozoyeva: "When he moved to Nakhchivan – a place where everyone knew each other – in 1937, he immediately grabbed our attention. Children and adults alike admired this beautiful elegant man, dressed in an impeccably tailored suit with a white shirt and a perfect tie, wearing black patent leather shoes, miraculously unspoiled by the urban dust. He would go to the theatre in the central park (the main leisure area for the locals), and was immediately recognisable by his lively gait. It was obvious that he had come to work in our theatre. Imagine how flattered I was when Ibrahim Hamzayev started talking to me – I agreed straight away when he suggested joining his troupe."¹

Drama classes at the society became fascinating. Ibrahim Hamzayev did not just rehearse scenes from an upcoming play with the teenagers, he would also tell them about the theatre, giving lectures on Stanislavsky and helping them to gain a foundation in the techniques and psychological approaches of acting.

According to Ibrahim Hamzayev's son, former local Culture Minister Nizami Hamzayev, his father used to tell his students, "Anyone, and particularly an artist, should only go outside looking perfect, as if on stage. Only a clean-shaven, well-dressed person with perfectly shined shoes has the right to face the public. And you should always greet both strangers and friends with a smile: never let your personal worries show on your face. Always speak calmly with everybody at work. Good manners, internal and external sophistication are the unmistakable features of a true artist and – of a true leader." Heydar stayed true to this advice for the rest of his life.²

Hence, the theatre gave Heydar Aliyev a lot that he would take into his political work. It shaped his brilliant, often-improvised speeches, his eloquent diction, his ability to carry himself, his Hollywood smile and immaculate sense of style, which would later amaze everybody around him. His friends and supporters admired these qualities, the foreign media found them surprising, while the sullen, sloppy Politburo members led by a hopelessly provincial general secretary, envied them.

¹ Mirzoyeva, 77-78

² Ibid., 79-82

Aliyev's youthful love for the theatre never changed. He continued to diligently attend premieres at all Azerbaijani theatres as well as Baku performances by foreign theatrical organisations right up to the end of his life. During his political career, he helped many writers, actors and artists, supporting them financially. In the 1990s, when he was president, he saved many leading actors from poverty by establishing presidential scholarships and pensions. He also transformed the Telman Club into a grandiose Palace of Pioneers as a tribute to the place he cherished.

On 25th June 1939 Aliyev successfully completed the Nakhchivan International Pedagogical College with top grades in all 30 subjects. His diploma was a ticket into a teaching career, although by the time he graduated his desire to become a teacher had somewhat cooled. He had been seized by other, more ambitious dreams and aspirations.

REALISING A DREAM

When he graduated from college, in mid-1939, Heydar Aliyev was only 16. Who was this tall, handsome young man with refined and noble features who made almost all the girls in his class sigh hopelessly with love? What did he dream about, what were his ambitions?

First off, he was a typical Soviet boy with a traditional understanding of Soviet ideology, hoping to change the world. Resonant communist slogans like "decent people should live in a decent society" or "a person is the master of his own fate" fuelled his aspirations. Fortunately, the terrible avalanche of Stalinist repressions (1937-1938) spared his family, and Heydar's elder brothers enjoyed reputable careers and were shooting up the social ladder, inspiring their younger brother.

In 1939, Alirza Jafar oglu, Heydar's father, joined the Communist Party. It was a conscious choice since even prior to the Revolution, while he was working in the Baku oilfields, he had sympathised with the Bolsheviks and, according to his relatives, had participated in the workers' strikes and demonstrations. His father's consistency of ideology, of course, would influence the younger family members.

Most of Heydar's peers who grew up in the 1930s and the early 1940s were true romantics and idealists. Raised in a half-traditional, half-Soviet fashion, they were naïve and open, and dreamt of great accomplishments, of reaching all conceivable heights in science, the arts, and the military, glorifying themselves and their native land. For all their ambition, they lacked pragmatism. "Money didn't interest us. We thought that too much money was sinful," Ibrahim Ismayilov told me with a smile. During the holidays he and Heydar would talk about education, the theatre, discuss books they had read and make plans for the future, but never about earning money.

Everyone who knew Heydar Aliyev as a young man notes one inherent characteristic of his: he was a natural leader. He always had to be the number one in any friendship group or social gathering, indeed, under any circumstances. His family and friends, including his older peers, unequivocally accepted this leadership in school, in college, and later on in life. Even then, many could predict that he had a bright future ahead of him, but what sort of a future would it be?

Kamran Ganjaliyev told the writer Musa Urud: "In June 1939 we were lying on the sand after taking a dip under the bridge across the Bazarchay River, sharing our childhood dreams. Heydar sat on a large black rock a bit further away. He listened to our conversation, and then suddenly said, 'Hey, Gasim, if I'm going to work at all, I'm going take Mir Jafar Baghirov's¹ place, anything else it would be a waste of time!'

¹ Mir Jafar Baghirov was first secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan from 1933 to 1953.

I recalled his words very well when, exactly 30 years later, he was elected first secretary of Azerbaijan and realised that on that day Providence itself had spoken through him."

By the time he graduated from the Teachers' College Aliyev had decided to become an architect. Ibrahim Ismayilov recalls that during his last year at college, Heydar intently studied maths and drawing, and read books on architecture. Heydar once told him that his dream was to construct wonderful buildings in Baku. Although his plans on becoming an architect fell through, he kept his promise, transforming his capital city.

Heydar Aliyev's father was initially against him moving to Baku, where his older sons lived. His large family was still struggling, and his health was worsening. His heart was slowly giving up. Furthermore, a teaching job seemed most attractive to this humble railway worker. His father advised Heydar to postpone further studies and accept a job as a rural school teacher in Shahbuz.

Heydar went to Shahbuz in the middle of the summer "for a scouting mission", but he also sent a letter to his brothers about his dreams of continuing his education and becoming an architect. While in Shahbuz, he met his former college classmate Zargalam Huseynova. This is what she recalls about the meeting: "I was sent to teach in Nurs, and he was allocated a village called Gishlag. He told me he didn't like teaching, and that he wanted to move closer to home. The head of education in Shahbuz was an Armenian woman, Ms Yesayan. She helped him get a new assignment and transferred him to the Ministry of Education. Years later, Aliyev went to Nakhchivan to celebrate the city's anniversary and asked to see Ms Yesayan. He heard that she was ill and laughed, saying that she was hiding from him so that he didn't remind her about the 30 rouble bribe he had given her for help."

The young Heydar Aliyev's resourcefulness and the moral support of his brothers and mother – who convinced his father to let his son move to Baku – opened the way for him to realise his dreams. In the early 1990s, in an interview with a Turkish journalist, Irfan Ulku, Aliyev recalled that his father had to borrow money from friends in order to send him to the capital. Leaving his parents was very emotional. His mother, ever restrained, could barely conceal her tears and whispered prayers, waving goodbye. It was her first long-term separation from her favourite child. For him, however, this trip was very exciting.²

The trip to Baku was not easy at the time. The crossing over the Mehri was only opened in 1941, and so it took Aliyev three days to travel to Baku via

Yerevan and Tbilisi. Heydar was accompanied to the capital by his younger brother Agil, and the pair lived with their older brothers for a time, so as to lessen the financial burden on the family. Agil Aliyev's biography notes that: "Our brother worked at the Academy of Sciences from 1938; he was one of its founders and secretary of the party committee. He was given a very pleasant apartment on Ali Bayramov Street. At that time, people in the city would never leave their home without having somebody trustworthy to look after it. Our brother, Hasan, was consequently very happy for us to stay in his home while he and his family went on vacation to Yessentuki. Heydar sat 13 entrance exams and got in to the university with the best grades."

Little is known about the brief time that Heydar Aliyev studied at the Industrial Academy.¹ Most of the subjects were taught in Russian, which allowed him to practise and improve his language skills, making him almost irreplaceable for important tasks at the NKVD and the Council of People's Commissars of Nakhchivan. Aliyev later commented that during that time he never stopped painting, and some of his works were exhibited in Baku galleries.²

Although he completed his first two terms with excellent grades, as usual, Heydar Aliyev was forced to interrupt his studies and leave Baku.

¹ Urud, 135

² Irfan Ulku, *Ot Krasnoy Zvezdy do Polumesyatsa* [From the red star to the crescent], (Baku: 1994), 15

¹ Now called the Azerbaijan State Oil Academy.

² Ulku, 15

RETURN TO NAKHCHIVAN

“Heydar studied for just one year at the academy. We had financial issues and couldn't afford to live in Baku. So we returned to Nakhchivan,” recalled Agil Aliyev.

According to Agil, they left Baku in 1940 – one year before World War II raged across the Soviet Union. Most biographies, meanwhile, indicate that he studied at the academy between 1939 and 1941, and that he withdrew from his studies because of the war. Much later, following his resignation from the Politburo, his enemies published a few articles in the Moscow press, claiming that he hid from the army by moving back home, to Nakhchivan, and faking sickness. It was just this issue that set off the most barbed attacks from his enemies in the second half of the 1980s, led by the former Azerbaijani Prosecutor, Gambay Maminadov.

“Rubbish. Utter nonsense,” says Ibrahim Ismayilov. “I worked as a department secretary at the Nakhchivan Prosecutor’s Office and happened to be in Baku at the time. In the summer of 1940 the Nakhchivan Military Commission organised a bike ride through the border areas. It was part of our preparation for military service. We completed a 429 mile (690 km) bike ride from Nakhchivan to Baku. We were held back in Baku, as we were meant to participate in the August athletes’ parade in front of Baghirov himself. The date of the parade is engraved in my memory; it was on 12th August. The parade took place on Khagani Street, where we now have the Writers’ Union and the Turkish Embassy [since relocated to Bakikhanov Street – Ed.]. After the war, parades were organised in a square outside the Government House, although at that time there was a film studio there.”

After the parade we were told to be at the station by two o’clock, so I thought I had enough time to visit my uncle. Unbeknownst to me, the others left on a morning train instead, together with my travel documents. I walked along the platform wondering how to get home. Nakhchivan, after all, was a border zone, so you couldn’t get there without your passport. Then I met Heydar and his younger brother Jalal.¹ We embraced and kissed. I told him what had happened. He said not to worry, as he had two tickets and would take me with him.

It turned out that Heydar had taken a long break from his studies and decided to go back home. He was living in his elder brother’s house, but Hasan Aliyev’s wife, Zargalam, was a very stubborn woman. She accepted Heydar at first, but then she changed her mind. He could have moved to the halls of residence, but it would have been impossible to live off one scholarship alone. There were goods’ shortages in the mid-1940s, and food prices had risen sharply. He also said anxiously that his family needed his help with his younger siblings, ‘I’ll work for a couple of years, help my brothers finish school and then go back to studying. It’ll be fine.’

¹ According to Agil Aliyev, Ibrahim is mistaken mistake here. It was Agil on the platform together with Heydar; Jalal was meeting them in Nakhchivan.

During the train ride I had to hide from the ticket officers. Although, eventually, we somehow arrived in Nakhchivan, we got arrested at the station. Heydar was a Baku resident and I had no passport, so the two of us ended up in a holding cell. Jalal was released on account of his age, and he immediately told his father what had happened; he rushed to the head of the *militiya*¹ and explained the situation. So they let us leave.

I went back to my job in the Prosecutor's Office and Heydar got a job in the Records Department of the Nakhchivan NKVD. He catalogued documents by year and subject. I sometimes stopped by his office and noticed that his colleagues treated him with respect. By that time he was completely fluent in Russian, and could write well and draw up documents in the appropriate manner, since documents at the NKVD and at the Prosecutor's Office were predominantly written in Russian. The Military Commission also found his skills useful. There were not very many educated people in Nakhchivan then, so people like him got snapped up very quickly. During the war we were given new passports, and with his neat handwriting, Heydar filled in almost all of them.

It was at that time that he started working with the security services. He still worked in the records department, but he worked for the security services, getting assignments in the secret archives.

The NKVD gave him an allowance and released him from military service as a promising employee. When I was drafted into the army in 1942 and went to the Military Commission, Ismayil Gasimov, our common friend, who worked as an aide there, told me that Heydar would not be drafted, as he had NKVD exemption, but this was classified.

The allegation that Heydar apparently produced a medical certificate saying that he had tuberculosis is a blatant fabrication. First of all, who would have given him such a certificate? Secondly, he couldn't have been admitted to the NKVD with tuberculosis; they would have discovered this during their scrupulous health checks.²

Aliyev addressed the issue in November 1989 in an interview with a Russian journalist, Andrei Karaulov: "I worked for the Nakhchivan NKVD from 1941 onwards, where I was in charge of classified archives, and not as a courier as [Mammadov] suggested. I headed the Nakhchivan Committee of People's Commissars, and from 1944 onwards I was involved in the operational work of the NKVD, NSM and KGB."³ When asked about his purported desertion from the army, as alleged by Gambay Mammadov in *Moskovskie Novosti*, he replied sharply, "This interview is libellous. I never evaded army conscription and never produced any medical certificate saying I had tuberculosis."⁴ He was too proud to reveal the real reasons behind his

sudden return to Nakhchivan, as it would have meant touching upon delicate family issues. I, however, have considered it necessary to do so, in order to set the record straight at last, and to disprove the absurd charges against him.

* * *

Hence, at the tender age of 17, Heydar Aliyev's life abruptly changed. He had to leave his carefree, comfortable student life in a large metropolitan city and begin an adult life, supporting his family. It bothered him, of course, that his dream of becoming an architect had to be postponed indefinitely, although he could not have imagined at the time that he would ultimately take an entirely different path in life.

Another tragic event awaited him in Nakhchivan. An elderly resident, former party member Yunis Gasimov told me what happened: "Once, when he was already the leader of Azerbaijan, Aliyev arrived in Nakhchivan and requested us to leave him to walk through his old neighbourhoods by himself. He walked from the start of Pushkin Street up to the television station, passing through Shabab, where a girl he loved once lived. We used to call her Maman, and she was studying to become a nurse. They were very much in love, but, unfortunately, she tragically died."

During my work on this book, I was able to contact Maman's relatives and find out that her real name was Sona Aghayeva. Sona means "beauty" and "swan", and that is how everybody described her – like a beautiful swan. Heydar Aliyevich's brother Jalal recalled that unlike the olive-skinned girls of Nakhchivan, she had very pale skin, blond hair and a thin, elegant figure. Heydar, for his part, was irresistible to the local women in his new suit. According to Nakhchivan's older residents, they were the most stunning couple in the city.

Sona was studying nursing; Heydar had graduated from the Teachers' College a year before and had gone to Baku. According to her relatives, Sona was a few years older than Heydar, who was only 17 when they first met – quite unfit for a serious family life. Although it was time for Sona to get married, she would not hear of it. In her family, as in the play by Chekhov, there were three sisters. The eldest stepsister, Bani, was a domineering person, who worked at the Prosecutor's Office and was the family breadwinner. All the family obeyed her. Bani's daughter remembers her mother saying, "Sona and Heydar met secretly and took long walks under the sprawling willows near the house. The local people called the place Seyudlu Alley (willow alley), a perfect spot for young couples. Once, she came back especially late and their mother scolded her terribly."

Nobody knows how the sisters fell out. Perhaps Bani shamed Sona, since she was meant to be thinking about getting married, and not dating young boys. Or maybe she forbade her to date Heydar, because some much more eligible bachelors must have been asking for her hand. Or, perhaps, something happened between the lovers. In a fit of desperation,

¹ The civilian police.

² Andrei Karaulov, *Vokrug Kremlja* [Around the Kremlin], (Moscow: Slovo, 1993), 214
³ Ibid., 214

Sona decided to commit suicide. She poured kerosene over her clothes and struck a match right in the middle of Pushkin Street. At the time, this form of protest against household tyranny was very common in Azerbaijan. Sona survived for a few days, and, according to her relatives, Heydar spent every night by her side, and when she died he cried inconsolably over her coffin. There is a rare picture contained in the family album showing the young Heydar at the tomb of his beloved.

I have shared this story because the young Aliyev loved Sona sincerely and was by her side until her very last breath. According to Jalal Aliyev, if not for Sona's suicide, the couple would have got married. Secondly, this sad story must have left a very deep, indelible mark on Heydar Aliyev's soul, and as a biographer writing a full version of his life, I simply could not leave it out. Finally, this young Nakchivan girl who took her own life during her prime because she could not conceive of a life without Heydar has earned the right for us to know about her deep love.

While in Nakchivan I asked Bani Hasanova's daughter to take me to Sona's grave at a local cemetery. It was winter, and her modest grave was almost completely hidden under the snow. I spotted Bani's grave nearby. She died in 1985, 42 years after her sister's death. I hope that their souls have been reconciled in heaven and that they have found eternal peace.

Following Sona's death, Heydar stayed away from girls for some time. After the war his friends began settling down and starting families. In 1948, Heydar and Rzagulu would be best men at Ibrahim Ismayilov's wedding, and organised his wedding reception. Ibrahim Ismayilov would often ask his friend about marriage, but Heydar would never answer seriously. Once, however, he replied, "I won't marry until I find my place in life, until I finish university and I know that I can fully support my family." As a consequence, his life as a bachelor ended comparatively late, at the age of 31. On his deathbed he would confess to his daughter, Sevil, that, had he not met her mother, he would have never got married. But that is another story – a happy one that I will turn to in later chapters.

THE FIRST YEARS OF THE WAR

Needs of the outbreak of war made people anxious. Food supplies became irregular and the first queues for bread could be seen on every corner. The entire economy of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic was put on a war-footing and a hasty programme of construction work began to rebuild the old railway junctions and stations, while building the new ones.

On 24th September 1941, the CPSU Central Committee and the Council of People's Commissars ordered all able-bodied people in the country to work in the fields during the harvest. Young people volunteered or were drafted by the local air defence forces, learning to dig trenches and build shelters. After work, Aliyev and his friends underwent general military training: they were all Komsomol¹ members and were keen to help their native country.

Although he was not part of the actual combat force, Heydar Aliyev was posted to the front and was directly involved in the important events unfolding on the Soviet Union's southern border. With the outbreak of the war, the Nakhchivan-Iranian border section was turned into a strategically important war zone that attracted a lot of attention from the international intelligence services. Numerous Nazi intelligence officers operating in Iran, for example, carried out much of their work in this region.

Although formally declared a neutral state, Iran continued to collaborate with Nazi Germany. The Iranian government planned to occupy the South Caucasus and parts of Central Asia if the Nazis won the war. In June and July of 1941, the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom made a series of diplomatic manoeuvres demanding an end to Iran's ambiguous political games. On 19th July, in accordance with the recommendation of the Defence Select Committee and Article Six of the Soviet-Iranian Treaty of 26th February, the British Cabinet decided to send troops to the south of Iran and on 25th August the Soviet Union followed suit.²

For the Soviets, the Nakhchivan border section suddenly became the main gateway into Iran. They used it to transport equipment, weaponry, provisions and other supplies sent from Azerbaijan to help the locals. Groups of party and government officials, intelligence officers, cultural figures and diplomats from Soviet Azerbaijan were sent to the Iranian section of the Azerbaijani republic via Nakhchivan. Heydar Aliyev's future father-in-law, Aziz Mammadkarim oglu Aliyev, a secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan (the CPA Central Committee) and member of the Military Council of the 47th Army in Tabriz, led these operations. The Azerbaijani party leadership, including Mir Jafar Baghirov, also travelled to Tabriz via Nakhchivan. Baghirov also

¹ The All-Union Leninist Young Communist League.

² Ismayil, 91

held several meetings with Seyid Jafar Pishevari, the head of the National Government of Southern Azerbaijan, in the city.

In the summer of 1941, Britain and the United States established a programme for military and economic aid known as lend-lease, which included the USSR from 7th November 1941. Most of the goods were transported through the Persian Gulf, across Iran and further along the Azerbaijan Railway.¹ As a result the Julfa-Minjevan railway acquired an important strategic military status.

Hundreds of Hitler's spies, saboteurs and terrorists were set to work in the rear and in the occupied territories, while the Nazis trained more spies in their 60 special training facilities. These events transformed Nakhchivan from a quiet provincial town into the beating heart of an invisible frontline against Fascism. One of the main duties of the young security officer, Lieutenant Aliyev, was to identify and neutralise Nazi spies. His operational successes led to awards and military medals.

* * *

In 1943, Heydar Aliyev headed a department of the Nakhchivan People's Council. In addition to his personal qualities, a number of external factors had helped his career. At the time, many prominent party officials with extensive administrative and political experience were drafted into senior positions in the army. In total, 14,000 of them were mobilised during World War II.² We should not forget that the purges of 1937 and 1938 had severely impacted the party, the government and the security services. They had resulted in a terrible shortage of young, educated and, more importantly, dynamic and driven junior managers during the pre-war and the wartime periods. So Heydar Aliyev's rapid career progression was hardly surprising. Over the same period, for instance, his friend Ibrahim Ismayilov, was promoted from administrative assistant to deputy prosecutor of the Nakhchivan Republic. As it happened, it was not Ismayilov's own desire to be promoted; it happened on the orders of the Regional Party Committee. After initially serving in the army, he had planned to return to his studies at the Tbilisi Institute of Railway Engineers. At around the same time, in late 1943, Heydar Aliyev was sent to the personnel department of the People's Commissariat of State Security. I am sure that this decision was taken in the same manner as Ismayilov's case, in that nobody inquired about Heydar Aliyev's own wishes. These shifts in job occurred frequently because in July 1941 the councils of people's commissars in union and autonomous republics, as well as its regional and territorial committees, were given the right to reallocate staff during wartime, regardless of their departmental affiliation.³ Furthermore, the strategic importance

¹ Ibid., 26-27

² Munchaev & Ustinov, 451

³ Ibid., 444

of the Nakhchivan-Iran section of the Soviet border and events in Iranian Azerbaijan demanded the expansion of the area's security services. Locals with a better knowledge of the language, customs and distinctive characteristics of the local mindset on both sides of the border were ordered in as reinforcements. Hence, a talented and well-educated young man like Heydar Aliyev simply could not have been overlooked by the security services.

There are no records of how Heydar Aliyev reacted to the proposal to join the security services, but I feel that the young Heydar did not really want to change jobs, and for good reason.

Firstly, like his friend, he dreamed of becoming an architect after the war and hoped to complete his studies at the Academy. His transfer to a military organisation put an end to these plans. Secondly, he was offered a post as ordinary security officer at the NKVD, which meant a significant reduction in salary and food rations. Meanwhile, his father, Alirza, died in 1943 from acute heart failure, leaving the young man as the sole breadwinner for his large family. This meant he desperately needed those 'red cards' and ration packs from the Council of People's Commissars. Thirdly, whilst working in the NKVD's special archives, Heydar Aliyev learned about certain practices that the Soviet security services widely used in the 1930s and that were not at all to his liking. He shared his disapproval more than half a century later: "During the 1920s-1940s, the security services did a great deal of harm to the Azerbaijani people. So many innocent people were imprisoned. So many individual lives and the lives of entire families were ruined by the political repressions of the 1930s. The purge of 1937-38 inflicted particularly deep wounds on the Azerbaijani people, its intelligentsia and its intellectual potential. Nonetheless, the security services continued to implement this policy throughout the 1940s and into the early 1950s."⁴

In 1994, in his pamphlet *Ot Krasnoy Zvezdy do Polunesyatsa* [From the red star to the crescent], Turkish journalist, Irfan Ulku quoted Heydar Aliyev: "I was recruited by the NKVD. Nobody helped with my transfer. I still don't know the reasons behind that appointment [my emphasis]."⁵

Despite his doubts, Heydar Aliyev could not refuse the security services. During the war, Azerbaijan and the entire Soviet Union were living at the very limits of their mental and physical endurance. He did not consider himself in a position to challenge the choices imposed on him by the party leadership.

On 27th January 1944 Heydar Aliyev filed a request to join the People's Commissariat for State Security as an intelligence officer. He became a lieutenant in the NKVD in May 1944. However, let me restate that this is only a theory. It is entirely possible that the move to the intelligence services was

¹ *Vernost Narodu, Rodine, Gosudarstvu* [Loyalty to the people, the motherland and the state], (Baku: Gyandzhlik, 1997), 19-20

² Ulku, 15

Heydar Aliyev's own choice: after all, he was young and full of energy and quite possibly could have liked the idea of a risky and more adventurous job with the Cheka (state security). Furthermore, he was sent to the counter-intelligence (the Fourth Directorate). His new job offered the prospect of trips to the border regions, meetings with undercover Soviet foreign intelligence officers and handling enemy agents.

With time, he proved to be the right choice, becoming a brilliant operative. Even when he worked as the deputy chairman and later the chairman of Azerbaijani KGB, Heydar Aliyev continued helping the intelligence services with their work. He enjoyed working with the new officers and was known as a master of cover stories and turning enemy agents. To use the words of the KGB General, Ziya Yusifzadeh, "Heydar Aliyev was born to work for the Cheka."

A NECESSARY RETREAT

“The KGB's reputation is well deserved, especially as the bulk of its work remains unpublicised. In order to remain uncompromised the security services could not leave any traces ... But this merit brings with it an inescapable negative factor: it is extremely difficult to undertake any research in this area.”¹ I am inclined to agree with this sentiment. During my research about Heydar Aliyev's time with the KGB, I met with dozens of former intelligence and counterintelligence officers, as well as former KGB heads in Azerbaijan and Moscow. Almost every single one of them retained a clear sense of duty, even though the state they were trying to protect no longer existed. So I had to find ways around this barrier, such as asking whether I would be wrong to write a certain piece of information. Some obliged, but others became even more reticent. The information I managed to stitch together presents a vivid picture of a bygone era; some stories contain a lot of exclusive details and lively episodes from Heydar Aliyev's professional life.

Due to the levels of secrecy it was not easy to uncover facts about Heydar Aliyev's KGB work in the archives of the Azerbaijani National Security Ministry (the NSM). It took multiple and persistent appeals to the NSM management for me to gain access to a number of useful documents. I also found it useful to read political literature and memoirs published in Russia and abroad by Soviet intelligence officers in the last decade. Put together, they offer a rather holistic picture, reflecting the various stages of Heydar Aliyev's career within the organisation. Thus, the majority of the information in this book is being published for the first time. It helps to understand Heydar Aliyev's personality and his role in the establishment of the national security services in Azerbaijan and the Soviet Union as a whole.

The lives of all great people are obscured by legends and hearsay, even more so if the person was a KGB general. I have heard and read many stories about Heydar Aliyev's work that have turned out to be false. Shortly after he passed away, the *Vlast'* newspaper published an article about the events in Hungary in 1956, outlining how a team headed by a KGB agent from the Caucasus by the name of Aliyev rescued Yuri Andropov's son,² who was being held hostage.³ However, I have been informed by individuals who are undoubtedly well-informed on the matter that this is a myth. First Deputy Chairman of the KGB Filipp Bobkov called General Grigorenko, the former head of counterespionage, in my presence, in order

¹ A. Shevyakin, *Zagadka Gibeli SSSR* [The mystery of the USSR's collapse], (Moscow: Veche, 2003), 45

² Yuri Andropov, who would become CPSU general secretary following Brezhnev's death in November 1982, was the Soviet ambassador to Hungary during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution.

³ *Vlast'*, No. 50 (2003), 44-45

to establish his opinion on the subject. His reply was succinct: "Aliyev never went to Hungary." In addition, Aliyev is a very common surname in the Caucasus, so it is perfectly feasible that an officer of the same name was in Hungary during the uprising.

According to the Turkish journalist Irfan Ulku's book, in the early 1950s, a young Captain Aliyev received a list of 5,000 Azerbaijanis who had deserted from the army or were prisoners of war in Germany. There was a secret order to find and punish these people, but according to his Turkish biographer, Heydar Aliyev resolved to take a desperate measure, replacing the list with a number of missing persons and fictitious names, hence, allegedly saving 5,000 lives. However, according to my knowledgeable sources, this story is likely to be nothing more than a legend as well.

In their 2005 biography *Heydar Aliyev*, Viktor Andriyanov and Huseynbala Miralamov also publicised some misleading information about his service in the KGB in Iran, Turkey, Pakistan and Afghanistan, claiming he had lived in one of these countries as a Soviet spy.¹ According to Ilya Zemtsov's book *The Party vs. the Mafia: Plundered Republic* (Paris, 1976), Aliyev worked behind enemy lines during World War II, and later in the military intelligence headquarters. Zemtsov also writes that he worked for the Eastern Division of the KGB intelligence (the First Directorate) in the early 1950s and visited a number of countries in the East. However, Ziya Yusifzadeh, the former head of the Azerbaijani KGB, confirms that Heydar Aliyev worked for the counterintelligence department and not for the foreign intelligence. If he did go abroad, then it was only to take brief official trips. Indeed, KGB veterans would often tell me that Heydar Aliyev made many genuine contributions to the former USSR's state security organs, and that it is simply unnecessary to attribute any fictitious deeds to him. During my work on this book I have often had the occasion to become convinced that these words are justified.

FROM FIELD OFFICER TO DEPARTMENTAL HEAD

" Since 1920, the security services have often changed their name. At first we had the Emergency Commission (the Cheka), then the State Political Directorate (the GPU), then the Peoples' Commissariat of State Security (the NKGB) and then the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (the NKVD). I use their Russian names because, although they can be translated into Azerbaijani, this is how we know them."

(From a speech Heydar Aliyev gave to the Azerbaijani Ministry of National Security on 28th June 1997)

On 28th March 1919, Artillery General Samedbey Mekhmandarov, the minister of war for the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, and Samedbey Sulkevich, the chief of staff, signed Order No. 157 establishing intelligence and counterintelligence departments. Since then, 1919 has been considered the year when the Azerbaijani national security service was born. In 1997, President Aliyev decreed that 28th March would be an official professional holiday for the Azerbaijani special services.

On 29th April 1920, the day after Bolsheviks' April Revolution, the Revolutionary Committee of Azerbaijan (Azrevkom) issued a decree establishing Azerbaijan's Emergency Committee for Combating Counterrevolution, Speculation, Sabotage and Official Misconduct. Later, on 7th August 1926, the Azerbaijani Cheka was renamed the State Political Directorate, or the GPU. This marked the beginning of a long period of shaping the security services: with mergers and separations, resignations and new recruitment.

Over the decades, the KGB became a powerful body with a refined structure of dozens of departments and divisions, its own troops and paramilitaries,¹ research institutes and universities, a network of overseas agents and stations around the world, including an army of undercover agents and informants across the country. According to Vladimir Kryuchkov, the last chairman of the KGB, by 1990, the service had a budget of 4.9 billion roubles.² As a consequence, the Soviet secret services were justly considered to be one of the strongest and best-informed intelligence services in the world. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the accompanying death of the superpower that the special services sought to protect brought an end to this view.

¹ At one point 220,000 people served in the border guards, with a further 60,000 serving in the government signallers.

² Vladimir Kryuchkov, *Lichnoye Delo* [A personal matter], (Moscow: Eksmo, 2003), 364-379

¹ Viktor Andriyanov & Huseynbala Miralamov, *Geydar Aliyev* [Heydar Aliyev], (Moscow: Molodaya Gvardiya, 2006), 38-39

In late May 1944, new intelligence officer Heydar Aliyev began his career in the personnel department at the newly established Nakhchivan Commissariat for State Security. With the war coming to an end, imagine the challenges that Lieutenant Aliyev faced at the time. By the spring of 1944, Soviet troops reached the foothills of the Carpathians and Romania. The siege of Leningrad was finally over; Crimea had been liberated. Externally, Soviet victories forced its allies to open a second front, landing their troops in Normandy on 6th July 1944.¹ Internally, the period 1944-1946 was definitely one of the most dramatic times for the Nakhchivan security services due to the events in Southern (Iranian) Azerbaijan.

The fate of Southern Azerbaijan was largely defined by the Soviet leadership's plans to control various energy resources in Iran and the Middle East. At the time, Britain enjoyed absolute dominion over the oil reserves in the Middle East, so it opposed the USSR's plans together with the USA.

"In March 1944 Stalin gave the order to begin negotiations for oil exploration and a concession in northern Iran. On 16th August 1944 Beria wrote to Stalin and Molotov informing them the British and Americans were undertaking undercover operations threatening the Soviet plans. ... The course of events showed that acquiring this concession would be no easy task. And so the Soviet Union's return to the Azerbaijani issue was designed to encourage the solving of the oil question. Secret resolutions issued by Moscow in June and July 1945 added territorial interests to the USSR's oil interests in Iran."²

Hence, the Soviet authorities used the people of Iranian Azerbaijan to put pressure on Iran and the West. However, the Kremlin's interest in Azerbaijan coincided with the most cherished aspiration of the Azerbaijani people – the reunification of their country. On the other side of the Iranian border, the repressive politics of the Pahlavi regime (banning Azerbaijani language, history and culture) sparked a series of protests. The presence of the Soviet military in Southern Azerbaijan on the one hand, and the enthusiastic work of the political officers and intellectuals in the Soviet Azerbaijan on the other, spurred on the process of democratisation and facilitated the rise of the national liberation movement. This is how the National Government of South Azerbaijan, led by Seyid Jafar Pishevari, was established. Using Mir Jafar Baghirov, the leader of Soviet Azerbaijan, the Moscow leadership manipulated this process. Modern Azerbaijani researchers are united in the opinion that "our leaders, including Baghirov, acted appropriately at the time, when we had a unique opportunity of reunification with Southern Azerbaijan."³

¹ Munchaev & Ustinov, 470-472

² Jamil Hasanli, *Yuzhny Azerbaiydzhan: Nachalo Kholodnoy Voiny* [Southern Azerbaijan: the start of the Cold War], (Baku: 2003), 420-421

³ Aziz Sharif, "Otchet Zhizni Aziza Aliyeva" [Observations from Aziz Aliyev's life], *Zerkalo*, 17th April (2004), 27

On March 6th, 1944, the question "Regarding Measures to Increase Cultural and Economic Aid to Southern Azerbaijan" was discussed at a session of the Soviet government. This discussion led to more than 620 specialists of various kinds being sent from Soviet to Southern Azerbaijan. On 14th September, Baghirov sent a detailed report to the Kremlin outlining the practicalities of implementing the Soviet policy in Southern Azerbaijan. One of the main objectives was to extend intelligence work to neutralise "hostile provocateurs" and the actions of the Iranian authorities that were affecting Soviet interests.

From July 1945 the "struggle for oil became crucial for the USSR, and at the beginning of July Baghirov was summoned to Moscow. On 6th July, after careful consideration, a secret decree was issued ... that established it was expedient to begin preparatory work to establish an autonomous Azerbaijani region in Iran with broader rights."¹ Using military bases, Stalin hoped to expand the USSR's borders, claiming Southern Azerbaijan and eventually reaching the Persian Gulf and securing new oil-rich areas.

The Soviet Azerbaijani security service helped to organise demonstrations amongst the Southern Azerbaijanis, recruiting secret agents in Iran, gathering intelligence for Stalin and Molotov, and covering Soviet counterintelligence operations in Iran. As Ibrahim Ismayilov told me, while working for the NKGB in Nakhchivan, Lieutenant Aliyev "monitored the situation in Iran and met with returning agents, some of whom were Iranians recruited by our intelligence."

Lieutenant Aliyev and his colleagues provided security to the Soviet and foreign delegations travelling to and from Iran, like General de Gaulle's transit visit in November 1944. On 7th April 1946 Mir Jafar Baghirov met with Pishevari in Julfa, and later, in June and October, the two met in Nakhchivan. It was then that Aliyev personally met the all-powerful leader of Azerbaijan.

In 1946, the UN Security Council discussed the Azerbaijani issue twice. Under pressure from the international community, especially the USA, the USSR withdrew its troops from Southern Azerbaijan. The Soviet-Iranian Treaty signed in Tehran on 4th April 1946 recognised that the situation in Southern Azerbaijan was an internal issue for Iran.² On 4th December the Iranian army launched an attack on Southern Azerbaijan. Despite repeated requests for support from the Azerbaijani government and Mir Jafar Baghirov, Moscow could not offer anything other than moral support.

As a result, the democratic movement in Southern Azerbaijan was destroyed. The Shah's troops occupied and looted Tabriz. Thousands of the activists were shot or imprisoned, and many leaders of the Azerbaijani Democratic Party – Pishevari, Pedagyan and Yahya – fled to the Soviet Union. Baghirov called Stalin, informing him about the riots in Southern Azerbaijan and asking

¹ Hasanli, 78

² Ismayil, 99

for help in restoring the national government. Stalin's reply, "I cannot start a third world war over five million Azerbaijanis" left Baghirov in despair.¹ Yet, thanks to this call, Moscow agreed to open the border for the refugees fleeing from the terror in Iran.

The Nakhchivan NSM, including Aliyev, worked day and night, organising the refugees' arrival, processing their details and accommodating them. Aliyev worked closely with Pishevari and other leaders of the democratic movement that remained in Nakhchivan and helped the new arrivals.

6,318 people had crossed the Soviet border by 5th January. Although the crossing points were later closed, Iranian refugees continued to arrive. By 1954, the total number of refugees from Southern Azerbaijan had risen to over 9,000.² In Nakhchivan, and later in Baku, Aliyev worked on identifying Iranian spies among the refugees. As the Cold War intensified, Iran, the USA and Britain used the situation to send their own agents to the USSR.

Heydar Aliyev received his first promotion for capturing and exposing spies in the Nakhchivan sector of the Soviet-Iranian border. In 1947, Senior Lieutenant Aliyev was appointed head of the NSM Fifth Directorate in Nakhchivan. According to the head of the Ministry of National Security Archives, the Fifth Directorate was one of the most important organisations in the Nakhchivan security services responsible for counter-intelligence work with Iran and Turkey.

By way of concluding the topic of Southern Azerbaijan in the years 1944-1946, it is worth noting the indelible effect they had on Heydar Aliyev. These events led to his support of Azerbaijan Democratic Party members living in Baku, when he was the republic's leader. Despite pressure from Moscow and repeated attempts to close the party, he convinced Brezhnev to maintain it and its headquarters in Soviet Azerbaijan. He could not openly discuss this, but he hoped to witness Azerbaijan's reunification. He broke his silence once, in November 1982. During talks with foreign diplomats he mentioned that 10-15 million Azerbaijanis were living in unbearable conditions in Iran, and that sooner or later Northern and Southern Azerbaijan would be reunited.

CHOOSING BETWEEN TWO EVILS

After the war, many repatriates flooded back into the USSR from abroad, and Heydar Aliyev worked to screen these individuals right up until he left to study in Leningrad. The famous British historian Geoffrey Hosking writes: "Probably the most unlucky of all Soviet citizens were those who had been captured by the Germans. The Germans considered them 'subhuman', kept them in concentration camps and let them die of hunger and disease, while making them work till their last breath. But the Soviets equated captivity to treachery and refused to sign the Geneva Convention about prisoners of war."³

Many of them returned to Nakhchivan. Some were captured during the war, or had surrendered to the Germans; others had served in Nazi divisions fighting against the allies. Various estimates indicate that between 1.2 and 1.6 million people from the USSR fought for the Nazis.⁴ Thousands of people were transported back to the Soviet Union. By July 1946, about 14,000 people had been repatriated to the Azerbaijan SSR; the majority were Russian (3,566), but many were Ukrainian (2,704), Moldovan (2,000) and Armenian (650).⁵

A Verification Committee for the repatriates was set up in Nakhchivan and across Azerbaijan. According to Ibrahim Ismayilov, he and Heydar Aliyev "worked with repatriates who had been prisoners of war or who had joined the Fascist army or their legions. We gave these people a thorough going-over. If individuals had fought against our troops, then it was considered a crime ... However, we did not touch individuals who had been taken prisoner and held in camps. We only dealt with those, who had served in the Nazi military."

Fewer political repressions took place during wartime. After Yezhov⁶ was convicted, Beria, as head of the People's Commissariat, banned the *militsiya* from conducting mass arrests and deportations. Thereafter, all arrests were carried out with approval of the prosecutor, while the courts established all punishments. All cases were transferred to the judicial authorities and to the Special NSM Council.⁷

The historian Eldar Ismayilov examined archive materials from the years 1945-1953. He concluded that whilst Azerbaijan did not have repressive campaigns such as the Leningrad Affair, the Mingrelian Incident or the

¹ Geoffrey Hosking, *Istoriya Sovetskogo Soyuza* [The history of the Soviet Union], (Smolensk: Vagnius, 2001), 275

² Valyansky & Kalyuzhny, 246

³ Eldar Ismayilov, *Vlast i Narod. Poslevoennyi Staliniizm v Azerbaydzhanie* [Power and the people: post-war Stalinism in Azerbaijan], (Baku: Adilogli, 2003), 171-172

⁴ Nikolai Yezhov was the people's commissar of internal affairs from September 1936 to November 1938. He was famous for his extreme cruelty and sadistic behaviour. He gave a special order removing all restrictions on the use of torture during the questioning of prisoners. He was convicted and executed on 4th February 1940.

⁵ Mammadov, 80

¹ Adigozel Mammadov, *Chas "Iks" Perevorota M.J. Bagirova i L.P. Berii* [Hour X of M.J. Bagirov and L.P. Beria's coup], (Baku: 2005), 189

² Hasanli, 417

Case of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, political arrests continued in the country. "The security services felt the need to justify their existence by fulfilling annual quota of arrests for any anti-Soviet statements. Recording all such statements resulted in bulging dossiers on practically every citizen."¹

Heydar Aliyev later recalled this himself. In 1997, during a speech to the Azerbaijani Security Service, he was very critical about the secret police's tactics in the 1940s:

"As a young secret service officer, I would come across multiple records from 1937, 1938 and subsequent years, and would always ask myself who these anti-Soviet nationalist groups were. Who were these people seeking to undermine the foundations of the Soviet regime? Some of them were arrested, shot or killed in remote Siberia. Others, however, were set free, despite the fact that their names were listed under various anti-Soviet organisations. I wondered why they were released. If they really were nationalists who had engaged anti-Soviet, counter-revolutionary activities. But if they were innocent, why were they on the list? I could not get my head around so many fraudulent, unfounded cases. Unfortunately, if people had expressed any political opinions contradicting the official position, they were immediately taken in for questioning and often punished. I saw it happening in the late 1940s and early 1950s."

Senior security service officials in Nakhchivan urged their subordinates to be vigilant when dealing with "enemies of the people", "anti-Soviets" and "counter-revolutionaries". But, according to Ibrahim Ismayilov, they would often try not to bring cases regarding anti-Soviet agitation to court, and would halt them at the investigation stage. "Heydar was very meticulous with such cases. He questioned the need to start a criminal investigation when someone had made inappropriate remarks about the country's leaders. Sometimes he even disagreed with his superiors and often complained about being forced to open such criminal cases."

Suleyman Mammadov, a well-known Nakhchivan agricultural expert, was one of the individuals Heydar Aliyev saved from prosecution. Once he publicly criticised the government's policy on pests, especially in the cotton industry. He suggested changing the system of governance, starting with the minister, and reassessing the entire approach in this sector. He faced prosecution for these entirely justified comments. Aliyev convinced Hasan Farajev, Nakhchivan's minister of state security, that the industry desperately needed Mammadov's expertise, and he was released.

In 1947, the party decided to exile individuals who had served their sentences in the 1930s to the remote countryside. The dirty work of exiling these "hostile elements of society" fell on the security services. Ibrahim recalls that Heydar Aliyev defended Huseyn Asadov.

¹ Ismayilov, 171-172

² *Vernost Narodu, Rodine, Gosudarstvu*, 20

Farajev was forced to turn a blind eye to his young colleague's liberal tendencies because he regularly needed him to draft documentation. On his behalf, Heydar Aliyev wrote various official memoranda to the central government, including various reports on Nakhchivan's secret police and the local situation in general. The minister appreciated his efforts, and so did many Nakhchivanis. Isa Mammadov, for instance, came to Nakhchivan from Moscow in 1948 and recalls meeting with Heydar Aliyev: "We were introduced by Ibrahim Ismayilov, who was the deputy prosecutor at the time. Our buildings were on the same street: the Komsomol Regional Committee at one end and the Prosecutor's Office at the other. Ibrahim once invited me to his house, where there were a few young people, including Heydar Aliyev. I was a novelty for them because I came from Moscow, which seemed very distant and unreachable for them. Heydar stood out among the rest with his height, looks, and his brilliant eyes. He seemed very cheerful and sociable, joking with his friends.

He knew so much about different things. I learned a lot from him; I would often think that he knew more than me, although I was the one from Moscow! He even had a better knowledge of Russian literature than me. He always developed himself by reading newspapers and books on different subjects. Some of our friends were older and higher up, but they often sought his advice. I still find it impressive. It was as if he had leadership qualities in his blood."

Heydar Aliyev tried to distance himself from the repressive regime, as well as save innocent people. He had to use all his diplomatic skills and the authority he had earned in Nakhchivan to save his good friend Ibrahim Ismayilov. The case was a serious one: Ismayilov had trodden on the toes of Yusif Yusifov, the first secretary in Nakhchivan. Baku wanted to get to the bottom of the incident, and Heydar Aliyev was assigned to write a report about this conflict. The report landed on Baghirov's desk and Yusifov was summoned to see him, "Why did you lie to me?" Baghirov asked. "It turns out that you are the crook! What will I tell comrade Stalin now? We only appointed you to this post three months ago, but you have already started taking bribes! We should remove you from office, not Ismayilov."

Two days later, Ismayilov was summoned to Baku by telegram. He asked his friend whether he knew anything about it. "From what I know, you are to be promoted, but don't tell anyone yet," Heydar Aliyev replied.

Ismayilov arrived at the Baku Prosecutor's Office, where he was informed that Baghirov had promoted him to the most important job at the Prosecutor's Office. "You have showed great integrity, and he appreciates such principled workers. Based on his instructions, therefore, we have promoted you to head of the Investigation Department."

"At the time, we had departments instead of directorates," Ismayilov recalls. "There were forty people in that department, and I was only 26 years old. It was a huge promotion for me."

In my view, this episode with Ibrahim Ismayilov is very revealing when it comes to Heydar Aliyev's character. It attests to the fact that he fought bribery and corruption long before 1969, and did not bow to any authority in this fight. After all, Baghirov could well have believed the person he had promoted, Yusifov, in which case he would have directed all of his anger on individuals who had supported Ismayilov, as well as the prosecutor himself. Several years later, when he was already working in Baku, Aliyev would fall victim to his own principled nature. This would be a real endurance test, but he would ultimately prevail.

THE YOUNG ALIYEV AND HIS FRIENDS

Despite all the hardships of the war and its aftermath, life carried on. Heydar Aliyev was not a sullen, fanatical workaholic, alienated from simple human pleasures. He and his peers were young and energetic, full of optimism and hope for the future.

During the war, Heydar Aliyev had become the breadwinner for his younger brothers and sisters. The boys did try to earn some money: Agil worked as a projectionist, and Jalal taught in the village of Bananiyar. Their uncle, Zeynalabdin, lived in the village of Norashen and helped as much as he could. He was very close to his nephews and nieces, even more so because he had had his own children relatively late in life. "My father worked on a collective farm – at the time you couldn't just skip work," explains Suleyman Aliyev, Zeynalabdin's son. "He used to return home at dusk, load some food and dung for the furnace on his donkey and ride 30 miles to Nakhchivan to help his brother's family."

Heydar Aliyev's mother Izzet khanim was an extremely compassionate woman, always sharing what little she had, be it oil, kerosene, salt or matches. Fikrat Gadimov told me that "when she cooked she would always save one portion for an unexpected guest. She always wanted to feed her guests."

During the war many families lost their men. Shafiga Aliyeva remembers Khurshud, a young woman with five children who lived next door to the Aliyev family. Her husband was away fighting in the war. One night they were woken up by a loud cry. The crying did not stop, so Izzet went to see what was happening. Khurshud explained that they were crying from hunger. Izzet rushed back home, wrapped as much cheese into some pita bread as she could and gave it to Khurshud. Afterwards, Shafiga saw her mother sitting on the edge of the bed, head in her hands, the whole night. Izzet could not sleep, because she had six more people to feed.¹

When his father passed away in 1943, Heydar Aliyev became the head of the family. He would spend almost no money on himself, giving his entire wages to his mother instead. According to Agil Aliyev: "There were no door bells then, only the latch. We could recognise Heydar's firm knocking. Everybody could. When he worked for the NKVD, even *militsiya* officers were slightly afraid of him."

This feigned severity subsided with his family and his close friends. His sister Rafiq^a recalls: "He was the most pleasant companion – witty, humorous – he knew how to laugh wholeheartedly, his light eyes sparkled with happiness. There was a big age difference between us, but we always had good talks, often about literature. I always looked up to him. My brother was a man with a beautiful soul and a great mind. He influenced our lives hugely, opening up new prospects for us. All his stories were absorbing and interesting."

¹ Aliyeva, 53

Isa Mammadov said: "Despite his youth, he was very reserved. He didn't tolerate any nonsense and never laughed very loudly. Even back then he was very sophisticated. He respected Azerbaijani traditions, knew how to listen and never interrupted. He was a proud man, but never arrogant."¹

Ibrahim Ismayilov recalls that, despite the huge volume of work, Heydar Aliyev still read a lot of fiction and professional literature. Some were highly classified books on intelligence and counterintelligence kept in the Commissariat of State Security's library, which he read on the premises only, often staying there quite late. "We mostly talked about work. At the time I was studying for a distance law degree at the Baku branch of Moscow State University, so I shared what I had been learning with him, especially civil and criminal law and evidence theories. We talked about cases that we had dealt with at the NKVD and the Prosecutor's Office. Heydar was always striving to widen his range of interests. He made me teach him how to interrogate detainees and how to fill in documents on criminal cases. And of course he talked about his work."

In 1947 retail prices on consumer goods finally went down for the first time. They continued to drop every year for the next seven years, usually on 1st March. Between 1946 and 1950 bread became three times cheaper and meat two-and-a-half times cheaper. "Seeing the results of mass food production, people in Azerbaijan became a little more confident about the future."² Food rationing came to an end in December 1947, trading was restored and the economy and agriculture began to show signs of revival.

At the time, Aliyev had two close friends: Ibrahim Ismayilov and Ismayil Gasimov, his future brother-in-law. He was also very close with his mother's nephew, Rzagulu Guliyev, who also worked in the Ministry of State Security. They spent most of their free time and holidays, such as 1st May, 7th November and New Year's Eve together. Ismayilov's religious parents were teetotal, so they usually got together at Heydar Aliyev's place.

"Izzet would cook kebabs, dolma and grilled meat in the pan, we mostly drank *tutovka*³ or wine. We used to have good wine and brandy in Nakhchivan; we even had our own brandy factory. Vodka from Moscow arrived later, but we always liked *tutovka*, although, we never drank too much.

We didn't have radio, just a black gramophone. Before the end of the war, we used kerosene lamps at home, because only public organisations had electric lights at the time. But this didn't stop us from having a good time: we gave toasts, shared jokes, laughed and sang together!"

(From Ismayil Ibrahimov's recollections)

¹ Isa Mammadov, "Geydar Aliyev v moyey Zhizni" [Heydar Aliyev in my life], *Azerbaydzhan*, 13th May (2003)

² Valynsky & Kalyuzhny, 243

³ A strong alcoholic drink produced in the Caucasus.

In the late 1940s, Isa Mammadov, the first secretary of the Nakhchivan Komsomol's Regional Committee, joined Heydar Aliyev's circle of friends. Aliyev would make Isa Mammadov first secretary of the Lankaran Party Committee in the 1970s and he would make the town famous across the whole Soviet Union for its incredible vegetable harvest. Later, he would work with Heydar Aliyev in the Central Committee, overseeing Azerbaijani agriculture.

"He wasn't as interested in me as in the regional committee's cars!" Isa muallim said with a laugh. "In those days security service personnel mainly rode horses. Hence, he didn't have an official car, but I had two in the regional committee's garage, an American Willys, and a Russian Pobeda. He would sometimes borrow my car to travel to a remote region for work." Heydar Aliyev was a very accomplished equestrian. "As an officer, I had a really good horse and we had to ride from one village to another to do our job."

Nakhchivanis did not celebrate their birthdays at the time, but Heydar Aliyev persuaded his friends that it was the main celebration in each person's life. Isa Mammadov said, "We once celebrated Heydar's birthday at our home in Aralyg (Sharur) with my parents; we took a picture, which he signed in Russian, 'To my dear friend and brother, Isa'. He already spoke better Russian than us then – he could write as well as speak it."

His friends remember that Heydar hated foul language; no one ever heard him swearing. His "weakness" was that he liked to dress well. Ibrahim muallim said that once they ordered him a suit in the latest fashion. "The tailor, Hasan, was famous across the whole of Nakhchivan, and his son Khudaverdi Hanifayev later worked at the Council of Ministers and the Central Committee. We spent an entire month going to fittings, and Heydar would find something wrong with it every time. But in the end the suit turned out to be wonderful!"

According to Agil Aliyev: "My brother loved to dress well. He had tailors in Nakhchivan and in Baku, and for many years he ordered suits from a Russian tailor who lived on the street behind the Malakan garden. This tailor did everything himself, right up to the last stitch. Heydar didn't even look at off-the-peg suits. Around 1951 shops started selling ready-made coats and imported suits. People generally preferred tailored suits, however. I remember that in 1951 or 1952 they started selling Italian flared coats in Baku, and in the 1930s bell-bottoms were very fashionable. Heydar ordered himself pairs of those too – more than 13 inches wide at the bottom!"

Everyone who knew Heydar Aliyev as a young man remembers him as a kind, sweet and peaceful person. However, I managed to extract a confession out of Ibrahim Ismayilov that they once got dragged into an altercation.

"We saw some soldiers outside the theatre harassing local girls. It was in 1946, when there were still a lot of military units stationed in Nakhchivan,

¹ *Bakinskii Rabochii*, 17th August (2002)

and many soldiers and officers on leave behaved senselessly, disrespecting our customs. Naturally Heydar, a friend of ours, and I tried to help the girls, which ended in a genuine brawl.

On a different occasion, Heydar and Rzagulu travelled with me to Baku on an official trip. We had to get tickets but there weren't any. They pushed me forward, so I went up to the cashier, but there was a long queue. A Russian captain in front of me yelled, 'Where do you think you're going, *yoldash*'? So I hit him. He was about to hit me back, but Heydar and Rzagulu arrested him and took him to the *militsiya*.¹

The Azerbaijani historian Eldar Ismayilov writes about this kind of behaviour on the part of the Red Army in Azerbaijan in his research about the post-war period: "Archival documents indicate that the soldiers treated Azerbaijan like an occupied territory, and not a part of their own country. Baghirov's appeal to Marshal Tolbukhin, who was in charge of the South Caucasian military region, in June 1947 reports 'looting and other atrocities. Mass complaints have been coming from regional organisations.' He quotes a coded message from Regional Secretary Samukhsky, 'Some soldiers from Kirovabad [Ganja – Ed.] garrison systematically attacked the orchards at the Kirov and Mikoyan collective farms in vehicles and even tanks, plundering them, destroying their vegetables and fruit, and beating up managers and labourers.' Yagubov, the Azerbaijan SSR's interior minister, compiled a report in which he listed 36 incidences of offences committed by troops in Azerbaijan between May and June 1946."² Heydar Aliyev and his friends could not tolerate such behaviour and stood up for themselves, and their actions are surely a positive reflection on their characters. In both situations they acted like real men, not yielding in the face of armed opponents.

Consequently, his time in the Nakhchivan NSM School enriched Heydar Aliyev personally and professionally. He saved dozens of people from the camps, proving to his countrymen (and to himself) that one could remain humane and reasonable, even working in such terrifying organisations like the NKVD and the NKGB.

Just before his 26th birthday, in May 1949, important news arrived from Baku concerning Heydar Aliyev's future career. As the Cold War kept escalating and the global socio-political environment was shifting, work at the security services required more and more specialist knowledge. So, Lieutenant Aliyev was offered the opportunity to attend staff training at the Leningrad Security Service College.

Part 2

CAREER IN THE SECURITY SERVICES

"DESERVES PROMOTION"

(*Performance Report for Senior Lieutenant H. A. Aliyev*)

Immediately after the war (20th June – 10th July 1945) Aliyev attended short courses for employees of the Azerbaijani NKVD to enhance their qualifications. The completion report contained top marks in every assessment category.

In June 2002, Heydar Aliyev, the president of Azerbaijan, and Vladimir Putin visited St. Petersburg for the opening ceremony of a monument to the great poet Nizami, on Kamennoostrovsky Avenue.

Heydar Aliyev's motorcade headed to Astoria Hotel straight from the airport. When he had got out of the car, he looked around the square in front of the hotel and surprised the team accompanying him by going off in the opposite direction. We looked at each other in bewilderment, but followed him. It turned out that Aliyev remembered that in 1950 the NSM College was nearby. Naturally, nobody knew where the college was, but Heydar Aliyev found the place where he had spent an unforgettable year 50 years previously – Gorokhovaya Street, block 6, now occupied by the local government.

As deputy chairman of the Azerbaijani KGB, Colonel Aliyev went on a refresher management course – this time in Moscow, at the F. Dzerzhinsky Graduate School of the KGB (now the FSB Academy). At the age of 43, he went back to study and once again graduated with only perfect grades. Even as the head of the Azerbaijani KGB, Major General Aliyev would return to the KGB academies, only now as a lecturer, speaking to students about his great experience and the most successful special operations carried out in Azerbaijan under his supervision. Arif Zeynalov, who graduated from the KGB Academy in Kiev in 1968, remarked that almost the entire academy attended Aliyev's two-hour lectures.

Heydar Aliyev graduated from the course in Leningrad with equally high marks and with a brilliant reference. Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Baku in 2001 and presented the president of Azerbaijan with a unique gift, a copy of Heydar Aliyev's graduation certificate from the Soviet NSM School, showing that he graduated 'with distinction'. The performance

¹ Spoken with irony, derogatory in this context.

² Ismayilov, 261-262

report, signed by Colonel Pinchuk, head of the Leningrad College, noted that Senior Lieutenant Aliyev "demonstrated only his excellent qualities during the course of his studies, which he took very seriously. He was always an excellent student." The report continued, "Comrade Aliyev skilfully establishes what is of key importance when working on operational matters. He understands the operational environment, makes the right decisions, and compiles documents enthusiastically."

The report also notes that Aliyev undertook voluntary work while at the college. He campaigned at a polling station in Leningrad during the elections to the Supreme Soviet. He loved Leningrad, declaring many years later that "St. Petersburg is very dear to me. I think of my student years here very fondly as the time that played an important role in my future life and political career."¹ His performance report from the Leningrad college, dated 21st June 1950 concludes with the following words: "Deserves promotion".

* * *

Heydar returned from Leningrad with gifts for the whole family and the neighbours. His mother was overjoyed to see her favourite child again; he brought her a beautiful navy blue voile fabric, which she used to make a dress in the traditional style accompanied by a long pleated skirt and a blouse. This outfit remained her favourite until the end of her life.

That evening he talked for a long time about the wonders he had seen and the people he had met in the distant Leningrad. His mother lovingly watched her grown-up son, and did not resolve to ask whether he would be leaving again soon. As if reading her mind he said, "For now I have been appointed to the same job as before my departure. We'll see what happens next. Don't you worry, Mother, I'll never leave you again."

Heydar Aliyev kept his word. A month later he was transferred to the central office of the Ministry of State Security and was made deputy head of the Sixth Department of the Second Counterespionage Directorate. He was given an apartment in Baku and brought his mother and younger sister to live with him. "When Heydar settled in Baku, he helped the rest of his family move there too," recalls Suleyman Aliyev. "Only Shafiga was married, but Jalal, Agil and Rafiga moved in with him as well. Izzet missed Nakhchivan and often visited her house and us in Norashen, as by then there was a bus running to Abrakunis. In 1954 I also went to Baku. Izzet bought me new shoes, clothes and walked me home."

Heydar Aliyev moved into his first apartment in Yerevan Street two years later. He lived together with his mother, brothers Jalal and Agil, and their sister, Rafiga, in this small two-room apartment. After Heydar

Aliyev's wedding, his brothers moved to a rented flat, but his mother and Rafiga continued to live with the newly-weds.

Unfortunately, in October 1957, a few years after moving to Baku, Heydar Aliyev's mother died of heart disease. She was 62. Her heart, wracked by war and the hardships of daily life and caring for her children, had failed her.

According to his friends and relatives, Heydar Aliyev cared for his mother dearly. He never argued with her, accepting her traditional worldview and lifestyle. Izzet was very religious: she went to the mosque, fasted during Ramadan and performed Namaz. Shafiga Aliyeva recalled that her mother always covered her head in front of her sons. "I remember once it was just the two of us in the house, and I was combing her hair. Suddenly there was a knock at the door. Mother realised that it was Heydar and rushed to cover her head with a *kelegayi*.¹

She continued to fast and pray while living in Baku. Although Heydar Aliyev had an important position at the KGB, and one of his duties involved tackling religious prejudices, he respected his mother's piety.

In May 1956, Izzet was admitted to Medical Commission Hospital No. 1. KGB veteran Akram Selimzadch recalled this period in Heydar Aliyev's life: "He normally worked till 9 or 10 p.m. He would wait for the chairman to leave, and go with him or after. At that time, however, he would go to the hospital every day right at 6 p.m. People say he was there every day till very late and that Izzet died in his arms. He buried her according to Islamic tradition.

¹ *Bakinskiy Rabochiy*, 11th June (2002)

¹ Aliyeva, 28

ON THE EASTERN DESK

The 6th Department of the 2nd Directorate of the Azerbaijani NSM, where senior Lieutenant Aliyev started his new job, supervised counterintelligence operations in eastern countries, such as Turkey and Iran. By the late 1940s and early 1950s Iran and Turkey had fallen under the influence of the West, the USA in particular.

Soviet and Western political historians have argued for decades about who initiated the military and political confrontation between the USSR and its anti-Hitler allies. Soviet historians mark the famous speech that Winston Churchill delivered at Westminster College in Fulton City (USA) on 5th March 1946 as the beginning of the Cold War. Churchill urged the West to protect its monopoly over nuclear weapons, oppose communist expansion, and preserve "the fraternal association of the English-speaking peoples", especially in military terms. This where the term the "Iron Curtain" comes from. Churchill expressed his concern that all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe were on the other side of the curtain and were "subject ... not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and, in many cases, increasing measure of control from Moscow."

In an interview with *Pravda*, Stalin referred to Churchill's speech as "a call to war with the Soviet Union" and said that if "Mr. Churchill and his friends" were to pursue a new military campaign in Eastern Europe, "they will be defeated the same way they were defeated 26 years previously."¹

Western historians, however, argue that the Soviet Union provoked its recent allies into the Cold War. Firstly, it refused to withdraw its troops from Iran, using the reunification of Southern (Iranian) and Northern (Soviet) Azerbaijan as an excuse. Secondly, the Soviet Union openly declared its expansionist plans for Turkey.

Ten years later Robert Rousseau, then US Consul in Tabriz, published an article "1946: The Battle for Azerbaijan" in *Middle East* journal, which began: "It is safe to say that the Cold War began on March 4, 1946. On this day fifteen Soviet tank brigades entered the Azerbaijani region of north-western Iran and moved from the Iranian-Turkish border toward its centre. Another similar sized army based in Bulgaria began making for Turkey's European borders. At the same time Ankara and Tehran were under heavy diplomatic pressure, and instability reigned in Greece, Azerbaijan and Iranian Kurdistan."²

Immediately following World War II Stalin initiated a high-profile campaign in the Armenian and Georgian press and amongst the foreign Armenian diaspora. The main demand raised was the return of Armenia's western regions from Turkey. During a conversation with Bevin, Great Britain's foreign affairs

¹ *Dokumenty Russkoy Istorii* [Russian historical documents], *Istochnik*, a supplement to *Rodina* journal, part 1 (1998), 93-102

² Hasanli, 249

minister, in Moscow in 1946, Stalin openly declared the Kremlin's claims to controlling the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, as well as several Turkish regions that had supposedly historically belonged to Armenia and Georgia.¹

Following Allen Dulles' famous speech at the Council on Foreign Relations, Stalin stated that the USA was the USSR's main enemy. In December 1952, Stalin clearly outlined future objectives for the security service: "Intelligence officers must not act directly... Never recruit a foreign agent by undermining his sense of patriotism. We do not want double agents who think they are fighting their homeland. If the agent's patriotic feelings are undermined, he will not be a reliable agent. *Rid intelligence work of clichés. Always adjust your strategies and tactics; always adapt to the global situation [my emphasis]. Take advantage of the global situation. Conduct flexible, well thought-out attacks. ... Our main enemy is America [my emphasis].* But the main thrust must be not on America itself; we must create secret resident agencies in bordering states first and foremost."²

Hence, the Iron Curtain came down over the Soviet Union. A long and gruelling psychological war began, which was accompanied by efforts to undermine Soviet ideology, propaganda battles, the funding and promotion of dissident groups and the fostering of an opposition within the USSR. Furthermore, the USA and other countries intensified their intelligence activities against the USSR to determine its military and economic capabilities. Consequently, the West became interested in Azerbaijan due to its geostrategic location and its oil and gas reserves. On Stalin's orders, all the Soviet security services, including those in Azerbaijan, responded in kind: studying their enemy, recruiting foreign spies and deploying them to neighbouring countries.

Counterintelligence in Azerbaijan focused mainly on Iran and Turkey. The USSR had withdrawn from Iran, granting the USA unfettered access to the country for a long time. Kamal Aliyev, a former KGB officer who worked in the Iranian division of Soviet counterespionage for many years, said: "Iran under the Shah was one of America's closest allies. American troops and equipment were deployed along the Azerbaijani-Iranian border. It was complicated, since Azerbaijanis, our people, lived on both sides of the border. People frequently crossed the border, and SAVAK³ agents could be amongst them. We accepted about 300 defectors a year, constantly adding to an already large Iranian diaspora in Azerbaijan, which we had to keep tabs on."

In response to the Soviet threats, Turkey began strengthening its ties with the West, joining NATO in 1951. Many anti-Soviet and anti-communist

¹ J. Hasanli, *Sovetsko-Amerikano-Angliyskoye Protivostoyaniye v Yuzhnom Azerbaydzhane* [Soviet, American and British Opposition in Southern Azerbaijan], (Baku: 2001), 240

² *Istochnik*, No. 5 (2001)

³ The secret police in the Shah's Iran.

organisations founded by immigrants from the Turkic republics of the Soviet Union were operating in Turkey. Turkey had a historically strained relationship with Russia and became one of Moscow's most hostile enemies.

Undoubtedly, these ideological stereotypes dating back to the beginning of the Cold War were deeply embedded in the Soviet secret services. Heydar Aliyev was no exception. Two or three years after finishing his training he received the highest evaluation from the Central KGB Office for his successful planning and implementation of a series of special operations against Iran and Turkey. *Operation Alagez*, supervised by the head of the 2nd Directorate, Eyyaz Mammadov, was one of the first.

Beginning in 1947, the CIA used the Turkish and Iranian intelligence services against the Soviet Union, often recruiting former Soviet citizens. The Turkish security forces, for instance, recruited an agent by the code name Alagez. He was born in Astara [Azerbaijan – Ed.] and had been in Iran during the war, before later fleeing to Turkey, where he appeared on the radar of the Turkish security services. After being enrolled and trained, he was sent to Azerbaijan, where he was turned and recruited by the local KGB in Baku. After thorough screening and training, with the consent of the USSR KGB's 2nd Directorate, he was sent back to Turkey. He underwent thorough checks there and was again sent back to Azerbaijan. This spy game lasted six years, from 1950 to 1956.

The operation helped the Azerbaijani intelligence services learn more about the Turkish channels of communication, specific information about their individual agents, and information on their future plans and ambitions, as well as understand how they dispatched agents into the USSR. Former KGB officer Jabbar Beylarov recalls that "at the time Turkish intelligence was very competent, and the fact that our intelligence service managed to get our informant into the Turkish secret service was sensational for USSR as a whole."

Heydar Aliyev, however, gained even greater renown amongst his counterintelligence colleagues following his successful planning of *Operation Duel*.

This operation helped to discover Turkish and American plans directed against Azerbaijan. Several agents were involved in *Duel*. An agent nicknamed Radist ("radio operator") was captured by the Germans in 1942 and sent to the Abwehr Zeppelin Academy.⁴ Upon completing the course, he was supposed to be sent to the Soviet Union. But due to the defeat of Nazi Germany, he ended up in a displaced persons camp run by the Americans, who handed him over to the Soviet authorities in Germany. He was then sent back to his native Azerbaijan.

During his debrief Radist confessed his past and named other Soviet citizens who had studied with him at the Zeppelin Academy. His background

⁴ A German military intelligence organisation that operated from 1921-1944 and had different levels of operational efficiency in the pre-war and war years; in 1944 it was subordinated to the SS and Himmler. The USSR's response to the Abwehr service was SMERSH, which was an acronym of *Smert' Shpiionam* – Death to Spies.

made him the perfect candidate for an intelligence operation, and Heydar Aliyev crafted his cover story. "Heydar Aliyev's cover stories were always perfect," – remarked Lieutenant General Ziya Yusifzadeh, a veteran of the Azerbaijani secret services. "Radist was deployed through the so-called 'green' border with Turkey, the section of the border controlled by security services where there were no border posts. From there he was caught by the local police and sent to be interrogated by the Turkish secret service, who were later joined by military intelligence and the CIA. It took them a long time to verify his story. We didn't hear from him for over a year. Our sources abroad confirmed that he was indeed taken by the Turkish secret service, and that he was being screened and trained. About a year later they sent him back to Azerbaijan. He met with Heydar Aliyev and reported that his missions were to identify military and other secret facilities located in Azerbaijan. Every time Radist was sent to Azerbaijan by Turkish intelligence, he would meet with Heydar Aliyevich, who would then brief him on how to interact with the Turkish military intelligence agents. Dozens of Turkish agents were caught as a result of this operation."

I personally read a unique handwritten document composed by Lieutenant Heydar Aliyev. Over its 10 pages he describes the personalities of the Soviet agents who participated in Operation Duel, explaining all their cover stories. One notices the thorough elaboration of the cover stories, as well as the careful process of selecting the right agents for the Turkish "front". All these people had a complicated relationship with the Soviet regime and thus could be of interest for the Turkish secret service.

The document also provides an interesting insight into the selection and recruitment strategies of spies from the Soviet citizenry. Agents Jupiter, Seid, Mirza, and others were people with dubious pasts: one had served a prison sentence for theft, another was a prisoner of war and had served in the German army, while the others had relatives in the Musavat Azerbaijan Party living abroad, on "enemy" territory. Among individuals with such a background, the intelligence services effortlessly found people suitable for fieldwork – both as official and unofficial agents. With rare exceptions, they all agreed to cooperate, because their choice was either that or serve a sentence in Siberia.

Between the 1930s and the 1950s, being related to "enemies of the people", representatives of ill-favoured social classes or those who could be traced to Turkey or Iran was considered seriously compromising, especially for state employees. In his book *Vlast i Narod* [Power and the people], Eldar Ismayilov provides many examples of how Baghirov and his team dealt with such "undesirable" citizens based on information gathered by agents or operatives. Ironically, Baghirov's team (with Emelyanov's permission) investigated Heydar Aliyev's future father-in-law, Aziz Aliyev. He was incriminated because "his sister lived in Iran", "he was in Iran in 1920" and he was "friendly with people who had relatives in Iran." Aziz Aliyev lost his high-ranking government position as a result of this investigation. Such

were the realities of the Stalinist era: senior Lieutenant Aliyev played by the rules of his time, without questioning the government's ability to use politically compromising information as a means of ideological sanction and total control over the population.¹

The Central KGB Office praised operations Alagez and Duel. That much is apparent from a letter sent by major General Lyalin, deputy head of the USSR KGB 2nd Directorate, to the chairman of Azerbaijani KGB, Colonel Kopylov:

"9/XI-1957 No 2/5 – 753. Top Secret. The 2nd Directorate of the Azerbaijani KGB has completed Operation Alagez to a very high standard. Given their significant personal contribution to this operation, we suggest rewarding the head of 2nd Directorate, A. Mammadov and his deputy, H. Aliyev."

A comment by the chairman of Azerbaijani KGB written in a sprawling hand at the top right-hand corner of the letter reads:

"FAO comrade Samedov. Present our thanks to comrades A. Mammadov and H. Aliyev, and issue a reward of two weeks' salary to both.

F. Kopylov."

Moscow often recognised Heydar Aliyev's counterintelligence work, as can be seen from another document in the KGB archives:

Order No. 0258, 9th September 1961:
"Concerning awards for officers of the 2nd Directorate of the USSR KGB and the Azerbaijani KGB. For the successful execution of a special assignment and for displaying initiative and perseverance –

I ORDER THAT:
Lieutenant Colonel Heydar Alirza oghlu Aliyev
Be awarded a valuable gift

AND THAT
Major General Aleksandr Kardashev,
Colonel Mikhail Leonov, Captain Nikolai Eliseev
be awarded a certificate of thanks.

A.SHELEPIN
Chairman of the KGB

¹ Ismayilov, 206

On 15th April 1960 Heydar Aliyev was awarded the Honoured KGB Officer badge; in May 1962 he received the Order of the Red Star, and in 1964, the Medal for Impeccable Service, First Class.¹

Heydar Aliyev's multiple promotions were evidently due to his operational success. Judging by his signatures on various certificates and documents, in June 1956 he was still a captain, in 1958, he was a major, and in 1960 a lieutenant colonel. I was told that at the time it took between three and five years to get promoted to a higher rank in the KGB. Heydar Aliyev, however, was promoted from captain to major general in just 10 years for his work protecting the southern Soviet border, which was unprecedented in the Azerbaijani security services.

As for Operation Duel, KGB officers in Azerbaijan told me that this operation found its way into textbooks used at all Soviet intelligence academies. Heydar Aliyev even used *Duel* as an example when giving lectures at KGB Academies in Russia and Ukraine, shedding light on his agent recruitment strategies and his methodology for developing cover stories.

Heydar Aliyev enjoyed sharing his experience with young officers and gave lectures from the very beginning of his work in Baku. Retired KGB Lieutenant Colonel Jabbar Beylarov recalls that he first saw Heydar Aliyev in 1952 in a lecture he gave at the Ministry of State Security (NSM) Inter-Regional Academy. "Over 300 NSM officers from all Soviet republics studied at our academy. Heydar Aliyev lectured on special operations. We had heard about this smart security officer called Heydar Aliyev before, but until then had never seen him in person. During the lecture we saw a slender captain, who recently arrived from Leningrad. He spoke perfect Russian without a hint of an accent. There were many Russians in the audience and even they were impressed with his language skills. He didn't use notes during the entire two-hour lecture. He made a big impression on all of us. We all marvelled at his knowledge, intellect and the way of speaking."

Following a raft of successful operations in the East, Aliyev was made deputy head of the NSM's 2nd Directorate in Baku, and by the end of 1953 – head of the same directorate. It was a rapid and rather unexpected promotion.

¹ I was provided with this and other information concerning Heydar Aliyev's career by staff at the archives of the Azerbaijan Ministry of National Security.

STALIN'S DEATH AND BAGHIROV'S FALL

KGB officers' memoirs describe the years 1951-1953 as the most dramatic in the history of the Soviet secret service. They were characterised by personnel changes among the central authorities and by power struggles between various groups of powerful KGB officials. Until his death, Stalin kept shuffling his associates like a deck of cards, firing some and promoting the others. He feared the formation of alliances and coalitions strong enough to shake off his autocratic grip on power. The NSM was always full of Stalin's men, each of whom started their own personnel adjustments and structural changes.

In the summer of 1951, Viktor Abakumov, the minister in charge of the NSM, was removed from his post and accused of treason. He was accused on account of his alleged involvement in a Zionist conspiracy and his attempts to hinder the investigation into the Doctors' Plot.¹ He was replaced by Semyon Ignatyev, a member of the Central Committee. Ignatyev and his deputies Goglidze, Epishev and Ryumin rapidly instigated a new campaign of political repression, acting on Stalin's direct orders.²

The Azerbaijani NSM was more stable, as Emelyanov had been its head since 1939. Nonetheless, the changes in Moscow's personnel caused some concern among the regional offices, especially as news of the arrests of new types of "social pests" and "terrorists" began to arrive all the more frequently. The Azerbaijani NSM apparently did not want to lag behind and attempted to imitate their colleagues in Moscow and Leningrad by doing everything they could to uncover counter-revolutionary activity in Azerbaijan. In March and April 1953 Emelyanov reported to the ACP Central Committee that a counter-revolutionary gang had been discovered in the Shahlasar village, Lankaran District. He also gave a broad report on the discovery of a Menshevik organisation allegedly active in the Qakh District and wrote an extensive memo "On the activities of Pan-Turkists in Turkey and Iran, as well as on certain nationalistic, Pan-Turkist and Pan-Islamist issues in Azerbaijan".³

The new round of political repression came to an end with Stalin's death on 5th March 1953. That evening Beria became head of the combined Interior Ministry, which then included the *milititsiya* and state security forces. When assessing Beria's short (March-June 1953) period in power, many modern scholars agree that he played a critical role in initiating the post-Stalin reforms and providing the impetus for mass rehabilitations. One of the oldest senior

¹ A case investigating and accusing renowned Jewish doctors of trying to murder Soviet leaders.

² This period in the NSM's history is described in detail in Pavel Sudoplatov, *Spetsoperatsii. Lubyanka i Kreml. 1930-50 Gody* [Special operations: the Lubyanka and the Kremlin, 1930-1950], (Moscow: Olma-Press, 1997)

³ Ismayilov, 321-322

intelligence officers at that time was Pavel Sudoplatov, who was very close to Beria. He discusses Beria's revolutionary ideas in his memoirs: "Regardless of the motives for Beria's initiatives in April and June 1953, his proposals to abolish the labour camps, to release political prisoners and to normalise the relationship with Yugoslavia provided the foundation for the elimination of the cult of personality, which was later implemented by Khrushchev during the so-called 'thaw' period.¹

"After Stalin's death, we started to revise our main objectives abroad and at home. Beria took matters into his own hands. I was among those whom he instructed to prepare memos with detailed analysis of the mistakes made by the party organisations and security services in tackling the nationalist underground activities in Lithuania and Ukraine. Our reports described cases of unfounded deportations and the repression of various ethnic groups that had not engaged in any anti-Soviet activity. Beria thought it necessary to promote local people into leadership positions, and to appoint Russians as their deputies. He insisted on fostering local traditions, culture and languages. In particular, he was concerned with the education of a new generation of local intellectuals, who would find the ideals of socialism closer to their hearts. I remember Beria's proposal to introduce local medals and awards, which he believed would result in the emergence of a sense of national pride."²

Beria's revolutionary approaches and the immense power frightened his former colleagues. He was arrested in the evening of 26th June at the Presidium of the CPSU Central Committee. He was accused of "treasonous and anti-party activities" and he was executed after a closed trial. As British historian Geoffrey Hosking puts it, "in this way, the most powerful of Stalin's successors was brought down by Stalinist methods."³

Following Beria's arrest, storm clouds gathered over the leader of Azerbaijan, Mir Jafar Baghirov. He was invited to a closed session of the Presidium of the Central Committee on 2nd July and asked to testify at the upcoming Central Committee plenum about Beria's collaboration with the Musavat government counterintelligence during the period of the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic. One of the main accusations against Beria was the fact that in 1919, during the Russian Civil War, he had worked for the Musavat intelligence agency and had allegedly established secret contacts with the British Secret Service in Baku, which had helped him infiltrate the Bolsheviks. As many researchers point out, Beria openly spoke about this, and claimed that he had worked in Musavat counterintelligence on the Bolsheviks' instructions. In any case, everyone from Dzerzhinsky to Stalin knew about it.

¹ The "thaw" of the mid-1950s and early 1960s saw the end of political repressions and censorship and the release of millions of Soviet political prisoners from the labour camps.

² Sudoplatov, 55

³ Hosking, 303

Despite Baghirov's speech, which was full of repentance and recognition of his "mistakes", the fate of this once omnipotent Azerbaijani leader had been decided. Khrushchev, Suslov and Malenkov rudely interrupted Baghirov's speech, leaving no doubt that he would not be forgiven for his close relationship and longstanding friendship with Beria. On 12th and 13th July 1953 the 6th Joint Plenum of the Central Committee and the Baku Committee of the Azerbaijani Communist Party was hosted in Baku, during which, in accordance with orders from above, Baghirov's behaviour in relation to the Beria case was condemned as "unsuitable for a party member".

Baghirov was removed from his post as chairman of the Azerbaijani Council of Ministers and forced to retire from the Central Committee Bureau. One of Baghirov's main accusers was Emelyanov, his Interior Minister who had worked by his side for almost 15 years. Some Azerbaijani researchers have suggested that prior to Beria's arrest it was Emelyanov who had found Beria's Musavat files in the depths of the Interior Ministry's archives and sent them to Moscow, bypassing Baghirov. Emelyanov's betrayal of Baghirov to help Kremlin's leaders allegedly enabled him to escape execution. Instead, he was sentenced to 25 years' hard labour.

However, the famous prosecution of Baghirov, Emelyanov and four of their associates only took place some two years later. So they had a little more time to enjoy their freedom; Baghirov even worked at the Kuibyshev city oil directorate as deputy head for personnel matters. Moscow appointed its own candidate, Anatoly Guskov, head of the newly formed Azerbaijani KGB, to replace Emelyanov. This demonstrated that Beria's policy of replacing senior intelligence officials with local staff had not been overly popular in the Kremlin. Nonetheless, Moscow was unable to halt the process of the KGB's "localisation", which Baghirov had set off at the end of his career.

It was a time characterised by brutal and hypocritical power struggles, the downfall of many prominent leaders and the initial stages of a painful process of purging the security services. This was the time when Heydar Aliyev began his professional career, and he had to overcome many great obstacles on his way.

* * *

Heydar Aliyev was made head of counterintelligence at the end of 1953. Although he later stated that this appointment came as a surprise to him, it was in line with the requirements of the time: Khrushchev had stated that the main goal of the KGB's restructuring was to rid it of all employees who had been compromised in some way. Filipp Bobkov recalls: "The restructuring started to take place even before the 20th Congress. The KGB was established in March 1954 and was put under the oversight of the USSR Council of Ministers. Ivan Serov, the former deputy interior minister, was made KGB chairman.

Soon after the KGB was established in the summer of 1954, Khrushchev delivered an important speech at a meeting of senior KGB officials. The speech lasted two hours. In it Khrushchev shared his vision for the future of the organisation. He spoke emotionally and vividly. He stressed that the main objective was to strengthen the legitimacy of socialism and eradicate flawed methods of leadership. He fired security service officials who had broken the law, been involved in falsifying evidence or who had used illegal methods of investigation. It was quite a task to undertake this work.¹

Evgeny Pitovranov, the former head of the 2nd Directorate, shed some light on the young Heydar Aliyev's promotion in an interview with *Vlast* magazine: "[Nahum - Ed.] Eitingon said to me once, 'Look at this young officer Aliyev, he's been working very intelligently against the Iranians.' General Eitingon was a man worth listening to: he was deputy head of the KGB Assassinations and Sabotage Bureau for a long time and had been responsible for Trotsky's assassination in Mexico. Pitovranov got the chance to get a closer look at Heydar Aliyev soon enough. "The personnel department sent seven or eight people to my office to check whether they were eligible for promotion. Almost all of them were from the Muslim republics. Heydar Aliyev was one of them. I thought he came well-prepared and was interesting. We talked for about an hour. He wasn't short of intellect and confidence. I felt that he was a rather cunning man, and brazen in the good KGB sense of the word.

A call from the personnel department followed. I explained that Heydar Aliyev made a good impression on me. He was well-educated, well read, intelligent, nothing if not tenacious. He understood our trade very well and knew the operational environment in his country. I was happy to confirm his promotion to the head of counterintelligence in Azerbaijan.²

Following Beria's execution, the judicial division of the Interior Ministry and its special councils were liquidated in 1953. Over the course of their existence (1934-1954) 10,101 people were sentenced to death. From then on any sentencing became the prerogative of the courts. The number of people working for the Interior Ministry was reduced by 12 percent by firing those with dubious pasts. 1,342 former security personnel were put on trial and given various sentences. 2,370 further people received administrative reprimands.³

As part of the significant reconstruction of the Interior Ministry and the KGB, they both became investigatory. The Interior Ministry dealt with crime and the KGB worked on state security issues only. The internal prosecution service of the NSM and Interior Ministry was shut down. While

¹ Filipp Bobkov, *KGB i Vlast* [The KGB and power], (Moscow: MP Veteran, 2003), 143-144

² *Vlast*, No. 50 (2003), 43

³ Valyansky & Kalyuzhny, 247

during Stalin's time, prosecutors were basically subordinate to the NKVD, following the restructuring they now controlled the activities of the Interior Ministry and the KGB.⁴

Naturally, this "purge" affected the Azerbaijani KGB, and Heydar Aliyev was an active participant in it. Beginning in late 1953, the prosecutors embarked upon a large-scale campaign to rehabilitate people prosecuted under Stalin, working in close collaboration with the KGB officers involved in the review of the files related to the victims of political repressions. Thus Heydar Aliyev became aware of the great scale of the tragedy in 1937-38 that cost Azerbaijan tens and thousands of lives – long before the 20th Congress and Baghirov's trial. I was told at the Ministry of National Security Archives that in 1955 alone the Azerbaijani KGB investigated 5,800 current cases of repressed people, 5,000 of which were disregarded as "unreasonable", while their documents were destroyed. Most of these cases were falsified, exaggerated or opened on the basis of anonymous information.

Ibrahim Ismayilov was a deputy prosecutor at the time and worked on these special cases. He remembers the process in this way: "Our work felt like an endless conveyor belt of cases. First, the KGB checked each case, concluding that the evidence was insufficient for prosecution. The checking happened mainly in Heydar Aliyev's department. We in the Prosecutor's Office used the KGB's decision to appeal to the Supreme Court on the victims' behalf, withdrawing illegitimate convictions and rehabilitating the accused.

I only dealt with rehabilitations. Between 1954 and 1958, about 35,000 such cases crossed my desk. We worked on 15 to 20 cases a month. I calculated that about 50,000 famous people were arrested in Azerbaijan, including artists, writers, playwrights and actors. Almost everybody in the Azerbaijani Academy of Sciences had been prosecuted. In provinces almost all chairmen of collective farms, local authorities and executive committees, as well as district secretaries had been sentenced. In essence, everyone was prosecuted without exception. In Azerbaijan these prosecutions totalled about 100,000 people.

KGB officers played a huge role in the rehabilitation process. Khrushchev later unfairly dumped all the blame for the purges on the state security, forgetting that the Central Committee was the main body instigating the purges, and the KGB only carried out its orders. I remember that we then found cases against writers such as Huseyn Javid, Mikayil Mushfig, Ahmad Javad, Yusif Vezir Chamanzaminli and Seyid Huseyn. As a book lover, Heydar Aliyev made sure that their cases were examined first, so that they could be rehabilitated as soon as possible."

As before, there were also prisoners of war, many of whom were persecuted after the war. Many of them succumbed to Nazi propaganda and fought for Nazi Germany in the foreign legions and rebel armies.

⁴ Roy Medvedev, "N.S. Khrushchev", *Druzhba Narodov*, No. 7 (1989), 145-146

But there were also truly heroic people. In the book *Heydar Aliyev*, Viktor Andriyanov and Huseynbala Miralamov mention three Baku Cheka officers, including Heydar Aliyev, who unearthed sensational information about First Lieutenant Mehdi Huseynzadeh, who had courageously fought with the Yugoslav partisans. "Mikhailo", as his comrades used to call him, took part in many daring operations, and the Nazis offered a reward of 300,000 marks for his head. Mehdi was eventually killed in battle and was buried near the village of Cepovan in Slovenia. Several years and a lot of convincing later the Azerbaijani and central authorities agreed to eternalise his memory. "The Azerbaijani KGB sent their proof of Huseynzadeh's heroic achievements to the Central Committee of Azerbaijan. The Central Committee sent these documents to Moscow. As a result, Mehdi Hanifa oglu Huseynzadeh was posthumously awarded the title Hero of the Soviet Union by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet on 11th April 1957. For his comrades, relatives, and friends, as well as for all Azerbaijan it was a day of celebration, which took place thanks to the KGB officers Mammadov, Aliyev and Bantserov – in this order the Cheka officers are listed in the memo on Huseynzadeh's heroic deeds."¹

As he acquainted himself with these political cases, Heydar Aliyev started to notice repeating names of NKVD officers who had been linked to the torture of defendants and the fabrication of cases. Many of them, however, continued to work in the security services and in his department. Much later he spoke to fellow KGB officers about this difficult period in his life: "While heading the work to identify and get rid of those who betrayed Azerbaijan in the 1930s, and to replace them with new staff, I encountered many difficulties. It was very troublesome, so troublesome, in fact, that they levelled all sorts of accusations against me."²

Heydar Aliyev managed to fire and even arrest several officers working in his own department. The zeal of the young head of the 2nd Directorate struck a warning note among the KGB's leadership. Heydar Aliyev recalled a rather curious affair in this regard. In early 1954, he went to see Deputy Minister Aghasalim Atakishiyev. General Atakishiyev had worked extensively with Baghirov, but kept his position for some time after Baghirov's removal from office (although he would later lose it and stand trial with the former Azerbaijani leader). Heydar Aliyev provided Atakishiyev with various documents on numerous KGB officers, and suggested that they should be arrested as well as removed from the security services. Atakishiyev was frightened by these allegations and attempted to discourage his subordinate from carrying out this undertaking. He kept repeating, "You are still young, you don't need this, leave these people alone, this will be resolved without your involvement." But Heydar

Aliyev stood his ground; to him the evidence of their guilt and their misconduct was too obvious. "I did this once, twice, three times, but shortly thereafter, in 1955, I became a victim of my own decisive actions."¹

Atakishiyev and other high-ranking officials at the KGB realised that the campaign would inevitably affect them, as they were directly involved in carrying out the repressive policies of 1937-1938. They decided to rein in the overly independent head of the 2nd Directorate. They used a disgraceful, yet common method of discrediting their own staff by setting him up and filing a fake complaint.

The case was unwound skilfully from within, and eventually reached the KGB leadership in Azerbaijan and Moscow. Heydar Aliyev was threatened with dismissal from the service. At the last moment, however, he was given a warning from the party and was demoted to the rank of senior criminal investigator. Some KGB officers believed that Heydar Aliyev was saved thanks to Imam Mustafayev, then first secretary of the Azerbaijani Communist Party and very friendly with Heydar's scientist brother, Hasan.

His younger brother Jalal has a different theory, however: "When Heydar became first secretary, he laid hands on a memo that had been sent to the CPA Central Committee regarding this matter. It was in Imam Mustafayev's handwriting and said, 'Fire him!'. So, it was Moscow officials rather than Mustafayev who saved him – that's what my brother told me himself." When I later talked to high-ranking KGB officers, I became convinced that this version of events was not unfounded. His Moscow-based supervisors probably decided that they could not lose such a valuable officer.

Heydar Aliyev was sent to work at the KGB Archive accounts department as a senior criminal investigator in mid-1955. He did not stay there for long, however. Just six months later he returned to counterintelligence work as the first deputy head and later the head of one of the divisions in the 2nd Department. By 1958, at the age of 35, Aliyev was in charge of the entire Azerbaijani counterintelligence service.

Lieutenant General Ziya Yusifzadeh explains Heydar Aliyev's rapid rehabilitation in the following way: "His actions were ahead of his time. He raised the issue of discharging discredited KGB staff in 1953 and 1954, but it was not until 1956 that it became a new directive, after Baghirov's trial. Most importantly, however, the 2nd Department was much more successful in its counterespionage activities when Heydar Aliyev was in charge. The secret service only hired talented people with a broad range of interests who were devoted to the people and the party, and subjected them to a two or three year period of probation. However, Heydar Aliyev's organisational and analytical qualities set him apart from the rest of the staff. For this reason he was promoted again rather quickly." During a

¹ Andriyanov & Miralamov, 80-81

² Vernošt Narodu, Rodine, Gosudarstvu, [Loyalty to people, motherland and state] 22

conversation with me Filipp Bobkov commented that Heydar Aliyev's promotion to head of the 2nd Department "shows that he was a decent person with excellent professional skills."

Heydar Aliyev bounced back from the obstacles that life put in his way. In 1954 and 1955 an attempt was made to erase nearly a decade of his work for the security services, which caused him to start again practically afresh. His detractors were certainly confident that they could put an end to his career, and none of them could have imagined that it would only take a few years for him to rise to the highest levels of the professional hierarchy, first in the KGB, and then in the party. It is said that a person's fate is programmed in their name like in a computer chip. The name Heydar Aliyev translates as "horseman galloping ahead", and he was indeed an extremely successful rider. He was able to stay in the saddle and win the race, overcoming history's harshest vicissitudes.

DESTALINISATION

It was not until Nikita Khrushchev's "secret" report was presented at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party that people began to fully understand the scale of the Stalinist excesses. Delivered on 25th February 1956 at a closed session of the congress, the report shed light on Stalin's cult of personality. The report was groundbreaking; it inspired a sea change in the way people thought and felt, and shook the very foundations of the Soviet totalitarian regime, sparking a crisis in the international communist movement.

As Khrushchev later recalled: "The delegates listened with bated breath. It was so quiet in the room that you could hear a pin drop. It is difficult to imagine how shocked they were to learn about the atrocities instigated against some of their fellow party members."¹

Local party committee members across the Soviet republics read the text of the speech, which came with the stamp "not for publication", with similar astonishment. All the KGB veterans I interviewed recall the shock they experienced that day. After all, many had viewed Stalin as an infallible deity. Heydar Aliyev said once in an interview: "Stalin's propaganda worked in such a way that even to the victims of purges, he was almost a god. People believed that without Stalin there was no future – not for the country, not for themselves. Stalin's death shocked everyone, including Zarifa's² family and me. We wondered what would happen to the country."³ According to Ziya Yusifzadeh, people were "stunned, shocked and disheartened: the KGB staff felt especially uncomfortable, since it turned out they, while being a state security service, in fact acted illegally."

There were also some who did not believe the revelations, predicting that Khrushchev would not last long in power. There were mutterings about the "up-start" who had only sought to unmask Stalin because of his own ambitions. In fact, as irony would have it, Khrushchev, who was now the main driving force behind exposing Stalinist repressions, was someone who had personally sanctioned mass executions and denounced so-called "enemies of the people" most fiercely at the party meetings.

Ibrahim Ismayilov recalls: "We were shocked and perplexed at first. And then we started realising what was going on. I was in Moscow when the 20th Party Congress took place; we were gathered for the swearing in of prosecutors from around the country. At the General Prosecutor's Office of the USSR we were shown the records of the party congress. We were told that it would require a lot of work to shake all that dirt off the KGB. Heydar and I accepted this quite enthusiastically, without any

¹ Nikita Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Vspominaet* [Khrushchev remembers], (Moscow: 1971), 334

² Zarifa Aliyeva, Heydar Aliyev's wife.

³ From Vagif Mustafayev's film *Istoriya Odnoy Lybvi* [A certain love story].

internal protest. After all there wasn't a family in Azerbaijan untouched by the Stalinist repressions, and we ached for those people."

At around the same time Azerbaijan experienced another upheaval. The open trial of the former Azerbaijani Party leader Mir Jafar Baghirov began in Baku. His closest associates sat next to him in the dock: individuals such as the heads of the law enforcement agencies (Atakishiyev, Emelyanov), as well as their deputies (Borschhev, Grigoryan, Markaryan). The case of "the bloodiest commissar", Yuvelian Sumbatov-Topuridze, was dismissed due to illness. The historian Eldar Ismayilov aptly remarked: "Moscow skilfully internationalised the hearing by putting two Azerbaijanis, two Russians and two Armenians on trial, thereby dividing the burden of responsibility for the mass repressions in Azerbaijan between Moscow (Emelyanov and Borschhev), Azerbaijan (Baghirov and Atakishiyev) and Armenia (Markaryan and Grigoryan). This gave the trial a certain symbolic value."¹

In addition to his involvement in the mass repressions, Baghirov was accused of concealing elements from his past, including his collaboration with the district commissar of the Provisional Government, Ali bey Ziziksky, and his disgraceful involvement in illegal activities connected with a thuggish member of the Dashnaksutyun, Amazasp. One of the most severe accusations against Baghirov was that he knew about Beria's role in the Musavat counterintelligence, concealed these facts, and even removed the documents proving it from the national archives to pass them on to Beria, thereby securing his support in promotions throughout his career.

The indictment referenced the fact that Baghirov had falsified thousands of cases during the political repressions and noted that he was personally involved in the torture and beating of prisoners under investigation. Among the individuals accused of counterrevolutionary activity by Baghirov and later executed were some Central Committee secretaries, including Ruhulla Akhundov, Aliheydar Garayev, Gazanfar Musabeyov (chairman of the Council of People's Commissars) and his deputy, Mirza Davud Huseynov, former leaders and members of the Azerbaijani government such as Sultan Majid Efendiyyev, Huseyn Rahmanov, Hamid Sultanov, Heydar Vazirov, Dadash Bunyadzadeh and many others. Other evidence, such as Baghirov saving former Musavat members, members of landowners' and beys' families and other "anti-Soviets" from persecution, came to light during the trial.

After Azerbaijan gained independence and the Musavat government of Azerbaijani Democratic Republic government was politically rehabilitated, however, many accusations against Baghirov lost their relevance, and indeed, even showed him in a positive light. Nonetheless, the extent of his responsibility

for the terrible purges in 1937 was undoubtedly significant. *The Trial of Mir Jafar Baghirov*, published in 1993, quotes Baghirov during the investigation and the trial: "My primary mistake was that I turned a blind eye to Beria's activities and those of his long-term secret service colleagues such as Sumbatov, Borschhev, Grigorian, Markarian, who defended his hostile position, and that I didn't spot their true motivation. I entrusted the NKVD to them. Thus, my guilt before the Azerbaijani People is so great that it is not enough to just execute me by firing squad. I should be hanged, quartered and cut into pieces."²

Still, Baghirov was not the one who instigated this bloody bacchanalia. He was its obedient executor and even its victim, if you will. Similar events took place everywhere. They were carried out by Khrushchev in Ukraine, by Arutinov in Armenia, by Kaganovich, Mikoyan and Voroshilov in Russia. No wonder they all tried – according to Khrushchev's memoirs – to dissuade him from his "crazy" idea, as they realised that they would have to bear all the heavy responsibility for Stalin's crimes. Discussing the draft of Khrushchev's speech at the Presidium, his opponents reminded him that at the time they had all unconditionally supported the Central Committee's decision to physically repress the "openly, still armed enemies of the people", and that those in the Politburo obediently voted in favour of the mass executions, and that together with Yezhov and Beria they had all partaken in those 'cleanups'. 'What are you going to say about yourself, Nikita? We were all in it, after all ...'³

During the trial, Prosecutor General Rudenko presented a document to be identified by Baghirov. It was signed by Stalin and contained a list of people to be executed. Ibrahim Ismayilov saw these "kill lists", as he was overseeing rehabilitation issues in the republic's prosecutor's office. This is how he recalls it:

"When we started looking into old cases, and I received from Moscow the Politburo-approved lists of people who had been subject to arrest or elimination, I realised that it was a real human meat-grinder. Three kill lists were used to make arrests under Moscow's orders. When Baghirov said during his trial that the purges were not his fault, as he was just following orders, he was referring to these lists. They were compiled locally in Azerbaijan, but by officials from Moscow rather than local KGB officers. They collected materials to compile these lists and sent them to Moscow for approval. Based on what Moscow then said, people were arrested and executed."

The first list contained only the names of various senior officials. The second list had the names of heads of directorates and departments, i.e. mid-level executives. On the third list, there were people who allegedly belonged to anti-Soviet terrorist organisations. Names here varied from

¹ Sud nad Mir Dzbafar Bagirovym, [Mir Jafar Baghirov's trial], (Baku: Yazichi, 1993), 115

² Dmitri Volkogonov, Sem Vozbdey [Seven leaders], (Moscow: Novosti, 1995), vol. 1, 372-375

¹ Ismayilov, 113

ordinary farmers to distinguished writers. For example, in the Alibayramli and Shamakhi regions, entire villages were prosecuted based on allegations that they were preparing to overthrow Soviet power.¹

Heydar Aliyev managed the security of Baghirov's trial at the Dzerzhinsky Club, and spent a lot of his time there. There is no doubt that this experience made a strong impression on him. Later, in a speech at the Ministry of National Security, he said that he could still remember those court sessions.

What was the young state security officer's view of the person who had Azerbaijan under his monocratic rule for 20 years? Heydar Aliyev almost never touched upon this subject in his many public appearances and interviews. He only briefly mentioned this in 1997, when he was listing the names of former heads of Azerbaijani state security services: "Mir Jafar Baghirov headed the organisation for a while from 1920, but you are well aware of the facts of his biography and the crimes he committed against the Azerbaijani people."²

And yet it seems that the young Heydar Aliyev had mixed feelings about Baghirov. On the one hand, he grew up during the Stalinist era. He lived and worked with boundless faith in the values that Stalin and Baghirov proclaimed. Nobody could shake that off overnight. On the other hand, knowing about the cruel repressions and lawlessness, and about the party's sincere intention to restore order within its security services, allowed him to overcome the "Stalinism syndrome" without inner struggle. Furthermore, Stalin's death and Baghirov's arrest gave him the opportunity to marry, Zarifa khanim, whom he had loved greatly his entire life.

Based on his professional choices and his views, Heydar Aliyev was very much a product of Khrushchev's thaw. "It was quite hard to transition from the Stalinist regime first to the Khrushchev era and later to the principles of Brezhnev's rule," notes Ibrahim Ismayilov. "It was important to adapt your professional approach under each government, and Heydar Aliyev managed to do so; he was able to face new challenges."

* * *

In 1957, Heydar Aliyev graduated with a degree in history from Kirov Azerbaijan State University. Five years into work and already a family man, he attended lectures and seminars, and passed exams to fill an educational gap on his CV. Many public sector workers like Heydar Aliyev could not get their university degrees due to the outbreak of World War II. Therefore, many employees of party, Soviet organisations and law enforcement rushed to gain distance-learning degrees so as to enable further promotion. One year after his graduation, Heydar Aliyev would gain more practical experience as the head of the 2nd Department of the Azerbaijani KGB.

¹ *Vernost Narodu, Rodine, Gosudarstvu*, 23

HEAD OF COUNTERINTELLIGENCE (1958 - 1964)

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, during Khrushchev's thaw, all aspects of the USSR's political, cultural and economical life underwent turbulent reforms. The Iron Curtain became somewhat thinner, and many writers, artists and scientists were allowed to travel abroad. Western theatres and concert bands frequented the Soviet Union. Literature began to play a bigger role in society. Magazines such as *Yunost*, *Moskva*, *Nash Sovremennik* and others sprung in Moscow, while poets such as Yevrushenko, Rozhdestvensky, Voznesensky, Akhmadulina and Okudzhava captivated the minds of the Soviet youth.

Meanwhile, in Azerbaijan people were becoming more attuned to their national consciousness and taking a renewed interest in their national history, language and folklore. Mirza Ibrahimov, a famous writer and the chairman of the Presidium of the Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet, held an open media debate about making Azerbaijani an official language. The result was of historic proportions: in 1956, the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan adopted a constitutional amendment (to the constitution of 1937) making Azerbaijani the official language.¹

Readers gradually saw the return of their favourite authors such as Huseyn Javid, Mikayil Mushfig and Yusif Vazir Chamanzaminli. Courageous words from poems like *Gulistan* by Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh and *Dni Ispytaniy* by Rasul Rza could be heard everywhere. They voiced clear, angry accusations against Tsarist Russia and the Iranian monarchy, the powers that had divided a once united Azerbaijan. Their words became rallying cries for the poets of the 1960s, and their poems were distributed illegally in print format or learnt by heart.

A group of Azerbaijani historians released a book entitled *The History of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan*, in which they gave a fair description of Nariman Narimanov's great contribution to Azerbaijani culture for the first time in many decades, although on Khrushchev's orders *Kommunist* magazine later criticised the book for its "nationalistic narrow-mindedness" and "idealisation of the past". At the same time an almanac called *Azerbaijan injeseneti* (later *Gobustan*) began to be published, as well as the evening newspaper *Baku* in Azerbaijani and Russian, and the children's magazine *Goyarchin*. In 1956, the first "blue screens" came into Baku households as the Baku Television Studio began broadcasting.²

Soviet foreign policy changed track, too. In particular, Khrushchev improved the Soviet Union's relationship with the West. Khrushchev's first trip to the USA in September 1959 "was not just a memorable event, it was a historic event, since it was the first time that a leader of the Soviet

¹ Ismayil, vol. 7, 153

² Ibid., 154-155

Union and the Communist Party had visited the USA. This resulted in a general *détente* in relations between the USSR and the West.¹ In the early 1960s, on Khrushchev's orders, the Navy's large and powerful battleships were dismantled, and large aircraft were reduced in numbers or completely destroyed. These capabilities were replaced with strategic ballistic missiles. The development of new types of small arms was also brought to a halt, resulting in the closure of several defence research institutes.

Eventually, in early 1960s, a new law, "Regarding the Significant Reduction in the Size of the USSR's Armed Forces" was adopted at a special session of the Supreme Soviet. This had a great impact on the security services as well. Heydar Aliyev later recalled: "The Soviet Army made about 1.2 million people redundant. State security bodies went through restructuring: five units were merged into one. I was heading one of them at the time and was promoted to the head of the new combined unit."² According to Ziya Yusifzadeh, the department became a kind of committee within a committee after the restructuring, with more than a hundred people within a complex structure. It was a directorate with departments responsible for industry, transport, ideology, and so on. From then on, the head of this organisation had to oversee various tasks, from identifying spies and saboteurs to distributing apartments and vacation vouchers.

* * *

The changes also affected the KGB. The Komsomol first secretary, 38-year-old Aleksandr Shelepin, replaced Ivan Serov as KGB chairman in 1958. Serov left a long trail of illegal activities, including the repressions. The new chairman began a thorough purge of the KGB. "Many workers were sent into retirement, while others were moved to the personnel departments of various other institutions, or appointed as heads of various paramilitary security units at small-scale maintenance organisations. New KGB employees were mainly hired from relatively young Komsomol staff."³

After three years, Vladimir Semichastry replaced Shelepin – nicknamed "Iron Alex" – and continued his work. He praised the policy introduced by Shelepin and proudly added that he was continuing what Shelepin had started: "We selected people for the KGB from the party, and we hired many talented staff. The personnel of the KGB changed almost entirely; we barely had anyone left from the old days."⁴

There was still some hostility towards new staff, however, on the grounds that they lacked professional experience. Some former KGB officers claim

¹ Medvedev, 180

² *Vernost' Narodu, Rodine, Gosudarstvu*, 22

³ Medvedev, 172

⁴ Karaulov, 27

that this period saw a lot of casual appointments from the Komsomol and other party authorities, worsening their overall performance. Fedor Kopylov, who replaced a very experienced KGB officer, Anatoly Guskov, as the head of the Azerbaijani KGB was a striking example of unprofessionalism. There were a number of anecdotes regarding the new chairman, and he also caused a serious conflict amongst members of the Azerbaijani KGB towards the end of the 1950s.

From a story by former Azerbaijani KGB Chairman Ziya Yusifzadeh:

"Prior to his promotion, Kopylov was known for being the incredibly honest secretary of the Kursk Regional Committee. But he knew nothing about KGB work. He also wasn't aware of what was going on in Azerbaijan at the time, so this often resulted in ridiculous situations. In 1958, for example, the son of a collective farm chairman was murdered. The alleged murderer was captured and put in our custody. He told his cellmate that he indeed had a poor relationship with the victim, however, 'Hazrat Abbas knows that I didn't kill him'. Upon hearing this, Kopylov requested that Hazrat Abbas be brought in for questioning. Shikh Ismayilov, the head of the 4th Department, then explained to him that Hazrat Abbas was a saint, a prophet. We didn't know whether to laugh or cry."

Towards the end of 1958, the heads of several departments at the Azerbaijani KGB asked Imam Mustafayev to replace Kopylov. They made an uproar about it, and General Gomoзов, the deputy head of the Soviet KGB, arrived from Moscow to investigate where the complaints had come from. Shelepin sent him to sort everything out *in situ*.

The investigators from Moscow reported their findings to Mustafayev: they agreed that Kopylov was not an expert in intelligence work. Mustafayev nonetheless allowed him to keep his job, as he found him 'satisfactory'. A party conference was held in the Azerbaijani KGB at the end of that same year, and I went along as a delegate. For the first time in the history of the security services, a KGB chairman was blackballed. Kopylov was not elected to the KGB's Party Committee. The Central Committee was forced to replace him a few months later."

Colonel Akram Selimzadeh, formerly of the KGB, said that prior to Kopylov's dismissal in 1959, there was another meeting attended by the newly elected first secretary of the Azerbaijani Communist Party, Veli Akhundov, in which they discussed Kopylov's contribution to the unhealthy state of the KGB. Selimzadeh continues: "There were two rival groups in the KGB. Colonel Kopylov was in one of them. It mainly consisted of officials who were responsible for the unlawful arrests and executions of 1937-1938. This caused a lot of unrest; making it hard to just get on with our work."

Heydar Aliyevich didn't belong to either of the groups, so when he requested permission to express his opinion, it was unexpected. He proceeded to say: 'I respect all my colleagues. People from the two hostile

groups approached me, but I refused their offers to join their circles. I believe the time has come to stop this quarrel, it won't lead to any good; it's time to simply do our jobs. I appeal to all honest communists in the audience and ask them to support what I have to say. We must solve the question of strengthening the KGB's management.' So in fact he, a young officer, expressed his lack of trust in Kopylov and essentially brought up the question of whether Kopylov should be replaced. A round of applause followed. Everyone supported Heydar Aliyev. Kopylov was summoned to Moscow shortly afterwards and fired.¹

A new chairman of the Azerbaijani KGB was appointed. The post was given to Aleksandr Kardashev who had previously been the deputy chairman of the KGB in Ukraine. Ziya Yusifzadeh describes him in the following way: "He was an extremely competent security officer, always full of energy. He loved Azerbaijan and cared about the local staff. You couldn't call him reckless. We worked very well together. Four years later he was promoted to deputy director of the 2nd Directorate of the USSR KGB."

* * *

Despite the difficulties of the restructuring process, the security services rapidly liberalised. Filipp Bobkov recalls: "I don't know how deliberate it all was, but it left no doubt that the KGB was adhering to the law and was more mindful of human rights. Within the Soviet Union, counterintelligence was limited mainly to searching for foreign spies and supervising foreigners in the country. As far as keeping tabs on Soviet citizens was concerned, preventative, educational measures were used, above all, to stop citizens from committing illegal acts."¹

One of Aleksandr Shelepin's most significant achievements was the publication of Order No. 00420. It set out the organisation's new objective: the application of preventive rather than punitive measures against certain citizens. Former KGB officers agree that this completely changed the nature of the work carried out by the KGB.

Heydar Aliyev, now a colonel, was a keen supporter of these new ideas and actively applied the new measures. Senior officials at the KGB were familiar with his great eloquence and often entrusted him with giving presentations at regional meetings explaining new KGB policies down the hierarchy.

"A lot of people were made redundant in March 1960," Bakhtiyar Suleymanly, who was present at one such meeting, told me. "The Zangilan and Jabrayil departments were being attached to the Fuzuli office. Heydar Aliyev came to give a presentation. Local employees gathered to hear his speech. He explained Shelepin's order to us point by point, emphasising that we should behave carefully with people and treat them humanely. We were told that if 'Person X',

¹ Bobkov, 252

for example, had criticised Soviet regime, made nationalist statements or praised life abroad, we had to carefully investigate his or her case before launching a prosecution. Heydar Aliyev urged us to follow the law and to avoid the tragic mistakes of 1937."

Heydar Aliyev travelled around the country in the early 1960s, giving lectures to various different audiences. Unlike many other KGB officers, he loved leaving his desk to meet real people. Very soon the popularity of this handsome grey-eyed lieutenant colonel exceeded the limits of the KGB. He became well known amongst senior party and government officials, as well as in the various economic agencies dotted around Azerbaijan. Lecture halls were always packed to hear him speak.

Around this time Heydar Aliyev built a good relationship with Azerbaijani writers. This was an unusual step, given the tension between the KGB and creative intellectuals. Lieutenant Colonel Mammadali Sarajev recalls: "In the late 1950s and early 1960s I headed a unit supervising the creative intelligentsia. Relations between the Writers' Union and the KGB were not particularly friendly. The head of the Writers' Union, Mehdi Huseyn, once had a clash with a KGB officer, who asked him for tickets to some event on behalf of the KGB chairman. He replied saying that it wasn't 1937 anymore, and they could decide for themselves how to allocate tickets among the KGB: he was showing that he wouldn't be ordered around. This incident brought to a halt almost all interaction between the KGB and the Writers' Union for three years. On one occasion, however, Heydar Aliyev instructed me to make contact and establish a relationship with the senior officials at the Writers' Union. Frankly, it was not an easy task. It took two months of perseverance to restore our relationship with the writers. For this, I used my old personal contacts with important intellectuals, and gave regular reports to the head of the unit.

Then Aliyev surprised me, 'Talk to Mehdi muallim, I'd like to give a lecture to his writers.' I stammered. He sensed that I wanted to say something and asked, 'Well, why not?' I replied that the lecture would have to be in Azerbaijani. He laughed and reassured me that this wouldn't be a problem.

"I talked to Mehdi Huseyn; he seemed interested in Heydar Aliyev's idea and called for a big meeting. His office was packed when we arrived; many had to stand. Heydar Aliyev started his presentation in Azerbaijani, but explained that due to the particularities of the issues under discussion he had to switch to Russian. For two hours the capricious audience of intellectuals was captivated. They treated him with respect as we left, and a literary newspaper published a report on the meeting a few days later. Hence Heydar Aliyev became known in literary circles."

The KGB soon had to apply the same principle of prevention towards protesters against Khrushchev's unpredictable policies, which had led the USSR towards a food crisis. So as to fulfil his own slogan "catch up and overtake the United States in the production of meat, butter and milk per capita,"

Khrushchev sharply reduced the number of privately owned livestock farms and increased the number of publicly-owned ones. Indeed, people could no longer own cattle. "This absurd ban had serious consequences. There were not enough meat or dairy products and the public grew frustrated. In attempt to resolve this, the CPSU Central Committee and the USSR Council of Ministers adopted a resolution on 31st May 1962, which increased meat and butter prices."¹ Meat prices rose by 30 percent and butter prices went up 25 percent; there was a shortage of these products.

Furthermore, the American corn production levels impressed Khrushchev. He decided to change the sowing mix by introducing corn that provided both grain and silage. This led to a disaster. At the height of the corn campaign, in 1962, at least 9 million acres (37 million hectares) had been planted with corn, but it could only ripen on 1.7 million acres (7 million hectares) of those. This coincided with a sharp drop in the amount of hay, and normal crop rotation was disrupted. Many fields were simply abandoned. In 1963, due to drought and the devastation wrought by the corn campaign, just 107 million tonnes of grain were harvested in total.²

Hence, bread joined meat and milk on the list of scarce foods. Anyone who lived through this time will never forget the long overnight queues outside bakeries in Baku and other cities. I still remember my mother's haggard and ashen face when she brought back a loaf of rye bread, exhausted from many hours standing in line. I also remember the childish joy I shared with my brothers when our elder sister, who was a graduate student in Moscow, brought a couple of baguettes home for New Year in 1963.

The crisis did not help Khrushchev's popularity. It was not until three decades later that the Soviet people learned about the Novocherkassk massacre³ in which riots and workers' demonstrations were bloodily put down. Protests spread across the country and often manifested themselves in unusual forms. Jabbar Beylarov told me of one such incident that took place at the Japaridzeh Baku factory:

"Heydar Aliyev summoned me and asked if I knew of an incident that had taken place in the area I was responsible for. I didn't. He wondered why I wasn't aware of it, but I was pretty new then; it was only my first week on the job and I hadn't even visited that factory. He then said, 'Somebody at the Japaridzeh factory destroyed Khrushchev's portrait: they poured paint over it and gouged his eyes out. Find out who did it. You have one week.' I spent the whole week at the factory, questioning everybody and trying to work out what happened. I reported to

¹ Volkogonov, 386-387

² Hosking, 346-347

³ There was a strike at a locomotive factory in Novocherkassk. The strike eventually culminated in riots on 1st and 2nd June 1962, which the Soviet Army brutally put down, reportedly killing 26 protesters and wounding 87 more.

Heydar Aliyev daily. On the eighth day I finally found the offender – an Armenian, Mangasarov, a machine operator.

I told Heydar Aliyev that the offender could not justify his behaviour, as he was drunk when he committed the crime. Back in those years we aimed to prevent such crimes, so we decided to talk to him, and held a discussion group to share ideas on possible courses of action. We took his youth and family situation into consideration and decided to demote him, take away his bonus and give him a formal warning. At the time, Khrushchev's rating was declining rapidly; there had begun to be shortages of bread and other products. So the general public were showing their discontent."

An even more formidable demonstration of protest against the government's internal policy took place in Sumgayit, reverberating back to Moscow. While discussing social unrest of the mid-1960s with me, Filipp Bobkov explained the cause of those riots: "The city was being beautifully rebuilt at the time, but the slums on the outskirts of Sumgayit had been neglected, and the locals protested. Heydar Aliyev was very interested in how the government responded to the needs of the general public and spent a lot of time on this issue later as the head of state. He did a lot during the riots in the 1960s in Sumgayit to stop them from spreading."

Ramiz Mammadzadeh, second secretary of the Sumgayit Party Committee, continues the story: "In 1963, during a parade on 7th November, demonstrators suddenly stopped in front of the stage. We got worried, especially me, because I was in charge of ideology. I left the stage and went to find out what had happened. A group of young workers from 1st Sumgayit Building Trust had torn down Khrushchev's portrait from the Palace of Chemists, and put up Stalin's picture. I went back to the first secretary, Nadir Balakishiyev, and suggested that we end the parade, which was almost finished anyway. He agreed, and we then went off the stage to talk to people. I said, 'Fine, you love Stalin, but why would you tear down Khrushchev's portrait?' Suddenly we saw some hooligans beating up the city's commissar, Colonel Krol. Somebody had hit him with a woman's shoe and he fell to the ground. The deputy head of the city *militsiya* was also attacked. The head of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda, Inglab Abbasov, came just in time to save the first secretary from being stabbed. We managed to calm people down somewhat by talking to them. Some of the city elders joined us, mostly members of the city committee. We then held a meeting at the city committee. We called Veli Akhundov and informed him of the incident, and then called Chairman of the Azerbaijani KGB Semyon Tsvigun. They said they would arrive soon to help."

We thought that we managed to resolve the situation, but then there had been another attack on a *militsiya* station in the old town. Balakishiyev suggested that we go there and sort it out, but I said, 'Nadir Agayevich, you should stay here, as we don't know what is going on. There could be

an organisation behind this, and they might seize the city committee if we all leave.' He stayed, and we went to the *militsiya* station.

There was already a crowd of five or six thousand people. We were told that hooligans had broken into the *militsiya* station, beaten up the officer on duty, burned *militsiya* motorcycles and overturned their cars. The crowd outside had gathered to watch. We went out to calm them, then I suggested we check on the detainees in the cells to see if the hooligans had let them out. Besides, we had to see if the weapons stored at the station were still intact. Thankfully, all detainees were still in their cells, and no weapons were missing. We made our way back to the city committee. Semyon Tsvigun and Heydar Aliyev arrived at 4 p.m., and we informed them of our actions.

It turned out that the riots were caused by the lack of bread, meat and potatoes in the shops of this workers' city. For the same reasons, people had raided the bread factory in the village of Razin; the first secretary of the regional party committee was severely beaten while he tried to stop the robbery. He suffered heart failure following the raid and died shortly afterwards. I remember guarding our bread factory the entire week after that.

It was a spontaneous protest, but the ringleaders were hooligans. To the KGB's credit, it did not start a witch hunt – searching for guilty parties in the crowd, undertaking mass arrests and so on. Heydar Aliyevich led an unbiased investigation, which resulted in the ringleaders' arrests. I think they only got three years in prison. We discussed the situation at the Bureau of the Central Committee with representatives from Moscow and decided to issue a formal warning to the local party leadership to improve the food supply in Sumgayit.¹

At the time such events were not publicly reported, leaving the public in the dark. You had to listen to foreign radio broadcasters to hear that kind of news. My father used to stay up late sitting in front of our massive wooden radio trying to tune into "enemy" radio programmes, muffled by the Soviet jamming devices. There was other tragic news, like the Chelyabinsk tragedy, the wreck of the *Novorossiysk* battleship in Sevastopol, which claimed the lives of 603 seamen, the Baikonur catastrophe, and others.¹ These events were testing the Soviet system, gradually destroying it from within.

* * *

The duties of the counterintelligence department run by Heydar Aliyev were not limited to catching "anti-Soviets": they looked for Western spies and informants, managed foreigners entering and exiting the country, and prevented spying and sabotage. Operation Douglas, in late 1958, was one of their key counterintelligence successes: an American Douglas S-16 aircraft was shot down over Azerbaijani airspace.

¹ Volkogonov, 389-390

The Russian historian Roy Medvedev writes that American spy planes had started photographing Soviet territory under Stalin. "They even flew over Moscow and Leningrad – sometimes during formal Soviet holidays and parades. Soviet media never reported such humiliating incidents, because the government simply lacked the funds to prevent them."¹ It was only in 1960 that the Air Defence Forces acquired more accurate and, more importantly, high-flying anti-aircraft missiles. The first American plane was shot down over the Urals on 1st May 1960, causing an international scandal and serious issues with the USA.

Two years previously though, an American aircraft was shot down over Azerbaijan. Heydar Aliyev's team set out to look for its crew. Ziya Yusifzadeh speaks about this operation in Vagif Mustafayev's film *The Professional*: "The American Douglas S-16 was spotted about 170 kilometres into Azerbaijan's territory. In agreement with the Ministry of Defence, two MIG-17s were sent to intercept the intruder and fired warning shots to force the plane to land. These were ignored, so the MIG-17s fired direct shots, hitting the plane's wing. The plane started to descend. Villagers from Gindarh, in Agjabedi, reported seeing five or six people bailing out with parachutes. Using the special forces, the air defence and locals, Heydar Aliyev's operative group managed to arrange a search party of around 500 people in just a few hours. They scoured the area looking for the American crew. They arrested nine Americans, who they questioned at the KGB headquarters in Baku. Heydar Aliyev personally led the interrogations. I interpreted during these interrogations and was amazed by his skills. He managed to get the locations of American airfields in Southeast Asia, Turkey, Pakistan and Europe out of them without them even noticing."

Khagani Baghirov, head of the archives at the Ministry of National Security, told me that the American pilots were allegedly later taken to Iran, where they were handed over to the American Embassy. A medical examination proved that they showed no signs of torture or any other unlawful physical or psychological pressure. But a transcript of the *Voice of America* programme from 5th December 1982² reads: "In addition to the U-2, 22 years ago, Soviet forces shot down another US spy-plane in the Caucasus. Eight or nine crewmembers were taken in by the Soviet military. The US authorities repeatedly requested to have their pilots returned, but Moscow ignored their appeals. *Their fate remains unknown until this day* [my emphasis]." No wonder Heydar Aliyev kept this information in his archive.

This indicates that either the crew really was never sent to America, or that they preferred to remain in a third country. Nevertheless, Operation Douglas was considered highly successful and its main participants were rewarded.

¹ Medvedev, 181

² The transcript was found in Heydar Aliyev's personal archive of transcripts of foreign radio programmes broadcast between 1969 and 1984.

The film *The Professional* describes another successful operation conducted under supervision of the head of Azerbaijani counterintelligence, in which he personally recruited a Western military spy nicknamed Akhito. Ziya Yusifzadeh explains: "Moscow informed us that Akhito frequented Leningrad, Kiev, Moscow and Tbilisi, gathering intelligence. When he arrived to Baku, we mounted round-the-clock surveillance on him. Heydar Aliyev ordered to catch him red-handed, while he was photographing sensitive sites. He was staying at the old Intourist Hotel and planning to access our naval dockyards. He set off for the Caspian Fleet dockyards via the hotel's backdoor. He was under surveillance, but this was reduced to give him the opportunity to reach his target. He was arrested when he started taking pictures there. Heydar Aliyev decided to turn him, since, as a military spy, he possessed a wealth of information on his native country and on the other countries he had already visited. The KGB's 2nd Directorate approved this decision, and Heydar Aliyev set to work. Akhito was considered an important asset, and the KGB knew they could rely on Heydar Aliyev's skills to turn him. It took him three attempts to ensure Akhito understood that cooperation with the KGB was a better deal than serving a long prison sentence. A few months later, Heydar Aliyev secretly met with him in one of the Western countries. This was one of his best spy recruitments, and was praised by the KGB Central Office. Akhito was transferred to the jurisdiction of the KGB in Moscow after that, and worked with them for a long time, providing very interesting information."

I asked former counterintelligence officers about Heydar Aliyev's methods for turning enemy agents. The most senior intelligence officer in Azerbaijan, Adil Baghirov, describes him like this: "He made an immediate good impression on people, and you would open up to him whether you wanted to or not. He acted so naturally around people that they trusted him; he had a rare gift for persuasion and charm. He diligently studied all available information on his 'subjects' before talking to them. As a result, he found their weaknesses and was then able to deftly steer the conversation in the required direction."

Ziya Yusifzadeh shed some light on previously unknown aspects of Heydar Aliyev's work in counterintelligence:

Elmira Akhundova: Regarding Heydar Aliyev's work for the security services, was he involved purely in counterintelligence, or did he also take part in foreign operations?

Ziya Yusifzadeh: As head of counterintelligence he mainly worked within the country. After recruiting an agent, however, he would travel with him so that he could manage him at first. Then he would pass the agent on to the resident agency in the agent's home country. Heydar Aliyev travelled abroad in different ways. He was a member of the Union of Soviet Societies of Friendship, so he sometimes travelled as their delegate; at other times, he travelled as a private person. For his meeting with Akhito in Berlin,

he used a fake name and went as a private individual; the KGB and the German Democratic Republic NSM were informed about this. We had a considerable presence in Berlin, so the relevant staff did everything necessary to accommodate the meeting. On another occasion, when Heydar Aliyev was already first deputy chairman of the Azerbaijani KGB, he had to meet another valuable informant abroad. To avoid suspicion, he toured Europe with his wife on the tourist cruise liner Rossiya. While the ship was docked in Marseille, he managed to attend a pre-arranged meeting with his agent there.

E. A.: So even as a top-level boss, a deputy chairman, he was directly involved in running special operations? Why was that?

Z. Y.: Heydar Aliyev was a natural Chekist,¹ and often developed special operations and then implemented them. Due to his heavy workload, he didn't have to do this, but there was a mindset in the KGB that the head should be an example for his subordinates; he should sometimes run special operations himself. Heydar Aliyevich loved all elements of the operational work: the games of cat and mouse with the enemy, acquiring valuable sources of information. In short, he could not imagine himself working in the security services without getting involved in field work.

Kamal Aliyev, the KGB officer responsible for identifying the terrorist who blew up Bus No. 106 in Baku, shared some interesting recollections with me about Heydar Aliyev's professional qualities. Kamal Sattarovitch had worked for the KGB since 1944, but joined Heydar Aliyev's department in the late 1950s; prior to this, he worked in the 1st Department (international intelligence) and was being primed to spy in Iran.

"Heydar Aliyevich placed me in the Iranian division. He would immediately send compelling counterintelligence information he received to me. He even went so far as to obtain Iranian currency from Moscow in order to recruit local agents. He inspired me with his attitude and his dedication to the job: bypassing my divisional heads, he communicated with me directly. I would check his information, amend it and then go to him to jointly develop a plan of action. He grasped everything almost instantly, and, indeed, was almost always correct in his judgements. Thanks to his outlook and his position he knew much more than ordinary officers like me and gave us a lot of wise guidance. He was not interested in ranks and positions, only professionalism. He liked to assign jobs directly rather than via unit heads, to avoid miscommunication."

According to Kamal Aliyev, the 2nd Department had a special group for "active measures", as well as investigating and recruiting foreigners. Even when Kamal Aliyev had already transferred to the Iranian division, Heydar

¹ A term for employees of the state security services. The name refers to the USSR's first state security organisation, the Cheka.

Aliyev continued to send him materials relating to this group's active work, because he had experience as an intelligence officer. On one occasion, Kamal Aliyev was notified by his colleagues in Ukraine that a foreigner working in the press service for a European country's cabinet was due to travel to Baku. "He travelled to Odessa first, before telegramming the date of his departure to his aunt in Baku. This caught my attention, so I decided we should send Mikhailov, our English-speaking officer, to Odessa to make contact with this individual. As Heydar Aliyevich was on holiday in the village of Bilgah, I explained my reasoning for this decision to his deputy. Although he decided it was a waste of money with no clear reward, I drove to Bilgah to meet directly with Heydar Aliyevich. We scheduled a meeting next morning, and I told him what I knew. He didn't hesitate and urged me to act on my information. This was a classic feature of his managerial style: he didn't need a long explanation to understand the essence of what you were saying.

I ordered Mikhailov to buy a ticket to Baku on a seat next to our target. Over the trip, they became friends and exchanged telephone numbers. Apparently, he was the son of a Russian colonel who had settled in Europe after the Russian Civil War. Mikhailov spent a week driving him around in a KGB car, treating him to dinners and so on. When the target returned to Europe, a senior KGB officer – Adil Baghirov – travelled there as a tourist in order to personally deliver a letter written by Mikhailov to him. This marked the beginning of our journey towards recruiting the young man. Moscow soon became interested in the case, requesting all our information on him. Later, our colleagues from Moscow informally confirmed that he had successfully cooperated with the Soviet KGB. This was just one of the many cases of huge successes based on Heydar Aliyev's initiative."

There was another operation called Bigot. An Iranian SAVAK spy, Bigot, was caught in Azerbaijan in 1964. As part of his cover, he was a member of a pro-Soviet Union communist party (the Tudeh Party), and had supposedly come to Baku to check the communication channels between Iranian émigrés in Baku and the Tudeh central authorities in Iran. However, he actually planned on travelling to the Tudeh headquarters in East Germany. SAVAK wanted to intercept their communications to get latest information on the Tudeh Party.

Although Bigot had found refuge in Azerbaijan under the pretence of fleeing persecution from the Shah, the true motivation behind his activities was soon discovered. Kamal Aliyev explains: "When we started working with him, one of our agents reported that this was a setup. Bigot had personally instigated the arrests of many communists in Iran; indeed, two of the Tudeh's leaders were facing the death penalty because of him. As soon as Heydar Aliyevich learned about this, he appealed to the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan with a proposal to assist in saving the lives of these underground communists. The appeal was sent to Moscow, and then forwarded to the Shah. As a result, their death sentences were replaced with long-term imprisonment."

Filipp Bobkov, a former first deputy chairman of the KGB who was Heydar Aliyev's direct manager for several years, recalls: "Heydar Aliyev was always true to his word. He would never let you down. We could always rely on him and openly discuss anything with him. If he disagreed, he always said so. He always had his own way of looking at things, and was rigorous about coming to the right decision. He was a highly principled man, with a good, responsible attitude towards his actions. He was already an esteemed counterintelligence officer, and his work as well as his opinions were well respected at the central office. His time at the KGB marked a successful period for the country's counterintelligence service as a whole."

* * *

As the head of counterintelligence, Heydar Aliyev was responsible for ensuring the safety and security of important guests visiting Azerbaijan from Turkish Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel, to Khrushchev. Sabir Huseynov prepared a unique account of the years he spent working with Heydar Aliyev specifically for this book. In 1964, Lieutenant Colonel Aliyev went to oversee the security of an important event in the city of Kirovabad (now Ganja), where Sabir Huseynov worked as prosecutor general.

"Heydar Aliyev informed me and other local law enforcement officers in the strictest confidence about an upcoming high profile event that would be attended by three first secretaries of the Communist Parties from Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan as well as an unidentified VIP from Moscow. He was personally responsible for the safety of these attendees. He requested that we provide him with detailed information regarding politically unreliable criminal elements who were currently not in prison, including mentally unstable individuals. He also requested information on shootings and stabbings by the next morning. He briefed us in detail.

As we were about to leave, he asked me to stay. Then, when the two of us were left alone, he put his hand on my shoulder and said, 'I've heard that your office has a good criminal informant network from Kirovabad to Gazakh.' I replied that I had been using them to gather information and did not see anything wrong with it, since otherwise we would have been left with many unresolved cases. He said that he was not accusing us, but was in fact looking for some help from them in relation to his 'propaganda' work. I agreed to help. He then almost whispered, 'I'm not going to jeopardise your network, but the chairman of the Supreme Soviet Presidium, Nikolai Podgorny, is coming here for a few days, so we can't allow for any slip-ups.'

We spent the whole of the night and half of the following day privately visiting various people of high standing in the criminal world. Heydar Aliyev was confident and inspired respect, so our unpredictable associates felt that they could trust him. They gave their word not to do anything crazy.

The event went very smoothly, without even a hint of trouble. After Podgorny had left, Central Committee First Secretary Veli Akhundov thanked all those involved in its security. However, the main organiser of this highly successful event was standing to one side, behind Akhundov's team. No one could have guessed that he had not slept in over 48 hours; he carried himself with aplomb and looked well-groomed, fresh and cheerful."

Khrushchev's thaw somewhat chipped away at the fear and numbness that pervaded the lives of millions of Soviet citizens. People became more daring; they started to speak their minds, attend public protests, showing their disagreement with the government's domestic and foreign policies. Heydar Aliyev's 2nd Department dealt with such individuals and their "nationalistic" or "anti-Soviet" behaviour. His peers recall that he always tried to use preventative measures to nip an issue in the bud before it became too serious.

Professor Yagub Mahmudlu recalls an interesting episode from the beginning of the 1960s that is connected to this: "I was the secretary of the Komsomol committee at the Faculty of History at Baku State University. After coming to power, Nikita Khrushchev began an antagonistic campaign against China. One of our very talented students protested against it. He circulated handmade flyers among the students. It soon became serious and the KGB got involved, requesting that I arrange a closed Komsomol meeting. Heydar Aliyev gave an extensive speech to the students. A heated discussion followed. Then we needed to decide what to do with the agitator. We were in a tight spot, but we still wanted to do the best for our student. Heydar Aliyev saved the day by proposing to let Komsomol educate their comrade. We all gave a sigh of relief as we all knew what a catastrophe had been averted."¹

People sometimes expressed their dissatisfaction with the government in a more extreme way, requiring the KGB's involvement. Retired Colonel Akram Selimzadeh, who worked for many years in the KGB's Investigative Department, recalled an anonymous letter that proved to be a major thorn in the side of senior KGB officials. The letter contained information pertaining to a potential assassination attempt on Veli Akhundov, the first secretary of the Azerbaijani Communist Party. Experienced handwriting experts soon established that the letter had come from a pipe factory worker who lived in Sumgayit with his wife and two children. Poor living conditions and despair had led him to make the threat. Naturally, he had no weaponry and was not intending to actually shoot anyone. Heydar Aliyev and Selimzadeh took these factors into consideration and persuaded the chairman of the Azerbaijani KGB, Semyon Tsvigun, to set him free without a criminal record. Tsvigun told Akhundov what had happened and the latter, ordered him to find the man a better job.

¹ *Istoriya i yeyo Problemy*, [History and its problems] No. 2 (1989), 7

The 2nd Department often had to deal with such "anti-Soviet elements", as the numerous internal agents and informants referred to them in their reports, and to invite such people to the KGB offices for a conversation. In Stalinist times, tens of thousands of people had been arrested and prosecuted based on such "reports", whereas now the KGB preferred preventative measures after a thorough check.

Azerbaijani counterintelligence also dealt with various underground youth organisations and student groups in Baku. Heydar Aliyev gave some of his most eloquent speeches in order to persuade the KGB leadership not to destroy the young people's lives, and to use preventative measures alone. Tofiq Abdin was one of the people he saved; a member of the Writers' Union and the executive secretary of the *Gobustan* magazine, he achieved recognition as an Azerbaijani journalist in Turkey in the 1990s. Prior to these achievements, however, in 1962 he was working full-time as supervisor's assistant at a wool factory, while attending a distance-learning degree course.

A first-year theatre student at the University of the Arts, Abdin was living in a small rented room on the former Tretya Sverdlovskaya Street, filled with books written by some of the most famous Azerbaijani writers of the 1960s. "For about a year or two, 10 fellow students had been coming to my room for a book club. They included Bahlul Abdullayev (future philology professor) Movlud Suleymann (future writer) and Mammad Asgarov (future deputy prime minister), as well as others from different universities. We used to go to the tearoom of a local garden to discuss books. We also met during classes and in various other literary clubs. Through this endeavour, we formed a group of like-minded friends. Although we started off as a book club, we then started discussing the reunification of Azerbaijan, which became the main purpose of our group. This all occurred during the brief Khrushchev thaw, when we were allowed to discuss taboo subjects. That was the time when Abbas Zamanov would talk to us about revolutionary topics, when Khalil Rza wrote his poem *Dva Berega* [Two shores], and Rasul Rza's poetry touched our souls with its groundbreaking form and provocative content.

I had written a poem in response to Mirza Ibrahimov's novel *Nastupit Den* [The day will come], in which I had repeated the question 'When will this day finally come?' A search was conducted in my room and the poem disappeared. It was later shown to me during an interrogation at the KGB, when they kept asking me, 'What did you mean by this? What were you hinting at?' Later, we found out we were under close surveillance. They had planted an informant in our circle, so we didn't stand a chance.

At first, we would simply have long, heated debates on the subject of reunification, but then we started to produce newsletters and announcements trying to attract new members. I used my German typewriter with Latin letters, and this was also taken away during the room search. The individual

who set us up suggested organising a meeting with students from the Foreign Languages University in order to recruit new members. We had no idea that we could be arrested and expelled for this; we were just a bunch of provincial boys acting instinctively. We lacked a smart leader who could guide us. After that meeting, the KGB called us all in for questioning, one by one.

Then, something very unusual happened: we all were set free, and not even expelled from the university. I imagine it was all due to Heydar Aliyev who was a high-ranking officer at the KGB at that time. I remember that Igor Belyaev wrote an article in *Literturnaya Gazeta* describing the 19-year-old Heydar Aliyev's passion for Azerbaijani reunification, so perhaps 20 years on he recalled his youth and the idea re-emerged in his mind. I have heard that Shikhali Gurbanov also played a part, but I believe that the KGB was the main decision-maker in our case. Incidentally, our group caused a lot of fuss; even Pavlov, the first secretary of the Komsomol, mentioned us in his report, saying that we had been whipping up nationalist sentiments amongst young people and so on.

They arrested us each individually, spent an age interrogating us and then let us go. I knew it was my turn when the black KGB Volga arrived to pick me up from work at 9 a.m. I spent the whole day in their offices; they asked me about our club, its purpose and our actions. They even asked why I had a Russian girlfriend, and why I was reading Nazim Hikmet's poetry, and not that of our national poets (they found a book in my room).

Then, at around six p.m. they took me somewhere else, where I saw a handsome officer sitting at the desk. Much later, I learned it was Heydar Aliyev. I was a shy, country boy in ragged clothes. I can only imagine how naive and young I looked to him. He looked at me, stood up and asked, 'What do you want?' Scared, I mumbled that we didn't want anything. 'If this was 1937, you would all be prosecuted and your parents would hear nothing more of you. Let him go.' He got my papers and I was taken away and sent home. I still find it all very strange. We all graduated from university, got good jobs, and later travelled abroad as tourists. In 1969, I worked at *Gobustan* magazine before joining the Writer's Union and becoming a writer and journalist. I believe that we are truly indebted to Heydar Aliyev for saving us.'

The famous Azerbaijani author Movlud Suleymanly also recalls his own youthful encounter with Heydar Aliyev: "I was interrogated in various offices for the whole day. In the evening, I was taken somewhere down a long, dark corridor. The officers cautiously opened the door and pushed me in. I stood at the door and looked around in confusion. The office was really big, and a broad-shouldered man with slicked-back hair was sitting at a desk. He told me to come closer. I took a few steps forward and stopped again. He told me to come closer again. I came closer; on his desk there was a bowl with apples. He offered me one; I refused. His voice changed and he asked me to sit down. He seemed so formidable and intimidating that I felt like somebody

had thrown me against a wall. I timidly raised my head and looked at him. For some reason, he reminded me of my uncle – the commissar in our village – and I almost broke down in tears. At this point, I didn't think that I would ever leave the building, so I mentally buried all my hopes of freedom.

The man then asked what I had done; I kept quiet but he repeated the question. I replied that we had talked about the reunification, which prompted him to ask if I even knew anything about Southern Azerbaijan. I thought it best to remain silent. He asked what else I had done. 'Nothing', I said, to which he replied, 'we know everything, anyway. Each of you will get what you deserve.'

Finally, he asked where I was from; I told him. He didn't say anything for a while, and I dared to look at him. Forty years have gone by, but I will never forget the look on his face. His grey-green eyes, just a minute ago so heavy and authoritative, looked gently at me, and seemed for a moment even fatherly. He asked about my family, and I told him that my father had been killed in the war, but that I still had my mother, who worked at the collective farm. 'You need to appreciate the work of the people who raised you. Study to become smarter! Do you know what would have happened to you in the past? You would have been executed, all of you!'

Meanwhile, I had somewhat come to my senses and was able to finally comprehend the nature of the situation. Of course, I could have started to cry in shame, embarrassed that our cause had ended in such an inept and stupid way, but the man's voice and the genuine sincerity of his words offered some relief. He continued: 'Remember this. I will say it to all of you. Stop with this rubbish, do something useful – study science or history, help your nation. Learn the Russian language and other languages. We know about your silly heroics, but it doesn't bring about any good, it doesn't help anybody. Moscow has now demanded a report about you, they also know about this. I won't let them have you though. Do you understand what this means?'

Although 40 years have now passed, I still remember that meeting; I understand more about what 'this' truly 'meant' with each day that goes by."

In rare instances, however, KGB investigations into nationalistic groups would develop into criminal cases and be taken to court. At the end of 1963, Semyon Tsvigun replaced Kardashev as the chairman of the Azerbaijani KGB. Before coming to Baku, he had worked in various branches of the intelligence service based in Ukraine, Moldova and Tajikistan and was an expert at finding "anti-Soviet members of extremist organisations", such as Ukrainian nationalists. Former KGB officers say he would look for a political slant in his cases, thus making them bigger and more important. Only Heydar Aliyev was able to dissuade him from applying overly harsh measures – and sometimes only with difficulty.

In 1965 Akram Selimzadeh led the investigation into a criminal case of Allahverdi Gurbanov and Pasha Abdulrahimov, who were prosecuted

under Article 67 of the Criminal Code of the Azerbaijan SSR. I found the documents pertaining to this case during my research in the KGB archives.

In 1965, Gurbanov and Abdulrahimov decided to create the Azerbaijani Language Protection Committee. Judging by their file, they were both highly educated and socially engaged: Gurbanov was a member of the CPSU, worked at the Lieutenant Schmidt factory and studied at the Baku Oil College. Pasha Abdulrahimov was a Komsomol member, worked as a driver at the Baku port and was a second year student at the Azerbaijan Theatre Institute. They both lived in workers' dormitories, and felt, as a result, a growing sense of dissatisfaction: 90 percent of the residents there were from the countryside, they barely spoke Russian and so couldn't understand any public announcements or meetings, which the dormitory supervisor conducted in Russian. According to the indictment, the pair managed to organise 12 "illegal gatherings" (16th May – 1st August), and worked on "recruiting and propaganda".

From the charge sheet:

At meetings they claimed that "Russians and Armenians enjoy more privileges than Azerbaijanis, who are subject to restrictions and harassment, and subjugated by the Russians. They also stated that Azerbaijani schools are being replaced with Russian schools. Furthermore, in his speeches and conversations with fellow students, Gurbanov made the slanderous accusation that the Russians are trying to displace Azerbaijani language, culture and traditions, while extracting all valuable resources from the country. Moreover, he said that the CPSU is supposedly implementing a policy of Russification, which involves sending young Russian women to large Azerbaijani cities like Baku, Sumgayit and Mingachevir to encourage mixed marriages and displace the national language."¹

Soon, not content with conversation, the committee members decided to take active steps.

"In June 1965, they discussed the activities of their nationalist group; Gurbanov consequently proposed taking over a radio station during the upcoming workers' parade scheduled for 7th November. Gurbanov and Abdulrahimov then both showed their support for the idea that Azerbaijan should leave the Soviet Union."²

Indeed, in the 1960s, Baku was a cosmopolitan and international city; Azerbaijanis preferred to send their children to Russian schools, looking down on those who didn't speak the USSR's principal language. All paperwork was in Russian, and constitutional amendments establishing Azerbaijani as the official language of the country were conveniently forgotten. During the trial, Gurbanov said that he and his co-defendants

wanted to appeal to the Azerbaijani leadership so that Azerbaijani would be reinstated as the official language and used in public institutions.

Despite pressure from Moscow and the Azerbaijani KGB chairman's desire to make an example of the men for the benefit of the authorities in Moscow, Heydar Aliyev's department opposed mass arrests. About one hundred people received warnings and appeared in the courtrooms only as witnesses. Allahverdi Gurbanov and Pasha Abdulrahimov spent just one year in a penal colony.

Incidentally, the young men did not suffer in vain. The case received widespread coverage across the country, and following the investigation, the Azerbaijani KGB sent extensive reports to the Central Committee in Moscow. From then on "local values received more attention. Shikhali Gurbanov (secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, 1966-1967) and his associates have made a considerable contribution to this cause. National themes were encouraged in literature as a means of inspiring critical thinking; for example, in 1966, the poem *Heydarbaba Salam* [Greetings to Heydarbaba] by Shakhiyar, a renowned Azerbaijani poet living in Iran, was published in Baku. Similarly, in 1967, a group of creative young people began publishing the progressive magazine *Ulduz*. Moreover, Novruz bayram became an official spring holiday."³

At this time, Heydar Aliyev and his staff dealt with a large number of intellectuals, writers and scientists, all of whom were called in for questioning at the KGB. This, however, will be discussed in detail in the next chapter of this book; prior to this, I would like to touch on a little known subject: Heydar Aliyev's work regimen and distinctive leadership characteristics as shown by his work as head of counterintelligence and later as head of the KGB.

* * *

In his lecture to the students at the Ministry of National Security Academy, on the eve of Heydar Aliyev's 80th birthday, Lieutenant General Ziya Yusifzadeh said: "Heydar Aliyev worked from 9 in the morning until 9 at night. He wrote a plan for each day and worked according to it. He insisted that his staff should make similar weekly and monthly plans, which he said were necessary for meeting targets. He truly loved his job, and knew every detail of each operation. He surprised local officers with his knowledge of their work, not to mention the city and district authorities."

We always looked forward to his presentations. Even when he worked at the KGB, he never used notes during his speeches, but knew how to connect with his audience. His speeches always generated a lot of interest. After each board meeting, middle-ranking officials who couldn't attend would try to establish from each other what he had spoken about.

¹ *Ugolovnoye Delo* [Criminal case], No. 13, vol. 10, 188-190

² *Ibid.*, 192

³ *Ismayil*, vol.7, 159

When preparing a speech he would work closely with the division whose work or operation he was due to discuss, and he would undertake the majority of preparation work himself. He would even correct drafts that other divisions brought to him, providing useful feedback. His official documents consisted of perfectly structured, logical arguments and were devoid of tedious details.

He stayed in control by keeping a special notebook with detailed information on all important ongoing operations. Officers would joke that they were in trouble if he made a note about them in his notebook.

As head of the 2nd Department, he oversaw all the KGB's city and district offices across Azerbaijan, scrutinising their work down to the smallest detail. He would talk with two or three of the heads of various district offices about their work on a daily basis. The divisional heads knew he had this habit, and so they were always prepared for a call.

Every week he would summon one or two officers to his office (including the lowest-ranking officers) to hear about their work. So everyone tried to be prepared at all times. This was an effective method of management, as it created an atmosphere where high standards and responsibility were expected. Heydar Aliyev knew all his staff; he knew what they looked like, and understood their strengths and weaknesses, which helped him to apply their skills properly, maximising efficiency in the Azerbaijani KGB.

He was very strict about his requests and orders and always gave deadlines. He kept deadline cards and would always call for status updates a day or two prior to the deadline. God forbid that someone missed the deadline! This would happen, of course, but usually only in extreme situations. Everyone tried to avoid this, and we would sometimes work through the night or at the weekends to do so.

Heydar Aliyev often took part in the planning and execution of various operations. He believed in setting a good example. He enjoyed spending time with young agents, and often ran seminars, told them about unclassified operations, and advised them on how they could develop their skills. He emphasised that their career was in their own hands: their promotion depended on their knowledge, abilities, skills and their professional development. Indeed, he treated everybody equally, becoming close to individuals who were good at their jobs. He might even turn a blind eye to certain personal defects if someone was a professional at work."

Other former colleagues also describe Heydar as an eloquent and experienced professional with high standards. They all agree that his work ethic and professional discipline sometimes meant that he was difficult to work with, but that he was always fair. They describe the trusting and caring atmosphere that prevailed in his department. He was always warm and sincere even with the most junior staff, and always took an interest in their lives and those of their families.

Albert Salamov adds: "He had an excellent memory, which he constantly tried to improve. Colonel Adil Baghirov, an honorary KGB officer who

worked with him for years, once told me that he had a gift: he could read a page once and instantly recall it, without making a single mistake. When he was preparing for a speech or conversation in any field, he would look through a mountain of literature in advance, make notes, and then be able to talk as an equal with any specialist.

He remembered everybody in our country's KGB, and knew their first names and surnames regardless of their location, whether they were based in the central office or in the local divisions. He knew everything about them, down to the very last detail."

"On 15th January 1965, there was a tragic accident at the construction site of an aluminium factory in Ganja. The site was vital for meeting the Seven-Year Plan and was being supervised by Kosygin, the chairman of the Council of Ministers. A spark from some welding hit a gas tank, and the resulting explosion killed a person. It wasn't an act of terrorism, but we didn't know this at the time, so we created a special committee headed by the deputy prime minister of Azerbaijan to investigate the incident. At the time, Heydar Aliyev was deputy chairman of the KGB and he assigned me to sit on this committee. We spent almost a week at the site, questioning workers, talking to experts and examining construction plans, before coming to the conclusion that the explosion had occurred as a result of negligence.

On my return to Baku, I reported directly to him and showed him the plans. While explaining what had happened, I saw that he was not looking at me, which made me think that he wasn't listening. But when I finished, he asked me how I could be so confident in my findings. I explained that I was a trained engineer from the Industrial University.¹ He then smiled and released me, appearing pleased. It was clear how much he enjoyed a well-prepared, well-evaluated piece of work."

(From Jabbar Beylarov's recollections)

"In 1963, a residential block for KGB employees was built. At the time, I was the secretary of the party organisation department, so I was allocated a flat. Prior to that, three of us – our departmental deputy director, Halykov, an officer from the city committee, and I – had gone to visit the flat of one of our colleagues. We were shocked to see that he was living in just one room with his three children and his wife, who had cancer, so when they began allocating flats I gave up my flat in favour of my colleague. The deputy chairman, Eyyaz Mammadov, was unhappy with my gesture. After the meeting Heydar Aliyevich reassured me, saying that I had done the right thing by helping someone. He said, 'You helped him, and somebody will later help you.' The Directorate of Azerbaijani Border

¹ Now the Azerbaijan State Oil Industrial University.

Troops had just been shut down, and many of the employees' families had left the republic; their flats therefore began to be redistributed amongst the KGB officers. Vladimir Bantserev, the deputy head of the 2nd Department, moved to one of these flats, and so the Baku City Executive Committee gave his former flat on Neftchilar Avenue to me and my family. I knew that this could only have been possible thanks to Heydar Aliyev's personal efforts on my behalf.¹

(From Kamal Aliyev's recollections)

Acquiring accommodation was a pressing matter at the time. Many KGB officers said that they had obtained their flats directly through Heydar Aliyev and proudly showed them off to me. At first, many of them lived in tiny apartments or even the basement rooms of communal flats together with their families. However, when Heydar Aliyev became KGB chairman he acquired the Council of Ministers' authorization to build six high-rise buildings for KGB staff. Former KGB officers will never forget how they got hold of their spacious, well-furnished flats in these buildings.

On 23rd December 1964 the Personnel Department of the Soviet KGB received a request to promote Heydar Aliyev to the position of deputy chairman of the Azerbaijani KGB. His promotion was approved in January 1965. The following is an extract from his letter of recommendation: "He has personally participated in a number of important KGB operations against Western informants. Under his direct supervision, several operations against Iranian agents have been successfully carried out. In 1963, Heydar Aliyev expertly managed the search for and detention of an important criminal who was attempting to flee abroad. Later, from 1962 to 1964, he implemented a variety of preventative measures designed to avert negative events and guide confused Soviet citizens in the right direction."

At the time Semyon Tsvigun, Brezhnev's protégé, who had worked with him in Moldova, headed the Azerbaijani KGB. He and Heydar Aliyev would later become great friends. In my view he also played a significant role in Heydar Aliyev's election as the first secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan in July 1969.

On 31st March 1965, Heydar Aliyev was promoted to the rank of colonel. The second half of the 1960s would be filled with difficult work for him: restructuring the security services, conducting special operations and renewing the KGB's personnel. The energy with which Heydar Aliyev approached his work gained the attention of the KGB authorities in Moscow. Indeed, when Tsvigun was promoted to become the deputy chairman of the Soviet KGB and sent to Moscow, Heydar Aliyev was recommended as his replacement in Azerbaijan, and became the first Azerbaijani to take this post in many decades.

CHAIRMAN OF THE AZERBAIJANI SECURITY SERVICES (1965-1969)

In the archives of the Ministry of National Security (MNS) I was presented with a list of the heads of National Security in Azerbaijan – Heydar Aliyev's predecessors. I discovered additional details about them both at the MNS Museum and in the essay "Heydar Aliyev: An Anatomy of Coming to Power" by the journalist Alirza Balayev.¹

So, who were these people who headed the secret police in Azerbaijan as it assumed its many guises, from the Cheka (Emergency Committee), through the GPU (State Political Directorate), the NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs), the NKGB (People's Commissariat for State Security), the MGB (Ministry for State Security) to the KGB (Committee for State Security)?

On 11th June 1919, *Mammadbaghir Saleh oglu Sheykhzamanov*, a member of the Azerbaijani parliament, became the first head of the "Anti-Counterrevolution Organisation". He handed in his resignation after just over two months in office, preferring to return to parliamentary work. On 15th August 1919 the position was given to his younger brother, *Naghi Sheykhzamanov*. Both were members of the Musavat Party and their deputies were in the Hummet Party. After the Soviet regime was established in the country, the heads of this agency were subject to reprisals. Mammadbaghir Sheykhzamanov was executed by firing squad, but his brother, Naghi, managed to emigrate to Turkey. Many others working for the national security service were executed or thrown into prison. Many senior figures in the Azerbaijani military met with the same fate in 1920, when the Bolsheviks ruthlessly executed Major General Shahzade, Amir Kazim Mirza Qajar, Major General Ibrahim aga Usubov, Major Abdul Hamidbey Haitabashy, Colonel Rustambey Shikhinsky and Colonel Samedbek Sulkevich. Only Samedbek Melkmandarov and Aliagha Shikhinsky managed to escape this terrible fate thanks to Nariman Narimanov's direct written appeal to Lenin. Jamshid Nakhchivanskiy was executed by firing squad in 1937.

On 18th May 1920 the Azerbaijan Cheka became independent from the Special Division of the 11th Red Army. 1920-1921 witnessed the appointment of three successive chairmen: *Semyon Pankratov*, *Baba Aliyoldash oglu Aliyev*, and *Eyyub Shirin oglu Hanbulagov*. A tragic fate awaited these last two: in 1938 they were executed as enemies of the people.

Mir Jafar Abbas oglu Bagbirov, the future party leader of the Republic of Azerbaijan, became the chairman of State Security twice: between 1921 and 1927 (Cheka) and between 1929 and 1930 (GPU).

Novruz Karim oglu Rzayev was the chairman of the GPU for two years (1927-1929), but he was later also executed during political purges. This is how Heydar

¹ *Bakı Post*, special edition (1998), 2-3

Aliyev later described him: "I remember that in 1956, during the trial of Mir Jafar Baghirov and his associates, the investigation found a letter that Novruz Rzayev had sent to Stalin. In this open letter Rzayev protested courageously and with conviction against the mass purges of 1937-1938. At the time the letter was quoted in the local press. It was for this reason that during my time at the KGB, we immortalised the name of Novruz Rzayev. He was a great man who faithfully served his people. After him, Azerbaijanis were no longer trusted to run the security service, instead in that post we had people from various nationalities, including Armenians, Russians, Jews, Georgians, but not a single Azerbaijani."¹

Indeed, from 1930 to 1933 the chairman of the GPU in Azerbaijan was the Russian Mikhail Frinovsky. Alirza Balayev writes that afterwards Frinovsky was promoted to the post of USSR Minister of the Navy. But in 1938, as deputy to the "bloody *narkom*" People's Commissar of Internal Affairs Nikolai Yezhov, he was executed by firing squad, together with his young wife and their school-age son.²

Here is a list of the chairmen of the Azerbaijani KGB before Heydar Aliyev:

*Aleksei Agrba (1933-1934)
Yuvelian Sumbatov-Topuridze (1934-1938)
Mikhail Rayev-Kamensky (1938)
Stepan Yemelyanov (1939-1953)
Anatoly Guskov (1953-1956)
Fedor Kopylov (1956-1959)
Aleksandr Kardashev (1959-1963)
Semyon Tsvigun (1963-1967)*

As a rule, the vice-chairmen were also non-native: Kavtaradze, Borshchev, Grigoryan, Markaryan, Purnis, Gulbis, to name a few.

Many of these met a tragic end: Markaryan, Grigoryan and Borshchev were executed, Gulbis and Tsvigun took their own lives, and Yemelyanov and Atakishiyev were sentenced to 25 years in the Gulag. The academician Ibrahimov told me that after doing time in Baku (despite originally hailing from Tatarstan), Yemelyanov appealed to the first secretary of the Central Committee, his former subordinate Heydar Aliyev, who instructed that Yemelyanov was to be given assistance: he was granted accommodation, a pension, and even, if memory serves, a job.

This brief outline demonstrates how unpredictable and tragic were the lives of those who were meant to "guard the revolutionary rule of law" in the early years of Soviet Azerbaijan. Georges Danton probably had similar victims in mind when he stated back in the 18th century, "The revolution devours its own children."

¹ *Vernost' Narodu, Rodine, Gosudarstvu*, 23

² *Baky Post*, Nos. 1-4 (1996)

The appointment of an Azerbaijani to the post of chairman of the Azerbaijani KGB was certainly an historical event. However, according to Heydar Aliyev, he was not the first-choice candidate. In 1997, in a speech addressed to the MNS staff, he recalled the events that had taken place some 30 years earlier: "Some of my former colleagues who were seeking personal gain had teamed up with Tsvigun and tried to appoint a person from Moscow or another Russian working in the Azerbaijani KGB. For the sake of historical accuracy I must say it was only thanks to Andropov's personal involvement and to the position taken on the matter by the first secretary of Azerbaijan that in 1967 an Azerbaijani was appointed for the first time to the post of chairman of the KGB."¹

Heydar Aliyev likely knew more about the circumstances of his appointment than we do today. His relationship with Tsvigun, the chairman of the Azerbaijani KGB at the time, was built on mutual respect; all KGB veterans note that Tsvigun valued Heydar Aliyev highly for his organisational skills and took his opinion seriously. However, other candidates also had their hearts set on the post of KGB head.

According to Ziya Yusifzadeh: "After Tsvigun was promoted to the post of the first deputy chairman of the USSR KGB, the question arose as to who would replace him in Azerbaijan. By that time, Georgia and Armenia had native KGB chairmen. In Georgia, for example, Aleksi Inauri had been KGB chairman for about 30 years. He was a colonel general,² a war veteran and a Hero of the Soviet Union. Inauri was a member of the Collegium of the USSR KGB (the only member from the South Caucasus) and he was also friends with Gorbachev. But the central office looked down on Azerbaijan because of its Muslim population and its geographical proximity to Iran and Turkey. Therefore, they preferred to appoint Russians as chairmen of the Azerbaijani KGB.

Of course, it would be wrong to claim that everyone approved of Heydar Aliyev's candidacy. General Solovyov was the head of the Special Section of the Baku Air Defence and a member of the Azerbaijani KGB Collegium, which also included Kozlov, head of the Special Section of the 4th Army. We, the Collegium, also were to select and put forward our candidate for the post. Solovyov and Kozlov insisted that the KGB's chairman had to come from Moscow. With this, they implied that an Azerbaijani could not be trusted. Solovyov himself dreamed of being appointed to the position. In order to appease him, he was subsequently appointed head of the Special Section of the Moscow Air Defence." The former KGB General Ilhuseyn Huseynov corroborates this story.³

¹ *Vernost' Narodu, Rodine, Gosudarstvu*, 24

² Equivalent to the British and American rank of lieutenant general.

³ A. Huseynbeyli, *Interview s Generalom Razvedki* [An interview with a general from the intelligence services], (Baku: 1997), 47

Filipp Bobkov, former head of the 5th Directorate, adds: "The first to really back Heydar Aliyev was Aleksandr Kardashev, as they had worked closely together in the Azerbaijani KGB. After leaving Baku, Kardashev became deputy head of the 2nd Directorate; we worked together. Before leaving, he suggested that Tsvigun appoint Heydar Aliyev as deputy chairman; a recommendation that carried a lot of weight."

Thereafter, Heydar Aliyev became the obvious candidate for the post of chairman. We all knew him to be a well-established and competent director and believed that it would, therefore, have been pointless to get somebody new in from outside the republic.

In short, Heydar Aliyev was appointed chairman of the KGB regardless of who recommended or supported him. Everybody agreed that he was the right candidate for the job." On 22nd June 1967, Heydar Aliyev officially became the chairman of the KGB in Azerbaijan.

A month before this appointment, on 19th May 1967, there were personnel changes in the KGB's top leadership. According to Russian historians, the fact that Vladimir Semichastny was dismissed as the chairman of the USSR KGB, to be replaced by CPSU Central Committee Secretary Yuri Andropov, was the result of a major power struggle centred on Brezhnev.

On 14th October 1964, at a special plenum, Khrushchev was relieved of his duties as first secretary of the CPSU Central Committee and chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers, ostensibly on the grounds of "ill health". Brezhnev then became the new party leader, while Kosygin took charge of the Council of Ministers.

In 1965-1967 Brezhnev "was not the sole leader of the party and the state, and many believed him to be an interim figure. At the same time, the chairman of the Council of Ministers, Aleksei Kosygin, had a huge influence and aimed to play a leading part in policymaking not only on domestic economic issues, but also on many foreign matters."¹ Nikolai Podgorny, the chairman of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet, was also promoted to leading roles. According to Petro Shelest, the former first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine: "Brezhnev always consulted Podgorny on any personnel, organisational, political, ideological or economic issues. They always worked together. Almost all Politburo members turned to Podgorny for help when they needed to solve – or postpone – a difficult problem."²

However, Brezhnev saw Aleksandr Shelepin, a 49-year-old member of the Politburo and the first deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers, as his strongest competitor, due to Shelepin's popularity. It was Shelepin who

¹ Roy Medvedev, *Neizvestnyy Andropov* [The unknown Andropov], (Rostov-on-Don: Feniks, 1999), 95

² Petro Shelest, "Kak eto Bilo" [As it was], *Sovershenno Sekretno*, No. 6 (1990), 22

recommended Semichastny for the position of KGB chairman, and Brezhnev reasonably believed that Shelepin continued to pull the strings in the organisation. Hence, in his rise to power he neutralised the threat posed by Semichastny first. In mid-May 1967, at a Politburo meeting, Brezhnev suggested that Semichastny be removed from his position to make way for Andropov.

According to Petro Shelest's memoirs, Brezhnev made this decision almost independently, surprising many Politburo members and Central Committee secretaries. Despite voting for him, Shelest condemned in writing such "cowardly and treacherous techniques in personnel changes."³ However, as is evident from an article published in 1990 in the *Sovershenno Sekretno* [Top secret] magazine, Shelest admitted that Semichastny was involved in "undermining" Brezhnev by turning other members of the KGB against him. Moreover, if we are to believe Shelest's revelations, he himself urged Brezhnev to get rid of Semichastny.

Roy Medvedev writes regarding Semichastny's successor: "Andropov's transfer into the KGB was in fact a major promotion for him, because in the late 1960s the chairman of the USSR KGB was a more influential figure than common Central Committee secretaries. Also, having left the Central Committee Secretariat, Andropov was elected a candidate Politburo member. This was a significant rise up the party hierarchy and meant that the KGB and its chairman were granted additional authority."⁴

Russian political analysts do not always agree with this way of interpreting events. For example, Georgy Shakhnazarov, who worked as a consultant in Andropov's team for several years, writes in his book *S Vozhdyyami i bez nikb* [With and without leaders]: "Brezhnev, of course, read articles from foreign newspapers that hailed Andropov as the rising star of Soviet politics and predicted his imminent ascent to the very top. This could not fail to set the cunning general secretary on his guard, and in his typical duplicitous manner he came up with an original way of nullifying his opponent's threat while gaining the maximum benefit: appointing Andropov to head of the KGB. Knowing Andropov's absolute integrity, Brezhnev could relax: with this manoeuvre he had entrusted a vital government agency to an intelligent man, and rid himself of a competitor at the same time."⁵

Heydar Aliyev held Yuri Andropov in the highest regard until the end of his days. It is now possible to maintain that Andropov was Heydar Aliyev's most loyal associate during the following 17 years, right until he passed away in February 1984. He would support Heydar Aliyev in the uncompromising struggle against corruption, elect him to the Politburo,

¹ Petro Shelest, *Da ne Sudimy Budete* [You will not be judged], (Moscow: Politizdat, 1995), 282

² Medvedev, "Unknown Andropov", 97

³ Georgy Shakhnazarov, *S Vozhdyyami i bez nikb* [With and without leaders], (Moscow: Vagrius, 2001), 107-108

make him one of the leaders of the Soviet government, and acquaint him with the most close-knit, "friendly" circle. I am utterly certain that Heydar Aliyev would have become head of the USSR Council of Ministers had Andropov not fallen ill and died. Unfortunately, history books accept no ifs, buts or maybes.

The 1990s witnessed the publication of a great number of memoirs of former Politburo members. They write proudly of their familiarity with the late Andropov. Heydar Aliyev wrote nothing at all on that score; he chose to take the secret of his relationship with Andropov to the grave.

Yet in Andropov's latter years it was to Heydar Aliyev that he confided his innermost ideas and plans for national reform: it was precisely Heydar Aliyev's style of leadership and methods of fighting corruption that he implemented after he became general secretary. Many people at the top knew perfectly well who Andropov's main adviser was. This, too, did nothing to endear Heydar Aliyev to party bureaucrats, who feared for their positions and their place in the party itself.

DISSIDENTS AND THE CREATION OF THE KGB'S 5TH DIRECTORATE

One of Andropov's first initiatives was establishing self-governance, both in Moscow and in the Soviet Socialist Republics. He also created departments of the KGB to combat "acts of ideological sabotage on the country's territory". These became the KGB's 5th Directorate, and its role was to control dissidents and clamp down on activities threatening to "destroy or compromise the communist ideology and socialist regime". In 1967, in order to increase the efficiency of ideological "warfare", analytical groups were also created within the KGB to gather and process all the relevant information the state security services received from various sources.

Today a considerable amount of political research containing detailed analysis of the USSR's defeat by the West in the Cold War has been published in Russia and other countries. Undoubtedly, one of the most important factors behind the West's success was the creation of negative psychological propaganda linked with the name and image of the Soviet Union. In his book *Likbolet'ye* [Troubled years], Lieutenant General Nikolai Leonov, a former high-ranking officer of the USSR KGB's 1st Directorate, relates: "Sparing no expense on propaganda, our political opponents strengthened their campaign of discrediting the Soviet Union with every passing year. We must admit that our activities gave them a great deal of material with which to do so. One time we came across an assertion from former American President Nixon that it was much more economical to invest one dollar in propaganda than to invest 10 dollars in developing new types of weaponry. He justified this proposition by saying that weapons will never be put to use, whereas propaganda is effective every hour of every day."¹

There were a number of factors which caused concern: the events of 1968 in Czechoslovakia; the unrest and ethnically motivated riots of the late 1960s and early 1970s in various parts of the USSR; the stepping up of activity among the West's ideological and propaganda centres. All this seriously alarmed the country's top political leadership, who, without hesitation, resolved to reinforce the role and influence of the KGB in the state system.

In his book *Ot Khrushcheva do Gorbacheva* [From Khrushchev to Gorbachev], Viktor Grishin, the former first secretary of the Moscow City Party Committee, argues that Andropov "achieved the objective of restoring state security services in all towns and regions, appointing KGB personnel to research institutes, factories and establishments with either defensive or other national significance. The state security apparatus was deployed once again for air, rail and sea transportation, as well as in the army and naval forces. People's letters and the correspondence of various organisations were again subjected to surveillance.

¹ Nikolai Leonov, *Likboletye* [Troubled years], (Moscow: Terra, 1997), 210

A system of 'activists', 'informants' or, put more simply, snitches, was reinstated in the collectives of enterprises and institutions, as well as within the community. The practice of listening in on telephone conversations, both local and long-distance, was reinstated. What is more, it was not only telephones that were tapped: thanks to technological advancements, the KGB knew everything that was said in the flats and countryside residences of members of the government and party leadership. Through Brezhnev, Andropov successfully brought about the transformation of the KGB from the Committee under the USSR Council of Ministers to the Committee of State Security of the USSR. That is to say, an organisation that was subordinate to no one, fully independent, and to all intents and purposes under the jurisdiction of the CPSU general secretary alone.⁵¹

Officials from the 5th Directorate focused their attention on Russian human rights activists, as well as dissenting members of the scientific and creative intelligentsia. Both groups openly, if from quite different positions, criticised party and government policy, and undoubtedly counted "agents of influence" among their number.

In accordance with this, the historian and political commentator Roy Medvedev, who spent many years under the close surveillance of the security agency, writes in his book on Andropov: "Dissidents' expectations for the reshuffle in the leadership of the KGB turned out to be unfounded, although Andropov was undoubtedly more careful and measured in his public appearances. Opposition activity blossomed in 1967-1968 for a multitude of reasons, including events in Czechoslovakia. However, repressive measures were stepped up at the same time."⁵²

Roy Medvedev details statistics for people convicted of anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda in the USSR. In the five years from 1956 to 1960, 4,676 Soviet citizens were convicted of political crimes. Between 1961 and 1965 the equivalent figure was 1,072. In 1965 a total of 20 people were convicted, in 1966 the number was 48. In 1967 and 1968 the number of people convicted for political crimes was 103 and 129 respectively. 195 and 204 Soviet citizens were convicted in 1969 and 1970 respectively. Medvedev writes that these numbers are not complete, because a significant number of dissidents were brought to justice by way of normal articles of the criminal code. Furthermore, sectioning and exile were not always registered as court convictions.⁵³

Filipp Bobkov, a skilled counterintelligence agent, headed the 5th Directorate between 1969 and 1983, and naturally has his own view on this issue. According to him, the 5th Directorate rarely resorted to repressive measures, and only "in cases of serious criminal activity."⁵⁴

⁵¹ Viktor Grishin, *Ot Khrushcheva do Gorbacheva* [From Khrushchev to Gorbachev], (Moscow: ASPOL, 1996), 60

⁵² Medvedev, *Unknown Andropov*, 147

⁵³ Ibid., 148.

⁵⁴ Bobkov, 221

When I met Bobkov I simply had to broach the subject of dissidence and ask him whether the rather harsh methods of combating Soviet dissidents were justified. His answer was as follows: "It is crucial to specify who the dissidents were, for such a concept did not exist in the vocabulary of the 5th Directorate. The concept of the 'dissident' came from the West. Our clear mission was to expose individuals who were disrupting the constitutional order. These people were breaking the law and engaging in subversion. The concept of dissident behaviour was invented to cover them and to justify the West's sympathy and assistance for them. The individuals the West glorified as 'dissidents' were criminals and delinquents. They engaged in subversion, and for that reason we prosecuted them. Very carefully."

I met Vladimir Maximov shortly before he passed away. He had been welcomed into Moscow with open arms. Articles about his emigration, life abroad and sadness at the collapse of the Soviet Union appeared in the *Pravda* newspaper and other publications. We bumped into each other quite by chance, although he was seeking to meet me. Maximov began to reproach me for allowing the collapse of such a nation. 'But you strove for that outcome. Did you not work towards that goal?' I retorted. 'Yes, but we did not imagine it would turn out like this.' Many people now assert that they were fighting against communism, not the country."

The intelligence agency's structure included ideological sub-departments until 1954. Under Khrushchev they were refocused towards combating the effect of foreign ideological centres, while at home the struggle was continued against the subversion Bobkov mentions. The departments themselves were abolished. Yet on Andropov's initiative they were suddenly reinstated and called upon to hinder the enemy's ideological subversion. The concept of ideological subversion may, all things considered, have been interpreted too loosely at times, referring to anything from underground printing and the distribution of anti-Soviet pamphlets to the "pernicious" influence of bourgeois culture on the youth and intelligentsia.

During my conversations with former members of the Azerbaijani KGB's 5th Directorate, I attempted to establish how many convictions were made in the years 1967-1969 under article 188-1 of the criminal code of Azerbaijan ("the deliberate dissemination of fabrications that disparage the Soviet governmental and social order"). As it turned out, not a single one. Even after 1969 this article of the criminal code was barely used.

Control over literature and social sciences also increased, and the KGB found ample informants among the creative intelligentsia. With Andropov's arrival at the KGB came the tacit command to all KGB operatives to recruit informants, or "sources" on a purely patriotic basis. The criminal contingent was an exception: the departments were permitted to pay currency traders and drug dealers for their clandestine complicity. Others were offered a variety of incentives: some were helped to take foreign

holidays or gain employment; others were offered medical care or even career advancement. It was possible to go as far as to award particularly valuable agents decorations or a "veteran's pension". One of my sources informed me that the security services had no less than 12-14 informants in each enterprise and each institution. This allowed them to monitor almost the entire population of the small republic.

Azerbaijan's creative intelligentsia were the most closely observed and monitored; although, this monitoring was implemented in a far more civil manner than in Russia. Another factor bears mention: there was a considerable number of individuals among the writers and in other spheres who had been raised in the traditions of 1937. These people informed on their work colleagues entirely voluntarily, "as their conscience required", as they say. Some of them even attempted to appear holier-than-thou as they sought out and revealed sedition where there was not the slightest trace of it to be found.

It is paradoxical but nonetheless true that Heydar Aliyev and his young colleagues at the state security agency were at times more lenient towards writer, poet or academic than this individual's colleagues, who demanded strict punishment of the "renegade". Much later, at the 10th Congress of Azerbaijani writers, Heydar Aliyev spoke openly about the denunciations from members of the creative intelligentsia that were literally heaped on his desk both at the KGB and the Central Committee: "Innumerable people, even writers like yourselves, came to me with accusations. Someone would come and declare that X was a pan-Turkist, while another would assert that Y was a pan-Iranist; a third would insist that Z was in fact a Turkish spy. Others would claim so-and-so was an Iranian spy, while such-and-such was against Soviet power and that someone else's grandfather had been against Soviet power and that this individual himself was anti-Soviet. So many turned up to 'give warnings' and try to block the publication of one work or another."¹

Aslan Kenan's essay on Firudin Shushinsky, the well-known researcher of Azerbaijani folk music, contains an intriguing episode in which he discusses the publication of *Shusha*. This book met with considerable hostility from Armenians since Shushinsky had supposedly insulted Andronik's honour and virtue, thereby damaging the friendly relations between the two republics.

Aslan Kenan writes: "At Moscow's insistence this issue was addressed to the Bureau of the CPA Central Committee. Speakers at the meeting of the Bureau, which dragged on for more than six hours, attempted, in no uncertain terms, to brand the young researcher a 'bourgeois nationalist', so on and so forth. However, there were some academics who rated the work extremely highly and offered their support to the young author. They were backed up

¹ The Tenth Congress of Azerbaijani Writers, 28-30th October 1997, Baku

by a few government officials."¹ One of these was Heydar Aliyev, chairman of the Azerbaijani KGB. After that meeting of the Central Committee Bureau on 17th April 1969 there came renewed attacks on the book. Nevertheless, Heydar Aliyev's department prevented further reprisals against its author. Once Heydar Aliyev came to power, the persecution of Shushinsky came to an end. Although, naturally, the ever-vigilant Chekists kept their eye on the headstrong music scholar for a long time, and the heads of the 5th Directorate summoned him for preventative "heart-to-heart" talks on more than one occasion.

While working for the 2nd Department, Heydar Aliyev preferred using preventative measures rather than punishment after the fact, a tactic that the ideological department later employed. "Targets" were invited into the KGB, where they were treated to a preventative conversation and an official warning in the name of the government in accordance with the order of the USSR Supreme Soviet. Fear of the KGB gnawed away so corrosively at Soviet citizens that at times only a single summons into the terrible department was sufficient to rehabilitate the "rebel" as a law-abiding citizen.

Writers, poets and artists are a capricious, highly-strung and excessively ambitious bunch. I know this from my own experience, having worked in the Union of Writers for around 10 years. One of them missed out on a prize; another's birthday was not sufficiently celebrated; yet another was dissatisfied with his living conditions. This social discontent would be reflected in the individual's work or in ostentatiously oppositional and even anti-Soviet declarations when among friends and colleagues, which, of course, immediately became known to the relevant authorities.

Major General Bahadur Huseynov, the former head of a department of the 5th Directorate, recalls the intriguing case of the poet Khalil Rza. The national-democratic movement born in Azerbaijan at the start of the 1990s would elect him its standard-bearer and mouthpiece, but at the time Khalil Rza was merely a researcher at the Institute of Literature, and a highly gifted poet and translator. However, being a very emotional and impulsive person, he would frequently make disrespectful remarks about politicians in Moscow, claiming that Azerbaijani workers were neglected and oppressed on their own soil, and the like.

"We invited him into the KGB. 'What drove you to such thoughts?' I demanded of him. He answered: 'Comrade Huseynov, I am a poet, I write for the people and my homeland, I praise Azerbaijan's achievements. There are four of us in my family; we live a cramped life. I have requested a different flat on numerous occasions, but to no avail.'

By that time Heydar Aliyevich was already working in the Central Committee. In a report addressed to him we described how

¹ Aslan Kenan, "Nepovtorimiy Issledovatel Azerbaydzhanskoy Narodnoy Muzyki" [A unique researcher of Azerbaijani folk music], *Zerkalo*, 29th October (2005)

Khalil Rza would make nationalist remarks in his circle, express his dissatisfaction with the party line, and how he justified this behaviour by his difficult living conditions. We requested Heydar Aliyevich to take Khalil Rza's popularity as a poet into consideration and order him to be allocated a flat. As a result, Khalil Rza received a three- or four-bedroom flat.

There was no end to writers giving 'warnings' about each other – and we had to react to these 'warnings'. We would contact an agent who worked among writers to clarify whether the accusation corresponded with reality. More often than not, the facts laid out in these anonymous letters were unsubstantiated.¹

Former KGB employees recall the vast quantity of red tape involved in checking these 'warnings'. It is with good reason that Leonid Shebarshin, a veteran of the Soviet intelligence service, writes that the distinguishing feature of his work was "the ceaseless flow of documents, many of which, as far as I can see, are unnecessary, and serve only to distract people from their work and disrupt their thoughts."¹

Bureaucratic red tape was the defining characteristic of every government department of the Soviet Union, and one that even closed institutions such as the KGB could not escape. However, sometimes employees would attempt to hide their genuine desire to save some potential dissident from more severe punishment with a "paper trail". Bahadur Huseynov, for example, recalls the active battle against religious nationalism and extremism that was carried out in the Soviet Union in the 1970s:

"In other Muslim republics (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) many clerics were convicted for religious propaganda. That did not happen here. Here, if some remarks were made, the response was limited to preventative measures and warnings. I worked for six years as the chairman of the Nakhchivan KGB, and we did not arrest a single person in all that time. We followed Heydar Aliyev's maxim, 'Try to make the situation better.' He would frequently repeat, 'An operative can only be highly commended for his work if he has deterred the activity of anti-Soviet elements and forestalled the possibility of their arrest and exclusion from society by preventative means.'

Both in his position as chairman of the KGB as well as in senior party positions, Heydar Aliyev was very tolerant of the faithful and their spiritual leaders: mullahs, akhundas, and qadis. His respect for the religious faith may have had its roots in his family. I have already discussed the deeply religious attitude of his mother, Izzet khanim. His stepsister Sura and her husband Gulu were also religious. According to the recollections of older residents, Gulu worked at the newspaper *Sharg Gapisi*, was a bursar and later weighmaster in the salt-mines. A warm-hearted and decent man, he

helped his wife's family greatly at the beginning of the 1930s, when Alirza kishi disappeared from Nakhchivan for months at a time to earn money at Baku's oil refineries.

After the war Gulu turned to religion: he began reading the Quran, leading commemorative Majlises, and was even called 'mullah Gulu'. Sura khanim also observed the Ramadan fast and performed Namaz.

Former party worker and current Milli Majlis Deputy, Fattah Heydarov recalls: "Uncle Gulu was a very active, eloquent person; he knew the Quran and could preside over religious conversations, therefore he was invited to organise and lead Majlises.

Once, after Heydar Aliyev had been appointed deputy chairman of the KGB, we met Uncle Gulu by chance at a Majlis and I joked, 'Uncle Gulu, now you can no longer be a mullah.'

After all, the KGB had always fought against any manifestation of religion. 'Don't worry,' he answered, 'I went and asked permission. I asked him whether he would like me to stop attending Majlises and reading the Quran. But he just smiled and embraced me. 'Don't pay anyone any attention! Set your compatriots on the path of truth, as you have done previously, and I will try my best to do the same here in Baku.'

This conversation showed me that Heydar Aliyev was not against religion, and that he would protect national and religious customs and traditions."

In his later years, after becoming president of an independent Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev would fulfil every faithful Muslim's dream; he visited the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, completed a small hajj and received the supreme honour: the doors of the Kaaba were opened to him. I am certain that the spirits of his deeply religious ancestors – and above all that of his dearly beloved mother – spoke within him during those moments.

It is also worth noting that the CPA Central Committee's secretaries for ideology in the second half of the 1960s were well-educated and highly respected in creative circles. Eminent figures include the well-known literary critic and playwright Shikhali Gurbanov, and also the historian and theatrical theorist Jafar Jafarov. They spoke out against the policy of cracking down on writers. They convinced Akhundov, the first secretary of the Central Committee, to refrain from creating conflicts with the intelligentsia and from holding public "ideological denunciations" of Azerbaijani writers and academics.

There were a few rare instances where more serious difficulties could not simply be smoothed out, especially when information had reached Moscow. The central authorities insisted that "troublemakers" should be punished so that they could serve as an example. In a speech to personnel from the Ministry of National Security in 1997, Heydar Aliyev recalled a well-known case involving a group of Azerbaijani historians, including Ziya Bunyadov, a Hero of the Soviet Union and a future academician.

¹ Leonid Shebarshin, *Ruka Moskvy* [The hand of Moscow], (Moscow: Tsentr-100, 2002), 74

In the spring of 1964, there was great pomp and celebration to mark the supposedly voluntary union of Azerbaijan with Russia. In recognition of this, Azerbaijan was awarded the Order of Lenin. Many members of the creative intelligentsia were opposed to this loose – to put it mildly – interpretation of historic events. However, they preferred not to express such sentiments explicitly, but through nuances and subtleties of language. Z. Bunyadov, M. Ismaylov and S. Aliyarov decided to launch a démarche. In March 1969, they presented papers to the academic council of the historical faculty of the Azerbaijan State University, demonstrating that there could be no such thing as a voluntary joining of Azerbaijan to Russia, given that the Tsar's generals had conquered Azerbaijani territories with fire and sword.¹

Heydar Aliyev recalls the consequences of that event: "We were ordered to punish the historians, especially Ziya Bunyadov, with the severest penalties possible. But I put a stop to such attempts. Today, it is with a feeling of great pride that I can say that during my tenure as chairman of the Azerbaijani KGB and, later, as president of Azerbaijan, not a single initiative was launched that was not in the interests of the Azerbaijani people. In defiance of all endeavours to exert pressure on us, we did not arrest a single opposition member, nor was anybody detained for anti-Soviet activity or propaganda."²

Heydar Aliyev would often recall another story, one connected with Rustam Ibrahimbeyov and Eldar Gulyev's 1969 film *V Odnom Yuzhnom Gorode* [In one southern city]. The film did not make it past the censors, and was very nearly condemned to a life gathering dust on the shelf. However, upon discovering that two young Azerbaijani cinematographers had shot a film in which they bravely and openly exposed negative phenomena in society, Heydar Aliyev expressed a desire to see it. After watching the film, "I did not just inform the Central Committee and Moscow, I insisted, demanded, that they give permission for the film to be shown."³

The Azerbaijani KGB's Moscow bosses did not always approve of such 'liberalism'. Bahadur Huseynov recalls how in 1968 a commission led by Major General Vartanov was sent from Moscow to check the local agency's work. Regarding the 5th Department, they concluded that the fight against nationalism was insufficient. General Huseynov called Filipp Bobkov, the chairman of the 5th Directorate of the USSR KGB, to inform him that, in his opinion, these remarks did not reflect reality.

"Comrade Vartanov is aggravating the situation," Huseynov said. "I request that this issue be taken off the agenda. We report to you annually on the work we have accomplished and indicate how many people have been preventively called in for nationalistic tendencies. This work is being actively carried out in Azerbaijan – we just don't take the cases to court."

¹ Ismayil, vol.7, 160

² Vernost Narodu, Rodine, Gosudarstvu, 25

³ Ibid., 26

Azerbaijan's creative intelligentsia was not the only social group to be closely monitored: many agents established themselves among the local youth, primarily infiltrating student circles. The information gathered from such groups was a cause for concern at times. Indeed, the students of Baku – who counted many individuals from socialist and developing countries among their number – reacted vocally to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. KGB reports, for instance, note that anti-Soviet graffiti appeared on the walls of buildings in the Technical Institute, and even in its lecture hall, and that certain groups of students openly expressed their opposition to the Soviet invasion of Prague.

Azerbaijani students continued their dangerous underground activities in 1967 and 1968, creating more and more groups and organisations. Some pursued the goal of unifying Northern and Southern Azerbaijan, while others tried their hand at fighting corruption. According to Ramiz Mamadzadeh, Ibrahimov, the dean of the University, declared in 1968 that some seven or eight students had formed a secret organisation which sought Azerbaijan's reunification. With Heydar Aliyev's agreement, the head of the KGB's 5th Directorate went to meet party and Komsomol members. He later revealed: "We held a large meeting and explained the party's position on the matter at hand. After this everything calmed down. We didn't arrest anyone, we didn't call anyone to account. We dealt with a lot of similar cases in this way."

In his piece *Ya i KGB* [The KGB and I], the renowned journalist Alirza Balayev describes how, in the autumn of 1967, he was presented with a proposal to become a member of an underground anti-Soviet organisation. During its impromptu constitutive meeting Balayev convinced his comrades to "remodel" the organisation and focus its main energy away from fighting the Soviet regime to battling corruption, which had become deeply rooted in all aspects of society by that time. However, there were some attendees that stood by the creation of a more radical, anti-Soviet organisation. "I have now come to think that the people who advocated an anti-Soviet direction were actually informers who, in return for uncovering such a 'serious' group, were intending to scoop hefty jackpot (such as a position or entry to a university). You can also suppose that it was those very informers who initiated the idea of creating this organisation, in pursuit of personal gain."

The "conspirators" acquired a typewriter, which they proposed to use to print leaflets, as well as other materials about corruption. They decided to stick up the leaflets at night on the streets of Baku. However, this venture was nipped in the bud; after a few days, suddenly and without warning, *milititsya* officers apprehended Alirza Balayev and his relative Ismayil Babazadeh (also a member of the organisation) and took them off to the KGB. Some "Russian colonel" held a preventative conversation with the young men that was designed to counteract and prevent subversive activity, and took a written statement from them. According to the journalist

himself, this colonel dealt with them very politely, which arouses mixed feelings of surprise and gratitude in Balayev to this day, all the more so for the fact that, as the KGB promised, this event did not have any impact at all on the study, work or personal lives of the "conspirators".¹

According to Filipp Bobkov, preventative work among the population in Azerbaijan was considered to be highly effective: "If we are to talk about repressive measures against dissidents in Azerbaijan, then the arrest of Elchibey [the assumed name of Abulfaz Aliyev – Ed.] was, I daresay, the only precedent. That is not to say that tendencies towards protest were not observed, just that operatives knew how to prevent them from escalating. In the case of Abulfaz Aliyev, when prevention did not succeed, he was arrested. But that was the only instance. This attests to the fact that problems were coped with and solved through political means, rather than in a heavy-handed way. We looked on arrest as an extreme measure demonstrating that we could not avert ideological subversion. The main thing was to observe the processes at work, to understand their cause and to take measures against the causes rather than the people. And, incidentally, we managed to do this in Azerbaijan."

Of course, the matter was not limited to the struggle against ideological subversion alone. Heydar Aliyev took on and supported any initiative that worked in favour of Azerbaijan's national interests. For example, officials from the 5th Department had some interesting projects with regards to the Azerbaijani diaspora. Ramiz Mammadzadeh, the former head of the 5th Department, gave me an account of some of them.

"In 1968, we received intelligence from abroad about an old Azerbaijani man living in France who had ancient Azerbaijani manuscripts of great importance to the study of our history. We were set the task of acquiring these manuscripts. The difficulty, however, lay in the fact that this man did not like the Soviet Union or communists, and so it was useless to try to appeal to him through the official channels.

Heydar Aliyevich tasked our department with devising the appropriate arrangements. The head of the 2nd Division of the 5th Department was Magus Mammadov, a young but very experienced KGB serviceman who had completed his intelligence and reconnaissance training in Moscow. He and I prepared the necessary arrangements, and I presented them to Heydar Aliyev. He asked who the best person was to implement these plans. 'In my view we should put my former university teacher, Professor Abbas Zamanov, on the case,' I said. 'But Abbas Zamanov has been excluded from the party. Will he agree?' I replied that I would try to speak to him.

In the early 1960s the renowned scholar of philology Abbas Zamanov was excluded from the party for nationalism and was out of favour. For

that reason he was not entirely inclined to particularly pro-Soviet feelings, and had a corresponding attitude towards the KGB. Hence, Heydar Aliyev initially had his doubts that Zamanov would agree to our proposals.

He told me to invite Abbas Zamanov in to see him, adding just before I left the office that I should first find him *A History of Azerbaijani Literature*.

We set the meeting with Abbas Zamanov for the following day at 2 p.m. I used the intervening time to go home and find Heydar Aliyevich a book on the history of Azerbaijani literature.

The following day Abbas Zamanov and I came for our appointment with the chairman. During the conversation I was mostly silent, while Heydar Aliyev and Abbas Zamanov spoke between themselves. The conversation lasted two hours.

When we had left the office Abbas Zamanov asked me what Heydar Aliyevich's degree specialisation had been. I replied that he was an historian by education but had never worked in this field. 'Surely he's a literary specialist?' Abbas muallim asked me. I replied that this was not the case.

This episode clearly illustrates how thoroughly Heydar Aliyevich prepared for any matter, and the attention he devoted to solving any issue, using all the resources at his disposal to try to gain success.

After this discussion we sent Zamanov and our colleague Mammadov on their mission to France. Abbas muallim convinced the elderly emigrant to donate the precious manuscripts to his homeland, and these manuscripts, which contain literary sources dating back to the period of the poet Nizami, are now held in the Manuscript Archive of Azerbaijan. The choice of Zamanov as candidate for this task turned out to be correct, since that old man would not have wanted to talk with a communist, and Abbas Zamanov was not a member of the party; he was a distinguished scholar with nationalist views."

There was also an active process of recruitment being conducted among foreigners, who began visiting Baku more and more often from the mid-1960s onwards, as tourists or on private visas. Ramiz Mammadzadeh related to me how he managed to persuade the leader of one of the Azerbaijani cultural societies operating in the United States to collaborate. Tapping into patriotic sentiments, they talked him into carrying out certain work among American citizens of Azerbaijani descent, mainly aimed towards drawing them closer to the country of their roots. On behalf of the Society of Friendship and Cultural Links with Foreign Countries he was presented with Azerbaijani musical instruments – such as the *tar* and the *kamancha*, – and supplied with literature, so that he could set up related social groups. Mammadzadeh told me, "I remember, *America* magazine then published an article about the work of an Azerbaijani society operating in the USA, and the help Soviet Azerbaijan was giving this group so it could carry out its cultural work."

¹ *Baky Post*, Nos. 1-4 (1996)

It was in fact Azerbaijani intelligence officers who came up with the initiative of creating a social organisation in Azerbaijan that would carry out work among their foreign compatriots. Ilhuseyn Huseynov recalls that Heydar Aliyev supported this idea the whole time, both while as chairman of the KGB, and as Central Committee first secretary. Similar societies already existed at that time in almost all Soviet republics, not least in Armenia, where there was a whole committee dedicated to the matter of Armenians living abroad. However, Moscow categorically opposed the idea, according to Huseynov: "Especially Foreign Affairs Minister Gromyko. The USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs opposed it because it feared that should this Veten Society ["homeland society"] be formed, it would begin carrying out work among Azerbaijanis living in Iran as well, which might in turn anger the Iranian authorities and negatively affect international relations."¹

It was only in the mid-1980s, when Heydar Aliyev was already a Politburo member and one of the Soviet state's leaders, that this idea could finally become a reality. Elchin, a famous Azerbaijani writer from the 1960s, became the chairman of the Veten Society, which went on to play a significant role in reinforcing the links between the Azerbaijani diaspora and the Soviet republic.

THE KGB CHAIRMAN AND THE CREATIVE INTELLIGENTSIA

By his own account Heydar Aliyev felt a deep affinity for literature and books from the very moment he learnt to read: "It is fair to say that literature has had a great role in my personal development, education and moral upbringing. I read all the works by Azerbaijani poets and writers with great fondness while I was at secondary school. I have not had the occasion to reread many of those books, but they left such a strong impression on me that I remember them to this day."²

For all the dissimilarity of character and temperament between Andropov and Heydar Aliyev, they shared a love of art, literature and music. Andropov wrote what was, according to his associates, respectable poetry, and had a passion for jazz. Heydar Aliyev drew in his youth and was even set to become a professional architect. Both were blessed with a decent baritone voice and enjoyed singing when amongst friends. One of Heydar Aliyev's biographers, Nikolai Zenkovich, makes the observation: "Never – neither before nor after them – had the [security services] had such erudite and well-rounded heads. Both the USSR KGB under Andropov and the Azerbaijani KGB under Heydar Aliyev became markedly intelligent, which even many dissidents recognised."³

It is entirely possible that, despite successfully advancing up the career ladder, which ultimately led both of them to the apex of state power, Heydar Aliyev, just like Andropov, was at times overcome by a sense of melancholy about his unrealised youthful ambitions. I feel that Heydar Aliyev loved the counterintelligence profession for the very reason that there was something in it akin to creative endeavour. In any case, in the process of enlisting foreign agents – at which, as first-hand accounts confirm, Heydar Aliyev was unparalleled – KGB operatives needed to possess exceptional acting abilities and exercise masterful control over their body language. This is, surely, the very same kind of performance that one observes in the theatre: in both settings being believed is paramount.

According to the recollections of Andropov's colleagues, he was a man of a reserved, self-contained and aloof disposition; he almost never socialised or mixed with Politburo members or KGB colleagues outside of work. At the same time, however, he would quite gladly establish personal relationships with members of the artistic intelligentsia: Andropov's biographers write of his exchanges with Yevtushenko and Voznesensky; of his friendship with the writer Yulian Semyonov, to whom he supplied the idea for the plot of *Seventeen Moments of Spring*; and of the patronage he extended to the singer Muslim Magomayev.

¹ *The Tenth Congress of Azerbaijani Writers*, 234

² Nikolai Zenkovich, *Heydar Aliyev. Zigzagi Sudby*, [Heydar Aliyev: The zigzags of fate], (Moscow: Eksmo, 2007), 324

¹ *Ibid.*, 45

As for Heydar Aliyev, even while head of the Azerbaijani KGB he could count a significant amount of writers, artists and musicians among his friends. His relationships with some of them subsequently grew into sincere and long-lasting friendships. Associating with these individuals offered him a respite and allowed him to learn first-hand about popular sentiments in the academic and creative spheres. Then, taking these sentiments into account, he could make policy adjustments in his agency.

One of the first to become acquainted with Heydar Aliyev was the great Rashid Behbudov. The singer was very familiar with the family of Heydar Aliyev's wife, Zarifa khanim, due to the fact that he had given several concerts in Dagestan when her father, Aziz Aliyev, was governor there. The journalist Svetlana Mirzoyeva recalls the singer's words: "When this young man, Heydar Aliyev, appeared alongside Zarifa (whose family already lived in Baku), Behbudov privately dubbed him Gladiator or Spartacus because of his height, athletic build and noble bearing. Spartacus turned out to be a man with an astonishing feel for art. Behbudov was struck by his musicality, asking me: 'Do you know how well he sings? You'd think he was a professionally trained singer, but he really works – and here he lowered his voice – in the secret police. I was at their house yesterday. We came out of a concert at the Dzerzhinsky Club together, and the couple took me home with them. You know, Heydar sang my entire repertoire through, with Zarifa accompanying him, it's like they have a whole philharmonic orchestra at their house'."

Heydar Aliyev's acquaintance with the renowned painter Tahir Salahov goes back to 1962. They first met at a banquet dedicated to the opening of the exhibition "Cuba Through the Eyes of Soviet Artists". Tahir Salahov immediately took a liking to the KGB officer, "He seemed to me to be a pleasant, likeable person, who spoke good Russian and gave marvellous toasts."

Before long, the artist had occasion to get to know other, far more valuable qualities of his new acquaintance, such as loyalty, reliability and a willingness to give immediate assistance. "If not for Heydar Aliyev," says Tahir Salahov, "I would have had to live the rest of my life without a leg." This is what happened: "On the night of 18th December 1964 I was involved in an accident on my way to the airport to meet a friend. There was black ice on the road and, in order to avoid crashing into a lorry, I turned the car to the right – it came off the road and onto the pavement, and hit a tree. The steering wheel passed just by my face and tore through the roof. And my legs were broken by the brake pedal.

At 2 a.m. I was operated on at the Sabunchinsky hospital, and they wanted to remove a leg. Since they had only given me a local anaesthetic, I regained consciousness for a few seconds. Some kind of sixth sense told me that they intended to amputate my leg.

¹ Mirzoyeva, 155

I called the doctor over. They were surprised, because the curtain was already drawn across and they were preparing to carry out the amputation. I asked the doctor what he was planning to do, and he replied that he was thinking only of saving my life.

I gave him Heydar Aliyev's telephone number and told him to call it. 'I'm losing consciousness,' I said, 'but you call this number and find out what else can be done.' After this I blacked out.

The doctor went off to make the call. As it turns out, he was acquainted with Heydar Aliyev and recognised the number.

Heydar Aliyev came to the hospital straight away. Azerbaijan's leading surgeon, Mursal Garayev, and the artist Kamil Aliyev had also been with me on that ill-fated journey to the airport. They had also suffered injuries, but to a lesser extent.

If it had not been for Heydar Aliyev, I would have had to live without a leg. To all intents and purposes he as good as saved my life. By the morning I was close to death from severe blood loss. He spent the whole night in the hospital and insisted on a consultation. Later on, the doctor who was treating me told me how Aliyev had said to him, 'Do everything in your power to keep Tahir alive'. It turns out that the doctor was also from Nakhchivan and knew Heydar Aliyev well. It took me six months to recover after that, and the leg still hurts to this day."

Tahir Salahov also told me about another curious incident, which befell the Azerbaijani impressionist artist Sattar Bahlulzadeh: "Heydar Aliyev had a wide circle of friends among the creative intelligentsia; he was on good terms with everyone. You could turn to him on the most delicate of issues, and he would always try to help.

For example, Sattar was once treated in an improper way. He was in a restaurant, and an old, pre-revolutionary kettle decorated with an Azerbaijani pattern took his fancy. He wanted to buy this kettle, but they began to ask him where he had acquired the money, because he didn't look all that presentable. Sattar didn't tend to pay much attention to his appearance. The people at the restaurant did not realise who he was, and they called the *militsiya*. The man who was with him called me and told me that Sattar had been taken off to the drunk tank at the *militsiya* station, even though he was not actually drunk.

I called Heydar Aliyevich, and he helped us considerably: he made the necessary calls and ordered the release of Sattar and the punishment of those who had treated him in such a way. Then he met with the artist himself, who was very grateful to him. I remember Sattar asking, 'Why did they treat me, a People's Artist of Azerbaijan, like that? What did I do wrong?'

When Heydar Aliyev spoke at Sattar Bahlulzade's 90th birthday celebrations, I reminded him of that story. 'You know, I had quite forgotten about that,' he said."

Heydar Aliyev always prided himself on the affinity he had with artistic people; it would seem he was drawn to them, seeking the interaction coloured by emotion and feeling that was lacking in his official life. He was keen that they should not perceive him simply as a KGB general with whom they had to be on their guard.

He would often ask his deputies or the chairman of the 5th Department to speak to some comrade or other, to try to influence them, but subtly, so as not to cause fear or offense. "He always said that the intelligentsia was a precious resource, and we must maintain a special relationship with them," recalls Ziya Yusifzadeh.

In the 1970s many so-called dissidents left Russia for the West, and the most passionate and uncompromising among them were exiled against their will. A number of historians and political scientists consider this to have been a politically unwise decision.

"Some of the key decisions made by Andropov to protect the socialist system were professionally untenable, since, in practice, they led to results which were the opposite of what had been intended; for example, when under Andropov it became fashionable to expel anybody considered to be a dissident. Once abroad, they were instantly recruited by anti-Soviet propaganda groups, and they took to toiling away against the USSR, taking advantage of all the technical facilities of their new employers. Was that really a favourable outcome?"¹

During that same period, not one of the intellectuals who left Azerbaijan did so for political reasons. Undoubtedly, this is thanks to Heydar Aliyev, who simply did not allow dissidence to arise in Azerbaijan. A former employee of the 5th Department tried to prove to me that there was no *real* opposition in Azerbaijan. Individuals who did come to the attention of the KGB cannot truly be called dissidents, because they were not protesting against the flaws of the system, nor against the system itself; instead they spoke out against certain specific shortcomings, such as the suppression of the Azerbaijani language, the division of a single people, etc. I do not agree with this interpretation. At that time, to oppose the dominance of Russian in public institutions or to write about the tragedy of the divided nation was a real act of dissent, because it was contrary to the official policy of the Soviet state. The way in which officers of the Azerbaijani KGB presented it to their Moscow-based leadership is another issue. Heydar Aliyev sincerely believed that placing security measures and administrative pressure on any writer or scientist could have no positive outcome, and might even anger and make an enemy of them.

In the early 1990s an unusual correspondence between Andropov and the prominent Soviet physicist Pyotr Kapitsa was published in the Russian press, in which Kapitsa appealed to the head of the KGB to release Sakharov

from his administrative exile. In this letter, some interesting ideas are expressed on a scientist's right to hold non-conformist opinions about society's social and political aspects.

The following is an excerpt from Kapitsa's letter, and in my view, the sentiments are similar to those Heydar Aliyev regularly stated in conversations with colleagues: "Life has shown me that people of great talent are very rare, and therefore they should be valued and protected. Great creativity requires a particular temperament, which leads to high degrees of discontent, so talented people tend to have what some call a difficult character. In fact, creative works are usually received less than warmly because, for the most part, people are conservative and are seeking a quiet life. As a result, the dialectics of humanity's development lies in the grip of a conflict between conservatism and dissent; this has been the case throughout history, in all areas of society."

In order to win a horse race, you need horses. However, true stallions are a rare find, and they are hard work; they need skilled riders who take good care of them. It is easier and smoother to ride on an ordinary horse, but, of course, you will not win the race on it."

When he became head of the party in Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev would protect these fiery, flighty stallions on several occasions. He would once joke in a conversation with Azerbaijani writers that he "was the biggest dissident among you." As we all know, in every joke there is a considerable element of truth.

¹ Valery Legostaev, *Zagadki Ligacheva* [Ligachev's riddles], *Zavtra*, No. 52 (2000), 6

¹ *Kommunist*, No. 7 (1991), 51-57, cited in Medvedev, *Unknown Andropov*, 203

KGB MAJOR GENERAL

Four months after Heydar Aliyev's appointment as chairman of the Azerbaijani KGB, on 30th October 1967, by order No. 136 of the USSR KGB he was promoted to major general. He became the first Azerbaijani general of the country's state security agency. He learned of his appointment as a general when he was in his native Nakhchivan, celebrating the republic's 40th anniversary as an autonomous state.

I have the first-hand accounts of two people who witnessed this landmark in Heydar Aliyev's life. One of them is the artist Tahir Salahov, the other – a former employee of the Azerbaijani KGB, Albert Salamov: "In October 1967, Nakhchivan received the Order of Lenin, I recall, to mark the autonomous republic's 40th anniversary. Heydar Aliyevich took the train to Nakhchivan, taking a few of us with him. When we arrived in Nakhchivan, Tsvigun called from Moscow on a high-frequency telephone, and he was the first to congratulate him on his promotion.

I was standing beside Heydar Aliyevich and heard everything.

We were all very pleased that our chairman had been granted the rank of general. I remember that Peskov, the deputy head of political affairs for the 4th Army, was standing next to Heydar Aliyevich. When he was about to hang up at the end of his conversation with Tsvigun, Peskov literally snatched the receiver from his hands and shouted, 'Semyon Kuzmich, how is it that I have not been appointed lieutenant general?!"

That came as a shock to me: that a general should be begging for a title. He then lamented to us at length about the fact that he had not been promoted. Heydar Aliyevich didn't pay undue attention to this behaviour, and simply walked off. I still recall the great degree of love and respect with which he was received in Nakhchivan."

Tahir Salahov remembers: "We travelled with him on the 40th anniversary of the Republic of Nakhchivan in 1967. I was a deputy of the USSR Supreme Soviet representing Nakhchivan. We even set up a branch of the USSR Union of Artists in the Ilyichevsky (now Sharur) region.

The official celebration of the anniversary was held at the Palace of Culture. Nakhchivan's first secretary and then Veli Akhundov presented their reports, followed by other speakers offering congratulations.

We were sitting in the presidium. I went out for a cigarette in the lobby. Suddenly, the telephone in the corner rang. There was nobody on duty, so I answered the phone: 'Is Heydar Aliyev available? I'm calling from Yuri Andropov's office.'

I caught Heydar Aliyev's eye and waved him over. He came to the phone, and then all of a sudden I heard: 'Yuri Vladimirovich, I serve the Soviet Union! Thank you!'

He heard the news of his appointment to the rank of general when back on his native soil.

During the break Akhundov, Alikhanov (chairman of the Council of Ministers), and Isgandarov (chairman of the Supreme Soviet) came out into the lobby of the presidium. Akhundov greeted me, 'Good to see you, Tahir. I am glad you've come to the festivities. What is the good news?' 'I'm fine, thanks,' I said, 'we have just received the wonderful news that Heydar Aliyevich has been promoted to the rank of general.'

The news was announced that evening at the banquet, and all the Nakchivanis in the hall gave him a standing ovation.

We all travelled back together on the train. I was in the same compartment as Heydar Aliyevich, Firangiz Ahmadova, Chingiz Sadikhov, Lutfiyar Imanov: everybody from our group came into our carriage from the neighbouring ones. Our table was laid and the celebrations began in our compartment. I remember us all singing, rejoicing and congratulating him. When we got out at the station in Baku, Heydar Aliyevich invited me to his home. They were already expecting guests, and Zarifa Azizovna had laid the table with food. General Matrosov and some other military men were there proposing toasts. We spent the best part of two days drinking to his promotion to general."

A friend and colleague of Heydar Aliyev's wife, Zahra Guliyeva, recalls with a smile how Zarifa came to work one morning and said with a laugh, "Congratulate me, Zara, because I have just become a general's wife."

"We had not even known that Zarifa's husband had an important role in the KGB. She never boasted about things like that," said Zahra Guliyeva.

Former Azerbaijani Foreign Affairs Minister Hasan Hasanov, adds: "In 1967 I was promoted to the party's Central Committee. Eldar Nuriyev was working as an advisor in our department. Once, an employee from the CPSU Central Committee came, and Eldar had to accompany him on a trip to Nakchivan. When he arrived he said that there was a celebration planned at the city stadium to mark the anniversary of the founding of the republic, and both me and my comrade from the CPSU Central Committee were invited to this event. During the celebration at the stadium it was announced that Heydar Aliyev, who was already chairman of the Azerbaijani KGB by then, had been awarded the rank of general. At this news, the whole stadium stood as one and began to applaud. The man who had come from the CPSU Central Committee, not understanding what was going on, stood up too and joined in the cheering. When they had all sat back down, he asked Eldar why everybody was clapping. Eldar explained that the chairman of the Azerbaijani KGB, Heydar Aliyev, had been promoted to general. Moved by what he had seen and heard, the advisor replied that he 'never would have imagined that thousands of people could stand and cheer a KGB general with so much joy. He must be a truly extraordinary man!'"

SPECIAL OPERATIONS AND MISSIONS

Naturally, the struggle against ideological sabotage and the surveillance of dissidents did not represent the main bulk of the work carried out by the security services. The Azerbaijani KGB's main personnel and resources were allocated to other tasks, principally in the intelligence and counterintelligence sectors. Wondering which aspects were priorities for Heydar Aliyev after his appointment as chairman of the Azerbaijani KGB, I approached Khagani Baghirov, the head of the State Archives at the Ministry of National Security. He gave me clear and succinct military-style answers.

1. To oppose Armenian nationalism and any attempts to separate off Nagorno-Karabakh.
2. To carry out the necessary work to strengthen state borders.
3. To oppose foreign intelligence services and intensify counterintelligence work in this area.
4. To fight crime in the country more successfully through the implementation of counter-measures and a plan for communication and cooperation between the Ministry of Home Affairs and state security bodies.

Hence, over the two years Heydar Aliyev headed the state security services, a plan of action was developed to deal with the key issues of border security, counterintelligence and organised crime. Given Azerbaijan's geostrategic position and its political situation, these were the most pressing issues.

* * *

Azerbaijan and its capital Baku have always been subject to close attention from the enemy's secret services. Legal and illegal agents gathered information on the naval base of the Caspian fleet, airfields, radar installations, anti-aircraft missile sites, and in general on air defence systems and facilities, the configuration of military units and the combat-ready status of military forces. Besides the illegal infiltration of their agents across state borders, foreign intelligence also employed other resources such as diplomatic channels, tourism, scientific and technological exchanges and international transport. Diplomats gathered data on Azerbaijan's economic potential, the locations of large-scale industrial facilities and specialised engineering facilities of national economic or military importance. Heydar Aliyev placed special emphasis on intercepting and restricting such activities. During the latter half of the 1960s, under his direct leadership, a number of covert operations were carried out with regard to these spying diplomats, which ended in their positions being compromised and even in their ejection from the country.

On 20th December 1967, as the country marked the 50th anniversary of the state security services, Heydar Aliyev appeared on television for the

first time and also published an article in the *Bakinskiy Rabochiy* newspaper. The appearance of this handsome, youthful general on television, speaking without notes in perfect Russian, captured the public's attention. In his article, Heydar Aliyev frankly discussed the large-scale special operations to combat western agents with diplomatic passports: "In recent years the state security services have exposed and curbed espionage activities carried out by many diplomats, tourists, members of various delegations and spies who have been trying to infiltrate the USSR. These include former military attachés to the British and American embassies in Moscow, Generals Hilton and Grow, the Military Attaché of the USA Colonel Aubrey, assistant officer to the British Naval Attaché Lavil, and others.

In early 1965 a group of American military agents stationed in Baku attempted to gain access to a military facility three times, and when they did not achieve their aim, another group was sent to Baku with the same aim five days later. This group operated more carefully, using more ingenuity, however they were also unsuccessful."¹

In the mid-1960s, special measures were also undertaken in connection with the military attachés to the Western embassies. The Azerbaijani KGB servicemen recorded a particular interest among military agents in the sea route from Baku – Pehlevi – Baku. During the period from May to November 1968 this journey was taken by all seven of attachés on board the *Guriyev* liner. Of course they were followed by 'our' people. In the reports it was noted that the foreigners were carrying out visual surveillance and attempted to take photographs of military facilities from the liner. In some instances the special measures led to their removal from the country, as happened with Kristner, a US citizen who arrived in Azerbaijan posing as a tourist.

At the end of each year, the heads of each republic's KGB prepared written reports on the work of their departments. These reports were sent to the USSR KGB, although the first secretary of the central committee of the republic in question was also privy to them. In his time as chairman of the Azerbaijani KGB, Heydar Aliyev had to sign detailed reports twice, which were sent to the central authorities. I was able to see these fascinating documents, which give a vivid insight into the kind of activity undertaken by the Azerbaijani secret service during the Cold War.

The main efforts of the operating body of the Azerbaijani KGB in the area of intelligence between 1967-1969 were directed towards the covert infiltration of the Iranian secret service and also of American agencies located in Iran. With this aim safehouses in Tabriz and Pehlevi were actively used, along with private tourist entry and exit channels. The construction of a hydroelectric plant on the river Araz provided Azerbaijani and Iranian

intelligence with a new field of activity and new opportunities, which each side attempted to put into operation. The 1967 report mentioned that the Iranians, who were concerned that the Soviet secret service was carrying out reconnaissance and counterintelligence work at the hydroelectric facility, created a 60-person-strong taskforce called *Khafezat* in May of that year, and assigned the construction site to the *miliitsiya*.

As is also clear from the report, the CPA Central Committee (most likely at the insistence of the KGB) went to the CPSU Central Committee with a proposal to increase cultural, political and economic ties with Iranian Azerbaijan, with the aim of strengthening Soviet influence there. Some proposals were introduced, including, among others, the introduction of additional employees focused on Iranian Azerbaijan into the workforce of the Soviet Embassy in Tehran, the creation of a consulate in Tabriz (a long-held dream of Heydar Aliyev) and a hospital, as well as the publication of a monthly newspaper called *Azerbaijani SSR*.

In the meantime, Heydar Aliyev proposed to the KGB authorities that they supplement the staff of the KGB commissioner in East Germany with an Azerbaijani secret service employee "to particularly focus on Azerbaijani immigration and Iranian students of Azerbaijani ethnicity studying in higher education institutions in West Berlin or West Germany. This would provide the opportunity to broaden our intelligence base across Iran and provide access to the main enemy."

In late 1967, a meeting of local SAVAK agencies took place in the city of Khoi, after which the Iranian secret services noticeably increased their subversive activity at the hydroelectric facility. The following was stated in the chairman of the Azerbaijani KGB's 1968 report: "The SAVAK agencies, with the help of a significant number of official employees and agents located at the facility, are undertaking reconnaissance tasks as well as attempting to manipulate some of our specialists working in the facility, in an anti-Soviet spirit, to persuade them to betray their homeland, and to incite nationalist feelings."

Considerable attention was given to counterintelligence work among defectors and repatriates who had made their way out of Iran and into the USSR. The 1967 report indicates that the number of intrusions across state borders in the recent period had significantly decreased. There were 127 incursions in 1965, 55 in 1966, but only 24 in 1967. This can be explained by "measures taken by the committee to intercept known Iranian traffickers such as Meshadi Ali, Ibrahimli and Tagizadeh, and more varied approaches to the acceptance of defectors."

In the 1968 report concern was expressed regarding the appearance "on the Iranian coast of the Caspian Sea of mini-submarines with an operational range of 150-200 km, which could provide the enemy with real capabilities to ship their agents into the USSR across maritime boundaries." A specific aim was set: "To devise proposals aimed at

¹ Heydar Aliyev, *Na Strazhe Zavoyevaniy Oktyabrya* [Guarding the conquests of October], cited in *Bakinskiy Rabochiy*, 20th December (1967)

strengthening operations along the coast and reinforcing the tactical and operational security of maritime borders, with the goal of stopping the potential smuggling of enemy agents into the USSR.¹

In the late 1960s the Azerbaijani KGB began to focus on scientific and technical intelligence (STI). Heydar Aliyev's 1968 report mentions an STI group's "attainment of interesting information on the activity of Italian scientific centres in the fields of micro-molecular chemistry and radio-electronic engineering, as well as on long-term projects run by the Americans in the field of oil-well drilling, and significant research by the French firm Rhone Poulenc in the petrochemical field, and so on."

Ilhuseyn Huseynov, the head of the Azerbaijani KGB's foreign intelligence service, writes that the information that the Azerbaijani KGB obtained through STI often brought profits in the region of hundreds of millions of roubles for the country. In the book *Intervyu s Generalom Razvedki* [An interview with a general from the intelligence services], he gives the following example: "The task of regularly obtaining information, technology and documentation on 'oil, and the oil and petrochemical industry' was assigned to the STI division. In one Western nation our employees succeeded in procuring all the documentation on using one well to produce from two or three horizontal oil strata. We sent this material for assessment by Azerbaijani experts. They analysed the material and told us that the introduction of the production methods which we had obtained could bring several hundred millions roubles to the economy over a period of just five years. That was a lot of money indeed at the time. We gave the oil drillers all the technology we had obtained from reconnaissance work and it was then used in Baku and other USSR republics."¹

In the late 1960s, a number of skilled people from scientific research institutes, including postgraduates, came to the STI subdivision. All of them received training at higher education establishments of the USSR KGB, except a few who, on Heydar Aliyev's initiative, were sent on a training programme to capitalist countries through the USSR's Ministry of Higher Education.

Azerbaijani counterintelligence concerning industry and transport, preventing possible sabotage, determining and eliminating possible causes of accidents, fires and crashes, was extremely active. In the 1967 report this example in particular was given: "At the Sumgayit chemical plant it was discovered that an English firm, Simon Carves, had delivered substandard high-pressure pipes, which could break during production, with serious consequences. As a result of the action taken, the company was forced to replace all pipes imported to the USSR and to provide a warranty certificate for them."

As he received extensive information on the developments of a variety of projects related to the national economy, Heydar Aliyev would often

send letters and statements detailing adverse circumstances that had arisen in some enterprise or ministry to the CPA Central Committee. In addition, the head of the KGB would not limit himself to one single piece of information; he would try and analyse the reasons for the incident and give his recommendations and advice for rectifying the situation. Reporting on the assessment undertaken by KGB employees at the Novobakinskiy Oil Processing Plant in connection with the outbreak of a fire there, Heydar Aliyev addressed a letter (23rd August 1967, No. 10/683) to Central Committee First Secretary Akhundov. Regarding the cause of the incident, he notes the obvious technical reasons, but also lists a range of negative factors which were common in all oil processing facilities in Azerbaijan at the time: a rapid turnover of skilled workers, a lack of qualified workers at many of the plants, delayed refurbishment of equipment, the unsafe condition of installations and the premises, and the deterioration of pipelines and equipment.

In a letter dated 20th January 1969 and addressed to Akhundov, the chairman of the Azerbaijani KGB mentions his concerns about the low quality of fuel delivered by Baku oil processing plants for the refuelling of the squadrons stationed in Baku and Zabrat. In Heydar Aliyev's opinion, this "could lead to serious aviation incidents." Therefore, on the recommendation of the KGB, the Azerbaijani Civil Aviation Authority, with the approval of the USSR's Ministry of Civil Aviation, was forced to refuse the delivery of fuel from Baku oil processing plants and switch to using aeroplane fuel from Grozny.

In various reports and statements sent from the Azerbaijani KGB to party bodies, Heydar Aliyev frequently outlined the negative elements of internal procedure, such as ineffective ideological work among the general public, shortcomings in commerce, everyday life, transport and the operation of administrative bodies, which caused civil discontent and provoked various kinds of "nationalist and anti-social behaviour." On 22nd May 1969, he gave a speech at a joint meeting of the Azerbaijani KGB and Ministry of Internal Affairs. He talked anxiously of the poor supply of goods to the republic: "During the last couple of days there has been a significant lack of meat and other goods in Baku, and growing discontent of a political nature has already been recorded. This could all lead to large-scale disorder, which, of course, could put us in a difficult position."

This knowledge of the true situation in various sectors of the national economy and of weak spots would soon stand Heydar Aliyev in good stead in his role as Central Committee first secretary. It would be very difficult to deceive him with triumphant reports during his 14 years in power, because the KGB would faithfully supply its former boss with objective information on the situation in all of Azerbaijan's major industrial enterprises and agricultural facilities.

¹ Huseynbeyli, 35

* * *

Heydar Aliyev paid close attention to security along Azerbaijan's state's borders, establishing which parts of the border could be illegal entry points for Iranian and Turkish agents. In 1968, he directed Azerbaijani security agents along with a subdivision from the South Caucasus Border District to travel illegally along various routes: Baku – Pushkino – Jalilabad; Baku – Fuzuli – Lankaran, and so on. The results proved disheartening. According to reports, "this exercise has demonstrated the extremely weak condition and poor organisation of our border security, to the extent that all of the illegal intruders were able to move freely along the routes and into the heart of Azerbaijan, often with the help of locals."

At the same time, Heydar Aliyev remained firmly against the use of unnecessary repressive measures towards residents of the border regions. General Bahadur Huseynov recalls: "In 1958 I gave a speech at a meeting where Heydar Aliyevich was also present. 'Every year, we give a report from our detachment about arresting thousands of illegal intruders in the border regions. But these intruders are in fact locals who live and work in Baku, or students studying in the capital, visiting the border during their vacation. This means we are artificially creating intruders. The issue is that in the past the KGB and other border forces instituted a system where anyone going into a border region required a permit. So anyone working or studying in Baku needed authorisation just to go home.'

Heydar Aliyev responded immediately: 'You should not do this,' he said. 'Border guards must detain individuals who have no business in being near the border, who have no relatives or acquaintances in the border regions.'

The restrictions were completely lifted after Heydar Aliyev's intervention, and the residents of the border areas were able to travel there with just a passport and no special permits. Soon after, the number of border violations dropped significantly – to just 10 to 15 people per year. Those special passes were still used, but only for people travelling in from other Soviet republics."

Heydar Aliyev would not have been Heydar Aliyev if he had been able to rest on his laurels, and had not led his team to solve new problems, further increasing the efficiency of the intelligence and counterintelligence divisions. As such, the criticisms both in his account of the year 1967, and in his report on the results of the Azerbaijani KGB's work in 1968, are of great importance.

The greater part of Heydar Aliyev's report on the security services' work in 1968 was devoted to an analysis of their shortcomings. He levelled harsh criticism at the 1st Department (foreign espionage) for its agents' feeble infiltration of both the Turkish and Iranian national security agencies (MIT and SAVAK), and of the American agencies working on Turkish and Iranian soil. He also criticised the absence of agents among foreigners involved with scientific and technological developments, and among the

Americans, and the low level of qualification of the agents assigned to deal with foreigners. He declared that "the level of counterespionage in Azerbaijan fails to meet the requirements of the current situation on the ground." Little creativity, acuity, or ingenuity was shown in the work of the operational staff, who had become mired in bureaucracy instead. Genuine work was replaced by drafting endless plans, statements, and inquiries, and any action was undertaken "along pre-established lines, lacking any analysis of the target's strengths and weaknesses, including their idiosyncrasies, primary concerns, and aspirations."

Heydar Aliyev advised the heads of the 2nd Department and peripheral agencies "to take a more proactive role in carrying out covert operations based on intelligence received, and not to limit themselves to simply observing and approving plans for action; to constantly pass on their intelligence expertise to their young colleagues and to share their own practical experience. As for the personal participation of leaders in more important, long-term operations, it is essential to move away from mere promises towards action."

Heydar Aliyev was a paragon of discipline and responsibility, and dealt strictly with any professional laxity or carelessness in his team, even firing staff.

In the previous chapter I discussed how, as head of the 2nd Department and then vice-chairman of the Azerbaijani KGB, Heydar Aliyev took an active role in masterminding and carrying out special operations, personally recruited agents and even met with them abroad. I will now elaborate on one such successful appointment from the mid-1960s.

"THE NATURALIST"

The man known as the Naturalist came to Azerbaijan in 1964 on a private visa. Information obtained by the USSR KGB showed that he had worked in the Wehrmacht high command between 1942 and 1945, often travelling to countries in the East and West to investigate the technical and economic military potential of Hitler's satellite states. He was an analyst, assimilating intelligence from various sources within Hitler's secret service for the high command. He had visited the Soviet Union several times.

Learning this, Heydar Aliyev, who was already the first vice-chairman of the Azerbaijani KGB, assembled a group of skilled operatives responsible for the Naturalist while he was in Baku. Their information first of all confirmed the facts about him and, more significantly, revealed the hostility he and his father had felt towards Hitler and his racial policy. This led him to retire from the Wehrmacht at the end of the war, working first as a teacher and then as a journalist.

This was reported to Heydar Aliyev. He listened, then said, "Arrange a meeting to discuss the possibility of his cooperation with Azerbaijani state security." A meeting was arranged.

The then head of the department responsible for operations and detentions was Zaur Efendiayev. Indeed, Efendiayev joined Heydar Aliyev in the discussion with the Naturalist that led to his recruitment. Efendiayev was consequently awarded a medal for military service for successfully running this operation. I met with Efendiayev and asked him to disclose some of the details of this special operation. He willingly agreed, and even showed me a unique photo taken during the meeting. Below is an extract from our conversation.

Zaur Efendiayev: In order to corroborate the information we had gathered, we had to remain close to the Naturalist, arresting him on around the third day.

Elmira Akhundova: How did you justify arresting a foreigner?

Z. E.: Our justification was that he had been observed with a woman late at night in a park near the Intourist hotel. So, a team was sent to pick him up, and then we put our plan into action – the *militsiya* contacted the relevant authorities and it went from there. At 3 a.m. I came and took his statement addressed to Heydar Aliyev, who earlier instructed me on what exactly should be written in the statement. This man wrote that he, a citizen of such-and-such a country, had come here with such and such intentions and had been arrested by the *militsiya*. The statement ended with the words, "I ask to meet with you."

I reported everything to Heydar Aliyev the following day. He chose a time, we prepared a room in a hotel as he had requested and met with the Naturalist. At the meeting we laid our cards on the table and informed him that we would like to work with him. I did put a little pressure on

him in this regard, outlining his situation: "You were brought to us by the *militiya*, and we in turn can pass you on to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Then things get tricky." He, of course, did not want the matter reaching the ministry. We simply told him we were captains, without stating our surnames or ranks. It was a long conversation, but I cannot divulge the full details to you.

The Naturalist was a West German. He told us he was a journalist, that he had never taken up arms against the Russians, and had nothing to do with the secret service. He said that he sympathised with the USSR, with Azerbaijan. Heydar Aliyevich was highly professional and immediately steered the conversation towards contacts. We spoke to him in Russian, since the Naturalist spoke the language well.

E. A.: Did he give you any information that proved his sincerity? Did you receive any intelligent from him?

Z. E.: Yes, while he was still in Baku. He said he had widespread connections all over Europe, that the men he'd worked with in the Wehrmacht were well-placed in NATO and so on. We asked him a series of questions, including some about American bases. He gave us certain information, which we carefully verified and then gave him corresponding tasks. But this was a test – that is, we asked him for information we already had.

E. A.: I have heard that Heydar Aliyev visited Berlin for covert meetings with the Naturalist: was this official or did he pose as a tourist?

Z. E.: Heydar Aliyev went to Berlin in a KGB capacity, ostensibly on official business. We received a letter from the Naturalist indicating a time and place to meet. West German citizens could visit the GDR without being checked at the border, so the Naturalist could travel freely to East Berlin. He was a journalist – we didn't need secrecy. The main thing was not to let his contact with USSR intelligence come to the attention of the secret service. Heydar Aliyev made two trips to Berlin, the first to verify intelligence we'd received, and the second to pass the contact on to Soviet agents.

Heydar Aliyev often criticised his co-workers for a lack of initiative, for missing opportunities or failing to separate irrelevant information from valuable intelligence requiring further attention. During his tenure as KGB chairman, one of its last successful criminal cases was the case of three girls from Baku involved in currency speculation. An investigation into these speculators' connections led to a long list of valuable sources of information in foreign embassies in the USSR.

FOREIGN STUDENTS AND THE ABDELGHANI CASE

From a report by the chairman of the Azerbaijani KGB, Major General Aliyev: "The leadership of the 5th Department must:

- mobilise all its forces and means to prevent hostile ideological activity against our republic, and endeavour to study and investigate our adversaries' ideological centres;
- improve counterintelligence regarding foreign students from capitalist and developing countries at universities in Baku."

From the start of Khrushchev's thaw, students began to come from so-called developing countries and Eastern Europe to study in the USSR. Even the Angolan President Eduardo dos Santos, who has now led the African country for more than a quarter of a century, studied at the Azerbaijani Oil and Chemistry Institute (AzOCI) in Baku for five years.

The former AzOCI principal, Ismayil Ibrahimov, told me that the Institute's first international students came from Yemen in 1963. "At first we couldn't even accommodate them," remembers Ibrahimov. "We put them in basements and private apartments, before building five or six housing blocks.

With this intake, the secret service's interest in the institute also rose sharply. In one year, between three and four hundred students studied in our preparatory faculty, and approximately the same number in the main faculties. It was a diverse, multi-ethnic contingent with a whole host of problems and a vast range of aspirations and desires. They had to be monitored closely so that we could pre-empt any issues that might arise. This would have been impossible without help from the service."

Ibrahimov admits to having had close contact with Azerbaijani counterintelligence and, in particular, the head of the 2nd Department, Lieutenant Colonel Aliyev. "I remember an occasion we gathered all the teachers and students together for an extended assembly. I invited Heydar Aliyev to give a lecture; it was in 1963 or 1964. He was very sociable and could establish a rapport with any audience."

Moscow also kept a close eye on Azerbaijan's foreign contingent. Filipp Bobkov recalls: "A new period began, as international students began arriving at universities throughout the USSR. This area of intelligence fell under my responsibility. The Americans began very actively planting agents among the students, especially those from Africa. I remember a large group from Ghana and Guinea came to Baku, and I discussed at length with Heydar Aliyev how to prevent American agents infiltrating the country this way. We dealt with it well." Skilled counterintelligence officers were placed undercover as vice-principals, deans or deputy deans in universities throughout Azerbaijan to give tighter control over foreign students.

"At the start of the 1960s the skilled KGB operative Rafi Mammadov was appointed our principal," recalls Ibrahimov. "We also had two deans' offices – one for preparatory students, and the second to answer questions from foreign students in all faculties. The deputy deans were also members of the secret service."

In the chairman of the Azerbaijani KGB's 1967 report, it is noted that "during an operation concerning foreign students, primary evidence has been received pointing to the existence in London of some kind of 'centre' for recruiting and training students from Asia and Africa studying in socialist countries." Accordingly, Heydar Aliyev encouraged Moscow to step up its efforts to recruit foreign students into the Soviet secret services.

In 1965 a serious incident took place in Baku: the body of Ghanaian student Darko George was found near the city stadium. Such an event was unheard of at the time, unlike in modern-day Russia, where racially motivated murders committed by skinheads have become almost an every-day occurrence. Back then, the Ghanaian's murder raised a great uproar: it was given widespread coverage on foreign radio, and international students in Baku went on strike to demand that whoever was responsible be found and brought to justice. Representatives from the Ghanaian embassy, relatives of the young man, came to the capital. The USSR sent a senior aide from its public prosecution office, Vladimir Vodolazhsky. Simply put, the investigation became a matter of honour and national prestige for Azerbaijani law enforcers.

Baku's public prosecutor, Ata Aliyev, led the investigative team, and the case was managed by KGB Chairman Semyon Tsvigun and Heydar Aliyev. During the investigation it came to light that Darko had roomed with Ahmed Abdelghani in a dormitory for international students. Abdelghani was a former Iraqi communist and refugee who had been granted political asylum by the Azerbaijani authorities in the early 1960s. He had studied in Lviv for three years before transferring to the Medical Institute of Baku.

According to witnesses, George was friendly with Abdelghani. On Sunday night, students were allowed out of their accommodation and went for walks or met up with girls. But Abdelghani disappeared. Investigators began a search for him, which intensified when a cleaner found blood on his pillow. When Abdelghani was arrested, it was discovered that one of the phalanges had been cut off. He flatly refused to speak to anyone.

Then Heydar Aliyev proposed to bring in the KGB agents who had worked with Abdelghani during his arrest at the Nakhchivan border. This turned out to be the correct tactic. "According to my information," Aliyev said, "Abdelghani was once taken in by state security. We granted him political asylum. I believe we need to find an investigator with close psychological ties to him." They discovered that Akram Selimzadeh was in contact with Abdelghani.

"Selimzadeh is a trained investigator," Heydar Aliyev continued. "He is experienced despite his youth. I suggest we give him this task. If

Abdelghani is guilty, he will be able to get a confession out of him." Selimzadeh proved himself, not only obtaining a confession, but more importantly, producing irrefutable material evidence.

The trial took place in the Railway workers' club in Armenikend,¹ and was presided over by Sanan Musayev, with Gambay Mammadov leading the state prosecution. It lasted 10 days. Many foreign dignitaries and journalists came to watch. Abdelghani was sentenced to eight years, and received this sentence with relief. He was subsequently deported from the USSR.

Fortunately, this was the only serious incident involving foreign students for the whole of Heydar Aliyev's leadership of the KGB and the Azerbaijani party organisation. However, the importance of counterintelligence agents in this field should not be understated: after finishing their studies in Baku, many foreign students returned home as real "Soviet agents of influence", determined to sway domestic and foreign policy in the USSR's favour.

¹ The unofficial name given to a region of Baku occupied predominantly by Armenian nationals during the Soviet era.

THE KGB AND ARMENIAN EXTREMISM

A knowledge of both historical documents and the latest research by Azerbaijani scholars allows us to conclude that efforts to annex the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region (the NKAR) and join it to Armenia were made in all the years following its formation. The first and most serious effort was made immediately after World War II. In one of his books, the historian Eldar Ismayilov cites an anecdote from the memoirs of Mir Hasan Seyidov, the then secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan. In the autumn of 1945, Baghirov bumped into two Politburo members in Stalin's waiting room – the Armenian Anastas Mikoyan and the Georgian Lavrentiy Beria. Both asserted that the question of Southern Azerbaijan was already settled, and that the territory of the Azerbaijan SSR would soon increase substantially. As if in jest – but perhaps not – they expressed the hope that Baghirov would now be more accommodating and consent to the transfer, not only of Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia, but also of a group of regions in the north-east of the republic (Balaken and Zagatala among others) to Georgia. Baghirov replied that now was not the time for that discussion.¹

Shortly afterwards, the Armenian leader Arutinov, clearly with Stalin's backing, brought the proposal to transfer Nagorno-Karabakh from the Azerbaijan SSR to the Armenian SSR before the CPSU for consideration. A memo was sent to the Azerbaijanis, requesting their opinion on the matter in question. A copy of Baghirov's response, which very adeptly and cogently repudiated Arutinov's arguments, is preserved in the state archives. It is true, he wrote, that Azerbaijan might agree to the transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh (excluding Shusha District) to the Armenians, if they, in turn, were to transfer three regions of the Armenian SSR inhabited by Azerbaijanis to Azerbaijan.² I think it was only Mir Jafar Baghirov's firmness on this point, coupled with the failure of Stalin's policy in Southern Azerbaijan, that allowed the republic to hold off the threat of territorial expansion for a time.

In late December 1947 the USSR Council of Ministers began the "voluntary-compulsory" deportation of Azerbaijanis from certain regions in the Armenian Republic to the Kur-Araz lowlands of Azerbaijan. This was the first tragic exodus of Azerbaijanis from their native lands in the Soviet period.

From the beginning of Khrushchev's thaw, Armenian nationalists recognised a certain spirit of concession among the public, and turned this to their advantage by exacerbating the Karabakh issue. Furthermore, Khrushchev's arbitrary redrawing of Russian administrative territorial

¹ Ismayilov, 293

² I. Aliyev, *Nagorniy Karabakh. Iстория, факты, события* [Nagorno-Karabakh: history, facts and events], (Baku: Elm, 1989), 89

boundaries, particularly the transfer of the Crimea to Ukraine, sparked separatist feelings in other union republics.

At the start of December 1960, the CPA Central Committee received an appeal to the president of the Azerbaijani Soviet that had been published in the *Baikar* newspaper ("fight" in Azerbaijan) in Boston, USA. After a demagogical foreword and toasts to the glory of "brotherly" Azerbaijan, representatives of the Armenian lobby in the USA proposed that the 40th anniversary of Soviet Armenia should be celebrated by presenting it with Nakhchivan and Nagorno-Karabakh. These territorial ambitions were unashamedly justified with reference to the Armenian nation's demographic problems. The appeal argued that giving two Azerbaijani autonomous regions to Armenia would "have great significance, especially for the one million Armenians living abroad, as this wonderful present would greatly increase the opportunities for several hundred thousand Armenian émigrés to be repatriated. The repatriates could settle freely in Nakhchivan and Karabakh, which are Armenian autonomous regions only connected to Baku instead of Yerevan in an administrative sense."

Veli Akhundov ordered Nazim Hajiiev, the Communist Party's secretary for ideology, to urgently prepare a thorough response that defended the interests of the republic and its territorial integrity. His son, Aydin Hajiiev, writes: "My father created a special group including historians, lawyers, cartographers, and senior members of the party's Central Committee and the Azerbaijan Council of Ministers. Work was in full swing. It was helped greatly by the late Professor Aliosat Guliyev, who was then director of the Azerbaijani Institute of History. The work on compiling information was completed very quickly. All the necessary documents (including archival references, maps, etc.) were sent to the CPSU Central Committee."

Soon after this, the secretary for ideology received an urgent call. It was Mikhail Suslov, the head Soviet ideologue. He informed Nazim Hajiiev that the issue would be considered by the Presidium of the Central Committee and, as the author of the document, he was required to fly immediately to Moscow.

In Moscow, Hajiiev successfully carried out a large amount of preliminary work to enlist the support of KGB head Aleksandr Shelepin, CPSU Central Committee Secretary Brezhnev, and other party functionaries from Staraya Square.¹ He was helped greatly by the personal connections and authority of Vladimir Semichastny, the then 2nd secretary of the CPA Central Committee. Their joint efforts succeeded in repelling the attacks of Armenian nationalists, not least among them Anastas Mikoyan, a member of the Presidium of the Central Committee who moved in very high circles.

¹ Aydin Hajiiev, *Vse Ponят, но не все Простит* [Understand everything, but do not forgive everything], (Baku: Elm, 2000), 170-171

² This is a reference to the Central Committee headquarters, which was located at 4 Staraya Square, in Moscow's Kitai Gorod district. Staraya Square literally means Old Square.

Incidentally, shortly after this discussion, Nazim Hajiiev was admitted to the hospital of the USSR Ministry of Health's 4th Department with a malignant tumour. His operation was carried out by the Kremlin luminary Professor Abramyan. According to Hajiiev's friend, Professor Topchibashev, who flew from Baku solely in order to be present for the operation, the procedure was bungled. After this, one of the brightest and youngest Central Committee secretaries of the Akhundov period (aged just 38!) lived for less than two years. Hajiiev's son has grounds to suspect that his father's early demise was anything but accidental.

In the second half of the 1960s, a new attack was carried out. Heydar Aliyev recalled it much later, in conversation with a group of Azerbaijani writers. "I remember that an order came from Moscow in 1966 or 1967. Akhundov called me in to see him. It was a CPSU Central Committee decree ordering CPA Central Committee Secretary Akhundov and Kochinyan, the secretary of the Armenian Communist Party, to discuss and come to an agreement on the issue [of handing the two autonomous Azerbaijani regions over to Armenia]. What did this mean? It meant that the issue of Azerbaijan's jurisdiction would be resolved by Armenia. We racked our brains. I told [Akhundov] that he should travel to Moscow and meet with Brezhnev. He went and was able to convince Brezhnev to revoke this decree."²

In the mid-1960s, the Azerbaijani secret services exposed the activity of several illegal nationalist groups, which were then broken up. Yerevan emissaries from a group called The Union of Armenian Youth tried to create their own organisational structures in the autonomous region. Another youth group comprised of seniors from a secondary school in Stepanakert (now Khankendi) distributed pamphlets containing a call to unite all the "Armenian" territories, including Nakhchivan and Nagorno-Karabakh. General Huseynov, the head of foreign intelligence, recalls the following from June 1965: "Ulubabyan, the executive secretary of the branch of the Azerbaijani Writers' Union in the NKAR, delivered a petition to the Central Committee demanding that the NKAR be ceded to the Armenian SSR. A number of high-ranking party members and Armenian officials also signed this petition. The KGB kept the Azerbaijani government informed on all these developments. Urgent measures were taken to curb the activities of these agents provocateurs."³

In the Azerbaijani KGB's 1967 report, Heydar Aliyev gave a detailed analysis of the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, noting: "In a number of cases, politically harmful and antisocial incidents have occurred in the region with the influence and direct participation of certain nationalist elements from the Armenian SSR. This is attested to by a series of occasions in the last five years when Armenians have travelled to Stepanakert to spread

¹ Heydar Aliyev, *Guarding Cultural Heritage*, vol. 1, 367

² Huseynbeyli, 17

rumours of Nagorno-Karabakh's imminent unification with Armenia; they have gathered signatures on a petition drafted for this very purpose, and imported and distributed great quantities of the nationalist "Appeal to the Armenians of Karabakh" and other printed material of a provocative nature."

In his book *KGB i Vlast* [The KGB and power], Filipp Bobkov, the former head of the KGB's 5th Directorate, analyses the origins of the Karabakh conflict and concludes that one of the main causes was Armenia's aggressive nationalistic propaganda: "The theory of Armenian exceptionalism is indoctrinated in the population from childhood. For example, in a textbook for years seven and eight in secondary school, one question asks which capitals contain Armenian schools. There is then the explanation there are no such schools in the USSR's capital, although they do exist in several other countries. Only one member of the Molodaya Gvardiya organisation, which fought against the Nazi occupation, is mentioned in the textbook. That is Zhora Arutyunants. Other names, even those of the movement's leaders, are not mentioned. Regarding, for example, accomplished Soviet musicians, artists, cultural and scientific figures, usually only those with Armenian surnames are mentioned. Naturally, thanks to this indoctrination, the propaganda of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaksutyun) found fertile ground.

When I was in Armenia, I spoke with Demirchyan on this matter. Our long and difficult conversation came to nothing, as the leader of the Armenian Communist Party strongly asserted that nothing bad was happening there. On the eve of my departure, I met with him again and provided him with new facts regarding Dashnaks' active infiltration into Azerbaijan. On this occasion, Demirchyan reacted a little differently. At the next plenum of the Central Committee of the Armenian Communist Party, he called on communists to fight against Dashnak influence. However, nothing was actually done beyond this formal appeal, with the exception of a few articles that struggled to be published. For the residents of Nagorno-Karabakh, this inactivity turned into disaster."¹

The Azerbaijani secret services were not inactive: they periodically informed the higher authorities about negative events occurring in Nagorno-Karabakh. The archive of the Ministry of National Security contains many letters and documents signed by Heydar Aliyev and other KGB heads that were sent to the CPA Central Committee and other organisations at various times. These materials consist of numerous reports on individuals and groups inciting cross-national tensions.

Unfortunately, the party leadership of Azerbaijan and, more importantly, of Armenia, reacted in a quite lacklustre way to these and other alarm signals from the KGB. According to Filipp Bobkov's fair observation, both the Central Committee and other bodies believed that the fight against

nationalist manifestations, sabotage and terrorism was the business of the KGB: "As they are the secret police, they must foresee such actions and prevent them, and if these actions have already happened, it is the KGB's job to investigate them. Nobody wanted to recognise the cause of the issue or to understand that a tragedy could only be prevented by educational work directed against Dashnak propaganda."¹

Almost immediately after taking office as the chairman of the Azerbaijani KGB, Heydar Aliyev was faced with a serious problem. On 3rd July 1967 there was rioting in Stepanakert fuelled by blood feuds and dissatisfaction with a verdict at the local court. Three Azerbaijanis were accused of the murder of eight-year-old Nelson Movsesyan, the son of one of the chairmen of a collective farm in the Martuniinsky region of Nagorno-Karabakh. A hearing took place in Stepanakert. Two individuals were found guilty at court: one was sentenced to the death penalty, while the second received 15 years imprisonment. The third defendant was acquitted.

The trial was held in an open-air cinema in Stepanakert's Azizbeyov Park. Even during the hearing the relatives of the murdered boy aggravated the situation in every way, spreading rumours that the judges had been bribed by the defendants, and demanding the death penalty for all three. As the defendants were being led in, stones and eggs were thrown at them, and a scythe (symbolising death) was attached to the patrol car they were transported in.

On the day the verdict was to be announced, an enormous group of people (almost 8,000) gathered in the park next to the open-air cinema. The relatives of the deceased, who were unsatisfied with the "softness" of the court's decision, provoked the crowd into disorder, which had very serious consequences. First, someone immobilised the *militsiya* van, so the *militsiya* would be unable to take the defendants away. Then the raging crowd started a scuffle with *militsiya* officers, broke down the door of the cinema, poured into the premises where the prisoners were being held, and demanded they were handed over. The guards fired several warning shots in an attempt to disperse the crowd and were showered with stones and broken bits of furniture in return. After this, the angry crowd began to lynch the two prisoners right in the centre of the cinema, smashing their heads and inflicting multiple stab wounds. The mutilated corpses were then dragged out into the street and jeered at.

An even worse fate awaited Zohrab Mammadov, who had been acquitted by the court. He managed to hide in a *militsiya* van, but the rioters found out where he was. They rushed up to the vehicle, turned it over and set fire to it. Mammadov was burned alive. The perpetrators dragged the burnt corpse out of the van and over to the two other bodies. They placed them on a prepared pile of wooden boards, covered them in petrol and set fire to them.

¹ Bobkov, 313

¹ *Ibid.*, 312

The case files, which I examined in the Azerbaijani Ministry of Security Archives, contain shocking details of how the incinerated bodies were desecrated. In a medieval display of barbarity, they were dragged through the streets to frighten the Azerbaijani residents of the NKAR's capital. More than 10 *militiya* and prison officers were seriously hurt.

The local KGB and the prosecutor's office launched a criminal investigation into the affair. Heydar Aliyev put together an experienced team led by Colonel Firudin Baghirov, and supervised their work himself. In addition, he personally went to Stepanakert and spent 15 days there. The investigation lasted for about a year, and resulted in a large group of Armenians facing charges. Fourteen people were sentenced to various jail terms and five were sentenced to death. Three of those sentences were carried out.

During the investigation a resident of Yerevan called Grigoryan was arrested. He disclosed the location of an arms cache and the existence of a group of individuals who were apparently preparing terrorist attacks against active party and Soviet functionaries in the NKAR who had "allowed" such a number of arrests. The 1967 KGB annual report states that "this information was double-checked by the security services, and four Kalashnikov automatic rifles, two RP-46 machine guns, a Nagant revolver, a Mauser, spare parts for the Kalashnikovs, etc., were recovered from the cache; all of these had been stolen in Yerevan."

The renewed activity of Dashnak party members was another headache for the Azerbaijani security services. As the Iron Curtain began to weaken, and tourists began to travel back and forth between the USSR and the West, Dashnak agents carrying specific instructions from their foreign patrons began to make occasional trips into Armenia and the NKAR disguised as tourists and private individuals. A secret memo (No.2/II-383, dated 7th February 1962) sent from the USSR KGB's 2nd Directorate to Heydar Aliyev, head of the 2nd Department, and retained in the KGB archives states: "at the end of November 1961 an American spy made a special trip to Lebanon and held a secret meeting with the leading members of the Dashnak party's foreign bureau. ... The foreign bureau decided to train and illegally dispatch agents to the Armenian SSR from bordering countries along repatriation routes so that they could commit sabotage. It also decided to use tourist trips to the USSR and journeys made by individual Armenians visiting relatives for the purposes of espionage, and to facilitate the disruption of the upcoming repatriation of Armenians to the USSR by any means necessary, including acts of terrorism against individuals who were actively facilitating repatriation."

According to Filipp Bobkov: "Although Baku was an international city, the Dashnak party actively worked at segregating the Azerbaijani population. Heydar Aliyev and I often discussed the problems of growing Dashnak influence and infiltration by Dashnak agents. His unwavering attention was always focussed on the issue of how to counter the Dashnaksutyun's destructive activities."

Many years later, as president of an independent Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev met with a group of prominent Azerbaijani writers. He discussed the reasons behind the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and recalled the difficulties he had faced when curbing the Armenian nationalists' attempts to claim Azerbaijani land, and how challenging it had been at times to hold his ground at the highest levels of government.

When Heydar Aliyev was appointed first secretary of the CPA Central Committee in summer 1969, he continued to devote all his attention to the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region, so as to deny his opponents the slightest bargaining chip in favour of unifying the NKAR with Armenia. I will discuss his work on the "Armenian" question in the 1970s in the second half of this book.

HEYDAR ALIYEV AND THE AZERBAIJANI KGB'S DOMESTIC PERSONNEL

In a speech to members of the Ministry of National Security of Azerbaijan in 1997, Heydar Aliyev described his own beginnings in the central apparatus of the country's NSM in the following manner: "I started working in Baku in 1950, after I had graduated from the security service academy in Leningrad. At that time the service was called the Ministry of State Security. The ministry's counterespionage department was one of the biggest. I was made a divisional head of the department. There were six divisions in the department, but only one was run by an Azerbaijani. His three deputies were not Azerbaijanis – two of them were Armenians. This means that in 1950 an Azerbaijani was appointed to the position of divisional head for the first time. The heads of the other divisions were not domestic personnel."¹

Two years later the division responsible for Turkey and political emigration was placed under the command of an Azerbaijani, Huseynov, who was to become the head of the Azerbaijani Foreign Intelligence Service. Major General Huseynov comments that his appointment was received ambivalently: "The ambivalence is explained by the fact that at that time there were quite a few Armenians in management positions in the security services, particularly in the 2nd Department. Hence, before me the head of my division was an Armenian, Konstantin Arushanov, while his superior was another Armenian, Arnais Akopov. Some, of course, were honest, hard-working operatives. But there were also some falsifiers, in particular a man by the name of Damazyan. As head of the Iranian division, he would frequently employ highly sophisticated methods to 'expose' Iranian secret service agents from among the Azerbaijani defectors who were regularly seeking refuge from the Shah's government in Soviet Azerbaijan at the time. There was also abuse of power in relation to Turkey: Armenian nationalists had long been nurturing a hatred for Turkey and its people. Hence, the appointment of a young Azerbaijani to a relatively senior post in an area which had always been of interest to Armenia, most definitely put the falsifiers' noses out of joint."²

By the end of the 1930s, the majority of the personnel in the NKVD central apparatus were Russians, Armenians and Jews. After the war, however, Baghirov started to promote locals to management positions in the security services much more actively. The historian Eldar Ismayilov, who has studied the staffing structure of the Azerbaijani NSM in detail, claims that Azerbaijanis held about 50 percent of management positions in the NSM by the beginning of 1953.³

¹ *Vernost Narodu, Rodine, Gosudarstvu*, 21

² Huseynbeyli, 17

³ Ismayilov, 154

Moreover, while a Russian occupied the NSM's senior post, all other law enforcement bodies were invariably run by Azerbaijanis. Ismayilov writes that in 1951 Azerbaijanis already made up 75 percent of staff in the Azerbaijani SSR Prosecutor's Office, including 61 percent of staff in the central apparatus. In 1947, 23 people were elected to the Supreme Court of the Azerbaijani SSR, of whom 16 were Azerbaijanis, five were Russians and Jews and two were Armenians. There was a similar situation in the Interior Ministry and at the Ministry of Justice. Ismayilov believes that this tendency "significantly limited opportunities for anti-Azerbaijani sentiment in these organisations, facilitating more regard for the way of life and mentality of the local population. It would be an injustice to ignore the role M. J. Baghirov played in this matter."¹

The "Azerbaijanisation" of the security services only continued into the post-Baghirov period "with great difficulty", admitted Heydar Aliyev. "However, we achieved a lot after 1960, when we had to merge some divisions together due to cuts. We managed to get rid of a lot of people, you might say. Many were fired, young staff members were promoted, and Azerbaijanis started to represent the majority in management positions. From approximately 1953 onwards we began a process of renewal and purging; I was a direct participant in this process and, in later years, it fell to me to organise it."²

When Shelepin, Semichastny, and later Andropov, were heading the KGB, individuals were appointed to KGB management positions from the Komsomol, the party or other administrative organisations. As the socialist rule of law continued to grow stronger, the post-Stalin KGB came firmly under the CPSU's control. The party finally "remembered" that it was responsible for the political management of the security services and that it ought to combat high handedness in their work. Nonetheless, many KGB veterans reacted warily to the influx of party and Komsomol staff. During the perestroika years, a former KGB operative published an article in *Ogonyok* magazine with the title "It is Shameful to Remain Silent": "I think that the personnel reshuffles had a big impact on the fact that the security services performed functions and work that was not in their nature from the mid-1950s up to the 1970s – and perhaps the present day. The specialists who had been expelled were replaced with party and Komsomol bureaucrats who brought a pervasive incompetence, free-for-all mentality and sense of careerism into the security services."³

I would like to take issue with this statement. The younger staff who found themselves in the security services were, perhaps, lacking in expertise, but at least their hands were clean. The majority of the expelled "specialists", on the other hand, were assistants of the Markaryans and Borshchevs who

sent thousands and thousands of totally innocent people to prison or to their deaths. Heydar Aliyev hated this caste of "committee people" and got rid of them at the very first opportunity, preferring to appoint individuals in their place who were, perhaps, not as experienced, but who were at least not tarnished by their participation in the Stalinist purges.

Ramiz Mammadzadeh recalls:

"I know for sure that on entering the KGB he created the opportunity for young people to get promoted. He hired many young people on the recommendation of the Komsomol and sent them to Moscow for an education. In the future they became his power base in the KGB. He already understood that the KGB personnel of the old school used the methods of the 1930s and 1940s, and their knowledge and ideological orientation were not fit for the demands of the day."

The recollections of a veteran of the security services who had reached the rank of general, Bahadur Huseynov, attest to the fact that Heydar Aliyev was always concerned with the issue of domestic personnel, "I met Heydar Aliyev for the first time in 1958 in Prishib (Jalilabad District), where I was serving in the border troops. I was a lieutenant colonel and the deputy head of a reconnaissance detachment. Heydar Aliyev, then the head of the KGB's 2nd Department, was on an official trip to Lankaran, and on the return journey he stopped off at the Prishib border troops detachment, which was when we got to know one another. The first question he asked was how many Azerbaijanis were there. 'Just two,' I answered, 'Captain Gasimov and me.'

"Why are there so few in such a big detachment?"

"The staff were chosen in Baku and Moscow," I explained.

"What nonsense! We send tens of thousands of people into the army from Azerbaijan, yet there are just two people here!"

Later, while working with him in the KGB in Azerbaijan, I saw with my own eyes how concerned he was with local staff. I remember when he sent me to Nakhchivan he gave me the following instructions: 'Develop your staff so they can deal with today's demands, so that no one can say that Azerbaijanis can't work. Actively promote them to senior officer positions.'

Thanks to Heydar Aliyev's initiative, many Azerbaijanis began to serve in the border troops in the 1970s, including as commanders of border detachments, border posts, and headquarters. He tried to strengthen all positions by appointing local staff. This proved very useful after the collapse of the USSR and the creation of an Azerbaijani state."

Retired Major General Mustafa Nasirov told me that in 1968 the KGB chairman made him deputy head of the Military Division of the South Caucasus Border District. In 1972 Nasirov was simultaneously made head

¹ Ismayilov, 155-156

² *Vernost' Narodu, Rodine, Gosudarstvu*, 23

³ Yaroslav Karpovich, "Stydno Molchat" [It is shameful to remain silent], *Ogonyok*, No. 29 (1989), 9

of the Military Division and deputy head of USSR KGB's South Caucasus Border District troops. At that time it was an extraordinary feat for an Azerbaijani to be appointed to such a high-ranking military position.

Ziya Yusifzadeh commented that, when he was made chairman of the Azerbaijani KGB in 1980, Heydar Aliyev gave orders for the security service staff in Azerbaijan to be renewed. Specific quotas were to be implemented: in 1981, 40 young Azerbaijanis were to be accepted into the security services, and 30 the next year. In addition, Heydar Aliyev ordered up to 20 Azerbaijanis to be sent every year to study at the Dzerzhinsky KGB Academy once they had completed their military service and had returned to the republic. These far-sighted instructions facilitated the "Azerbaijanisation" of the security service personnel. In a few years' time Heydar Aliyev's young protégés would make up the backbone of the Ministry of National Security. This organisation was called upon to tackle the completely new set of challenges born out of the different historical and geopolitical conditions at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries.

One of the most senior members of the Azerbaijani KGB, retired Colonel *Adil Bagirov*, told me how Heydar Aliyev interviewed the young candidates who were selected to work in the KGB: "After joining the 2nd Department, he began getting rid of the old timers and replacing them with young staff. He carefully selected them himself, holding long conversations with each one. He would check their intellectual level, ability to win over the person they were talking to, mental aptitude and range of interests. He would always ask what they enjoyed reading and whether they knew their native Azerbaijani writers and poets, as well as their country's history. Once one of the candidates recited a poem by the renowned Azerbaijani satirical poet Sabir. Heydar Aliyevich was so pleased that he immediately signed his contract. Incidentally, Andropov also used to say that a security officer should be better than the people with whom (or against whom) he would work. He should be able to convince, which requires a high intellectual capacity."

There weren't that many professional security officers trained in KGB colleges at the time. Therefore, our executives selected promising young people from various organisations, institutions and universities. Hence, we had engineers, linguists, theoreticians and practical people working for us; they were later sent to study in Leningrad or Moscow, or to Baku, where there was also a one-year interregional KGB college."

From a conversation with retired Colonel Albert Salamov:

"Back when I was a lieutenant, just a criminal investigator, Heydar Aliyevich invited me to his office a few times to talk. He had this way of doing things – he would closely study everyone who joined the KGB, take an interest in every individual's personality, abilities, aspirations, interests. He paid close attention to both the youngsters and the older generation.

He would invite you into his office, and win you over such that you would tell him everything – things you would not tell even a close friend or relative. When he began asking questions, I realised that he knew more about me than even I could tell him. Sometimes he would take an interest in the most insignificant details, like a father watching me grow up. I always left his office feeling inspired."

Heydar Aliyevich truly loved working for the security services. He wanted the people working with him to grow and develop professionally. It was as if he was using these interviews to establish who he could trust – he had a keen understanding of psychology.

As both a member and head of the KGB's collegium, Heydar Aliyevich would invite his colleagues and fellow citizens for individual talks every day. He had the ability to win people over, patiently hear them out without interrupting, and often carried out their requests. So representatives of the creative intelligentsia, scholars and journalists, were drawn to him as much as ordinary people. This allowed him to receive valuable and multifaceted information regarding Azerbaijan, and then use these findings to make necessary changes to the running of the KGB apparatus. While he was head of the KGB, he did much to raise work standards for the whole collective. Heydar Aliyevich often held strategic councils, was always present at party meetings, and would come to meetings of the 2nd Department. He always paid his party dues in person; he never once let a party secretary come by his office to collect his dues for him. Sometimes he would come out of his reception area and take a stroll around all the KGB's offices. No KGB chairman had ever done this before, but he would and he would chat to you, ask how things were going, see what your working conditions were like, and make comments. That is to say, he kept the collective in a mobilised state. Everyone knew that Heydar Aliyevich might walk in and see what they were working on at any moment."

Another KGB veteran, Zaur Efendiyyev recalls: "We had a common room where classes for young recruits often took place: one of our more experienced colleagues would share his professional expertise. As vice-chairman, and later as chairman, Heydar Aliyev would run such classes. He tried to empower the youth with practical working skills."

Heydar Aliyev was a strong-willed and independent leader. And he was not at all pleased when the central leadership made decisions without consulting him, especially decisions regarding personnel – even if these personnel had been singled out for promotion. As told by Akram Selimzadeh, on the eve of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, the so-called "Tsinevsky" group was formed from 80 members of the USSR KGB. Over several days, the group prepared – at the KGB Academy in the Moscow suburb of Golitsyno – for their subsequent departure for Prague. There were three Azerbaijanis in that group: Vladimir Bantserev, the deputy head of the 2nd Department, Vladimir Yarovov, assistant to the chairman, and Akram Selimzadeh himself.

"We were preparing for departure," Selimzadeh recalls, "and suddenly we, the three Bakuvians, were called in to see Tsvigun. We arrived at the USSR KGB headquarters on Lubyanka Street. Tsvigun's assistant, Colonel Podorozhkin, announced our arrival, and we went into his office. Tsvigun shook everyone's hand. He was very fond of Bantserev and Yarovov. The latter had been his assistant, and they began to reminisce, 'I ate *shashlik* in Azerbaijan', Tsvigun said, smiling, 'and drank cognac. But here they feed me sour milk.'

After they served us tea, Tsvigun began to speak. 'Well, friends', he said, 'you are going to Czechoslovakia. Don't bring shame on Azerbaijan. I recommended you; I telephoned Heydar Aliyev and specifically asked him to send you on this assignment, because I knew you would not let me down. I'll tell you honestly – after all this is over, Bantserev, I'm going to make you a general. You'll stay in Germany, with a group of Soviet forces. I'll recommend you, Vladimir Trofimovich,' he announced to Yarovov, 'for general. You will head a special division in Bulgaria. And you, Akram, will come to work in Moscow for the USSR KGB. Teach the locals what real work means!'

I kept silent, thinking to myself, 'what does he mean, Moscow? I don't want to work in Moscow!' We sat in silence; Bantserev was as red as a lobster. I could only say, 'Thank you, Semyon Kuzmich. I have been accepted as a graduate student in Moscow. I think we'll be able to resolve this issue after the trip.'

'It's a good thing you're going to study here. You complete that study, and then we will provide any help you need.'

Tsvigun was a very kind man. We were fond of him. As we were leaving his office, Bantserev said that we needed to tell Heydar Aliyev about the meeting. He called him right there on a high-frequency telephone. Heydar Aliyev was indignant when Bantserev said he was calling from Tsvigun's office, and asked why he was there.

'He summoned us here,' Bantserev replied. 'Akram Selimzadeh and Yarovov are also here. Tsvigun is telling me to consult my wife – he wants to send me to work in Germany. And he is promising to transfer Akram to Moscow when everything is over in Czechoslovakia.'

Heydar Aliyevich lost his temper and began to shout at Bantserev, 'Who gave you permission to go see Tsvigun? Why did you go? To beg a position from him, have him make you a colonel? I promised that I would definitely make you a colonel. Why is Tsvigun taking away my best personnel? Who am I supposed work with? Let him take Yarovov. But don't let him touch you two!'

'I'll hand you over to Akram,' Bantserev said. 'He can confirm everything to you.'

Heydar Aliyevich let loose at me, asking what kind of a nuisance I was making of myself over in Moscow.

'The three of us were called in, Heydar Aliyevich. Tsvigun said we were here on his recommendation, and what Bantserev told you is true. Yarovov

accepted the offer, but Bantserev didn't accept. He said that he would have to talk to his wife first.'

'Put him on the line!'

I handed the phone back to Bantserev and reproached him for involving me, as Heydar Aliyevich had shouted at me. That was the first time he had ever raised his voice to me. I can't remember him ever being so angry.

'Come and see me after Czechoslovakia,' Heydar Aliyevich continued. 'I'll settle this issue myself!'

We stood there as if we had been scalded. Bantserev asked me what he should do. 'There's a man waiting on my answer – a lieutenant general at that.' I advised him to go in to see Tsvigun and find the way to dodge the offer. Bantserev hesitated. 'I could never become a general in Azerbaijan. This is a unique opportunity.'

'Volodya', I begged him. 'There's nothing I can say to you. Try to avoid this promotion, and we'll see how things turn out later.'

He went back to Tsvigun's office and I went to the hotel. They returned soon after. Yarovov was ecstatic; he really was transferred to Bulgaria after that, with a group of Soviet forces, and became a general. He only returned to Azerbaijan to collect his family. Heydar Aliyevich did not say a word against the transfer. But Bantserev came back to Baku and stayed here forever. After all, he had worked with Heydar Aliyevich for a long time; he had been his deputy while Heydar Aliyev was head of counterintelligence."

That is how Heydar Aliyev fought for his best personnel, even if it meant confronting the Moscow leadership. To conclude, it is worth noting one more detail that is characteristic of Heydar Aliyev's personality and the almost magnetic influence he had on those around him. KGB veterans often recall that when Heydar Aliyev went down a corridor, everyone would stop what they were doing, clear the way for him, and stand at attention. The mere sight of him would cause them to do this, even if they were in civilian clothes. Fear of the leadership was doubtless not the only reason they did so; Heydar Aliyev was, quite simply, always so immaculate himself that all his colleagues at the KGB tried to imitate him – however limited their success.

"HE LEFT US WITH A HEAVY HEART"

As head of the state security services, Heydar Aliyev had to handle every issue related to his employees' living conditions and housing, as well as issues seemingly outside the KGB's remit. Addressing complaints from the general public was a special priority. Rusty state machinery, bureaucratic red tape, as well as callous officials meant that many of citizens' letters and complaints went unanswered for months at a time. People would stand for hours in the waiting rooms of district and city committees, the Central Committee and the Cabinet of Ministers – where officials often waved them away, unwilling to consider the matter in any depth. Only then, in despair, did they go to the KGB for justice. Ziya Yusifzadeh recalls that, on becoming deputy chairman of the KGB, Heydar Aliyev gathered all the departmental heads and ordered them to hold a public reception, once a week after work. Under his leadership, this became KGB practice for the first time.

In an address to the students of the Azerbaijani State Security Academy, Ziya Yusifzadeh recalled: "When Heydar Aliyev became head of the KGB, the stream of complaints increased. All were addressed to him. At that time complaints were usually directed to a district or city committee, the Central Committee, Moscow and even to Lenin's mausoleum. And all the complaints were batted back and forth: problems were simply left unsolved. But after Heydar Aliyev's appointment to the KGB leadership, people began to write to him with urgent requests, believing that he would read them, attend to them and resolve them fairly. He received the general public himself once a week (about 30 or 40 people), and persuaded his deputies, and even the departmental heads, to do the same. The KGB's standing among ordinary people grew dramatically as a result. People were now not afraid to bring their grievances to the KGB."

Receptions of this kind accomplished another goal for Heydar Aliyev – better acquainting him with current situation in Azerbaijan and popular sentiments. Before long, the stream of complaints – which had once trickled into the district and city CPSU committees – was gushing into the Azerbaijani KGB. Heydar Aliyev periodically informed the Central Committee that ordinary people were addressing numerous appeals and complaints to the KGB. As a result, the Central Committee made a ruling concerning the 'handling of workers' letters and complaints', and the process of public relations improved significantly."

In his book *KGB i Vlast* [The KGB and power], Filipp Bobkov describes a similar situation with Russian workers' complaints. Only, in contrast to Azerbaijan, the CPSU Central Committee was dissatisfied with the efficiency of officials handling the complaints: they thought that the KGB "wanted the general public to see them as nice guys! Alarms were sent up from the General Department, which was headed by Chernenko and Bogolyubov, to more senior leaders. The KGB is meddling in other

people's affairs, they complained; and a corresponding memo made its way onto the desk of the CPSU General Secretary.¹

In the previous chapter I discussed how six multi-storey residential complexes were built in Baku for the state security employees during Heydar Aliyev's tenure. A new KGB building was also constructed in Baku on Heydar Aliyev's initiative. What is more, General Mustafa Nasirov, who served in the mid-1960s as the head of border troops in Nakhchivan, remembers to this day how – in large part thanks to Heydar Aliyev's help and support – a new border patrol housing complex was built in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. Heydar Aliyev dedicated considerable resources to providing amenities, medical treatment, and recreation for the personnel. It was thanks to Heydar Aliyev, KGB veterans recall, that the Moscow leadership allowed them more trips to resort towns such as Kislovodsk, Yalta and Pyatigorsk than employees of other government agencies. Heydar Aliyev would never leave a single request unanswered.

Retired Lieutenant Colonel Jabbar Beylarov gratefully recalls how he was able to secure a transfer from Lankaran to Baku in 1963. Lankaran's humid climate was discovered to be harmful for Beylarov's children, who had been diagnosed with rheumatic heart disease. Beylarov addressed a report to the KGB chairman, requesting a transfer to the capital, but Kardashev would not budge.

Beylarov went to Heydar Aliyev, then head of counterintelligence, for assistance. "No problem, don't worry," Heydar Aliyev told him. To this day, Jabbar wonders how he could transfer him to Baku and employ him in his own division, when the KGB chairman had refused it.

I was astonished by retired Colonel Kamal Aliyev's story about how Heydar Aliyevich helped his only son, Volodya, to enrol in the KGB Academy. In itself this is nothing out of the ordinary, but the circumstances under which it took place certainly were.

"I once went to Moscow and visited the KGB College. Nikonov, the head of a KGB division who had earlier obtained very interesting materials through me, was working there at the time. He and I were on friendly terms. He said to me: 'You always wanted your son to study here. We used to only take on young men after they had done their military service, but now they can apply after completing secondary school.' I was pleased to hear this news and went to Samedov, the KGB deputy chairman for personnel, with a request for my son to take the entrance exams. He refused. I then went straight to Heydar Aliyev, the KGB chairman. He heard me out and telephoned Samedov, 'Let him take the exams, what's the point of getting hung up about bureaucracy!'

¹ Bobkov, 224

As my son's application was being put together in 1969, another candidate from Azerbaijan was sent to the KGB Academy. Before us. But there was only one vacancy. Heydar Aliyev, however, reassured me. 'If your son passes the exams I will call the director of the academy, and they will both be accepted.'

So we sent in my son's application. At the beginning of July, Heydar Aliyev was summoned to Moscow, while my son and I went to Balashikha near Moscow for the entrance interviews and exams. We stayed in the Peking Hotel.

My colleagues in the 2nd Directorate found out that Heydar Aliyev had been called in to see Andropov and asked me to ask him about it, 'Perhaps they want him to work with us at the ministry?' As we ate our breakfast in the morning in the restaurant, I decided to ask him. Heydar Aliyev smiled and replied, 'Do you remember the time when I was just a lieutenant? They asked me to go to Moscow then, too. But I am not a lieutenant anymore.' He fell silent and then added, 'I would advise you not to go either.' I had just been offered a job in Moscow. This was his way of saying, 'Don't hurry – I rose to the rank of general in Azerbaijan, and you will too.'

He spent a few days in Moscow and left for Baku. I stayed with my son. A day or so later my colleagues from the office called me up and said, 'Go outside and buy a copy of *Pravda* right away.' I couldn't believe my eyes as I read that the CPA Central Committee plenum had elected Heydar Aliyev to the position of the first secretary on 14th July. I thought that all was lost, since even if my son did pass the exams, they would not be able to accept him, and it would be difficult to get through to Heydar Aliyev. I thought he was hardly likely to remember us, as he would have so much work.

However, a few days later Khalykov, deputy chairman of the Azerbaijani KGB, found me in Moscow. 'Kamal,' he said, 'Heydar Aliyevich was here yesterday. He told me to tell you not to worry and that he has spoken to the director of the academy.' Even having been elected Central Committee first secretary, with all his new responsibilities, he had not forgotten about a request from a lowly serviceman. He kept his word.

My son successfully graduated from the academy, worked in Baku, then in the intelligence departments in Moscow and Turkey."

(From Kamal Aliyev's recollections)

Although he already knew that he would be leaving the KGB to work in the party, Heydar Aliyev continued to involve himself in its work until his very last day there, personally overseeing the execution and completion of the tasks he had set his staff.

Albert Salamov recalls how in the summer of 1969 he returned from his first foreign assignment to Turkey, where he had accompanied a large group of Soviet tourists, including 30 Azerbaijanis. His role as an intelligence operative was to join the group disguised as an industrial engineer. Before Salamov left, Heydar Aliyev had given him some instructions for when he was in Turkey.

From a conversation with Albert Salamov:

Albert Salamov: The trip was very difficult; one person died, and a woman almost stayed behind after she believed the Turkish guide – who was clearly a Turkish secret agent – when he persuaded her that he would marry her if she stayed. Basically my nerves were really tested. I spent some time in Moscow when I returned, so that I could report back to my superiors. We usually gave our reports orally, and would then send a written report from Baku.

A couple of days later I received a call from the KGB saying that Heydar Aliyev wanted to see me and would be waiting at the Peking Hotel, in room 504. This room was a luxury suite reserved for the Azerbaijani KGB's use.

Heydar Aliyevich opened the door; I remember that he was dressed in a dark blue tracksuit, the sort worn by supporters of the Dynamo Moscow football club. He invited me to sit down and we started to talk. I, of course, spoke far more than him, filling him in on all the details. Our conversation lasted for about 40 minutes, and I think I must have tired him out – but he showed no trace of displeasure.

I didn't know at the time that Heydar Aliyevich had been invited to a Politburo meeting where it was decided that he was to be elected the first secretary of Azerbaijan. I asked for permission to stay in Moscow for two more days. He smiled and agreed. That was his way of thanking me.

Elmira Akhundova: It is astonishing to think that he had just gone to a Politburo meeting where a question of paramount importance for his career – and, indeed for Azerbaijan – had been decided. And then a rank-and-file officer had returned back from a standard assignment that he, Aliyev, could easily have ignored. Yet he was so responsible and so dedicated to his work that he considered it his duty to hear your report.

A. S.: We all took our lead from him on this. He loved seeing any job through to its conclusion. When I got back to Baku from my assignment and learnt that Heydar Aliyevich had been promoted, I was of course happy for him, but I was amazed at the same time.

Our last meeting took place in the Dzerzhinsky Club where the entire Azerbaijani KGB assembled. Heydar Aliyev had come to say goodbye. The hall was full, with the women sitting at the front, handkerchiefs in their hands and tears in their eyes. Heydar Aliyev gave a speech, said his farewells and said that he was leaving to work for the party, that they had begged him and even forced him to run Azerbaijan. He said that he was leaving with a heavy heart because it was difficult to leave a team that he had worked with for 25 years. The women cried. Even I almost cried, along with many other men, since it was sad that such a person was leaving.

THE KGB CHAIRMAN'S PRIVATE LIFE

Heydar Aliyev was very passionate about his work and dedicated himself to it selflessly. His work and sense of public duty were the backbone of his existence, and he was prepared to sacrifice a great deal for them, including his free time, holidays and pastimes. Later on in his life the president admitted sheepishly in conversation with foreign journalists that he did not have any hobbies. It is true that he liked swimming and exercised in the morning throughout his life, but these were just part of his healthy lifestyle rather than hobbies. He simply did not have the time for pastimes that were fashionable among the bureaucratic elite, such as hunting or fishing, or other similar forms of active recreation, since he used his entire intellectual and physical capacity at work.

Nonetheless, Heydar Aliyev was not an out-and-out workaholic. More important than anything to him was his family – his wife and children, and he was endlessly happy in their company.

Heydar Aliyev often told the story of his acquaintance with his future wife and her family. The famous Azerbaijani film director Vagif Mustafayev subsequently made a documentary based on his stories that won prestigious awards at international film festivals.

The dramatic day-to-day realities of Stalin's era are reflected in a most remarkable manner in the love story between Heydar and Zarifa. This was a time when not only an individual's career, but also their private life and most intimate feelings could be mercilessly trampled upon at any moment at the whim of the all-powerful party leaders. As if to test his mettle, Heydar Aliyev was often challenged in this way. After he had met Zarifa and decided to make a life with her, he was forced to challenge the cards Fate had dealt him and insist on his right to stay with his beloved.

Zarifa khanim's father, Aziz Mammad Karim oglu Aliyev, was a legendary self-made man. Aziz Aliyev was born into a poor family from Yerevan and, despite having to overcome great difficulties, graduated from grammar school with top marks. He entered the Military Medical Academy in St. Petersburg prior to the Revolution, and later ran the healthcare system in Soviet Azerbaijan.

Mir Jafar Baghirov noticed Aziz Aliyev's talents and entrusted him with high official positions. From 1938 to 1939 Aziz Aliyev was the secretary of the Presidium of the Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet and people's commissar for healthcare. During the war he was the secretary of the CPA Central Committee and carried out an important mission to Iran. For six years he then ran the Dagestani Regional Party Committee, where he is still remembered to this day. Tahir Talibly writes that Aziz Aliyev saved Dagestanis from deportation during the Stalin-era resettlements by forming a national cavalry squadron, which fought bravely against the Nazis as part of the 416th Taganrog Division.

An enormous amount of work was carried out in Dagestan to help the war effort. It was on his initiative that the construction of the Samur-Divichinsky Canal began.

In January 1949 he was summoned to work for the CPSU Central Committee in Moscow. This definitely concerned senior leaders in Azerbaijan. According to Central Committee Secretary M.G. Seyidov, Baghirov literally talked Aziz Aliyev into returning to Azerbaijan and taking up the post of deputy chairman of the government. In a letter to Malenkov in February, 1950 Baghirov asked the CPSU Central Committee to approve Aziz Aliyev's transfer to Baku. According to the historian E. Ismayilov: "Baghirov's persistence in this matter can only be explained by one thing: the Moscow leaders could very well see this Azerbaijani who had appeared before them as a successor to Baghirov in the post of first secretary of Azerbaijan. After Aziz Aliyev's transfer to Baku it was only a matter of time before he came into conflict with Baghirov."¹

On 5th September 1950 Aziz Aliyev was discharged from his position as deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers and was made director of the Institute for Reconstructive Surgery and Orthopaedics, which he had founded some time before. Meanwhile, the Azerbaijani NSM began investigating anonymous letters, which had suddenly started being sent to the party's governing bodies. The 5th Department launched an investigation against Aziz Aliyev into accusations of "nationalism" and "concealment of social origins". Soon after, Aziz Aliyev was demoted again to the position of deputy dean of medicine in a regional hospital. On 12th June 1951 Aziz Aliyev received an official reprimand at a meeting of the CPA Central Committee, which was recorded in his personal file.

At that unfortunate time for Aziz Aliyev's family the romance between Zarifa and Heydar began in earnest. The difficulty of the situation lay in the fact that Heydar Aliyev worked in the very department tasked with investigating the compromising material on his future father-in-law. The ambiguity of the situation worried Zarifa: she was concerned that it might inadvertently damage her beloved's career. On their next date she told Heydar Aliyev, "We won't be able to meet anymore because my father has been fired and is facing various accusations. You work in the intelligence service and this could harm you. It seems that we are not fated to be together."

Soon after this conversation Emelyanov, the state security minister, called Heydar Aliyev in to see him. An unpleasant meeting took place. The general ordered him to cut all ties with the disgraced Aziz Aliyev's family and threatened to fire him from the security services. In effect, Heydar Aliyev had to choose between his career and his love – a test of his ethical maturity. After all, at that time there were all too many instances of very close friends or even relatives avoiding someone who had fallen out of

¹ Ismayilov, 198

political favour and roused the ire of the authorities. Men even renounced their wives out of fear for their careers or even their lives; bridegrooms broke off their engagements and abandoned their fiancées "by order of the party".

Thankfully, Heydar Aliyev did not hesitate for a moment: by this point Zarifa had stolen his heart with her personality, femininity, charm, and rare intelligence to such an extent that he could not conceive of life without her. "Can you imagine what I was thinking – given that I was working in the KGB, that I knew what was going on with her father and how he was being investigated? I had heard that there were plans to resettle the entire family to Kazakhstan. I thought to myself that if they were resettled I would go to Kazakhstan with her. I thought it might even be easier to find work there than it was in Azerbaijan."¹

Life can be amazing sometimes. Who would have thought that in a couple of years' time, Emelyanov and Baghirov would end up in the dock, and that KGB officer Heydar Aliyev would be in charge of security for the trial? Who would have thought that having been released from prison a quarter of a century later, Emelyanov would return to Baku and ask for help from his former subordinate, and that the former subordinate would do all that he could to help the powerless old man, crippled by the labour camps. Perhaps Heydar Aliyev felt his own peculiar form of gratitude to Emelyanov in addition to pity: it would not have cost the chairman of the National Security Ministry anything at that time to carry out his threat and punish Heydar Aliyev. But he did not, and apparently did not report to his superiors that a member of his staff was continuing to secretly date Aziz Aliyev's daughter.

Regardless of the dramatic circumstances surrounding their romance, it had a happy ending. In November 1954 they went to the registry office and modestly celebrated their wedding at the flat that Heydar Aliyev had recently received from the NSM. Ibrahim Isinayilov, Heydar Aliyev's childhood friend, was his best man.

"We all put a lot of effort into preparing for his wedding. It really was a difficult time – we didn't have enough money. So we helped Heydar out the best we could. We managed at least to get hold of food for the table: chicken and other meats. His mother, Izet khala [Aunt – respectful form of address – Ed.], cooked the wedding meal, and his sisters helped.

The wedding took place at Heydar's two-room flat in what used to be called Yerevan Lane, next to School No. 6. It had one large and one small room. That was the wedding venue. The newlyweds and guests went from the registry office to Heydar's place. Only 50 guests were invited, just relatives. There was no music, nothing extravagant."

¹ From *Lyubov, Pokbozhaya na Son* [Love is like a dream], an episode in Oksana Pushkina's television programme *Zhenskiy Vzglyad* [A woman's view].

I asked everyone who knew Zarifa khanim the same question: "What was she like?" The reply was always: "Very humble." Hers was the sort of humility that marks out a genuinely intelligent and cultured person. Neither her own academic titles (PhD, professor and, finally, member of the Academy of Sciences and laureate of the extremely prestigious ophthalmological Averbakh Academy Prize for Medical Sciences in the USSR), nor the important position of her husband changed her personality one bit.

One could give many examples in support of this claim; I shall limit myself here, however, to a few observations from those people closest to Zarifa khanim, her friend Zahra Guliyeva, and her daughter Sevil Aliyeva. Professor Guliyeva worked as the dean of the Azerbaijani Medical Institute (1972-1983), and after independence she headed the State Committee for Women until she passed away. This is how she recalls it: "The cream of Azerbaijani society visited Aziz Aliyev's house. Famous writers, composers, artists, academics and university professors – they were all there! The children were aware of this, yet neither the children nor the parents ever boasted of the fact that Aziz Aliyev was a Central Committee secretary or the most important person in Makhachkala. Zarifa did not think in such petty terms. I cannot remember her wearing anything extravagant. She dressed very simply, avoiding attention."

The family greeted everyone as if they were a dear guest. I remember that they had a lady who helped them around the house. Her husband worked as a street cleaner, and they were poor. When her husband fell ill, Zarifa took care of him and went round with bags of food and medicine.

She was such a kind person! One of our ward sisters, Belousova, was living in very tough conditions. Zarifa wrote to all the authorities on her behalf and managed to improve the situation. We even went to that ward sister's house-warming party.

Zarifa khanim was in charge of a university faculty in Baku and lectured in the Institute for Advanced Medicine. Doctors from across the USSR came to listen. 'I feel a bit awkward at times,' she said. 'I give a lecture, and when I go out, they thank me for it!' 'You deserve their thanks,' I replied.

I was chairwoman of the Society of Ophthalmologists when Zarifa khanim was awarded the Averbakh Prize and came to Baku. 'This is the highest award given to Azerbaijani ophthalmologists,' I said, 'you have earned it. We will congratulate you at the society's next meeting.'

She looked frightened. 'What are you going to do?'

'Well, we'll give you some flowers.'

'No, don't! I don't want you spending a single penny on me.' She did not even accept flowers or boxes of chocolates from patients. She didn't sully the integrity of her white coat with even the smallest stain.

We were barely able to persuade her to celebrate this award, and it took a great deal of effort to persuade her to attend. She was such a humble lady.

When the children were still young, Zarifa once confided in me, 'Heydar and I spent all of last night talking about how we are going to raise the children. What a responsibility it is!' I laughed. 'What are you talking about, Zarifa? You and him are highly-educated, cultured and thoughtful people. I am certain that you won't have any problems with your children.' When I see them now, particularly Ilham [Aliyev], I think that she would have been proud of her children."

"It was in her nature to be unusually modest," adds Sevil Aliyeva. "Even during official events at the Lenin Palace mum would either arrive to the near-empty hall and sit down before everyone else, or, if the hall was full, we would go up before then heading down to our seats from the upper seating. This was not the same as, let's say, the wives of certain ministers, who would sometimes be late deliberately and walk upwards from the bottom rows so that everybody looked at them. Mum didn't like attention. She would always ask the security guards to prevent the TV crew from filming us. And the fact that my father went to all official proceedings with mum was due to the strong attachment he had for her. He couldn't live without her."

Zarifa Aliyeva also possessed a quiet patriotism – an unspoken but active love of her people. She did not express this love through eloquent statements or grand phrases, but rather through tangible, specific projects. Instead of living the peaceful, measured life that befitted the first lady, Zarifa khanim, as if on principle, would set herself tasks, each one harder than the last. Later, unafraid of infection, she joined the ranks of the doctors who had volunteered to combat a trachoma epidemic in the years after the war. In the 1970s, she went on to organise laboratories for the treatment and study of occupational eye pathologies in hazardous industries,¹ and then conducted academic research in iridology, a completely new field of ophthalmology at the time. She co-authored the unique book *Fundamentals of Iridodiagnosis*.

At the same time she tried not to let her professional work interfere with her responsibilities as a mother and wife. At times she felt almost guilty for the fact that science and research took away precious hours that she might have been able to dedicate to her family. "She was very attached to her children, to her family, and this became more important than everything else to her," Sevil Aliyeva told me. "Family was closest to her heart. Dad knew how great mum's academic potential was, how talented she was, and so he tried to instil a desire in her to go further. I remember how she would sit down to work on her articles and books at night, when we had all gone to bed. When we travelled to Moscow she constantly had engagements with her ophthalmologist colleagues. But she didn't have any aspirations to become famous. What she did achieve was the result of academic work, of great diligence. And dad could not make peace with that falling by the wayside. You were asking about difficulties and arguments – well that

¹ The Ganja Alumina Refinery and the Baku Tyre Factory among others.

sometimes caused them. He would say to her that she should continue her academic research so that she wouldn't lose momentum. He would try to inspire and persuade her about this all the time.¹

Despite the colossal burden of his official duties, Heydar Aliyev always found time for his family. Sevil khanim recalls how she would accompany her father on walks when Zarifa was held up at work, how her father taught her and her brother to swim. "I even remember how dad would tie my little bow," she said with a sad smile.

Heydar Aliyev loved to travel out of Azerbaijan with his family, although this happened extremely rarely, especially while he was head of the KGB. Sevil remembers one occasion in 1966, when Heydar Aliyev was attending a training course for senior staff in Moscow, he managed to find a week of holiday and took his wife and daughter to have a look around Leningrad, the city of his youth. Then they headed to the Baltic capitals by car, where they were met by his friends – fellow KGB employees.

* * *

Those veterans of the security services who had the chance to see Heydar Aliyev during his rare moments of relaxation remembered him for his easy and laid-back manner in his relationships with his subordinates, his love of humour, jokes and infectious laughter. Heydar Aliyev was very loyal when it came to friendship. He never forgot his friends, even once he occupied top positions. Isa Mammadov recalls a meeting he had with Heydar Aliyev in the 1960s when the chairman of the KGB arrived with a state delegation for the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic's 40th anniversary celebrations: "I was working in Nakhchivan as the head of a school attached to a state-run foster home. We hadn't seen each other for a long time. When he heard that I had started a family, that I had children, he said to one of our close friends that he ought to call on me. He found some time to visit us. At the time I was an ordinary school headmaster, whereas Heydar Aliyev held a high position in Baku. But he was the kind of person who put personal relationships before everything else. Not everyone is like that."¹

I would like to round off this chapter with an emotional story from Ekaterina Aliyeva, the faithful wife of Colonel Kamal Aliyev: "In the 1960s we would often go on holiday to the KGB sanatorium in Kislovodsk, which was where Heydar Aliyev and Zarifa khanim would also go. Once (I think it was in 1965) we all went to my mother's house in Kislovodsk for a barbecue. A table was set under some apple trees. Kamal set about lighting up the coals in a makeshift brazier, Heydar made skewers for shish kebabs out of sticks. It began to drizzle, the coals got damp and Kamal just could not get them to light. Heydar went up to him and started teasing; he said, 'You don't know how to do anything!' Then

he took the matter into his own hands and deftly started the fire. We barbecued practically in the rain, right there in the garden under the apple trees. It was fun, the men told some funny stories. Then it started quickly getting dark, and we decided to go back to the sanatorium without waiting for the rain to finish. We walked through puddles, the rain kept pouring and pouring, but we were laughing and skipping, we were so happy! We were young and had our whole lives ahead of us."

A huge life and a long road certainly did lie ahead for Heydar Aliyev, along with triumphs and setbacks, successes and failures, moments of transcendent happiness and overpowering grief. He would have to witness the destruction of the ideals he respected so keenly, and live through the collapse of the country that he had so faithfully and passionately served. After returning to the summit of political power, he would have to step into a new era and begin a life from scratch – in a completely different country. Sometimes I feel as if I am writing a book about different people, as the life of one person cannot physically encompass such an astonishing variety of deeds and events.

¹ Isa Mammadov, 120

BURDENS OF POWER AND RESPONSIBILITY

HIGH TIME FOR A CHANGE

Life itself proved long ago that a nihilistic attitude towards your own history does not lead to anything good. Any success, any progress, whether it is in economics, culture, or politics, is only justified if it is based on tradition, on the positive experience accumulated by preceding generations. Heydar Aliyev was never a nihilist. He had equal respect for those who ruled Azerbaijan before him, and in his reports and public speeches he would often mention examples of the positive changes that had taken place during the post-war period in Azerbaijan. So, let us look back and remember Azerbaijan's party leaders in the pre-Aliyev era.

Following the Kremlin's chosen candidate Sergei Kirov and a procession of his successors, local individuals began governing the republic: Mir Jafar Baghirov (1933–53), Imam Mustafayev (1953–1959), and Veli Akhundov (1959–1969). All three made a certain contribution to the development of Azerbaijan's technical, academic and cultural potential.

Hence, the republic developed at an accelerated pace after the war: the development of oilfields in the Caspian Sea; the construction of new industrial centres – Sumgayit, Mingachevir, Dashkesan; the rapid growth in the industrial potential of Baku and Kirovabad; the powerful spurt in the development of ferrous and non-ferrous metallurgy, machine building, and chemical industry – all of these occurred during the so-called "Baghirov period" of Azerbaijan's history.

Imam Mustafayev Dashdemir oghlu, who ruled Azerbaijan in the post-Stalin period, was a remarkable character. A famous Azerbaijani geneticist, an expert in plant breeding, and a member of the Academy of Sciences, Imam Mustafayev worked as head of several commissariats before his appointment as "boss" of Azerbaijan. Earlier he also occupied positions minister of the Institute of Agriculture of Azerbaijan and head of the Ganja District Committee of the Azerbaijan Communist Party. He governed the country for all of five years, but these were years of spiritual ascendancy and cleansing – the rebirth of a national self-consciousness and large-scale leadership replacements, where preference was given in particular to local people who spoke Azerbaijani. What a saga it took just for this to become the official state language!

Khrushchev rebuked Mustafayev for "nationalism" and "regionalism" in the republic. On 1st July 1959 the question of the Communist Party's activities in Azerbaijan was discussed at the Presidium of the CPSU Central Committee, and by 6th July Imam Mustafayev had already been relieved of his position as first secretary. Much later Heydar Aliyev would recall how profoundly infuriating he found the decree regarding the "nationalist trends in the Azerbaijani Republic". "At the time it was difficult to find a nation or a republic as international as Azerbaijan. And yet they pinned the label of nationalism onto us. They said we had begun eulogizing Nariman Narimanov, and yet were mentioning little about Shaumyan and so on. That was the position we were in."¹

Fortunately the quick-tempered and unpredictable Khrushchev was not a sadist, unlike Stalin. Besides, it was 1959, not 1937. Hence, Imam Mustafayev was only forced into retirement, and was permitted to return to his academic work. He worked at the Institute for Genetics and Selection at the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences until he died, serving as its director from 1971.²

Veli Yusif oglu Akhundov replaced Mustafayev. Born in Baku in 1916, he graduated from the Azerbaijan State Medical Institute in 1941 and was called up for military service. His rapid progress through the ranks began after the war, and he occupied a series of important posts, such as health minister. He became chairman of the Azerbaijani Council of Ministers in 1958, before finally being appointed first secretary of the CPA Central Committee in 1959. He would occupy this position for exactly 10 years. After being removed from power, he worked as vice president of the Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences until 1972, before heading the Department of Virology, Microbiology and Hygiene until his death.³

On 21st June 1996 Heydar Aliyev gave a great speech in Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences to mark the public celebrations of Veli Akhundov's 80th birthday. He revealed many new aspects of their relationship and called Veli Akhundov's decade-long tenure as first secretary of the CPA Central Committee "a difficult period in the history of the country." He recalled how Akhundov and his team had undergone Khrushchev's removal from power and the transition of supreme power to the Brezhnev faction. All of this was accompanied by a shift in foreign and domestic policy, along with leadership reshuffles. Heydar Aliyev noted that ruling the country at that time was not an easy job, all the more so in the wake of the party's well known decree about "nationalist trends" in the activities of Azerbaijani Communist Party.⁴

¹ Heydar Aliyev, *Nasha Nezavisimost Nezyblema* [Our independence is unshakeable], vol. 6 (Baku: 1998), 452

² *Azerbaydzhanskaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya*, vol. 7, 105

³ Ibid., vol. 1, 495

⁴ Heydar Aliyev, *Our Independence*, 452-453

In Heydar Aliyev's words: "Thanks to his knowledge, experience, intellect, and patience, Veli Akhundov steered the republic through this difficult 10 year period, during which it achieved substantial successes and our people created a great deal. But none of this happened by itself. Veli Akhundov, as Azerbaijan's leader, had a significant role in all the successful achievements of that period, and, as such, deserves high praise."

At the same time, the last years of Akhundov's rule were characterised by a growth in national crises that resulted in Azerbaijan's chronic developmental lag, with a whole series of key indicators placing the nation in last place out of all the Soviet republics.

The government's weakness led to a widespread decline in responsibility and discipline, as well as the rise of negative phenomena. In his article "Heydar Aliyev. A New Star on the Kremlin's Horizon", the Russian historian Roy Medvedev analyses the reasons for Azerbaijan's change in leadership: "Contrary to the opinion about inhabitants of the Caucasus, most Azerbaijanis were living very poorly, although corruption and embezzlement had reached startlingly high levels and were being conducted almost openly. One of the many commissions from Moscow was astonished when they made 100 test purchases of various goods in stores in Baku, and were short-changed or cheated in all 100 cases!"⁵ This underground economy permeated every pore of the state to such an extent that some industrial and agricultural facilities were used as though they were private property.

A similar situation was unfolding in neighbouring Georgia. The republic's clandestine millionaires, like Azerbaijan's currency speculators and operators of illegal factories, became legendary in the USSR, and the bribery of officials became a favourite topic in national folklore.

Emigrant writers Elena Klepikova and Vladimir Solovyov wrote in their scandalously famous book *Zagovorshchiki v Kreml* [Plotters in the Kremlin]: "in Georgia, as in Azerbaijan, nepotism, bribery, the 'purchase' of high-ranking positions (including ministerial portfolios), and underground industries which were able to successfully compete against their state-owned counterparts, reached fantastical proportions. Both these republics practically seceded from the centralised socialist empire to become underground capitalist states."⁶

* * *

While trying to discover the reasons behind the radical changes at the apex of power in July 1969, I meticulously questioned the individuals I spoke with about Heydar Aliyev's predecessor. This was because the situation that took shape in Azerbaijan largely centred on Veli Akhundov's

⁵ *The Washington Post*, 29th June (1984)

⁶ Elena Klepikova & Vladimir Solovyov, *Zagovorshchiki v Kreml*: ot Andropova do Gorbacheva [Plotters in the Kremlin: from Andropov to Gorbachev], (Moscow: AO Art Centre, 1991), 261

personal qualities – as a man and as a politician. Oddly enough, the clear shortcomings and negative features of the Akhundov regime were largely seen as a continuation of the subjective advantages of his brilliant personality. Almost everyone indicates “intelligence” and “a democratic attitude” as Akhundov’s distinguishing traits.

“Akhundov had none of Heydar Aliyev’s sternness. He was a trusting, gentle-hearted person,” says KGB veteran Albert Salamov. The former secretary of the CPA Central Committee, Ramiz Mammadzadeh, agrees: “Akhundov was a well-educated, intelligent, cultured man. I remember him giving a report in the Dzerzhinsky Club. He spoke for over two hours without notes, even reciting excerpts from the poetry of Seyid Azim Shirvani and Nizami by heart. Not every first secretary could boast of being able to do that. However, he was unable to bang his fist on the table and make demands or take drastic decisions.”

Tahir Salahov, a National Artist of Azerbaijan, recalls Veli Akhundov’s last speech, on 6th July 1969 in the Dzerzhinsky Club: “Akhundov was an intellectual, but not a politician. He would relax and say, ‘I saw a film where Cherkasov played the main character. I very much liked one of his quotes: ‘Hasten to do good’.

In the East, such words coming from the first secretary, directed at a hall filled with the heads of regions as well as ministers, could be interpreted in any way. It was clear that an ‘iron fist’ was needed to provide contrast to this cultured limpness.”

Heydar Aliyev was part of Akhundov’s close circle and described him in the following way: “He was a highly qualified person, with a broad range of interests. Aside from a knowledge of his own field, he was very experienced politically. He was very cultured, interested in history, and a cultivated and very modest man. Modest not only in his private life, but in his relationships with other people. He had a friendly attitude towards people. Some accused him of excessive liberalism. True, he was a liberal at work. Apparently, this stemmed from the softness of his character.”¹

One of the main reasons behind Akhundov’s resignation were the conflicts and squabbles between members of the Azerbaijani leadership.

Turan Huseynov, former executive assistant to Heydar Aliyev, recalls: “During Akhundov’s regime a faction was formed by the chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, Mammad Isgandarov, the chairman of the Council of Ministers, Enver Alikhanov, and Mammad Alizadeh. The latter came from Moscow, worked in the KGB as a departmental head, and eventually became the Azerbaijani interior minister. They created a powerful opposition to Akhundov that he was unable to manage. Of course, these conflicts in the upper echelons of power were reflected all down the chain of command.”

According to Ismayil Ibrahimov, the former deputy chairman of the Azerbaijani Council of Ministers: “If an economic downturn occurred in

the last few years of the Akhundov regime, it was not so much Akhundov’s fault as that of the government headed by Alikhanov, who worked without due care. In general, they failed to develop the necessary relationships, and there was an outright power struggle. They were pulling Azerbaijan in different directions. Both Isgandarov and Alikhanov were waiting for Akhundov’s impending retirement, especially since they knew that he suffered from a severe form of diabetes. And, of course, each of them was vying for his power. Nobody ever expected that Heydar Aliyev would succeed Akhundov.”

Heydar Aliyev himself recalled this at a memorial evening for Veli Akhundov in 1996: “In those days, I watched all the fuss and sometimes spoke with Akhundov on the topic. I once explained to him with a heavy heart that because of their own personal ambitions, our people sometimes stoop to such low actions. However, the individuals who tried to overthrow Akhundov ended up overthrowing themselves. Akhundov was forced to leave his post, but not one of them was thought worthy to replace him.”¹

Apparently, this topic engaged Heydar Aliyev’s imagination. It was as if he foresaw that the eternal human vices – treachery, megalomania, the betrayal of former friends and colleagues – would play an unfortunate role in his own political fate. It was because of this that he would talk with Veli Akhundov several times on the subject, and they would find examples of similar “diseases” in the past, most frequently by remembering Nariman Narimanov’s dramatic fate. One of the most respected and worthy leaders of Azerbaijan in the 1920s, Narimanov was eventually removed from his native Azerbaijan through the efforts of his own inner circle, which, incidentally, contained more than a few senior Armenian party members.

“They committed various acts of provocation against Narimanov,” Heydar Aliyev asserted bitterly. “For that reason, on the one hand, his departure to Moscow was due to his election as one of the chairmen of the Central Executive Committee, but on the other, it was intended to remove a man who had worked to reinforce Azerbaijan’s national foundations of the republic.” Heydar Aliyev recalled how Mammad Said Ordubadi wrote in one of the newspapers that, while working in Moscow, Narimanov was in Tbilisi for business and wanted to visit Baku, but Dadash Bunyadzadeh did everything in his power to prevent Narimanov from returning to Azerbaijan and speaking there. Heydar Aliyev was convinced that the Azerbaijani leaders’ internal disunity was the main reason that foreigners ruled the republic between 1920 and 1933. According to Heydar Aliyev, internal disagreements led to the mass purges of 1937-1938. As a result of internal squabbling, the republic was accused of nationalism in 1959.

Similar internal squabbles in 1988-1993 led to Azerbaijan’s loss of Nagorno-Karabakh and the occupation of seven of the republic’s regions.

¹ Heydar Aliyev, “Our independence”, 458

¹ Ibid., 455

Unfortunately, all we learn from history is that we never learn from history. Recent scholars of the Soviet era, among them the English journalist Martin Walker, have suggested that Heydar Aliyev himself was directly involved in removing Veli Akhundov. In the political environment of the time, rumours were spread about some kind of document that was supposedly sent from the Azerbaijani KGB to the USSR KGB regarding the untenable situation in Azerbaijan due to rampant bribery and corruption. This document was supposedly the last straw for the Kremlin.

I do not think that this was the case, at least not entirely. Firstly, it was the direct responsibility of the KGB chairman to inform the local and union leadership of the situation in Azerbaijan, including any negative phenomena. In answer to my question on whether the head of the State Security Committee advised the republic's leader about the fight against corruption and protectionism, and whether he reported on the situation in Azerbaijan, KGB veteran Albert Salamov answered: "He was obliged to report on the current situation in the republic. These documents were prepared, and Veli Akhundov was obliged to read them. Anyway, when I became head of the department, we sent all similar materials to the Central Committee."

In addition, there were enough sources without Heydar Aliyev. Take, for example, just the institute of Central Committee second secretaries, practically the Kremlin's appointed governors. They were assigned to the local leadership in order to inform the USSR's higher political leadership what was happening in each republic. The journalist Alirza Balayev recalls attending a press conference in the late 1980s with Viktor Polyanichko, Azerbaijan's second secretary. When Balayev asked what came under his remit, the reply was that one of his main duties was "to give the Politburo information on the situation in Azerbaijan."¹

Heydar Aliyev asserted that it never occurred to him that he might one day lead Azerbaijan, and yet he was the one who replaced Akhundov. Just two years previously he had been made a general and appointed head of the Azerbaijani KGB, and had launched a large-scale reform of the state security services. "I could never have imagined," he confessed, "that I would run the country – I was so far removed from all that, continually immersed in my own professional work."²

Traditionally, individuals who aspired to the party's highest posts throughout the republics were heads of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, Central Committee secretaries or, occasionally, chairmen of the Council of Ministers. The appointment of someone who had been nurtured in the corridors of the KGB broke this tradition and, in Heydar Aliyev's own words, caused a great stir – in the USSR and abroad.

¹ *Baky Post*, special edition (1998), 6

² Heydar Aliyev, "Our independence", 455

"This was the first case of its kind in the entire history of the CPSU and the USSR," writes the Russian author Nikolai Zenkovich. "It was not repeated until 15 years later, when, in 1984, Boris Pugo, the head of the Latvian KGB, was elected first secretary of the Latvian Communist Party. He, however, already had experience of party work. Before moving to state security in 1976, Pugo spent two years as the first secretary of Riga Party Committee. ... Heydar Aliyev had not spent a single day working on official party business."¹ In addition, Heydar Aliyev was not even a full member of the Central Committee – only having candidate membership at that time.

According to Ibrahimov, Akhundov himself nominated a different successor: Central Committee Secretary for Industry Ali Amirov. Amirov's contemporaries remember him as a highly competent specialist with a good knowledge of industry who solved problems efficiently. In this respect he was similar to Hasan Seyidov, who replaced him soon after.

As well as Ali Amirov, Moscow considered quite a few candidates, including Veli Akhundov's main rivals, Mammad Isqandarov and Enver Alikhanov. Kapitonov, a CPSU Central Committee secretary, had this to say about the "search", at the CPA Central Committee's July Plenum: "I will speak frankly, comrades; our party's Central Committee has given this matter considerable attention and thorough examination, as has the Central Committee Bureau. There were many candidates to consider for the position of first secretary, which is completely understandable and only natural given the abundance of highly skilled officials in this country."

So, as we can see, Moscow did not immediately think of Heydar Aliyev. Moreover, he was not even in the running at first. And, of course, without Tsvigun, a man close to the general secretary, and without Andropov's support, he might well never have come onto Brezhnev's radar. I believe that Brezhnev was always somewhat wary of the idea. Heydar Aliyev was, in his opinion, a wild card, especially since a KGB man had never yet been appointed to the political leadership of a republic. I am also sure that the general secretary's inner circle, almost entirely made up of traditional conservatives, shared his wariness. In short, Tsvigun and Andropov had to make a great deal of effort to convince Brezhnev that there was just one man with the strength to bring order to Azerbaijan.

Some of the people I have spoken to believe that it was Yuri Andropov rather than Tsvigun who played the main role in Heydar Aliyev's nomination. In the words of Tahir Salahov: "They wanted to appoint General Rasulbeyov – he was Tsvigun's candidate. He was called to Moscow for an interview, but

¹ Zenkovich, 368-369

² Documents from the 16th CPA Central Committee Plenum on 14th July 1969. From the State Archives of Azerbaijan's Political Parties and Social Movements (GAPPOD), fund 1, list 56, case 4

he refused the position. Rasulbeyov was older than Heydar Aliyevich and did not want to take on such a responsibility. The search for another candidate began, and then Andropov suggested Heydar Aliyev. I got the impression that Tsvigun was secretly against the idea of his former subordinate attaining such great heights.¹

Filipp Bobkov, who was head of the USSR KGB's 5th Directorate at the time, agrees: "I think that Andropov had the final say. The general opinion at the time was that order needed to be established throughout the Azerbaijani republic and its government, and that we needed to begin a meaningful fight against bribery and corruption. Heydar Aliyev had already proven himself more than capable of this as director of the KGB."

I am truly convinced that life pushed Heydar Aliyev forward, and that he did not scheme against anybody, to put it crudely, and nor did he engage in behind-the-scenes power struggles. He was chosen for his own personal qualities and his attitude towards his work. He certainly could not be accused of careerism, of elbowing others out of the way to make room for himself –that was just not the case. Heydar Aliyev fully deserved his nomination, and in those days we really needed a candidate like him."

In his book *Neizvestnyi Andropov* [The unknown Andropov], Roy Medvedev puts forward his own version of the events: "In 1969 it was decided that Akhundov should retire as the first secretary of the CPA Central Committee. But who should replace him? This question had to be answered by Brezhnev himself, who did not know Heydar Aliyev. But Brezhnev's good friend General Tsvigun knew him well, as he had been the head of the KGB in Baku until 1967. Ultimately, Tsvigun recommended that Heydar Aliyev be given the job in the Azerbaijani Party. Andropov supported this recommendation."¹

However, the question of who exactly facilitated Heydar Aliyev's rise to power is not important. What is important is something else: almost everyone I spoke to clearly mentioned the fact that he was granted this position in order to establish order and combat negative phenomena.

The US-based writers and Soviet historians Vladimir Solovyov and Elena Klepikova wrote with dissident bitterness that Andropov chose Heydar Aliyev and Eduard Shevardnadze to implement a "trial police coup in territory belonging to the USSR," carried out "under the guise of the struggle against corruption."

There is another explanation as to why Moscow felt it necessary to bring in a KGB general to establish order. Personally, I am more inclined to believe this version than the first one. It seems to me that for leaders like Brezhnev, Suslov, Chernenko et al, problems such as bribery, nepotism and bad management presented less of a danger to the socialist cause than budding nationalism, independent thought and aspirations towards

greater independence. We should bear in mind that Heydar Aliyev was appointed shortly after the tragic events of 1968 in Czechoslovakia, events that caused "intellectual ferment" and the spread of dissident ideas among the Soviet intelligentsia. Gripped by "Czechoslovakia Syndrome", senior figures in the Kremlin decided first of all to bolster the leadership of the two states in the South Caucasus. As far as Moscow was concerned, these presented a much greater threat due to their geopolitical situation and the presence of powerful centres of independent thought among their national intelligentsia. Therefore Heydar Aliyev, the "Iron Chekist" and steadfast internationalist, and later the tough Interior Minister Shevardnadze, were brought in to nip any signs of nationalism in the bud and secure the foundations of the Soviet state.

The Azerbaijani writer Anar agrees: "Heydar Aliyev was appointed as first secretary in 1969. In August 1968 Soviet tanks had rolled into Prague, and there was the threat that nationalist sentiments could develop in the union republics as well. This was discussed in the Politburo. Heydar Aliyev, a trusted figure who had been trained by the KGB, was appointed first secretary predominantly to stop similar displays of nationalism and separatism. This is my personal opinion. I can remember one Moscow journalist by the name of Oganov (a former Bakuvian, by the way) saying to the Azerbaijanis after Heydar Aliyev's election, 'What harsh treatment you've received! ...

I believe that Heydar Aliyev, while a Chekist, a KGB employee and so on, always remained an Azerbaijani nationalist at heart. I am using nationalist in the good sense of the word, in that he was devoted to his nation. Therefore, he supposedly came to power on the wave of a fight against nationalism, but very quickly changed the course of this campaign towards the fight against corruption. That is how this reshuffle occurred."

Foreign radio commentators gave detailed coverage to the news of the transfer of power in one of the states in the South Caucasus. The following comes from a broadcast by the Azerbaijani service of *Radio Svoboda* on 18th July 1969:

"What does this choice [of the KGB chairman for the position of the first secretary] mean? Could it be the transformation of the party organisation into another part of the Chekist apparatus? You know, there has never been a case like this in Azerbaijan or in any of the other Soviet states. True, many security service agents have worked within the party and in other positions of responsibility – even the former first secretary, Baghirov, was a member of the service. However, none of them ever moved straight from state security to the party's Central Committee. ...

We do not yet know the reasons why Akhundov was relieved of his responsibilities as first secretary. But it might be suggested that the Kremlin does not trust the Soviet republics, which are trying to gain

¹ Medvedev, "Unknown Andropov", 360

greater independence in the resolution of internal issues. *The Kremlin's new rulers want to turn Aliyev into a second Baghirov [my emphasis].*¹

Whatever the case may have been, the beginning of the Heydar Aliyev era on 14th July 1969 marked a new chapter in the history of Azerbaijan. This was the time that, for all its costs and limitations linked to the Soviet administration, was characterised by an unprecedented surge in Azerbaijan's social, economic and cultural development, and mainly by an intense spiritual regeneration among its people and the mass awakening of national self-awareness.

UNANIMOUSLY ELECTED

The Azerbaijani State Archive of political parties and social movements retains the shorthand record of the 16th Plenum of the Azerbaijani Communist Party, which was probably one of the shortest meetings in its history. Only one issue was raised at the meeting – the re-election of the first secretary. At the time, some influential Moscow Party officers were visiting Baku: namely CPSU Central Committee Secretary Kapitonov, and Starchenko, a CPSU Central Committee sectoral head.

Judging by the number of full and candidate Central Committee members who were present at the plenum (just 87 out of 125 and 56 out of 75 respectively), the change in the republic's leadership had come as a surprise to the majority of active party functionaries, many of whom were outside the capital, due to a swelteringly hot summer in Baku. It was therefore with some difficulty that a quorum was formed. This is also an indicator of the low level of party discipline, which had been faltering during the period of liberal governance under Veli Akhundov.

After the plenum had begun, the floor was given to the emissary from Moscow, Ivan Kapitonov. His speech contained at least two interesting points. Firstly, whilst recognising Veli Akhundov's achievements and thanking him for his work, Kapitonov began a change in the republic's party leadership, which, if not democratic, was decidedly progressive.

For the first time in the history of post-war Azerbaijan, the Central Committee first secretary departed with honours to a high position, rather than to a prison cell. And, secondly, as has previously been mentioned, Akhundov's successor, Heydar Aliyev, was neither a member of the Central Committee Bureau, nor even a member of the Central Committee in any capacity. So he had skipped two steps in the Soviet party hierarchy, in an almost unprecedented promotion.

After Kapitonov had spoken, the floor was given to Veli Akhundov. After thanking Kapitonov for his sincerity and the warm review of his work, Akhundov added: "The truth is, I am quite gravely ill and recently spent three months in hospital in Moscow. I have a serious heart condition that makes it impossible for me to continue my work. Recently, I have been aware of my conscience nagging me. Although I have a great breadth of experience and I know what needs to be done, my health does not allow me to do those things. That is what led me to approach comrade Brezhnev, asking to be released from the post and given the opportunity to dedicate my remaining energies to science. I must say that Brezhnev obliged my request with the greatest attention and understanding. His first response was to praise the work I have done over the last 10 years and to say that there was no need to hurry, that I still had more work left in me. But after I showed him my doctor's report, he agreed that I could transfer to scientific work. I would also like to share my opinion regarding the candidacy of comrade Aliyev.

¹ A live commentary broadcast in Azerbaijan on 18th July 1969 on *Radio Svoboda*.

Comrade Aliyev fulfils all the criteria – both politically and practically – to become a great first secretary of Azerbaijani Communist Party. He is suitably well-educated and erudite, and thoroughly capable of taking on a large volume of work in a short time period. He is loyal to the party and objective enough to treat all staff equally [my emphasis], and, given history and the current situation, it is the personnel issue in Azerbaijan which is the key issue here:¹ we know him to be an honest and decent communist. Dzerzhinsky said that a *Chekist* should have a passionate heart, a clear mind and clean hands. Comrade Aliyev has all of these qualities, and I am more than confident that he will live up to the glorious traditions of our Azerbaijani party."

After the vote, during which Heydar Aliyev was unanimously elected, the floor was given to the new first secretary, who gave the obligatory speech of gratitude, thanking the CPSU Central Committee and the Politburo for their vote of confidence in him.

And now we turn to what went on behind the scenes, and was not included in the transcript. To say that this shocked the representatives present at the plenum of the country's senior party officials would be to put it mildly. They perfectly understood which way the wind was blowing and what it soon meant for each and every one of them. The head of such a formidable and powerful institution as the KGB was no doubt aware of everything that went on, for which many of them would soon pay the price, either through losing their positions, if they were lucky, or, if they were not so fortunate, through the loss of their party membership or even a prison sentence.

Therefore, the party's internal resistance to Heydar Aliyev's candidacy was, naturally, considerable. However, under a totalitarian regime, it was kept hidden and manifested itself for the most part in the incredulous looks and dubious head shaking of dignitaries.

Ramiz Mammadzadeh recalls that the only person who actually spoke out against Heydar Aliyev's candidacy was Sabir Shafiyev, the first secretary of the Shemakhinsky District Party Committee. But even he did not actively oppose it, simply asking, "Tomorrow we will return to our respective regions; how will we explain to people why we failed to find anybody suitable for the position of first secretary in the whole party apparatus, in the Central Committee?"

Kapitonov's response went something like this: "The KGB is part of the party and government organs and implements the CPSU's policies. Therefore, there is nothing surprising in promoting a man who led that organisation to the position of Central Committee first secretary."

I asked the longest-standing member of Heydar Aliyev's team to tell me as honestly as possible how the "higher-ups" felt about Heydar Aliyev's election.

¹ Akhundov referred to careful staff relations twice in his short speech; it was clearly an issue of concern for him.

Ismayil Ibrahimov replied: "In truth, his appointment was not met with unanimous delight and approval. We were quite a strong group of ministers, all trained economists. Naturally, people reacted to Heydar Aliyev's appointment with some degree of scepticism. I cannot say that joy was the prevailing sentiment, but, equally, there were no vocal objections or indignation. For, indeed, who could risk such behaviour? Party discipline is party discipline, after all. People were apprehensive, but they did all accept him into their ranks, especially after the Central Committee's August plenum."

This is important for the purposes of complete accuracy: many Azerbaijanis still consider the Central Committee's August rather than July plenum as an historical moment for their republic, as it was where Heydar Aliyev first unveiled his action plan and delivered a truly revolutionary speech that resounded far beyond the borders of the Soviet Union.

The agenda of this totally ordinary plenum read as follows, "Preparations for the 100th anniversary of Lenin's birth."

When Heydar Aliyev was elected first secretary, the report for the upcoming plenum had already been prepared. It consisted of a rather traditional array of official-sounding clichés, which stuck to the party line. After looking through it carefully, Heydar Aliyev expressed surprise at the nature of the report. His aides, experienced in such matters, started to explain to him that anniversary reports, particularly those associated with Lenin, were written from an overwhelmingly positive perspective, with an expectation that they would predominantly make reference to success. "And who came up with this rule?" Heydar Aliyev asked ironically. They were, of course, unable to give any reply that seemed sensible to him. He emphatically put the report aside and laid out his vision of what it should contain.

The Central Committee employees were somewhat discouraged by the way in which Heydar Aliyev envisaged the report, but, naturally, nobody dared to challenge the first secretary. Hence, the report which Heydar Aliyev presented at the August Plenum of the Azerbaijani Communist Party did not restrict itself to the successful work of the party and Soviet authorities in the republic; indeed, most of the report was actually dedicated to serious shortcomings in their work.

According to former CPA Central Committee Secretary Hasan Hasanov: "It was unprecedented in Azerbaijani party practice. It was the first time the plenum had been held in an atmosphere of fully open and critical analysis. Over the course of the meeting, virtually all the republic's leaders, without exception, found themselves subject to sharp criticism, and all this unflattering analysis was repeated in the newspapers, and found its way into public discussion. What previously used to be hushed up and spread only through rumour and gossip, was finally presented openly to the public."

"His speech at that plenum will remain forever etched in my memory," reminisces Hasan Seyidov, who was the director of a factory in Baku at that time. "The speech had a far-reaching effect throughout all of the USSR. He talked about the corruption that had engulfed the country, and about the other problems that were playing a role in the deterioration of the socio-economic situation and reducing living standards.

We had never heard such frank criticism before. After his report, many people were inspired with the belief that the republic would soon overcome its developmental lag and surge forward."

On 7th August, the *Bakinskiy Rabochiy* newspaper published an abridged transcript of the report. It had an explosive effect. For a long time, this edition was an extremely coveted and scarce commodity for many thousands of party and Soviet workers throughout the country.

Heydar Aliyev was one of the first national leaders to speak of the root evils of the Soviet system. And he did so in public – not in the corridors of government or private conversations. Those evils were bribery and corruption within the state apparatus, the abuse of their positions by officials, and the violation of the principles of equality.

He suggested that his party colleagues needed to take a good, hard look at what was going on around them and candidly admit that the official ideology, which preached the principles of honesty, fairness and decency, was in reality being violated at every turn. And it was not the average citizen that was violating them, but rather individuals from the highest levels of power – the heads of ministries and departments, and civil servants. He was speaking about the situation in his republic, but Azerbaijan did not exist in isolation; it was part of a unified country, the USSR. Therefore, what was happening in Azerbaijan must to some extent have been representative of all of the Soviet Union.

A broad, Heydar Aliyev's report was hailed as a real sensation. Following it he would be presented with long lists of quotations from Western publications on a daily basis.

They all wrote as one about the appearance in the ranks of the Communist Party of "Aliyev the Chekist", who had appeared in order to turn everyone and everything upside down. Foreign radio presenters devoted entire broadcasts to this phenomenon.

The responses of the Western media to Heydar Aliyev's "seditious" statements are preserved in his personal archives. Here are some of them:

Reuters from 11th August 1969:

"The man who was appointed the head of the republic's Communist Party last month made astonishing statements about alleged cases of corruption and lack of discipline among senior officials in the Transcaucasian Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan. ... His speech largely explains why Mr. Aliyev has succeeded the former party leader, Mr. Alkundov, who has been demoted to vice president of the Azerbaijani Academy of Sciences."

An extract from a *Radio Svoboda* broadcast in Russian on 12th August 1969:

"Baku: Heydar Aliyev, the first secretary of the Azerbaijani Communist Party, has made a speech exposing bribery and the unethical behaviour of a number of senior government and party officials in Azerbaijan. ... He spoke about a lack of discipline and behaviour that is incompatible with communist morality. Heydar Aliyev demanded that the perpetrators be exposed in a ruthless fight against bribery. Furthermore, he claimed that many Azerbaijani officials had been appointed to their positions through nepotism. Many of them, according to Aliyev, are too concerned about their own material welfare."

On 12th August 1969 the *Morning Star* newspaper published an article entitled "Careerism Under Fire":

"Heydar Aliyev spoke out against instances of immorality and misconduct by some officials. He harshly criticized the methods of management, selection and placement of personnel in Azerbaijan."

On 30th August 1969 the Turkish *Yeni Gazete* reprinted an article entitled "Azerbaijan has Become a Region of Intrigue and Bribery" from *The New York Times*:

"Heydar Aliyev, the recently appointed head of the Azerbaijani Communist Party, claimed that 'intrigue, dishonesty, bribery, deceit and fraud' are thriving in Azerbaijan, stressing the need to rid the republic of these evils. According to Aliyev, these failings have permeated the entire USSR, as bribery is now a habit for each and every official. None of the ministers are performing their duties effectively, and industrial production has fallen by two thirds, while an 'atmosphere of immorality' reigns in the country. It is believed that this representation of the situation in Azerbaijan ... was sanctioned by Moscow. This represents the first time since the Khrushchev period that such serious accusations have been made against such a large group of senior officials [my emphasis]."

After Heydar Aliyev's speech at the August plenum it was clear that a new era was on its way, and was bringing with it radical changes; for example in personnel policy, as nobody was in any doubt that the new leader would begin his reforms with a renewal of party and economic workers.

MEANWHILE, IN THE KREMLIN ...

Heydar Aliyev was elected party leader of Azerbaijan in the middle of 1969. In this year the Soviet Union would celebrate its fifth year under Brezhnev and the next 10 years or more would go down in history as the only Soviet period of relative stability, which would later be unfairly termed as a time of "stagnation".

Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev, who was undoubtedly a major figure of the Soviet era, played a significant role in Heydar Aliyev's fate. In this book, we will touch on various aspects of their relationship more than once. Now, though, I will take a closer look at Brezhnev's political portrait, which would be torn to pieces during Gorbachev's perestroika.

Incidentally, in his first major interview, which was published in Azerbaijan in early 1990, Heydar Aliyev condemns Brezhnev's posthumous hounding: "Many people are badmouthing him now. In Azerbaijan there are people who wrote poems in praise of Brezhnev at the time, I still have some of those poems in my archive, and now these people have turned their back on him. Every leader has positive and negative traits, but I can say that Brezhnev was a leader who always listened attentively to others, recognised when somebody was speaking the truth. He had good ideas and would always try to help."¹

Reflecting on the reasons for Brezhnev's rise, one of his biographers writes: "The country was tired of Khrushchev's careless vacillations. The whole party organisation, from top to bottom, silently resented the constant and ill-conceived changes. People were frustrated and enraged by the unexpected food shortages. The time was ripe for a calm and circumspect leader. Brezhnev seemed to fulfil these criteria for everybody. ..."

People, including those within the party, needed a break, so that they could look around themselves and quietly reflect on the past and, above all, what the future might hold. Patient, careful and kind-hearted, Brezhnev had already done enough to demonstrate to everybody that he had these qualities.²

However, according to another historian, Brezhnev was extremely combative when it came to threats to his personal power: "Most people in and around the Central Committee considered Brezhnev as weak, and many saw him as a temporary figure. This could be the reason that the participants of the coup were won over by his candidacy to the position of first secretary. And those who underestimated the ability of the new leader to retain power later faced the consequences. But I remember that a few weeks after the October plenum, Nikolai Inozemtsev told me about a conversation he had had with Anushavan Arzumanyan,

¹ *Ulduz*, No. 6 (1990), 68

² Sergei Semanov, *Brezhnev*, (Moscow: Veche, 2002), 108

who knew Brezhnev well from the war. 'There is no need to teach this man about power struggles or how to manage his staff.'¹

According to Viktor Grishin, the former head of the Communist Party in Moscow: "Leonid Brezhnev was an energetic, thoughtful and courageous leader. In the first half of his nearly 20 year tenure as head of the party and the country, he did a lot to develop the country's economy and culture, and to strengthen its standing internationally. He actively facilitated industrial development, the strengthening of the foundations for economic development, and he took an interest in science, particularly that relating to the military and space."²

There were some significant positive social changes and the standard of living of the rural population noticeably increased. Reflecting on the early part of the Brezhnev period, Burlatsky writes: "In place of the 11-year schools introduced during Khrushchev's rule and intended to make education more polytechnical, 10-year schools were reinstated. Farmers were given back their household plots. ... Khrushchev's policy of planting corn everywhere, regardless of the suitability of the land, became a thing of the past. ... Gradually there was a shift from the cultivation of virgin land to the improvement of agriculture in the country's central regions. Collective farm workers received retirement pensions and were guaranteed a minimum wage. The minimum production requirement for essential supplies was reduced, while the prices and sales volume of agricultural products went up."³

At the plenum on 24th March 1965, unachievable agricultural production plans were scrapped, and a strict production requirement was put in place across the nation, but farmers were allowed to freely sell what was produced in excess of this. The surcharges applied to the purchase price for wheat and rye were increased by 50 percent. Private plots began to be encouraged as part of individual farms producing cattle, sheep, goats and poultry. On Brezhnev's initiative, a broad programme to develop agriculture in the more fertile parts of Russia, as well as a food programme, were developed.

At the plenum on 29th September 1965, an economic industrial reform programme was announced – to improve planning and management and to stimulate production. It laid emphasis on economic accountability and activity, prices and profit.

According to Sergei Semanov, for the average Soviet worker, Brezhnev's rule was "the most prosperous time in the whole of the 20th century, which was characterised by numerous hardships. There were no wars, no revolutions, no famine and no upheavals. Life was improving, although the

progress was slow and intermittent. The trouble, investments and savings banks were secure. For the most part, people were given free housing, boys and girls even from the most ordinary families could get into Moscow State University and Leningrad State University without requiring nepotism or the right contacts, and associate professors did not take bribes. It was the same for hospital treatment. Army service was unequivocally highly respected."⁴

Virtually all scholars of the Brezhnev period note the general secretary's peacefulness. After all, he had lived through the horrors of World War II and the considerable upheaval and poverty of the post-war years. This attitude, reflected in the favourite slogan of the Soviet people, "Just Let There be Peace", was perceptible in the Soviet Union's relatively balanced foreign policy.

Georgy Arbatov, an academician who was head of the Institute for US and Canadian Studies in the 1970s, recalls the détente as follows: "In May 1972 the first Soviet-American summit meeting since 1959 was held. It became a real breakthrough in Soviet-American relations, marking the start of the period of détente.

Other equally important changes occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s in terms of our policy towards Europe. I have already mentioned the agreements with West Germany and the agreement regarding West Berlin. In fact we improved our relations with virtually every Western European country. The development of our relationships with social democratic parties and the radical change in our relations with the international social democratic movement, as well as with the Socialist International all seem extremely significant to me. The so-called European process was also successful: negotiations on security and cooperation in Europe culminated in the signing of the famous 1975 treaty in Helsinki."⁵

Numerous memoirs by Brezhnev's advisers and former aides allow us to form an opinion about the general secretary's personal qualities and his style of leadership: "When he first came to power, Brezhnev would begin his working day in a rather unusual manner, devoting at least two hours to making phone calls to other senior members, to many respected Central Committee secretaries in the various republics and regions. He would speak to everybody in the same manner, asking for people's opinions, winning them over and strengthening his authority. It created an impression of him as a fair, peaceful, tactful leader who never took any steps without consulting with other comrades and securing his colleagues' full approval.

He almost never spoke first when discussing matters of state at meetings. He let everyone who wanted to speak have their say, and listened attentively. If there was a difference in opinion he preferred to set the matter aside, and let it be reconsidered so that everyone would agree."⁶

¹ Georgy Arbatov, *Chelovek Sistemy* [Man of the system], (Moscow: Vagrius, 2002).

182

² Grishin, 32

³ Fedor Burlatsky, *Vozzdi i Sovetniki* [Leaders and advisors], (Moscow: Politizdat, 1990), 295

⁴ Semanov, 8

⁵ Arbatov, 273-274

⁶ Burlatsky, 292

Burlatsky's overblown irony aside, it must be stated that Brezhnev really was one of the most democratic rulers of the Soviet period. Heydar Aliyev's aides recall that Brezhnev often called him personally. He was genuinely interested in what was happening in Azerbaijan and was always ready to offer assistance. Brezhnev inculcated a sense of collective management into the staff of the CPSU Central Committee and maintained it right up to his death.

Georgy Shakhnazarov, future aide to Gorbachev, remembers Brezhnev in this way: "You cannot deny that he was charming. No matter how many times I saw him, I never heard him raise his voice, be rude to anyone or swear, things which other perfectly cultivated people do on occasion."¹

"He was a sociable, well-mannered and sensitive person," adds his personal assistant, Oleg Zakharov. "He loved jokes and valued resourcefulness. He also respected that sort of cautious courage, which is not the product of frivolity or insolence. He pretended not to notice insignificant mistakes. He knew how to fill someone with confidence and how to encourage someone at a difficult time. Having observed quite a few high-ranking leaders in my time, I think it fair to say that very few of them possessed these commendable qualities."

Roy Medvedev is of the opinion that Brezhnev stood up for the interests and sentiments of the party personnel. He gave them back many privileges which they had previously lost, raised their salaries and gave the local and republican leaders an almost free rein. One of Brezhnev's greatest skills was his ability to select a team of energetic and committed assistants. After his death neither the members of the Politburo nor his aides had a bad word to say about him. Shakhnazarov, for instance, writes the following about Brezhnev's aide Georgy Tsukanov:

"Brezhnev trusted Tsukanov because he thought he was a decent person. He was not wrong. After all, few people knew about all his whims and ways like Tsukanov, who was privy to Brezhnev's behind-the-scenes machinations – not to mention the rather less than salubrious aspects of his life. Nonetheless, he never shared anything with even his close friends. He kept his silence when Brezhnev was alive and also maintained this after the general secretary's death. ... He lived humbly in his later years, getting by on just his pension, yet he still determinedly refused these offers."² He really was a manifestation of the old adage: "if you show me your friends, I will tell you who you are". Shakhnazarov, for his part, sought both political and financial gain from Gorbachev, publishing a book about perestroika and working at Gorbachev's foundation.

Vladimir Medvedev, Brezhnev's long-time bodyguard, describes his ability to select a team: "Brezhnev was pretty good at reading people. In any case

no one betrayed him, unlike what had happened with Khrushchev before him and Gorbachev after him. The system for selecting and appointing leaders, which, as I have stated, was in existence long before him, led to the appointment of some excellent men. Individuals such as Kosygin, Andropov and Ustinov were all outstanding."³

Viktor Pribytkov writes that Brezhnev is "sometimes underestimated: people attempt to portray him as a nearly senile old man, but when necessary he was an excellent strategist and tactician."⁴ Heydar Aliyev himself told me how Brezhnev grasped his ideas very quickly and despite resistance from the apparatus pushed decrees and resolutions through the Politburo that assisted Azerbaijan's economic development.

According to Zakharov, Brezhnev's former secretary, during the party plenums or sessions of the Supreme Soviet, he would receive up to 25 or 30 people, including the first secretaries of the union republics, regional leaders, ministers and the like. Consequently, resolutions beneficial to the regions were adopted frequently. Brezhnev "never looked like a particularly gifted political leader. That said, he was rather skilled at addressing questions of economic development; he knew the leaders in the party and state administration well, and he was a strict adherent to the principle of collective action when dealing with difficult issues."⁵ According to Zakharov, Brezhnev paid attention to Kosygin and actively listened to his comments and suggestions, even though Brezhnev did not like his bluntness, which sometimes turned into direct disagreement with the general secretary.

Despite the differences in personality, tastes and interests between Heydar Aliyev and Leonid Brezhnev, one thing is beyond doubt: both sincerely liked the other. Indeed, were it not for Brezhnev's support, even with all his energy, Heydar Aliyev would not have been able to carry out such large-scale reforms in Azerbaijan. There was sometimes great opposition from Brezhnev's conservative circle towards the initiatives of the first secretary of one of the Islamic republics (the word "Islamic" was never said out loud at that time but was always in people's thoughts). In such confrontations he often had to turn to Brezhnev to act as the adjudicator and final authority. Thankfully for Heydar Aliyev, Brezhnev was always on his side. However, he did not find favour with Brezhnev immediately. The seemingly excessive zeal of the Azerbaijani leader initially concerned the careful and cautious Brezhnev. He even thought at one point that Heydar Aliyev was intending to "overthrow the Soviet government in Azerbaijan". We shall, however, get to that all in good time.

¹ Shakhnazarov, 219

² Oleg Zakharov, "Zapiski Sekretarya Trekh Gensekov" [Notes by a secretary to three general secretaries], *Glasnost'*, No. 13 (1992)

³ Shakhnazarov, 214

⁴ Vladimir Medvedev, *Chelovek za Spinoy* [The man behind], (Moscow: Ruslit, 1994), 129-130

⁵ Viktor Pribytkov, *Apparat* [The apparatus], (Moscow: VIS, 1995), 60

¹ Zakharov, 23

INCOGNITO VISITS

In the first few months of his premiership, Heydar Aliyev terrified Baku's entire business elite. Taking advantage of the fact that few people could recognise him, Heydar Aliyev started going on clandestine trips into the city. He would dress plainly, leave his house and get into the first taxi to turn up. He would take the longest route so that he could talk to the driver and ask him what life was like for the local people, what they didn't like, and what they complained about most of all. Or he would go into a shop and ask the assistant, "How much does meat cost?" - "Two roubles and forty kopecks!" Why, he would ask, is it so expensive? Only the very best meat went for two forty in those days, but the shop assistants would say they only had gristle, and would just shrug their shoulders. Some of them would even tell him to get lost. He would then "get lost" in the warehouse or storeroom, where he would usually find ample supplies of the sought-after foodstuff. About 40 people were arrested in two or three weeks of raids following Heydar Aliyev's "tip-offs".

Rumours began spreading among the Azerbaijani party elite that Heydar Aliyev was using underhand methods to wage a sort of guerrilla war. But how could he have found out what was really going on otherwise? When he asked the prosecutor, he would report that "all is well" in Azerbaijan. The interior minister would say the same. And yet the Azerbaijani people were unhappy. Heydar Aliyev knew that they were unhappy when he worked at the KGB; that, however, was another, unseen part of the problem, carefully hidden away from the public.

Unfortunately his incognito trips soon came to an end. People had started to recognise him. He later found out that a photograph of him had found its way into every shop. Witty Baku taxi drivers even gave him the nickname "Mikhailo". The film *On Distant Shores* had recently hit the cinemas. In the film the legendary Soviet partisan Mehdi Huseynzadeh, a.k.a. Mikhailo, fights behind enemy lines in Yugoslavia and Italy. The film was extremely popular, so this nickname was very flattering.

A month later warnings concerning Heydar Aliyev's unconventional activities were sent from Baku to the Kremlin. The phone rang in Heydar Aliyev's office. Brezhnev was on the line, calling during his Crimean holiday. Heydar Aliyev's first reaction was annoyance - that his former colleagues had already started telling on him. Despite this, however, he was delighted by Brezhnev's call - a rare luxury.

"How's everything going?" Brezhnev asked.

"Good. I have got abreast of the situation and begun some real work," replied Heydar Aliyev warily.

"Aren't you going a bit too far?"

"What do you mean, Leonid Ilyich?"

"As if you don't know! All the foreign radio stations are going crazy over what they say that chap Aliyev is doing to destroy the Soviet system in Azerbaijan."

"You have been incorrectly informed, Leonid Ilyich. I am not destroying anything, quite the opposite."

In about 40 minutes he told Brezhnev everything that he had witnessed and thought about over the days since his election. He told him about the endemic bribery, widespread theft, machinations in the trade sector and the general public's dissatisfaction. He evidently managed to persuade Brezhnev. By the end of the conversation the general secretary's voice began to sound softer, although his last words still sounded like an order: "Take it from me – don't go over the top! You are already far too hot-headed, as I see it."

Brezhnev consequently came to like Heydar Aliyev very much; he trusted him completely and helped when he could. But he never understood his vehemence and principled stand when it came to dealing with theft and bribery. There was, however, a reason as to why the Azerbaijani party's efforts to crack down on these phenomena were usually discussed privately and not mentioned in the official speeches given at party conferences. The reason was, of course, that under Brezhnev the "underground millionaires" of the North Caucasus and Central Asia operated almost officially. Moreover, Brezhnev's close friend Nikolai Shchelokov was Soviet interior minister for 17 years, even though he was corrupt. Only under Andropov, following Brezhnev's death, were serious anti-corruption measures finally introduced across the country. If it had not been for the unwavering support of Andropov, whom Brezhnev trusted and whose counsel he sought on all matters of internal and external policy, Heydar Aliyev would have had a very difficult time when he first came into office. The real turning point in the relationship between Brezhnev and the Azerbaijani party head took place after Brezhnev's first visit to Baku.

* BAKU IS A BEAUTIFUL CITY!"

In 1970, as the 100th anniversary of Lenin's birth was being celebrated across the USSR, Azerbaijan celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic and the formation of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan. On 30th September 1970 Brezhnev arrived for the celebrations and awarded Azerbaijan the Order of the October Revolution. Previously the Azerbaijan SSR had been awarded two Orders of Lenin.

Baku had never before welcomed so many distinguished guests. All the first secretaries of the union republic's communist parties and all the full and candidate Politburo members came to Azerbaijan for the festivities.

A lot had to be done so that Baku could receive so many delegations. The old Intourist Hotel, the Philharmonia, where the celebratory reception was to take place, and the Opera and Ballet Theatres had to be refurbished. Heydar Aliyev entrusted this work to a pair of recently appointed deputy chairmen of the Council of Ministers, Alish Lemberansky and Ismayil Ibrahimov, who executed it brilliantly.

On 30th September Brezhnev, Shelest, Kunayev and Mzhavanadze, together with Heydar Aliyev and other members of the Azerbaijani government, attended a celebratory exhibition entitled "The Economy of the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic over the last 50 Years" in Primorsky Park. They walked along the tree-lined paths of the Boulevard and admired the oil derricks far out to sea. Pavilions, finely created by architects and designers, presented the economic and cultural successes achieved by Azerbaijan over the last 50 years. Judging by the exuberant note he left in the VIP visitors' book, Brezhnev was very pleased by the exhibition.

On 2nd October 1970, Leonid Brezhnev and Heydar Aliyev gave speeches at a formal ceremony at the Akhundov State Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet. Heydar Aliyev's introductory remarks were unusual, and as you re-read them today, you cannot help but admire his oratorical skill. He did not simply welcome the delegations from the union republics; he expressively characterised each republic, introducing the guests to the history of relations between their region and Azerbaijan and its people. When speaking about St. Petersburg, he recalled that "in the 1920s Leningrad was the first to send equipment to Baku's destroyed industries and factories"; when greeting the delegation from Ukraine he noted that "during the First Five-Year Plan miners from the Donbass and oil workers from Baku united to be pioneers in the patriotic movement of *udarniks*"; addressing the delegation from Belarus, he emphasised that "in the forests of Belarus, the land of fearless patriotic avengers who brought terror

¹ Superproductive, highly enthusiastic workers.

to Hitler's occupying forces, the sons of Azerbaijan fought shoulder to shoulder with the sons of other Soviet nations."

Brezhnev stated in his speech that he approved of the "keen-minded, principled, practical discussion" initiated at three Azerbaijani Communist Party plenums to tackle shortcomings in the republic, and promised his help in grappling with global problems. He said that between 1971 and 1975 capital investment in Azerbaijan would grow by more than one-and-a-half times in comparison with the preceding five-year plan, and would total 6.7 billion roubles.

Brezhnev made one of his most famous statements about Baku on this trip: "Baku is a beautiful city! It is clear that it was built by people who were passionate about their homeland, careful in their treatment of their national traditions and able to skilfully use the achievements of modern city-planning. It is a joy to live and work in such a city."

As well as showcasing the achievements of Soviet Azerbaijan, the anniversary celebrations were a parade of the new first secretary's successes. It was clear from the generally jubilant atmosphere that Heydar Aliyev had charmed and amazed all of the Soviet Union's party leaders with his handsome appearance, assertiveness, energy, oratorical skill, and brilliant organisation of the celebrations. Many people left with an impression – and some with a sense of envy – which would characterise this successful leader for the rest of his long life. Mikhail Gorbachev, who was the head of the Stavropol Regional Party Committee in 1969, attended the celebrations in Baku along with other party leaders from the North Caucasus. The future leader of the USSR recalls his visit to the capital of Azerbaijan in Vagif Mustafayev's film *Istoriya Odnoy Zavisti* [The story of an envy] and notes that Heydar Aliyev organised everything "wonderfully", that Brezhnev was "extremely enthusiastic", and that everyone was "really excited" to see how emotionally the local population reacted to the events.

Vladimir Medvedev, Brezhnev's former head of security and author of the famous set of political memoirs *Chelovek za Spinoy* [The man behind], visited Baku in 2003. The following is a short extract from our conversation:

Elmira Akhundova: When did Brezhnev single out Heydar Aliyev from among other leaders? It didn't happen immediately, did it?

Vladimir Medvedev: I don't know what Brezhnev thought of him before Heydar Aliyev became first secretary, but when we came here in 1970 – when Aliyev was already first secretary – he made a great impression on everyone, including Brezhnev. Heydar Aliyev showed himself to be a real leader; he knew everything going on in Azerbaijan and its surroundings. What is more incredible is that he knew about both economics and culture and absolutely anything concerning Azerbaijan. After speaking to him, Brezhnev went up to his room. As he passed me in the corridor he said, "There, we've found the sort of chap we need!" I heard the admiration in his voice.

Brezhnev visited Azerbaijan for the second time between 20th and 23rd September 1978. He awarded the Order of Lenin to the city of Baku. He visited several factories, met with older party members, war veterans, and cultural figures. It was on this second trip that he coined his second famous phrase: "Azerbaijan is walking tall!"¹

By the end of 1969 the Azerbaijani government had already openly and objectively reported on the state of Azerbaijan's industrial and agricultural production to Moscow, requesting aid. Shortly afterwards, a large group of officials from the CPSU Central Committee arrived in Azerbaijan. They familiarised themselves with the problems of the national economy on the ground. A sizeable report, put together by these officials together with Azerbaijani specialists, was presented for Brezhnev's attention.

The response was not long in coming. In July 1970 two joint decrees were issued: "On the Measures Developing Agriculture in the Azerbaijan SSR" and "On the Measures for the Continued Development of the Azerbaijan SSR National Economy". These were the first union decrees out of five that Heydar Aliyev would succeed in passing through the Politburo in the 1970s, which would play a critically important role in the dynamic and fast-paced development of local industry and agriculture. According to Roy Medvedev, "In conditions of general economic stagnation, Azerbaijan developed comparatively quickly; some people even spoke of an Azerbaijani 'economic miracle'".¹

Heydar Aliyev achieved remarkable success in the very first year he governed Azerbaijan. But this was only the start of a long road for the ambitious Aliyev; everything contained in his original documents was still to be implemented in the course of many years of persistent struggle for the whole Azerbaijani nation. From this year on, Azerbaijan would transform into a huge construction site, where the seeds of the future industrial and economic potential of an independent country would be sown.

¹ Roy Medvedev, *Unknown Andropov*, 360-361

THE STAFF ARE EVERYTHING!

In his very first months of being in charge of Azerbaijan, the problem of "selecting and of placing personnel" arose to the fullest extent for Heydar Aliyev. Both during under Mustafayev and Akhundov, a significant number of well-educated and energetic personnel had entered senior state and party positions, and the number of native Azerbaijani leaders increased exponentially. At the same time, not all of them had the necessary abilities to find a solution to the complex challenges that Azerbaijan's new leader set before the party.

"The front line of the party and many of its rank and file members, while supporting their leader's ideas and realising how necessary these were, turned out to be simply incapable of implementing them in an organised manner – and that was the enormous difficulty Heydar Aliyev faced," writes Ibrahim Samedov in the article *Zharkoye Leto 1969 Goda* [The hot summer of 1969], "Therefore, there was a critical demand for personnel with a new way of thinking and a high level of responsibility who were capable of decisively and resolutely imposing order."¹

By the beginning of 1971, on the threshold of the 28th Congress of the Azerbaijani Communist Party, which was required to form Azerbaijan's Central Committee and organs of higher party power for the subsequent term, Heydar Aliyev had already replaced practically half of the governing body of party personnel in regional and urban party organisations. In addition, many individuals were punished for various transgressions. In his address at the much talked about congress, which caused a great stir, Heydar Aliyev openly named party officials at fault, as well as the reasons for their removal from office. He would retain this style of stirring things up among party personnel with a public and transparent explanation of the reasons for the resignation or dismissal of some high-ranking party official or other until the end of his "communist rule" in Azerbaijan. Even at his first party congress he, made sure that everybody understood that from then on nobody would be above the law in Azerbaijan.

Apart from those listed by Heydar Aliyev in his report, by the early 1970s many officials from the middle and higher echelons of the party's state apparatus were dismissed from their posts, expelled from the party and punished in administrative or criminal proceedings due to shortcomings in their work. The very worst fears of the civil servants had started to come true. The calm and untroubled life of the Communist Party's elite had come to an end.

¹ *Bakinskiy Rabochiy*, 10th August (2004)

HEYDAR ALIYEV'S PRINCIPLES IN SELECTING PERSONNEL

Talking with members of Heydar Aliyev's team from the Soviet era, I usually asked the question of how and according to which criteria his renowned staff were selected. Thanks to the zeal of his numerous opponents, the mistaken opinion has arisen that the basis for the formation of the ruling elite in the 1970s was the principle of regionalism.

In the USSR, Brezhnev, who liked to draw personnel from the region where he had worked, laid this tradition in place. There was even a witticism, which circulated by word of mouth among the general public: In Russia there was the pre-Petrine era, then the Petrine, and now – the Dnepropetrine", in reference to the region of Dnepopetrovsk where Brezhnev hailed from and the reforms of Peter the Great. Brezhnev appointed many of his work colleagues from Dneprodzerzhinsk and Dnepropetrovsk to high-ranking state and party posts.¹ In Moldova Brezhnev befriended Konstantin Chernenko, who became his most loyal ally. Neither did he forget Semyon Tsvigun, the vice chairman of the Moldavian security services. Also working there was Sergei Trapeznikov, whom Brezhnev would subsequently make the head of the CPSU Central Committee's Science Department.

In contrast to him, in the 1970s Heydar Aliyev selected personnel according to their professional aptitude first and foremost; it was absolutely all the same to him which region a particular promoted employee came from. On the contrary, according to his contemporaries' accounts, he preferred constantly reshuffling his team, tossing them into incredibly varied sectors of party management and diverse regions of Azerbaijan. This helped protect personnel from the malicious infection of localism, which was the weak link of the personnel policy in many of the Soviet republics.

As Mikhail Nazarov recalls: "From the very start of his work as the first secretary of the CPA Central Committee, Heydar Aliyev presented high, but fair, demands to the senior party personnel. The main qualities essential for candidates were professionalism, honesty, integrity, erudition, modesty, and general cultural refinement. Everything was evaluated, right down to the behaviour of a certain individual in everyday life. As a result of the strict "selection" into the Central Committee's apparatus, young, promising, up-and-coming personnel aged around 35-38, with experience of industrial and party work, rose to various high-ranking posts. They originated from a most diverse range of Azerbaijan's regions. ...

¹ Among them were Ivan Novikov (deputy chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers), Nikolai Tikhonov (chairman of the Council of Ministers), Georgy Tsinev (deputy chairman of the KGB), Georgy Tsukanov (first aide to the general secretary), and Nikolai Shchelokov (minister for internal affairs).

For other individuals attracted to working in the Central Committee apparatus, there was also an unofficial age eligibility. An instructor for the Central Committee had to be no more than 25 to 30 years old, a deputy department director no older than 35. Along with this, preference was given to those candidates who had already worked for a time within the lower party ranks, as instructors in the district or city party committees."

Nazim Ibrahimov also shared his recollections on this matter: "The contingent of first secretaries of Baku during Heydar Aliyev's time were a motley crew. Hailing from all corners of Azerbaijan, they had previously been technicians, scientists, industrial workers. Only two of them had come from the KGB: the Shamakhi native Niyazi Najafov headed the Azizbeyon region, while Muslim Mammadov, from Lahij, became the first secretary of the Nasimi District.

Who else? First Secretary of the Lenin District Party Committee Shekir Karimov, was from Karabakh, the Armenian Boris Kevorkov headed the Kirov Region, and was afterwards elected first secretary of Stepanakert, while the Karagadsky District Party Committee was headed by Valentin Bogoslovsky.

The editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Vyschka*, Fazil Muradaliyev (from Shemakhi), headed the central 27 Baku Commissars District in the capital. During that same period Aydin Mammadov, from Georgia, was appointed as chairman of the Baku Council. I was born in Baku, and previously had nothing to do with party work. However, by the will of fate and Heydar Aliyev, I became first secretary of the Oktyabrsky District Committee.

Do you see what I am trying to say? Baku, which was the centre of Azerbaijani cultural and economic life, was not simply handed over to Nakchivanis – individuals from the same region as Heydar Aliyev."

Mammadzadeh, the head of the Ideology Department, was one of those who transferred from the KGB with Heydar Aliyev. He was entrusted with the position of arguably the highest responsibility: heading the Central Committee's Administrative Department. This is how he remembers it: "Several months passed after Heydar Aliyev's election to the position of first secretary. In January he called me in and suggested that I transfer to work in the Central Committee, overseeing the law enforcement bodies. I decided to decline because I had this feeling of mistrust towards the administrative bodies, which contained no small number of corrupt and unsavoury characters. I gave him an honest reply: 'If you take me for this position you will get a real headache: I know how corrupt these people are, and I will recommend that you get rid of many of them.'

He replied that this was just what he needed. He intended to clean up the government apparatus and the republic itself, ridding them of bribery and corrupt officials, and replacing them with decent, hard-working people who knew their task.

I worked for about a year as the head of the Administrative Department. During this time we replaced the heads of many departments in the *miliitsiya* and state attorney's office."

According to Ziya Yusifzadeh, the former KGB chairman, in the process of selecting party personnel Heydar Aliyev would often consult with former colleagues and ask their advice, and would listen to the opinion of the security services. At that time practically "all candidates for senior posts underwent vetting at the KGB; our opinion was taken into consideration. What is more, there would often be two or three candidates for each position. They would be discussed at the Central Committee Bureau, and a collective decision would be made. Heydar Aliyev always paid close attention to the opinion of the Bureau members."

On 30th July 1975, a plenum was held, dedicated to the challenges facing Azerbaijan's party organisation in further improving the selection, distribution and training of personnel. In his report at this plenum, Heydar Aliyev critically spoke out for the first time against the flagrant violations of personnel recruitment policy that had been permitted under the previous leadership. He even detailed specific names and incidences of people with a criminal past or falsified higher education diplomas who had been accepted for senior positions, and people that had been previously removed from one position for unsatisfactory or substandard work who were quickly appointed to another.

He also presented the party organisations with the task of more actively promoting women to leadership roles. By that time six women were heading district party committees, women were in charge of 18 collective farms and eight state farms while, overall, women comprised 16.6 percent of the leading party, Soviet and trade union personnel.

At this particular plenum Heydar Aliyev adeptly raised the issue of so-called "seconds": "In the party it has always been considered expedient to elect promising comrades with potential to such positions as second secretary of the party committee, deputy minister, or deputy director, who subsequently could be promoted to primary roles. Unfortunately, in practice, mediocre and unpromising workers are all too often appointed to these positions. The deplorable practice of choosing deputies according to head's preferences rather than their political or professional qualities is very dangerous, and we must wage an all-out war against it."

From a conversation with Ismayil Ibrahimov:

Ismayil Ibrahimov: There were none of "his people" or chance individuals in his team. He chose personnel who had already proven themselves in one field of work or another, and only according to their professional qualities. He selected a treasure trove of personnel.

Elmira Akhundova: What helped him in the search for personnel?

I. I.: His previous post, first of all. When General Rasulbeyov retired, Heydar Aliyev offered him the post of communications minister. He knew who was capable of what. Our permanent representative in Moscow, Jamaladdin

Magomayev, was once asked who had been elected to the post of first secretary in Azerbaijan. His reply, in my opinion, was brilliant: 'A man who hardly anybody knows and who knows everyone.'

"He selected personnel with great care, and would employ a most diverse range of methods in this process," explains Kamran Rahimov. "For example, he might be speaking with me about something work-related and then suddenly ask for my opinion about someone totally unrelated to that matter. And out of surprise I would just say what I thought. He would put questions like that to many people, and would draw his own conclusions when he had gathered a wide range of opinions. It was as though he possessed a certain hypnotic power, and he would draw everything you knew out of you."

According to Ramiz Mehdiyev, who worked in a great variety of leadership roles within Heydar Aliyev's team: "In the 1970s and early 1980s the selection and the distribution of skilled staff were based on a specifically developed system. Nothing happened by chance. Firstly, before nominating a candidate for a leadership position, we scrutinised his CV: the path he had taken; where and how he worked; how he had distinguished himself; his ethical qualities, etc. If the results of this examination were satisfactory, the candidate's personal records would be given to the secretary, and then to Heydar Aliyev. Even though he completely trusted the departments, he would then investigate the candidate himself via his own sources: he would check that there was nothing negative in the CV; that the person in question had no vested interests; that there was no close relation or friendly connection with the leadership; and that he was being promoted for objective rather than subjective reasons. After this Heydar Aliyevich would put forward a proposition to the Bureau, and the agenda was sent in advance to all full and candidate members of the Bureau. In the course of the meeting, all of them had to comment on the candidacy. A minister, for example, would be appointed in the following way. Everyone would be asked to state their opinion: who was 'for' and who was 'against'."

There was not always universal agreement. And if new facts preventing a certain from being assigned to a position surfaced in the Bureau, then the proposition was put on hold.

Ramiz Mehdiyev adds: "Heydar Aliyev would often say that the promotion of personnel should be based first and foremost on state interests, and that it should be carefully assessed whether an individual deserved the position on account of their ethical or professional qualities. If personnel had not been chosen according to these strict principles, then the country would not have experienced such a meteoric rise. The sensible choice of staff and the flat-out mobilisation of the workforce capacity were some of the important elements of the successful reforms that Heydar Aliyev carried out in all aspects of national life: economic, social and cultural."

In my notepad I have a great many accounts of people who were assigned to some position or another by Heydar Aliyev. Let me introduce a few of them.

From a story by Fattah Heydarov:

"I occupied party posts from 1970 to 1976. Then, from 1976 until May 1978 I worked as minister for public services in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic.

To be honest, the work there wasn't really for me. I am a teacher, as they used to say, a worker on the ideological front, but in that position there were only technical problems to solve: questions of production and salary. The remit of the minister for public services included hairdressers, tailor's workshops, domestic appliance repair workshops, etc. It all seemed dull and unfamiliar to me.

One day I was summoned by the first secretary of the regional party committee. He suggested going to Ordubad with him. We sat in silence for the hour-and-a-half long journey; he did not explain anything. We arrived and I saw that the plenum of the district committee had gathered. I was elected first secretary of the Ordubad District Party Committee at the plenum. After the elections I had to pass an approval at the Central Committee. Heydar Aliyev received me himself.

'Have you got down to work?' he asked.

'Yes, Heydar Aliyevich.'

'What is the situation like there? You know the region well. What are the problems there? How can I help?'

'There are problems with the water supply and the construction of sites with a socio-cultural purpose, especially schools.'

'Then work on them. What do you require from me?'

'In order to dramatically improve the water supply problem, a reservoir must be constructed where the Ordubad and Gilan rivers meet.'

He wrote something in big letters in his desk diary. 'Anything else?' I said that the danger of a landslide had arisen in one of the villages, and people were worried. He wrote that in his diary as well. He ended the conversation, got up, shook my hand and said, 'Good luck and I will say it again: go and do good, honest work.'

I had already gotten up to leave when Heydar Aliyev stopped me, 'Wait a minute. You do know that it was on my initiative?'

I was surprised because I hadn't been able to figure out what had suddenly brought about my return to Party work. 'I knew how well you worked when you were second secretary. You conducted yourself very respectfully, and your family always had a very modest attitude, not separating themselves from other people. I was told about that. Therefore, when the question of the candidacy for the post came up, I immediately thought of you. You didn't ask me for this, did you?' he added jokingly.

'No, Heydar Aliyevich.'

'You see, honest work is remembered. Go and work just as honestly. Tell this to your comrades. We must do our best. We must serve the people honourably.'

I still recall those words. He valued honesty most highly of all. He instructed that party workers should spend most of their time with the people, in the thick of it, rather than sitting in their office all day. He enjoyed – and excelled at – talking with ordinary people, and he also expected that of us.

I always tried to follow his example. My visitors never waited in the reception area; they simply opened the door and came into my office. We were forever travelling, talking with people working in the fields. I would drink tea with the collective farmers and have lunch with them there in the pastures and the hayfields. I learned all of this from Heydar Aliyev. He selected his workers very carefully, according to his requirements. You can't make a good suit from bad material.

You see, we had long been considered lazy, incapable of high-quality work, to put it simply – second-class citizens. It had a great bearing on our national character. We lost our national identity, our self-respect. Therefore the task at hand was not only to improve the country's economic performance; it was to boost morale and to restore the people's faith in themselves and in their work. In order to resolve these difficult problems, Heydar Aliyev surrounded himself with a strong team of like-minded people."

From a conversation with Nizam Ibrahimov:

"Heydar Aliyev's talent lay in seeking out ability. Of course, mistakes happen, and he made mistakes. But if he realised that he had been mistaken in choosing a candidate, he would remove them from their duties. During the 1970s he replaced many people.

He gave each new worker a trial period in order to fully ascertain their potential. He could afford to do this as he was still young and he had the time. It was clear that he still had plenty of energy, strength and capabilities. The skill to see a person's potential was one of Heydar Aliyev's remarkable character traits. He said himself that, except determination, intelligence, resolve and talent for work, he also had an extraordinary intuition. He could see through people like an x-ray."

From a conversation with Svetlana Gasimova:

"Take my personal experience: I arrived in Baku from Ganja as a 16-year-old girl. I had no connections through relatives or locals to anyone in a top position. My parents were ordinary people: my father was an engineer, my mother was an agriculturist. I achieved everything thanks to Heydar Aliyev, who saw something in me and appointed me head of all trade in the country. He was on a train with Culture Minister Zakir Baghirov in Taganrog at some

point, when a conversation started up about trade and he was asked why he had risked appointing a woman as trade minister. He replied, 'Our women work very well. They are punctual, responsible, and get the job done. If you want the job to be done well and on time, give it to a woman.'

From a conversation with Yuri Mammadov:

"In 1980 I was appointed deputy head of the Administrative Department. Heydar Aliyev received me and I will never forget the conversation we had. He outlined the significance of the position and of the importance of the department. But more than anything I remember his parting words to me. I had already made my way to the door, when he suddenly called me back, I returned to stand near his desk. 'Mammadov,' said Heydar Aliyevich, 'do you look at yourself in the mirror in the morning?'

I started feverishly wondering why he had asked me this. He repeated the question, and I replied that yes, of course I did.

'I'm not sure about that. Take a good look at yourself – you're only 34 years old.'

I finally realised that he was talking about my build: I weighed about 98 kilograms then and wasn't very tall. Heydar Aliyev continued, 'What kind of example will you be setting for the communists and your colleagues who you supervise? I give you a month to get into shape.' I started to go running the next day, and I still exercise now. I only have him to thank for the fact that I still look presentable at 60."

In this chapter I have mostly talked about the principle of selecting workers for the party and state apparatus. However, it was equally important that Heydar Aliyev approached the training of workers for all sectors of the national economy with a sense of the future. I discussed this in a conversation with Svetlana Gasimova:

I must say that Heydar Aliyev deserves credit for adding one important asset to the Azerbaijan's natural wealth: domestic personnel. Cadres only are an asset to a nation if they are truly qualified, well-educated, have good experience, and if there is control over their development and proper employment. I participated in all these elements. I reported to the Central Committee Bureau many times on how they were employing young specialists who had graduated from higher education establishments abroad and at home. We forgot about that aspect. Of course, Azerbaijan has oil, cotton, vegetables and fruit, etc. We had always had these products, but had used them carelessly. In order to ensure their proper use, Heydar Aliyevich created a new asset: personnel. In addition, they were trained for the purpose of developing all sectors of the national economy, culture, education, etc.

Heydar Aliyevich understood that in order to improve Azerbaijan's economy and raise the standard of living, it was necessary to make

better use of the republic's natural resources. The same went for fruit and vegetables, which were plentiful in Azerbaijan; we did not use them efficiently, and more than half withered on the vine. He created an additional sector, which was run by the Ministry for the Processing of Agricultural Commodities. It contained the Horticultural Committee, the Committee for Viticulture, and then the Cotton Ginning Industry. When he created these divisions, his priority was training staff for them. Where Azerbaijan had used to export its raw cotton at a cheap rate, then we began to process the cotton, purify it and use the waste in the production of cottonseed oil and animal feed etc. The cotton was converted into fibres, threads and materials; the whole production cycle began to take place in Azerbaijan itself. Therefore, specialised factories and textile plants were constructed. Before the 1970s, there was nothing like this. The creation of a cotton industry necessitated many cotton factories. It was necessary to procure equipment and train staff. He sent young men and women to specialised higher education institutes, trained technical specialists in this field, equipped the facilities and built factories, thereby creating a whole new industry.

Or take the wine industry. There had previously been no state control over grape production. Heydar Aliyev created Azerbaijan's wine industry and increased the level of grape production to two million tonnes, which greatly benefited the economy. People started building houses. Everything that you now see in the villages of Azerbaijan – schools, hospitals, clinics, libraries, chess schools, residential houses – all this was built in the 1970s. Moreover, this was not simply about increasing the acreage of vineyards, but also about processing grapes, using them for preserves, juice, syrups, and high-quality wine. These goods were sold on the national market and exported abroad, all of which brought wealth to Azerbaijan.

In other words, the training of personnel was connected with the creation of new industries in Azerbaijan and aimed at the better use of our country's natural resources, at raising the population's quality of life. New jobs, the implementation of new technology, fitting out factories with modern equipment, the production of goods which could compete in national and foreign markets – these were Heydar Aliyev's strategic goals. A country with natural resources is not rich unless it also has qualified workers who know how to use those resources. This was Heydar Aliyev's principle and invaluable contribution in the development of Azerbaijan, of its economy, science and culture."

"I WAS ALWAYS AGAINST LIBERALISM"

In this and in the following parts of my book I will often refer to two significant interviews that Heydar Aliyev gave after his retirement: one a series of exchanges with the famous Russian columnist Andrei Karaulov (from the end of 1989 to the start of 1990); the other a conversation with the Azerbaijani journalist Elmira Ahmadova (June 1990). He was very sincere and candid in these interviews because he was no longer in power. Just this once, he could be open.

This chapter also relates stories told by Heydar Aliyev's staff about his working life: his routine, his ways of communicating with his staff, the running of the Central Committee Bureau, the preparation of important documents. They should help us attain an in-depth understanding of Heydar Aliyev's personality.

"I was almost never captivated by anything other than work," Heydar Aliyev confessed to Andrei Karaulov in an interview.¹ Relatives, colleagues, and critics all agree on his staggering capacity to work. For this reason, sustaining the rhythm he set was not an easy task. He demanded a lot from his team. "Some thought that I was too demanding and over-particular to the point of cruelty," continued Aliyev. "What can I say? I always felt that every decision I took was well-founded. I was always opposed to liberalism. For example, I never thought highly of people who ingratiated themselves."²

Turan Huseynov, who was Heydar Aliyev's advisor of almost six years, gave me some astonishing information about his daily routine:

"Before Aliyev, Akhundov had a normal routine (9 a.m. – 6 p.m.), at times until 7 p.m. He didn't work on the weekends. He would only pop in for a couple of hours on Saturday when we were on the cusp of a plenary session or party meeting. But Heydar Aliyevich had an unfathomable work regimen: he would arrive early in the morning, have lunch in a small lounge, getting food brought to him from cafeteria. He would work all the way through until two or three in the morning. In the middle of the night he might request me to call somebody, like the officials in the cotton-producing regions. They knew about his work routine, so they also stayed late. Sometimes on a Friday he would come up to me, put his hand on my shoulder and say, 'Well, you can relax tomorrow!' I would thank him, but then in the morning I'd be woken up by a call from Namiq Tagizade, his head of security, asking me to open the office. Heydar Aliyevich would greet me with a joke about us relaxing together.

Under Akhundov the ministers had meetings only once a week, but Heydar Aliyevich summoned them to his office, especially law enforcement officials, a few times per week during the war on anti-corruption.

While I was working for him, he left the country maybe twice for a long holiday. Otherwise he was always in Azerbaijan.

¹ *Nasbe Delo*, No. 4 (1990), 5

² Ibid.

Although he liked to tell jokes and have a laugh, he never had free or informal conversations with his assistants. He once buzzed the intercom for the waiting room, as he needed me for something. Akper, the head of security, and I were there already. When I didn't pick up, he left his office and looked around the waiting room, but didn't see us. He continued to buzz, getting angrier. I ran in, and he asked me where I had been. I explained that we had been lying on the floor, resting our backs, which were hurting from sitting for 15 hours. He burst into laughter, 'But you're spring chickens, what am I supposed to do?'

He was a tough man with an incredible capacity for work. His security used to say that it was alright for us – at least we got home at 2 or 3 a.m., while they had to wait till dawn. Heydar Aliyevich used to go swimming in his Zaghluba dacha or in the sea, even if it was 3 or 4 in the morning. That was how he shook off his tiredness."

At the start of 1980 Mikhail Zabelin became Heydar Aliyev's office manager. During Zabelin's two-year-service, Aliyev taught him several lessons that the future Head of the Russian Community in Azerbaijan would never forget.

From a conversation with Milli Majlis Deputy Mikhail Zabelin:

"The work wasn't easy, of course, bearing in mind how demanding Heydar Aliyev was of all his employees. When you were called into his office, you would summon up all your strength before facing his penetrating gaze.

Above all he demanded efficiency and self-discipline. One day Hasan Seyidov came into the reception area, followed by Gurban Khalilov a short while later. I offered them to go into Aliyev's office, but they preferred to sit outside. Then another member of the Bureau arrived, and also stayed in the waiting area. I didn't understand what was happening. A few minutes later Heydar Aliyevich called me from his office, asking whether anyone was in the reception area. I replied that, yes, so-and-so had come. He banged his fist on the table and asked why they hadn't gone in. I explained that I had suggested for them to enter, but they had told me they would wait outside.

It turned out they were waiting for him to head out to a Council of Ministers' meeting together. I didn't know about this, but he thought I had deliberately made them wait, which irritated him. He cared about other people's time and instructed us to tell people the exact time of the meeting so that they could decide for themselves when to arrive."

From a conversation with former CPA Central Committee Secretary Fuad Musayev:

"He had high expectations of his staff and of himself. Even during the sweltering summers we worked till 11 or 12 at night. If he was at work, it meant we had to stay too. Someone, either Gurban Khalilov or Kamran Baghirov, once asked him to let us off at 6 or 7 on a Saturday, but he was surprised that he was 'keeping us'.

We really did work very intensely – and not just for show. He infected us with his unflagging energy and amazed us with his knowledge of

construction, industry, or social affairs. It seemed that he knew more about economics than his experts."

Heydar Aliyev had a deep understanding of management psychology and what is now known as interdisciplinary knowledge. He thoroughly knew everything that he needed to know. He did not hesitate to consult with specialists and continued learning until the end of his life. He came to know the issues in agriculture, manufacturing and the oil industry inside out. He went into every little detail.

Heydar Aliyev's colleagues remember that, just like Andropov, he never tolerated sloppiness. Fyodor Burlatsky, who worked with Andropov, writes: "Nothing was too trivial for Andropov. All of his work had to be impeccable and fully complete. He never tolerated lacklustre work and hated carelessness. If someone was not up to the task, that was understandable. But not trying was unforgivable. And it must be said that everyone around him did try very hard, not so much out of fear as out of conscience. Judge the pastor by his flock, as the saying goes. With few exceptions, Andropov had a very capable flock."¹ This description fits Heydar Aliyev and his team, too. I asked Zakir Abdullayev, a Central Committee departmental head who worked with Heydar Aliyev for almost 10 years, what he had learned from the first secretary:

"Many people who worked with Heydar Aliyevich at the time said that they learned from him. Some of it happened routinely, some deliberately. For example, I really wanted to know as much as him. He studied and understood a lot of things, knew a great deal, even in my area of expertise – agriculture. That was the way he worked. If we discussed building projects, his 10-15 day preparation would amaze the architects.

He had a wonderful memory. He would remember the most insignificant things, things that had happened 20 or 30 years ago. That astounded me. I wanted to learn to do that, too. He'd remember figures without making notes. Name any figure, he would repeat it to you in five years' time.

He set high standards for himself and his staff. Discipline, high standards, and objectivity were his principal qualities. Of course, he was sometimes incorrectly informed or advised by those around him, but as a rule, he tried to be as objective as possible.

He might sometimes raise his voice but he didn't swear. Over the many years I worked with him, I only heard him use bad language towards someone once. He had great self-control."

"But as a rule, Aliyev was quite a severe man," Turan Huseynov told me. "I often had to give sedatives to the ministers who came out of his office after a dressing down. Their faces would be practically green."

¹ Burlatsky, 158

Huseynov told me another interesting story in this regard. A Bureau meeting was in progress. The assistant, who was not usually present at such meetings, came in to inform Heydar Aliyev of an important call from Moscow, and witnessed the following scene. Haji Ibrahimov, the secretary for agriculture, was talking about the situation in the regions. Until he started working for the Central Committee, Ibrahimov had headed the Nakhchivan Regional Party Committee for seven or eight years. He was a conscientious worker, and a decent man. Unusually for that time, during the several years he worked in Nakhchivan, not a murmur against him, not one complaint, anonymous or otherwise, reached the senior staff. Therefore, Heydar Aliyev trusted him in the role of secretary for agriculture. Everyone in the Bureau meeting had a heavy leather file containing documents. Ibrahimov began, "Heydar Aliyevich, you have just read out the quotas for the cotton harvest. I would like to make a few amendments: Ujar District will not yield that much cotton, the soil is too saline. Zerdab won't either. They'll have trouble coming up with 10,000 tonnes. Where are they to find the rest?" Aliyev raised his voice at Ibrahimov, saying, "That's enough! You are always acting against the party line!" It was then that Kozlov picked up his file and whacked it on the table, "What are you shouting at him for? What is he, your valet? You're shouting at a Central Committee secretary!" "Kozlov wasn't afraid of anything," Turan Huseynov recalls. "He was used to acting like a lord under Akhundov."

Other members of Heydar Aliyev's team remember episodes like this. According to them, Kozlov, the second secretary, was ill mannered and behaved like a second-in-command. He knew how to stand up for himself – that is to say, for Moscow. After all, what is a second secretary, really? A man whose role is to supervise the first secretary. Of course, Heydar Aliyev, proud and ambitious as he was, could not be expected to keep such an obdurate deputy on his team for long. After a few years, Kozlov left Azerbaijan for a new post, and Yuri Pugachev, who Aliyev got along very well with, replaced him as second secretary. Pugachev was, as Ziya Yusifzadeh put it, a "work horse". Of course, he too reported to Moscow, but he had an understanding and respectful attitude towards Heydar Aliyev's ideas because he saw that he, Aliyev, was giving his all, doing the work of four people.

Vladimir Semichastny's 2002 memoirs *Bespokoynoye Serdtse* [An anxious heart], includes several curious passages about his brief spell in Azerbaijan as the second secretary. His boast, "I arranged things, such that not one Central Committee resolution went through without my say-so, even if Akhundov had signed it"¹ alone speaks volumes.

¹ Here and later, Nikolai Zenkovich's book *Geydar Aliyev. Zigzag Sudby* [Heydar Aliyev: The zigzags of fate] is cited.

During his two or three years in Azerbaijan, Semichastny did not take the trouble to learn a single word of Azerbaijani ("Why should I?" he asked Khrushchev, when the latter visited Baku for the republic's 40th anniversary. "In two years' time, you'll tell me to leave for Uzbekistan. And you think I'm going to learn Uzbek?"), and communicated with the local people through a young Azerbaijani interpreter. Once, after visiting the opera house for a mugham² concert, he decided to give Ideology Secretary Nazim Hajiiev, a piece of his mind, saying, "You mustn't confuse an opera house with a pasture!" For some reason, Semichastny had convinced himself that mugham was the affair of the peasantry, who would perform it while leading the cows to pasture, and could not proceed without smoking hashish at the same time. "They're addicts over there!" Semichastny shouted at the astonished secretary. "Have you heard all that howling, caterwauling and carrying on?"

"The envoys from Moscow were rarely distinguished for their diplomacy, flexibility, ability to cooperate and find common ground," writes Nikolai Zenkovich. "Ill feeling accumulated on both sides, until it reached critical mass, which exploded into Gorbachev's perestroika."³

In Nikolai Leonov's book *Likholye* [Troubled years], there is a curious passage about the institution of the second secretaries: "From Stalin's death onwards, the governments of the republics began constantly increasing their independence. The party leaders were gradually turning into all-powerful national 'chieftains' who found themselves in peculiar, almost feudal relationships with Moscow. But this whole national state-building process was kept secret. No one spoke of it out loud. It was never championed as a possible answer to the national question. Although, in a formal sense the second secretaries were Russian – which made it possible to talk about Russian control – they were in fact limited to secondary roles. They were either assimilated into the local elite, or simply ignored by the real leaders. These men were usually mediocre, insipid party officials – committed, not so much to the interests of the state, as to mollifying their superiors, who might be full Politburo members or candidate members, but in any case had direct access to the general secretary. All these bland 'representatives of the central authorities' drifted like shadows, one after the other, through the history of the Communist Party in the republics, without leaving even the slightest trace of political thought or practical action behind them."⁴

And thank God, we exclaim, that these Kremlin viceroys were not as stern and haughty as their predecessors in Tsarist Russia: ruling the fringes of the empire according to the dictates of "divide and conquer". Yet, though they may not have left us with the "slightest trace of political thought", it would

² A type of Azerbaijani folk music.

³ Zenkovich, 428

⁴ Leonov, 206

be unfair to blame them collectively for taking insufficient "practical action". Pugachev, for instance, was universally recognised as a singularly hard-working man who gave significant help to Azerbaijan in resolving many of its issues related to economic and agricultural development. And despite being assigned to Azerbaijan, Pugachev believed he was working for the greater strength and well-being of the entire USSR. It was, after all, a single, unified state, whose eventual collapse no one dared to consider.

As Nikolai Zenkovich writes, under Aliyev second secretaries also tried to "exert an influence on Azerbaijan's national leadership. But this was not possible when it came to Aliyev, of course: he was not the calibre of person who could be easily influenced. He did not, however, clash with the Moscow appointees, as was often the case in other republics. He was able to maintain civil, cordial relations with Moscow, without sacrificing either the republics' interests or those of the USSR as a whole. This was a fine art that Aliyev mastered to perfection."¹

Zakir Abdullayev, a former Central Committee departmental head, described another, equally picturesque scene in which a member of Heydar Aliyev's team openly revolted against his tough leadership style. In anticipation of possible criticism from Aliyev's staunch supporters, I would like to note that such episodes do nothing to dishonour or debase his memory. On the contrary, they contribute vivid, human features to his portrait and elicit our admiration for officials who were not afraid of expressing their unflattering opinion to him.

THE RASIZADEH "REBELLION"

"Aliyev always gave his full attention to any serious, important matter – even though, for him, there was no such thing as an unimportant matter."

As a result, Bureau meetings were usually quite tense, and could be drawn out for six or seven hours, without a single break. Though Aliyev's authority and severity weighed on everyone, I do not remember anyone strongly objecting to it. Once, however, Shamil Rasizadeh, the deputy chairman for agriculture in the Council of Ministers, got up in front of everyone, theatrically threw his papers across the room, and shouted right in Aliyev's face, 'What do you want from us?'

Aliyev had just been harshly criticising the council's work on agriculture, and Rasizadeh's work in particular. Aliyev may have overstepped the line in some regard, and Rasizadeh could not tolerate it. 'We're working day and night, without a thought for ourselves, and you are so unfair to us,' Rasizadeh shouted, addressing Aliyev in the informal register. He talked agitatedly for a long time, and those of us sitting near him did not try to make him sit down. Once he had calmed down, Aliyev gave him a dressing down. Everyone thought this marked the end of Rasizadeh's career, but, despite that outburst, Aliyev didn't touch him. They remained very close."

I feel that Aliyev let this "mutiny" pass, not only out of affection for Rasizadeh, but because he liked people who did not bottle up their grievances, who had the courage to say to his face what they thought of him and his methods of government. Even if the things they said were not always pleasant. There was, however, a time and a place for such things. It meant little if you spoke out after being relieved of your duties for serious abuse of office.

According to former *Literaturnaya Gazeta* staff writer Emil Aghayev: "[Heydar Aliyev] did not seek to surround himself with sycophants (though, like cockroaches, they crawl in through every crack!). He would only consult with people he respected. He wouldn't bring his final and indisputable opinion crashing down on you before you had opened your mouth ... Few people know how to listen like he could – even to those who were telling him something he already knew, or saying stupid things. I noticed this myself more than once, both at writers' congresses and when travelling around Azerbaijan with him. ... It was not objections that he could not tolerate, as some people think, but pettiness, cowardice, people who didn't dare look him in the eye, who couldn't bear his gaze, became flustered around him, were lost for words."

"He didn't like it when people shuffled around in his presence, or worse – were insincere," former Central Committee Secretary Fuad Musayev recalled. "So, in my case, he knew that one way or another I'd say what I had to say. He liked people to be straight with him. He had no sympathy for toadies. If you didn't like something, it was always better to come out and say it."

¹ Zenkovich, 428

Former CPA Central Committee Secretary Hasan Hasanov told me that Aliyev preferred his personnel to behave sincerely, naturally; he did not like artificiality or dishonesty. 'He said to me once, 'The people who come to talk to me are all the same, for some reason, all alike.' 'Is that good or bad?' I asked. 'It is neither good nor bad, but they should not behave so awkwardly. I want to see them as they are in real life, not the act they put on just for me.'

According to his team, Aliyev was accustomed to making his own decisions regarding personnel, without input from Moscow. If necessary, he had the authority to override the opinion of the CPSU Central Committee. He did not like being pressurised. Of course, Aliyev was not immediately granted this independence. It took a long period of persistent effort to break the tradition of endless agreements and lobbying in certain offices on Staraya Square. Within the CPSU Central Committee's Organisational Department there was a sectoral head with responsibility for the South Caucasus. Until 1969, this man practically governed Azerbaijan – in any case, its leaders took his personal opinion almost as gospel.

As Ramiz Mehdiyev told me: "Aliyev would often question why we needed to agree personnel issues with this sectoral head. He would say that we had a much clearer idea in the republic of who would best cope with the various duties required. This secretary had the power to telephone from Moscow and declare categorically, 'I wish to put so-and-so forward for this or that post.' He would be told, 'But we've already discussed and resolved this matter in the Bureau'. 'No, the CPSU Central Committee thinks otherwise. Reconsider your decision!'

"To break away from this tradition of strong-willed intervention by Moscow in the appointment of national personnel, Aliyev had to be incredibly stubborn over a long period of time. Disagreements between the leadership of Azerbaijan and this particular Central Committee department became so tense at one point that Aliyev was forced to turn to the party leadership. The official in question was dismissed. Unfortunately, I can't recall his name.

This was a sobering incident for many in the capital. Moscow understood that Aliyev was not the kind of leader who could be ignored or dictated to. In short, the relationship began to change, little by little – all the more as Azerbaijan grew in strength and prestige, gaining a reputation for its achievements throughout the entire country. After this, anyone sent from the Central Committee or supervising Azerbaijan from Moscow would have to be very respectful in their relations with Aliyev and make a great deal of effort to cooperate with the relevant state structures in the correct manner, without applying pressure."

Another serious problem linked to appointments to top positions in the republics – ministers, heads of committees and departments – was that of poison pen letters. The authorities treated any anonymous letter very attentively in those days, as it could ruin the life of even the most

decent and honest leader. Stories and satirical articles were written on the matter, and this dark legacy of the Stalin period was criticised in plays and feature films. Nevertheless, the letters provoked a reaction that was at times painful and savage. In fact, anonymous letters were a convenient way of keeping a wide range of leaders under control – from a minister to the first secretary. Especially if the leader was too independent.

Ivan Laptev, editor-in-chief of the *Izvestia* newspaper between 1984 and 1989, writes that he is most proud of the fact that his publication brought an end to anonymous reports and petty gossip: "The livelihoods of millions of our compatriots were crippled, even destroyed, by poison pen letters. Out of the five or six hundred thousand letters we received every year, tens of thousands were anonymous, but we had to treat them like normal letters. Following Polyanovsky's article "After the Anonymous Letters", *Izvestia* received ten times as many. The issue had to be raised three times at a Politburo session. We achieved our aim, though: a special top-level decree outlawed such letters."¹

Nazim Ibrahimov shares his recollections about an interesting episode dating back to the early 1970s: "In 1973 we had a fruitful conversation about developing the Oktyabrsky Region. At the end of the discussion Aliyev asked, 'Well, all right, Ibrahimov. But what worries and concerns you?'

I replied, 'In principle, nothing, Heydar Aliyevich. But you know, I am 37 years old and had never previously encountered anonymous poison pen letters or defamation. But now there is all kinds of muck being written about me.'

A large stack of paper was lying on the table next to Aliyev. He placed his hand on it and asked, 'Do you know what this is? It is material on you.'

In other words, in preparation for talking with me, he had requested all these anonymous letters. 'It is material on you,' repeated the first secretary, 'but just remember one thing: right now things are also being written about Leonid Brezhnev, denunciations about me are being dashed off, and about you too; in a word, everyone is being written about. Unfortunately, this is our reality. Bear one thing in mind: they'll write, that I can guarantee you, but you must behave in such a way that none of it is substantiated. That is your main task. Then you can sleep peacefully.'

Heydar Aliyev would often not even manage to make a routine personnel decision before anonymous letters would speed to Moscow from unnamed civil servants who were "offended" by the move. At that time, the election of a candidate to a post had to be collaboratively agreed upon with the department or with the CPSU Central Committee Secretariat, and with the corresponding federal ministry or department. In short, one was obliged to overcome a myriad of obstacles, and then on top of that those poison pen letters. Often a candidate who had set off Moscow to be confirmed in their post would be outpaced by a heavy dose of "compromising information",

¹ *Izvestia*, 28th December (2006)

swiftly delivered by tireless anonymous informers. That is to say, despite his undisputed authority in Moscow, in terms of the personnel question Aliyev always found himself caught between the Scylla of the malign local anonymous informers and the Charybdis of the Muscovite bureaucrats.

Therefore, in order to forestall his detractors, Heydar Aliyev would sometimes resort to highly unconventional methods. Nazim Ibrahimov, the former chairman of the State Committee for Publishing, related one such instance to me. In August 1980 he was on holiday with his family in Sochi, when suddenly he was urgently summoned to Baku to meet with the first secretary.

"I entered Heydar Aliyevich's office. At first he said nothing to me. He led me over to the bookshelves and started showing me some of the latest releases and asking for my opinion on some publication or other. Then he said: 'You know, I achieved a lot in my 10 years of service, both in agriculture and industry. But there were certain things I did not manage to do. There is one sector where I could not do anything – the publishing industry. I would remove one official and appoint another, but it was to no avail. This is still an unresolved issue. Now that builder [Marat Allahverdiyev] holds office. He's made a mess of things, stirred up squabbles and conflicts among the collective. I'm embarrassed to talk to Moscow; we are constantly lagging behind in this area. You're from the city, you have governed a region, you were involved in science, industry. So I was just thinking: maybe you could solve the situation?'

'But what if I don't?'

'Give it a try! After all, you weren't born a secretary of the district committee – you became one. It's a very complicated, delicate job, but you, as an educated man, will step up to the task.'

And so we concluded the discussion and bid each other farewell. Then suddenly he told me to wait and called in Rafael Allahverdiyev. 'He has your ticket. You're flying to Moscow tomorrow at 7 a.m. Nobody should know, not even your family. Board the plane in the morning, and take the flight.'

'And what about Karimov?' I replied. Karimov was, after all, secretary of the city committee, and I only of the district committee; hence it should be my duty to notify my immediate superior. 'That's not your problem. You know what kind of people we have here. You won't even have a chance to sit on the aeroplane before the anonymous poison pen letters start flooding in. They'll send in a couple of telegrams and wreck your candidacy, and I'm sick of it. So not a word to anyone! You'll fly into Moscow, go to an appointment with Tyajhelnikov [at that time the head of the CPSU Central Committee's Ideology Department] then to the Central Committee secretary, and finally to Stukalin, the union minister.'

Moscow would regularly hold consultations with the ministers and chairmen of the state committees, and verbally express its opinion on the choice of candidate. But the official confirmation of the elected candidate

happened at the CPA Central Committee Bureau. 'You'll run these three meetings', continued Aliyev, 'and then you'll return straight away. We'll confirm your appointment the day after tomorrow, at the Central Committee Bureau.'

I successfully got through the interview. I arrived at the Central Committee Bureau. All the secretaries, my colleagues, were in attendance. Nobody had the slightest inkling about anything. The whole leadership of the State Committee for Publishing was also present.

Suddenly, Aliyev announced, 'There's a question concerning the State Committee for Publishing'. He did not start the discussion himself. 'Allahverdiyev, do you have anything to say?'

Allahverdiyev replied that he did. Aliyev patiently heard him out, and then said, 'There is a proposal to remove Allahverdiyev from his current post and give him a severe reprimand.'

At this point his deputy, Farida Gasimova, also decided to speak. She had seen that Allahverdiyev was being removed from office, and took the opportunity to launch an all-out attack on him. The two of them had constantly been in conflict. Aliyev heard her out as well, then suddenly declared: 'There is a proposal to remove Farida Gasimova from her post as deputy chairwoman of the State Committee for Publishing. I suggest appointing Nazim Ibrahimov as chairman.'

Everyone was astonished. Even First Secretary of the City Committee Karimov, a member of the Bureau, had not known a thing. In other words, this was a kind of secret operation, masterminded and superbly executed by Aliyev.'

This highly illuminating episode attests to the fact that even someone as powerful as Aliyev was forced to resort to devious measures so as to deflect the attacks from anonymous poison pen writers and opportunistic factions.

* * *

Was Aliyev immune from errors by his staff? Of course not. In his last interviews, he often returned to this topic, openly admitting that "our most severe mistakes were committed by our staff – incidents in which individuals who we had trained and promoted into positions of responsibility in the 1970s let us down and allowed abuses of the system. As I have said before, we never defended our professional honour."¹

Ramiz Mehdiyev recalls how Aliyev took each error of this kind to heart. "Of course there were failures," he recounted. "We would appoint an individual, he would work for a year or half a year, and the results would be modest, to say the least. If someone worked honestly, he would be given the chance to prove himself in another area. But if he crossed the line, lowered himself to bribery or greed, then Aliyev's position was firm. He cherished his staff, guarded them, and as a result worried very much about every situation of this kind."

¹ *Nasbe Delo*, No. 4 (1990), 5

No leader is immune to shortcomings in their personnel policy, as they are dealing with living people, not machines. But Heydar Aliyevich was able to see these flaws and correct them in time. It is important that he never hid them, clearly expressing his position both in the Bureau and during Central Committee plenary sessions, justifying the Bureau's decisions on some or other personnel matters."

I will return to the subject of personnel problems in the chapter "Let Justice Prevail", which discussed the fight Heydar Aliyev conducted throughout his entire leadership against bribery, businesses operating in the shadow economy and other negative phenomena. For now, however, I will turn to the priceless recollections of individuals who were privileged enough to be "in it together" with Heydar Aliyev in the 1970s.

"What else impressed me about Heydar Aliyev? He could listen to you for hours without a break or interrupting. He probably learnt the habit of listening more than speaking in the KGB. He also had the ability to let you into his confidence. He might scold and criticise you, but he would support you when you needed it. This is an exceptional talent for a leader to have.

Heydar Aliyev was very democratic during discussions. We would all speak up and state our positions. Differences of opinion did arise between us. In this respect, his talent was the patience to listen to it all, digest, analyse and come to the most appropriate decision. He would sum it up, and we would come to a consensus. Our decision was always a collective one. He would consult with the Bureau members on literally every issue."

(From a conversation with Ismayil Ibrahimov)

"I would like to say a few words about his personal qualities. Naturally, anyone who was called in to see the first secretary would be nervous, but I noticed the following: he understood when someone was worried, and could diffuse the tension by asking probing questions, or sometimes moving the conversation onto an unrelated topic, so that the other person would feel more comfortable. Heydar Aliyevich was an excellent communicator, and an even greater psychologist. During a conversation he would create the perfect atmosphere for a person to be able to open up to him completely. In addition, his team members knew that if they were invited to a private conversation with him, he would never use anything that was said privately against them. He would weigh it up in his head and then come to an appropriate conclusion, without revealing his sources. That is, Heydar Aliyevich never betrayed people he spoke to. He might impart information he had received, but would make it seem as if it came from him."

(From a conversation with Hasan Seyidov)

"I heard from many people that Aliyev knew everything. 'It is impossible to have a conversation with him,' the district officials would tell me, almost in tears. 'You start telling him something, and he says, 'I know, you have this and that in your region, but for some reason you never talk about this.' He had all the information."

(From a story by Turan Huseynov)

"Everyone was surprised that he spoke like an artist when he met with artists, like a writer with writers, and so on. But you needed to know him. He would spend 10 days or even longer preparing for a meeting with artists. He had to know everything about every guest: where they were born; what was unique about their work; what their work was, where it was exhibited. Even with his phenomenal memory, he still prepared for meetings. The Academy of Sciences, museums, institutes and other organisations would prepare documents, and he would study them thoroughly. For that reason everyone simply marvelled at him."

(From a conversation with Lydia Rasulova)

"A month before Aliyev was due to leave for Moscow, he compiled a list of books that he needed, and I brought three enormous boxes of books from the library along with Rafael Allahverdiyev. There were books on legislation as well as textbooks on healthcare, transport – all the sectors that would come under his remit as first deputy chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers. He surrounded himself with these books, and he read, studied and made notes on them right up until his departure. That is, Heydar Aliyev went to Moscow with full knowledge of what an enormous responsibility he had taken on. He was an Azerbaijani from the periphery of the Soviet Union; he had been appointed to such an important position, and therefore he had no right to be inaccurate at all in his wording, to make mistakes or show ignorance on any subject."

(From a conversation with Mikhail Zabelin)

"Heydar Aliyev spoke with everyone as equals. He would travel to a region, go to the foreman in a cotton field, and have a professional discussion on agricultural subjects. The foreman would say, for example, that he was obliged to collect five tonnes per hectare. And Aliyev would urge him not to go overboard. 'You won't have such a big harvest. Count how many bushes you have in one square metre.' And the foreman's jaw would drop in amazement.

I often attended the Central Committee Bureau, where topics such as the performance of the metallurgical industry would be discussed. The directors of factories, ministers, and Bureau members would all give speeches. Heydar Aliyev would listen, with a little folder in front of him. He would open this folder, glance at it and suddenly blindside the speaker. 'But in your warehouse you have a shortage of products.'

And you' – addressing the previous speaker – 'have two apartments allocated for distribution that have been embezzled.' They would nearly collapse: how does he have this information? Assistants in other departments often gathered similar incisive information for him. The departments would also sometimes prefer to keep quiet, however, because this area came under their remit; they answered for the given sector and were not particularly keen to expose all of their weak spots. On these occasions Heydar Aliyev had his own sources of information."

(From a conversation with former Azerinform correspondent Vladimir Morozkov)

Heydar Aliyev also managed to put the heads of military units stationed in Azerbaijan to work in Azerbaijan's economic interests. For example, Colonel General Aleksandr Kovtunov, commander of the 4th Army, served in both the Bureau of the Azerbaijan Central Committee, and the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan. On more than one occasion, he took orders from Heydar Aliyev, and fondly remembers how the first secretary used to "take advantage" of military men. Air Marshal Anatoly Konstantinov recalled how Aliyev drew military men into Azerbaijan's civilian life and day-to-day issues:

"He would say to us, frankly, 'You live in this country, don't you? Then be so good as to take an interest in local issues.'

While I was commander of the Baku and the Krasnoznamensky Air Defence Forces, I was also a member of the Central Committee Bureau, and represented Azerbaijan at two convocations of the USSR Supreme Soviet. I lived as a full-blooded citizen of my country, fulfilled my constituents' needs, built roads, schools, inspected factories and manufacturing plants, represented the Azerbaijani government at official functions, handed out medals and awards to productive workers on the orders of the Supreme Soviet, and so forth. There's one instance that springs to mind: Heydar Aliyevich once called me into his office and told me that the ore-mining and processing plant in Nagorno-Karabakh needed inspecting. Why did he want me to go? Because I was Russian, and the local people were more likely to trust me. He would always think of things like that.

A complaint had reached the Central Committee from Nagorno-Karabakh that the river there had turned red. I flew to Stepanakert. The plant was using explosives to access the ore, and when I flew over the city, I could see the explosions, and the rock being excavated for transport. But when the explosions detonated, everything flew up in the air. Naturally, pieces of rock were falling in the river and that's how it turned red. There were engineering experts with me who started figuring out a solution. I went back to Baku to inform Heydar Aliyevich of the situation.

'So, the water's genuinely red?' he asked.

'That's right.'

'Prepare a report. We will raise the issue at the next Bureau meeting – and you will present it.' I gave a report at the Bureau meeting, and proposed a course of action. Measures were taken. I think that both the director and head engineer of the plant were fired for breaking environmental safety standards.

Heydar Aliyevich did not like insincerity or superficiality. He prized objective judgment above all in his inspectors, as well as strategic thinking: how could the failings we uncovered be dealt with? For his part, Heydar Aliyevich would attend sessions of the Baku Air Defence Force's Military Council. I would inform him of the date the council was to meet and brief him on the questions up for discussion. If an issue piqued his interest, he would ask me to prepare a synopsis of it. I am so glad to have crossed paths with people who brought me out of my military shell. I was involved in more far-reaching work, often working on issues related to Azerbaijan's social and economic problems. All this broadened my perspective as a leader."

When I asked them about Heydar Aliyev's leadership qualities, practically everyone I interviewed described him as unusually demanding of his staff, strict, and willing to fire people for falling short of the required standard. However, he never acted rashly. To illustrate this, Zakir Abdullayev told me of a curious episode, when Heydar Aliyev's objective, understanding attitude helped to avert the unfair dismissal of a member of the Council of Ministers.

THE BAKHISHEV INCIDENT

On the seventh floor of the old Central Committee building, a large meeting of the Committee Bureau was in session. All the regional officials and ministers were present. Among them was Agash Bakhishev, the deputy head of the Council of Ministers' Agricultural Department. When Heydar Aliyev got up to give his concluding speech, Bakhishev began to experience chest pain. He leaned over to Feyruz Mustafayev, who was sitting next to him, and whispered, "I don't feel so well. Catch me if I keel over." Aliyev, noticing Bakhishev talking to the man next to him, shouted, "You there! What's your job?"

"I'm deputy head for agriculture in the Council of Ministers."

At that time, the chairman of the Council of Ministers was Ali Ismayilovich Ibrahimov, who was overawed by the first secretary.

"Ali Ismayilovich," Heydar Aliyev said agitatedly, "What kind of people do you keep on your staff? He doesn't know how to act with decorum. I'm speaking here, and he's having a conversation."

"In short, he gave Ibrahimov a proper dressing down," Zakir Abdullayev told me. "The meeting came to an end. As soon as I had left the assembly hall, Bakhishev came up to me. 'You must understand, I wasn't feeling well, and I told Mustafayev, but Heydar Aliyevich thought I was having a conversation with him.' It turned out that he had come to ask for help. The problem was that Ibrahimov, who hadn't even got back to the Council of Ministers yet, had already given the order for Bakhishev's dismissal. Once Aliyev had spoken, that was it."

It was the end of the working day. Everyone was tired. The meeting had been tense, as always. But all the same, I called Heydar Aliyevich on the direct line and told him I needed to speak to him for two minutes. He agreed, and I went up to his office.

'That man wasn't feeling well and asked his neighbour to catch him if he suddenly collapsed during your speech. That was when you saw him having a conversation. But he was only asking for help.'

'All right,' Heydar Aliyevich replied. 'He should have told me and I would have let him leave the room. How is he now?'

'Well, he's OK. But Ali Ismayilovich has ordered his dismissal.'

Heydar Aliyevich picked up his phone and called the chairman of the Council of Ministers.

'Ali Ismayilovich, you should be ashamed of yourself! I give you a hundred orders of high state importance, and you are hardly ever this efficient. But this poor devil wasn't feeling well and almost keeled over. And he was just telling the man next to him. Let him be.* In three months' time, on my recommendation, Bakhishev was appointed to the Central Committee.'

Heydar Aliyev was sometimes known to use idiosyncratic "educational" methods on his team-members. These often yielded better results than

any punishment. Hasan Hasanov remembered one such event from the late 1970s.

"I was working in Ganja, preparing a series of proposals for Heydar Aliyev's subsequent review. Before arriving in Baku, I telephoned the Central Committee to request a meeting with him. ... When we met, I presented my proposals, and Heydar Aliyevich voiced his support. He also asked me numerous questions, which I answered. At the end of this lengthy discussion, he said, 'Very well, put it all in writing, and I will address your concerns.'

'But everything's already written down,' I replied. 'Well, then, give your document to Yakov Mikhailovich. I will look over it now and endorse it.'

I left Heydar Aliyev rather late – at just gone 11 p.m. Flying high after the successful meeting, I went to see Yakov Kirsanov, the head of the Central Committee's General Department. I signed the document, explained to him what it was about. I arrived home with a feeling that I had done my duty, had dinner, and began to get ready for bed. Just before 1 a.m., the telephone rang – it was Kirsanov. 'You gave me the document,' he said, 'you signed it, but didn't date it.'

'Forgive me, I was so ecstatic after my meeting with Heydar Aliyevich that I wasn't quite with it. I'll come and date the document tomorrow morning.'

'No,' he said, 'you can't come tomorrow. You need to come now.'

'Why? What are you going to do with it *now*, in the middle of the night?'

'I'm not going to do anything with it. Heydar Aliyevich said that if Hasanov had to come to the Central Committee at 1 a.m. and date his document, it would be the last time he'd forget to date what he signs.'

And that seemingly mundane event has stayed with me my whole life. Later on, I used a similar method with my own subordinates, so they'd remember to do their work in the right manner, with no exceptions. And that held for any kind of sloppiness – not just dating documents."

Despite his colossal workload, Heydar Aliyev was always prepared to spend time working with his staff one on one. Former Oktyabrsky District Committee First Secretary Nazim Ibrahimov gave this startling example: in 1973, when all the district party leaders were up for re-election, Heydar Aliyev talked to all the candidates for three hours each. And there are 75 or 80 districts in Azerbaijan. He gave up time he could have been relaxing, spending time with his family, his children. He would ponder aloud what had been done in this district or that, what still needed to be done, how the future first secretary should behave towards his people, his subordinates, etc.

"I was re-elected first secretary of the regional committee four times", recalls Nazim Ibrahimov. "I will never forget Heydar Aliyevich's parting words to me during our first conversation. 'When you start working for the party,' he said, 'everything in your life will change. You won't feel quite so free in society anymore. Imagine that you have been stripped naked and sent out on to the street. As you walk by, everybody you meet can see

and discuss your every flaw. They are there for all to see. That is why I am telling you now to remember one thing when you become a secretary. You used to be an athlete; you made friends with all kinds of different people, you used to go to restaurants. You were free to behave however you liked. But now you must pay attention to how you get into a car, to the places you choose to frequent, how you speak to other people, how you present yourself in a meeting. No one used to pay attention to these things, but now you're an important figure, everybody is looking at you. You have involuntarily become a role model; you set an example to others in terms of your lifestyle and demeanour.' He continued in this vein for a long time, telling me how I should behave around the general public and my subordinates. You remember such lessons forever."

Mikhail Zabelin, Heydar Aliyev's former assistant, related another interesting incident to me:

"Heydar Aliyev gave a speech at a standard event such as a meeting of party functionaries. There was a football match on that day – Neftchi were playing. There was supposed to be a live broadcast of the match, but the head of the Gosteleradio¹ chose to broadcast the meeting instead of the football.

Heydar Aliyevich, who was unaware that the match should have been showing at that time, was watching his speech. Hasan Hasanov called and informed Heydar Aliyevich of the situation. Then Heydar Aliyev gave everyone an earful – including Hasanov. 'How have I been let down in this way? What have you done? You have cancelled the broadcast of the match for the sake of my speech! People will be sitting at home cursing me. They will have gathered round the TV wanting to watch the football, but they'll see me instead. Do you think this is propaganda or anti-propaganda? What are you doing?"

* * *

The recollections of Heydar Aliyev's staff from the 1970s that deal with the running of the CPA Central Committee Bureau are of particular interest for understanding the first secretary's style and methods of work. Individuals who had opportunity to participate in Bureau sessions confirm that every meeting was, to use modern terminology, a well-orchestrated master class that was planned to the smallest detail, and that Heydar Aliyev used these meetings to demonstrate his consummate public and political management skills to his team.

Later, in an interview with Andrei Karaulov, Aliyev commented, "There was total freedom of speech in the Central Committee Bureau and Secretariat meetings. Some comrades thought that we were in session a lot. Discussing one issue could sometimes take three or four hours, but we always allowed

¹ The State Committee of the Council of Ministers for Television and Radio Broadcasting.

everybody time to be able to speak, to examine the issue and come to the right decision."

According to Heydar Aliyev, his relationships with members of the Bureau "were respectful, but also firm and demanding. I never really built up a close inner circle around me."²

Facts are facts. In literally his first Bureau session, Aliyev taught his subordinates a highly instructive lesson, clearly indicating that Veli Akhundov's era of liberal governance was a thing of the past. Heydar Aliyev's former aide, Turan Huseynov, voiced his thoughts about this as colourfully as always:

"Akhundov was a very gentle, intelligent man. At times, far too gentle. I'll give you an example that characterises him as a leader. Enver Alikhanov was chairman of the Council of Ministers under Akhundov. He was almost always late for Bureau sessions, and defiantly so. Alikhanov was generally stronger than Akhundov, in Azerbaijan we'd say 'he was inconsiderate towards him'. The Bureau meeting would begin, and I would be called on first. 'Turan, have you contacted comrade Alikhanov?'

'I have called him,' I would answer. 'Call him again, tell him that we're waiting for him.'

The Bureau normally met at two p.m. on Thursdays. I would call, and he would rudely say to me, 'Alright, alright, you've already told me that. Enough already!' – and then hang up. He would appear five or so minutes later, as the Central Committee and the Council of Ministers were in the same building at the time, and he only had to go to the fourth floor. He would go to the reception and, knowing that the Bureau members were waiting in the next room, he would casually pick up the phone and call his wife to ask her about something trivial. Only after this would he come into the Bureau. He played that little game with us whenever he could.

When Aliyev became first secretary, Namiq Taghizadeh, the head of security, said to me, 'Let's see whether he'll be late now.'

Alikhanov was five minutes late for the first Bureau session Aliyev chaired. At that point someone rang on the direct line – Heydar Aliyevich had said to me that if anybody ever called him on this line, then, even if he was busy chairing the Bureau, let's say, or at lunch, then I should take a note and put it on the table, saying that so-and-so had called. I wrote a note saying that Kulakov, a CPSU Central Committee secretary, had called, and walked into the office meeting room. Alikhanov had just turned up, so I became an unwitting witness to the conversation that took place between them.

Heydar Aliyev said, 'Enver Nazarovitch, you do not respect me, fine, but do you not respect any of these people either?' He indicated the others sitting in the office. 'Why are you late?'

¹ Karaulov, 222

² Ibid., p. 221

Alikhanov began to make excuses, saying he had visitors from Poland.

'What are you talking about?' Heydar Aliyev replied. 'You are regularly late, and you are late on purpose!' He struck his fist on the table. Alikhanov flushed a deep red. No one had ever dared to talk like that to him before.

When the Bureau meeting was over, Alikhanov left the office and angrily spat out: 'Look at him, see how he speaks to me! And to think that I recommended him for the rank of general!'

The Central Committee Bureau met every Thursday, and there were occasionally additional sessions. The Bureau was very rarely cancelled, mainly only if Aliyev was in Moscow and could not attend.

All the Bureau members would receive the agenda the day before the session. If an issue had not been conclusively dealt with, information would be prepared for the Bureau. In this case, a draft resolution would be prepared, which would be discussed before the Bureau. The Bureau members would assemble and decide whether to dismiss somebody, whether to impose party sanctions etc. Bureau could also change the draft resolution; the discussions sometimes resulted in major changes such as increasing or reducing the punishment.

Often, during the discussion of an issue, when it became clear that the proposed solution did not address every aspect sufficiently, Heydar Aliyev would call a break. He would gather the Bureau members in his office and start the discussions afresh. He did not want to make mistakes, because the fates of real people were at stake.

Lydia Rasulova has said that Heydar Aliyev prepared very carefully for each Bureau meeting. For example, if a department had raised a question, he might summon the head or the deputy of this department to the Bureau 10 times, asking further questions, sometimes very unexpected ones. The officials would then gather information on these new aspects.

As Lydia Khanim explains: "If the Bureau had three or four serious issues, that meant three or four folders of additional material. And he would investigate all of this. What's more, he would work through it himself, underlining things in red pencil and making notes in the margins. I do not know if there was another leader in the republic who worked so thoroughly on documents. I never worked with another secretary who prepared in the way that he did for Central Committee Bureau meetings."

According to everybody I have spoken to, Aliyev's greatest quality, which came naturally to him, was his willingness to listen. He would give anyone who was present an opportunity to speak – not just Bureau members. He never spoke first, so as not to predetermine the direction of the discussion. During the course of the debate, he might ask a question or give the floor to somebody, but he would never express his position. He would take notes while his colleagues made speeches, underlining what he considered important.

The moment of truth came at the end of the discussion, when Heydar Aliyev would give another master class: he would demonstrate the logical outcome of the matter, highlight key points and suppositions, and guide his colleagues to the need to make a particular decision – always a well-reasoned one.

Hasan Seyidov once posed a question to the first secretary: "Heydar Aliyevich, you come to the Bureau with your own opinion on each matter. But have you ever arrived with one view and left with another?"

"Sometimes," replied Heydar Aliyev. "There have been occasions when I've had my own opinion, but listening to other people has made me realise that I was mistaken. That's fine."

Heydar Aliyev was glad whenever the people whose issue was being discussed in the Bureau were able to defend their position and prove that they were correct, suggesting a specific way to resolve the problem. In these cases he might drastically alter the course of a session.

Former Trade Minister Svetlana Gasimova, who was appointed to the position in June 1979, recalls one such case. At that time, Azerbaijani industry was growing in strength, producing more and more consumer goods. The quality of these goods, it must be said, left a lot to be desired. Therefore, her main task was to gear light industry towards the consumer and the market, rather than the warehouse.

"As trade minister I was very critical in my analysis of production quality," she recalls. "Every month I would report to the Council of Ministers, describing my ministry's work over the past month and specifying which consumer goods had been supplied.

Although I was reporting to senior officials, my analysis was scrupulous because I had a thorough knowledge of the situation in the enterprises and could back up my words with facts. Sessions of the Council of Ministers usually started with my information, which was generally critical. This annoyed a lot of people. Complaints were sent to the very top that the manufacturing industry was over-fulfilling its targets, but that the Trade Ministry was refusing to sell its products. Enterprise directors complained most of all – the head of a jewellery factory, for example.

I was told that the matter would be discussed in the Central Committee Bureau and that I would be rebuked at the very least, if not sacked. And so after it was reported that the Trade Ministry had refused to buy a million roubles' worth of jewellery, and that the warehouses were full of unsold merchandise, Heydar Aliyevich called me in to the Bureau and told me to go up to the rostrum.

I began to explain our work. Then I said: 'I will be clear on this matter. Take, for example, the jewellery factory. It is only right that we don't take their wares, because they are mainly rings and earrings made of cheap red stone. Azerbaijan's purchasing power has increased, and our women want diamond earrings, emerald necklaces and bracelets, turquoise rings and pearl necklaces.'

They won't be buying anything made of red stone for their sons' and daughters' weddings. People are beginning to live well and won't accept these products. The factory is taking no notice of this. I have been there on several occasions; I visited the warehouse with the ready goods. We have a full hall here – can anyone speak up if their daughter or wife wears jewellery decorated with red stones? No one's does, and so I refuse to purchase it. How can we be expected to force it on people? We would have leftovers. Millions of roubles' worth of leftovers in department stores, billions of unsold goods in our Ministry. What am I supposed to do with all of this?

Aliyev looked severely at the enterprise directors and the vice-chairmen of the Council of Ministers and rebuked them. 'Why are you looking like that? You know she is telling the truth. Why aren't you producing goods made out of turquoise? Why don't you make necklaces and rings with diamonds and pearls?'

When I had left, Efim Gurvich, a deputy in the Supreme Soviet, told me that they had been about to fire me. But everything had turned on its head. That is to say, Heydar Aliyevich would not make a decision without investigating it first."

As a final note on Heydar Aliyev's staff, we should remember one legendary individual – a man who worked closely with him for many years and who is remembered by all Bakuvians with gratitude.



Preparing to open a building during celebrations
of the 50th anniversary of the Nakchivan ASSR, February 1974



Sheki, 6th July 1974.
From left to right: Sergei Kozlov, Heydar Aliyev, Ali Ibrahimov



Visiting the Lankaran border detachment. From right to left:
First Secretary of the Lankaran City Party Committee Isa Mammadov,
Major General Mustafa Nasirov, Heydar Aliyev



Reviewing a military parade. From left to right:
Colonel General Aleksandr Kovtunov, Gurban Khalilov and Heydar Aliyev



At an assembly to mark the 60th anniversary
of the Border Troops, May 1978. From left to right:
Major General Mustafa Nasirov, Heydar Aliyev, First Secretary
of the Baku City Party Committee Ali Karimov



Reviewing construction of the Gabala Radar Station
along with Air Marshals Archil Gelovani
and Aleksandr Koldunov, 13 May 1978



A subbotnik (community service day) in the Friendship of Peoples Park,
Shikhev, 10th April 1973



At the construction of the Sarsang Hydroelectric Power Station,
16th August 1975



Heydar Aliyev at the exhibition Chronicle of the Great Patriotic War.
30th April 1975



With delegates to the 25th Congress of the Communist Party
of the Soviet Union, February 1976



Residents of the town of Khachmaz welcome Heydar Aliyev, just elected a candidate member of the Politburo in Moscow, March 1976



Outside the House of Culture, Shusha. Heydar Aliyev is making recommendations to the individuals responsible for public works in the town, December 1977



Surprised by a spontaneous welcome at Khachmaz railway station



Heydar Aliyev with female Azerbaijani delegates to the 26th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, February 1981



Heydar Aliyev loved to go on unscheduled strolls to interact with ordinary people



Heydar Aliyev greatly appreciated feedback from workers



From left to right: Kamran Baghirov, Heydar Aliyev and Aleksandr Ivanov



Barda, 25th August 1978



The first secretary of the Central Committee paid attention
to the smallest agricultural details. 1970s



Yevlakh, 12th July 1977





With students at the Jamshid Nakhchivanski School, 1980



At the scene of a railway disaster, 13th September 1979



The first secretary of the Central Committee spoke to oil workers as equals. From left to right: Kamran Baghirov, Aleksandr Ivanov, Heydar Aliyev, Fuad Musayev



Heydar Aliyev held the media in high esteem.
Central TV correspondent Mais Mammadov invariably
accompanied him on his trips to the regions



Time to relax at last. After the departure ceremony for Leonid Brezhnev, general secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, September 1978



He was a natural orator



He was the best at listening to others

ALISH LAMBARANSKI

Alish Lambaranski was a graduate of Azerbaijan's Industrial Institute (today the State Oil Academy), a World War II veteran, head of the Union of Azerbaijani Oil Plants, deputy oil minister, recipient of the Stalin Prize and the popular mayor of Baku in the 1960s – he was appointed president of the city's executive committee in 1959. He worked in Moscow as the first deputy head of the Council of Ministers' Main Directorate for the Microbiological Industry until Heydar Aliyev came to power. He is loved and remembered as the man behind the reconstruction of Seaside Boulevard (Baku's very own Venice!), the well-known cafés Mirvari [Pearl – Ed.] and Nargis in the city centre and The Green Theatre, as well as renovations to Molokan Garden and many other magnificent establishments that transformed the face of Baku. A hit song was even dedicated to a popular Bakuvian bench in the 1960s.

In 1970, Lambaranski agreed to return to his native republic to take up the position of deputy chairman for construction in the Azerbaijani Council of Ministers. He proved very useful to Heydar Aliyev in this capacity, realising ambitious projects under his guidance.

Heydar Aliyev later recalled: "We set out to build The Palace of the Republic, and were able to hold official ceremonies there after a short time – in December 1972. I entrusted Alish Lambaranski with managing this project, then with the Baku factory making air-conditioning units, then the Gulustan Palace. I did so because I trusted him and because he worked passionately, putting his heart and soul into it."

After Heydar Aliyev transferred to work in Moscow, Lambaranski also restored the Opera and Ballet Theatre twice (once after a fire). His swansong came after Heydar Aliyev's return to the republic in 1993, when he revived the former Taghiyev Theatre (now the Theatre of Musical Comedy). He passed away on 1st May 1999, shortly before his 85th birthday.

"Already gravely ill, Lambaranski discovered that Heydar Aliyev was going abroad for an operation and became very concerned. As Agabey Sultanov, a famous doctor and Lambaranski's brother-in-law, related, he was stunned when the dying man raised his hand upwards in his last hour, as if to ask: 'How are things at the top? How's the president?' When he was told that all was well and that the operation had been a success, he smiled weakly and closed his eyes. ... 'To be concerned about a friend's health at such a moment? But that was Lambaranski all over!'"

Alish Lambaranski's official biography is very characteristic in terms of understanding the fine details of Heydar Aliyev's personnel policy in the 1970s. The first secretary was a collector of domestic staff, and tried to make sure

that any official who had gained experience and proved themselves in Moscow, Kiev or any other city in the USSR returned home and contributed to Azerbaijan's economic and socio-cultural development. As a consequence, however, when the artificial issue of Nagorno-Karabakh arose again during Gorbachev's perestroika, Heydar Aliyev's opponents accused him of sending too few Azerbaijanis to Moscow. They said that there was no need to "drag them all back" to Baku. They claimed that without Heydar Aliyev's personnel policy, far more officials like Lambaranski would have been working in the CPSU Central Committee, and hence Azerbaijan would have been able to neutralise the attacks by Armenian separatists and their lobby in Moscow.

I do not know how justified these accusations are. Heydar Aliyev loved Azerbaijan more than life itself and strove to squeeze every last drop of potential out of his Azerbaijani officials. Who could have supposed in the 1970s that a whole 15 years later, as a result of Gorbachev's bungling leadership, separatists of all stripes would raise their heads, and that the mighty superpower would collapse in a flash, burying much of what gave Heydar Aliyev his *raison d'être*? In my opinion, Heydar Aliyev was acting in a far-sighted manner when he took domestic personnel under his wing; otherwise the republic's transition to independence would have been far more difficult. Even with this sturdy professional backbone, educated by the Central Committee first secretary himself, the construction of a new Azerbaijani state remained far from easy.

A GIFTED ORATOR

The tradition of giving grand and detailed speeches at various party congresses, forums and conferences arose in the post-Stalin era and flourished to hyperbolic extremes under Brezhnev. Despite illness and difficulties with his voice, Brezhnev was a prolific public speaker, and his addresses at party conferences could last almost a whole day.

Party leaders throughout the union republics were also expected to speak publicly. They took their lead from the Kremlin. In the 1970s Baku hosted a huge number of events, and not only party functions: cultural days for various union republics; all-Union or international conferences, meetings of workers to mark Azerbaijan being given challenge red banners. Heydar Aliyev's brilliant and sharp speaking could be heard at all of these gatherings and forums. I was curious to investigate the preparation involved in his famous speeches and reports, especially as none of his biographers have ever investigated this.

All party conferences and plenums in Baku were conducted in Russian, and the documents were then sent to Moscow. As an exception, sessions of the Supreme Soviet took place in Azerbaijani. Heydar Aliyev was bilingual and was able to switch freely between the two language. According to the practice of the day, he would give most of his speeches in Russian, although he would use Azerbaijani whenever possible. In addition, he almost never used a pre-prepared text, improvising in Azerbaijani instead; perhaps this was partially because it was difficult to find anyone who could help him write a speech in this language.

The famous Azerbaijani writer Mowlud Suleymanly recalls an occasion in the mid-1970s, just before New Year, when the entire city did voluntary work on a Saturday to lay the foundations of a park on Shikhov Beach. The Writer's Union had their own section where these literary individuals planted trees. Aliyev strolled about the future park, chatting with people, before finally approaching the representatives of the creative intelligentsia.

"As always he spoke simply and was easy to understand," recalls Suleymanly. "He joked with the 'elder statesmen' as well as showing an interest in the young writers."

The poet Gabil noted rather frankly that Heydar Aliyevich spoke Azerbaijani really well.

Heydar Aliyev began to laugh softly. 'Gabil, it's strange that you should be surprised that I speak Azerbaijani, but not by my knowledge of Russian. Azerbaijani is my mother tongue, I have a duty to know it – and not just me, but all of us.'

These words were met with applause. But the matter did not end there. The leader's belief in the importance of knowing your native language spread to all corners of the republic very quickly, forcing bureaucrats to reconsider their disdain towards Azerbaijani. The words that Heydar Aliyev had spoken at an

ordinary Saturday's volunteering and his overall work in this area changed the cold attitude Azerbaijani society had previously shown towards its own language.

In 1970 a group of prominent intellectuals asked Heydar Aliyev to attend a party meeting at the Azerbaijan State University. He promised to come to an election and report meeting at the end of the year. He kept his word. The assembly hall was packed. On that day he spoke to those academics for around three hours in the purest Azerbaijani. In fact, it was his first speech to the academic community to earn a 'hurrah' and shatter a number of myths: firstly, that he was really a Russian-speaker, and secondly that this KGB-trained first secretary had only superficial knowledge. The audience was struck by his grasp of the subjects he addressed, his deep understanding of the psychology and mentality of intellectuals, his fresh ideas and reflections on the situation in education, and his strategies to develop it in the republic. This meeting fundamentally changed the scientific and creative intelligentsia's attitude towards him.

Heydar Aliyev formed his own nerve centre, bringing in Azerinform Director Efim Gurvich, an aide to First Secretary Ramiz Tariverdiyev and Arif Mustafayev, Head of the General Department Yakov Kirsanov, and future Head of the Propaganda Department Afrand Dashdamirov to work on compiling his reports. From the outset, these men would gather in his office to discuss the subject matter and general concept of a report, its direction, key sections, highlights, and so forth. Then the appropriate department would issue a questionnaire, which would be used to compile extensive background information. The group would use this information to consolidate the text, putting it into the language of a report. Gurvich would then go through this rough draft and streamline it. Members of Heydar Aliyev's team smiled as they told me how the secretaries from various district and municipal committees would make a pilgrimage to see Gurvich in the run-up to a plenum or congress. Some would ask him to lessen his criticism or remove their names from a report; others implored him to note their "achievements" in one of its positive sections.

During this preparation, the material would be constantly refined and polished, and fresh facts would be added. Of course, Heydar Aliyev would examine the text extensively himself, contributing his own observations and suggestions, personally re-writing and re-working the report and throwing up new ideas and thoughts. Central Committee secretaries and the departments that came under their remit would also be involved.

The Central Committee Bureau members would receive the report several days before the start of a plenum. They would gather for a discussion and express their own wishes and observations. On Heydar Aliyev's suggestion, constructive observations would be added to the speech's final draft.

Nevertheless, even with this final draft in hand, Heydar Aliyev would still improvise elements as he addressed a plenum or party activists – anything from a few phrases or paragraphs to entire pages.

"Back then there were no voice recorders," recalls Vladimir Morozkov. "So I sat near a loudspeaker in the wings and checked the prepared text against what Heydar Aliyev was actually saying. I made a note of any deviations, as I didn't trust the stenographers. They tended to work slowly and didn't give us their transcripts until later on. But we needed the corrections for the following day's press. The main text of the speech was set beforehand, but would await correction towards evening."

When we had made the necessary changes, we took our materials to Heydar Aliyevich. He examined the whole text yet again together with its additions and amendments. And then as late as 9, 10 or even 11 p.m. we would 'chase' the newspapers with our final version.

He worked more meticulously than anyone else on official texts. He checked literally every word, every paragraph of information concerning his work that would appear in print the next morning."

Zakir Abdullayev remembers: "I saw how Heydar Aliyevich would personally refine the documents his team had prepared. At the time, Yakov Kirsanov was head of the Central Committee's General Department, and was an extremely intelligent man. However, the texts he produced were fundamentally reworked by Heydar Aliyevich, who would polish every fine detail. The paper would often be covered in notes on both sides. Aides may have drafted these texts, but Heydar Aliyevich was the master craftsman who revised everything from start to finish. He had the handwriting of a calligrapher, and it was a real pleasure to read the notes he made."

The majority of Heydar Aliyev's speeches began with a tribute to the times, an expression of gratitude to the CPSU Central Committee and its trusted helmsman, or a declaration of belief in Lenin's party and devotion to the struggle for a bright communist future. This was just the necessary preamble, however. The essence of a report was its critical content. I would say that Heydar Aliyev's capacity for self-criticism was unmatched.

"All of Heydar Aliyev's speeches were written in a critical tone and set new tasks," Hasan Seyidov remembers. "There were so many successes throughout the republic, all sectors of the national economy were growing, but still he was critical! The more things we found to criticise, the more negative points we put to him, the happier he was. I would sometimes suggest that we say a bit more about our successes. 'No', he'd answer, 'we need to keep it brief when it comes to success.' I would point out that our enemies would say we had been bragging about success, but then indicate how many failures we had had. He would reply that the more candid we were about our shortcomings, the fewer there would be in future."

Zakir Abdullayev tells a similar story: "Heydar Aliyevich often said: 'The key to success and development begins with critical analysis and exposing shortcomings. If you do not recognise your shortcomings, you will become self-satisfied and think that you have nothing to improve'."

Turan Huseynov recalls an occasions when professors were called in from Kirovabad to help the agricultural secretary write a speech for an upcoming plenum. "After Heydar Aliyev had received their preliminary work, he called in his assistant – I was there – and said: 'What kind of report is this? It has been written by doctors of science, professors, but it doesn't contain a single fresh fact!' He tore the entire thing up and threw it in the bin. He then told me not to send anyone in – he did not want to be disturbed. He stayed in the office until morning rewriting the report. Through his various channels he enquired about matters in certain regions and discovered their unresolved issues, their weak spots. In Zardab Region, for example, it had rained, but the cotton had not been covered with cellophane and had begun to rot. They had been thrifty in Kurdamir, but not in Zardab or Aghdash. He gathered facts like these and brought them up at the plenum.

Then the secretaries of the district committees called me and asked with fear and astonishment who had written the speech for him. 'What do you mean?' I replied. 'Listen, those facts are brand new; we haven't even reported them yet. Where could he have got that information?'

Heydar Aliyevich left no stone unturned, you see. He had evidently learnt this in his previous job with the secret service, where mistakes could prove life-threatening."

Heydar Aliyev's speeches and discourses at less substantial events were pure improvisation. He would attend numerous meetings with party members, workers or voters, and would bring only a short text that the departments had prepared. This would contain a few facts, outlines, talking points and statistics. He would "beef up" the text as he went along, turning it into a full speech. His peers relate that he would address active party functionaries for two to three hours, speaking mainly without notes.

Many people still remember a brilliant speech Heydar Aliyev made in The Gulustan Palace – which had only recently been opened – to celebrate 60 years of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan. Large delegations from all of the union republics were in attendance with their first secretaries. At this reception, Heydar Aliyev raised his glass in honour of each delegation in turn and gave a unique speech containing such exact information about the history, culture and traditions of each republic that all the attendees were simply shocked. He concluded by reciting a quatrain from the republic's classic literature by heart. In the words of Svetlana Gasimova: "It was a shining demonstration of Heydar Aliyev's phenomenal personality, his erudition and intellect. He spoke in the purest Russian, without any notes – it had to be heard to be believed!"

Heydar Aliyev's most devoted and enthusiastic listener was his wife, Zarifa khanim. One of her friends and colleagues in ophthalmology, Zahra Guliyeva, told me: "Back then almost all meetings took place at the Dzerzhinsky Club – the Lenin Palace had not been built yet. Zarifa tried to hear every single one of her husband's speeches. She would come and sit in a corner and listen. She was blown away by his skill as an orator. She often said to me: 'Zahra, Heydar was sent to us by Allah. We must take care of him.'"

A POLICY OF CHECKS AND BALANCES

Khrushchev's removal also brought about the gradual end of his famous thaw. The late 1960s marked a discernible ideological shift to the right. Of course, Stalin was never formally rehabilitated, and nor were the Stalinists able to condemn the 20th Party Congress. However, the screws that had been loosened in the realms of ideology, culture and social science were once again tightened, almost to breaking point. Censorship became more severe, as publications were scrutinised in order to remove any freethinking 'subversion'.

The dissident Moscow intelligentsia nicknamed the period after 1968 "Creeping Re-Stalinisation". At this time it was rare that people were arrested and tried for their beliefs, but "sinners" could be fired, severely reprimanded by the party or tried by a "court of honour" in the hope that they would publicly repent and renounce any views unworthy of a Soviet citizen. Individuals who stubbornly opposed the official ideology could be interned in a psychiatric clinic or exiled abroad and stripped of their Soviet citizenship.

"For some who were not even directly persecuted, the fight against dissent meant serious personal trauma," recalls Georgy Arbatov. "It became normal practice to force prominent intellectuals and cultural figures to sign letters harshly criticising disgraced figures from the scientific, literary or artistic worlds. Those who refused to sign could expect trouble – sometimes this was the first step on their own journey out of favour. Those who agreed faced the contempt of their colleagues and friends. Many buckled and wrote unsavoury things. Although there were hundreds, or perhaps thousands of direct targets of the anti-dissident policy, their exposure and persecution involved every single department of the so-called secret police. Additional agents infiltrated many branches of society; denunciations were encouraged, correspondence was censored and phone conversations were tapped. This could not go unnoticed: even extremely highly placed individuals began to fear wire-tapping, surveillance and denunciations."¹

Heydar Aliyev's daughter, Sevil khanim, provided me with these priceless, exclusive recollections for my book:

"I knew that we were being monitored a long time ago – back in the 1970s. My father, mother and I would stay in a hotel when we visited Moscow, and if he wanted to tell her something, he would take her into the bathroom and turn on the tap before talking.

I also remember that an old friend of my father's, a colleague from the KGB, told him that we were always being monitored. This was during a good period, when he was working as a Central Committee first secretary

and was coming to Moscow for events. The person that told us this was from the directorate that dealt with audio surveillance."

A truly tragic paradox of the Soviet era was this: someone who had cut his teeth in the KGB, and even been its head at one point, could subsequently find that he too was under surveillance by the agency.

In the 1970s, the secretary in charge of the CPSU's Department of Science Culture and Propaganda was Pyotr Demichev, who his peers describe as talentless and poorly educated. Needless to say, he also handpicked officials who would replicate his ideology throughout the Soviet states.

"In Suslov's time, the Central Committee's Ideology Department 'protected' the country's vast intellectual and cultural life: the media, science, education, culture, foreign policy and even sport. ... It goes without saying that the period of Zhdanov's 'pogroms', which had crucified Akhmatova, Zoshchenko and Shostakovich, and of Khrushchev's reprimands of Pasternak, Neizvestny and Voznesensky, were long gone. Demonstrating 'respectability' in an attempt to distinguish the Brezhnev era from the periods of 'cult' and 'subjectivity', party authorities did not conduct sensational show-trials. They merely guided individuals who had strayed back onto the pre-ordained path, sometimes with a fatherly telling-off, sometimes with a punishment as a warning. A special 'soft' method of ideological repression was even devised. The regime did not execute or arrest the authors of daring or disagreeable works (with a few exceptions) – instead it confiscated their work itself, sent it abroad or, in contrast, said it could not be published abroad. For example, the Central Committee might decide to publish certain non-conformist authors 'because of their difficult financial situations', but with only a 'limited print-run' or 'only for scientific libraries'.

Sins against the official Truth (as it was worded at the time) could include a 'pessimistic' essay on life in the villages, an attempt to publish the forgotten works of mystic Russian philosophers, a frivolous television broadcast or an article hinting at the non-Russian ancestry of Vladimir Lenin's mother."¹

* * *

To encourage the leaders of each Soviet republic to wage a more active and principled struggle against displays of local "nationalism", the Kremlin and the KGB considered it necessary to launch an attack on two fronts from time to time: against dissidents and their pro-Western stance, and against the so-called "Russianists". Even earlier, in the 1950s, Suslov had raised the issue of the ultra-patriotic magazine *Slavyane* to the CPSU Central Committee's Ideology Commission, and the magazine ceased to exist as a result.

¹ Andrei Grachev, *Kremlevskaya Kronika* [A Kremlin chronicle], (Moscow: Eksmo, 1994), 11-12

This policy of checks and balances was successfully continued in the 1970s. On 30th April 1974, Andropov, the head of the KGB, ordered an investigation into the "anti-Soviet" magazine *Veche*. According to Sergei Semanov's book about Andropov its editor, Vladimir Osipov, became the first political prisoner to be convicted since the 1975 Helsinki Treaty. This was followed by the dismissal of Pyotr Yakir and Viktor Krasin, who had published *Khronika Tekushchikh Sobystiy* [A chronicle of current events], and their exile to Ryazan and Tver.¹ Within a few years, Semanov himself had been branded a "Russianist".

According to Elena Klepikova and Vladimir Solovyov, the Russian nationalism of the 1960s and 1970s was secretly supported by KGB even under Shelepin and Semichastny. In the second half of the 1960s, the Russian Party existed semi-clandestinely. In the 1970s, Russianists were appearing in the press increasingly openly – in the *Moskva* and *Nash Sovremennik* journals, and at the Molodaya Gvardiya publishing house. At the same time, according to Klepikova and Solovyov, "anti-Semitism became a point where both the official and the Russophile ideologies converged." The authors recall Molodaya Gvardiya's publication of a hundred thousand copies of the book *Chuzhiye Golosa v Efire* [Foreign voices on air], *U Posledney Cherty* [At the last frontier], by Valentin Pikul called, *Oruzhiye Obrechennykh* [Weapons of the doomed] by Ivan Artamonov, and other anti-Semitic publications. However far this went – and Solovyov and Klepikova believe that Andropov himself contributed to certain anti-Semitic pamphlets – it is clear that the KGB skilfully used the Russianists' activities against the liberal dissidents.

Brezhnev and his ideology minister, Suslov, used the same policy of checks and balances in the fight against the "right" and "left" factions in the creative intelligentsia. On the one hand, party officials "checked" dissidents who were of a liberal-bourgeois inclination – a group that mainly contained Jews. Hence, tough measures were taken against the liberal magazine *Naty Mir*, to the point that its editor-in-chief Aleksandr Tvardovsky was moved to the docile and blusterous *Yunost'* publication. On the other hand, the main representative of the patriotic Russian line of thought, the editor-in-chief of *Molodaya Gvardiya*, Anatoly Nikonorov, was also replaced. According to Sergei Semanov, this was Brezhnev's famous "swing" technique – a step to one side (approval or condemnation) combined simultaneously with a step in the opposite direction.

In my view, the Kremlin ideologues acted entirely appropriately, in the higher interests of the state. If they did not display integrity in dealing with dissent within Russia, the country's dominant republic, they could not demand the same from the leaders of the other union republics, who were responsible for the control of local ethnic groups.

¹ See Sergei Semanov, *Yuri Andropov*, (Moscow: Eksmo, 2003)

At the end of the 1960s and 1970s, there was a lot of unrest and riots in the USSR provoked by ethnic issues. All of these uprisings were strongly suppressed and their instigators were arrested and prosecuted.

There is information about the ethnic riots and conflicts in Roy Medvedev's book *Neizvestniy Andropov* [The unknown Andropov], as well as in V. Ponomarev's pamphlet *Obozchestvenniye Volneniya v SSSR* [Social Unrest in the USSR]. For example, in late 1966, the Crimean Tatars, who had been deported to Central Asia in 1945, held mass protests in Uzbekistan, marking the 45th anniversary of the Crimean Autonomous Republic. In late 1967, Andropov's agency had to deal with the demands of representatives from Abkhazia who had gathered at the People's Congress and were protesting against 'Georgianisation' of their autonomous republic.

On 17th May 1967, there was major unrest in Frunze, (Kyrgyzstan SSR), which was suppressed by the armed authorities. Earlier in this book I discussed similar riots in Stepanakert, which took place in 1968 following a murder trial on a collective farm. In May 1969, Uzbek youths held anti-Russian demonstrations in Tashkent, and in 1971-1972, there were disturbances in Tbilisi, Georgia and Kaunas, Lithuania. A large public demonstration attended by thousands of Ingushes was held in Grozny on 16-19th January 1973. There was periodically unrest in the Baltics. As Roy Medvedev writes: "Naturally, this was a serious sign, but it did not attract enough attention from the Soviet and party leadership. In addition, the press wrote almost nothing about these events."¹

However, all of these incidents were covered in detail in the foreign press, as well as in the newscasts by Western radio stations. Below is a quote from a broadcast on *Radio Svoboda* on 5th February 1970, in which the dismissal of the Azerbaijani interior minister and his deputies, the chairman of the State Planning Committee and the Chairman of the State Committee for Radio and Television is commented on.

Talking about the change in leadership in the Internal Affairs Department, one of the commentators notes that, along with the official story, there are "unofficial reasons that tend to be kept secret from the masses. *One of the main unofficial reasons is the danger of the spread of nationalist aspirations* [my emphasis]. In some circles, it is no secret that the government of Azerbaijan is seeking more autonomy, with the aim of having its own representative at the United Nations, like Ukraine and Belarus. Such feelings are widespread among the republic's intelligentsia. Apparently, the visit of Turkish Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel and Turkish President Cevdet Sunay, accompanied by large delegations, have helped fuel these feelings."²

On the other hand, the current Kremlin leaders surely hold nationalistic and even jingoistic views in many cases! To put it truthfully, a fish rots from the head down."

¹ Roy Medvedev, "Unknown Andropov", 243

Vladimir Solovyov and Elena Klepikova's book *Zagovorshchiki v Kreml'e* [Plotters in the Kremlin] provides an interesting characterisation of Aliyev and his relationship to the problem of nationalism, "In [Heydar Aliyev's] face – and along with it, the face of Eduard Shevardnadze, Georgia's minister of internal affairs – could be seen the highest product of the human species, bred in the clandestine nurseries of the KGB. They were of Imperial-cosmopolitan lineage, despite their names, which sound outlandish even to the Russian ear: both studied in Russian schools,³ both are lacking in any national or other roots, and each considers his state to be an integral and inseparable part of the Soviet empire. Both, but especially Aliyev, are intolerant of their people's national characteristics, traditions, nature and lifestyles – for them all of that is nothing more than superstition, hangovers from the past, inconveniently standing in the way of the creation of a universal and supranational Soviet empire. This is a typical KGB-worldview, which Andropov quite possibly also shares."⁴

Roy Medvedev writes in his book about Andropov: "Young people in the 1920s and 1930s, along with the leaders of the country and the party, gave little thought to their nation's recent or distant roots, particularly in the North Caucasus. In the Soviet state, social status was of most importance."⁵ Communists were, in fact, internationalists; in that Medvedev was right, and the issue of nationality was of little priority to them.

Western political analysts are correct in one respect: Aliyev was a communist, convinced of the sanctity of Marxist-Leninist ideas. Much later, on the eve of the collapse of the USSR, when the former party leaders hastily recast themselves as dissidents, he, with disarming sincerity, confessed in an interview with the journalist Elmira Ahmadlova, "Since my youth, I have devoted my life to the Communist Party. I was born in a simple working-class family. My father was a communist, and at 20 I joined the Communist Party. Communist ideals were sacred to me; I could not accept any other ideology. I never even considered adhering to a different set of beliefs. I have been faithful to the general policy pursued by this system."⁶

Judging by Heydar Aliyev's first actions and public statements, as the new first secretary he tried to "meet the requirements of the day" and live up to the expectations Kremlin ideologues had of him. He was cautious and far-sighted. He remembered well the end of Imam Mustafayev's career and the adverse effects it had for Azerbaijan. Therefore, in his first years in power, Heydar Aliyev often used Brezhnev's "swing" method; on the one

² Heydar Aliyev graduated from both secondary school and university in the Azerbaijani language.

³ Solovyov & Klepikova, 51

⁴ Roy Medvedev, "Unknown Andropov", 19

⁵ *Udruz*, No. 6 (1990), 74

hand, he presented himself to Moscow as a dedicated and consistent enemy of 'nationalist inclinations' and outdated attitudes, while on the other hand, he saw to it that the excessively zealous members of his team did not go too far by taking his policies too literally.

Indicative in this respect was the CPA Central Committee Plenum on 29th October 1971, which was dedicated to the tasks set by the republic's party organisation in terms of the future strengthening of ideological work. In fact, this was the first (and, thankfully, the last) time Aliyev criticised members of the creative intelligentsia at a party forum, naming specific "guilty" writers. Some members of his team saw this performance as a "call to action", while the intelligentsia perceived it as a move towards a crackdown.

However, when the threat of violence was looming over some of these representatives as a result of the excessive zeal of the party ideologues, Heydar Aliyev judged it necessary to intervene immediately. After the plenary meeting, Daniil Guliyev, the secretary for ideology, had all-but turned brothers Magsud and Rustam Ibrahimbeyov [also spelled Ibragimbekov -Ed.] into dissidents. It went so far that they fled to Moscow and feared to return home. Heydar Aliyev invited them to see him for a face-to-face conversation.

Magsud Ibrahimbeyov: On that evening, Rustam and I arrived at Heydar Aliyevich's home at eight o'clock, and left at half past eleven. At the time, he was extremely busy. We talked and talked. Not about ourselves. We told him everything we knew, and in reply he told us his plans, speaking about how often he had to involve himself in unsavoury affairs. Finally he said to me, "It's not right that you should be in Moscow, afraid of something. Come back and we will sort everything out for you." And that is what happened.

Elmira Akhundova: Does that mean that certain individuals in his circle started inflaming the situation in search of dissidents?

M.I.: In the Writers' Union there were some rather mean-spirited, jealous people. They would take stories to him and whisper nasty words about us. When Nabi Khazri spoke about the novella *I ne Bylo Luchshe Brata* [There was never a better brother] at a plenary session of the Baku Party Committee, he said that we have our own Solzhenitsyn – Magsud Ibrahimbeyov – who is disparaging our beloved homeland. And another person, also a writer, showed Aliyev some of my work and said, "Look what this despicable man is writing." Aliyev told me all of this that night, concluding the conversation by telling me to return and work as normal. He said that I should call him if we had any problems. That was how he put an end to all the fuss surrounding us.

A similar situation occurred in the early 1970s regarding the arts almanac *Gobustan*, whose editor was the popular young writer, Anar Rzayev, who remembered that, "As an experienced Chekist and apparatchik, Heydar Aliyev

realised that it was necessary to satisfy the Kremlin's aspirations, which, allegedly, provoked the battle against nationalism."

Almanacs were entirely new in post-Stalinist society. They were the brainchild of the talented Azerbaijani youth of the 1960s. Everything in them was new and different, their bright, unusual layout contrasting with strict official style. Their covers were decorated with medieval Azerbaijani miniatures, caricatures from the magazine *Molla Nasreddin*, paintings by the contemporary nonconformist artists, Javad Mir Javadov, Tahir Salahov and Rasim Babayev. The cover also introduced the reader to works by Italian Renaissance artists, Japanese prints and drawings by Picasso. This was, of course, misconstrued.

The almanac's contents and the desire on the part of its founders to step outside traditional boundaries angered party officials even more. There were discussions on Picasso, Chaplin and Stravinsky, the poetry of Southern Azerbaijan, contemporary art by Turkish artists and other Turkic-speaking peoples. Guest subjects included a Kazakh artist, the Kyrgyz cinema, Tatar music, the Tuva monuments and so on. It was also entirely unbiased politically. The staff of the *Gobustan* revived forgotten names of prominent members of the Russian intelligentsia, whose activities harked back to pre-revolutionary days and the years of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. All this caused the keepers of communist ideology to accuse them of Pan-Turkism. A number of Turkish words were used in the almanac, causing information that the magazine unashamedly contained pro-Turkish political propaganda to filter through to the higher echelons.

Some of Anar's over-zealous colleagues began to send "denunciations". So much so, that the rumour of the "opposition" Azerbaijani magazine reached Moscow, and Ivan Kapitonov, CPSU Central Committee Secretary, said at a meeting that a "nationalistic magazine under the name of *Gobustan*" was being published in Azerbaijan. Daniil Guliyev, CPA Central Committee secretary for ideology, was not in favour of the almanac either.

And yet, despite all kinds of attacks, criticism in the government press and even cartoons in the magazine *Kirpi*, *Gobustan* was not shut down. Heydar Aliyev could have closed it down at any time or appointed another, more acquiescent editor. "He did not do either of these things in spite of the pressure on him to do so", Anar recalled thankfully. "In fact, when he was first secretary of the Central Committee, Heydar Aliyev protected *Gobustan* and its editor both from numerous misfortunes and difficulties over many years and from the party functionaries who were working under him."

A quarter of a century later, when he was already president of an independent Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev evaluated the historical role played by *Gobustan* as follows:

"At that time, unlike official publications, it fostered our national culture, traditions and spirit. It awakened people's national identity, fostering respect

for our history and culture. At that time, it was commonly believed that before the October Revolution we had achieved nothing and that the Revolution had given us everything ... But *Gobustan's* young staff told the facts as they were, making people aware of the truth.¹

Sometime later, Daniil Guliyev was dismissed from the post of Secretary of the Central Committee for "over-zealousness" in professional matters and die-hard conservatism. Oddly enough, this "ideologue" was the main speaker at the last congress held by the Azerbaijan Communist Party in September 1991. He announced that the Communist Party had become outmoded and should be "closed down" and, after the Soviet Union had collapsed and Azerbaijan had become independent, he joined his children in the West. He lived the last years of his life in Germany, and although he was probably nostalgic for his country, he felt completely at home in the "heart" of bourgeois Europe, whose "corrupting influence" he had formerly so passionately and vehemently denounced. Life sometimes plays such extraordinary games – it really is the most amazing and unpredictable thing.

As first secretary, Heydar Aliyev did not warm to the vain attempts on the part of his subordinates to engage in party work at the same time as scientific or artistic activities. It is common knowledge that, during the 1970s, "fake" academic titles were given out left, right and centre. Aliyev was the first person in the Soviet Union to fight a trend that he perceived as being harmful to learning. At public party forums he often cited specific cases of how high-ranking officials had made use of their positions by farming out their dissertations and then shamelessly acquiring academic titles to which they had no moral right.

Unfortunately, some of the members of his party interpreted Heydar Aliyev's position as a sign of dictatorial intent and tried to obstruct party members who were real academics and had come to the Central Committee from scientific and artistic backgrounds. The former head of the Central Committee Cultural Department, Azad Sharif, once told me of such a happening:

"The second secretary of the Central Committee, Sergei Kozlov, liked to dabble in matters of culture even though he was, in fact, a livestock specialist. One secretary, Jafar Jafarov, publicly put him in his place, 'Sergei,' he said, 'When you give an expert opinion about artificial insemination, I am automatically interested. But how can you judge Azerbaijani literature without knowing anything about Russian literature? I know who is whispering these ideas in your ear, ideas that you then pass off as the Bureau's.'

Naturally, Kozlov found a way of paying his opponent back. Some time later, in Baku, Jafar Jafarov published a two-volume edition about the theatre. Kozlov reported to the Bureau that the secretary of the Central Committee, Jafar Jafarov, had used his official position to publish academic works. In reply,

¹ Heydar Aliyev, "Guarding cultural heritage", 271

Jafarov retorted, 'these books were lying in the publishing house for three years waiting to be printed. Perhaps the fact that I became secretary of the Central Committee led to the work being moved up the queue, but believe me, I have devoted 30 years to this two-volume publication.' It was, indeed, his life's work.

Heydar Aliyev came out in support of Jafarov. 'Sergei Vasilievich,' he said, 'you are mistaken. I have checked and found that these books were passed to the publishing house several years ago.'² The first secretary respected genuine academics, because he valued professionalism above all else.

* * *

A third rather indicative example of Heydar Aliyev's policy of "checks and balances" is the story of Rasul Rza, the editor-in-chief of *The Azerbaijani Soviet Encyclopaedia*.

In the mid-1960s, a decree was issued by the CPSU Central Committee and the Soviet Council of Ministers, stipulating that all Soviet republics were required to establish editorial offices ready to compile local encyclopaedias. In December 1965, Rasul Rza, the famous Azerbaijani poet and public figure, was appointed chief editor of the *Azerbaijani Soviet Encyclopaedia* (the ASE).

The poet was taking on a very large burden, since in its history Azerbaijan:

"Did not have the previous experience, traditions, expertise or personnel necessary to compile an encyclopaedia. There was no precise terminology, no specific terms for any of the regions and no established geographical names. There was not even a dictionary of the Azerbaijani language. In addition, there were a lot of contentious issues relating to maps and historical problems."³

Within a very short space of time, Rasul Rza managed to put together a team to carry out the ambitious task of creating a truly national encyclopaedia, in which "the continuity would not be broken". In spite of Soviet party-political directives, he was opposed to what he saw as the pernicious tendency to portray the Azerbaijani people as a backward nation that had no culture or valuable history prior to the October Revolution: "And did the October Revolution bring Nizami, Khaqani, Nasimi and Shah Ismayil, Akhundov and Sabir?" he asked his colleagues irritably.

The first volume of the ASE to be prepared by Rasul Rza's team included the names of many prominent Azerbaijani and – more widely – Turkic figures, referred by the Bolsheviks as "Musavatists" and "enemies of the people", in short, "foreign elements". In fact, in the first volume, party leaders of all kinds occupied a relatively modest place, especially the Armenians.

Rasul Rza also believed that the original Azerbaijani names for the Armenian and Georgian villages and settlements populated largely by Azerbaijanis should be included in the encyclopaedia. This was very timely, since in Armenia and,

² Anar Bez Vas [Without you] (Baku: 2003), vol.3, 66

to a certain extent, Georgia, villages, rivers, mountains and mountain passes, which for centuries had had Turkic names, were being hastily renamed.

In 1970, only four years into the project, the first volume of the *ASE* was drafted, including a special edition dedicated to Azerbaijan. On the eve of the 50th anniversary of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic, 20,000 copies of the first volume (known as *The Green Volume*) were printed. Despite receiving a very favourable review from the expert committee appointed, headed by the president of the Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences, Hasan Abdullayev, the copies never went on sale. Subsequently, senior party officials called the committee's judgement "unprincipled".

They not only found a large number of technical errors and other shortcomings in *The Green Volume*, but there were fundamental flaws that had to be corrected. At the same time, numerous comments, letters, and even outspoken denunciations flooded into the CPA Central Committee, the CPSU and the Main Editorial Office of *The Great Soviet Encyclopaedia*. Their authors considered it their "sacred" duty to discredit the work of the team working on the *ASE*, and criticised its chief editor in particular. All these letters and denunciations fell on fertile ground, especially if we remember that Levon Shaumyan, the deputy editor of *The Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* in Moscow, was not enamoured of Azerbaijan.

In the end, the matter passed to the CPA Party Control Committee. A special commission was then dispatched and, on 10th September 1975, a report reached the CPA Central Committee compiled by A. V. Sokolov, the inspector who was supervising the matter for the Party Control Committee, entitled: "The Results of an Examination of the Unfavourable Situation in the ASE Editorial Office". In turn, the relevant department of the Central Committee in Azerbaijan sent Heydar Aliyev their report "On the Serious Shortcomings in the Work of the ASE Editorial Office", in which it was stated:

"The first volume of the *ASE* ... lacks insight concerning the international and patriotic education of the workers and propaganda relating to the historical achievements of the development of socialist society in our country. The articles in the first volume of the *ASE* provide superficial coverage of the history of the revolutionary movement, the workers' struggle for Soviet power in Azerbaijan, and in particular, the history of socialism and communism in the republic. There is a dearth of articles concerning numerous prominent party, government and scientific and cultural figures from the Soviet Union as well as progressive figures from other countries, whose achievements are noted in both the Large and Small Soviet Encyclopaedia."

In spite of the efforts put in by the *ASE*'s chief editor, his fate was decided. Rasul Rza was relieved of his duties for "serious shortcomings in his work on *The Azerbaijan Soviet Encyclopaedia*".

Heydar Aliyev found himself in a difficult position during this troubling time. He was touched by the poet's desire to create a truly national encyclopaedia, but recognised that the "political immaturity" of the published volume could have far-reaching consequences for Azerbaijan. The spectre of Khrushchev's sorry ruling on "Azerbaijani nationalism" loomed up before him. After all the Control Committee's criticism, Heydar Aliyev was forced to take certain measures to prevent Moscow from taking even stricter ones. The row concerning the *ASE* had reached such proportions that he just had to react.

There was pressure on Heydar Aliyev both from the CPSU Central Committee, and the editorial board of *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia*. He seems to have prevaricated for a long time before resolving the issue. When he finally did, he made quite sure that Rasul Rza's dismissal as editor-in-chief of the *ASE* would not affect his creative activity in any way. Nariman Hasanalı, who worked on the encyclopaedia, describes the event very eloquently:

"The day Rasul Rza was dismissed, I was with the first secretary of the Azerbaijani Writers' Union, the writer Imran Gasimov. He told me he had only just spoken to Heydar Aliyev and had been ordered to visit Rasul Rza that evening. Then he added, 'Aliyev said that Rasul Rza was an integral part of our nation and our national culture. All the publishing houses and editorial boards should remember this and no one should stand in the way of his creative development!'"¹

These words dampened the spirits of those in favour of the prolonged persecution of the distinguished poet. In time, after the furore surrounding the *ASE* had died down, Rasul Rza was once more elected deputy to the Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet. He was awarded the Soviet Union's highest title, the Hero of Socialist Labour, in honour of his 70th birthday. Recalling the relationship between Rasul Rza and Heydar Aliyev, Rza's son Anar told me:

"Heydar Aliyevich once said, 'If I cannot have Rasul Rza named Hero of Socialist Labour, I will not be able to forgive myself.' That is to say, he wasn't his enemy and did not want to destroy him. It was simply that, faced with an onslaught of denouncers, he had to react somehow."

Former Azerbaijani President Abulfaz Elchibey discusses this in his book *Ya Govoril chto etot Stroi Razvalitsya* [I said that this regime would fall] of 1992. In his opinion, the literature of the 1960s and 1970s played a considerable part in fostering a patriotic, freedom-loving sensibility among the Azerbaijani people. Heydar Aliyev, he notes, had a "liberal" attitude towards writers:

"All those whom Aliyev criticised initially, he would later defend. He found them positions, named them Heroes of Socialist Labour, etc. So, he put an end to any discussion about 'enemy nationalists' in Azerbaijan. He lightened the general atmosphere."²

¹ *Svet Zelenovo Tsveta*, [The green light], in *Shornik Statyj* [Collection of articles], (Baku: 2000), 89

² Abulfaz Elchibey, *Ya Govoril chto etot Stroi Razvalitsya* [I said that this regime would fall] (Baku: 1992), 43

The Rasul Rza incident was very much of its time. In those days, people throughout the Soviet Union were often demoted and punished for taking ideological "liberties". Andrei Grachev recalls the editor of a forthcoming volume of *The Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* being severely punished because, in addition to the required entry on Trotskyism, he had included a short biography of Trotsky himself. This was considered to be political sabotage. Even the famous journalist, Aleksandr Pumpyanski, was summoned back from the United States, where he was working as a correspondent for *Komsomolskaya Pravda* – simply for stating that, in America, "millionaires were no longer an unusual phenomenon".

There was a general tendency in the media of the 1970s for the hackneyed communist rhetoric of the past to be adopted by party leaders. Party leaders in the Soviet republics had to work within strict ideological confines, sometimes falling back on what we now call "double standards". Even Heydar Aliyev did not manage to hold on to his integrity completely, especially when he first became party leader.

Much later, as president of an independent Azerbaijan, he openly admitted that, in order to keep the Kremlin happy, he had been forced to act cautiously. He recalled:

"I saw a lot while I was working for the KGB. I witnessed the one-sided political strategy Moscow was carrying out in the Turkic-speaking nations early on. And although I rebelled against this inwardly, I could not show my feelings. As first secretary of the CPA Central Committee, I could neither speak out against the politicians in Moscow, nor come into conflict with the Centre. Moscow's was a total, imperialist political strategy. If I had rebelled against it then, nothing would have come of it and Aliyev would have been finished, like so many other secretaries."

I gradually began to awaken the people's national feelings. I dreamed that these national feelings, that this awakening of the Azerbaijani-Turkic people, would become a reality. But I acted cautiously so as not to upset Moscow."

In fact, if we compare the attitude Heydar Aliyev adopted towards writers in both formal and informal settings we see two completely different things. In his public addresses to the creative intelligentsia, he urged them to take an active stance against bourgeois hypocrites and agents of imperialism, to promote internationalism and the indestructible friendship of the Soviet peoples. He sang the praises of the Russian language in almost all his speeches at party plenums and conferences and demanded that its teaching be improved in secondary and tertiary institutions. However, when in direct conversation with Azerbaijani writers, he often re-introduced a discussion – which he had started in the first place – about the role and meaning of the Azerbaijani language in the formation of national self-awareness.

The famous Azerbaijani prose writer and dramatist Elchin Afandiyev has some interesting memories of these tête-a-têtes:

"In 1975, before my appointment as secretary to the Azerbaijani Writers' Union, I met Heydar Aliyev for the first time. We had a very earnest conversation. And what struck me about him was what we call "*millilik*".¹ He told me, for example, 'In 1937 the Azerbaijani intelligentsia was uprooted and ruthlessly destroyed' – he mentioned Huseyn Javid's name several times. 'Today's intelligentsia was formed during the Stalinist era. It has been dogged by fear ever since. There is an exaggerated sense of internationalism in the work of the older literary generation. I want your generation to be more closely linked to our native soil, to Azerbaijani fables and folklore.' I still remember the respect with which he spoke of our writers, noting that it was they who had preserved and rescued the Azerbaijani language for the people. He asked me if I had been to an Azerbaijani school. 'Of course,' I replied. 'Well, you see, with the exception of writers, the children of what is left of the intelligentsia went to Russian schools. But you went to an Azerbaijani school, as did Anar and so did Suleyman Rahimov's children, and so on. I want you, the young, to be brave and write critically and to fear nothing and no one. And if you have a problem, come directly to me.'

Heydar Aliyev did much more than request writers to defend and promote their native language. He did so himself, and often took steps that were relatively dangerous for his time. In the aforementioned *I Said that this Regime Would Fall*, Abulfaz Elchibey writes that, during the 1970s, his attitude towards Heydar Aliyev changed for the better after he had made two important moves as first Secretary of the CPA Central Committee. Firstly, for the very first time he honoured a group of Azerbaijani linguistic scholars with a state award for their work on the four-volume *The Modern Azerbaijani Language*.

"The award meant that the prestige of Azerbaijani linguists had increased. After all, it was the work of these linguists that would influence the perceptions of the whole nation. In this sense, the award did us a great service. The sphere in which Azerbaijani was used widened as a result. And this happened quite naturally: as soon as the workers within a certain area won a government prize, it started to flourish.

This was a feather in Heydar Aliyev's cap. Secondly, he gave a state award to Ziya Bunyadov for his book, *The Azerbaijani State Under the Atabeks*. Ziya Bunyadov was referred to in many different ways in his time, including 'nationalist' and 'chauvinist', but Aliyev defended him against these attacks. It was as if he were saying 'you Armenians, you are always calling Bunyadov a 'nationalist', and now look, he's got a state award!' Once, when Heydar Aliyev criticised Bunyadov, the Armenians used it to their advantage, writing that even the first secretary of the CPA Central Committee was critical of his work. They were trying to pick a fight with Ziya. But after he had been given the award, the Armenians began to write that, if he had given the nationalist Bunyadov a state award, then Aliyev himself must be a nationalist.²

¹ Azerbaijani: "national self-awareness", "national spirit".

² Elchibey, 42

Of course, although approval of Heydar Aliyev's actions was not unanimous among the "upper echelons", they made him an object of respect and a figure of authority in the eyes of Azerbaijan's creative elite.

I think that, on the whole, Heydar Aliyev's close relations with the creative intelligentsia, especially with Azerbaijani writers (composers and artists tended to be more cosmopolitan) had a positive effect on his own philosophy. He admitted, in an interview with Andrei Karaulov, that his relationship with creative people "had always been close" because he "felt a great inner need". During his time as first secretary, these relations became stronger. I believe that his friendship with writers changed Heydar Aliyev himself, widening his outlook and—more importantly—causing him to develop a firm dislike of the narrow-minded conservatism of Soviet party leaders. A new current in Azerbaijani literature was emerging; it was strong even by the Soviet standards of the Men of the Sixties, the children of the 20th Party Congress. Anar, Elchin, Akram Aylisli, Fikrat Goja, Sabir Ahmadov, Mowlud Suleymanly, Yusif Samedoglu, Isa Ismayilzadeh and other writers were patriots in the best sense of the word. Heydar Aliyev associated with them, acquainted himself with their work, read the best of what they published in the journals *Ulduz* and *Azerbaijan* and, as a result, became increasingly alienated from the unwavering postulates of Marxist-Leninist scholarship. He probed deeper into his people's history, their sources and roots, and found answers to the questions affecting writers at that time. Heydar Aliyev may have had a point when he joked, 15 years later at a congress of Azerbaijani Writers: "I was the greatest dissident among you!"

Reflecting on the factors that gave rise to the Soviet Union's dissident movement, the historian, Roy Medvedev, wrote in *The Unknown Andropov*:

"The movement provoked dissatisfaction among the general public with what was happening in their country, namely, failures in production organisation, provision for the population, as well as the despotism and corruption that were still the norm throughout the Soviet Party hierarchy."¹

While he was still working for the KGB, Heydar Aliyev came to a similar conclusion. As a result, when he became first secretary, he led the fight against corruption and other faults in the state edifice, artfully sanctioning popular discontent. He also allowed literary and artistic manifestations of discontent (books, plays and theatrical performances). For example, he attended the premier of Anar's play, *Summer in the City*, which expressed the author's profound dislike of nepotism in universities and bribery in the medical and legal spheres. He rated it highly, despite its being performed without *Glavlit's* consent, something that would have been considered a national emergency at that time! There is another well-known story about the ban on R. Ibrahimbeyov and E. Guliyev's 1968 film, *In a Southern City*. One of Heydar Aliyev's first moves in the cultural arena was to recommend the film to *Goskino* for USSR-wide release.

The Azerbaijani film *The Interrogation* caused a stir in the Soviet Union. Although it met with an ambivalent reception, Heydar Aliyev managed to have the film awarded a Soviet state prize.

The Interrogation caused trouble, not so much in Baku as in Moscow. Heydar Aliyev thought highly of it, telling his colleagues that this was "an artistic interpretation of Central Committee Bureau politics". In Moscow, however, Interior Minister Nikolai Shchelokov, came out violently against it. He had attended a special screening at *Goskino*, and flown off the handle: the film criticised not just the Interior Ministry, but everything about Soviet life. It depicted the law enforcement organs, both the *militsiya* and the Public Prosecutor in an unflattering light. The first secretary stood up for it all the same. Yet, these events took place in the early 1970s, when Heydar Aliyev was not close to the general secretary, while Shchelokov was one of his favourites.

Years later, in an interview with Andrei Karaulov, Heydar Aliyev proudly recalled that, "In the history of Soviet cinema, this was the first film to expose social ills, and actively tackle them."

Andrei Karaulov: And how often have plays and films been forbidden in Azerbaijan? And book manuscripts?

Heydar Aliyev: Forgive me, Andrei Viktorovich, but during my time in office, there has been not a single instance of any work being banned ... We allowed full rein to writers and artists and no one was restricted in any way.

A. K.: But were there dissidents among the artistic intelligentsia?

H. A.: There were no dissidents as such. But perhaps this was because we weren't actively seeking them out.¹

I subjected all my interviewees to these same "uncomfortable" questions. In Russia, in Ukraine and even in the Baltic states, people were imprisoned for their beliefs, locked up in psychiatric hospitals, exiled for anti-Soviet propaganda and stripped of their citizenship, while we had peace and quiet. Were Azerbaijani writers really so law-abiding? Or was there something different going on here? The famous Men of the Sixties answered my questions, giving convincing examples from their own experiences. Heydar Aliyev, they attested, preferred not to provoke writers into open revolt against the system, but rather nipped potential conflicts in the bud.

From a conversation with the poet Vagif Samedoglu:

"I went to Latvia once with some poems I had published in the journal *Azerbaijan*. In Riga, the famous poet and translator, Uldis Berzinsh, who knew Azerbaijani very well, looked after me. And when he simultaneously translated

¹ Roy Medvedev, "Unknown Andropov", 163

¹ Karaulov, 226-227

my work at literary gatherings, all the Latvians would exclaim in surprise, 'It can't be! Poems like these couldn't be published in a Soviet journal!' They couldn't believe it. Uldis translated some of these poems, but could not get them published in the Latvian journal, *Atmoda*. I was, of course, criticised for 'pessimism', 'abstract humanism' and 'formalism'. It was then that I understood that if my poetry was published, it wasn't just thanks to Aylisli at the journal *Azerbaijan* or Anar at the almanac *Gobustan*. There was a higher power at work, encouraging it all.

I remember the day Solzhenitsyn was sent into exile I got very drunk. Some Moscow film makers had come to Baku and I proposed a toast to the disgraced writer in their presence. There were 30 people at the banquet. Of course, Heydar Aliyev was informed, but there were no noticeable consequences except that, later on, he said to me jokingly, 'You definitely let yourself go there!' And that was that. I want the KGB archives to be opened at last because I am certain there won't even be 100 documents on writers down there. Heydar Aliyev simply didn't look at them and he did not allow others to do so either. So, when he said, 'I was the greatest dissident among you!', he was absolutely right.'

In 1994, a collection of classified Politburo documents came to light in Moscow, concerning the writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, entitled *Kreml'skiy Samosud* [Kremlin mob rule]. Among others, there was a memo from the interior minister, Nikolai Shchelokov, to the general secretary, Leonid Brezhnev:

"In the Solzhenitsyn affair," Shchelokov wrote, "we are repeating the same grave mistakes we made with Boris Pasternak. Solzhenitsyn has become a powerful figure in a political struggle. This is a reality we cannot ignore. We should neither hush this up, nor tiptoe around it ... When viewed objectively, Solzhenitsyn is prodigiously talented. From this point of view, he is of unconditional interest to the Soviet authorities. It would be greatly to our advantage if his pen served the interests of the people. Solzhenitsyn must be given an apartment immediately. He must be registered and brought out into the open. One of the better-known executive workers should talk to him and wash away the bitter residue that all those attacks against him couldn't have failed to leave. *We must fight for Solzhenitsyn, not cast him aside* [my emphasis]. It is time our publishing houses understood that we must no longer reject literary works, but transform them. In this case, we must not publicly punish our enemies, but actively embrace them ..."¹

¹ A.V. Korotkov, S.A. Melchin, & A.S. Stepanov, ed., *Kreml'skiy Samosud Sekretnye Dokumenty Politburo o Pisatelye Solzhenitsyne* [Kremlin mob rule: secret Politburo documents concerning the writer Solzhenitsyn] (Moscow:1994), 169-172.

In spite of the great interest in this note shown by Leonid Brezhnev, the Kremlin "strategists" chose the least successful option as far as the distinguished writer was concerned. He was neither offered a residence permit in Moscow, nor allowed a cooperative flat paid for with his own money. Solzhenitsyn was exiled from the Soviet Union in 1974. The event provoked violent anti-Soviet hysteria in the West. I am unable to say what Heydar Aliyev thought of Solzhenitsyn's work, but he insisted on dealing with writers in precisely the way that Nikolai Shchelokov recommended, and that is a fact. He preferred not to drive them out of the country, but chose "actively to embrace them" by granting them high honours, awards, apartments, dachas, etc.

From a conversation with Elchin:

"The greatest, and often invisible, defender of the Azerbaijani Men of the Sixties was Heydar Aliyev. He was behind "The Trinity" on everyone's lips in the 1960s and 1970s, namely, Anar, Elchin and Akram Aylisli. Aylisli now declares with pride, 'I took liberties in my prose. I published things in the journal *Azerbaijan* that had previously been banned, etc.' But the question remains, was that all you were doing? Could you have taken such liberties if Imran Gasimov hadn't been behind you, and Heydar Aliyev behind him? The famous Russian critic, Lev Anninski, once asked, 'What's going on in that republic of yours? You are printing seditious things in your journals!' It is true that many of the works we published in *Azerbaijan* with Aliyev's silent consent could never have appeared in Moscow journals. They would have been considered dissident literature."

Many writers, largely of the older generation, who were suspicious of the new currents in poetry and prose and offended that they had been forced back into the margins of the literary process by the young, considered it their sacred duty to inform the Central Committee about the goings on in artistic circles. This was the case especially if one of the young writers had rocked what was, in their opinion, "the foundations".

Many of my interviewees recalled a row resulting from the publication of Mowlud Suleymany's story, *Dayirman*, or *The Mill*. Published in 1979 in Azerbaijan, it immediately became an object of attack with some people even calling it anti-Soviet. Letters were sent and those "higher-up" were informed. That same autumn in the Azerbaijani Writers' Union, *The Mill* was evaluated and essentially, put on trial. The CPA Central Committee could have made a special ruling because of row that had blown up round by this short story and, at the very least, permanently barred the author from his favourite occupation. Heydar Aliyev resolved the situation himself. When he had read the story, he telephoned the first secretary of the Writers' Union and asked him to protect the "talented author from unnecessary persecution".

"I found out later," Movlud Suleymanly recalled, "that Aliyev received my opponents. One of them recounted this story:

'We entered Heydar Aliyev's office, armed with a copy of *Dayirman*.'

'What is it?' he asked us.' Comrade Aliyev, this story contains slander against the regime, defamation and malicious and improper language!' 'What improper language?' the Heydar Aliyev was immediately interested.

They had underlined the 'uncivilised' words and phrases in red pencil in advance of the meeting and had even scrupulously counted exactly how many times the author had used slanderous expressions in the story: a total of 73! The first secretary leafed through the magazine, cast his eye over some of the places that had been underlined and suddenly laughed loudly, 'Well, comrades, in that case the Russians ought to take Sholokhov to court.' And that is how it was. Heydar Aliyev literally saved me from the clutches of reactionaries.'

Heydar Aliyev had an interesting relationship with the former president, Abulfaz Elchibey, leader of the Popular Front. In his book, *I Said that this Regime Would Fall*, Elchibey discusses his relationship with Aliyev sincerely and in some detail:

"My belief that Heydar Aliyev could never lead Azerbaijan was based on an idea that he had not received a sound education (or so I thought at the time), attending the KGB Academy instead. I confess that I was not well informed about his level of education at the time ... I realised later on that he had a very sharp memory and was, in fact, highly skilled. When I was in prison I also opposed him, maintaining my negative feelings towards him even two years after my release from prison. It was only later, when I listened to some of his speeches and observed some of his political moves that I came to see him as a very reasonable man and a powerful personality. It was as a powerful personality that I accepted him. Even if I did lead a propaganda campaign against him for six or seven years, I made up for it with another six or seven years praising him to the skies. I would be the first to acknowledge that my previous opinion of him was mistaken."

I believe that this confession made by the ex-president, then at the peak of his popularity, means a great deal. It inspires in me, personally, a great respect for this multifaceted figure, leader of the Azerbaijani National Democratic movement and the only real Azerbaijani dissident.

THE KGB VERSUS ABULFAZ ALIYEV

Now that I have quoted excerpts from an interview with the ex-president of Azerbaijan, Abulfaz Elchibey, I should attempt to determine what exactly happened in the mid-1970s and why Abulfaz Elchibey ended up in a stone quarry instead of a university department.

A fairly notorious court case took place in Baku in 1975. It was unique in that, for almost the first time in the post-Stalinist era, a member of the Azerbaijani intelligentsia found himself in the dock on account of his political views rather than any criminal misdemeanour.

Abulfaz Aliyev (he would become Elchibey 15 years later), the future president of Azerbaijan, graduated from the country's most prestigious Oriental Studies department at the State University of Azerbaijan and for several years worked as a translator in Egypt during the construction of the Aswan Dam. Later, after he had returned to Azerbaijan, he was invited by a professor to work at the history faculty at his alma mater. The new lecturer's students doted on him. Talking to him fired them up, stirring a spirit of rebellion in their young minds and inspiring in them thoughts of freedom. Soon the history faculty had its first underground student group, the intellectual inspiration behind which was, of course, the future leader of the Popular Front. The students wrote papers, read them out to their circle and then held long, heated debates. Shortly afterwards similar groups appeared at several other universities.

In short, the "disease" spread like wild fire, something that caused the authorities considerable concern. Furthermore, these underground groups openly discussed topics that were strictly prohibited at that time, such as the development of a national consciousness, ways in which Northern Azerbaijan could gain independence, secession from the Soviet Union and nationalist movements in Southern (Iranian) Azerbaijan. KGB reports about these dissident students and their teacher even found their way to Moscow whence an order came to destroy the underground groups and make an example of their organisers.

Elchibey was "worked on" from 1973. He was put under observation and information about his meetings and conversations gathered. His official file was so thick it was fit to burst! His case was then passed on to the chairman of the Azerbaijani KGB, Major-General Vitaly Krasilnikov. He was adamant: Abulfaz Elchibey should be arrested.

He was accused of spreading nationalist propaganda in his lectures, of expressing negative views about the way in which the Soviet state and society were organised, of condemning the attitude of state institutions to the young rural population, of having a poor knowledge of Russian and of trying to prove that the history of Azerbaijan had been falsified. In short, he had trampled upon the very principles of the Soviet system and had thrown the party and its politics into doubt.

¹ Elchibey, 37

The future president of Azerbaijan was faced with three years in prison for promoting nationalistic propaganda and inciting ethnic hatred. A compromise could have been reached if Elchibey had sincerely admitted his guilt, promised to put an end to his activities and limit himself to the "preventative measures" to which many members of the artistic and scholarly intelligentsia were subjected at that time.

The young lecturer was arrested and underwent daily interrogations. Elchibey did not deny anything and admitted everything of which he was accused in writing. However, according to A. Selimzadeh, the investigator, he did not give away any of his students or colleagues with whom he had had anti-Soviet conversations.

Meanwhile, the equivalent Soviet KGB directorate in Moscow had been following the progress of the investigation very closely and some of their staff left for Baku. An Armenian by the name of Robert Uluntsev was the chief of the investigative department of the Soviet KGB in Azerbaijan. He expressed his interest in taking part in Elchibey's interrogations several times, but the Azerbaijani KGB talked him out of it. They had studied Aliyev and knew that he would not say anything in the presence of an Armenian Colonel and would, perhaps, even incriminate himself. Krasilnikov thought that Abulfaz could be tried under Article 63 of the Azerbaijani Criminal Code, "Anti-Soviet Agitation and Propaganda". This was a weighty piece of legislation carrying a prison sentence of up to seven years. He would, moreover, have to serve his sentence in Russia, in the special labour camps. Selimzadeh and Aziz Rasulov, the lead investigator insisted, however, that there were no grounds for trying Abulfaz under this article. Ultimately, during a meeting with General Abbas Zamanov, deputy chairman of the Azerbaijani KGB, members of the investigative committee suggested that the case should be dropped, that Abulfaz Aliyev should be freed and that three months in custody was enough, particularly when he had admitted to everything. The other deputy chairman, Ziya Yusifzadeh, agreed and a report was sent to Krasilnikov. He thought for a while and said, "I will not object, but I myself should have a talk with Abulfaz Aliyev."

Selimzadeh recalls that he "primed" Abulfaz the evening before his conversation with the chairman, telling him what to say and how to say it. "At the end you will say that you are guilty as charged and that you were wrong. Then tomorrow you will be free."

When Elchibey was led into his large office, Krasilnikov frowned. Selimzadeh immediately sensed that something was wrong. He asked if he could replace the interpreter because Abulfaz had a poor command of Russian and might say something that he did not mean. Krasilnikov replied that he preferred to speak with him directly and try to understand what he said.

First of all, he asked, "What did you say about Russians?" This question incensed Elchibey. He said that he had never said anything bad about the Russian people. He had only spoken about people who sit in luxurious palaces and behave as if they were masters of the universe.

"Taking advantage of the hospitality and simple good nature of my people you have robbed them of their riches while also treating them with contempt. You are very different from most Russians. There is a chasm between you and the Russian peasant or the Russian worker. You have come here with just one aim in mind – the implementation of policies from Moscow."

They took the future president of Azerbaijan away. Krasilnikov looked at Selimzadeh and said, "We cannot even begin to discuss the possibility that this case should be closed. All we can do is to send him to a correctional labour colony for a long time."

Selimzadeh tried to object but Krasilnikov exploded, "Go and do as you are told. Draw up his indictment and don't forget that I'd have stuck him with Article 63."

The case was finally heard in court under two articles: Article 188 of the Criminal Code (Slander against the Soviet State and social system) and Article 67 (Incitement of Ethnic Hatred). Komsomol activists, students and lecturers were invited to the open trial, which took place in the Supreme Court of Azerbaijan. Elchibey acted calmly, did not make any seditious speeches and answered every question with the words "guilty as charged". Selimzadeh was even surprised by his strange "humility". The prosecutor asked for a sentence of three years for the accused and it was granted. He was sent to serve his sentence in the Garadagh correctional labour colony.

Many questions were raised regarding Elchibey's arrest and subsequent conviction. Why was Elchibey the only person to be convicted and why did the remaining members of the underground movements manage to avoid prosecution and even expulsion from university? And how was it that, after his release, Elchibey managed to return to his work at the Institute of Manuscripts at the Academy of Sciences (he served a little more than one of the three years to which he was sentenced)? This was very unusual by the standards of the day when Russian dissidents usually went abroad after serving their sentence or resorted to begging, owing to the fact that it was impossible to find work in their chosen profession. Clearly Heydar Aliyev managed to persuade Moscow not to continue the political repressions and spill as little blood as possible.

Earlier on, I quoted a few lines from an interview with Elchibey, who maintained his deep respect for Heydar Aliyev and retained it throughout his life. Elchibey's party comrades said that the portraits of two people always hung on the wall of his flat, that of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and that of Heydar Aliyev.

“WE DID NOT RESTRICT THE ACTIVITIES OF THE INTELLIGENTSIA”

These words were spoken by Heydar Aliyev, who, in the interview with Karaulov mentioned earlier, also recalled that:

“The Azerbaijani intelligentsia had complete freedom to do as they wished. Writers, artists and composers, very different one from another, were free to choose their styles and genres. We never interfered in these matters.”

If we remove individual conflicts between members of the intelligentsia and party officials from the equation, then Heydar Aliyev's words can be believed with confidence. When it came down to art, however, his tastes were more traditional. He enjoyed and appreciated realist painting and was apparently sceptical of the avant-garde fashionable with the young. I use the term “apparently” since he never criticised a painting adversely, even if he actively disliked it. Tahir Salahov notes that, when he visited an exhibition, Aliyev would – in the worst-case scenario – simply walk past a picture rather than stopping to look at it. He never publicly expressed his distaste for the personal style or choice of genre of any artist whatsoever.

Azad Sharif described that, when Heydar Aliyev first spoke to the head of the cultural section of the Central Committee he outlined his main task, which was to further the development of the talented creative youth that was beginning to make its mark and was already coming up behind the more seasoned artists.

Movlud Suleymanly remembers that:

“The 6th Congress of Azerbaijani Writers took place in 1976 with Heydar Aliyev in attendance. This was the first congress in which my young colleagues and I took part. During his speech Heydar Aliyev looked to the side of the presidium where Suleyman Rustam and other denizens of Azerbaijani letters sat and asked, ‘Suleyman, I read your poems in my textbooks when I was still at secondary school. Since then half a century has passed and your poems are still in school textbooks. This is laudable. But has there really not been a single new poet in 50 years? Where are the young ones?’ The thundering applause, which greeted Aliyev's words, still rings in my ears to this day.”

* * *

From the 5th Congress of the Azerbaijan Writers' Union onwards, Heydar Aliyev attended all the writers' meetings, giving long speeches in the beautiful Azerbaijani tongue. Many writers remember the question and answer session at the 6th Congress where, *inter alia*, the issue of moving the remains of the great Azerbaijani poet, Muhammed Fuzuli, from the Iraqi city of Karbala to Azerbaijan came up. Heydar Aliyev told the senior members of the Writers' Union:

"You brought this matter to my attention. But, please bear in mind that there are certain things that should be sorted out in advance. You are perfectly capable of making your wishes known. If I bring up this issue, it immediately takes on a different character and the initiative is lost. You need to take action!"

Later, in an interview with the journalist Elmira Ahmadova Heydar Aliyev recalled their attempts:

"We received information that the authorities in the Iraqi city of Karbala had destroyed Fuzuli's grave in the cemetery in which he was buried to facilitate the reconstruction of the cemetery. They had exhumed his remains and were keeping his ashes somewhere else.¹ This really upset me. With the help of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs we sent letters to the appropriate places. There was no response. I summoned Suleyman Rustam, Rasul Rza, Mirza Ibrahimov and Nabi Khazri and asked them to settle the affair. At that time we had just opened a consulate in Iraq. We were told that it would be very difficult to raise the issue at international level, but we, nonetheless, sent a letter to the president of Iraq, Hasan al-Bakr. Soon after, the Iran-Iraq War began, however, and the situation became somewhat complicated. Despite all our efforts, we did not manage to settle the transfer of Fuzuli's ashes to Azerbaijan. I think that if our intelligentsia and in particular, its more prominent members, had applied themselves more actively to this problem we might have been able to sort it out."²

Nonetheless, Heydar Aliyev always spoke with understandable pride about how he managed to do the impossible when it came to searching out the remains of Huseyn Javid, the famous Azerbaijani poet and playwright, in deepest Siberia, transferring them to Azerbaijan and having them buried in Nakhchivan. Despite the fact that in the 1970s attitudes towards the imprisoned poet were beginning to change, and despite the fact that his plays were being staged once more, his name was still tainted with charges of "nationalism" and "Pan-Turkism". Heydar Aliyev's opponents took advantage of his noble attempt to immortalise the memory of the great Azerbaijani poet to settle political scores with him. Elchin noted that at his last meeting with writers in 1982 – before he left for Moscow – Aliyev recalled the reburial of Huseyn Javid's remains and said:

"If only you knew how many opponents there were to this idea and how many anonymous letters I received! Even Leonid Brezhnev reproached me once, saying, 'here you are trying to do something for your people by bringing the ashes of a famous writer to your country while your fellow Azerbaijanis are inundating us with anonymous letters and calling your efforts anti-Soviet'."

¹ On 1st August 1994 at a meeting of the State Commission for Fuzuli's 500th Anniversary, Heydar Aliyev explained the rationale behind the repatriation of the great poet somewhat differently: "A new road was being built as part of a plan to redevelop the town of Karbala. The road was to go through the cemetery where Fuzuli was buried. The poet's remains were therefore exhumed and transferred to a mosque somewhere else."

² *Ulduz*, No. 6 (1990), 76

When he was first secretary of the CPA Central Committee, Heydar Aliyev devoted a lot of time to immortalising the memory of other famous writers and artists. He felt quite rightly that this would facilitate the development of a national consciousness and kindle a renewed interest in Azerbaijani history, literature and spiritual values. During his time as leader of the Azerbaijan Republic, museums were established in Baku in the houses belonging to Samed Vurghun, Jafar Jabbarli, Uzeyir Hajibeyov and Bul-Bul and plans were drawn up for yet more museums to be created in the houses of Jalil Mammadguluzadeh, Mammed Said Ordubadi and Muslim Magomayev. After Heydar Aliyev's departure for Moscow, these decisions were shelved and efforts to preserve the memory of the greatest proponents of Azerbaijani culture were only renewed after he had returned to Azerbaijan.

On Heydar Aliyev's insistence, the Central Committee later issued a decree that local history museums should be set up in every region. Fattah Heydarov notes that:

"This was an important step, since, in addition to new towns and developments, we also have very ancient ones – Sheki, Beylagan, Ganja, Gabala, Nakhchivan and Ordubad, for instance. Their history goes back thousands of years! Establishing local history museums in these towns created new jobs as well as bringing together many pieces of great historical importance. Priceless archaeological finds and ancient objects bought from local people are preserved in these museums to this day. It was Heydar Aliyev who prevented the mass exodus of our antiquities abroad."

The 7th volume of *The History of Azerbaijan* states that 87 new museums were opened during the 1970s and 1980s and that this number had grown to 124 by 1990. On Heydar Aliyev's initiative, The Museum of Azerbaijani History sent exhibitions to Tokyo, Budapest, Paris, Madrid, New York and London and the museum itself became a member of the UNESCO International Council of Museums.¹

"Carpet-making has an extremely important role in our history and is a key feature of our national identity" wrote the politician, Ramiz Mehdiyev: "However, because of the rather negative attitude to this particular form of applied art prevalent at the time, there was not a single carpet museum in Azerbaijan. Heydar was very concerned about this although it lay outside his official remit. Thus, on April 25th 1972, the official opening ceremony for the Museum of Azerbaijani Carpets and Applied Art took place."²

Heydar Aliyev paid particular attention to promoting the country's cultural legacy and encouraging a renewed interest in the arts amongst the local population. During the 1970s, in Baku, the Opera and Ballet Theatre and the Azerbaijan Drama Theatre were restored, and the Theatre of Musical

¹ Ismayil, 232-233

² *Bakinskiy Rabochiy*, 23rd May (2003)

Comedy and Young People's Theatre were built from scratch. The theatres in Sheki, Sumgayit and Aghdam were restored and the theatre in Lankaran reopened. The Azerbaijani performing arts flourished during this period.

The Azerbaijan Drama Theatre marked its centenary on 31st May 1974 at the Lenin Palace. Heydar Aliyev invited the cream of Azerbaijani theatre to the celebration and gave a rousing speech about the ways in which the first professional theatre in the East was preparing for the future.

The Azerbaijan State Conservatoire and the Samed Vurghun Russian State Drama Theatre had celebrated their 50th anniversary two years previously, in 1972. Heydar Aliyev loved celebrations and promoted them across the country, always with a certain élan. All these events served to promote Azerbaijani culture and brought numerous writers and artists additional privileges; some were given flats and others received special state awards. All this raised the status of people working in the arts as well as improving their material position.

Heydar Aliyev was responsible for the construction of memorials to famous Azerbaijani writers and poets as well as building art centres for writers, artists and composers and restoring architectural buildings. During the 1970s, memorials were also put up to Azerbaijani soldiers who had given their lives in the Second World War. We find it difficult to imagine today how all this deepened the feeling of national awareness. Ten years later, at the end of the 1980s, with the advent of one of the most powerful national democratic movements in the post-Soviet era, Mikhail Gorbachev was to suspect that it was the former Politburo member, Heydar Aliyev, who had kindled the flame of revolution in the Republic of Azerbaijan. The general secretary's supposition was, in fact, very close to the truth in that the leaders of the Popular Front were teenagers and young adults during the cultural renaissance of the 1970s and early 1980s when an appreciation of one's people, its history, literature and art became state policy in Azerbaijan. In this sense, the leaders of the national democratic movement were indeed Heydar Aliyev's "children".

* * *

Owing to his profound appreciation of the composer, Uzeyir Hajibeyov's musical genius Heydar Aliyev arranged for his 90th birthday celebrations to take place at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow. He honoured other famous Azerbaijani musicians too, including Gara Garayev, Fikrat Amirov, Niyazi and Rashid Behbudov. Heydar Aliyev celebrated cultural landmarks even at the beginning of his time as first secretary. These included the 600th anniversary of the birth of the great Azerbaijani poet and thinker, Imadaddin Nasimi,¹ the 100th anniversary

¹ It is not common knowledge that, when he was in Syria in the 1970s leading a government delegation, Heydar Aliyev expressed a wish to visit the city of Aleppo, where Nasimi was buried. Syrian President Hafez al-Assad personally sanctioned the change in the delegation's itinerary. After a long search Heydar Aliyev was shown the great poet's grave in a municipal cemetery. The grave was humble, but well tended. Heydar Aliyev made the acquaintance of the grave keeper, who turned out to be a descendant of the poet.

of the Azerbaijan Drama Theatre and birthday celebrations in honour of Uzeyir Hajibeyov, Muslim Magomayev, Mikhail Sholokhov, Mammed Said Ordubadi, Sergei Esenin, Samed Vurghun and Ashig Alasgar. These birthday celebrations were usually celebrated in two capitals – Baku and Moscow.

The Azerbaijani representative at the Union of Soviet Writers in the 1970s, the writer and translator, Azer Mustafazadeh, told me about a curious episode. The preparations for the 600th anniversary of Imadaddin Nasimi's birth in Moscow were being discussed and a meeting was held in the Azerbaijani Permanent Representative's office and attended by Heydar Aliyev himself. He asked where the celebrations were going to be held. In order to raise the profile of the event, it was decided that it should be held at the Bolshoi Theatre. The Soviet Minister of Culture, rejected the Azerbaijani request on the grounds that all the tickets had already been sold for the performance previously destined for the Bolshoi on that day and had been sold for cash. Heydar Aliyev picked up the phone and called Demichev himself. The latter dug in his heels: all the tickets had been sold and that was an end of the matter! At this point Aliyev asked the members of the organising committee to leave the room. Five minutes later he invited everyone back in again and told the Azerbaijani Minister for Culture, Zakir Baghirov, to go to the Bolshoi and finalise the details:

"We knew that he had defied the Soviet Minister of Culture", said Musatafazadeh, "And that he had called someone higher up, probably Suslov, or, perhaps even the general secretary himself. He was capable of confronting even the most powerful Moscow officials if it was in the interests of Azerbaijan."

Not content with the Soviet Union only, during the 1970s Heydar Aliyev, somewhat exceptionally, extended the range of Azerbaijan's cultural contacts and attempted to acquaint various countries across the world with his country. In October 1977, an exhibition opened in Japan detailing Azerbaijani historical and cultural traditions, while a festival of Azerbaijani culture took place in the Italian city of Naples. A similar festival was held in Britain in October 1978 and concerts by great Azerbaijani musicians led by Rashid Behbudov were given in Switzerland. Azerbaijani cultural festivals were also held to acclaim in France, Denmark and Portugal.

* * *

Heydar Aliyev had a great affinity with people involved in the arts and made an effort to understand their problems, antagonisms and disagreements. Creative people are capricious and sensitive: they often have difficult personalities and are prone to irritability. Their moods are changeable, like a child's. Many people today recall how Heydar Aliyev tried to make peace between the leading lights of the Azerbaijani musical scene, the conductor, Niyazi, and the composers, Gara Garayev and Fikrat Amirov.

“Heydar Aliyev did everything he could,” said Muslim Magomayev. “He telephoned them and summoned them for a heart-to-heart, all three together and each one of them individually. ‘I beg you not to discredit our culture’, he said, trying to make peace. They came to the meeting, nodded, agreed, smiled and promised to make friends, finally leaving Heydar Aliyev’s office together and then ... went their separate ways. These great geniuses did not make it up and he continued to worry about it.”¹

In 1973, Heydar Aliyev decided to put an end to the strife between the composers once and for all and invited them to his country residence at Zaghulba on a Sunday. “I spent all day with the three of them; it was a very important meeting. After this, the relations between them were significantly better,”² he related.

It was not only Azerbaijani artists in whom Aliyev took an active interest. It is not well known, for instance, that the great cellist, Mstislav Rostropovich, and the president of Azerbaijan became friends during the 1970s. After Rostropovich and his partner, Galina Vishnevskaya, had welcomed the disgraced Solzhenitsyn to their home and Rostropovich sent an open letter to the main newspapers in his defence, life began to get more difficult for him. He was prevented from performing in Moscow and Leningrad, his trips abroad were cancelled and he was not even allowed into Ukraine.

“It was at this difficult time that Rostropovich arrived in Baku, a favourite city where the people were dear to his heart,” wrote the famous Azerbaijani journalist, Svetlana Mirzoyeva, in her book. “He was welcomed with open arms. He treated the citizens of Baku to wonderful concerts that included music by a variety of composers from a variety of different eras. Rostropovich gave ten concerts in Baku over the course of five days.

His devoted friends made sure that he had a complete rest and enabled him to forget the intrigues he was experiencing in Moscow for a little while. Heydar Aliyev, the then leader of Azerbaijan, he knew well at first hand what was happening to him in Moscow. However, he gave into his sense of justice and his respect for the cellist’s art and not only did he not ban the concerts (as was the case in Ukraine, for instance), but even gave instructions to a trusted friend – the director Niyazi – that the discredited musician should be paid the utmost attention. It required considerable strength of character to fly in the face of omnipotent Moscow, which was so adamantly against the Rostropoviches!³

When the two famous musicians returned to Moscow 16 years later, many of their friends apologised and repented and the Bolshoi Theatre organised a celebration to mark 45 years of Galina Vishnevskaya’s career. Azerbaijan had no cause to repent and, when Heydar Aliyev was invited to Rostropovich’s 70th

¹ Muslim Magomayev, *Lyubov Moya – Melodiya* [Melody is my Love] (Moscow: 1999), 238

² Heydar Aliyev, “Guarding cultural heritage”, vol. 2, 212
³ Mirzoyeva, 144

birthday party in Paris by Rostropovich and the French president, Jacques Chirac, he reminded Rostropovich of his promise to visit his historical homeland. Rostropovich soon arrived in Baku and, delighted by the heartfelt welcome, promised to come back every year to give special master classes. He fulfilled his promise and gave master classes as well as concerts at the Republic Palace, the country’s main concert hall. He offered humanitarian aid and supported the Azerbaijani medical system and, thanks to his influence, a few years later the Japanese government offered a grant of several hundred thousand dollars to be spent on new instruments for the Uzeyir Hajibeyov Azerbaijan State Conservatoire. Baku repaid the debt: a music school and the street in central Baku where the great cellist was born were named after the Rostropoviches, *père et fils*. The flat where Leopold Vitoldovich’s family lived was turned into a museum. Rostropovich received two high state honours awarded to him by Heydar Aliyev personally, namely, the Order of Glory and the Istiglal Order.

Heydar Aliyev thought highly of all leading musicians, but had a special almost fatherly relationship with Muslim Magomayev. While I was working on this book, I met the famous singer and we spent almost two hours talking.

“Heydar Aliyev was like a father to me,” Magomayev told me. “He became almost like a relative particularly after the death of my uncle and, indeed, replaced all my relatives who had died. He often said, ‘You are like a son to me, Muslim’.”

In 1971, Heydar Aliyev awarded the 29-yr-old singer the title of National Artist of Azerbaijan. He was also awarded the Order of the Red Banner of Labour in the same year. No one in the Soviet Union had ever been awarded such a prestigious honour at that age.

* * *

Unlike the party superiors, who disliked and were unable to talk to the intelligentsia, especially writers, Heydar Aliyev found their company refreshing. For instance, he visited the Union of Soviet Writers twice; it had its headquarters at Vorovskaya Street in the centre of Moscow. He also delivered very lively speeches about Azerbaijan’s activities and answered insightful questions from the country’s leading writers.

From Azad Sharif’s story:

“The meeting took place in the September or October of 1971, in the main hall belonging to the Union of Soviet Writers. It was crammed full and writers came, who had not made an appearance there for years. Leonid Leonov, the “patriarch” of Soviet literature, who had not visited Moscow for 20 years, came especially to listen to him.

Heydar Aliyev stood by the grand piano and spoke for two hours without any notes. Silence reigned in the room. He spoke about the struggle against corruption, about how he was improving agriculture, what plans he had for industry, and then about the situation facing writers and the intelligentsia."

The writer and translator Azer Mustafazadeh has this to say of the same occasion:

"Heydar Aliyev spoke very clearly about the fight against narrow minded negativity. The audience was in raptures and Valentin Kataev proposed that Aliyev should become a member of the Union. He jokingly declined this honour, saying that there was already one Central Committee first secretary amidst their ranks – Sharaf Rashidov. One of the secretaries then said, 'Comrade Aliyev, unlike you, he has never been to the Union.' 'Really?' Aliyev replied in surprise. 'I will telephone him and tell him that he ought to put this right.'" A week later Azer Mustafazadeh saw Sharaf Rashidov in the corridors of the Writers' Union.

From a conversation with the writer Elchin:

"I was always surprised that Heydar Aliyev, who was born and brought up deep in the provinces and who worked at the KGB for many years – an organisation remote from art and creative activities – was such an acute literary thinker. I remember, in 1976, the 70th anniversary of Samed Vurghun was celebrated in Moscow and, afterwards, a small reception had been organised for the guests. Only about 30 or so attended, but those who did included 'living classics' like Leonid Leonov, the 'literary generals' of that period, Georgy Markov, Aleksandr Chakovsky and Nikolai Gribachev, and the leaders of Russian literary society, both official and unofficial. Heydar Aliyev also attended this reception and his presence restrained the big brother-like arrogance characteristic of many of the 'literary generals'. Consequently – to coin Heydar Aliyev's expression – their arrogance burst like 'soap bubbles' ... This alone is testimony to his qualities. It was impossible for anyone to show off there or to boast about their future Politburo membership just because leading functionaries of the Soviet government were present. The guests had simply to be themselves and to demonstrate their natural wit to show everyone what kind of place they were in."

On 12th June 1981, at the 7th Writers' Union Congress, Heydar Aliyev gave a speech in front of the Azerbaijani intelligentsia, with its most memorable passage relating to Southern Azerbaijan:

"Authors from Southern Azerbaijan work productively as members of the Union of Soviet Writers." He continued, "The management of this artistic union should, therefore, pay them considerable attention, promoting their works as widely as possible both at home and abroad. It should strengthen its literary ties with Southern Azerbaijan and develop a wide-ranging network of cultural contacts. It should also share our abundant artistic and aesthetic achievements with other writers."

Heydar Aliyev later commented on this speech remarking:

"When I appeared at the congress of the Union of Azerbaijani writers, the ban on the words 'Southern Azerbaijan' was lifted for the first time ... Until then it had been forbidden to print the words 'Southern Azerbaijan'. Some people were of the opinion that it might cause the relationship between the Soviet Union and Iran to deteriorate. But I was of the opinion that we should maintain close ties with poets from Southern Azerbaijan. At that congress, we chose Balas Azeroglu [a political refugee from Southern Azerbaijan] as the secretary of the Union of Soviet Writers and gave him the title of People's Poet."¹

It is not generally known that, while he was still working as the head of the Azerbaijani KGB's 2nd Directorate at the end of the 1950s, the young Heydar Aliyev personally set off to distant, snow-covered Saransk and brought Muhammad Biriya, a famous poet from Southern Azerbaijan, back to Baku. He had fled to the Soviet Union to escape from the Shah's repressive regime and, in 1949, he was given a long-term sentence. Strange though it may seem, a great poet who rejected all forms of totalitarianism and the state security agent who represented this very regime, enjoyed each other's company. They would often converse at length. Heydar Aliyev always looked out for the eccentric poet, eventually helping him return to his homeland.

In December 1982, while bidding farewell to Azerbaijani writers before going to work in Moscow, Heydar Aliyev spoke about Southern Azerbaijan once again, this time more frankly than before. The writer Elchin, who was present at the time, recalled later on:

"I remember that he spoke about the future unity of divided Azerbaijan, and that he spoke as if the country were an independent state. He said things that were startling in the context of those times, for example: 'I received an American journalist and he asked me about Southern Azerbaijan. I thought that if I replied as a party leader, then what I said would go straight back to the Politburo and elicit an undesirable reaction. So, come what may, I said what I thought, namely, that we are one people split in two and that, at some point, justice will be done.' I don't need to stress the significance of such statements within the context of the period and the importance of Heydar Aliyev's position."²

The close contact maintained between Heydar Aliyev and Iranian political refugees and his participation in the foreign activities of the Iranian People's Party will be discussed in a separate chapter.

Heydar Aliyev worked hard to obtain Moscow's approval for the Nariman Narimanov centenary celebrations. The anniversary of the death of one of

¹ *Ulduz*, No. 6 (1990), 78

² Elchin, *Litsom k Litsu s Istorijey* [Face to face with history], *Zerkalo*, 10th December (2005)

the leading lights of the CPSU Central Committee, a prominent party and government figure, was actually in 1970, although the celebrations only took place two years later.

"You may well ask why," reminisced the first secretary in an interview with the reporter Elmira Ahmadova. "Because its realisation required two years' struggle and because Narimanov was branded as a 'nationalist'. Armenian nationalists whispered behind our backs, working on the Central Committee so that they believed that Narimanov had made grave errors during his time and that these errors stemmed from his nationalistic theories, leading to the conclusion that he did not deserve a centenary celebration."

Putting up a statue to Narimanov became a complicated matter! I visited Mikhail Suslov and Leonid Brezhnev twice and they had completely different information about Narimanov. Ajdar Ibrahimov and Isa Huseynov made a film devoted to Narimanov at Mosfilm. The film was shown in Moscow before my time and, after Armenians complained, some important officials at the Central Committee banned it. They didn't allow us either to celebrate his anniversary or to put up a statue. After considerable efforts on my part, I finally got my way."¹

On 6th June 1972 Heydar Aliyev gave a speech at the unveiling of the statue. The bronze of the statue blended in successfully with the background of South Soviet Square with its picturesque view over the Azerbaijani capital. Thus, at incredible cost, and sometimes in spite of his open resistance to political pressure from the Kremlin (Heydar Aliyev even brought Narimanov's famous letters to Lenin to prove his point), justice was done and the name and deeds of "Doctor Narimanov" were immortalised in his homeland.

In an article, Ramiz Mehdiyev remembers another very noteworthy anniversary:

"In 1969, certain people falsified the history of Azerbaijan by insinuating that the opening of Baku State University coincided with the establishment of Soviet power in our country. They wanted to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the university in 1970 so that it corresponded with the anniversary of the establishment of Soviet power in Azerbaijan. Heydar Aliyev addresses this question in one of his speeches, 'This was ridiculous since we had already commemorated the university's 50th anniversary on November 1st 1969. I myself was present at that ceremony ...'

During this celebration, for the first time in their lives, many people were able to reflect on the goals and intentions of the people who created the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic at the turn of the century. In the Soviet academic circles of the time it was fashionable to discredit the ADR, but it transpired that Baku State University had been founded by these very people and that it was they who had laid the foundations for higher education in our country."²

¹ Ulduz, No. 6 (1990), 398

² Bakinskiy Rabochiy, 23rd May (1993)

"SHIPS OF EVERY FLAG, WELCOME!"¹

In July 1975, plans were afoot for a Days of Soviet Literature festival in Azerbaijan with discussions taking place at the secretariat of the Union of Soviet Writers; it was scheduled for October. The event was to be a truly grand affair. Nothing like it had ever been undertaken in the Soviet Union on a similar scale before.

Heydar Aliyev gave a long speech and talked about the economic, scientific and cultural developments in Azerbaijan. He went on to mention the struggle to promote "the eradication of any departure from socialist law" in the republic and outlined the events planned for the festival. These included team excursions by writers to various regions of the Azerbaijan Republic, even to the famous "Oil Rocks", as well as meetings with workers from schools and universities taking part in the event, a celebration to mark Sergei Yesenin's anniversary, and the opening of a museum in Baku in celebration of the distinguished Russian poet. The events included a poetry evening by the statue of Sabir, an exhibition of works of Soviet literature and a book fair.

On 2nd October 1975, the gala opening took place at Lenin Palace with writers and poets from all over the Soviet Union in attendance; there were 1,100 people! The interest in this event was so great that men of letters arrived in Baku from as far afield as Bulgaria, Hungary, the GDR, Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia, France, Portugal and Japan, but the Russian delegation was, understandably, the largest.

Heydar Aliyev delivered an outstanding speech at the opening ceremony. Although, of course, it reflected the realities of the time – party literature, Socialist Realism, the triumph of Lenin's ideas on nationalism etc. – Azerbaijan was of central importance especially in terms of its history, both past and present. The first secretary enumerated the great Azerbaijani poets, quoted lines from the works of Nizami and Samed Vurghun and spoke about the industrial, agricultural and cultural achievements of Soviet Azerbaijan. In this way, he was able to concentrate the audience's attention on his country, increasing Azerbaijan's prestige and authority within, as well as beyond, Soviet Russia.

He used contemporary "PR-techniques" when giving other speeches. For example, in his speech at the opening of the Days of Literature Festival in Azerbaijan, which took place between the 2nd and 11th of October 1972, he recalled the friendship between Azerbaijani writer and scientist, A.Bakikhanov, and the Russian poet Griboyedov, noting that Griboyedov "studied distinctive Azerbaijani statues with great interest and visited Ganja in order to

¹ The original quotation is a line from Pushkin's 1834 poem *The Bronze Horseman*.

² The oil platform, known as the "Oil Rocks", "Oily Rocks" or "Black Rocks", was built in 1947.

pay his respects to Nizami's ashes." He also told Russian writers about how another one of their great ancestors, Mikhail Lermontov, "had taken a lively interest in the history of Azerbaijan and thought highly of its language. He wrote, for instance, to his friend Raevski that he had 'begun to study Azerbaijani – the language, which is a lingua franca here and in Asia in general, as French is in Europe.'" *Eastern Poem* by Mirza Fatali Akhundov was published in the *Moscow Observer* in a Russian translation and was called "a beautiful flower, tossed by a poet's hand onto Pushkin's grave".

We, as Azerbaijanis, were familiar with these facts, but they were unknown to the majority of people who had come to Azerbaijan for the first time. He strove to spread his country's reputation far beyond its borders so that the guests respected and liked its inhabitants. For this reason he put together itineraries himself so that all those who took part in the festival would have as complete a picture as possible of Azerbaijan.

A large number of Soviet cultural events took place in Azerbaijan at the beginning of the 1980s. Functions connected with Azerbaijani culture were also often held in the capital, Moscow. I would like to mention one of these in particular. A gala was held in the Hall of Columns in the House of Unions on 17th November 1981 in honour of the 840th anniversary of birth of the great Azerbaijani poet and thinker, Nizami Ganjevi. The country's political elite were present, including the secretaries of the CPSU Central Committee, Mikhail Gorbachev and Vladimir Zimyanin, the heads of the writers' organisations in a number of Soviet republics, orientalist scholars etc. Hasan Hasanov, the CPA Central Committee secretary for ideology gave the opening speech. Hasanov told me an interesting episode that characterised Heydar Aliyev's relationship with the future general secretary of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev:

"I was directly involved with the organisation of the event and was asked to give the main speech on Heydar Aliyev's recommendation. We sent out invitations to all the members of the Politburo, ministers, and high-ranking colleagues in the Council of Ministers.

On the day of the anniversary, we arrived at the Hall of Columns in advance of the celebrations. I entered the presidium room and informed Heydar Aliyev that the hall was full and that all the guests had already arrived. He said: 'The Politburo is in session at the moment; they've let me off though, since I'm running the event. But the other Politburo members won't manage to get here in time. We didn't take this into account when we set the date of the gala.' Even before we had had time to end the conversation, the door flew open and, the then secretary for agriculture, Mikhail Gorbachev, was ushered in by the Azerbaijani representative to the United Nations, Enver Huseynov. He came in and greeted Heydar Aliyev very warmly. He then added boisterously: 'Heydar Aliyevich, I excused myself on your account. Nobody was let off from the Politburo session, but I insisted that I could not ignore an invitation from Heydar Aliyev.' Heydar Aliyev replied briefly:

'Thank you for your consideration.' Then he introduced me to Gorbachev and explained that I was the secretary for ideology and would be giving the opening speech at the gala, jokingly adding: 'If you have any questions about Nizami, he's your man.' They went into the hall and the evening began.

This and several other facts would indicate that Gorbachev held Heydar Aliyev in high regard and, what is more, tried to win his favour. I think that later changes in Gorbachev's relationship with Aliyev are testimony to what I can only describe as the insincere and opportunistic behaviour of the former general secretary to those around him."

According to the Azerbaijani academician, Afrand Dashdamirov, at that time, Heydar Aliyev paid close attention to questions of history and national politics. It was for this reason that he was also in favour of events that would essentially transform Baku into one of the main centres dealing with international issues in the Soviet Union.

"We held the most impressive academic symposiums on national relations," recalls Dashdamirov, "internationally renowned academics attended. He conversed with them and they left his office ready to promote Azerbaijan. Many years later, people would come to me saying they had written doctoral theses in their particular region based on material gleaned from a conference held in Baku. Heydar Aliyev naturally spoke at these forums, and this helped to mould his image throughout the Soviet Union so that, when he worked in Moscow and was exposed to the entire country, he was not unknown. He was known for what he had done in Baku."

On 31st October 1973, a gala was held at the State Opera and Ballet Theatre in honour of the 30th anniversary of the battle for the Caucasus. Heydar Aliyev arranged sizeable celebrations and invited guests from Russia, Georgia, Armenia, and the North Caucasian Soviet Republic. In his speech to the numerous foreign guests he emphasised the point that oil from Baku was one of the decisive factors in the victory of the Second World War. This is a largely unknown fact, but Heydar Aliyev openly referred to it during the Soviet period.

On 7th May 1975 a convention for workers from Baku in honour of the 30th anniversary of the victory, took place at the Lenin Palace. Heydar Aliyev gave an outstanding speech, once again noting the role oil from Baku had played in the defeat of fascism. Among his personal papers, I managed to find a unique description of him written by a foreign journalist during the Victory Day celebrations in Baku. The typewritten text below is presented here as it appears in the archive. Unfortunately, it bears no indication as to where it was published.

D. Noll

TAKh - J. HERROD

**Notes on the Victory Day celebrations in Baku
(8th-9th May 1975)**

After describing the celebrations, the foreign correspondents share their impressions of the leader of Soviet Azerbaijan:

"I noticed that, during the ambassador's visit, the public gathering, and the victory banquet (three completely different events), Heydar Aliyev made a rather strong impression upon me. The word 'strong' describes his character best, and his rhetorical style is largely defined by his forceful presence and clarity of diction. At the public gathering he behaved as if he were leading a pre-election campaign for 'presidential primaries' in New Hampshire.

He kissed the children who presented him with flowers in the best political style, and during a break he took a stroll amongst the public, shaking hands and charming everyone; he sometimes stopped for a moment to talk to various citizens about their concerns (I overheard him discussing the grape harvest with one old man). In short, he is the very opposite of the typical grumpy and badly dressed party official."

From the early 1970s onwards, events of international importance regularly took place in Azerbaijan, the 24th International Astronautical Federation Congress held in Baku in October 1973, for example. The previous 23 congresses had, strikingly, all been held outside the Soviet Union. Famous astronauts, engineers, theoreticians and experts in space development flocked to Azerbaijan. It was here, in fact, that the Americans first referred to the creation of a new multifunctional 'shuttle'.

The 4th Soviet Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organisation Conference took place at the Lenin Palace on 12th May 1976. It was also the 20th anniversary of this established organisation. Delegates came to Baku from all the Soviet republics as well as Moscow and Leningrad. There were also guests from socialist countries and numerous African and Asian states, as well as representatives from the United Nations, organisations for African unity and the World Peace Council.

On 3rd September 1981, an international youth conference took place on the subject of "Youth, Development and Peace". Delegations of youth groups from 38 Asian, African and Latin American countries, envoys from socialist countries, representatives from international youth organisations, the Komsomol, and the Soviet Youth Organisation Committee all attended.

The international meetings, which took place in Baku, caused our country and its leader to be known outside the Soviet Union. Heydar Aliyev himself gained from the experience and became a politician of international standing. He frequently went beyond his country's internal problems in his speeches, insightfully discussing Soviet foreign policy, the current international situation and the anti-colonialist and nationalist movement.

During the 1970s, he also led high-ranking party delegations abroad. He visited Syria, Yugoslavia, India, Mexico and other countries as leader of the Communist Party delegation.

In addition to Heydar Aliyev's personal acquaintance with foreign heads of state and the leaders of international communist and nationalist movements, all these visits broadened his horizons and sharpened his political abilities. These were qualities he would very soon need in his work as a Politburo member and as first deputy chairman at the Soviet Council of Ministers.

Here I would like to refer to the curious meeting between Heydar Aliyev and the general secretary of the Central Committee of the Chilean Communist Party, Luis Corvalán. His name is not very widely known among the younger generation today, but in the 1970s, Corvalán symbolised freedom; he was a figure around whom people rallied in the struggles against Pinochet's dictatorship. The Soviet authorities managed to exchange the Chilean communist for the dissident writer, Vladimir Bukovsky, about which, incidentally, he was not best pleased, thinking that he was essentially being put on a par with an enemy of socialism. Corvalán came to Moscow, and a grand tour of the Soviet Union was organised on his behalf. Azerbaijan was the first port of call on the itinerary.

THE MEETING BETWEEN HEYDAR ALIYEV AND LUIS CORVALÁN

66 Journalists were let into Heydar Aliyev's study for a couple of minutes. Then the speaker invited the guest in. Luis Corvalán, the famous Don Lucho, entered, sullen and bad tempered. He greeted Heydar Aliyev with a frosty handshake, pulled out a long wooden cigarette holder, put a Soyuz-Apollo cigarette in it and, without asking the host's permission, began to smoke. Nobody ever smoked in Heydar Aliyev's study; he couldn't stand it. But at that point Aliyev got up from his desk, went out to the adjoining room and fetched an ashtray, which he placed in front of his guest.

The conversation started in due course. Heydar Aliyev began to tell him about matters in Azerbaijan, about the development of cotton and viticulture, about the intended production of our own good quality wine and so on and so forth. Luis Corvalán suddenly interrupted him, 'We say that in the West capitalism is turning the people into drunkards in order to distract them from social problems. And here you are extolling the virtues of your wine, and talking about the development of the wine industry. How so?'

Heydar Aliyev remained silent for a moment, then said, 'You know, Comrade Corvalán, in my opinion alcohol is quite distinct from the issue of class. In fact, an interesting anecdote springs to mind. Three great peoples have lived here in the Caucasus from time immemorial: the Armenians, the Georgians and the Azerbaijanis. They love to joke at each other's expense. And so, one day, a Georgian, an Armenian and an Azerbaijani met up and were arguing about whose cognac was better. The Armenian proudly beat his chest and said, 'It is common knowledge that our cognac is the best in the world.' The Georgian replied, 'In that case, our cognac is the best in the Soviet Union'. The Azerbaijani scratched his head and said, 'Well, we're a modest people. Our cognac is the best in the South Caucasus'. The joke was translated for Corvalán. He burst out laughing like a child, was greatly cheered and then loosened up. One thing led to another, and they began to converse. The conversation flowed like clockwork and, when he came to take his leave, Corvalán embraced Aliyev and they exchanged kisses in farewell. All in all, by the time Corvalán left he was in a much better mood.'

(From the account of former Azerinform correspondent Vladimir Morozkov)

From a conversation with Olzhas Suleimenov:

"We first heard about Heydar Aliyev when he became first secretary to the CPA Central Committee in 1969. We knew that he had come from the KGB. Eduard Shevardnadze came to power a little later on. The Caucasus needed to be cleansed of corruption, particularly the in the south. Their appointments immediately attracted the attention of all the Republics. Discussions on the subject were held in intellectual circles, writers wrote volumes about it and

hopes that the atmosphere in the Soviet Union would improve were pinned on these two appointments, since we all knew what damage corruption can wreak on the culture, economy and, indeed, the image of a country.

Heydar Aliyev came to Kazakhstan in the mid-1970s, when all the first secretaries of the Soviet Central Committees in power during Brezhnev's leadership visited us. This event was connected with one of our festivals. It was then that I saw Heydar Aliyev for the first time. He made a speech just as they all did. As I was in the hall at the time, I was able to compare them. I remember to this day what an impression Heydar Aliyev's speech left on me. He had the presence and voice of a military officer and set out his thoughts very intelligently, logically and clearly.

Later on, I went to Azerbaijan when the Days of Soviet Literature were taking place in Baku. We made each other's acquaintance. However, I only got the chance to speak to him properly at the celebrations in honour of Nizami in October 1981, when the 840th anniversary of the great poet was being celebrated in Azerbaijan. I remember that we travelled to Ganja together. At that time I asked him, 'But why an 840th anniversary? We're accustomed to marking round dates – an 850th anniversary, a 900th so why an 840th?'

He replied very directly and with conviction, 'The anniversaries of such important poets should be celebrated every ten years in order to reawaken an interest in poetry, especially poetry of such a high order.'

During the banquet, Heydar Aliyev toasted me and said, 'Not only do the Kazakhs need Olzhas but so do all the Turkic peoples.'

Evidently, this was a covert response to all the rumours and discussions circulating about the fate of my book *Az i Ya*¹ and its author. Heydar Aliyev was *au fait* with the discussions taking place in the CPSU Central Committee Politburo. He was abundantly clear about his position on the matter and this was very important to me."

The famous Azerbaijani poet and translator Siyavush Mammadzadeh, who took part in many notable literary events in Azerbaijan had this to say about them:

"I feel indignant when I remember that some of my colleagues thought that nothing good or enduring ever came out of these events. I personally think that there was much that was valuable even in similar literary *Sabantuys* [Tatar and Turkic festivals – Ed.], events that were sometimes referred to ironically as 'literary friendships or camaraderie'. There was much there that was positive. A feeling of warmth and companionship remained in our hearts long after all the firework displays were over. Culture cannot exist independently. We can put up barriers between ourselves and others, but culture is universal ...

¹ *Az i Ya* means 'Asia and I'.

'The days of Soviet literature in Baku were unforgettable! Many literary figures – and not only in Azerbaijan – remember 1975 with a certain feeling of nostalgia ...'

'Ah, those memorable days! I can feel the atmosphere of unreserved, heart-felt, overflowing emotion to this day, the mutual attraction that reigned supreme at that time. Behind each and every one of our celebrated guests stood his land, his people and his cultural traditions. We made new acquaintances and forged new friendships. We're talking abstractly here: 'literary connections', but literary connections are, at the end of the day, real living people!'"

THE NEW CONSTITUTION

In 1978, Azerbaijan's new constitution caused Heydar Aliyev's respect for his language to be tested to the full. He was a member of the Soviet Constitutional Commission and, therefore, a leader in establishing the country's Fundamental Law.

The article concerning Azerbaijani proved to be a stumbling block due to the fact that Moscow wished to exclude it from the draft proposal. Heydar Aliyev found himself in an incredibly difficult position.

The article concerning Azerbaijani as the state language was first introduced in 1956 under Imam Mustafayev, although a similar article had been in place in Georgia and Armenia long before.

The chairman of the Azerbaijan Supreme Soviet, Mirza Ibrahimov, set the process to amend the constitution in motion – a really great achievement according to his contemporaries. The academician, Afrand Dashdamirov, told me that the essence of this achievement lay in the fact that Ibrahimov had persuaded Kliment Voroshilov, the chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union, to agree at a time when, as first secretary of the Central Committee, Imam Mustafayev had raised this issue neither with the Politburo, nor the Presidium. This would indicate that the Azerbaijani authorities had not informed the Central Committee, but had received consent only from the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. They then expeditiously included this issue on the agenda of a session of the Azerbaijan Supreme Soviet, the session accepted this amendment to the constitution, and it was then made public. It was therefore too late by the time Moscow had realised.

"But when they began to prepare the new Constitution in 1978", Afrand Dashdamirov went on, "they declared that a new socialist community had already formed, a Soviet people, that everyone was coming together, and because of this 'blend', they ordered the removal of articles in the different languages. This new order was addressed to all three South Caucasian states, since it was only these Republics that had articles concerning state language.

An extremely problematic situation arose in consequence since both our intelligentsia and the Armenians' were displeased. In Georgia they went even further with a full-scale mutiny breaking out and professors and students demonstrating against the removal of this article. The Georgian intelligentsia were particularly rebellious."

CPG Central Committee Secretary Soliko Khabeishvili also recalls the events of 14th April 1978:

"Thousands of rebellious young people with strongly worded slogans gathered in protest outside the government buildings and made their conditions abundantly clear. Not far from the government buildings everything was at the ready. Members of the government were also outraged and even shouted, 'Where's the army?' I replied to my colleague at the Bureau, 'What, you mean to say you'd have 9th March 1956 all over again, when young people were killed in Tbilisi because of Khrushchev? We found a peaceful solution to the problem then too!'"

There was also a crisis in Azerbaijan. Ramiz Mammadzadeh, who worked for some time as secretary of ideology, recalled:

"I remember that Heydar Aliyev said, 'I've had a word with Ivan Kapitonov about the article on Azerbaijani. I said that I thought the article should be included. But he started to raise objections, saying that many of the Soviet states didn't have this article, so why should we?' It was at this point that Heydar Aliyev turned to general secretary for help."

The party leader's obstinacy concerning the question of the state language caused incomprehension and even vexation and resentment among some of the leaders of the other Soviet states. One day he made a phone call to Vladimir Shcherbytsky, the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party. He spoke rather sharply to Heydar Aliyev and stated that, in this case, they had no other option but to declare Ukrainian as the state language of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. This was pronounced with some irony. Aliyev reasoned with him in reply:

"But nobody's stopping you. You're much bigger than we are and your authority in the Soviet Union is incomparably greater. So if that's what you want, amend your constitution accordingly, but don't interfere with us!"

Intense consultations between the three leaders from the South Caucasus took place at the same time as these rather strained negotiations. Heydar Aliyev, Karen Demirchyan and Eduard Shevardnadze all agreed that there should be articles on state language in their national constitutions. In my opinion, this was a fairly rare instance when the solidarity of the leaders of the South Caucasus helped to break the unyielding obduracy of the Kremlin and uphold national interests. I am convinced that, if just one of the first secretaries had backed down, then the issue would not have been resolved.

Animated discussions also took place within Azerbaijan itself, at the Constitutional Commission for instance. The first secretary of the CPA Central Committee orchestrated these discussions and invited people to the meetings from outside. The guests expressed their opinions fairly openly, opinions that did not necessarily coincide with the official standpoint adopted by Moscow. This

enabled Heydar Aliyev to appeal to public opinion during his discourse with the Kremlin. This public opinion was unequivocally opposed to the omission of the article on Azerbaijani from the constitution.

Work began on 20th April 1978. A special, unscheduled 9th convocation of the 7th session of the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan convened in order to accept the Fundamental Law.

With regard to the most "sensitive" issue in his report, Heydar Aliyev stated that, if the proposals made during the course of these nation-wide discussions were adopted, it would be deemed appropriate to append a specific article on language to the section on the "national-state and administrative-territorial structure of the Azerbaijan SSR". It was suggested that the revised Article 73 should be set out as follows:

"Azerbaijani is designated as the state language of the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic.

The Azerbaijani SSR endorses the use of Azerbaijani in state and public institutional bodies and in cultural, educational and other establishments and calls upon the state to take every possible care with respect to its development.

In the Azerbaijani SSR, free use of the Russian language, as well as other languages spoken by the population, is guaranteed on the grounds of equal rights. Any kind of privileges or restrictions in the use of a particular language are prohibited."

This was, of course, a great victory and, perhaps, one of the most important steps taken by Heydar Aliyev in the name of future Azerbaijani sovereignty. With the inclusion of Article 73 as part of the new constitution, a sound legal basis was created for the preservation and further development of the nation's most precious asset: the Azerbaijani language.

¹ Karaulov, 398

² Heydar Aliyev, "Our independence", vol. 4, 427-428

HEYDAR ALIYEV'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE INTELLIGENTSIA

I had the unique opportunity of becoming acquainted with a selection of letters and telegrams from Soviet cultural figures in Aliyev's personal archive. Judging by this correspondence, he was acquainted with writers and artists, musicians and actors, from a number of Soviet states and nationalities.

I read through countless letters from the Azerbaijani composers, Gara Garayev, Fikrat Amirov, Niyazi, Rauf Atakishiyev and Rauf Hajiyev as well as the singer Zeynab Khanlarova and Muslim Magomayev. There were also letters from actors, writers and poets. They turned to him regarding all manner of things, from a request for accommodation to matters of organisation from a recently formed symphonic jazz orchestra.

Many thanked Heydar Aliyev for his help, some when they received a state prize and others when they were awarded honorary titles etc. These included a thank you letter from Jafar Jabbarli's family when a memorial to the distinguished Azerbaijani playwright was unveiled. There is also a strikingly sincere letter from Gara Garayev's widow, Tatyana Garayeva, as well as telegrams of thanks from the future world chess champion, Garry Kasparov. He received letters from the chief editors of both the *Literaturnaya Gazeta* and *Druzhba Narodov*, Aleksandr Chakovski and Sergey Baruzdin respectively (the latter literally showered Heydar Aliyev with letters and telegrams asking him to appear in the magazine), the president of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Mstislav Keldysh, the great pianist, Emil Gilels, the chairman of the Artists' Union, Nikolai Ponomarev, the playwright Mikhail Shatrov, the writers Aleksei Surkov, Konstantin Simonov, Irakli Abashidze, Nikolai Gribachev and many others.

Some of the letters are much more than dutiful declarations of gratitude and warrant particular attention. I include a number of excerpts here:

"Dear Heydar Aliyevich,

I cannot tell you how touched I was by your kind heartfelt words of congratulations on my 60th birthday and the conferral of the title of Hero of Socialist Labour. Please accept my deepest, most sincere gratitude both for this and for your heart-warming attitude towards writers in general. I still have happy memories of my meetings with you during the ten-day festival of Soviet literature in Azerbaijan. I am gratefully yours and send you, as ever, my warmest wishes.

Yours, Mustai Karim
03/11/79".

"Dear Heydar Aliyevich,

My heartfelt thanks for your invitation. During the last two days, I have revelled in a genuinely festive atmosphere in no way contrived, but directly from the heart. A huge thank you for the chance to share in a festival enjoyed by the whole nation.

I have always wanted to meet you in person either in Moscow or in Baku. I would sincerely love to talk to you for a good long time on many subjects; after all, the past ten years in Azerbaijan show that our hopes and beliefs are not unfounded.

With communist greetings,
Yours, Mikhail Shatrov
28/04/80".

"Dear Heydar Aliyevich,

I am writing to express my deepest gratitude for your great help during a time of the gravest difficulty. As you know, in Baku I was advised to undergo an operation without delay as it was thought I had stomach cancer. In Moscow, at the Scientific Centre for Oncology, where I went thanks to your help, after a rigorous examination they found that I did not have any kind of tumour. Of course, I would not have survived such a major operation at the age of 76. I will always be indebted to you, my dear Heydar Aliyevich, not only for my successes, but for my very life. I am prepared to dedicate the life that you have given me to the great cause you serve so selflessly.

I am sending you a collection of my verses, published in Moscow, as well as a little book about me, which, yet again, my dear Heydar Aliyevich, came out only thanks to your help.

Once again I thank you and wish you good health and many more years of life.

Yours faithfully,
Samvel Grigoryan
21/10/82".

"Most deeply respected Heydar Aliyevich,

Six months have already passed since the death of Kar Abulfazovich and it is only now that I have been able to find the strength to write to you, although of course I should have done so much earlier.

I know, dear Heydar Aliyevich, with what love and respect you treated Garayev, how much good you did for him and how much kindness you showed! You supported him right up to the end. And when the inevitable could no longer be put off and the end was nigh, you tried to ease his final sufferings, lightening his last hours. So, I am sending you a huge, heartfelt and HUMAN¹ thank you!

In the terribly difficult days in May when, it seemed, nothing could ease our grief, you supported us. You helped us with your warmth and concern to endure this testing time, sharing in our grief as though you were one of our family.

After his death, right up until now, I felt your warm and, I would even say, solicitous attitude towards our family. I have repeatedly wanted to express my most sincere, heartfelt gratitude for everything that you have done and continue to do for us. It is thanks to you that I am living in Baku in a wonderful, comfortable and beautifully furnished flat that I am free of all domestic concerns, and want for nothing. And most especially, as a mother, I want to thank you for your close attention to my son, and your appreciation for his activities.

To conclude my clumsily expressed letter, in addition to my words of most sincere appreciation and highest gratitude, I would like to wish you, dear Heydar Aliyevich, your family and children, the best of health, happiness, inner peace and a long life.

With the deepest respect,
Tatyana Nikolayevna Garayeva
4th November 1982".

Here are two letters from the future World Chess Champion, Garry Kasparov. I believe that he was being completely honest when he wrote these heartfelt lines:

"Dear Heydar Aliyevich,

It is with great joy that I am writing to you about the successful outcome of the Interzonal Chess Tournament in Moscow. Your care and attention throughout the tournament gave me the courage to live up to your beliefs. I will be happy if this victory is my humble contribution to our country's great achievements so highly valued by the party and the state.

Garry Kasparov."

¹This was in capitals in the original.

"Dear Heydar Aliyevich,

I congratulate you with all my heart on the high level of trust that our Motherland has shown you! Your forthcoming departure will rather dampen my general feeling of joy, but I would like to thank you in particular for your paternal care and direct involvement in my affairs.

I am well aware that my success is as inextricably linked to you as is that of our country. I would like to wish you new, even greater achievements in your difficult and distinguished work.

Garry Kasparov."

According to his deputies, Heydar Aliyev always attended to letters from the intelligentsia personally, especially when they contained a request. His special relationship with them is evidenced by the fact that he carefully preserved all the old letters, telegrams, yellowing exhibition catalogues and old concert and theatre programmes in his personal archive. They went with him from Baku to Moscow and back again and were kept in boxes and folders in various government-owned apartments, ready to follow him wherever he went. The memory of these people, many of whom had already passed away, was dear to him. With their art and talents, they brought freshness and energy into his life, where there was practically no time for relaxation and entertainment, brightened up his working day, spurring him on to greater things. He was grateful to them for this while they were alive, and, after their deaths, devotedly preserved their memory until the end of his life.

There was a mutual feeling of gratitude between intellectuals and artists and Heydar Aliyev. This is illustrated by the difficult years following his retirement, when Tahir Salahov and Rustam Ibrahimov came to Barvika to see him, when Anar and Elchin telephoned him at his Moscow apartment and when, after his return to Baku, he was enthusiastically greeted at a writers' convention. This was in stark contrast to the behaviour of officials, his former colleagues at the Central Committee, who obstructed him in parliament. All this will be covered in the third part of my book.

"THIS IS MY BELIEF"

A Chekist through and through, a man brought up on a philosophy of healthy asceticism and contempt for consumerism – materialism, in fact –, Heydar Aliyev hated people who stole from the state pocket and "confused" public property with their own more than anything else. During the 1970s, he was particularly intolerant of party workers who abused their position and broke Soviet laws.

One of Heydar Aliyev's former deputies, Ramiz Tariverdiyev, recalls:

"In one conversation or speech, I don't remember which, he said pointedly, 'I really believe it and have despised it all my life.' At that time – and even western politicians concurred – the KGB system was considered the least corrupt. He believed that the struggle to eradicate corruption was a question of principle. You either liked it or you didn't."

While I was collecting material for my book, I met the famous Russian historian, Roy Medvedev, in Moscow. Among other things, I asked him how the liberal Moscow intelligentsia viewed Heydar Aliyev, in particular his struggle against social ills. This was his reply:

"In 1982, when Heydar Aliyev was invited to Moscow and appointed deputy chairman to the Council of Ministers, *The Washington Post* asked me to write an article about him. I wrote the article: 'Heydar Aliyev, the Rising Star in the Kremlin's Firmament'. However, before writing it, I had a chat with his acquaintances and used all my resources from as far back as 1969, when Aliyev became first secretary of the CPA Central Committee and began his struggle with corruption. He was surrounded by legends and it was difficult for us in Moscow to tell which of them were true and which were not. There was a desire to eradicate the corruption prevalent in society at large, and to do away with stagnation and people who could not lead – we will call it "Brezhnevism" in the broad sense of the word. Suddenly two leaders appeared in the South Caucasus, Eduard Shevardnadze, who began to set things right and fight against corruption in Georgia, and Heydar Aliyev in Azerbaijan, who like Shevardnadze, left the law enforcement agencies (one the MVD and the other the KGB) and capitalising on the party's monopoly on power, they both began to straighten things out.

In Moscow people sympathised with them, at least in intellectual circles, hanging on their every word. Some even started to read Azerbaijani Russian language newspapers in Moscow, like *Vishka* or *Zarya Vostoka* from Tbilisi. Their activities aroused enormous interest."

Heydar Aliyev never asked the question why he was needed. After all, why invite trouble and make enemies in the process of struggling against stagnation, conservatism and the failure to communicate properly? He would have been very surprised if someone had asked him this question up front. For him, everything was perfectly clear: the best country

in the world was the Soviet Union and the best system in the world was the Soviet system. But these were inherent flaws that prevented the builders of communism from attaining their future dreams. This meant that these flaws had to be uprooted with all a Chekist's determination and decisiveness. He began to think about the need for radical reforms to the system only later.

Former First Deputy Chairman of the KGB Filipp Bobkov recalls:

"Our first meeting after he was appointed was on this topic. He asked me where he should start and I replied, 'You probably know where to start. We need to restore order.' He agreed, 'At this point, the most important thing is to command people's respect so that they believe that you will fight against the violation of Soviet law and against everything that stands in way of a decent general standard of living.' He worked on this with evident enthusiasm. Three years after his assignment, I came to Baku for a conference connected with the KGB. He could not attend so I looked in on him afterwards, before my departure. During our conversation I asked him: 'Well, Heydar, in these past few years you've resolved a lot of matters. Have you got a handle on bribery?' All that he said was, 'I can say with complete confidence that they do not take bribes at the Central Committee'."

From the book *Zagovorshchiki v Kreml'e* [Plotters in the Kremlin], by Elena Klepikova and Vladimir Solovyov:

"Do you remember the old sacred symbol of the Committee for State Security, the Shield and the Sword? With the KGB general, Heydar Aliyev and, later on, with the Georgian, Eduard Shevardnadze, and, even later still, the chairman of the Soviet secret police, Yuri Andropov, the emblem stopped being a shield and became a sword pointed at those whom it was designed to protect, namely, omnipotent apparatchiks ..."

Heydar Aliyev introduced a completely new, open style of government. He undertook to eradicate corruption, which was accompanied by the summary dismissal of powerful party officials, and frequent arrests, in full public view. The press was involved in the never-ending purges. The party government newspaper, *The Baku Worker*, regularly reported on incidents of bribery and the embezzlement of state property, on undisclosed private factories, on nepotistic practices among the party leadership and on corresponding punishments, including the death penalty ...

This was how the Azerbaijani 'red bourgeoisie' was unmasked and surrendered to the open people's court. Tough police measures to expose and punish offenders were justified. The gulf between man and the state, between home and prison, between life and death, decreased sharply: nobody was exempt from exposure and punishment, not even those with money or those in high positions."¹

¹ Klepikova & Solovyov, 52-53

I worked for a long time with material from Heydar Aliyev's personal archive, taking down the names and surnames of these officials from old party documents and contemporary newspapers. Some of Heydar Aliyev's associates told me the most notorious facts about the fight against corruption. He brought this up himself at almost every conference or plenary meeting. As a result there is an impressive case file, some examples of which will be outlined here.

In 1973, an inspection of fishing businesses was undertaken in the Lankaran District, where there were a lot of corrupt practices. The managers of these businesses, located 40 kilometres from the centre of this district, had doctored documents so that they appeared to own a plot of 30 hectares planted with tomatoes harvested on behalf of the state. These vegetable plots existed, in fact, only on paper, just like the lorry loads of tomatoes supposedly sent to various addresses. Huge profits were recorded. As a result of this type of falsification, 15 million roubles were embezzled!

The investigation went on for two years and more than 60 people were brought to account. Six of these were sentenced to execution by a firing squad and five pardoned. The sentences seem harsh even so, with 22 men each receiving 15-year terms.

In the mid-1970s, extensive flaws and corrupt practices were exposed within the Khachmaz District Party Committee. The first and second secretaries of the District Party Committee, B. and T. Huseynov, and the chairman of the District Executive Committee, K. Rahimov, were expelled from the party. At the 29th conference of the Azerbaijani Communist Party, Heydar Aliyev held them up as an example of corruption within the party leadership. This case was characteristic of the irregular state of affairs in Khachmaz, the first to be brought to the first secretary's attention.

Towards the end of 1975, a notorious court case in which a large group of corrupt officials guilty of taking bribes was brought to trial. They were former employees from the Department of State Inspection of Trade and the Quality of Consumer Goods under the Ministry of Trade. 24 men led by the head of the department, Ibrahimov, were sentenced by the High Court to a term of between eight and 15 years. An investigative group from the KGB examined this notorious case, a case that was widely publicised throughout the Soviet Union. Related material includes the names of hundreds of merchants who had bought off inspectors with bribes.

In fact, party workers were not the only ones caught taking bribes who met with harsh sentences. Numerous teachers at institutions of higher education were convicted of bribery during the 1970s. Of course, they did not succeed in uprooting this completely from the system of higher education, but in

comparison with the pre-Aliyev period, morals in such institutions improved significantly. One example concerns my fellow students and me when we were studying in the then prestigious philology department at Azerbaijan State University. There was a mixture of people from different backgrounds there, but the students were mostly youth from relatively poor families. In all my five years there I do not remember a single instance where one of the professors even so much as hinted at the possibility of giving out good marks in exchange for a given sum of money.

Unfortunately, after Heydar Aliyev had left Azerbaijan, the situation in this sector deteriorated rapidly, especially with regard to higher education, with officials trying to recover what they felt they could have earned during Heydar Aliyev's leadership. In order to enter a prestigious university or college, it soon became necessary to pay out huge sums of money. For instance, when my daughter decided to apply to the newly opened Faculty of International Relations at the Azerbaijan State University, I went to see the dean "for selection" and came away bitterly disappointed. Teaching acquaintances had advised us not to apply to this faculty since, in order to enrol there, it was necessary to pay out something in the region of a six-figure sum.

Abulfaz Elchibey instigated the end of corruption when it came to enrolling in higher education. When he became the second Azerbaijani president in June 1992, he announced the introduction of tests. This was one of the most successful government initiatives made by the People's Front. When he replaced him in 1993, Heydar Aliyev not only retained the test system as a means of getting into higher education instigated by his predecessor, but also, despite the pressure from all sides, remained its most staunch advocate.

My daughter got into the Faculty of International Relations when she finished school in 1992, successfully passing the test with 630 out of a possible 700 marks (one of the best results of that year in the whole country).

A most regrettable incident as far as Heydar Aliyev was concerned was the matter of the first secretary to the Shamakha District Party Committee, S. Sailov. The first secretary of the CPA Central Committee was remarkably lenient towards this party worker.

Heydar Aliyev's personal assistant, Rafael Allahverdiyev, remembers the "Sailov incident":

"Sailov was first secretary in Shamakha District. Heydar Aliyev really trusted him and recommended him for the title of Hero of Socialist Labour. When that failed, he was successfully rewarded with the Second Order of Lenin. It turned out that he had the same ambitions as the first secretary of the Kurdamir District Party Committee, Mammadov. He built a luxury guesthouse and amused himself there with his cronies, he sorted his friends out with "comfortable" positions

and he only distributed goods in short supply himself, falsifying reports. When Heydar Aliyev was informed, in spite of the fact that Sailov was his protégé, he ordered an investigation. As a result, Sailov was expelled from the party, removed from his position and sentenced to ten years. I can imagine how hard this must have been for Heydar Aliyev."

Vladimir Morozkov, who worked during the 1970s as a correspondent for *Azerinform*, quotes the words of chairman of the KGB, Vitali Krasilnikov:

"The Chekists, who knew about Heydar Aliyev's fondness for Sailov, took a long time before deciding to tell him that in the basement belonging the first secretary of the Shamakha District Party Committee, they had found a pile of rotting Soviet bank notes. There was a lot of money there that had started to rot due to lengthy storage. At that time, it was impossible for the first secretary to spend it all, so he had put it aside it for a rainy day."

In short, he was yet another example of the secret millionaire, Koreiko, from the well-known satirical novel, *The Little Golden Calf*, by Ilf and Petrov (and there were many such in the Soviet Union).

On 1st August 1979, a long interview with Heydar Aliyev entitled "On Our Moral Standards" appeared in *Pravda*. In the interview, he went into great detail concerning the corrupt practices of his former favourite. The correspondent from *Pravda* asked Heydar Aliyev how such practices might be nipped in the bud. At that Heydar Aliyev, perhaps for the first time, uttered a word before the whole country, a word that was to become a favourite with Mikhail Gorbachev's. "One of the most important conditions for this is *glasnost* [author's italics]," he said. "And, of course, minute criticism and self-criticism."

Ramiz Mehdiyev, a member of Aliyev's party, recalled the following in one of our conversations:

"The names of the party leaders and economic authorities, who were engaged in corrupt activities in the course of their duties and had broken the law, immediately became part of the legacy of *glasnost*, since the decisions made by the Central Committee Bureau and the plenary assembly and conference material were published in the Soviet press. Long before Mikhail Gorbachev had pronounced the word *glasnost*, Heydar Aliyev had introduced open, straightforward methods of party organisation. His speeches published in the press from the early 1970s and 1980s are proof of this."

In addition to his fight against bribe-taking officials, Heydar Aliyev battled against illegal businesses and some of the most notorious *tsekhoviki* [clandestine entrepreneurs] who competed successfully with enterprises in the state sector in the Southern Caucasus, and in a number of cases outperformed them.

A former Azerbaijani KGB employee, Parviz Hatamzadeh, recalls that one of the first corruption cases when Heydar Aliyev was first secretary occurred in late 1969 - early 1970. This was known as the Firidun Heydarov case. Heydarov was the head of the Ministry of Social Security. He was a powerful *tsekbovik* and they found 32 kilograms of pure gold and numerous jewels in his possession. He openly took bribes while distributing vehicles to the disabled and opened 25 factories producing consumer goods. The factories had expensive imported equipment of the sort that not even the Ministry of Light Industry possessed. The employees of the Security Committee were instructed to conduct this case on Heydar Aliyev's orders. The judicial board sentenced Heydarov to 15 years' imprisonment and the newspaper *Pravda* published the story, which was broadcast across the whole country.

Even more notorious was the "Mashtagh factories" case. The factories were controlled by two employees at the Public Prosecution Service, Isqandar Babayev and Izzet Guliyev. Parviz Hatamzadeh noted that they acted as shareholders in a number of factories belonging the Ministry of Local Industry. Large amounts of money were involved in the case, so it was classified as a particularly significant case of organised embezzlement. The court proceedings came to a close in 1980. Three people were shot by order of the court including Babayev and Guliyev.

As Roy Medvedev wrote in an article: "It was tackling corruption that made Heydar Aliyev famous. He had many supporters in Azerbaijan, but also quite a few extremely dangerous enemies."¹ By the end of the 1980s, Heydar Aliyev was already being sidelined and many of those whom he had fired, expelled from the party or hauled up before the courts had begun to turn against him. In numerous letters and statements to the CPSU Central Committee, Central Control Commission and the general prosecutor these individuals claimed they were the innocent victims of Heydar Aliyev's "totalitarian" methods of government, demanding that the former first secretary should be brought to account before the party and even the criminal justice system.

Heydar Aliyev touched on this topic in an interview with Andrei Karaulov, noting that his opponents, "took advantage of statements made by individuals who had at some point been legitimately punished for their actions and wanted to besmirch the party's past performance."²

Andrei Karaulov: Were many people punished?

Heydar Aliyev: There were plenty. They had lost their posts and had their wrists slapped by the party. They have once again raised their heads in Azerbaijan today [in Vazirov-Mutalibov's time] and are doing all sorts of things with impunity. Many are simply out to take revenge on me.³

¹ *The Washington Post*, 29th June (1984)

² Karaulov, 212

³ Ibid., 221

I examined all Leonid Brezhnev's speeches made during his visits to Azerbaijan in an attempt to clarify the Kremlin's position on Heydar Aliyev's merciless war on bribery and other abuses of power. An interesting trend emerged. Leonid Ilyich never ventured an opinion on this particular aspect of the CPA Central Committee leader's work or mentioned it openly. He said instead that the first secretary was a good man who was getting to grips with cheats and bribe-takers and everything that was preventing us from getting on with our lives and moving forward. He said that leaders of other republics should follow his example. However, the fact that he did not mention his huge efforts to improve public morality in Azerbaijani society, something that Heydar Aliyev saw as the most important feature of his work, offended him greatly. Several of his advisors remember this.

From a Conversation with one of Heydar Aliyev's former advisors, Ramiz Tariverdiyev:

"Heydar Aliyev did not receive official approval for his anti-bribery policies, or, at least, not publicly. Do you remember Leonid Brezhnev's three trips to Baku? Brezhnev spoke of Azerbaijan's successes in the most diverse sectors. He spoke of its failings too, always in connection with its economy. He remained silent only concerning Heydar Aliyev's anti-corruption policies and no support for them was forthcoming, even though we all wanted him to voice his approval, especially Aliyev. He did not draw attention to the first secretary's work in a single speech or a single CPSU Central Committee document."

Despite the fact that, over the years, the general secretary valued Heydar Aliyev all the more as one of the most energetic and authoritative leaders, he clearly did not support his anti-corruption and anti-embezzlement policies.

In his book, *Leaders and Advisors*, Fedor Burlatsky recalls an interesting episode described by Brezhnev's speechwriter, Aleksandr Bovin:

"Aleksandr Bovin once told me about a conversation that took place at the dacha at Zavidovo where the next speech was being prepared. He told Leonid Brezhnev that life was hard for people on low salaries. Brezhnev countered by saying, 'You don't know life. No one lives on their salary alone. I remember that in my youth, when I was studying at the Technical Institute, we earned money by unloading train carriages. What did we do? For every three bags or boxes we unloaded, we kept one for ourselves. Everyone lives like that here'. The old adage is certainly true: the fish rots from the head down! Brezhnev thought the shadow economy, theft at work and officials taking bribes were entirely normal. It had become almost a universal part of life."⁴

⁴ Burlatsky, 299

It is hardly surprising that, given this condescending attitude to these "capers", the general secretary was unable to endorse the Azerbaijani party leader's excessive attention to these matters. I am convinced that, if it had not been for the fact that he was unconditionally supported by the chairman of the KGB, Yuri Andropov, Heydar Aliyev would have had to have toned down his anti-corruption policies significantly. I received indirect confirmation of this when I interviewed someone well-versed in "Kremlin secrets".

From a conversation with Vladimir Medvedev, head of Brezhnev's security services:

Elmira Akhundova: In your view, why did neither Leonid Ilyich in any of speeches, nor any other Politburo leader express support for Heydar Aliyev's struggle with corruption? What, in fact, was Brezhnev's attitude to what was going on in Azerbaijan?

Vladimir Medvedev: I think Leonid Brezhnev basically didn't know what was going on. Take this, for example. Yuri Andropov reported some unsavoury facts about Sergei Medunov to him. Brezhnev said, 'Well, what of it? What are we going to do?' 'Put him in jail', replied Andropov. 'What do you mean? We can't imprison first secretaries!' If he knew the scale of what was going on in Azerbaijan as far as anti-corruption was concerned, then perhaps he would have taken action.

E. A.: Do you mean that Yuri Andropov was the only one to support him?

V. M.: Leonid Brezhnev knew only what Andropov told him. He remained totally unaware of whatever Andropov chose not to report. Andropov didn't report everything simply so as not to worry Brezhnev.

Roy Medvedev writes in his book *The Unknown Andropov* that:

"At the end of the 1970s, anti-corruption policies brought Yuri Andropov into serious conflict with Leonid Brezhnev, which nearly ended with Andropov's retirement. Complaints made to the KGB mainly came from Nikolai Shchelokov, but some other leaders with access to the ailing and capricious Brezhnev also supported them.

... The information that Brezhnev received from sources other than Andropov and Shchelokov was very different. After one of Andropov's reports, Brezhnev even said, 'I feel ill thanks to Andropov's gloomy reports about the state of the country and have been out of sorts for a week. He'll drive me to my grave with his reports'.

His comments were passed on to Andropov. Brezhnev stopped meeting him for three months and even refused to speak to him on the telephone. Andropov was prepared to retire, but Brezhnev was reluctant to let him go. When Leonid Ilyich eventually asked Andropov for a report, everything that might have upset the ailing general secretary was omitted."¹

¹ Roy Medvedev, *Unknown Andropov*, 263-264

From a Conversation with Hasan Seyidov:

Elmira Akhundova: How did Moscow view Heydar Aliyev's fight against corruption?

Hasan Seyidov: A number of leading Soviet officials were not in favour of Heydar Aliyev's anti-corruption policies, since those who were punished often went to Moscow and then "put the screws" on the republic. Many members of the Politburo and senior officials at the CPSU Central Committee were opposed to Heydar Aliyev's principled stance. Some of them had links with the mafia in Azerbaijan and reacted angrily to their expulsion and the criminal cases opened against them. This made our work more difficult. They organised investigations, wrote reports and arranged for articles to be published in newspapers. We worked not only with Leonid Brezhnev, Aleksei Kosygin and Nikolai Tikhonov, but also with mid-ranking officials in the CPSU Central Committee and the Council of Ministers. They tried to put the brake on our initiatives and failed to deal with the problems facing Azerbaijan's economic development. Of course, this attitude was mainly down to the anti-corruption measures that sometimes provoked the opposite reaction from the centre.

In an interview with Andrei Karaulov, Soliko Khabeishvili, secretary to the CPG Central Committee, recalled that Eduard Shevardnadze's initiatives in Georgia elicited a similar reaction from Moscow:

"The opposition went into hiding while Eduard Shevardnadze was in Georgia. He was the only first secretary I remember to follow a genuinely sensible course in his work. People were afraid of him. As leader of the republic, he increased anti-corruption measures and measures to overcome the criminal gangs that formed such a part of our history during the 1960s and 1970s. The republic was held in high esteem – in other words, the opposition disappeared underground and waited. The anti-corruption measures, however, eventually reached an impasse owing to the fact that the shadow economy in Georgia was completely interconnected with the rest of the economy. Inter-ethnic tensions in Georgia were worsening and, in 1978, there was unrest in Tbilisi following the adoption of the new Constitution and huge financial abuses were discovered. We did not try to conceal these facts, yet in other parts of the Soviet Union everything was kept under wraps. The mafia knew this only too well and took advantage of our openness. There was a sense that we had reached a new stage, but naturally, we could not succeed in taking the social changes to the next level without support from above: we had support neither from Brezhnev, nor the Politburo in Moscow. I remember going to Moscow with some scandalous information about bureaucratic practices. I had already discussed this problem with Shevardnadze in detail and we wanted to discuss it openly at the Central Committee plenum. The file fell into the hands of Vladimir Brovikov, deputy leader of the department in charge of organisational party work. He flicked through it and said, 'We dealt with red tape here long ago. Stop trying to re-invent the wheel!'

... Numerous members of the mafia suffered on account of Eduard Shevardnadze's policies during the 1970s, but they did not disappear completely. Instead they prepared for potential change and surreptitiously began gradually to come out from under their stones.¹

In conclusion, both party leaders were alone in their efforts to fight corruption as well as unable to inspire large-scale anti-corruption policies across the country as a whole. A few years later when he came to power, Yuri Andropov tried to extend their experiment and demanded that the KGB and the Public Prosecution Office bring order and discipline to the country by "blessing" the high-profile arrests of the perpetrators of organised crime and shadow economy fat-cats.

"THE PEOPLE ALL SUPPORTED THEM"

Nonetheless, the majority of the people I spoke to thought that Heydar Aliyev's tough measures and uncompromising policies against the shadow economy and bribery had a positive effect. Furthermore, given the conditions and laws of the time, the absence of private property and a civilised market, the punishment of those who plundered what was already in short supply, speculators, dodgy factory owners and their benefactors was harsh, but necessary. In some parts of the Soviet Union, disreputable social elements had engineered a special merger between financial criminals and the party apparatus and were in the process of undermining the very foundations of the state as well as ordinary people's belief in social fairness and socialist laws.

We would do well to remember Detochkin's famous phrase in Eldar Ryazanov's comedy *Uncommon Thief*, "They're thieves, your honour, oh they're thieves!" The average citizen in Azerbaijan was quite accustomed to ubiquitous theft and was indifferent to this shameful practice. "So they're thieves? Who isn't?" Then, all of a sudden someone became leader of Azerbaijan, someone who really wanted to get to grips with the thieves, bribe-takers and speculators and, indeed, anyone else who was making huge amounts of money out of the lack of goods or from public property. The general population offered him unconditional support. People took note and manual workers, peasants and white-collar workers all started to have faith in the government, in fairness and in the idea that the government would finally do away with hypocrisy and double standards.

When he became first secretary, Heydar Aliyev set the communists a goal towards which to work: whatever happened, a sense of prestige and respect for hard work should be reinstated. Gradually – though not at once – honest, conscientious work once again became the name of the game. It was a good thing to work hard and earn good money. It was a matter of honour and prestige! The working man and collective farm worker could earn money to spend on a house, a car or a dowry for their daughters. This represented a real change in the way people thought, in their moral values and in everyday life.

Fattah Heydarov, a member of the Milli Majlis,¹ describes the moral changes taking place in Azerbaijan in the 1970s in the following way:

¹ The *Milli Majlis*, or National Assembly, is the legislative branch of the government in Azerbaijan

¹ Karaulov, 394

"Take the village of Nehram where I went to school. It used to be called *min ev Nebrəm*.¹ It was a large town with about 9,000 inhabitants. So many years have passed since the war, and yet all we've got are two buildings covered with corrugated asbestos board — the collective farm administrative building and the collective farm cowshed. All the other houses are made out of clay. As soon as it rains, the roofs are washed away.

Heydar Aliyev soon taught people to earn money by working hard, to live decent lives and to build homes. He brought a new way of life to the villages in Azerbaijan. It was as if people had woken up from a deep sleep.

During this period Aliyev stubbornly introduced his way of thinking to life in Azerbaijan: 'You have to live honestly and tell the truth. You have to work'.

He created the conditions necessary for honest work."

"Azerbaijan had never known the sort of building programme it had under Heydar Aliyev", a former reporter for Central Television, Mais Mammadov, told me, "Mansions were built. No one came to the first secretary asking for work or money. They asked for land, a car or furniture.

After the harvest had been collected the collective farm workers received pots of money, up to 20,000 or 30,000 roubles. Sometimes they didn't even know what to do with it.

When Aliyev visited the provinces, he always asked the ordinary collective farm workers what they wanted and someone at the back would shout, 'Cars!'

'But you've already got cars,' he replied. 'We've got Zhigulis and we want Volgas!' At that time the Volga was the Soviet equivalent of a Mercedes."

Some people panicked as a result of the tough new measures used to bring order to the country. Of course, the people who were afraid were those with the most to fear: there were no baseless persecutions on trumped up charges. All the people I spoke to agree on this. The sentences were perhaps excessively harsh by more liberal, contemporary standards. People were even sentenced to execution. This was the reality of the times and there is no getting away from it. It would be naïve to assume, however, that it was only in Azerbaijan that people were tried and executed. 'Large-scale theft of socialist property' was always considered to be the most serious state crime in the criminal codes of all the Soviet states.

In one of his conversations with Heydar Aliyev, Andrei Karaulov asked him directly, "Some recent articles suggest that you used the anti-corruption measures as a front for getting even with people who were not best disposed to you."

"That's a lie," replied Heydar Aliyev. "We fought leading officials who permitted various abuses, broke our laws and infringed the requirements of the Party Constitution. We have never forgiven them. I must add that the Central

¹ The translation from Azerbaijani is: "Nehram where there are 1,000 houses".

Committee never punished anyone without good reason. No one was persecuted when I was in office! It is true that the security services made mistakes and broke the law, but when the Central Committee became aware of this, the necessary steps were taken."¹

Extract from a conversation with Ramiz Tariverdiyev, former advisor to Heydar Aliyev:

Elmira Akhundova: What did you, ideologues and members of the intelligentsia, think about what he initiated in the republic? Were these measures seen as a sort of cleansing and did the people really support them?

Ramiz Tariverdiyev: Yes, the people all supported them.

E. A.: Did anything change in Azerbaijani society? Did anti-corruption measures play a role in improving the atmosphere?

R. T.: At the very least, the anti-corruption measures prevented the collapse in moral standards to the level we were to witness later on. I once asked Heydar Aliyev himself the same question in a private conversation. We were sitting together one evening, preparing our next report. "Is there any point in being so harsh? The number of bribe-takers and embezzlers is not getting any smaller. As soon as we get rid of one, then another pops up. There's no end in sight!" Heydar Aliyev replied, "You know, that's a very difficult question. But if we didn't try and fight against it, then there would be a proliferation of these social ills and they would assume massive proportions."

Of course people still stole when Heydar Aliyev was in power, but they stole more cautiously, in the knowledge that there was a superior checking up on them. There were different reasons for this, objective as well as subjective. Firstly, people felt a sense of responsibility and, secondly, there was a system of top-down control. People on the street were also afraid and this was a powerful restraining factor. This sense of responsibility forced people to work while their fear forced them even deeper into the state's pocket. During the course of a year, five or six regional secretaries were caught and severely reprimanded regardless of the extent of their guilt. Some lost their jobs and others even faced criminal charges. The same was true of government ministers. Practically no one was untouchable.

E. A.: Forgive the tautology, but were any laws broken when you were trying to contend with law-breaking? Did the anti-corruption measures become a sort of campaign?

R. T.: There was nothing of the sort. Everyone's guilt was proven. Perhaps there were a few isolated cases.

¹ Karaulov, 211-212

E. A.: Heydar Aliyev said in one of his speeches, 'We had to carry out the anti-corruption measures ruthlessly, for corrupt practices, unfortunately, turned out to be very tenacious.' This phrase says a lot. It seems to me that he was more optimistic in the early years. Did it ever occur to him that these measures were hopeless?

R. T.: No, it didn't. He ploughed right on and made many enemies for himself on the way. Remember his article in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* "Let Justice Prevail"? Aliyev read it to me before publication and asked, 'Well, what do you think?' 'I don't know, Heydar Aliyevich, it's really a fairly critical interview!' 'What have I got to fear?' he answered. He was already a candidate for membership of the Politburo. There was an overwhelming public response to the article in the republic. A stream of letters flowed in, completely unorganised and very sincere. For instance, a group of army officers and company workers voiced their approval in letters sent to Aliyev. They said that had to be stopped theft and bribe-taking, and that he was asking the right questions and so on. There was nothing similar in the whole of the Soviet Union.

"WE ARE NOT IDEALISTS ..."

The interview with Heydar Aliyev published on 18th November 1981 in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* under the title *Let Justice Prevail* caused a stir both in the Soviet Union and abroad. Ten years after he had entered Azerbaijan's government the whole country found out about the extremely unorthodox and harsh methods that the first secretary had used to fight bribe-takers, nepotists, thieves of state property and others who were "opposed to Soviet morality". The interview was a real sensation.

Given that the interview most clearly and distinctly reflected Heydar Aliyev's position at the time, it is worth dwelling on it at length. He begins by saying that from 1969 on, they had begun to tackle the shortcomings in the work of the party and the Soviet and domestic organisations that had been building up during the 1950s and 1960s. This included overcoming numerous abuses. He then informs his readers of personnel changes that have taken place in Azerbaijan, saying that government posts are now being occupied by energetic, self-sacrificing and highly moral people with very good organisational skills.

Heydar Aliyev goes on to recall his efforts to clean up the universities where bribery, favouritism and nepotism were rife amongst the academic community:

"We had to contend with individual university lecturers and important personnel trying to get their children into universities to study their parents' specialisms. We had to restrict such practices and even had to ban the children of people working for the administrative bodies from applying to the Law Faculty at the State University."

He notes that higher education was completely saturated with professors' children and grandchildren, while the majority of students who enrolled at the Law Faculty were the children of the *militsiya*, prosecutors, judges and state and party officials. Heydar Aliyev told the *Literaturnaya Gazeta* correspondent that he had prohibited party leaders and other officials from building dachas, from buying their own cars and from writing theses to gain academic degrees. When she heard this, Antonina Griga, the *Literaturnaya Gazeta* special correspondent, timidly tried to object, "Please, Heydar Aliyevich, we're talking about what is legal! And that is speaking kindly ..."

"You don't need to be kind," he replied. "That's my decision."

Let us break off from the interview for a moment so we can reflect for a moment on what Heydar Aliyev just said. There was essentially nothing extraordinary in his prohibitions. Grigory Shumeiko, in his book *From the Chronicles of Staraya Square* describes the puritanical habits of the Central Committee members during the Brezhnev period. He writes that the internal regulations of the apparatus did not permit

Central Committee employees to have their own dachas. A person could not remain in the Central Committee if he had family difficulties or was involved in a civil dispute and he was not allowed to purchase a car for his personal use.

Heydar Aliyev made sure that these attitudes were ingrained in the CPA Central Committee. He granted dachas to the creative intelligentsia and helped composers and academics to purchase cars, but he treated party officials much less indulgently. Many, even those with private means, could only dream about having personal cars and dachas.

Hasan Seyidov recalls that, for some time, Heydar Aliyev banned private construction completely and ordered that any spare funds should be spent on dachas for the creative intelligentsia.

"We took dachas away from many people," said Hasan Seyidov, "from prosecutors, trade union and party members and ministers. When we fired people for dishonesty or when an official became known to the security services we decided to take their dacha away. Dachas were allocated by contract enabling the dacha management trust to annul the contract. Dachas were then handed over to workers, leading manufacturers and members of the intelligentsia. Of course some people were unhappy with this. After Heydar Aliyev had left, some people made attempts to get their dachas back."

In conversations held with the author of this book, many of Heydar Aliyev's advisors from the 1970s recalled regretfully that they had had to put half- or nearly-completed dissertations to one side, as Heydar Aliyev did not approve of their attempts to do two things at the same time. We could view his comments in this regard in a different light. The ban was essentially logical: if you yourself are writing a dissertation, then you are spending too little time on your main line of work and if you are in charge of a large collective and have absolutely no time to write research papers then, it follows, someone else must be writing it for you. You, therefore, have a choice between scholarship (you can kiss goodbye to a career in the party) or public service.

It is also worth noting here that Leonid Brezhnev did not approve of senior government officials writing dissertations either. In his book, Yuri Chubanov describes a curious episode:

"Nikolai Shchelokov once intimated that he was writing a doctoral thesis and hoped to become a Doctor of Economic Sciences. The viva was supposed to take place in one of the Gosplan universities and someone had kindly let other people know about it by putting up adverts around town. One of these advertisements was taken down and handed to Leonid Ilyich. He summoned Shchelokov and told him, 'If you want to write papers and give lectures, then go and work at MGU!' Leonid Ilyich really gave it to Nikolai Shchelokov that day. It was only later when Leonid Ilyich was ill that Shchelokov managed to defend his dissertation."¹

¹ Yuri Chubanov, *Ya Rasskazhu vse, kak Bylo* [I'll say everything how it was], (Moscow: 1992), 94

In his book *Gody v Bolshoy Politike* [My years in high level politics], the academician Yevgeny Primakov describes the disapproval of those in the academic community towards party and Soviet officials who wanted postgraduate degrees:

"I was elected a corresponding member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences in 1974 and an academician in 1979. I naturally attended all the general meetings and often witnessed unusual events for those times. I remember, for instance, that all the senior members were involved in various machinations to get Trapeznikov, one of the people closest to Brezhnev and the head of the Central Committee Science Directorate, elected as an academician. He was elected by the history department, but rejected at a general meeting. Neither his previous research nor the speeches suggesting Trapeznikov for election, including speeches given by several respected academicians, helped at all."²

The same thing happened to the minister for higher education, Elyutin, when he was standing for election to become a fully-fledged member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences:

"The academician introducing him – the department secretary – described Elyutin as a serious scholar. The chairman, the president of the academy, asked if anyone had anything to say. A hand went up at the back of the hall and someone asked, 'What has Elyutin done over the last four years which sets him apart from mere corresponding members?' A whole list of papers written by the candidate independently and as a co-author or by a research team under his leadership were listed in response. The academician who asked the question came up to the rostrum and said, 'If Elyutin has managed to do so much research, then it follows that he has been a bad minister! He simply couldn't have had enough time. Or vice versa.' Elyutin was not selected in the secret ballot as a result."²

Thanks to Heydar Aliyev's success, large-scale attempts across the Soviet Union were made to get to grips with pseudo-academics in government. Following Heydar Aliyev's sensational interview in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, many senior officials at the local level started to take a dim view of their staff's attempts to do two jobs at once. I remember that a film about such bogus academics was even made in Moscow with the popular actor Anatoli Papanov playing the lead.

And now to return to the famous interview. *Literaturnaya Gazeta's* special correspondent asked Heydar Aliyev: "I have the impression that bribery is treated with greater aversion than any other form of crime. Why bribery in particular?"

¹ Yevgeny Primakov, *Gody v Bolshoy Politike* [My years in high level politics], (Moscow: 1999), 22

² Ibid., 23

"Bribery is a universal crime," replied Heydar Aliyev, "other crimes merely revolve round it ... We are all guilty of perpetuating this vile relic from the past, including those who are upright citizens and those who despise people who take and give bribes. Personal honesty and scrupulousness are not good enough as civil virtues. Being a good citizen means taking an active stance and having the ability and desire to resist evil."

In order to understand how this interview came about and why it had such a tremendous impact on society, we must bear in mind the climate of the country at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. The fact that the Soviet leader was seriously ill began to affect all areas of society: state and industrial discipline began to slip, the demands placed on personnel grew weaker and, in general, society became rather slack. In turn, this affected industrial and agricultural production.

In the book *Lichnost' i Vlast'* [Personality and power], the former KGB chief, Vladimir Kryuchkov, has this to say about the period:

"Leonid Brezhnev could not head every single department as well as his numerous colleagues, who of course took their lead from their leader.

The most worrying result was the decay of social and governmental morality. All too often, we saw signs that corruption and bribery were on the rise, that instances of theft of state and public property were increasing, as was abuse of power for personal gain ... there was a notable escalation in crime, especially in urban areas. No one at the top thought seriously about how to fight these social ills, and so it was that they began to snowball."¹

Another member of Brezhnev's team, Victor Grishin, the former first secretary of the party's Moscow Committee, also writes about this in his memoirs. In the early 1980s:

"Many towns and regions began to notice shortages of meat, butter and other foodstuffs and there was also a shortage of consumer goods (namely clothes and shoes). Naturally, people were not very happy. At the same time, the work ethic and industrial discipline were becoming slack, whilst theft, the embezzlement of socialist property and bribery were all on the increase. The struggle to counter these trends was somewhat half-hearted. Too few members of the law-enforcement agencies gave the matter their attention, and sometimes they themselves turned out to be corrupt. The CPSU Central Committee's attempts to boost political morale were feeble and the instructions necessary to eliminate these shortcomings were not forthcoming [my emphasis]."²

¹ Vladimir Kryuchkov, *Lichnost' i Vlast'* [Personality and power], (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 2004), 120-121

² Grishin, 46

It seems that it was Yuri Andropov who asked the Soviet Union's most popular and trusted newspaper to send their personnel to Azerbaijan to ask Heydar Aliyev to share his experiences concerning the eradication of corrupt practices. For ten years, nothing had been said about his struggle with the many types of corruption, giving the impression that these problems simply did not exist in the Soviet Union. Eventually the authorities were forced to admit that they *did* exist, and needed to be eliminated. They also had to admit the importance of learning from the Azerbaijani branch of the party and applying its lessons across the Soviet Union. A year later, Yuri Andropov (the then general secretary of the CPSU Central Committee) was preparing to implement Heydar Aliyev's methods. After a short time, large groups of embezzlers and bribe-takers in Moscow, Krasnodar, Stavropol and Rostov would be called to account, an investigation led into the "cotton scandal" in Uzbekistan and a concerted effort made against incompetent bureaucrats. Unfortunately, Andropov was unable to fulfil his plans due to ill health. His successors shelved most of these proposals, but managed to complete some of them after a year and a half at the helm of government.

DIAMONDS

At the beginning of the 1970s, an international crime ring was uncovered in Azerbaijan. Their operations involved currency speculation and the smuggling of gold and other precious things. A number of Armenian expatriates were among the group's members. One of the underground millionaires, Gurgen Magraryan, was in charge of a network of smugglers, and the matter came to be investigated by the KGB Colonel, Akram Selimzadeh, from whose colourful account I will quote below:

"A 1961 directive issued by the Supreme Soviet stated that people who had contact with foreigners whilst carrying out currency operations or who bought or sold foreign currency through citizens of other states were to be investigated by the KGB. I was assigned one such case.

I remember Heydar Aliyev invited the vice-chairman of the KGB, Abbas Zamanov, and myself to the Central Committee. We were brought in to examine some jewels confiscated during one criminal case. I waited while Zamanov went into his office. Barely three minutes later I was called in to see the first secretary.

'Well, Akram,' he said. 'Tell us about these valuables.'

"There were three incredibly rare gold charms, and Aliyev turned his attention to the first: 'I've never seen anything like this before. What exactly is it?'

The charms had gold medals with portraits of the Austrian Emperor Franz Josef on them. There were also rings with diamonds of three or four carats each in the collection, worth a lot of money. I knew something about diamonds, and so was able to give detailed information. Heydar Aliyev examined the valuables and asked just how much the whole lot was worth. I gave him the state value and the black market price.

During the course of the conversation, he began to ask me what I was working on at the time and I told him about a group of smugglers we were investigating. He was extremely interested, and gave us some very useful advice.

... We had received intelligence that a man from Baku by the name of Dikermakher was carrying out a large-scale operation smuggling gold and other precious things. We flew to Odessa with Colonel Bantserev to arrest him. A ship from France, the *Océania*, was due to arrive, and one of its passengers, an Armenian named Marie-Elizabeth Yereyan-Keropyan was to come and collect the contraband. Her husband had ordered her to risk travelling alone. She had even left her baby at home and it was not yet a month old.

Yakov gave Keropyan a kilogram and 200 grams of industrial platinum and 45,000 roubles in large denominations. In those days that was an absolute fortune. We took Dikermakher to the KGB there and then, and intensified our observation of the woman. We apprehended her as she tried to board the vessel, which already counted as foreign soil. We couldn't touch her on our territory because there would have been no legitimate case for smuggling.

When we examined her luggage we found the platinum and 45,000 roubles. We put her in a car straight away and took her to the KGB.

"I asked Elizabeth Keropyan where she'd got hold of the goods, and she answered that Dikermakher had given them to her. I showed her the second part of Article 81 (on 'Special Cases of Large-Scale Export of Monetary Valuables') and informed her that she might be given a long term for this crime – and she had a baby at home. Her only way out was to tell us the whole truth. As a result, she 'shopped' Dikermakher and his mates, who partially confirmed her testimony. We brought them to Baku and made a series of arrests.

During the trial, we learnt that Elizabeth was living with her husband and three children in Marseille at the time. She had once lived in Baku, where she married Martiros Keropyan, who was involved in buying up and re-selling gold, diamonds and foreign currency. They kept in contact with various associates after leaving the Soviet Union, including Dikermakher, with whom Martiros had once worked. When he moved to France in October 1970, Keropyan left Dikermakher more than a kilogram of platinum and 51,000 roubles for an extensive operation. Through Keropyan, Dikermakher was able to set up an unbreakable link with fellow Armenians, smugglers from the Lebanon, Alexandryan and Atamyan, and through these channels he smuggled gold into Baku in the form of solid gold chains two or three metres long. The 'merchandise' was paid for with Soviet money and industrial platinum. These chains were then bought up by a certain Armenian, who went by the name of Arch-Medved. The woman had once seen him while she was still living in Baku.

We began to search for this Arch through our own channels. We learned that his real name was Gurgen Avakovich Margaryan and that he was the director of a weaving factory in Sumgayit, and a clandestine multimillionaire.

We decided to arrest him. We had direct evidence against him, and Elizabeth Keropyan had identified him in several photographs. I travelled to Sumgayit with several colleagues. We went into the regional department and called Margaryan at the factory from there. It was he who answered.

'Hello,' I said. 'Tell me, can you take a big order for the manufacture of medical gowns? We need a large quantity, somewhere in the region of a thousand.'

'By all means, stop by, I'm at work,' he replied.

We did just that. I presented a warrant to search his apartment and working space and for his arrest. We called in his own employees, Russian girls, as witnesses.

"What is your salary?" I asked one of them.

'45 roubles.'

'Take a look, please – your boss has 1,800 roubles in small change in his wallet.'

'Why are you disgracing me in front of my employees?' Margaryan asked indignantly.

During our search, we found only a wallet. We left the factory in the hands of its chief accountant and brought Margaryan in for questioning. As we approached my office, he said, 'Comrade Selimzadeh, may I have a minute?' 'I'm listening.'

'I will support you for the rest of your days if you just let me go.' 'I'm not a prostitute for you to support me!' I replied, outraged.

At the time, Nikita Dubrovin (then an employee of the Second Department) was leading a search of Margaryan's flat. Heydar Aliyev had asked me beforehand to keep him up-to-date on our results. He took a great interest in the matter and was constantly checking to see how it was going. During the search of Arch's flat we found diamonds, jewellery, lists of those who owed him money, and so on. But we had yet to uncover the most valuable items of all.

During questioning Margaryan continued to whinge: 'Comrade Selimzadeh, I have throat cancer, don't torment me, don't arrest me.'

'You must be held to account for your heinous crimes, Arch. Do you know how much Soviet money has been leaching out abroad?'

'It isn't my fault! I just took what I was given.'

'Your home is being searched at this very moment. Tell me honestly where you are keeping the goods.'

'At home.'

'Where exactly? Bear in mind, Arch, that I've noted down what you've just said so your lies are being recorded and the punishment will be severe. A conviction like yours could even end in execution.'

'In a cupboard in the kitchen. I don't understand why you're playing games with me.'

I slowly made a note of his evidence. Then I rang for another investigator on the internal line, went into the office next door and called Dubrovin.

'Nikita, try the cupboard in the kitchen.' Half an hour later, Nikita called back: 'Akram, there's an absolute gold mine in there! Literally hundreds of rings!'

In the top part of the kitchen cupboard there was a boarded recess behind which 220 rings were hidden. We found all manner of things at the flat: cut and uncut diamonds, wedding rings, expensive imported technology and fur coats. We seized a huge amount of money. We then flew to Yerevan, where Margaryan's brother was living, and confiscated kilograms of booty. Margaryan's two daughters were just dripping with diamonds. They had plenty of money, but nowhere to put it, so they'd transformed it into gold. I asked the brother where it was from.

'From Lebanon, the Armenians brought it over. I weighed it in a jeweller's on Nizami Street – I have an acquaintance there, Jonas Agakuli.'

"We arrested eight jewellers, including the man in charge of gold chains at the *Zumrud* shop, and appropriated a large quantity of jewels. They were all connected like the links of one of their chains, and confessed to everything.

Arch paid the smugglers for his 'dodgy' merchandise with 'dodgy' raw materials and paid his workers in cash. Private business in a state enterprise was very lucrative. Furthermore, a quick check of his personal affairs made it clear that he was totally unsuitable for a leadership post in material production. During the Second World War, when Soviet blood was being spilt at the front, Gurgen had been sentenced to five years for shady dealings on the home front.

We informed Heydar Aliyev and the Central Committee that we'd arrested Gurgen Margaryan, who was linked with smugglers from the Lebanon. We had information that they had left Baku a short while ago and could still be found on Soviet territory. We rang Brest, gave them instructions as to where to find these Armenian smugglers and asked them to make sure they were discreet. Brest replied that they had discovered a secret hiding place in a toilet on the Moscow-Paris train in which Alexandryan and Atamyan were travelling, and had managed to seize almost 50,000 roubles. The men were questioned, but would not admit that the money was theirs. It was confiscated as unclaimed property and we were forced to let them go. They went abroad unimpeded. It was a pity, of course, that we could not complete the chain.

Heydar Aliyev later proposed that we organise an exhibition of the confiscated booty. A KGB viewing was arranged in what had been Gambay Mammadov's office, a big and bright room set up with black velvet over the tables and special cases for the diamonds. There was an eleven-carat ring, valued at 320,000 roubles – and that was in Soviet money! The smallest stone was one carat. All in all, several hundred carats of diamonds had been seized and, in addition, a vast haul of gold coins from Tsarist times, gold pounds sterling and around 50 kilograms of a whole array of other currencies.

At the time, the second secretary of the CPA Central Committee was Yuri Pugachev, who loved antiques and sent people to search shops for them. I remember Heydar Aliyevich, Yuri Pugachev, several leaders of Central Committee departments, the prosecutor general and the minister of the interior all attended the exhibition. I left the office as I felt uncomfortable surrounded by so many figures of authority, but suddenly Aliyev called me in: 'Akram, come here. Come and talk to us, you're the expert.'

He picked up a ring and asked how much it was worth. 'The experts have estimated its value at 26,000 roubles.'

'26,000?!"

'Yes. And this ring costs 320,000.'

They passed round the ring. Pugachev's hands shook uncontrollably. Hardly surprising – an eleven-carat stone shines like nothing you've ever seen! When they had inspected everything, Heydar Aliyev said:

'So, Comrades, you can see what's been going on right under our very noses and what people working in the retail sector get up to! These people steal state property and turn it into dead capital. I'd like to thank our co-workers in the KGB, who have managed to close this channel. Well done!"

Heydar Aliyev was very pleased, not only with the exhibition, but in particular by the fact that so many valuables had been returned to the state. The investigation took three months. Elizabeth Keropyan's husband turned to the Soviet embassy in Paris for help, asking for his wife to be released. He explained that they had confessed to their guilt and begged for leniency because of the baby and the three children left in France. The French ambassador flew from Moscow specifically to meet Keropyan. We presented the case to the authorities, and Heydar Aliyev asked the judiciary to show leniency. The judge released Elizabeth Keropyan on the grounds that she was a mother of three children and had cooperated fully with the investigation from day one. She was flown to Moscow and from there sent abroad. The rest were of course judged according to Soviet law. Margaryan and Dikermakher were each given 12 years, and the jewellers imprisoned for four or five. Numerous Armenians, relatives of Margaryan, attended the trial. They watched him with pride and adoration.

"Look what a man our Arch is, he has been talking for three hours!"

It was true that he managed to hold forth in court like an inveterate lawyer. The man was, quite simply, an artist!"

IS THE MAFIA INDESTRUCTIBLE?

Despite claiming otherwise, Heydar Aliyev was by and large an idealist. He never doubted the need to crack down on swindlers and embezzlers and believed that one day society would be cleansed of corruption and that people would then begin to lead more dignified and meaningful lives.

"In the path towards virtue, per aspera ad astra!"

However, at times even he was beset by doubts. In the words of Gasan Seyidov, "At first Heydar Aliyev was more optimistic, but he then came to realise that this was no easy matter. He admitted that it was proving more difficult than he had anticipated."

From a conversation with Afrand Dashdamirov:

Elmira Akhundova: You struggled valiantly to counter corruption and the shadow economy in many parts of the republic. One man believed that this would eradicate the problem. So what was the result? Did you succeed?

Afrand Dashdamirov: Experience taught us that this problem would be very difficult to resolve in all the Soviet countries. In practice it was very difficult to achieve anything in one republic alone. Eventually the struggle proved absolutely hopeless, but we didn't realise that straight away. I have only been able to see it in hindsight. Everything against which Heydar Aliyev and Eduard Shevardnadze (encouraged by Yuri Andropov and even Mikhail Gorbachev) were fighting came to an end with perestroika, as did the draconian measures used in Uzbekistan as a result of the "cotton scandal". In essence, perestroika aimed to legalise everything that was already taking place in Russia, Azerbaijan and the Soviet Union in general – that is to say that the shadow economy and personal ownership surged ahead, trying (and in many cases succeeding) to burrow into the very structures of the party, the state and the law-enforcement agencies. These problems were rife. If this had not already been the case, perestroika would never have taken place. By declaring democratic socialism, Gorbachev simply did not understand that he was working in a new era that had nothing to do with socialism. At the time, we believed that the key to success lay in getting rid of everything communal and collective, but I put the question to Heydar Aliyev, "In Absheron there are so many boarded-up dachas that have been confiscated and then never re-distributed, and they're falling into disrepair. Why not sell them to private owners?" He answered, "That is the road right back to bourgeois interests and money grabbing practices. We need to create large spaces for leisure activities and build hospitals for the people. That's the way out."

The journalist Mais Mammadov told me that Heydar Aliyev had admitted at a plenum: "Do you know how we are fighting bribery and corruption? With all our might. And I have to tell you honestly, we are still waiting for victory."

When I asked about the efficiency of Heydar Aliyev's steps against corrupt practices in the 1970s, Magsud Ibrahimbeyov answered in the laconic and intelligent manner of a writer:

"The situation with corruption was, of course, a minefield. Our leader clamped down hard on the mafia, but there are things against which Heydar Aliyev, Julius Caesar, and even Napoleon are powerless."

Indeed, without drastic economic reforms, only a policy of "tightening the screws" could justify the existence of administrative staff in the fight against corruption and embezzlement. Keeping them alive forever proved impossible. Completely different tactics were required. Heydar Aliyev had, in fact, realised this by the mid-1980s, and was, therefore, one of the few party functionaries at the height of Soviet power who fully and truly supported perestroika. It was not his fault that its architects turned out to be so mediocre.

Part 4

NATIONAL RECOGNITION

HEYDAR ALIYEV AND LEONID BREZHNEV

Leonid Illych Brezhnev arrived in the capital of Azerbaijan on 24th September 1982 to an ecstatic welcome. On his journey from the airport, he was taken to Lenin Square, where a grand theatrical presentation had been organised in his honour. Rashid Behbudov presented Brezhnev with a Baku Honorary Citizen medal, and the general secretary personally opened the newly built Palace for the Friendship of the Soviet Peoples in Nagorny Park [Now Avenue of Martyrs - Ed.]. He was also shown a panoramic view of the capital from the square in front of the monument to Sergei Kirov. A celebratory session of the CPA Central Committee and the Supreme Soviet had been arranged for that day, during which a third Order of Lenin would be presented to the republic. Azerbaijan had now received five orders: the Order of the October Revolution, the Order of the Friendship of the Peoples, and three Orders of Lenin.

It was Leonid Brezhnev's third visit to the Azerbaijani capital,¹ although this occasion attracted much greater attention from the press and gave rise to rumours and insinuations for many years to come. Brezhnev played a meaningful role not only in Heydar Aliyev's destiny, but also that of the whole of Azerbaijan. It is, therefore, worth going into a little more detail regarding his personality and shedding some light on the history of relations between Heydar Aliyev and Leonid Brezhnev as well as going some way to dispelling the plethora of myths perpetuated by the numerous anti-Aliyev publications in the Russian press during the latter half of the 1980s.

Brezhnev fell ill in December 1974 and, for the next eight years, was more or less unable to perform his role satisfactorily. At the time the political system, a hangover from Stalin's time, did not allow for normal, civilised leadership changes, the paradox was obvious: the more decrepit the general secretary became, the more power was concentrated in his hands, and the more actively his cult of personality grew.

Like the other leaders, Heydar Aliyev sang Brezhnev's praises, never failing to refer in his speeches to the contribution Brezhnev had made to the country and to the world and expressing gratitude for the attention he paid Azerbaijan and

¹ The general secretary's other visits to Azerbaijan took place in 1970 and 1978.

its problems (this was only fair). He also arranged magnificent receptions and send-offs for Brezhnev and, just like other leaders, always sent him birthday and anniversary presents.

Following Mikhail Gorbachev's "democratic" changes, this close relationship with the deceased general secretary was all but forgotten, and Gorbachev's aides, Anatoly Chernyaev and Georgy Shakhnazarov, conveniently "overlooked" Aliyev's address in their memoirs. Brezhnev's cult of personality was, in fact, by no means created by Heydar Aliyev. He discussed this later in an interview with Andrei Karaulov:

"... I can see when I look back on it, that we were guilty of a lot of ostentation and pomposness, especially in the preparations for particular ceremonies. But that was a common fault ..."

At that time, it was usual to honour Brezhnev both at home and abroad. This applied to every single republic. It would have been inconceivable for one country to welcome him any less enthusiastically than on his previous visit. Such a practice should probably be condemned, but to reproach Azerbaijan alone would be extremely unjust."¹

The omnipotent members of Brezhnev's Politburo had much more of a hand in the development of the party leader's cult of personality. In his book, Roy Medvedev writes about Leonid Brezhnev as follows:

"The whole state propaganda machine, together with the ideological framework largely put in place by Suslov, quickly focused on praising the 'great Leninist' and 'distinguished campaigner for peace'. From then on, Leonid Illich Brezhnev became not only the man at the top, the first amongst many, but also the indisputable leader, the party chief and *de facto* head of state. Before holidays, huge portraits of Brezhnev and posters with quotations from his speeches and reports would appear on people's walls. The images of Brezhnev were often much larger than those of other Politburo members and newspapers printed photographs of him almost every day. Sophisticated articles in newspapers and theoretical articles in party and social science magazines all contained 'important' quotations from Brezhnev's works. The scale of the propaganda campaigns on the consolidation of the party leader's authority, which began in 1970, surpassed anything under Khrushchev."²

Andrei Grachev, a former member of the CPSU Central Committee, recalls in his book *Kremlevskaya Khronika* [The Kremlin chronicles] that the first secretary of the CPG Central Committee, Eduard Shevardnadze, outstripped everyone else in terms of flattery:

¹ Karaulov, 222

² *Druzhba Narodov*, No. 1 (1991), 188

"[He] produced a sensation at a celebratory conference where Brezhnev was present by assuring the Russian people of Georgia's eternal friendship and announcing that, for Georgia, 'the sun rises not in the east, but in the north' and promised to raze the mountains in the Caucasus to the ground if they stood in the way of their blossoming friendship."¹

Heydar Aliyev was obviously offended by the Russian journalist, Andrei Karaulov's questions about Brezhnev's cult of personality:

"Let's go back to *Pravda* where there are photographs of myself and Brezhnev. People think 'Ah, that means that Aliyev was close to Brezhnev.' There are similar photographs of any party member including Gorbachev – lots in fact. Everyone has forgotten that and when he was talking about Brezhnev's books, Gorbachev said that *The Small Land* was a work of genius ..."

It was the Politburo, not Aliyev in Azerbaijan, who promoted Brezhnev to his high position. Remember what happened on Brezhnev's 75th anniversary – a whole page in *Pravda*, greetings from the CPSU Central Committee, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and the Council of Ministers. Who arranged all this? The Central Committee. Who embraced it? The Politburo members, including Gorbachev. Albums dedicated to Brezhnev were printed in Baku. But what was done in Moscow? They compiled a large album dedicated to Brezhnev that was sent from Moscow to all the members of the Politburo; it was too heavy to even lift. And his biography, his books? It was the Politburo and the Central Committee that took the decision to publish these."²

Later on, the political writer Fyodor Burlatsky the academician Georgy Arbatov and the journalist and political analyst Aleksandr Bovin published memoirs of their work at the Central Committee as consultants to Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev, and Yuri Andropov. They all criticised Brezhnev for his petty bourgeois attitudes, indulging in his personality cult and other faults. However, it was precisely people like them who created this cult. Many remember the ingratiating speeches written by consultants for Brezhnev's anniversary and the atmosphere surrounding his memoirs. Sergei Semanov quotes statements given by Vitaly Korotich, secretary to the Central Committee, future editor of *Ogonyok* and a passionate advocate of perestroika. These were published in the magazine *Politicheskoe Samoobrazovaniye* [Political Self-Education]. He was later to describe the whole Brezhnev era as stagnant, but at that time wrote about "the surprising timeliness and topicality" of Brezhnev's books, about the "edifying and remarkable" lessons to be found in Brezhnev's life history.

But then, he wasn't alone. As Valery Boldin accurately remarked, "after Brezhnev's death, everyone began to vilify the cult, to show how daring

¹ Grachev, 20

² Karaulov, 235

they were".¹ In this sense, Heydar Aliyev was more consistent. He remained faithful to Brezhnev's memory after he had died. It is surprising that despite the warmth and closeness of their relationship, Heydar Aliyev and Leonid Brezhnev were completely different people. His peers remembered Brezhnev as a hedonist who loved to socialise in male company and to "relax" away from his family. Heydar Aliyev was, on the other hand, a family man who went everywhere with his wife, who "relaxed" on Sundays at home in his family circle and never indulged in hunting or fishing. Leonid Brezhnev did not enjoy reading and was not very educated. Neither was he known for his sophisticated aesthetic tastes, whereas Heydar Aliyev loved reading and read a lot during his time as first secretary. He was a master of style and expert in the Russian language (despite not having had a Russian education) and he loved music, painting, and the theatre. The general secretary was an inveterate smoker, whereas Heydar Aliyev could not so much as stand the smell of cigarettes. But all the same, Heydar Aliyev found a way into Brezhnev's heart.

From a conversation with Aleksandr Ivanov, Heydar Aliyev's head of security:

Elmira Akhundova: You say that Leonid Brezhnev respected him. Did you personally see any evidence of this respect?

Aleksandr Ivanov: I saw how Brezhnev received Aliyev at his dacha in Yalta. Leonid Ilyich came out with his wife, they embraced warmly and everyone felt that Brezhnev was very happy with him. He didn't meet other party heads so amiably.

It was felt in the Kremlin offices that there was some kind of special relationship between them. Everyone in Brezhnev's circle treated Aliyev differently from other first secretaries. At that time Eduard Shevardnadze was a candidate for Politburo membership and Kunayev and D. Shcherbytsky were already members. But Brezhnev visited Heydar Aliyev much more often. He went to Baku at the end of September 1982 and passed away at the beginning of November.

E. A.: How do you think their friendship came about?

A. I.: It came about because of Heydar Aliyev's excellent work and considerable personal charm.

Despite their different ways of thinking, intellects, life styles, habits and interests, Heydar Aliyev and Leonid Brezhnev had quite a lot in common. In their youth, they both stood out compared with other Politburo members. They were both well dressed and rather good-looking. Like Aliyev, in his youth Brezhnev was physically very strong and took care of his health. He was an excellent swimmer and would exercise daily in the pool at his dacha. During his summer holiday in Crimea he would,

¹ Valery Boldin, *Krusheniye Pedestala* [The pedestal's collapse], (Moscow: 1995), 42

as a rule, swim in the sea for two to three hours before returning just before lunch. Aliyev also adored swimming and swam throughout his life. They were both rather reckless and daring. Brezhnev loved driving the cars foreign heads of state had given him and would fly down country roads at a terrifying rate.² Churbanov, Brezhnev's son-in-law, writes that: "He was fearless, no one was his equal. Out of his two Zil cars – only one was armoured – Leonid Ilyich usually picked the one that was "a bit lighter", since the armoured one was slightly slower."³ Heydar Aliyev never cared much for his own safety either. When visiting parts of the republic or on trips abroad, he was capable of a serious breach of protocol by starting an unplanned conversation with a member of the public and stepping into the thick of the crowd where anything could have happened.

Both Heydar Aliyev and Leonid Brezhnev were brave men and could bear intense pain if the circumstances demanded it. In March 1982, Brezhnev had a serious accident while visiting an aviation factory in Uzbekistan – he broke his collarbone and was in a state of shock. In spite of the doctor's insistence that the final part of the programme should be cancelled, Brezhnev decided not to spoil the public holiday and put off the flight. According to his son-in-law's memoirs, the next day Brezhnev "appeared at the celebratory sitting of the CPU Central Committee, Presidium and Council of Ministers, to give out the highest state awards: the arm with the broken collarbone was skilfully bandaged up and the pain numbed with novocaine."⁴

We would also do well to remember Heydar Aliyev had two serious falls on the stage of the Republic Palace. He picked himself up on both occasions and went straight back to the rostrum to continue his speech to the students! Neither man recovered from these accidents, which turned out to be serious. Both showed courage, however.

Another feature links Heydar Aliyev with the general secretary. He remained true to his word. Dmitri Ustinov, the minister of defence, once made the following remark after a telephone conversation with Brezhnev, "Leonid Ilych always keeps to his word and, in this respect, you can feel confident with firm ground under your feet." Another close colleague, the minister for foreign affairs, Andrei Gromyko, also described Brezhnev in a similar manner when he said, "He doesn't broach a problem immediately, but as soon as he makes a decision you can be sure that he will stick to it."⁵

Despite their colossal power, both Leonid Brezhnev and Heydar Aliyev lived relatively modestly. At the end of the 1980s the so-called "democrats" cried out endlessly about the unthinkable "privileges" of the party elite. This

¹ See the memoirs written by Vladimir Medvedev, the head of Brezhnev's security detail.

² Churbanov, 55

³ Ibid., 59

⁴ Kryuchkov, "Personality", 177

reached Brezhnev, and although he had no pretence to luxury, the Crimean dacha he usually holidayed in was state property. It was used by him, however, mostly as an official residence for the reception of foreign guests. He lived in one flat on Kutuzov Avenue for thirty years, resisting any attempts to move him into an elite flat or build him and his children a dacha or a villa.

Brezhnev could not even have dreamt of the privileges that Soviet leaders (and subsequent self-styled democrats) accorded themselves during Gorbachev's perestroika. For example, at the end of his life, the general secretary had ten personal cars that had been given to him by other heads of state. His grandsons took four of these, but the remaining six went to the Central Committee and the KGB. Sergei Semanov has this to say on the subject, "Everything is relative. It should be remembered that the 'president' of poverty stricken Kalmykiya had 70 cars in his personal parking space – 70! – not to mention Chess Palace and other such buildings.¹ Neither Heydar Aliyev nor his children had mansions in the suburbs and they did not even have their own cars. Aliyev's son apparently acquired his first car only at the age of 26 or 27. Much has been said in the preceding chapters about Aliyev's simple tastes, about his disregard for luxury and hoarding money. Sevil Aliyeva told me: I remember when he lived at Uncle Jalal's, he hung his suits on nails. This was at a time when the newspapers were writing about his 'wealth'. The other children and I lived in the Sovetskaya Hotel and he lived with his brother. We would come and see them in the evening. There was a bed in the room; and his suits hung from nails in the wall. That was how he lived in 1993 when he was already the future chairman of the Supreme Soviet. My father loved beautiful things, but he never cared for luxury or expensive things."

That they shared another similar character trait is illustrated by Vladimir Medvedev's account. They both loved to joke with their close colleagues: "Leonid Brezhnev didn't tease strangers, only those who were close to him. Anatoli Blatov was his assistant.

So there's Brezhnev sitting down, talking, and suddenly he calls out: 'Anatoly Ivanovich!' Blatov replies 'Yes, Leonid Ilyich!' 'Where were you yesterday evening?' 'In my room, Leonid Ilyich.' 'In your room? Fine.' Brezhnev had a personal assistant at the time, called Galya Doroshina. 'I called Galya Doroshina, she wasn't there either. Was she, by any chance, with you in your room?' 'Oh no, of course not, Leonid Ilyich, I was alone.' Galya corroborates this: 'Leonid Ilyich, I was at home!' 'Oh, you're both pretending. I have a strong presentiment that you were together.' Everyone laughs but Anatoly Ivanovich sits blushing.

It was always like that. As soon as Leonid Ilyich got out of his chair, Blatov would whisper to us: 'Now he's going to talk about me.' And Brezhnev really did look round before saying: 'Now where is that Anatoly Ivanovich?'

¹ Ibid., 210

He would only joke like that with someone close to him. He knew that Anatoli Blatov was easily embarrassed and would blush like a child, so he was always teasing him.

Heydar Aliyev also loved amusing jokes and pranks. I often witnessed them during his trips abroad and was at times even a "victim". After an exhausting day full of official meetings, he loved to have a bit of fun with someone from his entourage and would tell amusing stories about heads of departments or other civil servants in the presidential cabinet. I will never forget how accurately he described the fear in the face of one of his ministers when, before flying in a helicopter over a turbulent Northern Sea where they were supposed to visit a floating oil rig, the pilot suggested that they put on red overalls similar to the ones astronauts wear. The minister tried to persuade the president not to undertake the dangerous journey and Heydar Aliyev replied quite logically, "You seem to be more concerned for your own safety than mine. You don't have to fly, but if that's the case write a statement explaining your absence." The civil servant had to get dressed in the unfortunate suit and surrender himself to fate. When Heydar Aliyev retold this amusing incident during a reception in the Norwegian city of Stavanger, the whole hall shook with laughter. Of course, all these jokes and pranks were completely good-natured and did nothing to offend the "victims" pride.

An extract from an interview with Vladimir Medvedev, Leonid Brezhnev's head of security:

Elmira Akhundova: Leonid Brezhnev came to Azerbaijan three times. Was this because of his special relationship with Heydar Aliyev or his fondness for Muslim countries?

Vladimir Medvedev: I think he got on well with Aliyev. When he was in Moscow, Heydar Aliyev and his wife always called in on Leonid Ilyich at their dacha in Zarechye. They would arrive in the evening. He always had an official visit to the Kremlin. And we sometimes joked that Heydar Aliyev 'went to work' on Leonid Ilyich in the Kremlin while his wife worked on Brezhnev's wife at the dacha.

Brezhnev would receive Heydar Aliyev and his wife very warmly. They were even part of the 'narrow circle' present at family occasions, birthdays for instance. On one such occasion Heydar Aliyev had to give a speech. Everyone smiled: 'Well, now we will hear a Caucasian toast.' He spoke very beautifully, just like they do in the Caucasus. Their relationship was excellent; it was much more than merely official.

E. A.: And what about Sharaf Rashidov?

V. M.: Sharaf Rashidov didn't come to the dacha. Eduard Shevardnadze didn't have that kind of relationship with him either. Brezhnev treated Aliyev with real warmth. He sensed that he was an energetic person and he really respected people with a thorough knowledge of their countries.

E. A.: Do you remember any particular mark of appreciation during Heydar Aliyev's time in government?

V. M.: After a conversation with Aliyev, Brezhnev always remarked that he was a man you could rely on.

Yuri Churbanov, Brezhnev's son-in-law, recalls this same thing in his book:

"The general secretary didn't have any "favourites". Everyone worked as one team. But how did they work? It seems that leaders like Kunayev, Rashidov, Shevardnadze, Aliyev and Demirchyan respected Brezhnev deeply, but didn't hang on his every word. They worked off their own backs and consulted Leonid Ilyich, but *more often they themselves took responsibility* [my emphasis] ... I was frequently a witness to Leonid Ilyich's good opinion of Aliyev, Shevardnadze and Rashidov. In many ways, they complemented one another ... I remember Heydar Aliyev especially well; he was an energetic person and a talented speaker ... It always seemed to me that he knew every corner of his country very well."¹

During a conversation with Roy Medvedev, the author of sensational biographies of Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev, and Yuri Andropov, I asked him about the relationships in the Politburo during Leonid Ilyich's rule. I wanted to show how my hero got his bearings in the complex labyrinths of the Soviet political machine.

From a conversation with Roy Medvedev:

Elmira Akhundova: Heydar Aliyev once told me that when he worked in Moscow he became very disillusioned. There was no sincerity in the relationships between Politburo members; no one visited anyone else. It was as though they were afraid of something. Was there really such an atmosphere in the Kremlin?

Roy Medvedev: Yes. But it wasn't always like that. This began in 1974 when Brezhnev suffered a brain haemorrhage and lost his ability to control the state. That was when people started to fuss around the "throne". There were many powerful figures in his entourage – Gromyko, Ustinov, Kosygin; they were all powerful men. And the marshals from Stalin's time were very much alive and kicking.

In his early period, Leonid Brezhnev was a cheerful, handsome, impressive figure of a man although he was not a brilliant intellect. He was popular with women, enjoyed walking, carousing and racing cars. So, at the start, there was a completely different, more amicable atmosphere. And then suddenly he fell ill and a power struggle ensued; factions immediately formed, each intriguing against the others. Brezhnev had some kind of invisible cabinet. It dealt with rations and issues in the Kremlin, dachas, the heads of departments and such like. These were shadow leaders, so to speak, and had

the material resources to buy off anyone they wanted etc. They didn't make any claims to power, but they supported Brezhnev and made it possible for him to manipulate people. Kosygin had his own faction. He was after a big job in international affairs. Kosygin was more intelligent than Brezhnev. Andropov was a strong leader too, but didn't get on with Kosygin. Gromyko was considered fairly influential in the Politburo and formed a triumvirate with Ustinov and Andropov; together they opposed Kosygin's group. Kirilenko had his own group too. At the time he was number two in the party and leader of the so-called Sverdlovsk group. He had his own people. They all wanted leadership and to be able to influence Brezhnev.

E. A.: This was after 1974?

R. M.: Yes. The period of intrigue and mutual distrust had already begun. The atmosphere was similar to the late Stalin period. At that time, Malenkov was also unable to visit Khrushchev. Stalin considered this collusion. He didn't want members of the Politburo to hold unofficial meetings without him.

This didn't happen during Brezhnev's early years. During his first ten years Brezhnev didn't remove a single Politburo member or Central Committee secretary. His maxim was: "Stability and no one leaves". No one feared for his job and everyone worked well and got on with everyone else. It was only after 1974 that people left; Mazurov and Podgorny were removed. This was the kind of difficult atmosphere surrounding Heydar Aliyev.

E. A.: Did these intrigues affect the leaders in the republics? Did they need to join some kind of group or did this not concern them?

R. M.: They had to know who decided which sort of issues. They had to understand these intrigues, but not to participate in them. They didn't concern them as they were leaders in their own right. They weren't allowed to become involved with internal squabbles. Unless, that is, they were members of, or candidates for, the Politburo. From November 1976, when he became a candidate for membership in the Politburo, Heydar Aliyev had to come to grips with all this.

According to Nikolai Zenkovich's Russian biography of Heydar Aliyev:

"Heydar Aliyev behaved wisely, like a true leader of a nation. He enjoyed good personal relations with Brezhnev, Kosygin, Andropov, and other high-ranking Soviet party members. This enabled him to secure additional funds and goods for his country. Everything that was written or said about Heydar Aliyev's friendship with Leonid Brezhnev and his inner circle resulted from common or garden jealousy and other people's inability to build official and personal relationships with the influential circles in Moscow. Indeed, the economy of every Soviet republic was a collective part of a centralised, systematised administration, the cornerstone of which was simply the interests of every state. For this reason, all manner of

¹ Churbanov, 60

machinations were necessary so that each country could retain a little of its gross output. There was but a single, worthwhile goal: to reduce the gap between the pace of development and the people's standard of living.¹

After Heydar Aliyev's retirement, when his opponents were attempting to obstruct the former Politburo member because they were afraid of his influence and authority in Azerbaijan, they remembered his closeness to Leonid Brezhnev. Consequently, all sorts of vulgar rumours and improbable insinuations were spread around.

One of the accusations flying around during the time of Gorbachev's perestroika involved a fabulous signet ring that Aliyev supposedly gave Brezhnev during the latter's last visit to Baku. Heydar Aliyev himself categorically denied the suggestion that he had given any kind of ring. "When he arrived in Baku, he came down the steps from the aeroplane and I noticed he had a ring on his finger. I have a photograph of this meeting at the airport, in which it is clearly visible. No one gave him any kind of ring in Baku. In fact, the magazine *Smena* apologised to me officially for publishing something along these lines."²

I asked Vladimir Medvedev about the unfortunate ring.

He replied that the story "about the diamond was idiotic, since Brezhnev never wore a ring with a gemstone. He showed us the seal on his ring. 'Look at the seal I was given.' His initials L.I. were engraved on it. He never wore gems in his life. He arrived with this signet ring in Baku; it wasn't a present from Heydar Aliyev. There were presents from the republic, but not of that kind. In any case, presents are entirely personal."

Several years later the mystery of the ring was discussed in Brezhnev's son-in-law, Yuri Churbanov's book:

"Everyone is currently attacking Heydar Aliyev for having presented Leonid Ilyich with a very beautiful and expensive signet ring in Azerbaijan. Gdlyan was the first person to mention this ring and then all the journalists picked up on it. Even here, in a labour camp, I have read more than one article on this subject. In an interview that I also read, Heydar Aliyev himself says that he didn't give any sort of ring to Leonid Ilyich. But no one believes him. I can personally bear witness to the fact that he is telling the truth – Brezhnev's son, Yuri, gave him this ring for his 70th birthday. And this ring soon became one of the aging Brezhnev's favourite toys. As far as I remember, when I worked at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, there was no indication that Aliyev was abusing his official position."³

There is nothing further to say on the matter. Yuri Churbanov would not have had any reason to protect Heydar Aliyev. They were both in disfavour and Churbanov wrote these lines far from home.

¹ Zenkovich, 413-414

² Karaulov, 222

³ Churbanov, 61

There were indeed presents, however. One episode is mentioned in the memoirs of Brezhnev's wife, written by Karpov. Viktoria Petrovna tells how, after her husband's death, some people from the general department of the Central Committee came and demanded that she return all the gifts that countries and provinces had given Brezhnev for his birthdays, especially his 70th:

"Then they said, 'Your vase must be gold.' 'I don't know,' I replied: 'If it's gold or not. Here's your vase without its case.' I had put it in a cabinet. It looked superficially as though it were made of gold. It had a portrait of Lyena [Short for Leonid – Ed.] and an inscription 'From the people of Azerbaijan'. They took it away and inspected it. It turned out not to be gold, but silver gilt. But they never returned it."⁴

Anyway, what of it? On Brezhnev's birthday the Soviet republics and regions brought more valuable presents (in the material sense). In Yakutiya, for example, craftsmen prepared a traditional Yakutian cup from the tusk of a walrus (other sources say the tusk of a mammoth) decorated with rare diamonds and other precious stones. The heads of foreign states, who knew of the general secretary's passion for cars, gave him the latest Lincolns and Mercedes.

In his book, *With and Without Leaders*, Georgi Shakhnazarov, Leonid Brezhnev's last assistant and a favourite, who was quite open about his dislike for Heydar Aliyev, also mentions the legendary diamonds that Aliyev allegedly gave Brezhnev in Baku.⁵ According to Shakhnazarov, when he was head of state, Mikhail Gorbachev, a paradigm of decency and modesty, "would give away all the valuable presents that had been presented to him."⁶ Perhaps, he did give away presents, but the bank account he opened in Switzerland received priceless gifts from the French Armenians.

Much has already been written about Gorbachev and his wife Raisa Maximovna's expensive tastes, but I will give another such instance. During Gorbachev's visit to London in 1984, Raisa bought a pair of Cartier diamond earrings worth \$2,500 and paid for them with an American Express card. This was unprecedented: "Never before had a leader of the USSR had an American Express card, not to mention his wife. Its existence implies that its owner had a western bank account or, what is much more likely, that the Soviet government, which did have foreign accounts, was paying for the purchases made on it."⁷

The first secretary of Stavropol routinely gave Brezhnev presents. There is, in fact, first-hand testimony. Viktor Kaznacheev, who worked with Mikhail

¹ Semanov, 274

² It is interesting that no one has actually seen the diamonds, but everyone writes and talks about them.

³ Shakhnazarov, 234

⁴ Klepikova & Solovyov, 285

Gorbachev in Stavropol Territory, remembers this in his book *Poslednyj Gensek* [The last general secretary]:

"On the way back [the general secretary's train would always depart from Baku], I had the job of meeting the leaders. It was five o'clock in the morning. Konstantin Ustinovich [Chernenko] came out alone in his sports clothes and said, 'Let's not wake anyone up; let them sleep.' We loaded the boxes with gifts from this bountiful territory into the car and the train moved off."

Prying newspaper reporters also accused Heydar Aliyev of building a guesthouse supposedly for Brezhnev. Heydar Aliyev set the record straight by insisting that: "There wasn't a single guesthouse in Baku that could have been used as a state residence for foreign guests. We decided to build one right in the middle of Baku, using funds from the Council of Ministers' budget and did not take money from any other budget. There was always spare money in the Council of Ministers' budget. Leonid Brezhnev, other Politburo members and international leaders stayed there.

... In other parts of the Soviet Union, especially in resort areas, we have countless large state mansions, which are barely used. Why shouldn't we build a similar residence in Azerbaijan too, a country with such colossal potential, so that we can look after our guests properly?"

During all his 14 years of leadership, Heydar Aliyev built only one decent guesthouse using local resources, whereas Mikhail Gorbachev built elite mansions for the country's leadership at Kislovodsk, Mineralnye Vody and Zheleznovodsk. Viktor Kaznacheev, a former subordinate of Gorbachev in Stavropol Territory, recalls how Gorbachev organised a "luxury recreation industry" in the region, and this became his overriding concern. It all started with Gorbachev's meetings with the resident doctor to the Kremlin, Evgeni Chazov. When Chazov came to Stavropol, Gorbachev would drop everything and spend whole days with the physician – no one else was as knowledgeable regarding the customs and morals of those in power. Kaznacheev confirmed that it was Chazov who convinced Gorbachev to organise everything so that the country's leaders could holiday in Stavropol Territory.

The building contingents of the 9th Directorate of the KGB were soon constructing a stylish state dacha in place of the pioneer summer camp in Kislovodsk. On Chazov's advice, Andropov, began to visit Stavropol from time to time. Then the Gorbachevs coordinated their holidays so that they took place at the same time as the Andropovs' so that they could spend them together at Mineralnye Vody in the Caucasus.

¹ Viktor Kaznacheev, *Poslednyj Gensek* [The last general secretary], (Moscow: Gudok, 1996), 48
2 Karaulov, 223

... To return to our story of the guesthouse in Baku, which, as it turned out, was linked with the cancelled visit of the American president to Azerbaijan. Here is how Suleyman Tatiyev, who worked at the time as first deputy to the chairman of the Council of Ministers, remembers it:

"In 1978, the U.S. president, Richard Nixon, was due to visit the Soviet Union. He was supposed to arrive in Moscow, then stay the night in Baku and fly on to Iran the next morning.

People from the Soviet KGB came to inspect the conditions for his reception and they considered that our facilities were not up to the standard required for such an honoured guest. We did not have a guesthouse where we could accommodate President Nixon and his security guards. Heydar Aliyev was aggrieved. This was the reason behind building a special residence specifically for the reception of foreign leaders and other distinguished guests. Such visits would be of great benefit to Azerbaijan.

He wanted the guesthouse to be built as quickly as possible. It took us about eight or nine months to comply with this request, but Heydar Aliyev inspected our progress every Sunday.

Leonid Brezhnev was our first guest. The Gulistan Palace was being built at the same time, since we did not have anywhere to house important ceremonies and banquets. No matter how much they criticised him for building facilities to receive Brezhnev, I believe that Heydar Aliyev did not build very much. Ultimately it was of benefit to the country.

We built another guesthouse in Lankaran, by the Khanbulanchay water reservoir. The president of Finland, Urho Kekkonen, used it for his holiday almost immediately. I accompanied him. Several years later, in October 1982, the next Finnish president, Mauno Koivisto, visited Azerbaijan and stayed in Lankaran for three or four days. They had a very favourable impression of it."

In September 1982, Brezhnev returned to Baku although he was already seriously ill. Because of this, he suffered a number of mishaps during his visit, although these were not as drastic as in Tashkent. These incidents remained a source of amusement to his retinue for a long time afterwards.

Leonid Brezhnev had numerous deputies, whose status increased year on year. All Brezhnev's deputies won the State Prize, and one of them, Aleksandrov-Agentov, even won the Lenin Prize. These deputies sometimes helped their aging leader to "put his foot in it".

Brezhnev had the habit of reading not only his speeches and reports, but also short greetings from sheets of paper.

"When the time came to deliver a speech," writes Roy Medvedev, "Unlike Khrushchev, Brezhnev would conscientiously read the pre-prepared text without improvising. Without the paper in front of him, Brezhnev was completely at a loss and it was for this reason that he hardly ever gave public press conferences where

he had to answer questions from foreign journalists off-the-cuff. He did not like giving interviews either in his native Moscow or during trips to other countries.¹¹

Leonid Brezhnev trusted what was written on paper so completely that it often led to amusing incidents, one of which took place in Baku. Zakir Abdullayev remembers it as follows:

"I remember the risk taken by Heydar Aliyev during Leonid Brezhnev's visit to Baku in 1982, when the leader took to the rostrum and began to read his speech, introducing his address with 'Dear veterans of Afghanistan'. Heydar Aliyev stood up and publicly went up to Aleksandrov, the general secretary's aide, took the text for the speech from him, placed it in front of Brezhnev and removed the other one. Brezhnev saw that it was a new text and read out, 'Comrades, Citizens of Azerbaijan, I am not to blame'. He had been given a report on Afghanistan by mistake".

A different view comes from Mikhail Zabelin, a member of Milli Majlis, who worked at that time as Heydar Aliyev's legal assistant. He was, therefore, able to witness the incident at first hand. He has recorded for the first time the sensational details of what preceded the formal meeting held at Lenin Palace as well as Aliyev's state of health on that day:

"Heydar Aliyev was very jittery," remembers Mikhail Yurievich. "I am not sure why. On the surface, he was acting normally, but I sensed that he was tense. On the morning of the formal meeting at Lenin Palace, where Heydar Aliyev and Leonid Brezhnev were due to give their speeches, Aliyev lost his voice. He could not speak at all. 'Shall I telephone the minister of health?' I enquired. 'There's no need. Fetch me some hot milk and mineral water'. He gargled with it for almost an hour, without taking any medication. Most likely he went over his speech in his office. But a voice doesn't just disappear; it happens due to tension. He was worried about Brezhnev's health. That's only a guess since Heydar Aliyev certainly didn't tell anyone. Brezhnev was very ill. His retinue followed him and behind them was a resuscitation unit. And what if anything happened to him? There would have been dire consequences!"

An hour later Heydar Aliyev's voice had returned and he went to the Lenin Palace. I joined him there later. I left the Palace early. He returned and entered happy and smiling. 'Did you see?' he asked. 'Yes', I replied. 'So what happened?'

The day before, Brezhnev had made a speech in the guesthouse before the members of the Bureau. The next day, when he was due to speak at the formal meeting, he was given the wrong text by mistake and he began to read as if he were in front of the members of the Bureau. He addressed them as: 'Respected members of the Bureau...' When he said that, everyone gaped. What Bureau? He had met the members of the Bureau when he arrived, but the next day was the formal meeting. Aleksandrov, his aide, had given him the wrong speech. At the presidium, those who guessed

what was going on started to whisper. Aleksandrov went over to Brezhnev and whispered something to him. Brezhnev brushed it aside. Then Heydar Aliyev brought the speech over to Brezhnev. Everyone stared at him dumbfounded. Aliyev put the right speech in front of Brezhnev, whispered something, and Brezhnev said loudly: 'I am not to blame, comrades. They are'. And everyone started to clap.

It was a risky thing for Heydar Aliyev to do. Who could have predicted Brezhnev's reaction? It was a live broadcast to boot. The first secretary's decisiveness was important in this instance. He realised that, if Brezhnev had read on any further, he would have revealed undisclosed information. The speech before the members of the Bureau probably detailed failings as well as direct orders. The speech definitely did need to be taken away.

Heydar Aliyev returned after the meeting looking happy and excited. He was satisfied that he had been able to prevent this catastrophe. I remember when he said to me: 'Can you imagine what might have happened?' I remember those words to this day."

I will conclude with another story told me by the former chairman of the State Committee for Publishing, Nazim Ibrahimov. It shows that Heydar Aliyev had integrity and was a loyal friend. When he left to work in Moscow, he ordered Ibrahimov to work on the publication of a book on Brezhnev and his last visit to Azerbaijan (*The Third Order of Lenin on the Flag of the Republic*). Between late 1982 and early 1983, when he had finished preparing the material for the forthcoming book, Ibrahimov flew to Moscow. He settled in his hotel and phoned Heydar Aliyev's reception. Aliyev received him without delay. He reviewed the material for about two hours, was satisfied and instructed Ibrahimov to contact the management of the State Committee for Publishing in the Soviet Union about the publication in Moscow of 50,000 copies of the book – a substantial number even for that time:

"Some time later I was sitting in the office of the chairman of the State Committee for Publishing, Nenashev," recalled Nazim Sadikhovich. "When he discovered the reason for my visit, he was in despair.

"What do you mean? This is impossible! You've chosen completely the wrong moment for the publication of a book about Leonid Ilych. I'm absolutely certain that they won't understand us 'at the top'." Nenashev drummed his head expressively.

At the time, the clouds were already gathering around Brezhnev's family. His daughter, Galina Leonidovna, was called in for questioning by the KGB over a scandal involving stolen diamonds. Her husband, Yuri Churbanov, was ousted from his position at the MVD, and ended up under criminal investigation. So I immediately understood Nenashev's meaning. I replied, however, that I was only following the orders of a member of the Politburo, Heydar Aliyev, who had insisted that the book should be published in Moscow. 'Phone him and tell him yourself,' I said to the head of the State Committee for Publishing in the Soviet Union.

¹¹ *Druzhba Narodov*, No. 1 (1991), 189

He phoned the Politburo member in charge of his department, but he flatly refused and asked me to talk to Heydar Aliyev again. 'We will publish the book,' Nenashov said to me as he left. Nonetheless, try and persuade Aliyev that the number of copies should be drastically reduced, let's say, to 5,000.'

After a while I again found myself in Heydar Aliyev's office at the Kremlin and repeated my conversation with the head of the State Committee for Publishing.

Aliyev shook his head, 'Everyone says that Brezhnev and I got on well, that I was his favourite, but is that really the case? He got on well with all of us, with all Azerbaijan. He did so much for the development of the country's economy and agriculture. You should understand that better than anyone!' Heydar Aliyev sighed and continued, 'It is not right to betray the memory of those with whom you were close.'

Due to his persistence, this was perhaps the last book about Brezhnev to be published in the Soviet Union that treated him with genuine respect. Heydar Aliyev remained true to the memory of the deceased general secretary for the rest of his life.

A NEW STRATEGY FOR AZERBAIJAN'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

During the Soviet era, the economy improved in Azerbaijan. Industry became more diverse and agriculture developed, leading to improvements in education and better living conditions.

Before and after the war the country developed very fast, so that the contribution of the then leader of Azerbaijan, Mir Jafar Baghirov, is difficult to overestimate. A number of contemporary scholars, who have studied the period from the 1930s to the 1950s, have written about it more objectively.

Nikolai Zenkovich, for instance, describes it like this:

"Of course, Baghirov's achievements were considerable as far as Azerbaijan was concerned. After all, he spent 20 years at the helm, of which four were spent at war. Azerbaijan's oil reserves constituted three quarters of all the reserves produced by the USSR. At that time about 75 million tonnes of oil was extracted, producing 22 million tonnes of petrol. To today's reader this seems very little so I shall put it differently. 71.4 percent of the total amount produced by the Soviet Union during the Second World War came from Azerbaijan. It account for 80 percent of the fuel used for aviation and in 96 percent of the oil used in transport. Nearly all the Soviet tanks were fuelled by oil from Baku and 90 percent of aeroplanes ... In the spring of 1942 the YAK-3 fighter jet was developed in Baku as was the *Katyusha* rocket launcher. You can imagine how hard the country's leadership worked."¹

The author of a definitive monograph on post-war Stalinism in Azerbaijan, the Azerbaijani historian Eldar Ismayilov, writes that:

"During the 4th Five Year Plan, the state received a budget of 8.7 billion roubles and during the 5th the budget was increased to 15.8 billion roubles. In total, it was six times more than the relative sum allocated to the state during the 1st and 2nd five-year plans (1928-37) ...

Particular importance was attached to the development of the oil industry. It was assumed that during the post-war years this sector would be capable of restoring its potential through the R&D and the Caspian Sea oil excavation. On October 31st 1949, the Soviet Council of Ministers issued a decree "On measures for the improvement of the organisation of work on the discovery and development of offshore oil fields in Azerbaijan". This was a comprehensive programme that lead, ultimately, to the creation of the offshore oil platforms that became known as the "Oil Rocks". The exploitation of offshore oil fields in particular played an important part in the gradual rise in the volume of oil being extracted.

¹ Zenkovich, 399

After the war, the Soviet government authorised the construction of tube-rolling and synthetic rubber factories in Sumgayit, the Baku Electromechanical Plant, a ball-bearing factory in Baku, the construction of the Mingachevir hydroelectric power station, the Severnaya State Power Plant and many more industrial projects. This caused a breakthrough in the development of ferrous and non-ferrous metallurgy, electrical engineering, mechanical engineering and the chemical industry. ...

This breakthrough in industrial development meant more numerous industrial centres, Sumgayit, Mingachevir and Dashkesan for instance, with a corresponding increase in the industrial potential of Baku, Kirovabad as well as the rural areas. The generous investment of capital from the Soviet budget was of critical importance to the increase in industrialisation during the post-war years. This was accompanied by a desire to revive the past and, at the same time, to expand the oil industry in Azerbaijan for the future.¹

During the 1950s and 1960s, when Imam Mustafayev and Veli Akhundov led the party in Azerbaijan, industry and agriculture continued to develop. In his reports at party meetings and his speeches to the country as a whole, Heydar Aliyev repeatedly noted that the ambitious economic reforms of the 1970s and 1980s were not carried out from scratch. At the formal meeting on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Azerbaijani SSR on October 2nd 1970, he made a brilliant speech in which he outlined the whole journey taken by Azerbaijan during the Soviet period. In Azerbaijan today, he said, "there are extremely productive power plants and automated oilfields, modern factories, canals and artificial seas, cotton fields and vineyards, railways and roads. During the Soviet years, the gross output of the country's industry has increased 70 times."

Heydar Aliyev never renounced tradition and neither did he try and erase the achievements of his predecessors. Great people do not tend to have feelings of envy, as they are too independent.

... In the mid-1960s economic reforms, referred to as the "Kosygin Reforms", named after the then premier, Aleksei Nikolayevich Kosygin, were carried out in the Soviet Union. A whole range of measures were outlined. In the agricultural production sector, a long-term plan was established (5 year) for collective and state farms that excluded any arbitrary changes or allocation of tasks not included in the plan. These reforms strengthened the economic situation, enabling changes to the conditions in which agricultural products were acquired and stored. A material incentive was created for above-target sales as well as a pay rise for collective and state farm workers. In the industrial production sector, the territorial control system was abolished and control handed to the requisite ministries. However: "A focus on the development and implementation of economic methods of management

¹ Ismayilov, 218-221

became the most important aspects of industrial development. A range of measures was adopted in order to improve the economic self-sufficiency of the enterprises and a reduction in their administrative regulation. The number of directive planned indicators of their work was reduced by more than three times (from 30 to nine)."²

According to the majority of contemporary historians and political analysts, the reforms of the 1960s and 1970s were carried out extremely slowly and inconsistently and did not yield the expected results.

In the book *Premyer Izvestniy i Neizvestniy: Vospominaniya o A.N. Kosygine* [Known and unknown premier: recollections about A.N. Kosygin], many people involved in the Kosygin reforms have analysed the reasons for this failure. One of these is included here:

"When he initiated his reforms, Aleksei Kosygin thought the outmoded centralised system of management standing in the way of rational decisions should be changed. Only if it became decentralised would the management be improved and the real state of the country's resources identified.

When these reforms were at the planning stage, the decision-makers involved decided to acknowledge the failures in the management of the economy and to reflect them in the congress documents. A number of important resolutions were passed and changes to the production of mass consumer goods outlined. Then, as if some 'invisible hand', the likes of which Adam Smith never dreamt, had suddenly put an end to them and all attempts to build a new, contemporary system collapsed ... The upper echelons, from high-ranking officials to interested parties in the business community, must have perceived these plans as a threat and resented the carpet being pulled from under their feet."²

The concept of "economic stagnation" should not be vested with the same meaning however, as has often been the case in recent publications. It was during this period that foreign economic ties were beginning to be forged between the Soviet Union and other members of CMEA. Within the country much was being done to improve the standard of living enjoyed by the population. This included the intensive construction of accessible homes and roads and an underground transport system was installed in many Soviet cities. Everyday existence improved significantly for the Soviet citizens, including rural communities. The electrification of rural areas had almost been completed and the mass provision of gas supplies initiated. Industrial plants and factories were built, whole new sectors of industry were created from scratch and major scientific discoveries made. A "second" and "third" Baku emerged in Siberia, Tatarstan and Bashkiria. In spite of all this, though, the "Leftover Principle" still existed and there were general shortages and a coupon system...

¹ Munchayev & Ustinov, 568-569

² *Premyer Izvestniy i Neizvestniy: Vospominaniya o A.N. Kosygine* [Known and unknown premier: recollections about A.N. Kosygin], (Moscow: 1997), 202

Heydar Aliyev governed Azerbaijan during a difficult period. At national plenary sessions and conferences, the republic was always referred to as backward and if it was put forward as an example, it was always negative.

In this difficult situation, the new party leader did not want to enter into the age-old dispute of who to blame, but was much more interested in what he should do to remedy the situation.

He was not a trained economist and had to learn everything on the job. This was particularly important because the government elite, inherited from Veli Akhundov, awaited his first steps with interest. Many were spitefully impatient and expected him to solve everything somehow.

Heydar Aliyev did not begin by drawing rash conclusions and making over-hasty decisions, but tried to understand the situation first before acting. In order to do this, he armed himself with books, manuals and statistics. He studied economic trends with specialists and practitioners, identifying the most typical patterns. He would invite experts to the Central Committee, listen to their opinions in the Bureau, take their advice and carry out analyses. He visited companies and examined the situation at first hand. He would think matters through until the small hours of the morning, then he would come home, sleep for a few hours only to be in his office again by nine o'clock sharp. He knew that this struggle was going to be difficult, but was not one to be easily defeated.

... By the early 1970s, Brezhnev had granted a fairly wide degree of independence to local party leaders and introduced a policy of decentralisation, freeing Azerbaijan of petty bureaucracy. The practice of creating workers' groups and committees to solve individual issues and developing corresponding proposals for consideration along party and state lines was widely introduced.

After Heydar Aliyev had delivered reports to the CPSU Central Committee, these groups or committees would come to Azerbaijan. The Politburo would then adopt a resolution based on their visits to site and subsequent reports. As a result, a number of important decrees concerning Azerbaijan were issued by the CPSU Central Committee and Soviet Council of Ministers. These played a truly unprecedented role in the socio-economic development of the republic.

During a conference on the construction of the Vaikhir water reservoir held in Nakhchivan in August 2002, Heydar Aliyev remembered these documents as follows:

"At the first plenary session of 5th August 1969, the Azerbaijani economy was analysed in great detail. We demonstrated explicitly to Azerbaijan, as well as to the Soviet Union as a whole, that Azerbaijan's economy was in a critical state and in need of help. As I recall, in 1970, the CPSU Central Committee and the Soviet Council of Ministers issued two significant decrees involving Azerbaijan. One of these was linked with development of agricultural production in Azerbaijan and the other

with industrial development. At that time, this was an inconceivable event. Ministers and high-ranking officials in Moscow, congratulated us, but also said that in all their working lives they had never seen any such decrees being issued in regard to a Soviet republic.

But we achieved this. In the course of five years, from 1970 to 1975, we exceeded the targets. As I had the right to do so, I went to Moscow and informed both the Central Committee and the Council of Ministers that, although they had issued decrees concerning Azerbaijan, neither did they believe nor, indeed, did many others, that Azerbaijan would fulfil them. This was because, in the past, Moscow was of the opinion that the Azerbaijani leaders would give their word and on a number of occasions, receive specific aid, but then would not fulfil their targets ...

They asked me what I wanted and I replied, 'We need new decrees for the coming years.' This was because the system was set up in such a way that the minister was obliged to fulfil them. Otherwise, without a decree we would have to keep asking for this and that ... A new decree was issued in 1975 concerning measures for a further intensification of agricultural production in Azerbaijan and, in 1976, a new one on the development of progressive branches of industry in Azerbaijan."¹

A myriad of local and foreign strategic centres and public funds are currently at the disposal of the new independent states that arose out of the ashes of the Soviet superpower. Their experts are prepared to help the leaders of the former Soviet republics with economic innovations, calculations and prognoses. There are also opportunities to meet consultants from international financial organisations and the possibility of participating in all manner of economic forums and conferences. But back then, in the closed off conditions surrounding the Soviet economy and society as a whole, in many respects we had to feel our way, sometimes acting through trial and error, and taking note of a most diverse range of suggestions and proposals, including those from the most unexpected of sources.

At first, Heydar Aliyev lent an ear even to "enemy" voices. I was able to consult a unique document found in his personal archive: a transcription of a broadcast from the radio station *Svoboda* [Freedom] from November 16th 1971.

In this broadcast the commentators are arguing with Heydar Aliyev, who had recently spoken at the October plenary session (of 1971), about the role played by the ideological education of the workers with a view to a further increase in the productivity of labour:

"A rise in productivity depends on how much the personal incentive of the workers is taken into account," the radio presenter observes. "The development of production on account of an increase in labour productivity depends on providing enterprises with new technology, improving the organisation of jobs, the provision of raw materials and intermediary products, on the mechanisation

¹ *Bakinskiy Rabochiy*, 16th August (2002)

of industrial and manufacturing processes, automation and a plethora of other issues ... If one of these issues isn't dealt with, then the process of solving the others will be affected. Most of Azerbaijan's industrial equipment is out of date. The shelf life for this equipment is 15 years, but it has been in use for over 20. This problem affects the quality of production and lowers productivity ...

In the September issue of the magazine the *Azerbaijani Communist* it says that 60 percent of the revenue from enterprises that have adopted the new system goes into the state budget as the balance of its net earnings, with only 40 percent going back into the enterprise itself. This means that the state takes a large part of an enterprise's income and, as a result, there is not enough money left for the incentive fund ... Can we really demand an increased productivity on the part of the workers, while we maintain such a negligent attitude towards their personal interests? As Heydar Aliyev has observed, it is hard to achieve this by way of ideological education and the widening of socialist competition alone."

It is telling that the last lines of the radio transmission have been underlined in Heydar Aliyev's hand. This shows that the subject of the "personal interests of the workers" also worried the first secretary of the CPA Central Committee. Heydar Aliyev, additionally suggested to the government that factors involved in improving labour productivity, such as the renewal of out of date equipment and technology, the mechanisation and automation of manufacturing processes and the economic stimulation of industry and agriculture were all matters of top priority.

In an interview for the newspaper *Zaman* of December 6th 1991, Heydar Aliyev himself asserted that, even back in the 1970s, he had sensed a deepening of the economic and political crisis in the Soviet Union, "I thought that the Soviet republics would one day gain their independence. I dreamt at that time that Azerbaijan would become an independent state." Of course he could not openly confess to this dream, even to the closest of friends. However, the ultimate aim of his titanic efforts was to make his dream a reality one day and to facilitate the acceleration of development in all branches of the Azerbaijani economy.

Heydar Aliyev paid careful attention the situation in the traditional branches of the economy above all, principally the oil-refining and petrochemical industry. This is how he himself remembers it:

"Our oil-refining plants date almost to Tsarist times, although they did not in any way meet contemporary demands. When I began to analyse this issue, it became clear that new equipment and installations did exist in the Soviet Union, but that the leaders of the Soviet ministry were building them in other regions. Just imagine: oil has been extracted from Azerbaijani territory since time immemorial, but oil refineries with new technology are being erected in other areas! The thinking in the ministry was that the old refineries were sufficient for Azerbaijan. And what about the ecological situation in Baku, the Black City?

Why is it known as the Black City? Because the whole of Baku is covered in soot and grime. We raised the issue 'point-blank' before the ministry and the Soviet Council of Ministers, thus instigating the construction of two large new oil-refining plants in Azerbaijan.

... I spent some time at the plant known as the 22nd Party Congress Refinery, which is situated on the road to the village of Zigh. I started to feel ill at ease: the earth and the sky all around were the blackest of black and the waste was pouring out into the sea. We replaced all the equipment at the plant in its entirety and put up a new plant on the site with the help of German specialists. We bought new equipment for the production of high-quality petrol from France and a new complex for catalytic reforming was built."¹

In one of our conversations Hasan Seyidov, who was in charge of heavy industry for the Central Committee, recalled the saga surrounding the construction of new high-tech oil-refineries:

"I remember that, in 1975, V. Fyodorov, minister for the Soviet Oil-Refining and Petrochemical Industry visited us. At first he did not really want to grant us a new installation since it had already been promised to other regions. In the course of Fyodorov's two or three day stay in Baku, however, Heydar Aliyev managed to persuade him and secured the first oil processing plant (NBNZ) in 1976 and, after that, the second Baku oil-refinery (BNZ) in 1982. It was subsequently called EL OU AVT - 6,² and processed six million tonnes of oil per year. Heydar Aliyev monitored the construction of these units on a monthly – even a weekly – basis because he had a commitment to the Soviet Council of Ministers and wished to prove that we were capable of fast construction work as well as yielding high-quality products.

We produced high-octane oil at the French units for catalytic reforming, whereas, hitherto, we had only produced the low-octane A76 grade of fuel. Then, thanks to these installations, we started to produce high-octane 95-octane fuel, and now we even produce 98. With the help of these units, we were processing 24 million tonnes of oil per annum."

New complexes represented an integral part of a large programme developed in 1970 with the intention of overhauling the republic's oil-refining industry. Heydar Aliyev also instigated a substantial programme to raise technological standards as well as the quality of goods produced by Azerbaijan's oil-related manufacturing industry.

The plant named after Lieutenant Schmidt became a multidisciplinary enterprise of oil-related machinery manufacturing, one of the largest and most powerful in the Soviet Union. As a result, 70 percent of the equipment used in the Soviet oil industry was produced in Baku.

¹ *Ulduz*, No. 6 (1990), 68

² Acronym for "crude vacuum distillation unit".

Large-scale technological installations and new complexes were brought into operation in the petrochemical industry, and the enterprises concerned with the ferrous and non-ferrous metallurgical industries were modernised. The Azerbaijani pipe-rolling plant became one of the largest enterprises of that type in the whole of the Soviet Union.

For Heydar Aliyev remodelling industrial production by means of developing the most promising branches, determining scientific and technological progress and by building industrial units equipped with the most up-to-date and cutting edge facilities and technology was of the utmost importance. He would, therefore, try to "intercept" state orders for the construction of large-scale plants within the electrical, technological, radio, machinery manufacturing and defence industries, and to find the financial means to facilitate the technological modernisation, expansion and reconstruction of existing enterprises. He stated, in an interview with Andrei Karaulov, that 250 new industrial enterprises, manufacturing units and workshops were built in Azerbaijan in the period between 1970 and 1982.

Heydar Aliyev was proud of all his brainchildren, but a particular source of pride as far as he was concerned was a manufacturing plant for domestic air conditioners built in the mid-1970s. As one of Aliyev's biographers aptly noted, "He was born into the torments of Tantalus". Heydar Aliyev was often forced to beg in high places, trying to persuade the officials of the absolute need to build some industrial plant or other, or to construct a particular enterprise in Azerbaijan rather than anywhere else. The resulting clash of interests and ambitions sometimes dragged on for many months and, at times, even years. The kindly disposition of the general secretary saved the day; it was to him that Aliyev turned once he had exhausted all other possibilities.

During our first face-to-face meeting in Nakhchivan in the November of 1990, Heydar Aliyev told me the story of the construction of a well-known plant for manufacturing air conditioners. It came about thus. As I remember, Heydar mullah jokingly remarked: "Here I am and, as leader of Azerbaijan, I've directed all my energy and experience to building as many buildings, industrial and manufacturing works, plants and factories as possible in the capital of Azerbaijan, as well as in other towns and districts, and yet have never managed to get around to setting up home and settling down in a flat of my own." The new authorities refused him the right to have even a small living space of his own in Baku. He was compelled to make do with lodgings with relatives.

We began by trying to recollect what exactly had been built in Azerbaijan during the years when Heydar Aliyev was leader. We counted over and over and literally just lost count. I eventually spoke out:

"Speaking personally, my family and I are grateful to you for the domestic air conditioning factory. The fact of the matter is that we live up-town in an old apartment block and, as you know, these apartment blocks are traditionally covered in *kir*.¹ From May right through to October you can't live on the upper floor, since during the day the roof gets so hot that it literally glows with the heat absorbed from the sun, and the rooms resemble a boiling red-hot pan. The upper floor became habitable only many years later, once we'd finally acquired a Baku-produced air conditioner."

Heydar Aliyev started to laugh and replied: "Elmira, just imagine, that in the Soviet Union there really weren't any air conditioners. They appeared as a wondrous new invention not only in Baku, but also in Russia and the other Soviet states. And you probably most likely have no idea what an effort it took for me to push for the construction of an industrial plant in Azerbaijan. If you're interested, I can tell you about it."

I replied that it was extremely interesting, and turned the tape-recorder back on. I will reproduce the recorded transcript without any alterations or abbreviations, just exactly as Heydar Aliyev related it.

* * *

"In 1972, a union-wide conference for cotton growers to which leaders of the cotton-growing republics were invited was held in Tashkent. A delegation from Azerbaijan attended and Leonid Brezhnev was also present. Naturally, we all met him at the airport and then dispersed to our rooms. The conference was due to start somewhere around 10 or 11 o'clock in the morning. Brezhnev, who was an extremely sociable person by nature and had a very pronounced sense of humour, liked to joke with the Soviet leaders before this type of event. He made us all laugh on this occasion too. He was sitting in an armchair next to the late-lamented Sharaf Rashidov and said, 'Sharaf Rashidovich took me to my accommodation and settled me in, but it's still absolutely unbearable. The heat is beyond belief! I checked to see if there was an air conditioner in the room and I was overjoyed to find one. I plugged it in, but instead of fresh air, it pumped heat into the room. And then, I took a closer look and as well as hot air there was also dust. Sharaf Rashidovich, say I, what on the earth is this? Is this how you welcome guests?'

He told the story in good humour, but Rashidov pointed the finger at me, saying 'It's nothing to do with me; the air conditioners were made in Baku. He's the one to blame.'

'Ah!' said Brezhnev, 'So Aliyev is to blame for it all!'

Heydar Aliyev had, then, to clarify the matter: "There is an aeronautical factory in Buzovna where they also manufactured rather primitive domestic air conditioners in the early 1970s. They really were utterly unreliable. We mostly

¹ In Azerbaijani *kir* means molten bitumen. It was boiled in huge vats, and then poured over the flat roofs of the houses in Baku.

just used them in Azerbaijan, but unfortunately it seems as if someone decided to bring our air conditioners over to Uzbekistan. Leonid Brezhnev became 'acquainted' with one such specimen.'

Then I went on to say, 'In fact, nobody in Azerbaijan manufactures air conditioners. There was an attempt to get something going in a primitive, makeshift sort of way, but it wasn't taken seriously.'

All in all, everyone had a good laugh. Then, Leonid Brezhnev said, and I quote, 'What is this, comrades, why is it that in a country such as ours, where a good half of the population live in the southern Soviet republics, we can't get the production of domestic air conditioners up and running?'

You know, Elmira khanim, your fellow journalists like to portray him as some sort of fool, but he had great common sense and was able to think for the country as a whole. 'Yesterday I was really suffering from the heat,' he said, 'and I imagined what it would be like for anyone lying in a hospital or maternity ward and what it would be like for children in kindergartens.' He thought of the infirm, the sick and children first of all.

I took Brezhnev's idea about the air conditioners on board. It seemed all the more important because the leaders of the southern Soviet republics were present at this conference, so this particular subject seemed relevant to everyone.

'When I get back to Moscow,' Brezhnev went on, 'I'll definitely give orders for an air conditioning factory to be built.'

I immediately went into action. This was just what I needed. I put all my efforts into such enterprises and I could foresee what an asset this would be in the future.

'Leonid Ilyich,' I said, 'This is a good idea and I have a suggestion to make. Please give the order for this factory to be built in Azerbaijan and I promise to fulfil your order very quickly.'

'All right,' replied Brezhnev, 'let's discuss it later'. Brezhnev did not forget our light-hearted discussion. When he returned to Moscow, he immediately raised the question of building a domestic air conditioning plant with the Politburo. At the same time, he said that Heydar Aliyev had promised to build such a plant in Azerbaijan in record time. I heard about this and realised that it was time to get down to work.

Meanwhile, in Moscow, a decision was reached as to which ministry would oversee the construction of the plant. There was no precedent, and nobody knew about the technology required. The ministries all shied away from the 'inconvenient' order. The fuss ultimately reached Brezhnev, who ordered that the, 'Ministry for Electrical Engineering should be in charge of the construction of the factory.' The employees at the ministry put their heads together and eventually reached the conclusion that they would not be able to get it up and running unless they bought in technology from abroad.

'They discussed how much money they needed with the Central Committee. After the calculations had been made, a figure of 25 million dollars was put forward. Then, after a few days, a decree was issued by the Politburo and 25 million dollars allocated to the Ministry for Electrical Engineering for the construction of the factory. So, what did the minister, Mikhail Antonov, do? Contrary to Brezhnev's instructions, he gave orders for the factory to be built in the Ukrainian city of Zaporizhia.

Meanwhile I was sitting calmly in Azerbaijan and waiting for the project to get the go-ahead, when suddenly the alarm was sounded in Moscow that preparations for the construction of the factory were in fact underway in Zaporizhia. I dropped everything, flew to Moscow, and visited Antonov first of all, then Kosygin's deputy, Vladimir Novikov, in order to ascertain what was going on. It seemed abundantly clear, in fact. Many leading officials considered Azerbaijanis to be incapable of working with high-precision technology coupled with the fact that they didn't have any appropriate technical engineers or qualified personnel. 'Azerbaijanis build slowly, they said, and the quality of what they do is poor and Brezhnev has emphasised the fact that the construction should be completed within a short time.' They told me all this, but I could see that the issue was of a different order entirely. At that time, socially and economically important enterprises of this type were constructed in the Southern Caucasus and Central Asian republics only reluctantly. Preference was shown to the states closer to home, to Russia or Ukraine.

I was determined to fight to the bitter end, however. I even visited Kosygin, although he made me no concrete promises. So, I went straight to Brezhnev. It turned out that he knew nothing about it. 'Well now, how's your factory coming along, Heydar?' he asked me when I saw him. I shrugged my shoulders by way of reply and he asked me why. 'Well because your ministers have all pulled a fast one, and decided to build the factory in Zaporizhia.' He exclaimed, 'What? Oh, the so-and-sos!' Then he picked up his phone and called Novikov, the deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers. 'So what's all this arbitrary decision-making then? I told you that the factory had to be built in Baku.' The deputy chairman blamed everything on Mikhail Antonov. Brezhnev gave Antonov a slating too, so he protested, 'But don't you understand, Leonid Ilyich, there's a large-scale plant in Zaporizhia with its own highly qualified personnel? As you know, the manufacture of air conditioners requires considerable technical skill and we have mastered this technology in Zaporizhia, but in Azerbaijan it would be much more difficult ...' Brezhnev interrupted him, 'Do as you are told. I've worked in Zaporizhia and I know that this region is overflowing with industrial and manufacturing plants. In fact, there's no space left to build a new one. And, in addition, these air conditioners are needed first and foremost in the south, by the southern Soviet republics, so it follows that the factory needs to be built in the south. Why on earth

transport air conditioners from Zaporizhia to Baku, Tbilisi or Ashkhabad, when all this could be made much more cheaply and more conveniently in Baku? So there you go! And you journalists say he was a fool!

By the time I left Brezhnev's office everyone was already looking for me. Novikov summoned me, Antonov asked about Aliyev. They'd taken offence: 'What have you come to complain about us for?' I replied, 'And what did you expect me to do when you wanted to steal my factory from right under my nose?'

I left feeling somewhat more cheerful. However, one month went by and then another and not a peep out of Moscow. So I flew there to ascertain the reason for this latest delay. It turned out that representatives from the ministry had entered into negotiations with a number of foreign firms – American, German and Italian. They were all asking inordinately high prices, somewhere in the region of 120, 130 or 150 million dollars, whereas we had only been allocated 25 million. They finally approached the Japanese firm, Toshiba, (which, incidentally, turned out to be better than the others) and they agreed to fulfil the order for 90 million. Next, we had to go to the Politburo to ask for an increase in funding. However, none of the leaders of the relevant departments could bring themselves to do this. Baibakov and Kosygin tried to lumber each other with it, while Kosygin blamed Baibakov: there's no spare foreign currency, the funding's been exhausted, and so on and so forth. In a word, I got tired of all this bureaucratic red tape, and I approached the general secretary once again.

We talked business for a while and he once again asked, 'Well, Heydar, how's the construction of the factory coming along?' 'It's not', I replied. 'Why? You promised to get it done quickly.' I told him everything and Brezhnev flew into an awful rage and, I seem to remember, even swore in Russian. He picked up the receiver and said, 'Bring me a report, and we'll come to a decision'. We prepared the report in one day, Brezhnev signed it, and 90 million was granted to the ministry.

We lost a year because of all this red tape. I promised Brezhnev that we'd deliver the project by the 25th Party Congress. Back then, if you remember, it was fashionable to time the completion of important state objectives and projects to coincide with some significant date. The 25th Party congress was scheduled for the beginning of 1976. I didn't have much time, but I was determined to keep my promise, no matter what. Firstly, I didn't relish the thought of letting the general secretary down, since he'd really done everything in his power to make sure that the construction would be specifically in Azerbaijan. Secondly, I also wanted to prove that Azerbaijanis are a force to be reckoned with. I imagined how wonderful this factory would be!

I returned to Baku and chivvied everyone up. I visited site at least three times a month personally, demanded progress reports on a daily basis, ascertained what complications and difficulties there were, what materials were essential to meet our objective without delay or interruption, and so

on. I infected those around me with my enthusiasm and we finished building the factory within two years, beginning work on the construction of the factory during the second half of 1973, and finishing it in the December of 1975. We didn't just build the factory – that was only the half of it. We also had to train personnel to work on this enterprise. Therefore, while the construction was in progress, I sent 300 people over to Japan, engineers, technicians and labourers among them. 500 electrical engineering trainees were sent to improve their skills in Moscow, Leningrad and Ukraine. And by the time the factory was up and running, it was fully manned by highly skilled personnel.

I'm happy that I had a hand in the construction of this factory. It's been working for 15 years now, has long since covered its costs and has started to turn a profit. I visited Mozambique once and saw Azerbaijani air conditioners there. Later on, I came across air conditioners from Baku in other parts of the globe – in Korea, Vietnam and Angola, for instance – and I was really proud of what we'd managed to achieve."

However, sometimes the very reverse happened and Heydar Aliyev would do everything in his power to prevent the construction of a particular enterprise or hazardous industrial plant, or would actively close one down. This happened in the case of the production of the insecticide lindane¹ in Sumgayit. In an interview with the journalist Elmira Ahmadova he recounted:

"Leonid Kostandov, the minister for Chemical Industry, decided to construct a factory for the production of lindane in Azerbaijan. When I found out about this, I protested vehemently. I summoned Ali Ibrahimov, the chairman of the Council of Ministers, and demanded an explanation. 'It's Moscow's idea, it's not just for Azerbaijan, it's necessary for the development of the chemical industry in the country as a whole,' he replied. 'But surely permission was required from someone in Azerbaijan for the construction of such a project?' It transpired that Gospian had granted the necessary authorisation.

I declared that for as long as I was leader, the project would not go ahead."²

Sabir Huseynov, who worked as deputy minister for Internal Affairs during the 1970s, recalls that, after a fire in an oil storage plant, Heydar Aliyev made a number of important decisions to improve the ecological situation in the capital. Oil storage facilities were moved beyond the city boundaries and the fire services received the most up-to-date specialist equipment from Moscow including foam-extinguishers developed by native Azerbaijani engineers, which was the first piece of equipment in the world capable of effectively dealing with fires at oil refineries.

The development of the defence industry in Azerbaijan has received very little attention due to its highly sensitive nature. The former correspondent for

¹ Lindane is a pesticide used in agriculture.

² *Ulduz*, No. 6 (1990), 68

Azerinform, Vladimir Morozkov, briefly lifted the curtain on this topic when he told me: "Heydar Aliyev put a lot of hard work into the defence industry. He persuaded Moscow to locate plants for the defence industry in Azerbaijan. At that time, it was not the done thing to talk about this and much less to write about it. The plants in Baku, which were well known in the Soviet Union at that time, produced electronic equipment as well as various systems for the aircraft carriers being built in Nikolayev and even high-precision weapons. There were highly advanced industrial and manufacturing plants in operation in Baku; Lev Smirnov, the veteran deputy minister of the defence industry for the USSR often visited them. Heydar Aliyev raised the money in Moscow and requisitioned specialist electrical engineers and technicians brought over from the centre on a contract, reasoning that they would work in Baku for a while and leave within three years, during which time Azerbaijanis would have mastered the skills necessary to operate this advanced technology. In other words, the location of the defence industry in Azerbaijan meant the introduction of cutting-edge technologies into Azerbaijan and the training of native Azerbaijani personnel in the attendant specialist fields, ensuring scientific and technological progress. It was with a view to the future that he began to send hundreds of students to study outside Azerbaijan.

The defence industry led to a significant growth in Azerbaijan's industrial productivity. The enterprises were all subordinate to the Union as a whole, so that a corresponding social infrastructure was developed at the same time, namely housing, children's nurseries, schools, shops and roads. The necessary money came from the Soviet Union's budget and Azerbaijan did not contribute a single coin. This was therefore a very far-sighted policy."

Azerbaijan's fast-growing economy demanded record amounts of energy and there was an ever-increasing need for arable land. Consequently, energy supply and land reclamation demanded much of Heydar Aliyev's attention. During the 1970s, Azerbaijan was particularly successful in these areas. By the time the republic gained independence, its energy system had attained a production capacity of over 5,000 MW. Its electric power transmission lines, whose average length exceeded 100,000 kilometres, were the largest and strongest in the Southern Caucasus. While Georgia and Armenia combined were producing only 12 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity per year, Azerbaijan put out 23 billion in 2006 alone. In terms of energy per capita, Azerbaijan not only surpassed many of the other former Soviet republics, but was also a world leader. The foundations for this independent energy system were laid in the 1970s when, among others, the Azerbaijan Thermal Power Plant, the Shamkir Hydroelectric Power Station, the Ganja Power Plant, and the Tərtər Hydroelectric Power Station were built and put into operation forming a powerful and extensive industrial network of substations and power transmission lines.

Former Trade Minister Svetlana Gasimova recalls:

"Azerbaijani goods were distributed around the Soviet Union at a controlled and constant rate, but by the end of the 1970s, people were queuing up for them at Soviet trade fairs. I am proud to say that my work was largely responsible. There was a never-ending demand for Sheki silk, for example. People were asking me, quite literally begging me to get Sheki silk for some region or other. They tried to get at me through various Central Committee secretaries. This was how much the quality of our products had improved. We produced products connected with wine-making, fruit and vegetables, porcelain, pottery and calico ... We built a dye-works and carpet factories opened not only in Ganja, but also in Nakhchivan. A factory for woven textiles opened in Nakhchivan, and a great many other factories were built in Sumgayit. All of these needed female workers. Although the chemical industry generally used male workers, light industry developed on the back of female labour. Sewing, textile and weaving businesses started up. People eagerly awaited our products all over the Soviet Union, not to mention overseas. Azerbaijani manufacturers walked with their heads held high. But then, this had been ten years in the making."

I met former CPSU Central Committee secretary, Aleksandra Biryukova, in her pleasant Moscow apartment. She readily agreed to answer my questions – and told me much that was interesting about the time when she worked with Heydar Aliyev. She had witnessed Azerbaijan's quantum leap with regard to light industry at first hand:

"In those days, Azerbaijan was developing at a much faster rate than the other Caucasian republics, assuming a position of leadership in consequence. Most importantly, the republic was doing a great deal for its people. Yes, you started to produce hundreds of thousands of tonnes of cotton and the amount grew each year. But you didn't limit yourselves to producing and exporting cotton. After all, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, all of whom produced many tonnes of cotton, had hardly any new infrastructure. They all worked in the same conditions and all needed a breakthrough. Although he was not an economist, Heydar Aliyevich understood economics very well, and always knew which measures would be the most effective. At the same time as promoting cotton production, he also began to build textile-manufacturing facilities, namely cotton processing plants and spinning mills. Incidentally, they were very large enterprises. He wanted Azerbaijan to export its fabrics and took great pains to this end. Cotton cost very little at that time, but he introduced a turnover tax on textiles, and most of the revenue stayed in the republic. This was very important. At that time, all the indicators showed Belarus and Azerbaijan as standing out from the other republics. Both were awarded State Banners and everyone was talking about them. And it wasn't for nothing that Heydar Aliyev received these honours. He earned them. He succeeded in whatever he turned his hand to."

SOCIAL PROBLEMS

In the 1970s, the housing problem in Azerbaijan was very acute, as it was in the rest of the Soviet Union. On 5th February 1971, Heydar Aliyev gave a speech to the 40th Baku Party Congress, which he concluded with this sensitive observation:

"We must resettle all those living in polluted or industrial areas, in basements or cellars, in hazardous and derelict houses. We must provide normal housing conditions for these families. We will only solve this problem if we build – in the next ten years – roughly seven million square metres of housing. That means, on average, up to 700,000 square metres per year."

There had been building projects under Veli Akhundov of course, but the rate of construction left much to be desired. No more than 300,000 square metres of housing were built in a year, which meant that the rate of new construction had to increase more than twofold. Due to Heydar Aliyev's persistence, before his departure from Azerbaijan this figure was exceeded. In Baku, it reached several million square metres per year. During Aliyev's 13 years of leadership, 18.5 million square metres of housing were built in Azerbaijan, the equivalent of a city the size of Baku. 2,000,200 people – every third Azerbaijani – were resettled in new or improved accommodation.

It was only in the late 1970s that some of the republic's greatest economic problems began to be solved. Heydar Aliyev and his colleagues worked tirelessly to solve social problems, installing gas supplies in all the villages in Azerbaijan, improving the clean water supply and building better roads.

"We had already devised a five-year and a ten-year plan," Hasan Seyidov told me in an interview. "We knew when we wanted to install gas in a certain region, when we wanted the roads in order. And we began to tackle these issues one by one. Take the problem of roads, for instance. Back then, there was a rule that if we ended up with bitumen in excess of what our plan demanded, only 50 percent of it would remain in the republic. I remember Aliyev sent me to Moscow. I went, and negotiated that all excess bitumen would stay in Azerbaijan. On top of this, we built a new facility to make even more. I was travelling from the Bardinski region to Sabirabad with him one night when he said to me, 'Hasan, I think our roads have improved.' I jokingly replied, 'You obviously have more information than I do Heydar Aliyevich.' He laughed and said, 'But they told me that was impossible'."

In his 1971 speech to the 40th Baku Party Congress, Heydar Aliyev declared that green spaces should be created in Baku. He proposed that all the capital's neighbourhoods and public squares should be divided into sections and the sections into allotments. Each allotment was assigned a factory or plant, school or facility. Each was given a target corresponding to the numbers of workers and

students it housed: two trees per person, "If each resident plants and cares for two trees over the next few years, just think of how many woods and parks we would have in Baku!"

On 25th November 1972, Heydar Aliyev spoke at the opening of the Peoples' Friendship Park in Baku. He called for Baku to be turned into a garden city. That day, after the meeting, almost 40,000 seedlings were planted on the terraces of Shikhor Beach: birches and oaks, elders, pines and ashes, poplars and Judas-trees, cypresses and pomegranate trees, cherries and apple trees. Heydar Aliyev placed great emphasis on creating green spaces in the cities and villages, changing the face of the republic and building social and cultural facilities. As Svetlana Gasimova aptly put it, he felt for his republic in the same way a caring father might feel for his family home. And as far as his home and hearth were concerned, no detail was too small.

From a conversation with Fattah Heydarov, member of the Milli Majlis:

"I was second secretary of the Ordubad District Committee from November, 1970 and took part in all Heydar Aliyev's projects, especially those connected to his ideological vision. We attended various conferences in Baku and, after listening to his speeches, emerged full of energy for the work ahead. And there was a great deal of it. In Ordubad, at that time, horticulture was developing very rapidly, beautiful houses were being built, as were cultural facilities and administrative buildings. For example, even the district party committee, the most important body in the region, was still housed in an old silk-weaving factory. The Palace of Culture had been housed in the Juma Mosque building, which had been built in the early Middle Ages. So, we build a beautiful new Palace of Culture, with a capacity for 500 people, as well as a new building for the district and executive district committees. During the 1970s, new government buildings were built all over Nakhchivan. This was the pinnacle of the rebuilding programme."

Just think of all the schools we built! Practically one in every village. Schools, Palaces of Culture and social facilities were all part and parcel of Heydar Aliyev's programme. On his initiative, a far-reaching programme was drawn up by specialists from all over the republic, necessitating additional funds from Moscow.

Thanks to the recent developments in viticulture, cotton growing and crude oil production, Heydar Aliyev was assured of a guaranteed increase in budget revenue, enabling him to continue single-mindedly with his construction programme. He knew that if he had simply asked Moscow for money, they wouldn't have given him anything. So he strove to increase our budget revenue, and as a result, was able to demand an increase in the republic's allowance."

The achievements of Azerbaijan's working people did not go unnoticed either. Practically every year for 13 years, Azerbaijan was awarded the Red Banner of the CPSU Central Committee, the Soviet Council of Ministers, the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions, and the Central Committee of the Komsomol for his victory in the All-union socialist competition. The republic and its capital were awarded the Order of Lenin and the leaders behind production received high state awards or were named Heroes of Socialist Labour. These outstanding citizens appeared in the papers and on television. They were appointed to serve in organs of state, sent to Moscow as delegates to party congresses and other meetings. All this spurred the Azerbaijani on to new heights of labour and to even greater achievements. Azerbaijan and its leader were constantly in the eye of the media. There were columns in the leading newspapers dedicated to the "Azerbaijan phenomenon", not to mention special editions of journals, distributed not only in the Soviet Union, but in the socialist countries in Eastern Europe.

The well-known Azerbaijani writer Elchin spoke to me about these Red Banners, and the atmosphere in the republic at that time. In the 1990s, after Heydar Aliyev's return to power, Elchin joined his staff and lead the government's "cultural" division. He had been secretary to the Artists' Union during the late 1970s, actively publishing both at home and abroad. In short, he watched the events of the day with a discerning eye:

"For some reason, I was once asked in an interview what I thought about the Red Banners with which Azerbaijan had been decorated in the 1970s and early 1980s. I replied that they were a historical fact, deservedly received, and that it would be both impossible and senseless to deny their importance. Of course, if you look at our recent – and at the same time, very distant – past from today's perspective, then the many 'triumphal' award ceremonies would indeed appear fantastical and even surreal. But this is only one side to it. It is harder to see the other side, because it isn't obvious. But we must not ignore the fact that underneath all the pageantry, these 'triumphs' were slowly, and perhaps unconsciously, fostering a sense of self-worth in the Azerbaijani people. After long years of suppression, the first hint of a national rebirth emerged, tentatively at first. High-ranking bureaucrats were beginning to respect our leader, and this acknowledgment of our nation spread unwittingly to include all our people."

Behind all the 'socialist labour' successes and the Red Banners of that period, was the people's self-esteem, a people I have had the honour to write about in my time. All these 'labour victories', banners, orders pinned on the nation's flag, were only the tip of a huge iceberg, which broke through the water with great courage for that time. But the most important part was invisible, underwater; and this part was made entirely of self-esteem."¹

¹ Zerkalo, 10th December (2005)

THE RURAL CRISIS

During the Soviet period, Azerbaijani agriculture underwent great changes. During the 1960s, electricity was installed throughout rural Azerbaijan and modern infrastructure was installed for the collective and state farms enabling the emergence of many large-scale collective farms. By 1969, there were more than 7,000 university-educated specialists working in the rural areas. Construction had begun on key waterworks such as the Mingechevir hydrosystem with its giant artificial reservoir, the Ordzhonikidze Irrigation Canal, the Samur-Absheron Canal and Jeyranbatan Reservoir, the Main Mil-Mughan Drainage Canal, the Upper-Karabakh and the Upper-Shirvan Canals, the Bagramtepinsk Hydrosystem and the Akstafchay reservoir with its irrigation canals.

Azerbaijan suffered a serious economic recession in the late 1960s, however, and many branches of agriculture were in deep crisis. The material security of rural workers was destroyed and people lost faith in their leaders and, indeed, in social justice. In short, they lost interest in their work. According to Irshad Aliyev, Heydar Aliyev's minister for agriculture during the 1990s and an active participant in the economic and social transformation of rural Azerbaijan in the 1970s, the agricultural policy could be enacted, modernisation achieved, and the economic crisis turned around, only after a few critical problems had been solved first of all.

A comprehensive programme was drawn up to develop the cotton, wine, fruit and vegetable, tea and livestock-breeding industries with the help of scholars and specialists. The planning, Irshad Aliyev was at pains to point out, was undertaken with due regard for the specialties of various regions, their climates and environmental characteristics (there were regions better suited to fruit- and vegetable-cultivation, grain, cotton, wine, etc.). Landowners and scientists were encouraged to work together closely and the achievements of the scientists were introduced into rural areas. Regulations and payment standards were put in place in order to stimulate the economy, and personnel at all levels of the agricultural process began to receive intensive training. This resulted in a new generation of regional leaders and specialists from Azerbaijan's – not to mention the Soviet Union's – top universities, improved vocational schools and technical colleges.

And, of course, there was a large influx of funding from the centre, as a result of pivotal government regulations such as "On the development and specialisation of agriculture in the Azerbaijani SSR", and "On further escalation of agricultural production in the Azerbaijani SSR".

Of course, even the most precise statistics and correct scientific terminology cannot replace the testimony of those who witnessed and participated in these large-scale transformations. Instead of statistics and citations from reports

and speeches, my idea is to return to the climate of the 1970s and accompany Heydar Aliyev in his travels through the republic, visiting fields and farms and participating in well-known conferences – equalled nowhere else in the Soviet Union – spending time in Aliyev's personal train and sampling Nikitin's famous home-brew in the village of Ivanovka (and this is a true story!). My numerous interviewees – or rather co-authors – have helped me to create a living image of Aliyev's success.

"Under Veli Akhundov, 250,000-300,000 tonnes of cotton were harvested every year, and a similar quantity of grapes. Under Heydar Aliyev, however, production reached one million tonnes of cotton, and two million tonnes of grapes. It is of note that this was not just a question of stimulating wine production, but comprehensively developing all branches of agriculture. The re-education and training of specialists, and the building of roads, social facilities, housing and schools, etc. [were also important]."

(From Hasan Seyidov's account)

"As members of the Bureau, we visited the cotton-growing regions several times a year. Each of us was assigned a zone. That is to say, we gathered as much information on that zone as we could and observed the different stages in its development. We were told which new varieties of cotton needed to be introduced into the republic. After all, we did not have any of the fine-staple fibred varieties in Azerbaijan, only local ones, although our varieties had a high yield. And it was important to watch how the cotton bolls were growing and how they were opening in order to determine when they ought to be picked and when the leaves would fall so that the mechanical harvesting could begin. It was highly intricate work. Why was this necessary, you might ask? So as to keep the specialists on their toes, so they would know the Central Committee was behind them and to hear the opinions of local landowners and leaders concerning the problems they had encountered with water, chemicals, technology and areas for drying and storing the cotton etc. All these problems needed to be solved promptly if there was to be a good harvest."

(From a conversation with Lydia Rasulova)

From Colonel General Aleksandr Kovtunov's recollections:

"At the beginning of the 1970s, when I arrived in Azerbaijan, there was a visible difference between Soviet and Iranian Azerbaijan in terms of their standards of living. The Iranian Azerbaijanis wanted to prove that their standard of living was higher. They built some sort of infrastructure and a few houses to show us that life was better on their side of the Araz river. But, in fact, life was getting better on our side, especially in Lankaran and Masalli. They were being transformed before our eyes. Although Heydar Aliyevich invested equally in all the regions in the republic, he gave priority to improving the standard of living in the districts along the border."

He tried to attract all the best minds and use all the connections he had in the service of his native republic, Nikolai Baibakov, who was born in Baku, for instance. He did a great deal for Azerbaijan as head of Gosplan."

Mais Mammadov, a former reporter for Central Television, remembers that:

"Every February we held a trade fair. People arrived from all over the Soviet Union to haggle over our early cabbages. People would arrive armed with ready cash, and even begged us to let them have two extra train carriages. Imagine the impact on some Russian backwater like Uryupinsk where the cabbage crop is ready only in March or April. The Azerbaijani yield was in great demand! My Moscow friends would joke, 'You see, Mais, my wife allows me only two roubles a day. That's enough for a bottle of Aghdam wine, a jar of anchovies in tomato sauce, a 14-kopek packet of Aurora cigarettes and a piece of bread. All these are yours.' It was true that Aghdam wine and anchovies in tomato sauce were indeed our products."

Bonuses began to be handed out at the end of December, beginning of January. The people who worked on the collective and state farms, especially the wine growers, would arrive with their bags and receive piles of cash. Then, the shouting would begin as the cash had to be exchanged for goods. The villagers would storm the office of the collective farm president.

Some regions were drowning under a sea of carpets and crystal. I would go and see the director of the collective farm in Ivanovka, the infamous Nikitin, and he would be sitting there with a face like thunder. 'I've just kicked the people out,' he would say, 'they've driven me mad, the devils. I've got a shop full of Belgian carpets. I traded them for garlic. They've been lying here all year being devoured by moth. And I told them: whoever comes to the shop, sell them a carpet. But then the rhetoric started, 'Why are you selling our carpets?' And I reply, 'If the carpets are yours, go ahead and take them.' 'We don't want them right now.' 'What do you think I'm going to do, save them for you?'

In short, there was no trouble buying things in that district. In fact, the villagers were better dressed than city-dwellers. People came to Lankaran by bus from Georgia to buy all this stuff at the trade fair and take it back with them. We sold pomegranate bark to the Japanese. And there were still masses of rejects that no one wanted. But think how many nuts, especially chestnuts, we traded within the Soviet Union! And thanks to economic cooperation, everything we had was taken willingly. We received light industry products in exchange, clothing and televisions, for example. The republic grew wealthier by leaps and bounds."

THE BATTLE FOR LARGE-SCALE GRAPE PRODUCTION

Despite all his impressive economic achievements and the rising standard of living and financial security of his people, Heydar Aliyev was far from complacent. He was always thinking up new and ambitious projects and striving to find new sources of revenue as well as dreaming that Azerbaijan would find a branch of agriculture in which it would outstrip all the other republics. At the end of the 1970s, he took a gamble on grapes.

On 17th March 1979, the Azerbaijani newspapers published a new CPSU Central Committee and Soviet Council of Ministers decree entitled "On further agricultural specialisation and the development of viticulture in the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan". The decree set a production quota, that, "Given the additional preparation of areas under cultivation and the increasing development of viticulture and wine production, the republic should yield between 2.5 and 3 million tonnes of grapes in the year 1990." In order to meet these quotas, the necessary capital had to be raised and a comprehensive programme put into action. Land had to be reclaimed and water distribution systems, processing plants, roads, railroads, social and cultural facilities and water pipelines all had to be built, and gas had to be supplied to rural areas throughout the republic.

I found out at first-hand how this well-known resolution came about and what effect it had on the republic's economy. Zakir Abdullayev was in charge of the agricultural division of the Central Committee from 1978 until Aliyev's departure for Moscow:

"We made a huge breakthrough in viticulture development. It was Heydar Aliyev's idea," Abdullayev told me. "We talked with him a great deal on the subject. The thing about Heydar Aliyevich was that he loved sensation and success and he liked to be the first. He once told me in private that Azerbaijan had to take the lead in some branch of agriculture. With regard to cotton production he knew that, whereas Uzbekistan was producing six million tonnes, we were only producing 600,000-800,000 so that we could not be at the forefront. He also knew that we could never be the best with regard to the cultivation of tobacco and grain and livestock rearing. Initially, the goal set by the resolution involved increasing the grape harvest to 1.5 million tonnes. But Heydar Aliyevich wanted to take it, not to 1.5, but 2.5-3 million tonnes. I was understandably anxious about this.

'Heydar Aliyevich,' I said, 'we will do harm to other branches of agriculture. And where will we raise livestock, if we give pasture up to the vineyards? The same thing will happen to grain cultivation and other branches of agriculture.' I could see that he had already settled on these statistics in his earlier discussion with Leonid Brezhnev. 'Come on,' he said, 'let's write down 2.5-3 million, since I have already promised Leonid Illyich.' He had a point here, as on the strength of this 2.5-3 million,

we would receive a great deal of support from the centre. This would mean roads, pipelines for water, housing and a wine industry. There was more to it though. At that time, Moldavia was producing somewhere in the region of 800,000-900,000 tonnes of grapes annually. Their projected figure was 1.5 million. This was the real reason why Heydar Aliyevich had settled on 2.5 million – to outdo Moldavia."

Elmira Akhundova: And Moscow accepted this idea straight away?"

Zakir Abdullayev: Leonid Brezhnev immediately understood and took Heydar Aliyevich's idea on board", he replied. "The Soviet Union was importing a great deal of French, Italian and Spanish wine at that time. We were also importing a lot of cognac from France. And this decree would mean an almost complete freeze on imports."

E. A.: How did agriculture change after the decree was put into action?"

Z. A.: The basic aim was to develop this particular branch of agriculture so as to bring in a greater yield than cotton or grain. There is definitely a downside to viticulture though, in that you can only reap the profits after three or four years. You sow cotton, for example, and then harvest it in five or six months. On the other hand, there are benefits, like the high yield. And then there's another advantage. You can make bread from grain, but bread doesn't sell for much. Cotton sells for more if you have a large-scale industry, but you harvest grapes, send them on to the winemaking factories to be processed and, ultimately, they make an enormous profit. New factories were built in almost all the wine-growing regions with the intention of turning out first-rate wines. There were some factories around before this decree was issued, of course, but construction began in earnest only after 1979.

There were difficulties, of course. We depended on uncultivated, rain-fed land at that time. Viticulture didn't take off at all In Lerik, Yardimli, Gabala, Ismayilli and other regions. There were vines, in Sheki, for example, but we preferred mountainous, rain-fed land because other crops don't grow there. There was also another problem in that we had to rely constantly on Moscow for essential material resources. It was the only way we could realise the aims behind the decree. It was a huge job, but one with results. Money flowed into the republic. The workers' financial security improved as did the social safety net. New houses were built and new settlements, hospitals and schools. It was a truly mammoth task."

E. A.: Did Gorbachev's anti-alcohol campaign do much damage to this branch of agriculture?"

Z. A.: Almost 150,000 hectares of vineyard were destroyed as a result because there was so little demand. Many were uprooted with tractors. Heydar Aliyev planted between 250-280 thousand hectares. Now, thank God, people with means are beginning to invest in viticulture again. I hope they will revive the industry. After all, Heydar Aliyev put his very heart and soul into it.

From a conversation with Lydia Rasulova:

"I'll tell you an interesting story. We had an unbelievably good crop of grapes in 1981 or 1982, I forget which. The bunches of grapes on the vines each weighed a kilo. Eventually the time came to bring in this abundant harvest. As the whole of Azerbaijan lived off the grape harvest, everything depended on it. People built homes, organised weddings and bought cars and furniture with the proceeds. They no longer queued up with complaints as they had done previously. They asked the management for permission to buy a car or would say, 'My daughter is getting married so I need furniture, but I don't want Bulgarian or Azerbaijani furniture, I want Romanian, or, at the very least, Yugoslavian.' Such were their requests thanks to the grape and cotton crops. The rains came just when the harvest was about to begin. A day went by, then two, then three. The entire grape crop ended up under water and everyone's efforts had been in vain. Azerbaijan's economy largely depended upon that harvest and all of a sudden all the grapes had been flooded.

Heydar Aliyev held a meeting with a few members from the Polithuro and summoned experts from Moscow. The Research Institute of Viticulture and Wine-making had already been established in Azerbaijan, but it did not yet have any experts with the appropriate knowledge. We had a good quality cotton institute in Ganja run by Sidiga Mammadova, but we still did not have much experience with viticulture, so Aliyev invited experts from Moscow to offer advice on how to cope with the situation. They travelled to the wine-producing areas and informed us that, if we really wanted to save the harvest, we would need to gather it while it was still under water. This was because, once the water had receded, all the grapes would immediately start to rot. This was apparently the only option.

Heydar Aliyev called all his colleagues to the Dzerzhinsky Club where he gave a very emotional speech:

'As we have cultivated these grapes with our own fair hands, it is only right that we should reap the fruits of our labour. The experts have told us to bring in the harvest now. In spite of the torrential rain and even though the grapes are under water, this is the only way to save them.'

Even 20 years later when I think about his speech, I get goose pimples. He literally begged everyone to act on what he was saying and do everything they could.

The hall was full of senior farm managers, chairmen of collective farms and party officials. After his speech, that very night, they all went out to the vineyards, some in boats, some with coats, others without, some in knee-high boots, some in shoes, some people even took the oilcloths off their tables. Incredibly, they managed to save the harvest. Heydar Aliyev had an amazing talent for organisation and persuasion."

The well-known journalist Mais Mammadov who worked as a reporter for Central Television in Azerbaijan during the 1970s, recalls:

"I well remember the Soviet Deputy Minister of Agriculture telling Heydar Aliyev that he had warned the Georgians that Azerbaijan would soon overtake them in the cultivation of grapes. When they heard this, the Georgians joked that the Kur river would sooner reverse its flow than Azerbaijan would overtake Georgia. I was in Georgia again recently," he continued, "and said in my speech, 'well then, the Kur is flowing in the same direction as before and yet Azerbaijan has overtaken you by a country mile!' There was no laughter in the audience this time. I think that what Heydar Aliyev achieved with viticulture was a great boost for the entire Azerbaijani economy."¹

From Fattah Heydarov's story:

"There was a terrible shortage of vines at that time. By developing the industry in Nakhchivan and across Azerbaijan more generally, Heydar Aliyev ended this shortage once and for all. There was no longer any need to buy the glucose that used to be sold under the counter at pharmacies because there were so many grapes. Children and older people could now get the required amount of sugar from grapes all year round. Viticulture was extremely profitable for agriculture, much more so than cotton production. As soon as people had money they no longer squabbled amongst themselves. The collective farm workers used their earnings to buy cars, build houses and plant gardens. People started to have well-equipped and productive allotments."

The second part of this series deals with the blow delivered by Mikhail Gorbachev's notorious anti-alcohol campaign and how Heydar Aliyev resisted the destruction of the vines in Azerbaijan. I can imagine how terrible this must have been for him when he had put so much effort into an industry, on account of which, he had had so many sleepless nights and in which billions of roubles and many hours of labour had been invested. I am sure that this heartless attempt to destroy the vineyards upset him deeply and planted the seeds of doubt in his mind regarding the path chosen by the brave and dashing architects of perestroika.

¹ Bakinskiy Rabochiy, 11th March (2004)

THE SOVIET UNION'S VEGETABLE GARDEN

Although he had originally given priority to the cultivation of cotton and only later on to grapes, Heydar Aliyev tried to avoid turning Azerbaijan into a monoculture (like Uzbekistan) and made sure that production increased in various other agricultural sectors as well. Thus, on 21st August 1973, Heydar Aliyev reported to the Secretariat of the CPSU Central Committee about what had been done in Azerbaijan to increase the production and to improve the stockpiling of potatoes, vegetables and fruit and the distribution of these goods among the population.

The relevant CPSU Central Committee decree for Azerbaijan was soon published. Moscow had given Azerbaijan the task of providing the entire Soviet Union with early heat-loving vegetables. This meant new funding for Azerbaijan.

Milli Majlis member, Hadi Rajabli, worked in Lankaran during the 1970 and recalls the striking changes that took place in the region:

"Lankaran became the 'vegetable garden' of the Soviet Union. Heydar Aliyev's personality and his ability to argue in favour of the suggestions and well-grounded demands, which he put before Moscow, facilitated the additional financial support required by Azerbaijan. As a result we sent early vegetables to Russia and encouraged the growth not only of agricultural production, but also the processing industry.

The city of Lankaran was transformed before our very eyes. New residential homes were built everywhere and amenities such as holiday homes and sporting facilities were constructed in every borough, each one connected to a gas supply. All this transpired thanks to the increased production of vegetables.

When he presented these and other economic projects before Moscow, Heydar Aliyevich also discussed the infrastructure and construction of rural roads, schools and hospitals. The revitalisation of Azerbaijani villages consequently followed two paths of development, the first was economic and the second socio-cultural. This started a rapprochement much talked about at the time between cities and villages."

Dilruba Djamalova, the former first secretary of the Lankaran Town Party Committee, spoke to me nostalgically about the people who came from Siberia, the Far North and other parts of Russia to buy early vegetables and of the ensuing struggles in her office when an extra load was required, "It wasn't for nothing that they called us the 'vegetable garden' of the Soviet Union" Dilruba smiled, "I had a special map on which the towns that bought our supplies were circled. Sometimes there were more than a thousand circles."

* * *

From my conversations with fellow journalists and writers, former party members and his security personnel, I managed to gather a truly unique

collection of material on Heydar Aliyev's journeys to the Azerbaijani countryside during the 1970s, where he visited cotton fields, corn fields, tea plantations, vineyards, orchards and livestock farms and where he spoke to collective farm workers and held local meetings of various kinds. This represented a lesson in governance that included hundreds of people from many different offices and departments, from local Party Committee secretaries to farm managers and foremen. Aliyev understood the psychology of management very well and appreciated the importance of establishing a mutually beneficial relationship between the government and its people. This is the key, in fact, to correcting a course of action and solving problems. He understood the importance of listening to opinions from below and reacting to them in a flexible manner. It was also for this reason that he was constantly travelling around the countryside visiting the various enterprises, unexpectedly walking round the shops in Baku or having conversations with people on the street.

Heydar Aliyev's trips to the countryside were usually organised during the hottest summer months and the beginning of autumn, that is to say, when the main crops – the grapes and cotton – were ripening. These were not simply routine visits; on the contrary, they were exhausting and time-consuming tasks performed in the open air in boiling hot sun regardless of his rank.

Vladimir Morozkov described it as follows:

"We usually left Baku at 11 o'clock at night on a Thursday in three carriages (one for Aliyev and two for his entourage) attached to the Tbilisi train that had been reserved as far as Yevlakh. We would reach the provincial town on Friday morning. We then spent all day walking round the fields and farms and then spent the evening at meetings held at both district and regional level. All the most important ministers and heads of the relevant state committees attended these meetings. Executive matters were sorted out by the district bodies concerned. For instance, a representative said that they had problems with fuel. The chairman of Goskomtopliva [the state fuel company] would then be brought in and instructions given. Issues involving fuel or transport were sorted out straight away."

When the work had been completed, Heydar Aliyev would return to the capital by car. He usually offered the intellectuals accompanying him a lift, saying, 'If you want to come with me, do, but I ought to warn you that I drive fast. If you don't like fast driving, you can stay here overnight and travel back in the morning.'

Leonid Tairov, a reporter from *Pravda*, and I were once in the same car. The convoy reached Baku from Shamakhi in 55 minutes in the middle of the night! The first time the driver so much as touched the brakes was in Azneft Square ...

In September, Heydar Aliyev set out for rural parts once again, where he put the finishing touches to plans and production requirements, checking and adding up figures in situ.

The heat was intolerable and we were all sweating profusely, but Heydar Aliyevich was as immaculately dressed as ever in his suit and tie. He admitted, though, that, 'I don't eat lunch and I only take breaks for your sake. I have a glass of juice in my carriage during the day and eat an apple. By evening, I don't want anything to eat. Consequently I lose five or six kilos during every trip.'

He liked to take a group of intellectuals with him on his trips to rural areas, writers, artists and journalists for instance. Every evening, after the meetings, they would all assemble in a room in the Palace of Culture and he would ask them what they thought. He would ask them to, 'Write about the people, look at how village life has changed and how heroically our rural workers are working.' He would ask them if they had 'seen how the rural workers' requirements have grown? Today, for instance, the girls on the collective farms asked me for help in getting them some imported furniture for a dowry. Would that have been possible five years ago?'

We drove back to Baku on the Saturday night, prepared the report on the trip on the Sunday and, on Monday morning, the director of *Azerinform*, Efim Gurvich, reported to Aliyev, who examined everything to be printed about the events in which he had taken part personally."

From the recollections of Zahra Guliyeva, former head of the Azerbaijan Medical University:

"I often visited the rural districts. Everywhere I saw placards announcing that Heydar Aliyev had visited one 16 times and another 15 times. In fact, there wasn't a single district he hadn't visited.

When I worked as the head of the Medical Institute, we sent our students to the rural districts during the summer for medical practice and went out ourselves to monitor them. Once, I was in the Bardin region at the same time as Heydar Aliyev. He wandered around the cotton plantations all day long under the baking sun with his head uncovered, talking to all the collective farm workers and counting the number of bolls on almost every cotton plant. Then in the evening he would hold local meetings. I attended one of these and was struck by the fact that Heydar Aliyev spoke like a real specialist in agriculture, like someone who really knew about working on the land."

From Lydia Rasulova's story:

"At the regional meetings, he would listen to every collective farm boss, every district committee first secretary and, sometimes, the foremen and farm managers too. It would be hot, the air conditioning wouldn't work (they weren't any air conditioners at all until the mid-1970s) and there were a lot of people. The meetings usually lasted several hours. Then, at the end, Heydar Aliyev would give a speech lasting about two hours summarising the situation. He would very often be soaked to the skin with sweat. The strain on him was enormous.

I occasionally found myself in his group. Whenever they tried to erect some sort of covering or shade him from the sun in whatever area or collective farm we happened to be in, he always refused and said, 'So I am to stand in the shade while the farm workers work under the midday sun? Who do you take me for?'

He never held meetings simply as a box-ticking exercise. Even when he returned to Baku, he supervised everything personally. Had this or that area received its fuel delivery and what about the additional supplies of chemicals and so on and so forth? He spoke to local leaders every day, asking them to, 'Give me a report on how everything is going; what are the problems?'

Officials would try not to deliver petrol if they had been told that the petrol hadn't been dropped off and the combines wouldn't be going out the next day. Everyone had to write everything down because they knew that Heydar Aliyev not only had a phenomenal memory, but also extraordinarily high standards. Without fail the next day, he would ask if they had delivered the fuel or not. On his trips, these meetings represented an excellent opportunity for local managers to solve all the pressing problems created for them by bureaucrats."

The well-known television reporter Mais Mammadov has very colourful memories of these trips. From the beginning of the 1970s, his film crew invariably accompanied the first secretary:

"It was not a simple stroll, it was incredibly difficult work. Imagine us traipsing round the collective farms in 40 or 50 degrees of heat! Anyway, Heydar Aliyev was somewhat unpredictable. He might ask unexpectedly:

'Why have you brought me to this farm? Let's go to another one'. Our route would change just like that. As a result, people were always ready for any eventuality; they were forced to be on their guard. If our colleagues behaved well, then we could not show ourselves to be any worse. Heydar Aliyev would walk around the fields and argue with the farm managers. He used to ask, for instance, 'How many times have you watered this field?' 'Twice,' came the reply. 'Why are you lying to me? It's been watered once'.

We couldn't tell, but he had spoken to the experts and knew that when you water a field twice the plants grow in a different manner; they grow evenly.

He visited the farms well prepared and knew what he was going to talk about. It was very difficult for a farm manager or collective farm boss to pull the wool over his eyes.

'Why are you lying to me? I understand that you want a Gold Star and become a Hero of the Soviet Union. You promise a kilo of cotton and then you come up with three. But you knew all along that you would come up with three. Why are you trying to deceive me? Or do you want to sell a kilo on the black market?' 'No,' the manager replied, 'I was just erring on the side of caution.' 'Really, what did you expect, a tsunami?'

He could tell by eye how much cotton there was on a plant.

'How many bolls will there be from this plant, thirty?'

If you multiply 4 grams by 30, then you have 120 grams a plant. So he already had an idea of how much cotton a particular field would produce. Naturally, the farm managers were at a loss in his presence.

He didn't even spare the first secretaries. He once said to one, for instance, 'You have used rather a lot of poisonous chemicals!' His interlocutor began to try to justify himself, 'But, Heydar Aliyevich, insects have been eating the cotton.' But Aliyev wouldn't give in, 'People work here. Have you gone mad? What if your children were to come to work here tomorrow?' 'But there are a lot of pests!' 'I don't care.' He summoned one of the ministers and asked, 'Do you have a more natural means of getting rid of pests?' 'We do,' came the reply. 'So, why don't you use it?' he went on. 'No one asks for it.' 'Why should they? Do you live in America? What were you appointed minister for agriculture for? If he doesn't want what you have to offer, then I'll sack him. So you're just hiding things from them.' This was how things were sorted out."

A huge number of issues were resolved at the regional meetings. Heydar Aliyev always remembered precisely what someone had told him at the last meeting and what they were currently saying. He might even stop the speaker and say, "Stop. What did you promise me last year? You don't remember, but I do. You promised to bring in such-and-such an amount. I saw what high targets you had. But now you are lowering them to make yourself look better? This won't do."

It was the same story when he visited the oil workers. When he spoke to them they were struck by the fact that he knew what chemical reagents, well casing and tool grippers were. He used to say, "Well, okay, as far as I can see you are wasting such-and-such an amount of chemical reagents for each metre of drilling and that, as you know, is a lot."

They nodded, "Yes, Heydar Aliyevich, we agree. But we only have Soviet chemical reagents, not imported ones. The imported ones last longer." "Okay."

He was a genius. In the 1990s, when Heydar Aliyevich and I went to London he met the president of a chemical company and said to him, "I remember you, you built that factory in Sumgayit, but now it has to be rebuilt."

The businessman was surprised, "Your Excellency, this is the first time that I have met someone who understands economics so well."

In fact, Mais Mammadov was not exaggerating. When I looked through the newspapers of that time, I found numerous speeches by Aliyev delivered at various local meetings and was constantly amazed at what I read. Sometimes, I had the impression that it was a well-known expert talking about the difficulties connected with viticulture. He recommended ways of getting rid of the pests and diseases affecting vines and ways of increasing the sugar content in the grapes. He criticised farm managers for mixing different varieties of grape and

noted that when he was at the Sabir Aghsu collective farm he had noticed that five different varieties were being grown in one field. He requested all farm managers to make sure that vines were grown on trellises and the heads of the relevant departments to provide the collective and Soviet farms with the necessary materials and equipment.

After several years of this sort of work, everyone who accompanied Heydar Aliyev on his visits to rural Azerbaijan and attended his district and regional meetings understood agricultural production as well as qualified agriculturalists. Skilled managers who had worked closely with workers in the field were trained in this manner. Heydar Aliyev made sure that his officials respected the common man thanks to whose calloused hands the nation had become wealthy, by insisting that they talk to farm labourers, farm managers, combine drivers and dairy workers and by getting to the heart of their problems and concerns. This, indeed, was the most illuminating side of his "visits to the people".

The most pressing social problems in Azerbaijan had been dealt with by the beginning of the 1980s. Salaries were stable, people had confidence in tomorrow and were, thus, all the more determined to develop the infrastructure in both the towns and countryside, improve the conditions in the villages and to construct cultural facilities. Furthermore, with people like Fattah Heydarov, Dilruba Djamalova and Nazim Ibrahimov (there were many such people across Azerbaijan), a new type of leader had appeared, graduates of the Aliyev school who were noted for their business-like attitudes, their interest in progressive ways of working, their deep-seated sense of decency and their patriotism. Heydar Aliyev had great respect for this type of leader, supported their initiatives and protected them from the conservatism and sluggishness inherent in the Soviet bureaucratic machine. While he was at the helm in Azerbaijan, all the wheels of this machine turned smoothly.

* * *

Heydar Aliyev's economic triumphs and his successful administrative initiatives had an impact across the entire Soviet Union and did not long remain unnoticed by the Kremlin.

An edict of the USSR Supreme Soviet entitled "On the Award of the Title of Hero of Socialist Labour to the First Secretary of the CPA Central Committee Comrade H.A. Aliyev" was published on 24th August 1979. On 7th September 1979, all the Soviet and Azerbaijani newspapers published speeches by Leonid Brezhnev and Heydar Aliyev following an award ceremony held at the Kremlin at which Aliyev was presented the Order of Lenin and the "Hammer and Sickle" gold medal.

As I look at the picture published in Pravda, I see a handsome, elegant Aliyev - a brilliant man, a leader, one favoured by fate sitting in the front row next to Leonid Brezhnev, Andrei Gromyko, Aleksei Kosygin and Mikhail Suslov. In the third row, peeping over someone's shoulder stands Mikhail Gorbachev, the future (and last) general secretary. He was still very humble and stood at a distance, in awe of Heydar Aliyev's glory and popularity. This envy was to play an ominous role in the fate of our hero and almost culminated in tragedy. However, we shall come to this in the last part of our narrative.

Heydar Aliyev received many important state and government awards. The 1970s saw a deluge of such awards. The first secretary was awarded the Order of Lenin in 1971, 1973 and 1976. On 10th March 1982, Heydar Aliyev received another award, the Order of the October Revolution, and under Yuri Andropov he received the title Hero of Socialist Labour twice.

People nowadays often make fun of the "flood" of awards given out during the Brezhnev era by the leaders of the former Soviet Union to the Soviet republics, territories and regions, not to mention their patronage of their closest colleagues. It seems to me, however, that this mockery is ill placed. People received these orders and medals for their distinguished work and for their exemplary professional achievements and were justifiably proud of them. How could anyone have guessed that, within 30 years, the Soviet Union would collapse and with its demise the numerous Soviet orders and medals would lose their significance?

"DID FALSE REPORTING TAKE PLACE IN AZERBAIJAN?"

Andrei Karaulov asked Heydar Aliyev this question in 1990. The former first secretary to the Central Committee replied sincerely: "False reporting took place in Azerbaijan in various parts of the economy both before I came to power and during my tenure as leader, as it did across the entire Soviet Union (it takes place even today). Bribery, theft, false reporting and other malpractices committed by officials were widespread in Azerbaijan. We had only just started work when we had to start getting to grips with these problems, including problems of misrepresentation. Have they gone away? No. They continue to come to light, 'coming to light' being the operative term. They were everywhere: at local level, in businesses, on construction sites and on collective farms. All the facts, which were made known to the Central Committee, were discussed in great detail by the Bureau. We thought that we would be able to prevent managers at all levels from doing anything illegal."

Karaulov asked whether Heydar Aliyev and his staff were successful in completely eradicating these problems. Aliyev replied equally truthfully that, "Unfortunately, we were not successful in completely eradicating this problem."¹

Report padding was one of the greatest evils that the first secretary had to deal with. On the one hand, Azerbaijan had to keep up with the increased amounts of cotton, grapes and vegetables that it had to supply to the government while, on the other hand, it had to punish those who tried to meet and exceed these requirements by means of false reporting and other accounting malpractices.

There are some interesting pieces of information in a document prepared for the CPSU Central Committee later on by the first secretary of the Central Committee, Kamran Baghirov, in response to the investigation of a complaint from Gambay Mammadov, the former public prosecutor for the republic. These testify to the fact that the majority of court cases concerning theft or report padding took place in the 1970s on the initiative of the Central Committee or the regulatory bodies rather than the prosecutor himself. Hasan Seyidov, who often travelled rural areas with Heydar Aliyev, had this to say:

"You couldn't say that there was no report padding or cooking of the books, particularly in the agricultural sector. Heydar Aliyev tried to put a stop to it and punished numerous people. He raised the subject of report padding at practically every meeting with the party officials in charge of agriculture and said that high harvest yields were not needed at such a price and that we should put an end to false reporting. When discussing the rural economy Heydar Aliyevich constantly drew attention to this, saying, for instance, that it shouldn't say 1,000,000 tonnes, when, in reality, it was 800,000."

¹ Karaulov, 210

One of the people whom Heydar Aliyev trusted unconditionally during this period was the first secretary of the Lankaran Regional Party Committee, Isa Mammadov. On 30th January 1981, Isa Aliyevich was elected secretary to the Central Committee for Agriculture at the CPA Central Committee plenum. Although a position in the new cabinet was not forthcoming, he immediately set about making a name for himself. He learnt from local secretaries close to him that in certain cotton and livestock-rearing enterprises reports were being padded. He gathered the necessary evidence and then went to Heydar Aliyev and informed him of the situation, noting later:

"There were undocumented cotton plantations in Barda and in a host of other regions. The collective farm bosses were deliberately reducing the size of the plantations so that the yield from each hectare looked bigger. Furthermore the nefarious practice of reducing the number of head of cattle on paper was widespread, thus making the amount of milk received from each cow look greater. I checked all this and compiled my report."

Heydar Aliyev ordered Isa Mammadov to hold a meeting of the secretaries of the 19 cotton-producing districts in the presence of the minister for agriculture and the deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers responsible for agricultural matters. Before the meeting took place, they presented Aliyev with a detailed document stating who actually gathered the cotton, how much of it there was and who was in charge of the undocumented plantations and how many there were. He started to list the local secretaries of the Barda, Sabirabad, Aghdash, Shamkhir district committees one after another. One had added 20,000 extra tonnes to the account and another 10,000. He did not mince his words with them that day, "It's a good thing that there is at least one truthful person with some respect for me in Azerbaijan," he said.

"After this meeting I visited the rural areas to hold on-site meetings," Isa Mammadov told me. "Those guilty of report padding were punished, a group of district committee first secretaries were sacked and the first secretary of the Shamkhir district committee was arrested. In all honesty, report padding did take place, but we tried to put a stop to it. Heydar Aliyev reacted to this alarming information in a timely fashion and saved both himself and Azerbaijan from disaster."

Unfortunately, only a short time later, the very same Isa Mammadov was involved in highhanded methods of government, putting pressure on local districts and demanding unreasonable increases in the daily norms for cotton and grape harvesting. Zakir Abdullayev told me this piece of information.

The former first secretary of the Nakhchivan Regional Party Committee, Kamran Rahimov, told me that he had often prevented attempts by managers to engage in report padding to exceed the established plan:

"At that time, the government was engaged in an active campaign to stop report padding, theft of socialist property and bribe taking. I once informed the Bureau that, on the First of May collective farm, Isa Aliyev's workers harvested up to 70 hundredweight of corn a hectare. The second secretary of the Central Committee, Yuri Pugachev, did not believe me, thinking that this figure was the product of report padding. When the corn had ripened, I phoned Pugachev and said, 'Yuri Nikolayevich, come and see for yourself that I was right.' When he arrived we visited the collective farm together. 'Choose the field yourself and let the combine bring in the crop. Then we'll weigh it.' The field yielded 76 hundredweight a hectare.

Many people played the system, however. I was once visiting the Khanlyqlar state farm when I saw a woman shouting and getting all worked up. I asked her what had happened. 'Comrade Rahimov,' she said, 'I brought some grapes for delivery. The sugar content in my grapes is usually between 24 and 25 percent, but they deliberately lower it.' I summoned someone from another testing area and instructed him to test the sugar content of the grapes. The woman was right. I had the laboratory assistant who had massaged the figures sacked on the spot.

I was once told that the village elders from Sadarak had asked to see me. They wanted information about the grape harvest. I was surprised because it was already the end of October and the grape harvest had all been brought in. I asked them to come and see me, which they did. They said that in Sadarak the amount of grapes grown had been falsified. The sugar content had been lowered and the size of the harvest increased accordingly.

There was a State Committee for Viticulture in Baku at that time. This committee had apparently ordered the sugar content of the grapes to be lowered to increase the size of the grape harvest. I called Yunis Rzayev, the Chairman of the State Committee, with whom I was on friendly terms. 'Yunis Gahramanovich, put a stop to this practice,' I said. 'We shouldn't be encouraging the people to pad reports.'

I heard of so many trials and so many people being arrested for report padding! While I was in charge, however, no one suffered and there was not a single criminal investigation. The grape and corn harvests increased every year. When I first came to Nakhchivan, we were producing 10,000 tonnes of grapes, whereas in 1983 the harvest was 100,000 tonnes."

Report padding and the theft of public property was an endemic feature of the socialist economy and one of its key problems. Serious attempts were made in Azerbaijan to put an end to these practices; people were punished for report padding, sacked and tried in court while any information about their activities was published and disclosed to the public. All the people I spoke to, including those who did not like Heydar Aliyev for whatever reason agreed that report padding was not a widespread characteristic in Azerbaijan during the 1970s.

When Heydar Aliyev was working as the first deputy chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers in 1986, an enormous investigative team of 1,500 people was sent to Azerbaijan on Yegor Ligachev's orders. The team was led by Aslakhanov and Barannikov and went ostensibly to carry out a check on the republic's communication systems, but in reality it was there to gather compromising information about Heydar Aliyev. Under pressure "from above" they did whatever they could to unearth incidents of a large-scale report padding exercise underway in Azerbaijan and to foster a "cotton scandal" as notorious as the one caused by Gdlyan and Ivanov in Uzbekistan.

The investigators from Moscow travelled out to the rural areas. They summoned directors, managers and foremen and carried out the subsequent interrogations over-zealously, issuing threats and even imprisoning and arresting people. They tried to force people to admit to report padding. Everyone was on edge, including Heydar Aliyev, who was working in Moscow at the time and who was, of course, concerned by what was going on in Azerbaijan. Nonetheless, despite the investigative team's best efforts, they did not manage to rake up enough evidence to warrant a "notorious" criminal case, "bigger than Rashidov's" (as Gorbachev's aide, Georgy Shakhnazarov, had promised).

They were unsuccessful because, when he was the leader of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev had acted with great foresight by prohibiting the familiar practices of report padding and cooking the books. During the mid-1980s, the notorious Ivanov-Gdlyan gang managed to put half Uzbekistan behind bars for figure padding on a very large scale, but a scandal like this would not have been possible in Azerbaijan. Heydar Aliyev had already been dealing with the problem for a long time by getting rid of groups who were working in their own interests and who were trying to earn a good reputation for themselves by dishonest means.

THE WORSENING ECONOMIC CRISIS

The Soviet Union reached the peak of its economic development in the mid-1970s, but this was followed by a slow but steady decline. Unfortunately, Leonid Brezhnev and his government went no further than the half-hearted Kostygin Reforms. They chose not to follow Hungary and Yugoslavia's example, both of which had been transformed so that their presence on the market was gradually increasing with the creation of free economic zones and the influx of foreign investment. Many Soviet scholars believe that the country's considerable energy resources, coupled with high international oil and gas prices, stood in the way of any radical economic reform. With the help of its oil, the Soviet Union simply continued along the familiar path of large-scale development.

"Industry was growing gradually, but growing it was. Two extremely dangerous phenomena were becoming increasingly evident. Firstly, fossil fuel extraction was expanding in leaps and bounds, with more fuel being extracted in five years than in the whole previous history of the Soviet Union ... Secondly, the production of consumer goods was in steady decline. The Soviet Union continued to develop, but the international technological revolution passed us by. It did not help that any modernisation of the socialist model itself failed to catch on. On the contrary, popular confidence in administrative and bureaucratic decision-making only increased."

Problems with agriculture and food production continued to threaten our economy's stability. But any official decision-making in those areas relied on old strategies, whose inefficacy had already been demonstrated. Farms continued to be collectivised – that is, appropriated by the state. The use of chemicals did not have its expected results. Although the Soviet Union outstripped the United States of America in fertiliser production during the 1970s, agricultural productivity only decreased. This economic and technological sluggishness had only one cause: an endemic misunderstanding and fear of necessary structural reforms, namely, a move towards cost accounting in industry, cooperation in consumer services and collective contracts in rural areas.¹

The party leaders gave lengthy speeches predicting the impending victory of socialism throughout the world, foretelling the impending demise of capitalism and announcing the success of the government's food-supply programme. But those whose responsibility it was to feed the country – not with speeches, but with bread – were forced to negotiate with "accursed" foreign capitalists over extensive grain and meat imports. The communists could not provide enough food for their own people. The more experienced of the old-school apparatchiks had long felt that the state machine was becoming increasingly ineffective. In his book *Sem Vozhdey* [Seven Leaders], Dmitri Volkogonov writes that Brezhnev's

¹ Burlatsky, 300

deputies tried to ascribe critical and constructive evaluations of the impending crisis and strategies for averting it to the dying man. When he appeared before the Politburo two months before his death, Leonid Brezhnev described a traditional conference that had taken place with foreign socialist party leaders in Crimea. Without taking his eyes off his text, he noted:

"It is sad, but true that a number of our ministries are ailing. All are falling short of our trade contracts with fellow socialist countries ... I should add that our friends are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the work of the CMEA. Even we are sensing this dissatisfaction. The root of the problem is that the structures put in place over 30 years ago when this organisation was established have become outmoded ... Our allies are striving to combine top-down ways of managing the economy with the use of economic controls and incentives and rejecting an over-centralised leadership."¹

Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov discussed the deepening crisis in the state and party apparatus in a letter to the general secretary, claiming that its solution lay in tightening organisation and discipline and introducing strict administrative measures. Evidently, no one in the government gave much thought to fundamental economic and political reforms, or if they did, chose not to divulge anything to their colleagues.

Only Heydar Aliyev, it seems, saw the inevitability of fundamental change. He recognised that many industries were in decline, especially capital development, public transport, trade and consumer goods, in spite of Central Committee and Bureau legislation and the high standards to which party functionaries were held. Thus, notwithstanding the victory reports, the yearly Red Banners and the many awards and honours received by leaders of industry, Aliyev's speeches at party plenums and conferences became increasingly critical in tone. At times, his colleagues did not understand why he was speaking out so boldly and openly about shortcomings in production and economic problems when everyone else was celebrating the most recent victory on Red Banner.

Of course, he was a man of his time, and as such, it did not occur to him to change the system itself. He understood his work within the limits of an existing ideological system. He believed in tightening discipline, running projects in an orderly way, raising standards for party employees and those in the economic sector and trying to remedy shortages. In the case of the latter, he did not limit himself to administrative measures only. During Heydar Aliyev's final years as leader of Soviet Azerbaijan, he gave voice to many new ideas in his speeches including material incentives, the need to encourage household garden plots and private industry and initiative. But although Heydar Aliyev was ready for serious reform, there was a lack of agreement higher up. He was forced to manoeuvre within the administrative framework, squeezing out of it all that it had to offer Azerbaijan. He was constantly dogged by doubt, wondering whether the Soviet Union was heading in the right direction and taking Azerbaijan with it.

¹ Volkogonov, 98

From a conversation with the academician Yevgeny Primakov:

"I made Heydar Aliyev's acquaintance when he was first secretary of the CPA Central Committee and I was the first deputy director of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations [IMEMO], working under Nikolai Inozemtsev. This was during the early 1970s.

My first impression of him is still very clear. I inwardly compared him with Eduard Shevardnadze, whom I knew well. But then, when I got to know Heydar Aliyev and we began to talk – our conversations, in which we discussed the critical issues of the day, were always very interesting – I discovered that he was a good deal deeper than many party leaders. When I was in Baku, he invited me to spend a couple of days with him at his dacha in Zaghluba. I remember, we went swimming and then just stopped and talked, up to our chests in water. And for a long time, I remember, about 45 minutes. We just stood there, and discussed various things. It was already clear to me that something had to be done. It was a stagnant period, which he wasn't happy about. I could see by what he said that he had a realistic attitude to the current situation in the Soviet Union and the need to do something to change it."

Heydar Aliyev was very much discouraged by the fact that, despite all his mental and physical efforts, he could not save his people from the shortage of basic commodities. On the contrary, in fact. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, there was an acute shortage of food supplies. Coupons had to be introduced for many basic products. Several members of Heydar Aliyev's staff discussed these events with me:

"You see, we weren't getting enough products from the domestic livestock industry," Hasan Seyidov told me, "the state subsidy allowed us around 100,000 tonnes. The Soviet Union believed in the division of labour and our farmlands were devoted to cotton, grain, grapes and vegetables. These were exported throughout the Soviet Union and, in return, we got what we couldn't produce ourselves. But there were huge shortages because many of the republics didn't fill their quotas and obligations.

In Azerbaijan, we allowed citizens to develop their own, subsidiary economies, to have their own cows, for instance. This was a positive move. But then, we should bear in mind that the population was growing rapidly. In the end, we had to introduce coupons for basic foodstuffs such as meat and butter. We had particular trouble in 1980. The commission for food provision used to meet before the long holidays. We were trying to find additional resources and asked the suppliers to give us more or to take supplies from the state reserves. In 1980, though, even the reserves were depleted. I remember, we tried to persuade Heydar Aliyev not to go on his usual round of the shops. He thought for a while, and towards evening decided to go all the same.

And he went. He tried to explain to people as sincerely as possible. "Yes, times are hard, it isn't fair, but you must forgive us." You can't imagine with what warmth and understanding the people accepted his honest explanation. The next day, he summoned the Bureau members, "We have to raise the people out of this mire and do everything in our power to end the meat and dairy shortages." Soon, a decree was issued, encouraging domestic livestock breeding in Azerbaijan. Heydar Aliyev began to work out a special programme for each district – and not just for each district, but each village – until each one was producing what was best suited to it: apiculture or poultry, beef cattle or sheep and goats. Then another resolution was passed to encourage poultry farming in the republic. Poultry farms were set up in Siyazan, Devechi and Lankaran. We even built a village in Absheron, and called it Pitsegrad. After Heydar Aliyev had already moved to Moscow, the Siyazan plant needed equipment from Hungary. Grigory Romanov wanted to send it somewhere in Russia, but Heydar Aliyev went to Nikolai Tikhonov and got the equipment sent to Azerbaijan. There were many incidents like that."

The head of the Central Committee Department of Trade, Mikhail Nazarov, told me a wonderful story:

"It was New Year's Eve and the situation in Azerbaijan was increasingly tense owing to the lack of meat and dairy supplies. Our main suppliers were experiencing difficulties because of the bad weather in 1975. Before we all left for the New Year holiday, Heydar Aliyev called us together, as he always did, and asked how we planned to issue the people with provisions. When he discovered the gravity of the situation, he immediately telephoned the head of the Soviet Union, Aleksei Kosygin, and asked his permission to take the necessary products, mostly meat and milk, from the state reserves. And just imagine – Aleksei Kosygin broke his own rule, thanks to Heydar Aliyev."

Former Azerbaijani Trade Minister Svetlana Gasimova recalls that, on the first secretary's orders, the party employees responsible would often negotiate with other republics, in order to supply the people with much-needed products. Once, she was sent to Belarus for potatoes. There were particularly harsh early frosts that year that had destroyed Azerbaijan's potato crop.

"Heydar Aliyev sent me to the Belorussian Council of Ministers, who subsequently called an emergency meeting," explained Gasimova. "We discussed the issue and the president declared that the Belorussians would consider it an honour to carry out Heydar Aliyev's instructions. They considered them *instructions*, you understand, rather than requests. That was how much they respected his enormous authority."

Aleksandr Ivanov remembers an incident during one of Heydar Aliyev's visits to the shops when the shop workers attempted to flaunt an abundance of goods that simply did not exist:

"He knew that this was all an act: they laid butter and meat out on the counters and then surrounded the shop so that no one could sneak in, 'Look,' they said, 'we sell everything!' Heydar Aliyev could see right through this, and told them so. Then he moved on to the next shop on his route."

Svetlana Gasimova describes three ways of combating negative developments in matters of trade:

"First of all, measures were taken to eliminate shortages. Secondly, we tried to improve the organisation of trade. This meant pre-packaging the goods to sell to businesses to prevent any shortfall or surplus in terms of weight. The third step involved personnel so that experienced people, who had proved themselves to be trustworthy, were promoted. After I became minister for trade, the Bureau of the CPA Central Committee decided, along with several municipal and regional committees, that many of the workers in the Komsomol who had had an education in economics and experience of working with the people should be directed towards trade. They, in turn, both managed and appointed their own staff correctly and worked honestly without liaising with the mafia or other shady types. ...

We had a tough struggle on our hands. Cases involving a shortfall of over thirty grams were handed over to the public prosecutor, who carried out high-profile trials of cheats and swindlers. It should be noted that sales staff were not imprisoned, but rather the managers in charge of the big shops, many of whom were removed from their posts in consequence. Restaurants managers and wholesale retailers were also sacked and put on trial for underhand dealing, price speculation and various abuses of power. Ordinary people were in favour of these measures. They knew that Heydar Aliyev was behind all of this, and that he was dealing with the problem personally.

Every week he would travel around shops and markets. He forced agricultural districts where there were collective and state farms to grow their own produce, sending it to industrial centres and selling their goods at fixed prices in order to prevent speculation. These farms sold natural, high-quality cheese, butter, apples, and pears that they produced themselves. Regular fairs were arranged specifically for this purpose in Baku, Sumgayit, Ali-Bayramli (new Shirvan) and Ganja.

Industrial and consumer goods still caused a lot of difficulty, however, and so trade was organised on a priority basis. This was one way of dealing with speculation, and it was very effective. Everyone needed imported furniture, but there was so little. If any was left in the shops the store manager could buy it for a 'special', speculative price. With the help of trade unions and their local organisations, we compiled a list of businesses exporting furniture, fridges, television sets, clothes, shoes and so on. We paid particular attention to cases where writers, composers and other members of the creative intelligentsia were being overcharged."

A CPA Central Committee plenum was held on 12th July 1974 to discuss "Measures for the further improvement of trade and consumer services for Azerbaijani workers in accordance with the requirements of the 24th Congress of the CPSU". This was the first time that it had been suggested, and largely agreed, that trade could not be regulated simply with a few punitive measures. After this plenum, the government began to view the struggle to prevent the infringement of trading rights in the light of a broad range of related issues, namely increasing the production of consumer goods, improving their range and quality and the introduction of new technology into trading organisations, all of which had positive results.

In Moscow, Heydar Aliyev proved to be a leader whose versatility and broadmindedness would take his country further along the path of scientific, technological and agricultural advancement. He was behind a law, progressive for its time, on the "collective workforce", and also began a new chapter in the cooperative movement, supporting perestroika and the policy of "new thinking" unconditionally. He agonised over the economic reforms facing this huge multinational state. Unfortunately, the higher Mikhail Gorbachev and co. rose, the less notice they seemed to take of the opinions voiced by Heydar Aliyev and other intelligent members of the Soviet leadership. Not only did Heydar Aliyev come to be involved in this drama, but so did the whole of the Soviet Union.

ARMENIAN SEPARATISM

In addition to questions of economics and politics, his opposition to Armenian separatism, which he had experienced at first hand, was one of Heydar Aliyev's enduring concerns during his time as the first secretary, especially at the beginning. I have described his work relating to this issue while he was head of the KGB at length in the first part of this book.

Heydar Aliyev was confronted with this emerging separatism as soon as he was elected first secretary. After the Armenians had made the typical failed attempt to seize Nagorno-Karabakh in the mid-1960s, they changed tactics and embraced a less aggressive policy playing dirty tricks on their neighbours. They dragged out some old maps from the late 1920s, declared some land on the Azerbaijani border to be "Armenian since time immemorial" and demanded that it should be ceded to Armenia.

"The talks lasted two or three years," Aliyev recalled much later. "They were led not only by Veli Akhundov but also by Mammad Isgandarov, Enver Alikhanov, and the second secretary, Elistratov. Unfortunately, in 1969, these talks resulted in a decision by the Azerbaijan Supreme Soviet that these borderlands did, indeed, belong to Armenia and should be given back. When I became the leader of Azerbaijan in the July of that year, I mulled over the problem for a month and finally refused to implement the ruling. They continued to push for the question to be resolved in their favour for a long time, but I resisted. I understand how this unfair decision was made at that time. There is no longer any need to discuss that, but I would like to stress that Veli Akhundov had absolutely no desire to hand over these pieces of land. It was only pressure from Moscow and other sources that made such a decision unavoidable."¹

In an interview with the journalist Elmira Ahmadova, Heydar Aliyev recalled that: "In September 1969, I called the first secretary of Armenia, Anton Kochinyan, and requested a meeting. Our meeting took place on the border between the Gazakh [Azerbaijan] and Ijevan [Armenia] districts. I put the issue firmly on the table and suggested that Kochinyan should take concrete measures to counter the territorial pretensions of Armenian nationalists. In my opinion, it was a productive meeting, because there was no further trouble whatsoever between our two countries in the ensuing period."²

In his book *Sem Pisem v Iravan* [Seven letters to Iravan], the famous Azerbaijani poet, writer and publisher Hidayat writes:

"In one of the interviews, possibly the last, published in the youth magazine *Garun* in 1988, the former Armenian leader, Anton Kochinyan,

¹ Heydar Aliyev, *Our Independence*, vol. 6, 455

² *Uluz*, No. 6 (1990), 71

said that during his leadership, the Karabakh 'question' was brought up on several occasions, but Heydar Aliyev's authority and the weight his opinion held in Moscow prevented it from being 'resolved'. Mikhail Suslov went as far as to summon Kochinian and insist 'enough Armenian nationalism!' That put an end to the 'Karabakh problem' during the Brezhnev years. It could well be for this reason that Brezhnev's demise was seen in Yerevan as good news.¹

There were nevertheless a host of unpleasant incidents at the beginning of the 1970s. One of these incidents, provoked by Armenian nationalists, took place in 1969 in the settlement of Bayan, in Azerbaijan's Dashkasan District. People from Bayan, who were living in Yerevan and other Soviet cities, decided to erect a memorial obelisk there at their own expense to commemorate local casualties of the Second World War in perpetuity. Committees were organised in Moscow, Baku, Kirovabad, Khanlar and other Soviet cities to raise funds for the construction of the monument. Some 22,000 roubles were collected and spent on the construction of the sculpture in Yerevan. It took the form of a 14-metre obelisk of grey basalt, with a sculpted three-metre high eagle on its main face and a weeping woman in bas-relief on one of the side faces.

Remembering this episode, which had taken place almost 40 years before, the academician, Omar Eldarov, explained to me the true significance of the image of the eagle on the sculpture:

"This eagle was in fact a copy of one of the most important details on a monument in Yerevan honouring the victory of the Armenians over the Turks in the Battle of Sardarabad," he explained. "There are two anti-Turkish monuments in Yerevan. One is a monument to the victims of genocide and the other, a monument adorned with eagles and huge bulls, celebrates the Armenian victory in the Battle of Sardarabad. The eagle was an exact copy of a fragment from that monument, only much smaller."

The members of the Regional Committee Bureau discussed the issue and decided to remove the sculpture of the eagle from the monument. During the night of the 25th July, without the prior knowledge of the residents, it was removed and taken away. This act provoked outrage amongst the villagers and a stream of letters and telegrams flooded into the Soviet and Azerbaijani party organs. In addition, emissaries arrived from Yerevan deliberately to inflame the situation. They claimed that the action of the regional authorities had denigrated the memory of the fallen. Local residents held a spontaneous demonstration and hurled insults and threats against the party leadership and Soviet district authorities. The chairman of the collective farm belonging to the settlement of Bayan and the secretary of the party organisation were branded as traitors and threatened with physical violence. A commission was dispatched as a

matter of urgency from Baku under the leadership of the secretary to the Communist Party, Ali Amirov, who was sent to brief the local population.

As a result, the residents were promised a new memorial, which was to be placed upon the monument with their agreement and at the government's expense. The project was entrusted to the Council of Artists of the Republic, who were to create a sculpted figure to reflect the tragedy of the fallen soldiers.

Yet another shocking incident took place in the summer of 1969. Its instigators hoped to whip up tensions and whip up suspicion between the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis. On 15th August 1969, at Ararat train station in the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic, a group of Armenian hooligans maliciously attacked the conductors on a train on the 257 Yerevan – Baku route. The acting chairman of the Azerbaijan branch of the KGB, Vitaly Krasilnikov, describes this crime in a letter addressed to Heydar Aliyev, stating that, "a large crowd of riotous individuals from amongst the local population gathered at the station during the incident and created a disturbance."

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Armenian separatists attempted to foist the so-called "Kurdish problem" onto the Azerbaijani authorities, with the intention of causing trouble.

In a letter addressed to Heydar Aliyev (10/1522, 29th October 1969) on the subject, the chairman of the Azerbaijan branch of the KGB, Vitaly Krasilnikov, writes that:

"According to information received by us, Kurds living in the Armenian SSR are intending to send a delegation to the Azerbaijani authorities with a petition asking for the settlement of the following issues:

1. To permit the Kurds living in the Armenian, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan Soviet Socialist Republics to emigrate to the Azerbaijani SSR and to allocate a separate autonomous territory for them (?);
2. To open schools with teaching in Kurdish;
3. To create favourable conditions for the publication of creative, scientific and other literature in the Kurdish language;
4. To publish newspapers and broadcast radio programmes in Kurdish in the territory allocated to the Kurds;
5. To show concern for the provision of suitable employment for the Kurdish intelligentsia."

The Armenian nationalists, thus, resolved to carry out an ethnic cleansing of Kurds from their territory under the cover of a touching "concern" for their national and cultural rights. It is odd, though, that the idea of Kurdish autonomy on their own soil did not occur to them.

In his book *Intervyu s Generalom Razvedki* [An Interview with a general from the intelligence services], Ilhuseyn Huseynov writes:

"The 1970s were characterised by the brazen manner in which Armenian nationalists would raise the question of the 'historic possession of the Karabakh territory by Armenia.' The key players in these 'activities' came

¹ Gidayat, *Sem Pisem v Irevan* [Seven letters to Irevan], (Baku: 2004), 23

from the intelligentsia and youth, whose actions were coordinated by nationalist circles in Yerevan. They shifted their tactics to the stockpiling of weapons and military equipment, distributed pamphlets and attempted to form underground nationalist youth groups in order to achieve their criminal aims. It was precisely during this period that the Azerbaijan branch of the KGB managed to expose a certain R. Danielyan and the members of his terrorist group who threw a grenade amongst a group of Azerbaijanis in Stepanakert in June, 1971.¹

Excerpt from the 1972 report of the KGB Division of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region (the NKAR):

"On 18th June 1971 a hand grenade exploded outside the Karabakh Hotel, seriously injuring five Azerbaijanis. One of them later died of injuries sustained in the attack.

Eight Armenians were subsequently arrested after investigations by the regional directorate of internal affairs and a special unit from the garrison at Stepanakert. A large collection of weapons and military equipment was uncovered during a search of their homes.

Head of Division Bystrov."

At first, the office of the public prosecutor of the NKAR led the investigation into the explosion. Then it was taken over by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the NKAR. One of the ringleaders was arrested and later freed, ostensibly due to lack of evidence against him, but more than likely due to pressure from local inhabitants. Over a period of several months, six volumes full of information were compiled, but the investigation had reached an impasse. Heydar Aliyev examined the case at the Central Committee Bureau and decided to hand the investigation over to the "committee officials". The matter of the grenade was, therefore, left in the hands of our old acquaintance, Akram Selimzadeh.

From Akram Selimzadeh's story:

"... I asked the leader of our department to provide me with translators who would translate all the relevant documents from Azerbaijani and Armenian into Russian. Since the matter revolved almost entirely around Armenian nationals, I suggested that an Armenian speaker should be included in our team of investigators.

I was given Safar Aliyev. He had lived in Armenia and completed his education in Armenian. I was also given Sasha Shkitov as an investigator. The translators got down to business the very next morning. They translated all the material relating to the investigation and I then realised

¹ Huseynbeyli, 57-58

that it would be possible to throw light on the incident. There had simply been no system to the enquiries up to that point. It is quite possible that the Armenians had not read what the Azerbaijanis wrote, and vice versa.

We made progress. Soon we arrested Eduard 'Pshka' Danielyan, Valeri Agadzhanyan and Slavik Agadzhanyan. A total of eight people were arrested in connection with the investigation.

Valeri Agadzhanyan was the first to be arrested. When we examined the case materials we discovered that, when he was talking to his fellow conspirators, he had declared, 'You threw the grenade among the Azerbaijanis in vain.'

There is a hotel called 'Karabakh' in Stepanakert. All the PE teachers from the schools in the nearby regions – including Fuzuli and Shusha – had been invited to a seminar there. A large group of young Azerbaijanis had gathered in the evening and were chatting at the entrance to the hotel. Their only crime was their Azerbaijani nationality. The Armenians, who had managed to steal an RG-42 hand grenade from a military post, were concealed behind the hotel building and threw the grenade amongst the Azerbaijanis from there. One died immediately, another had to have his legs amputated and the rest were also wounded.

We succeeded in 'breaking' Valeri Agadzhanyan.

After all, the very exclamation: 'You threw the grenade among the Azerbaijanis in vain', provided us with a way in. Valeri gave us all the details and named the perpetrators. He himself was amongst them and had been present when the act of terrorism was being planned; it had been Eduard Danielyan who convinced them to go ahead with it.

'Let's throw a grenade,' he urged his fellow conspirators, 'let's blow up some Azerbaijanis, Turks that they are. We'll have our revenge.'

Some years previously, in 1967, there had been major disturbances as a result of the trial of the murderers of a young boy. 25 people were arrested in connection with the murder, Danielyan's older brother among them. He was sentenced to death, a punishment which was later reduced to fifteen years and Danielyan wanted to avenge his brother.

Once the Karabakh conflict began in the 1980s, this same Danielyan became extremely violent, torturing and murdering Azerbaijanis.

The court sentenced Danielyan 'Pshka' to fifteen years. This was already the second time he had been held to account for the murder of an Azerbaijani. As he was still a minor, he was given a reduced sentence. Valeri Agadzhanyan received ten years, the rest were given five or six for failing to report a pre-meditated crime. Heydar Aliyevich was extremely pleased with the outcome of the investigation and I was given an award."

Barely two years later, the Armenian nationalists carried out an even deadlier act of terrorism, on this occasion in the capital of the Soviet Union. In 1973, three explosions rocked Moscow, one in a shop on 25th October Street (now Nikolskaya Street), one in Derzhinsky Square and

one on the underground between Izlaimovsky Park and Pervomaiskaya. 29 people lost their lives as a result of these attacks.

The tale of the painstaking investigation and search for the terrorists is covered in Filipp Bobkov's book *KGB i Vlast* [The KGB and power]. Tiny fragments were pieced together to recreate first the container that had held the explosive (a casserole dish) and then the device placed on the underground. The passengers who had been in the carriage when the device went off were located and helped to put together a description of people who had left the carriage at stations before the tragedy took place. The descriptions proved conclusive: there were two terrorists, and it transpired that both were Armenian. Staff working at the Operational Investigation Unit met every plane and train arriving in Yerevan from Moscow and additional searches were carried out elsewhere. Two men matching the description of those seen at the Kursk train station emerged from the very first train to arrive in Yerevan from Moscow. They were Stepanyan and Bagdasaryan, members of an illegal nationalist group under the leadership of a certain Zatikyan. When his home was searched a casserole dish identical to the one that exploded on the underground was discovered in his attic. After their arrest, the perpetrators were confronted with the casserole dish that had been reassembled from fragments as well as various other pieces of physical evidence.

"It turned out," writes Filipp Bobkov, "that all three were members of an illegal nationalist party opposed to the Soviet system, and consequently, Moscow. They had decided to wreak revenge on the Russians: women, children, old people, it didn't matter who so long as they were Russian."

Such an incident should have attracted the attention of party and government officials and encouraged them to seek ways in which to address the causes of this interethnic hatred. However, apart from the investigative and legal procedures in Moscow, there were no repercussions. The Armenian authorities did everything they could to keep the crime from the general population. Karen Demirchyan, the first secretary of the CPA Central Committee, banned all Armenian newspapers from publishing information concerning the act of terrorism. A documentary on the trial of Zatikyan and his fellow conspirators, filmed during the High Court sessions, was banned from being shown even to prominent members of the Armenian communist party, and was viewed only by a narrow circle of the highest officials. Neither was the film shown in cinemas, despite the considerable advantages it would have had and the contribution it would have made in terms of awareness building. The Armenian leadership justified the ban by claiming that they wished to avoid compromising the Armenian people in the eyes of the Russians ...

Nobody wanted to draw political conclusions from the facts of the attack ... The authorities in the capital and elsewhere seemed not to realise that the problem would not stop there. Even some years later,

when nationalist tendencies were beginning to grow and the Dashnaks were resolutely spreading their ideological beliefs in Armenia, the local authorities refused to counter these movements, evidently not by accident."¹

Heydar Aliyev understood better than anyone the danger of an intensifying nationalist atmosphere amongst the party nomenclature of the NKAR. He resolved, for this reason, to bolster the leadership of the autonomous region with trusted and dependable staff. In the autumn of 1973, he put forward the then first secretary of the Kirovsky District Party in Baku, Boris Kevorkov, for election as first secretary of the CPA Nagorno-Karabakh Regional Committee. A plenum of the CPA Nagorno-Karabakh Regional Committee took place on October 12th, 1973. The Committee relieved Gurgen Melkumyan of his duties as first secretary and took away his membership of the Bureau of the Nagorno-Karabakh Regional Committee and elected Kevorkov in his place. Melkumyan was subsequently employed at the Azerbaijani Trade Union Council.²

Heydar Aliyev held Boris Kevorkov in high regard, petitioned for him to be awarded the Order of Lenin and two Orders of the Red Banner of Labour and put him forward for election to the Supreme Soviet. Kevorkov was also a candidate for membership of the CPA Central Committee Bureau.

It is of note that Boris Kevorkov worked as first secretary right up until 23rd February 1988, when he was relieved of his duties by a plenum of the Nagorno-Karabakh Regional Committee "for inadequacies in the workplace". The undercover millionaire and staunch separatist, Genrikh Pogosyan, took his place.

In 1975, at a plenum of the regional party committee, the first secretary of the Nagorno-Karabakh Regional Committee, criticised the nationalist elements who were striving to undermine political stability in Nagorno-Karabakh. Boris Kevorkov listed concrete facts and names, including that of Zoryi Balayan, and condemned attempts to turn the Dashnakist, Andronik, into a national hero. Heydar Aliyev described the consequences of that speech as follows:

"The nationalists reared their ugly heads once again and incited all sorts of acts of provocation against the Nagorno-Karabakh Regional Committee, especially Boris Kevorkov. Telegrams were sent to Moscow and other regions and tensions increased. Two months later we met Karen Demirchyan in Moscow and talked to him for four hours. I made it abundantly clear to him that any problems at all in the NKAR were to be resolved by the regional authorities and the leadership of Azerbaijan. Any interference in Karabakh by others could well damage our transnational relations, something that we could not allow. The situation was stable once again."³

¹ Bobkov, 311-312

² GAPPOL, Fund 1, inventory 80, case 491, 15

³ *Ulduz*, No. 6 (1990), 71

In 1975, the well-known writer Marietta Shaginyan arrived in Baku for the Festival of Soviet Literature. She visited Kirovabad in the NKAR and met some of the Armenian intelligentsia, who were nationalist in outlook. When she returned, Heydar Aliyev invited her to his house and she told him her views on the subject. Firstly, she remarked, the Armenians were doing very well in Azerbaijan, "living off the fat of the land"; secondly, before she arrived in Baku, she had been staying in a hotel in Yerevan and a group of famous Armenians had come to her to complain. They showed her a letter asking for the NKAR to be ceded to Armenia and asked her to sign the petition. Marietta Shaginyan not only refused to do so, but also advised her compatriots to give up this damaging and undignified undertaking. It was thus that Heydar Aliyev became aware that the Armenian separatists had not given up on their intentions.

"In February 1976, pamphlets were distributed on the Goris campus of the Armenian Pedagogical Institute and at the Yerevan Polytechnic Institute, appealing to the 25th Party Congress to deal with the issue of the unification of the NKAR as well as the Nakhchivan Autonomous SSR with Armenia. At the same time an article by Khanzadyan, a former member of the CPA Central Committee, appeared in *The New York Times* demanding the Soviet government to 'return the NKAR to Armenia, to which it used to belong'. At the same time, a letter from the communist, E. Oganesyan, was sent to the Politburo demanding the 'return' of the Azerbaijani districts of Shamkhor, Dashkesan, Khanlar, Shauamian and Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia. Idealisation of the past, nationalist arrogance and a deliberate exaggeration of the significance of the issue of the borders of 'Greater Armenia' in the Armenian press, academic, scientific and creative literature became a defining feature of that period. Many of these works were laced with pretensions to the lands of the neighbouring Turkey and Azerbaijan, suggesting to the peoples of those lands that Karabakh, Nakhchivan and other regions were in fact 'integral parts of historical Armenia'. This tendency can also be seen in *Armenian Folklore*, a book published in Moscow and translated and compiled by G. Karapetyan, where the author insists that 'the town of Shusha is the fortress-town of Artsakh, historically part of Armenia.'¹

Unfortunately, the Azerbaijani scientific and creative intelligentsia were far more concerned with praising the "unshakeable friendship between the Armenian and Azerbaijani peoples", so that the task of rebuffing the nationalists from neighbouring Armenia was left to just a few individuals. People in Azerbaijan, who did not want to stir up the situation, stood in the way of those on the side of truth and fairness.

The academician Igrar Aliyev remembers how Heydar Aliyev summoned him early in 1978 and told him that:

¹ Huseynbeyli, 58

"The Armenians have brought the question of the unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia to the attention of our government. It is very important for us to put together a well-founded report on the issue."

Igrar Aliyev reminded the party leader that he had been involved in putting together a similar report for Mir Jafar Baghirov straight after the war. Igrar Aliyev asked for the document to be retrieved from the party archives:

"Heydar Aliyev received me on the following day as well. He handed me the report that we had written 30 years before. Our short conversation showed me the extent to which the problem troubled him. It took me a month to prepare a comprehensive report on the history of Nagorno-Karabakh, which I then presented to the Central Committee. Its main points were discussed and approved the very next day at a meeting of the Central Committee Bureau. I got the feeling that Heydar Aliyev approved of the document as he thanked me after the discussion. I was to discover later on that he suppressed yet another Armenian act of provocation against the Azerbaijani people in the nick of time."

Heydar Aliyev received a group of Azerbaijani writers at the Presidential Palace on 10th November 1999 and described the events of 20 years before:

"A new Soviet constitution was inaugurated in 1977. A Constitutional Commission was formed, Leonid Brezhnev was the chairman and we were members; I represented Azerbaijan.

The Commission would meet from time to time to deal with pressing issues. At that time, the academician, Nikolai Ponomarev, was a Central Committee secretary and chaired the meetings. Leonid Brezhnev did not take an active part. One day I arrived in Moscow to attend a meeting of the Commission. It turned out that there had been numerous petitions asking for 'Nagorno-Karabakh to be ceded from Azerbaijan to Armenia.' Nikolai Ponomarev thought that the question needed to be discussed by the Commission as he was apparently already under the influence of the Armenians. Can you imagine what the very fact that the question was raised by the Commission meant?

A day before the Commission was due to meet I attempted to remove the question from the agenda – it was again necessary to go to Brezhnev. I told him that such a thing could not be permitted! He picked up the phone, telephoned Ponomarev and ordered him to remove it."

The disappointment felt in Armenia when Heydar Aliyev was elected to the Politburo and welcomed into the Soviet elite can well be imagined. Many years later, one of the leaders of the "Dashnaksutyun" party, Gevork Kirakosyan, was to announce with cynical honesty:

"If Aliyev stays in power, Karabakh will no longer be our home, but our prison. Heydar Aliyev has skewered Armenia and the Armenian lobby the world over."

¹ *Ekm*, special issue, Nos. 13-16 (2002)

² Heydar Aliyev, *Guarding Cultural Heritage*, 368

³ Gidayat, 51

When the events surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh started to unravel, a story appeared in the national media, clearly at the behest of Gorbachev's ideologues, that the reason behind the conflict was the NKAR's economic backwardness and the infringement of the Armenian population's rights. This was, of course, a lie invented to discredit Heydar Aliyev and to excuse the government's inability to counter these interethnic problems.

In an interview with Andrei Karaulov, Heydar Aliyev described the positive indicators of socio-economic development in the NKAR during the 1970s and 1980s, and listed everything that had been achieved in Nagorno-Karabakh during his leadership:

"A railway to the centre of the region, a wonderful train station in Stepanakert, a new airport. We organised regular flights between Stepanakert, Baku and Yerevan. I telephoned Karen Demirchyan and we agreed that Aeroflot Azerbaijan and Aeroflot Armenia would both operate the flights; you can see how we arranged all this down to the very last detail. Large-scale industries were built: a shoe factory, an electro-technical factory, factories producing condensers for the electronics industry and agricultural machinery etc. Significant measures were also undertaken to promote agriculture in the region. Two reservoirs were built with hydroelectric power stations as well as irrigation canals, which considerably improved water supply in the two regions. The production of grapes grew from 50-60 thousand tonnes at the beginning of the 1970s to 120-130 thousand by 1980. Production associated with livestock farming nearly doubled. This is saying a lot for a small region with a population of 170,000."

Much was achieved to promote social wellbeing. We founded a pedagogical institute in Stepanakert. It may not have been strictly necessary in such a small region, but we were hoping to co-operate with the intelligentsia. Lessons were taught in Armenian. I have already mentioned the construction of homes, schools, and health centres. We also restored and equipped the theatre and I supervised the construction of a large Palace of Political Enlightenment personally. We put up new monuments and we even rebuilt a large church that had once stood in Shusha and was destroyed in 1918, inviting stonemasons from Armenia to complete the work. We encouraged cultural relations between the NKAR and Armenia to flourish. Heads of ministries and departments and official bodies, theatre groups and concert bands, artists and academics frequently visited the autonomous region from Armenia. The slightest mention of any sort of restriction is entirely unfounded."¹

Heydar Aliyev visited Nagorno-Karabakh twice a year in order to keep his finger on the pulse, and he received an ecstatic welcome every time.

¹ Karaulov, 217-218

From a conversation with Aleksandr Ivanov:

"Once the first secretary's car just could not make it up the hill into Shusha. He had arrived for the unveiling of a monument to Vagif. The automatic car, a Zil, stalled on the ascent from Stepanakert into Shusha. Heavy snow had been falling since morning, all the paths to the mausoleum had disappeared under snowdrifts and the car began to slow down. It was then that local residents, many of whom were Armenian, lifted it up and carried it for some time, rescuing it from sinking into the snow. That shows how much they thought of him."

However, the more Heydar Aliyev achieved in Nagorno-Karabakh, the more he was disliked in certain Armenian circles, that is to say, among those who were determined to appropriate this bountiful little corner of Azerbaijan. There are a number of interesting facts concerning this in Hidayat's book, *Seven Letters to Yerevan*:

"Before the Azerbaijani leader became a member of the country's senior leadership, there were always images of all the members and candidates for membership of the CPSU Central Committee Politburo dotted round Yerevan. However, this came to an end with the election of Heydar Aliyev, so that they did not have to display his portrait at festivities and demonstrations.

I recall that, in the autumn of 1976, a meeting was held at the Yerevan Pedagogical Institute between Vardges Petrosyan, H. Emin and myself. As I was coming up the stairs to the last floor where the assembly hall was located, I saw portraits of all the members and candidates for membership of the Politburo on a stand. I came, first of all, to the conclusion that the students in the Azerbaijani sector, situated opposite the assembly hall, had taken care of this. But the place where Heydar Aliyev's portrait should have been was empty. Perplexed, I turned to the dean of the Languages and Literature Faculty and asked him indignantly why the portrait had been taken down. The dean replied, hesitating, 'Yes ... Someone's pinched it ... We'll find another portrait just the same.'

I didn't have time to react to this 'explanation' before we were invited into the assembly hall and all quickly took our seats for the presidium. But this upsetting incident had left a bad taste in my mouth. The rector declared the meeting open and after having had a word with Vardges Petrosyan, he put the microphone aside, turned to me and said, 'Don't be upset about the portrait, it's just some idiot's prank.' Clearly, he'd heard my question addressed to the dean when we were coming up the stairs. 'I'll deal with it personally. We'll find a portrait of the same size and fix it in place.'

'Some idiot's prank' seemed to me a funny way of putting it. I replied, 'Mikoyan's portrait has hung above our heads in Azerbaijan for 30 years, but not a single Azerbaijani has made so bold as to tear it down. Do you really think that we don't have any idiots among us Azerbaijanis? But even

so, nobody's ever done anything like this.' The rector turned red in the face, was going to say something in reply, but stopped short and instead muttered something to himself."¹

Hidayat recalls that, on more than one occasion when he was travelling round Armenia, he came across portraits of Heydar Aliyev that had been defaced by vandals, "My driver Hamlet, an Armenian by birth, would tear down the defaced portraits while cursing his fellow countrymen and, mad with rage, would take them back to the car."²

Heydar Aliyev was on friendly terms with Marshal Baghramyan. Heydar Aliyev saw the Second World War as sacred, and he had the greatest respect for those who had contributed to the overthrow of Hitler's Third Reich. Every year on May 9th he would meet veterans of the Great Patriotic War without fail, present them with commemorative gifts and awards and make sure that all their social needs and problems were attended to.

When Marshal Baghramyan was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union for the second time, the question of a statue in his homeland was brought up. He was born in the mountain village of Chardakhly in the Shamkhor (now Shamkir) region of Azerbaijan, but, in Hidayat's words:

"He failed to tell the truth about his early life and, in his personal records, identified his place of birth not as the village of Chardakhly, but the city of Ganja (previously named Yelisavetpol, and Kirovabad in Soviet times). This false information consequently appeared in reference books and encyclopaedias. The only connection that the future marshal had with Ganja was that he had studied at the technical college there."³

Whatever the case, he turned to the leader of Azerbaijan and asked him to erect the bust in Kirovabad and create a museum of military glory in the village where he was born instead. Heydar Aliyev brought this up at the Central Committee Bureau and, although it clearly contradicted the rules, they decided to grant the marshal's request. Soon afterwards, a bust of Ivan Baghramyan was erected in Zhivopisni Square opposite the technical college, and Heydar Aliyev travelled to Kirovabad for the festivities. The first secretary of the Central Committee and Marshal Baghramyan also opened the splendid new museum in the village of Chardakhly; many Second World War officers and generals came from this village.

All this was part and parcel of our shared history during the Soviet period, as were the tears of joy in the eyes of the elderly marshal as well as his numerous declarations of the Heydar Aliyev's greatness and the indissoluble bond between the three Southern Caucasus republics. Heydar Aliyev did, indeed, respect the best Armenians and did everything he could to ensure the

development and prosperity of Nagorno-Karabakh, but the separatist aims of Armenian nationalists, he very emphatically and decidedly cut short.

I will include several of the later statements made by the Heydar Aliyev regarding the "Armenian issue":

"I was the first secretary of the CPA Central Committee from 14th July 1969 to 3rd December 1982," said Heydar Aliyev, "and during the whole of that period not an inch of Azerbaijani territory was conceded to Armenia although Armenia made a number of attempts to take land from us. That's a fact. They never spoke about this openly, but the need to redefine the maps of Azerbaijan and Armenia was brought to my attention. This was because certain mistakes had been made during the 1920s. I replied that our borders were defined, and there was no need whatsoever to change anything."

I seem to remember that some gold mines were opened on the border of the Kalbajar region. The Armenians crossed over to our side and began exploratory survey operations there. When I found out, I instructed the Council of Ministers and the leadership of the Kalbajar region to expel them from our lands forthwith."

Both at the start of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and afterwards, Heydar Aliyev was convinced that this issue was not conceived in the NKAR itself:

"I visited the NKAR on a number of occasions," he recounted at a later date, "toured extensively in the region and conversed at length with the Armenians living there. Not one of them breathed a word about handing Karabakh over to Armenia. I remember one more thing. We were marking the 50th anniversary of the NKAR. When the region was awarded the Order of Peoples' Friendship, I gave a speech at the ceremony, and there is one sentence from that speech for which the Armenian nationalists cannot forgive me to this day. I detected a certain mood and I said, 'The Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region is an inseparable part of Azerbaijan, and will remain so now and forever more.'"

From a conversation with the former chairman of the Azerbaijan Supreme Court, Ibrahim Ismayilov:

"I arrived for a reception with Heydar Aliyev in the summer of 1982 and said that we needed to do something about the Armenian nationalists, that they were totally out of hand, and that we ought to take the necessary measures. He replied, 'But you know what goes on in Moscow, what influential forces they have behind them. If I could, I would do everything to stop them. But I don't have the option'. He was a candidate for membership of the Politburo and close to Leonid Brezhnev, and yet he was unable to counter Armenian extremism."

¹ *Ulduz*, No. 6 (1990), 72

² *Ibid.*

¹ Gidayat, 37-38

² *Ibid.*, 40

³ *Ibid.*, 50

In 1983, two students from El Salvador were killed in Baku. Three people were connected to the case, two main perpetrators and a third who helped cover up the crime. The organiser was an Armenian called Spartak Akopyan. He was sentenced to the maximum punishment, the death penalty, and was shot. The other two were sentenced to lengthy terms of imprisonment. It was a very high-profile case and was given wide coverage on television. In the Zavokzalnaya district of Baku, people said that the punishment was too severe and that Akopyan could have been pardoned. I was presiding over the court, since I was chairman of the Azerbaijan Supreme Court of Azerbaijan at that time.

In 1984 five Armenians were caught trying to cross the Nakhchivan border illegally. Two were shot by border guards and the remaining three were detained and tried in court. I presided over the court hearing, but it was the Azerbaijani prosecutor-general, Abbas Zamanov, who was in charge of the prosecution.

The culminating story is one of fraud and embezzlement, the protagonists of which were the crooks, Dadamyan and Bagdasaryan. Bagdasaryan had already been tried in court before. Since they were clandestine millionaires, they were able to buy off the press, the Union Prosecution Service, and leading members of our government. They must have spent a fortune in Moscow. Enver Gafarov presided over the trial, and was made to suffer for his integrity; he was offered large sums of money, and ultimately given the boot for convicting them. He was unemployed for several years.

The Soviet deputy prosecutor-general submitted a protest, and the judicial division of the Soviet Supreme Court brought the case back. It continued for two years without making any progress, was then handed over to the office Soviet prosecutor-general and, eventually, found its way to our public prosecution office with instructions to carry out the investigation procedure for a second time. Ultimately, the case was reclassified under Article 167 and "played down".

All these cases were seen in Moscow as being politically motivated. They caused a stir and were billed as the organised persecution and victimisation of Armenians. People were outraged that the judicial system in Azerbaijan repressed people on account of their national origins. They started to see me as an enemy of the Armenian people, Heydar Aliyev's man and one who would supposedly continue his tough stance against the Armenians. So, they forced me out too.

All in all, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the unimaginable began to happen. There was an immediate problem if there were Armenians among the criminals being convicted of a crime. It only took one of them to be convicted and an order would come through for the sentence either to be either revoked or amended to a milder one from the Soviet prosecutor-general's office, where a former resident of Baku worked, a certain Mizaryan. Moreover, big money was involved. We're talking about

bribery and corruption. But even if bribes were taken here, then it was only to the tune of 1,000 or 2,000 roubles, whereas in the central law-enforcement agencies, we are talking of millions. Overall, I'm convinced that Heydar Aliyev was sent to Moscow not because they just loved him so much, but in order to solve the 'Armenian issue' here and give them Karabakh.¹

When in conversation with Azerbaijani writers, President Heydar Aliyev was also able to cite cases in which Moscow showed favouritism towards Armenians:

"I'll tell you about one instance, which I won't ever forget," he said. "The director of a sector of the CPSU Central Committee phoned me up and said, 'A chief engineer at your Dashkesan ore mining plant, an Armenian, has been sacked.' 'Well what does it matter that the chief engineer who was sacked was Armenian?', I replied. 'He wasn't fired for being Armenian. I don't believe in that sort of classification. And, may I ask, where did you get this information?' He replied that he had been approached by some Armenian professors from the university, expressing protest. Do you see what I'm saying?"¹

When Heydar Aliyev retired as a member of the Politburo and first deputy chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers in 1987, there was an enforced pause in the exhausting stand-off 'Aliyev vs. Armenian separatism'. What was in store for Azerbaijan is known only too well.

¹ Heydar Aliyev, "Guarding cultural heritage", 368

HEYDAR ALIYEV, KAREN DEMIRCHYAN AND EDUARD SHEVARDNADZE

A thorough examination of the information from the 1970s and early 1980s, demonstrated that the co-operation between the three most senior officials in the Southern Caucasus was fairly successful. They visited each other for events shared between the three republics and the Soviet Union in general, met in Moscow at plenary sessions of the CPSU Central Committee and took part in conferences held by the Military Council of the South Caucasus Military District, of which they were all members.

Of course, there was a certain amount of rivalry behind the scenes between the three first secretaries, from which Heydar Aliyev invariably emerged the victor. This caused Karen Demirchyan and Eduard Shevardnadze to feel envious.

From a conversation with Colonel General Aleksandr Kovtunov:

"You know, it was abundantly obvious that the republics were on the ascent and that there was an unspoken competition between them. Who would come out in front faster: Georgia, Armenia or Azerbaijan? Azerbaijan lagged behind at first, but then began to take the lead; people's lives improved, and material prosperity, industry and agriculture developed at a tremendous rate. Heydar Aliyev managed to draw more attention to Azerbaijan, attracting many influential people to take part in the republic's activities. Leonid Brezhnev visited Baku on several occasions, itself an indicator of the direction the competition was taking."

In the opinion of the former secretary to the CPSU Central Committee, Aleksandra Pavlova Biryukova, "Eduard Shevardnadze could not forgive Heydar Aliyev for the fact that Azerbaijan developed incomparably faster than the other republics in the Southern Caucasus". Aleksandra Biryukova also recalled later on that, when both were already working in Moscow, Eduard Shevardnadze never supported Heydar Aliyev at the Politburo:

"Shevardnadze was very underhand. He would smile very sweetly, but would at the same time be whispering in Gorbachev's ear. That's an indisputable fact. I was very friendly with Anatoli Ivanovich Lukyanov, and even he sometimes said to me: 'Watch out for Shevardnadze'."

Indeed, the former Soviet minister for foreign affairs was not nicknamed "the White Fox" for nothing. When Heydar Aliyev was sent into retirement, Eduard Shevardnadze not only did not support his colleague at a time of great difficulty for him, but, on the contrary, did everything in his power to make Gorbachev's blow felt as acutely as possible. I will treat this matter in greater detail in the next part of the book.

Karen Demirchyan was elected first secretary of the CPA Central Committee in November 1974; he not only failed to make any kind of

effort in terms of weakening anti-Azerbaijani and anti-Turkish feeling in Armenia, but, on the contrary, encouraged Armenian chauvinism, directly or indirectly. He treated Heydar Aliyev with guarded respect, willingly accepted his invitations to Azerbaijan and delivered well-turned speeches. Heydar Aliyev's popularity, particularly among local Azerbaijanis, aroused his jealousy. One day, obviously at Demirchyan's bidding, Heydar Aliyev's planned trip to his family's native village of Djomartly was foiled. This came about under the following circumstances.

On 1st October 1982, Heydar Aliyev arrived in Yerevan for a conference of the Military Council of the South Caucasus Military District. Then, together with Karen Demirchyan and Eduard Shevardnadze, he visited Masis, a footwear manufacturing factory, where a friendship meeting was taking place. Heydar Aliyev noted later on:

"I was due to go from Yerevan to Nakhchivan, to chair a meeting of a group of the most active party members. When the event in Yerevan came to an end, I had the idea of going to Sisian, to call in at the village where my parents were born, and from there set off to Zangilan and Qubadly, which I had never visited in my whole time as first secretary. I told Karen Demirchyan about my plan. He approved and instructed the first secretary of the Sisian region, Shors Davityan, to accompany me on the trip."

According to plan, Heydar Aliyevich set off from Yerevan for Nakhchivan for the party meeting of agricultural workers concerning the annual results, and from there planned to go to the neighbouring Sisian region. He had never seen Djomartly, since his father's native village was much further and higher up than Urud (now Vorotan), which was situated in the lowlands.

Shors Davityan came to Nakhchivan to escort Aliyev. He had already instructed the chairman of the collective farm in Urud to get the village ready for their arrival, to put everything in order and determine where they would take Heydar Aliyev, what they would show him, and so on and so forth. They were due to leave in the morning, when all of a sudden on the evening before their departure, there was a phone call from Moscow. The chairman of the Council of Ministers, Nikolai Tikhonov, was holding a conference and Heydar Aliyev's presence was required. No matter how hard Aliyev tried to get out of it, even suggesting that the secretary of the Central Committee should be sent in his place, there was nothing to be done. He had no choice but to apologise to Shors Davityan, return to Yerevan and fly from there to Moscow. It was, in fact, an ecological conference and, as the presence of a candidate for membership of the Politburo and first secretary of the CPA Central Committee was completely unnecessary, Heydar Aliyev was angry that he had been called away to Moscow just to attend. For a long time afterwards he tried to understand why: was it at Karen's Demirchyan's request or did someone else report him for his proposed trip to Sisian and prevent his attempt to visit his native lands and people? Heydar Aliyev never had another chance to see Djomartly.

In contrast to his colleagues from the Southern Caucasus, Aliyev never went behind anyone's back, and often helped his colleagues when they asked him. One day at Eduard Shevardnadze's request, the first secretary of the Central Committee even sacrificed his "national interests" for the sake of saving the Georgian football team's pride. This is how the former party functionary, Yuri Mammadov, remembers it:

"Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan were united in the South Caucasus Military District, and a Military Council meeting was held annually in one of the capitals of the three republics. Once when one of these military councils was being held in Baku, the Armenian first secretary was not present, but Eduard Shevardnadze came. These military councils were usually held in the current Azerbaijani parliament. The meeting had been brought to a close, and we were walking along the passage with Heydar Aliyevich and Eduard Shevardnadze in front, and I followed about five steps behind. I heard Heydar Aliyev trying to talk the first secretary of the CPG Central Committee into staying for lunch and Shevardnadze's reply, 'I would have loved to Heydar Aliyevich, but I've scheduled a meeting for six o'clock this the evening. I can't possibly stay'. They walked on when, suddenly, Shevardnadze said to Aliyev, 'Heydar Aliyevich, I have a huge favour to ask of you. Neftchi is playing Tbilisi's Dinamo in Baku today'. Heydar Aliyev was delighted, 'Well there you go, stay and we'll go to the football match, and then you can fly home'. Eduard Shevardnadze replied, 'That's not why I brought it up. Heydar Aliyevich, we're in a tight spot, because at any moment we could drop out of the premier league'. 'And what must be done to prevent this?' asked Heydar Aliyev, 'What if our guys end the match with a draw? That'll be enough won't it?'. Then Aliyev turned to me, 'Mammadov, did you hear that?' 'Yes, Heydar Aliyevich, I did,' I replied. 'Then,' he said, 'Go ahead and deal with this issue.'

When I reached the Central Committee, I stepped into my office and made a phone call to Rzayev the chairman of the State Committee for Physical Training and Sport. At first he refused to listen, 'What are you on about, no way! We'll rip them to pieces, have no doubt about that.' Then I said it to him straight: 'The general opinion is that we'll play to a draw.' He still didn't understand my meaning as to whose opinion we were talking about. It was only once we had finished our conversation and he had put the phone down that he finally realised. He phoned me back in about 15 minutes and said, 'I've got it. Only how do we play without scoring a goal?' I asked. 'It would be best if there was a draw 1-1'. 'And who should score first?' I explained to him how it all had to be done and so that was what happened. First of all, they scored a goal against us and then we scored back. The spectators on both sides were satisfied."

When Heydar Aliyev came to power for the second time, he forgave his former colleagues at the Politburo for their past treachery. He involved Georgia in world geopolitical matters and ensured that it participated

fully in large-scale local projects. Here, I will quote from my own article "Soltude: The Fate of Presidents", which I wrote in 1998:

"Heydar Aliyev and Eduard Shevardnadze have similar destinies, with shared aims and a single dream. It seems to me that if anything happens to one of them, then it will be extremely difficult for the other to survive the loss. It also seems to me that, today, Heydar Aliyev is as necessary to Georgia as he is to Azerbaijan".

These were prophetic words: when Heydar Aliyev passed away, Eduard Shevardnadze vanished from the political arena almost immediately. Several years earlier his other colleague, Karen Demirchyan, perished needlessly in a terrorist attack on the Armenian parliament, having paid the price for his dalliance with Armenian separatism in full, which is, after all, only one step away from terrorism. It is true that, "Nothing in this world happens without leaving a trace".

"I HAVE GREAT RESPECT FOR THE MILITARY PROFESSION"

In the period 1960–1980, a large number of military units and combat equipment was stationed in Soviet Azerbaijan. Four divisions from the combined military forces were stationed in Nakhchivan, Kirovabad, Lankaran and Baku. They comprised the 4th Army. In addition, there were numerous brigades and regiments assigned to them – a so-called military unit. There were also two aviation divisions and one artillery division based there. All these reported to the South Caucasus Military District with its headquarters in Tbilisi.

During this time there were only two anti-aircraft defence districts in the Soviet Union, one in Moscow and the other in Baku. The Baku Air Defence Army was stationed in six of the Soviet Republics – the Southern Caucasus, the Northern Caucasus, South Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. It was composed of the Alyat, Tbilisi and Rostov corps, the Volgograd division, and a large number of brigades and aviation, radio-technical and anti-air missile divisions. The district headquarters were located in Baku at the renowned "Beryoza".

The Caspian Flotilla, erstwhile winner of the Order of the Red Banner, with its considerable forces in Astrakhan and Dagestan, was also based in Baku, as was the South Caucasus naval border detachment.

In short, the southern TMO – Soviet Theatre of Military Operations – constituted an extremely powerful military alignment.

While I was collecting material for this chapter, I managed to track down a number of military commanders in Moscow, who had served in Azerbaijan. In spite of their problems and illnesses, elderly Soviet Army marshals and generals agreed to meet me as soon as they heard that my book concerned Heydar Aliyev. Among these was Air Marshal Anatoli Ustinovich Konstantinov, a Hero of the Soviet Union. He commanded the Baku Air Defence Army between 1968 and 1980 and communicated with Aliyev very closely over a number of years. General Aleksandr Vasilievich Kovtunov was the commanding officer for the 4th Combined Army of the South Caucasus Military District between 1978 and 1983. General Aleksandr Stepanovich Gudkov served in Azerbaijan between December 1969 and July 1979. He concluded his service in Azerbaijan as a member of the Military Council of the South Caucasus Military District and chief of the army's political division.

Retired Major-General Mustafa Nasirov told me a number of interesting facts about the relationship between Heydar Aliyev and the Soviet border guards. All these men furnished me with invaluable material on the first secretary's attitude towards the army, about his involvement in military training exercises carried out in Azerbaijan, his participation in Military Council meetings for the South Caucasus Military District, the story behind the construction of the Gabala Radar Station and much more besides. These

subjects have, hitherto, hardly been touched on, since they have, for many years, represented a closed book.

The first question that I asked those whom I interviewed was whether, "the fact that so much of the army and their equipment was stationed on Azerbaijani soil aroused objections on the part of Aliyev". "No," they replied, "Such a question never came up even in jest. On the contrary, he was constantly worried about whether Azerbaijan was secure enough."

Aleksandr Gudkov and Aleksandr Kovtunov and other generals recalled the exceptional attention Heydar Aliyev paid to military professionals and towards their concerns and needs.

"When the Azerbaijani Military Commissar, Major General Yagub Guliyev passed away unexpectedly, we gathered at the officers' headquarters for the Baku Air Defence Army," Aleksandr Gudkov told me. "The question of who would be his successor was to be decided and Heydar Aliyev told us, 'I remember that in my family they were happier when I received the title of General than when I was elected first secretary for the CPA Central Committee. Not only do I myself have great respect for military men, but my whole family was brought up to respect soldiers and so I understand just how arduous service can be'."

Helping the army by constructing military camps and providing servicemen with living accommodation was always a priority, although Heydar Aliyev sometimes seemed not to care about this and did not want to allocate funds to it from the Azerbaijani budget.

Major General Mustafa Nasirov said that Heydar Aliyev's philosophy was extremely well thought out and far-sighted and that he did everything possible to smooth over relations between the border patrol guards and local administrative bodies. He also did a lot for them himself. For instance, he used Azerbaijan's budget to build flats for the border guards, reconstruct frontier posts, and improve living conditions for the soldiers' families. When he visited one of the border regions, he would ask after the border guards first of all. This was not just because he understood the importance of border defence, but because he knew that if mutual relations were good, then the border guards would make concessions to the local population on a whole host of issues.

One of Heydar Aliyev's problems involved the uncompromising regime with regard to its numerous restrictions governing every aspect of people's lives, namely, procedures for crossing the frontier, residency, movement and the use of land, mineral resources, water, forests and so on. Heydar Aliyev had himself grown up in a border region and had worked for the KGB, so he knew the hardships caused to the local community at first hand. The Soviet regime was rather rigid concerning border defence, especially if the border concerned was with a capitalist country. This meant that Azerbaijani border controls were particularly tight.

Naturally, such strict controls had an adverse effect on the economy, affecting the development of resorts, tourism, the use of rivers and

nearby mineral deposits and the legal and material status of the local population. Many unnecessarily severe directives were issued by the central administration without any consideration for local conditions.

To cite one example – a large part of Azerbaijan's border follows a river, which, naturally, provides the inhabitants with their livelihood. They are not allowed near it, however, and there is a real "iron curtain" – a two-metre wire fence – running along it. However, unlike other Soviet states, Heydar Aliyev managed to implement some very unusual measures on the Azerbaijani side of the border. It was only thanks to his foresight and perseverance that reservoirs were constructed on the rivers running along the frontiers. One of his most significant achievements in terms of developing the economy in Azerbaijan's border regions and improving the living conditions for their inhabitants was undoubtedly the joint construction with Iran of a unique hydropower system in the Julfa region on the Araz river. At that time – at the height of the Cold War and the political and ideological confrontation of two opposing systems – many people could not have imagined the erection of two hydroelectric power stations and the Mil-Mugan Dam in the Horadiz region. The political and economic significance of these projects at that time and, indeed, later on during the many years of blockade of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Region by Armenian aggressors cannot be overestimated. The Arpacay and Khanbulanchay water reservoirs also played a very important part in the economic development of the border areas. Mustafa Nasirov commented as follows:

"If the border guards had stuck to the letter of the law, then life for the local population would have been utterly unbearable. According to our instructions for instance, a permit was needed before anything could be built in a border zone or even if someone wanted to pass from the Ordubad District to the Zangilan District. In short, the officer in charge of the border guard detachment was officially considered master. The inhabitants of the districts along the frontiers had to put up with numerous absurd prohibitions.

Let's take the railway, for example. If I'm travelling from Baku to Yerevan via Nakhchivan, then I don't need a permit, but if I'm going directly to Nakhchivan, then I do.

... There were a lot of other similar problems. Fishing was forbidden, for instance. There were a lot of fish in the Araz river reservoir, but in the Agreement on the Joint Use of Hydraulic Station there was an article stating that commercial fishing was permitted only by mutual agreement between the governments of the two sides. In other words, the Soviet Union had to negotiate with Iran in order to grant fishing rights. Mustafa Nasirov came to an agreement with the Iranian border commissioner so that commercial fishing could take place at the reservoir on a trial basis, and so fishermen came from Ali-Bayramli and began to fish in Nakhchivan, bringing plenty of fresh fish to the town.

The Iranian and Soviet border commissioners had the power to make decisions on such matters in the border regions. With regard to improving living conditions for the inhabitants of these areas, much depended on those in charge of the border guard detachment and their attitude towards the local population. Heydar Aliyev understood this perfectly well.

The good relations existing between the local population and the border guard detachments during the dissolution of the Soviet Union were beneficial at a time when tragic events were taking place in Azerbaijan. Thus, in spite of the extreme situation existing in the border districts before and after the events of Bloody January, not a single border guard detachment unit sided with the Soviet army, remaining loyal to the local populations in question.

They adhered to the same policy when activists from the People's Front started a ruthless destruction of parts of the Iranian border, for example the expensive signalling system, communication and electric power lines and other technical installations. In what is known as the "Talysh-Mughan Republic" the Lankaran border guard detachment was the only military unit not to surrender to Alkram H umbatov's separatists.

Another important fact in the history of independent Azerbaijan involves the Nakhchivan border guard detachment. It was the first military unit to raise the three-coloured flag of the new sovereign state. This took place in the festive atmosphere of 22nd August 1992 when the flag was raised by the chairman of the Supreme Majlis of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, Heydar Aliyev.

The South Caucasus Military District military councils took place mainly in Tbilisi, although occasionally sessions were held elsewhere.

Heydar Aliyev, Eduard Shevardnadze and Karen Demirchyan were members of the Military Council, and the Central Committee second secretaries were, as a rule, members of the Military Councils attached to the army. The construction of military facilities, state border security, man power and the distribution of troops, change in the deployment of military units, rearmament, and other important issues would be discussed at these Military Councils. The first secretaries played a very important role in all this since they were effectively the leaders of their countries.

The first secretaries attended one or two meetings annually, although the meetings themselves took place on a monthly basis. The party leaders usually came when recruitment results, mobilisation, supplies and the mutual cooperation between the republics on issues relating to military construction work were being discussed. According to those whom I interviewed, Heydar Aliyev would always speak out at these Military Councils, offering constructive proposals, the use of Azerbaijan's conscripts in combat-ready military units, for example. He raised this issue repeatedly.

After one of these visiting Military Councils, which would be held in one of the three republics, the first secretaries would show their guests

new industrial construction projects and achievements in agriculture and organise meetings with the workers.

General Kovtunov remembered one extraordinary incident, a clear demonstration of Armenian duplicity:

"The construction of a highway along the border between Azerbaijan and Armenia (Julfa-Nakhchivan) was raised at one of the Military Councils. There was only one border road in operation at the time and traffic would travel through the Sevan pass. In other words, in order to reach Nakhchivan by car, a person had to pass through Armenia. There was also a road through Karabakh – a very complicated route I might add – but the main one went through the Sevan pass. This added considerable length to the journey. Thence, there was a straight road from Pushkino (now Bilasuvan), the Bilasuvan shoulder led straight out onto the Julfa road along the border. Then from Julfa there was a good road to Nakhchivan.

The army wanted a road built across this area. They offered the use of their own forces and engineering units, but Armenia was categorically opposed to it. We raised this issue several times and discussed it at the Military Councils. Heydar Aliyev was 'for' and Karen Demirchyan 'against'. Demirchyan deflected any reasonable arguments or suggestions.

Heydar Aliyev understood that this road would connect Nakhchivan with the rest of Azerbaijan, shortening the journey and providing obvious economic benefits. It's true, with its cliffs and mountains, the terrain there wasn't easy, requiring the carving out of tunnels. But, after all, the railway had also been laid in its time."

The reasons for Karen Demirchyan's refusal are very clear. Armenia wanted to keep Nakhchivan under close observation, and was opposed to the decreased use of communication lines passing through Armenian territory. According to General Kovtunov, in spite of Heydar Aliyev's drive and his standing in Moscow, he never succeeded in pushing through the highway project because, "he was prevented by an unknown current".

As first deputy chairman of the Soviet government, Heydar Aliyev was in charge of transport and managed to overcome stubborn Armenian opposition and obtain the approval of the Soviet Council of Ministers for the construction of the road. With the support of the head of government, Nikolai Tikhonov, the Council adopted the bill:

"And finally in 1983 we set about constructing the road," said Kamran Rahimov. "We reached the village of Nuvedi. There was only another 15 kilometres left to Mehri, but then conflict broke out with Armenia, and we had no choice but to abandon the project."

From Major-General Mustafa Nasirov's account:

"The troops adored him because he interacted with them differently from other leaders, informally and naturally. He took an interest in everything and entered into the smallest details of the lives of a particular border guard detachment, recognising many of the soldiers by sight. It

was on his initiative that the border guard officers were awarded honorary titles and a whole military unit or a military subdivision would be awarded certificates of merit by the presidium of the Supreme Soviet.

This is incomprehensible to young people nowadays, but back then all these methods of encouragement played a large part in the military and patriotic nurturing of the border guards. People on the border felt that they were surrounded by care and attention, that they were being thought about, and that their difficult work was valued. It was for this reason that Heydar Aliyev had authority with the soldiers."

I should add a word on authority here. Yuri Mammadov, a former Central Committee member, told me a very interesting incident related to this. While he was working at the Central Committee administrative department, Mammadov oversaw the military sector, the committee for state security and certain branches of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and public prosecutor's office.

During the early 1980s, large-scale military exercises were being carried out in Azerbaijan. The Soviet defence minister, Dmitri Fedorovich Ustinov, came to see them. The following procedure was established at the Central Committee: if Heydar Aliyev was conversing with a high-ranking guest, then the person in charge of that particular sector would stand a short distance away, so Aliyev could, without raising his voice, give him some instruction as and when necessary. It was for this reason that Yuri Mammadov overheard an intriguing conversation:

"Heydar Aliyev dined with Dmitri Ustinov, who was due to fly home the next day, in the guest house. After dinner they were taking a stroll round the park and I was walking a short distance behind them. Suddenly I heard Heydar Aliyev say to him: 'Dmitri Fedorovich, I have a favour to ask'. 'With pleasure, if it's within my power', he replied. 'I would really like an Azerbaijani to go into space'. 'What's the problem? We just have to find the right Azerbaijani pilot,' he answered and, when he arrived back in Moscow, Dmitri Ustinov gave the Main Personnel Directorate of the Soviet Ministry of Defence the necessary orders. Meanwhile, we looked for an Azerbaijani military pilot for six months, but to no avail. There were candidates from civil aviation, but no service men. During our search we even approached the officers of the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany, and sent our instructor there, who looked into the matter. We were still unable to find anyone. Then, after this annoying interlude he began to promote Azerbaijani enrolment in military flight academies, instructing us to participate actively in the selection of national personnel for the flying schools. In the very first year we chose 120 people for the military department of the Ulyanovsk Civil Aviation School. I remember, that Heydar Aliyev phoned the first secretary of the Ulyanovsk Regional Party Committee in my presence and made an appeal on behalf of the candidates. Just imagine: they all got in! Undoubtedly, many of these young lads are now working in the Azerbaijan Military Air Force or are training a new generation of young pilots."

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE GABALA RADAR STATION

In the mid-1970s, the Soviet military leadership broached the issue of constructing a radar station in the Southern Caucasus. Similar stations were in operation in the Far East, Central Asia, the Baltic States and Ukraine. The positioning of these radar stations created a 360-degree visibility of Soviet air space. In other words, we had an uninterrupted detection zone in place to warn us of our opponents' intentions.

Regarding the choice of location for the positioning a radar station, according to the military specialists, Azerbaijan occupied the most advantageous strategic position in the south of the country and also bordered on both Iran and Turkey. Local Air Defence forces often recorded instances in which the borders in this region were violated and acted in accordance with Cold War realities. Marshal Konstantinov recalls that, in November 1973, an Iranian fighter jet crossed the frontier in the Nakhchivan region and was shot down by a pilot from the South Caucasus Military District Air Force. A month later, in December 1973, two Turkish Air Force fighter jets again violated Soviet air space. They were spotted in the district of Yerevan and shot down by anti-aircraft missile troops of the Baku Air Defence District.

Naturally, Heydar Aliyev regarded the construction of this strategic installation as extremely important, all the more so because the officials who visited Azerbaijan to determine the location of the station included the minister for the radio-electronic Industry, Piotr Pleshakov, the Soviet deputy minister of defence responsible for the structural development of troops, Marshal Gelovani, and the Soviet deputy minister for defence and commander in chief of anti-aircraft defence, Marshal Aleksandr Koldunov, responsible for air space security across the entire Soviet Union.

From a conversation with Marshal Konstantinov:

"When Heydar Aliyev was asked whether he didn't have any objections, he simply asked another question, 'And why did you decide to put up a radar station in Azerbaijan?'

The Soviet leadership was forced into a lengthy explanation while Heydar Aliyev continued to disagree with their reasoning. 'Who will work there?' he asked with interest. 'Military personnel first of all', came the response, 'and, secondly, people employed independently from among the local population'. Then, Heydar Aliyev asked a very important question, 'And where will these people live?' Piotr Pleshakov finally got the hint: 'We'll build homes for them'.

In other words, Heydar Aliyev linked the recruitment of employees for the station with the construction of living accommodation, a school, a hospital and a telephone station. He used the radar station as a means of solving local problems without upsetting anyone.

Piotr Peshkov informed Marshal Gelovani that the construction workers would be the marshal's responsibility, whereas he would pay for the construction.

Heydar Aliyev, who was concerned that harmful radiation would have an adverse effect on the health of the local population, also asked questions about environmental safety. They explained that the radar station would, indeed, emit very powerful radiation, so that special radiation shields would be put in place to prevent the civilian population from coming to harm. The shields would block off any potentially harmful radio waves.⁷⁰

The construction of the Gabala radar station is linked to an interesting memory voiced by the late academician, Igrar Aliyev, director of the Institute of History at the National Academy of Sciences, in his article 'Heydar Aliyev and Questions Concerning the History of Azerbaijan'.

He relates how, at the end of 1977, historians found out that the construction of some kind of secret installation was under way in Gabala on the site of a unique architectural landmark, the ancient capital of the Azerbaijani state of Gabala. Igrar Aliyev called his old friend, the head of the Azerbaijani Parliament, Gurban Khalilov, and asked him to impart this information to Heydar Aliyev. Heydar Aliyev received Igrar Aliyev the very next day, listened to him attentively and made a telephone call:

"He rang Moscow to speak to one of the most high-ranking officers in the Soviet Ministry of Defence, I think someone with the rank of marshal. I can remember his conversation with the marshal to this day. He spoke to this military officer so severely that I was completely convinced of his attachment to his country and its history and culture. I experienced such a feeling of pride for my people and Azerbaijan. When he had put the phone down, Aliyev gave orders for the creation of a state commission to be headed by Gurban Khalilov, and we set off for Gabala the very next day."

It turned out that the projected radar station was designed in one of the Soviet scientific research institutes by a female architect – an Armenian as it happens – and was due to be built on the site of the ancient capital ... We succeeded in putting a stop to these works and secured the transfer of the installation a little further from the historic landmark. The salvation of this important Azerbaijani landmark, the ancient city of Gabala, would have been impossible without Heydar Aliyev's resolute and principled stance."⁷¹

The Creation of the Soviet Military General Headquarters [the *Stavka*] of the Southern Strategic Direction.

This story was narrated to me by one of Heydar Aliyev's closest colleagues, Sabir Huseynov. Since he is such an excellent narrator, I will quote his account verbatim:

⁷⁰ Elm, special edition, Nos. 13-16 (2002)

"It was almost 11 o'clock in the morning when the internal line with the first secretary buzzed, drawing me away from my work.

'Sabir, come and see me straight away,' ordered Heydar Aliyev.

I quickly went in to see him. He was pacing around his office in a state of agitation, deep in thought.

'Sit down!' he ordered. 'I want to ask you about something.'

I was familiar with his expression 'I want to ask you about something', which was purely rhetorical. He had already decided something for himself and needed to talk it over in order to view it from all angles.

'I'm listening, Heydar Aliyevich.'

He then went up to his desk and picked up a hefty folder. It was the meeting minutes for the previous day's Central Committee Politburo meeting. These reports would be routinely delivered to the top individuals in the Soviet states the very next day.

'The Politburo,' he says, 'has decided to create four military *stavkas* within the country. One of them – The *Stavka* for the Southern Strategic Direction – is due to be stationed in the Southern Caucasus.'

'Where precisely?'

'It's not yet decided. Eduard Shevardnadze and Karen Demirchyan will most likely pass it over and won't assign any particular significance to this decision; military issues are of little interest to them.'

'You want the *Stavka* to be stationed in Baku?'

'Precisely!' he said, enthused with new vigour, and again returned to pacing round the office. 'If we can secure the *Stavka*, then the South Caucasus Military District and the South Caucasus Border District, the headquarters of which are stationed in Tbilisi, will become subordinate to Azerbaijan.'

'Great!' I burst out involuntarily.

'So, now you understand. It's a prestigious issue of the utmost importance for us. Don't you agree?'

'I'm lost for words. We just have to pre-empt our neighbours.'

It was as though he had just been waiting for these words from me. He sat in his seat for a bit, then said, 'Fingers crossed!' and picked up the phone to the defence minister, Dmitri Ustinov.

In about a month Baku received a visit from the Politburo member, the Soviet defence minister, Marshal Dmitri Ustinov. Heydar Aliyev and the Georgian and Armenian leaders, who had come to Azerbaijan for the occasion, met him at the airport.

In the evening at the official reception, Dmitri Ustinov said the following and I quote verbatim:

'Heydar Aliyevich, I have not come to your fine capital empty handed! Allow me to read aloud the order, approved by the members of the Politburo and signed by me concerning the stationing of the *Stavka* of the Southern Strategic Direction in Baku. I have also brought with me the

new Commander-in-Chief of the *Stavka*, who was appointed yesterday by decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, Hero of the Soviet Union and Army General Yuri Maximov.¹

When he was announcing this I involuntarily looked at Eduard Shevardnadze and Karen Demirchyan. A shadow passed over their astonished faces. They exchanged glances. This was hard to miss.

Only after the guests had already departed, once I was left alone with Heydar Aliyevich, I enquired, 'Did you see how Shevardnadze and Demirchyan reacted to Ustinov's message?'

'I did, Sabir. The *Stavka* will cause Baku's status to rise above that of Tbilisi.' Rubbing his hands in glee, he suddenly seemed youthful, and said jovially, 'And we'll do much more yet!'

I remember these words today just as if he'd uttered them only a moment ago.²

MILITARY EDUCATION IN THE 1970s

Like all Muslim peoples, in Tsarist Russia, the Azerbaijanis were not called up for military service, since they were labelled "unreliable" and "unfit for combat", and were paid off in lieu. Sometimes the population in the Caucasus was used not as regular troops, but in the form of a "savage division". Nevertheless, quite a few Azerbaijanis left their mark on Russia's military history, having proved themselves to be valiant and courageous military commanders and, most importantly, dedicated to Tsar and country. The Russian writer and historian, Rudolf Ivanov, who in recent years has been working on a series of historical novels narrating the military heroism of the glorious dynasty of the Nakhchivan Khans, shows this convincingly.

The fact that Azerbaijanis are a heroic people was confirmed by what they achieved during the terrible years, 1941 to 1945. The 416th, 223rd, 77th, and a number of other Red Army Azerbaijani infantry divisions proved that they were capable of true military valour. 120 Azerbaijanis were honoured with the title of Hero of the Soviet Union and more than 170,000 soldiers and officers were awarded medals.

Unfortunately, after the end of the war the attitude towards Azerbaijan deteriorated. The Azerbaijani youth were called on to serve primarily in the construction industry and to work on railways, but they were barred from joining strategic aviation, tank or marine forces. Heydar Aliyev of course took note of this state of affairs:

"At some point he asked me to prepare a report on the state of Azerbaijani youth recruitment into the ranks of the Soviet Army," recalls Sabir Huseynov. "His brief was short and to the point. 'It is good that two thirds of all the new South Caucasian recruits are recruited from among our youth, but it's bad that they're handed shovels and pickaxes. 90 percent work in construction. This has to change.'

He telephoned Marshal Ustinov on his direct number then and there. Dmitri Ustinov agreed with Heydar Aliyev, and promised to instruct the Main Mobilisation Department of the ministry to correct the situation straight away. After this, the picture changed dramatically; now 90 percent of our youth have been drafted into combat troops.

He also gave orders for me to take control and organise recruitment through the military commissariats so that the new recruits would go into tank, artillery, aviation and combined arms military academies ...

"We need to direct the students specifically towards these educational institutions. We need military officers," insisted Heydar Aliyev.

He demanded the lists from our military commissariats to find out exactly where they were sending our young men to study. He would hold meetings with the students who were going to study at military academies.

These meetings usually took place at Republic Palace, now Heydar Aliyev Palace. It was wonderful to see the boys' eyes shining as they listened to the rousing parting message of the leader of Azerbaijan himself.

I should add, here, that Heydar Aliyevich always took time to attend the graduation ceremonies at the Baku higher combined-arms and naval academies. He personally handed the graduates their diplomas and officers' epaulettes.¹

A whole system of secondary and higher military education was created in Azerbaijan in the 1970s. This is how Heydar Aliyev himself remembered it during a meeting with cadets in the Nakhchivan branch of the Jamshid Nakhchivansky Military Lyceum:

"We decided to found a specialist military secondary school 30 years ago when the Soviet Union still existed in order to attract our youth to the military profession and introduce them to the art of war. Moscow opposed it and even said that it was not necessary since there was a Soviet Army and a Soviet people. Any young person could study at one of the Soviet military academies ... I stood by my decision, however, and tried to prove the need for a military secondary school in Azerbaijan.

We created this school 30 years ago, the present-day Jamshid Nakhchivansky Military Lyceum. It required a lot of work and deserves to take the credit for the creation of our national army and the training of our officers ... It was not just a theoretical idea initially, but we set out to secure the future of Azerbaijan. These were the first steps on the path to training professional army officers."

The journalist Vladimir Morozkov recalls how every year on Victory Day Heydar Aliyev would visit the burial site of the soldiers who had died of their wounds in the hospitals in Baku, as well as the memorials to Richard Sorge, Mehdi Huseynzade and Hazi Aslanov. Then, he and other members of the Central Committee Bureau would visit the Nakhchivanski School where the teenagers were studying.

"There were boys in need of state care," Vladimir Morozkov told me, "boys from low-income families, some of them orphans even. The school had special teachers, special conditions and military and sports training. Retired officers were in charge and the schoolmasters also came from the military backgrounds. When they had finished at the school, some of the boys were sent to study at the Soviet military higher education academies, where they received support.

At first, officials in Moscow looked askance at this training. Later on, however, the Central Committee approved of our experiment in the military education of teenagers. The issue was discussed by the Politburo, and a special resolution adopted to implement this approach in other states. After this, the Georgians also created a similar school of their own, named after General Leselidze."

¹ Bakinskiy Rabochiy, 19th June (2002)

Young men from Azerbaijan were also systematically sent to the higher military educational establishments of the former Soviet Union. As the retired Major-General Nasirov wrote, "At first, there were hundreds of applicants from Azerbaijan alone enrolling at the military institutions without entrance examinations."¹

From a conversation with the former head of the 4th Army political department, Aleksandr Gudkov:

"I think his unspoken stipulation that people who had not served in the army should not be promoted to positions of leadership is common knowledge. So, virtually nobody refused recruitment in Azerbaijan. There were, however, requests from some parents who had senior positions that their sons should not be sent to serve far away, but permitted to stay within Azerbaijani territory.

When the Nakhchivan military academy was founded, he sent all the Azerbaijani leaders there, including the commanders of units. He went round the classes, dropped in on the shooting range, conversed with the teachers and said: 'Comrades, consider this your duty.'

We had firstly to take on the duty of classroom educators and produce sound officers. Secondly, we had to provide assistance with uniforms, and, thirdly, to create training facilities by bringing in weapons for training and a variety of simulation devices. He brought in military professionals specifically for this work. He wanted to know, for example, why everybody was not fully equipped, why we were not up to strength and he put us, the soldiers, into direct contact with the administration of the institute – we did not ask where, what or why.

Another example was the Higher Military School. It had existed before Heydar Aliyev's time, but its training facilities were in an extremely neglected state. A great deal of work was done during his time. All the barracks and classrooms were repaired, it was equipped with a wonderful new shooting range and a swimming pool and other facilities were built. With the appointment of Barshatla as principal, it was completely transformed and held up as an example not only within the South Caucasus Military District, but throughout the Soviet Union. Heydar Aliyev often repeated, "This military school is the face of the Republic, and we need to train personnel."

He took great care to ensure that the school had departments for different nationalities. People went there to study not only from Azerbaijan, but from all over the Soviet Union."

Member of the Milli Majlis Fazail Agamaly wrote the following:

"Despite the fact that there were several military academies of strategic importance to the Soviet Union in operation in Azerbaijan, the number

¹ Ibid., 16th January (2004)

of Azerbaijani students enrolled in them was extremely low. Among the thousands of graduates from these schools, there were only five or six Azerbaijanis, and many of them were from 'international' families. This trend quite naturally troubled Heydar Aliyev. It is odd that, from the 1970s onwards, there was a considerable increase in the number of Azerbaijani youth enrolling in the higher military schools in Baku. According to statistics, in 1979, 65 percent of students were Azerbaijani.¹¹

This was how the basis for the future army of independent Azerbaijan was created and our national military commanders, who are now referred to as the Armed Forces of our country, were trained. Heydar Aliyev's personal contribution cannot be underestimated.

TRAINING THE KOMSOMOL

When he began his reform programme in the republic, Heydar Aliyev was well aware that his historic mission would be implemented largely by the Azerbaijani youth, who accounted for over half of Azerbaijan's population. He would, therefore, attend all the youth meetings, meet students and university graduates and often give detailed speeches at conventions held by the Leninist Young Communist League [LYCL]. At that time, the Komsomol was a rather powerful and influential organisation and included almost all the ideologically or intellectually "advanced" Soviet youth. He would headhunt future party leaders, chiefs, or, as they call them nowadays, managers, from the Komsomol.

Strangely, although he was extremely busy, Heydar Aliyev believed it necessary to meet every candidate who was standing for the post of first secretary of the district committee or of the Komsomol committee personally. It was only after a conversation with the chief cabinet member of the Central Committee's organisational department that he would approve a candidate for election to the plenum.

Of course, there was a lot of administrative red tape in the Komsomol's work, especially in its central administration, and Heydar Aliyev was not afraid to point this out. In a passionate speech delivered on March 11th 1978, at the 30th Congress of the Azerbaijani Komsomol, he criticised its leaders for weak leadership in top-priority projects, for their bureaucratic working procedures, for their lack of initiative and for their neglect of the occupational and moral education of young people.

In this speech, Heydar Aliyev also criticised materialism, which he despised deeply because of its inherently ascetic nature, considering it to be the scourge of modern society:

"Evidence shows that the plague of the bourgeoisie, the disease of materialism and consumerism, sometimes find fertile ground among a number of students. To a large extent, doting parents are to blame for pampering their overgrown children with money, expensive clothes and jewellery, and sometimes even cars."

The former head of the Azerbaijan Medical University, Zahra Guliyeva, recalled how Aliyev came to the institute during the entrance exams, watched them in progress, then went out into the yard to speak to parents and listen to their complaints.

"One episode sticks in my mind," Zahra told me. "Among the applicants was a well-groomed young man with his mother. Heydar Aliyev saw that he was wearing a watch with a thick gold bracelet on his wrist. It was summer, so people were in T-shirts. Heydar Aliyev approached them, and asked a few questions. Then he said to the boy, 'You've only just finished school. You should not be wearing that sort of watch just yet,' and showed him his

¹¹ Faktor Geydara Aliyeva v Obretenii Nashey Gosudarstvennoy Nezavisimosti [The Heydar Aliyev factor in achieving our national independence], (Baku: 2003), 6

own watch. He was the leader of Azerbaijan, and on his wrist was a very ordinary watch with a leather strap. The mother blushed and, of course, the boy was also embarrassed. I think this was a lesson he would never forget."

I think of that episode whenever I see a boy in the first flush of youth, who has not yet had the chance to earn a wage, but who has tasted all the pleasures of a carefree life, behind the wheel of a luxury foreign car. Sadly, today it is considered the norm. But in the far-off 1970s, it was exceptional and honest hard work on Komsomol construction projects, participation in student construction teams, in Komsomol brigades and disapproval of anything perceived to be negative or detrimental to the party was the norm.

Hadi Rajabli told me that, in order to instil superior moral values in young people, the "builders of communism" in Lankaran actively introduced new traditions and rituals. Examples of these were harvest festivals, song festivals, book fairs and folklore festivals. The Komsomol members were the main instigators behind all these initiatives involving nearly every district:

"Every year, we assessed the results of our work and rewarded people. The incentive was material as well as ethical. At that time, salaries in Azerbaijani villages were almost twice those of urban workers. This was very important in terms of the regeneration of remote areas. We looked for examples of high moral qualities everywhere, even in religion, because religion teaches certain basic values, not to steal for instance, to be honest and truthful and to help the weak. We found examples of human moral standards in the past as well as the present, in our history and our folk customs, and we tried to instil them in young boys and girls.

Those who grew up under the influence of the Komsomol and now occupy high positions, work to see Azerbaijan succeed as an independent state because they attended Aliyev's wonderful school."

"IN BAKU, CHILDREN STUDIED IN FOUR SHIFTS"

The second aim of the youth policy was associated with the improvement of the material and technical foundations of the educational system, especially at primary and secondary levels. In the early 1970s, there were not enough schools and nurseries in Azerbaijan, which had one of the highest rates of population growth in the Soviet Union. When he assessed the conditions in the nurseries and schools in Baku Heydar Aliyev was horrified and he ordered the municipal authorities to ensure that ten new schools and 12 nurseries were built in the capital every year. In addition, he ordered them to take care of the most important issues within the existing schools.

"At that time I worked at the *Bakgorispolkom*,¹" recalled Svetlana Gasimova. "Heydar Aliyev once invited us to the Central Committee Bureau and said, 'You know, it's dark in the evenings, and yet there are first-form children going to school. What does that say about the quality of our educational system? Mum and Dad have returned home from work and the child is only just heading off to class.'

If I say that children in Baku studied in four shifts, nobody would believe me nowadays. The schools didn't have enough room for the pupils. The situation was similar throughout the country. In small villages, the children were taught up to the 4th form, and then sent to another village or to the regional capital. This was compounded by the depressing state of the educational system with regard to its material and technical foundations.

Heydar Aliyev repeatedly raised these issues at the Central Committee Bureau, and personally listened to reports by those responsible for education. I also reported regularly to the Central Committee Bureau, as I was vice-chairman of the *Bakgorispolkom* and responsible for education and the commissioning of schools. Heydar Aliyev demanded that targets should be decided not in September, but on the 1st of July, so that between August 15th and 20th schools could be supplied with all the necessary equipment including desks, blackboards and visual aids, etc. I had to ensure that this task was fulfilled either by me or by some other responsible person. Heydar Aliyev's great achievement was the development of a network of schools and nurseries."

Svetlana Chingizovna remembers that women with children would come to her at reception, leave the child in the office and, in a fit of temper, tell her to, "Put that child in a nursery". For a referral to a nursery, you had to join a waiting list.

Heydar Aliyev often invited the management of the *Bakgorispolkom* to meetings and explained:

¹ The *Bakgorispolkom* was the main administrative institution in Baku during this period.

"We are creating new enterprises and light industry using mainly female labour is booming. We must build nurseries and open after-hours care groups in schools so that mothers can be free to leave their children and go to work with peace of mind."

As a result of all this, during Heydar Aliyev's first decade in power (from 1970 to 1980), 700 new school buildings were built in the cities, towns and villages, and the same number were refurbished.

Young Pioneer Palaces and camps, including urban camps, were built in Azerbaijan during the 1970s as well as the schools and nurseries. There were not enough Young Pioneer summer camps in rural areas at that time and not every parent could afford to send their child 40 or 50 kilometres away and then visit them every week. Summer camps were built close to where children could enjoy taking exercise on the sea front or in the city parks, spend all day in the fresh air, have lunch there and generally enjoy themselves and their parents would come and pick them up in the evening. There were educational games and all manner of competitions – in fact, it was such fun that children did not want to go home. Urban camps became a sensation, and news of Baku's take on organising summer camps for children reached the other Soviet republics, who followed suit.

The creation of an integrated system of pre-school and after-school facilities, the large-scale construction of youth centres, sports facilities and the modernisation of teaching materials and technical equipment all meant a completely new opportunity for leisure activities, keeping teenagers off the streets and equipping them with useful skills.

HEYDAR ALIYEV AND THE STUDENTS

In the 1970s and 1980s, not only were there developments in terms of the economy and social services in Azerbaijan, but higher education was also of a high standard. The reputation of some of Azerbaijan's universities went far beyond the former Soviet Union. Higher educational institutions trained a specialist elite for work in many countries in Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America. In turn, every year hundreds of young men and women were sent to study at the Soviet Union's most prestigious institutions.

According to official statistics, during the 1970s and 1980s, on Heydar Aliyev's initiative, 15,000 young Azerbaijanis were educated in more than 170 of the best-known universities in 50 major Soviet cities and were trained to fill 250 urgently needed occupations.

According to Lydia Rasulova, this policy greatly improved the educational system which, in turn, revolutionised the training of staff in order to benefit the economy:

"Some of the universities in Azerbaijan were monopolistic, shall we say, medical schools, for example. Without competition, educational standards did not always match up to Soviet standards. Heydar Aliyev considered it important for our children to study at the most famous medical colleges in the Soviet Union. He wanted to improve the quality of specialist training for the republic, promoting competition within Azerbaijan itself and encouraging a higher standard of teaching."

Only the most talented school leavers were selected, many of them staying on to postgraduate level, gaining doctorates and then returning to Azerbaijan with degrees ready to teach at the universities. People who worked at hospitals and clinics also taught at the medical institute. There is a big difference between teaching and medical practice, however, and it is unusual for a medical professional to combine sound practical skills with an ability to teach. Scientific personnel with advanced degrees, who returned to Azerbaijan and taught at the universities there, were able to raise the general level of teaching. There were also particular branches of medicine where there was a serious shortage of teaching staff, especially with regard to new medical specialisms.

Azerbaijan's economy flourished in the 1970s, with the development of new industries. Staff were needed to meet contemporary requirements for such enterprises as 'Ozone', the manufacture of deep-water jackets for the oil and gas industry, computing and instrument engineering. Young people were, therefore, sent to institutions where highly qualified specialists were trained specifically in these areas.

And, in addition, a person could be well educated and become an expert in a particular field, but without any knowledge of Russian they had virtually no future. All they could aspire to would be to work as the

chief engineer in a factory. The non-competitive entrance requirements meant that there were many children from outside coming up to university with no knowledge of Russian. There were specially organised preparatory departments where these children could study and the first six months were set aside for an in-depth study of Russian. A student who had graduated from the Azerbaijan sector certainly did not know Russian to the required level. It was very important to Heydar Aliyev that people should train not only to become specialists, but also that they should add Russian language skills to their knowledge of Azerbaijani. This would enable them eventually to run businesses, a ministry or an entire industry, and to represent their republic properly within the Soviet Union as a whole.

During his 13 years as leader, Heydar Aliyev revolutionised higher education. Thousands of highly skilled professionals were trained, who then went on to occupy leading positions in all sectors of industry, science and agriculture and who determined Azerbaijan's intellectual character for many years."

The students received a solemn send-off before they went up to university. Heydar Aliyev began a tradition from the mid-1970s onwards: on the eve of the 1st of September (the first day of school) he would be at Lenin Palace to meet the students who were leaving to study at distant universities. He would listen to the sincere, excited words of the young boys and girls who were proud to have been chosen to speak to their leader, and, he would end on the same note of sincerity in a speech imbued with reflections on the future of his beloved Azerbaijan, where these young people would soon take up their rightful places:

"... The future will present new challenges. A specialist, if he is indeed a creative person, must not only keep pace with change, but always stay a little ahead of it. This means that you must keep on studying and, to do this, you need a solid foundation of knowledge and skills behind you. The more thoroughly and assiduously you study, the more useful you will be to your country, to Azerbaijan, the more meaningful your life will be and the more significant your contribution to the development of society as a whole.

It is with hope that we are sending you away to university and it is with hope that we await your return, looking forward to your active and fruitful contribution. The pace of our country's economic and cultural development and the level of social life depends on you, your skills, abilities and knowledge, and on all the current generation of young people."

Heydar Aliyev gave this speech on 28th August 1975, but it could have been given yesterday: so relevant are these parting words for the youth of today in independent Azerbaijan.

It is significant that, following in the footsteps of his illustrious father, President Ilham Aliyev set up a government programme in 2006 to support talented Azerbaijani youth studying abroad. The horizons today are much wider than they were in the Soviet era and the students go, not only to universities in Moscow, St. Petersburg and Kiev, but also to other

leading universities in the UK, USA, Germany, France and many other countries. Today's goal is to ensure that young people, who have received a prestigious education, should respond to their country's need for them rather than joining the Western "white collar" rank and file.

According to the academician Arif Mehdiyev:

"A shrewd and far-sighted politician, Heydar Aliyev fully understood that economic and social development are impossible without scientific and technological progress, development and the deployment of advanced technologies. The Academy of Science made a significant leap forwards. In Azerbaijan, at that time, new branches of science were emerging. Aerospace, geophysical, and biophysical research was developing, as were high-tech industries, particularly instrument technology, electronics, microelectronics and the production of polymeric materials etc. In agriculture, new high-yield foodstuffs were created and advanced farming techniques were applied. The creation of new universities and the fact that young people were sent to study in the leading scientific and educational centres in Russia and other Soviet republics formed the basis for the opening of new research institutes, expanding the range of research and enabling the rapid development of the Academy of Sciences."

In the 1970s and 1980s, many people were sent from Azerbaijan to master the creative arts too, becoming qualified directors, cameramen, writers, and studying in the studios of the famous masters of Soviet cinema.

There was a change of hierarchy in many universities, so that staff that met the strict requirements Heydar Aliyev expected of them were in charge of education.

From a story by the former head of Azerbaijan Medical University, Zahra Guliyeva:

"When I was appointed head, I said to Heydar Aliyev, 'The Medical University is a can of worms. Surely you know what kind of people work there: give them inch, and they'll take a mile. Do you really think I can handle it?' He replied, 'The party is behind you. Don't be afraid of anything or anybody; if you work conscientiously, we'll always support you.'

I became head in 1972 and worked in that capacity until 1983. The situation there was terrible: without connections or large amounts of money being passed under the table, you couldn't get anywhere. If a professor worked as a lecturer then with him came his wife, daughter and son. I managed to break this vicious cycle.

Heydar Aliyev would call a meeting at the Central Committee every year in August. Every head would report on the progress made by the students in terms of their preparation for the entrance exams, and on the new facilities that had been created for students and parents. He always made sure that he visited every institution at the beginning of the academic

year. He would come, attend lectures, like an examination, and I would report to him on the incoming students. He would ask from which regions the applicants had come and which ones were better prepared and why.

If there were 350 top students every year in the republic as a whole, then 300 of them would be medical school applicants. I later found that more than half of them came on the insistence of their parents or because it was considered prestigious. I often spoke to the applicants, asking them, 'What prompted you to apply to this university? Did you read an interesting book about medicine or was there somebody seriously ill at home who you looked after and you enjoyed it? Did you help to administer pills and injections?'

More often than not I did not get a clear answer, which convinced me that many had absolutely no clue about medicine and certainly no calling. However, after some time, the situation began to change: there was a marked decrease in the number of professors' "darlings" and "bright young things" in my lectures. They began to be replaced by young people from the rural areas, talented boys and girls from the provinces, hungry for knowledge and who lived and breathed medicine."

The 1970s was a time not only of qualitative, but also quantitative, changes to the system of higher and specialised secondary education. Five new universities opened their doors and there were new specialised secondary schools in a number of cities. In answer to changes in industry, 29 new departments, 76 courses and many modern research laboratories were created in the universities.

By the end of the 1970s, Azerbaijan had 16 institutions of higher education with 526 departments and 134 faculties, attended by more than 100,000 students.

FIGHTING CORRUPTION IN THE UNIVERSITIES

Bribery in the admissions' departments was one of the greatest challenges facing Heydar Aliyev. At that time, students and their parents knew full well how much it "cost" to get into Azerbaijan State University, Azerbaijan Medical University, or the Institute of Foreign Languages. Everyone thought of these as elite institutions and the charges for the privilege of studying there were high. There was another charge during end of term exams. Working at the entrance examinations for these schools meant earning wads of cash and the possibility of helping out a few relatives. Because of this, the selection process for examiners at universities was extremely competitive.

Heydar Aliyev was absolutely determined to put an end to these corrupt practices. It was on his initiative that a special decree was issued by the Central Committee Bureau to improve the admissions procedure in universities. He often had to dismiss a head or two, remove and severely reprimand senior members of the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Special Education and to conduct special examinations in universities in accordance with Central Committee requirements.

And yet, despite the crackdown, the state of affairs in higher education especially during entrance examinations improved only slowly. Then, Heydar Aliyev thought of a radical way of reforming the admissions system. Lydia Rasulova, who worked for some time at the Central Committee as the deputy head of the department of science and education, remembers the event:

"Heydar Aliyev invited a group of people to discuss ways of eradicating corruption with regard to university admissions. In the end, they decided to establish a Centralised Admissions Committee. They selected a number of decent and academically minded teachers from different subject areas and invited them to the Central Committee on the day of the examinations. They then sent one to the medical school, and another to the academy of music etc. It was not a panacea, of course, but it did reduce the percentage of dishonest practices during admissions exams.

The best students were carefully scrutinised. If in one exam, one of them received a 'five', he or she would be admitted without any other tests, but if he or she received a 'four', he or she would have to sit all the other exams. Some parents would 'sponsor' a gold medal for their children. A special test was created for the winners. It would be noted, for example, if the medallist passed the entrance examination with distinction, but failed at the first set of university exams. The consequences could be very serious, with members of the committee, and sometimes the university management, losing their jobs.

All these measures were not one hundred percent successful, but the testing system initiated at the beginning of the 1990s was a fairly satisfactory solution to the problem."

In addition to setting up the Centralised Admissions Committee, Heydar Aliyev put even more stringent measures in place. We have already mentioned that he forbade the children of law enforcement officers to study law. Preference was given to young people from rural communities and to the children of working people. A year's work experience was introduced for school leavers. For example, if you wanted to become a doctor, you might go and work as an orderly in a hospital.

In addition, there was a non-competitive scholarship for higher education offered to students from Nagorno-Karabakh. At the time, the leaders in the area explained the need for this scholarship as being due to the fact that, in many villages in the NKAR, there were not enough doctors, teachers or lawyers. It was offered on the grounds that these students would then return to the NKAR as specialists. Another interesting point is that the scholarship was open to the whole of Nagorno-Karabakh, although the leadership had recommended that it should be offered only to Armenians. Students were sent to university not on the basis of merit, but because of their sense of kinship and community.



Presentation of the Gold Star of the Hero of Socialist Labour and the Order of Lenin to Heydar Aliyev, the Kremlin, 1979



Presentation of the Order of the October Revolution to Heydar Aliyev, 1982



Heydar Aliyev with performers in a concert to mark
the 16th Congress of Azerbaijani Trade Unions, 9th February 1982



Heydar Aliyev with a Supreme Soviet delegation in Mexico,
April 1982



A farewell photograph with members of the Bureau of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan
before departure for Moscow. They are still a single team at this point, 1982



After the show with outstanding Soviet actor and
comedian Arkady Raykin, 1st October 1975



With writers attending the Friendship of the Peoples –
Friendship of Literature All Union Creative Conference,
Baku, October 1980



Heydar Aliyev and Zarifa Aliyeva with Russian cultural figures



Ships of every flag, welcome!
Heydar Aliyev chats to Soviet cultural figures



Heydar Aliyev presents state awards to Azerbaijani cultural and artistic figures,
4th December 1980



Heydar Aliyev congratulates Gara Garayev
on being made a Hero of Socialist Labour, 1978



Chatting with Russian actors Vladimir Zeldin and Lyudmila Chursina



Presenting the Order of Lenin and the Hammer
and Sickle gold medal to Mirza Ibrahimov, people's writer of Azerbaijan,
chairman of the Writers' Union and chairman of the
Soviet Committee for Solidarity with the Countries of Asia and Africa, 23rd
October 1981



Heydar Aliyev opens Vagif's mausoleum in Shusha, 15th January 1982



At Vagif's bas-relief in Shusha, 29th July 1982



The opening of the Vagif Poetry Days in Shusha, 29th July 1982



Heydar Aliyev and maestro Niyazi, Baku, September 1983



Heydar Aliyev would spend his rare moments
of relaxation with his family



Relations between Heydar Aliyev
and his children were always good-natured



With Zarifa, the first granddaughter in the Aliyev family



A happy family



Heydar Aliyev, 1980

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPORT IN AZERBAIJAN

On 21st June 1974, the most active members of the party gathered to discuss how best to promote sport and physical education in Azerbaijan. Heydar Aliyev gave an important speech. Both he and other speakers talked about the lack of large-scale sporting activity, the poor results of Azerbaijan's athletes in Soviet and international competitions and the low standard of physical education in schools and institutions, as well as the fact that Azerbaijan lagged behind other countries in terms of its sporting infrastructure. This meant that many teams, such as the Neftchi Football Club, had no training ground. So as to resolve these problems, Heydar Aliyev ordered leaders at every level to give priority to physical training and sport. The first secretary of the NKAR party, Boris Kevorkov, stated that he had worked in both the Komsomol and the party for 20 years, and could not remember a time when sport had been paid so much attention.

From a conversation with Yuri Mammadov:

"In the mid-1970s, a very important document was produced, called "On the Development of Sport and Physical Education in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan." At the time we needed a new approach to extending physical education and professional sport. We needed to modernise our infrastructure, provide promising athletes with equipment and technical training and create a network of sports centres. Heydar Aliyev understood the huge political significance of sporting achievements for a nation. Why were Cuba and the DDR known throughout the world? Essentially thanks to their sporting prowess. How is a victorious team honoured? With its flag and its national anthem. Heydar Aliyev hoped that through sport we would achieve recognition not only within the Soviet Union but also beyond its frontiers.

Elmira Akhundova: What changed with the publication of this document?

Yuri Mammadov: A lot. Firstly, a lot more importance was attached to sport. The document – the combined work of the CPA Central Committee and the Council of Ministers – was published in printed form. It contained a number of important points. It suggested, for example, the creation of an Olympic rowing centre in Mingachevir and a network of sporting schools – in short, it covered a whole spectrum of issues connected with the development of sport. After this, a modern football pitch was built for the Neftchi football team and stadiums and sports grounds were constructed in many other districts.

The document was put together on Heydar Aliyev's initiative. He generally saw to every matter himself, all the more so as he was something of a sportsman himself and swam all his life.

He loved athletes and took great care of them, rewarding them with cars, flats and titles. Let me give some examples. He happened to be on

holiday in Kislovodsk when Neftchi, who were in the top league at the time, were playing a friendly match against a local team. Heydar Aliyev went to the stadium to watch this game and saw Neftchi lose. When he returned, he summoned the team's old trainer, Ahmad Alasgarov, and the president of the State Committee for Sport and Physical Education to the Central Committee Bureau. During their discussions, Aliyev asked:

"Tell me, Alasgarov, how could the team play like that?" Alasgarov made clumsy excuses and let slip: "You know, Heydar Aliyevich, there just aren't any tall people in Azerbaijan." Heydar Aliyev hit the roof! "And what am I, short? Kamran Baghirov, is he short?!" Ahmad Alasgarov was not a part of the team from then on.

Vladimir Mikhalevski considers himself very lucky to have played for Neftchi while Aliyev was leader of Azerbaijan, as he would often meet sportspeople and ask how they were getting along.

During one of his meetings with the football players, Heydar Aliyev went to the window and looked out only to see a house being built opposite. He asked the mayor of Baku, who was also present, whose house it was. The mayor answered that it was departmental, and that all the flats had already been taken. Aliyev objected in an impatient tone saying, "Four flats in that building need to be reserved for the boys," and the Neftchi footballers, who were in need of better accommodation, were given flats there almost the very next day.

When the boys walked out onto the pitch and saw Heydar Aliyev on the podium, they would think they were defending not only their country's honour but Heydar Aliyev's as well. "He did so much to promote sport and football that we just couldn't let him down," said Vladimir Mikhalevski.

The famous Baku goalkeeper Sergei Kramarenko recalls that "the Boss" came to visit them at the training ground at least once or twice a month and took an active interest in everything, enquiring after their children and asking whether their families needed anything. With his encouragement, there was only one way forward and that was victory.

When he was president of an independent Azerbaijan during the 1990s, Heydar Aliyev cleverly appointed his own son, Ilham Aliyev, as head of the National Olympic Committee. The benefits were clear and, the appointment of Aliyev junior meant that party functionaries and officials throughout the country began to pay sport the attention it deserved. The most modern Olympic complexes were built in practically every region and would be used by professional sportspeople and young people alike. Within a few years, Azerbaijan began to achieve comfortable wins in the most prestigious international tournaments and Baku played host to both European and international championships in various areas of sport. Most importantly, the goal Aliyev had set – attracting young people to sport and promoting large-scale participation – had been achieved. It was one the hallmarks of his younger years.

HEYDAR ALIYEV AND THE CHANGE OF TUDEH PARTY'S LEADERSHIP

After the defeat of the national liberation movement led by Jafar Pishevari in Southern Azerbaijan, two Marxist parties emerged in the area with native Iranians among their ranks: the People's Party of Iran (Tudeh) and the Azerbaijan Democratic Party (ADP). The Tudeh party's headquarters were originally located in Moscow, but then moved to Leipzig in the DDR, whilst the ADP had its head office in Baku. The leader of the Tudeh was against the ADP right from the start. On December 15th 1950, ten Tudeh leaders escaped from the Qasr Prison in central of Tehran. All the evidence points to the fact that their escape was organised by the Soviet Secret Services. When they were freed, the Iranian Marxists first of all demanded that Moscow should ban the ADP. In the 1960s and 1970s the ADP, led by Ghulam Yahya Daneshian over a long period, was a powerful party with a relatively strong position in Iran.

According to the historian Jamil Hasanli:

"Moscow never really considered closing down the ADP or dissolving its headquarters in Baku. It simply played along with the Tudehists, who believed that there could only be one Iranian Marxist party and that the democrats were preventing them from taking root in Iranian Azerbaijan. The ADP, they claimed, had the population in this area under their control and was operating a sprawling illegal network, which they said interfered with the Tudeh's activities. In my opinion, this was an attempt by Tudeh's leaders to justify their own weakness and disorganisation. Throughout the Baghirov, Mustafayev, Akhundov and Aliyev periods, Moscow put pressure on the Azerbaijani leadership to close down the ADP. Our leaders, however, opposed this, as the ADP was a nationalist party in the best sense of the word and gave a lot of thought to the matter of Southern Azerbaijan. Questions of nationality never occurred to the Tudeh, who were still working under the Marxist banner of class struggle. As a result, Azerbaijan's leaders were always able to persuade the Kremlin that the ADP must be preserved. In his letters to Moscow, the first secretary of the CPA Central Committee wrote that the ADP did not consider the Southern Azerbaijani question resolved. He believed, furthermore, that through the continued presence of the ADP it would be possible to influence the Tudeh's actions. That was how matters stood at the end of the 1970s."

A document prepared by Heydar Aliyev for the CPSU Central Committee shows that, in 1979, 19,000 Iranian émigrés lived in Azerbaijan and among these there were 4,396 political refugees. From August 1960, the ADP Central Committee, whose main work was carried out in Baku, was amalgamated with the Tudeh at regional level. The ADP had 3,500 members, brought together in 152 grass-root organisations.¹

¹ GAPPOD, Fund 1, inventory 89, case 213, 83

The CPA Central Committee provided support for the ADP's central apparatus as well as the Society for Political Immigrants. For instance in 1978, an estimate showed that this cost around 165,800 roubles, which included the salaries of Iranian party functionaries, administration costs and support for the editorial staff and printing expenses for their magazines and the newspaper *Azerbaijan*. The first secretary made the estimate himself and then informed the CPSU Central Committee.¹

From the early 1970s, the Soviet Union began to receive information about growing discontent among the Iranian population with the Shah's regime. The influence of the clergy was also increasing. By the end of 1978, a revolutionary situation had become a full-blown revolution. On 16th January 1979, the Shah fled the country, and on that very day statues both of him and his father were toppled from their pedestals in various towns and smashed. The revolution concluded successfully on 12th February when the Muslim religious leaders came to power.

From the account given by the historian Jamil Hasanli:

"In 1978 and 1979, just as the Islamic revolution was unfolding, the Soviet Union decided to use the situation to oust the Americans from Iran. The Soviet Union had its own agenda: the Kremlin assumed that Khomeini and his supporters were a bunch of ordinary religious fanatics, and that Khomeini himself was old, weak and unable to hold on to power. It believed, therefore, that it would be able to use him as an instrument through which to overthrow the pro-American Shah before handing Iran over to the Tudehists. That is to say, the Soviets wanted the revolution to take place on their own terms. They did not know whether to back the Islamists or not. At that time the leader of the Tudeh party was Iraj Eskandari, who was opposed to this idea and believed, as did his associates, that no good would come of it. Noureddin Kianouri's group, a faction within the Tudeh, wished to support the Islamists by cooperating with Khomeini and then trying to seize power at some later stage in the revolution. To achieve this they would need Moscow's support to appoint a party leader who shared their views. However, changes could only be made to the Tudeh leadership with the support of the ADP. During the 1960s, the two parties were closely interconnected, despite the fact that the ADP formally maintained its independence. Moscow had to resolve the matter. Many ADP officials - Ghulam Yahya's people - were included in the Tudeh's Central Committee, so that procedural matters (in particular the election of party leaders) largely depended on them. On the Kremlin's orders, Heydar Aliyev conducted a series of discussions with the ADP leaders and eventually with Kianouri himself."

¹ Ibid., case 211, 1-8

I was able to read the transcripts of the discussions between Heydar Aliyev and the leading Iranian communists. They reveal the full extent of his diplomatic brilliance and his ability to persuade people to change their opinions and adopt his position without applying a great deal of pressure. His negotiations with the leaders of the ADP and the future leader of the People's Party of Iran are interesting as they shed light on his political views concerning contemporary events in Iran, including his attitude towards the "painful" issue of Southern Azerbaijan. We can see that he was constantly worried about the trouble brewing in the neighbouring country and about the frightening possibility that it might influence the situation in Iranian Azerbaijan; we can see him doubting and reflecting, giving valuable advice and warning Iranian political immigrants against careless action that might have fatal consequences. In short, I think that it is high time that these sensational documents from the depths of the archives received some attention.

Between 11th and 13th December 1978, E. Jabrayilov, a divisional head in the Central Committee, referred two memorandums concerning the state of affairs in the Executive Bureau of the People's Party of Iran to Heydar Aliyev. They contained the following:

"Recently, the disagreements between Comrades Iraj Eskandari and Noureddin Kianouri have become very bitter and their positions seem irreconcilable ... all the party's work is currently directed towards Iran and Western countries, and is concentrated in the hands of the secretary for Organisational Matters, Comrade Kianouri, who acts independently, ignoring the opinion of the Executive Bureau. Kianouri is leading an energetic campaign to remove First Secretary Eskandari from the party leadership, and Eskandari feels demoralised and trapped. As a result of these disagreements, the Central Committee of the People's Party of Iran has, to date, failed to take a precise stand on the events in Iran.

At the Bureau's last session in November, comrade Eskandari recommended that contact should be made with Iran's National Front and its leader, Karim Sanjabi. Comrade Kianouri opposes this, however, and demands an armed uprising against the Shah and cooperation with Khomeini's forces.

... It is of note that comrade Kianouri is an experienced and devoted member of the party and a talented conspirator. He is organised, lively, erudite and articulate, and studied both in Germany and at the party's School of Higher Education. He worked under cover in Iran until 1954.

The CPSU Central Committee's international division (comrades V. V. Zagladin and N. N. Simonenko) actively support comrade Kianouri and have many good things to say about him. In my presence, Zagladin advised Comrade Daneshian to change his attitude towards Kianouri and support him. Nevertheless, comrade Daneshian still does not trust Kianouri and considers him a libertarian and an anarchist ... Comrade Kianouri is, in

fact, not particularly popular with members of the ADP Central Committee or, indeed, with many of the Iranian immigrants in Azerbaijan.¹

On 3rd January 1979, Heydar Aliyev's first meeting took place with a member of the Executive Bureau of Central Committee of the People's Party of Iran and the president of the Central Committee of the ADP, Ghulam Yahya Daneshian.²

At the ADP's plenum in November 1978, members of the Central Committee unanimously agreed to lend moral and material assistance to the revolution in Iran. Daneshian had this to say on the matter:

"Our people are ready. In 1946, when we came to the USSR, only 16 of us were graduates. Now after years of immigration and thanks to the constant efforts of the CPA Central Committee, we have more than 5,000 educated specialists. But we do not know how to act or what use we can be in the current situation in Iran."

Heydar Aliyev: Personally, I can't understand this. You have been waiting in exile for about 30 years now for the situation in Iran to mature. And now that the conditions are ripe and people from across the social spectrum, including believers, are rising up against the Shah, you cannot decide what to do. I would have thought that in the present climate the party should strengthen its connections in Iran and send loyal activists over there. Is anything like this being done?

Ghulam Yahya Daneshian: Very little. Comrade Kianouri, is being unreasonable and refusing to consult any of us. At the last session of the Executive Bureau he suggested that we arm the people and unite with Khomeini's supporters against the Shah. I asked him who, exactly, we were going to arm – on whom can we rely? We don't know if the party has allies in Iran. We are certainly not going to arm religious fanatics.

H. A.: ... Let us imagine that the Shah is overthrown tomorrow, and a more progressive, possibly more democratic, system is established. What would the People's Party of Iran suggest? Who, in your opinion, should lead the party in Iran? This person must have a great deal of authority, and the people must trust him.

Daneshian believed that Eskandari was the most suitable candidate for this job due to his large support base within the Central Committee. Heydar Aliyev, however, was not so keen on the "neutral" Eskandari who, "has no concrete ideas to speak of". He went on to inform Daneshian that Kianouri would be flying to Baku to meet them the next day, and asked him directly who, of the two of them, should be first secretary of the

¹ Ibid., case 213, 6-9

² Ibid., 14-22

Central Committee. Daneshian replied that Kianouri did not have the respect of the party, and that if he were to be appointed first secretary, then he, Daneshian, would resign.

H. A.: Our comrades in the CPSU Central Committee speak very highly of Kianouri. They see him as a very earnest and committed person ... you claim that he cannot lead the party, but also agree that Eskandari is not the right person. He has outlived his uses and plays no active role to speak of. Will he be accepted in Iran if the situation there changes? Of course, this is the party's own internal business, but I am concerned that your Executive Bureau should do the right thing at this crucial time.

On 4th January 1979, Heydar Aliyev and Ghulam Yahya Daneshian met for a second time.¹ Heydar Aliyev again put forward Kianouri as a candidate. He ended the conversation by suggesting that Ghulam Yahya Daneshian should meet Kianouri, who was in Baku at the time, to express his doubts and clarify his general stance:

H. A.: Some comrades told me that you hold the key to resolving this critical issue. Use it to establish a principled, mutually loyal and efficient party leadership.

G. Y. D.: I will try to look at the situation again and act as you've advised.

H.A.: You are making party history, so it is important to have your own clearly defined strategy and tactics. Speak to Kianouri, analyse the situation from the hypothetical standpoint that he is first secretary. That is, without doubt, what we want.

From Jamil Hasanli's account:

"Noureddin Kianouri, the secretary to the Central Committee of the Tudeh at that time, arrived in Baku from Leipzig. The Iranian Revolution was already in full swing. The Kremlin had ordered Heydar Aliyev to agree the changes to the People's Party of Iran's leadership with the Central Committee of the ADP, since this decision depended on its current leaders. As a result of a series of negotiations, Aliyev was able to convince them to tow the Moscow line and, at the same time, increase the influence of the ADP within the Tudeh Central Committee.

Heydar Aliyev suggested that, "It is up to you to elect Kianouri. Support him, but make your own position clear. Have him increase the number of ADP members in the Tudeh Central Committee in order to increase your influence there." This last point seemed extremely tempting to Daneshian and brought him round to the idea of compromise".

¹ Ibid., pp. 22-26.

Heydar Aliyev met Daneshian for a third time on 6th January 1979.¹ He expressed some interesting ideas about Khomeini and immigration:

H. A.: We cannot go on checking the facts again and again. We must act, work, seize opportunities and make decisions. Eskandari's position (it has also been yours on several occasions) could be tolerated if the situation in Iran were peaceful. But right now, while Tehran is on fire and the streets are barricaded, his inertia cannot be condoned.

Those who emigrate do so to pursue a clear and deliberate goal, but always retain their connection to their homeland and think of their own people. You know only too well how much you argue amongst yourselves. At present, no one is more popular in Iran than Khomeini; the people have complete faith in him and go to their deaths holding his portrait. Not only is he fighting the Shah, but is also opposed to the presence of the Americans in his country. Kianouri, the most astute among you, suggests uniting with him, but you object and call him a hot-head. You must stop looking at the events in Iran through the prism of your personal relations with Kianouri.

... Once we have appointed Kianouri, you must do everything to trust and support him. Forget your personal suspicions, quarrels and grievances and apply yourselves to the task in hand."

At the end of his long conversation with Heydar Aliyev, Daneshian agreed to carry out his suggestions. His Soviet education and upbringing had taught him that he was just a party foot soldier.

On 6th January 1979, Heydar Aliyev met Nourredin Kianouri, who thought that they should use the Iranian Revolution as an excuse to unite with Khomeini and other opposition forces and prepare for armed combat. The Executive Bureau did not support this view, however.

Heydar Aliyev wanted to know if Khomeini was willing to cooperate with the Tudehists. "I think so," replied Kianouri. "Not long ago I asked whether he thought American forces might invade Iran and he replied that, if they did, they would have to contend with a very determined opposition." Heydar Aliyev then wanted to know whether Khomeini had his eye on a position as head of state. "He lives 40 kilometres from Paris and only communicates with the small group around him," replied Kianouri. "He claims he doesn't want to be president, and prefers to remain a religious figure."

Heydar Aliyev: As far as I'm aware, he has said that he does not want to cooperate with communists.

Nourredin Kianouri: I think that was a tactical statement. He is sometimes portrayed as a reactionary in the Soviet press, in particular in Ivanov's book

Contemporary Iran ... on the whole, Khomeini does not see the Soviet Union in the same league as the United States. We know that the Ayatollahs, Talabani and Gomi, and other religious figures have spoken out in favour of the Soviet Union. Gomi, for example, recently said, "The USSR has not done Iran any harm for a very long time. We consider the Soviet Union a potential ally in our struggle against the Shah".

H. A.: How do you think the revolution is developing, and where does the party stand inside the country? ... How can we help you?

Kianouri replied that he had a strong group in Tehran as well as several smaller groups of 30 to 40 people in other Iranian cities. They published a secret newspaper with a circulation of 350,000. He asked for help in choosing politically reliable people to send to Iran, financial support from Daneshian and his party and the resolution of leadership problems within the People's Party of Iran. He also admitted that without Daneshian's support he "would not be able to do anything" about these. Kianouri made plans with the first secretary to send two or three new members of the Secretariat to take charge immediately. Heydar Aliyev said that that was the right thing to do. The resistance's centre of gravity must be in Iran, at the very heart of the revolution. Heydar Aliyev also advised Kianouri to:

"... Forget the past and speak to Daneshian from the heart, confide in him when possible, and convince him that, in the past, he has not valued you enough. It is really important that he should be confident that you are right ...

There are about 5,000 qualified people ready to set off for Iran from Azerbaijan, among them 370 political refugees who have graduated from the party's School of Higher Education, 180 of whom have doctorates. That's a quite a force. I am sure they are not the only ones, so you will not be short of people."

On the evening of 6th January Heydar Aliyev again met Kianouri, this time with Daneshian and a member of the People's Party of Iran Central Committee, Amrali Lakhrudi.¹

"Comrade Kianouri has a solid plan of action for the party," said Heydar Aliyev. "Unfortunately Eskandari, supported by certain members of the Executive Bureau, objects to these plans. For our part, we believe that Kianouri's proposals are correct in the current climate, which requires action, and would like to see his suggestions implemented."

Kianouri set forth his political standpoint:

¹ Ibid., 26-30

¹ Ibid., 42-50

"We are in favour of armed resistance against the Shah and an alliance with other opposition forces in Iran, particularly with Khomeini. The need for unity and a single leader to direct our comrades in Iran is currently greater than ever."

Daneshian agreed with this in principle. Lakhuri asked Kianouri who would be the recipients of the weapons and where they would come from. "We will arm the people who took to the streets in Tehran and other towns," came Kianouri's reply. When he saw that Lakhuri and Daneshian were not in favour of this, he added in a conciliatory tone:

"We don't have any weapons of our own to give them – we are a political organisation. We must point the people in the right direction and then they will disarm the soldiers and officers and seize their weapons. We will have a chance to discuss this in more detail later on."

Heydar Aliyev made conciliatory additions to the conversation, for example, "Try not to argue, although the best decisions often come from arguments and the exchange of opinions, but we must ignore that for now."

When matters of organisation had been discussed, Heydar Aliyev offered the Iranian revolutionaries his advice and explained the CPSU Central Committee's views on the matter:

"I have one piece of advice to give you. All revolutionary movements are inherently theoretical, but it sometimes seems to me that you are too concerned with theoretical reasoning, often to the detriment of your revolutionary cause. Now is the time for decisive action. Marxist-Leninist teaching is not mere dogma; it is a call to arms. World events force us to adjust our view of life ... I personally believe that any union with anti-Shah or anti-American forces would be advantageous ... What is so attractive about Khomeini's position in particular? He is fighting both the Shah and the Americans simultaneously. If there is any suggestion that a military regime is going to replace the monarchy, we will again be at an advantage. The Iranian people have grown up to worship the Shah from infancy. To them, he is a God. They will have no such faith in a military dictator and it will be easier to topple him, even with his American support. We need to come up with more adaptable, realistic and decisive tactics."

Kianouri is right to want to arm the people. It is one thing to shout political slogans and quite another to point a gun at someone who has killed peaceful demonstrators in cold blood, women and children among them. I understand that you have no weapons and no means of distributing them, but it is absolutely necessary to inspire the people and consolidate the strength of the resistance.

Iran is very important to the Soviet Union, and so we cannot remain indifferent to what is happening there. Leonid Brezhnev has made our position clear in an interview in *Pravda*. We cannot intervene in Iran's internal affairs. We can, however, support the Iranian people's fight for freedom and independence. We have warned the Americans that if they carry out armed intervention in Iran,

we will be forced to take appropriate measures. Of course, we would rather not provoke military action, but we must actively support the overthrow of the Shah. And this is not far off."

A meeting of the People's Party of Iran Executive Committee took place in Leipzig on 13th January 1979, led by its president, Iraj Eskandari.

Everything went according to plan. The Executive Bureau unanimously approved a document calling the People's Party of Iran to armed resistance in Iran. Daneshian then gave a speech, stating that, "events in Iran demand an energetic and active response from the People's Party of Iran. The first secretary of the People's Party of Iran Central Committee, Comrade Eskandari, is not fit to mastermind this crisis point in the work of the party. He has no links to Iran and is more or less totally inactive." Daneshian suggested that Eskandari should be relieved of his post and Kianouri appointed first secretary, a suggestion that was supported by other Central Committee members.

Another meeting was held by the Executive Bureau on 16th January 1979. There is an interesting point in Jabrayilov's report about this meeting:

"Comrade Kianouri gave a speech to conclude the meeting and made a particular point of the fact that this might be a good time to repatriate Iranian political immigrants. This would require some consultation with their Soviet comrades ... to carry out the undercover task, five or six loyal people are urgently needed to be sent to Iran, followed by another 30 to 40 over the next two or three months. *To prepare for armed combat, we would work closely with the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and Iranian communists. [my emphasis]*"¹

Once again, these words underline the fact that the CPSU was at that time keeping a close eye on Yasser Arafat and Abdullah Ocalan with a view to exporting their progressive revolutionary methods to other countries in the Near and Middle East.

From Jamil Hasanli's account:

"Shortly afterwards, Moscow ordered the Tudehists and allies of the ADP in Iran to support Ali Khamenei in the presidential elections, and generally to align themselves with Khomeini. Elections took place both in Iran and within the Tudeh. Incredibly, Noureddin Kianouri became first secretary of the Tudeh party at its 16th plenum, which took place in Berlin from 27th to 28th February 1979. Heydar Aliyev played a considerable part in this process."

¹ Ibid., 56-57

THE FAILURE OF THE KREMLIN'S POLICY IN IRAN

The Central Committee Executive Bureau of the Tudeh Party held a critical meeting on 3rd March 1979. The departure of leading party officials for Iran were among the most important issues raised. It was decided that the move would take place in three stages. The first would involve the Central Committee secretaries, the second the members of the Executive Bureau, while the third would include all members and candidates for membership of the Central Committee of the People's Party of Iran, as well as party functionaries. Telegrams would be sent to Khomeini, Bazargan and Sanjabi requesting permission for the People's Party of Iran to operate in Iran. A copy was to be sent to the editors of the *Ettela'at*, *Kayhan* and *Ayandegan* newspapers. The repatriation to Iran of political immigrants was another of the issues raised. The Executive Bureau's approval of the mass repatriation of Iranian political exiles living in the Soviet Union and its socialist allies was also noted in the resolution.¹

Heydar Aliyev reacted favourably to Kianouri's request for assistance for the Tudeh Party by selecting and training groups of Iranian political immigrants for practical work in Iran. He volunteered the organisation of short-term, exclusive training courses for 30 young Iranian immigrants, so that they could carry out their work, and he requested the approval of the CPSU Central Committee in a classified letter.

Events in Iran soon inspired the Iranian political immigrants living in Azerbaijan, especially as the people in the host nation actively supported their opposition the Shah's regime. Even the new leaders of the revolution openly acknowledged the contribution made by Tabriz: "The blood spilt in Tabriz," proclaimed Khomeini in one of his speeches, "runs in the veins of millions of Iranians." "Tabriz has shown us the path to revolution. Tabriz has broken the back of the Shah's regime," exclaimed Bazargan, Jafar Sharif Emami and other Iranian figureheads on numerous occasions.²

According to information received by the CPA Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, "a significant number of Iranians, particularly of the younger generation, have expressed their wish to travel to Iran for work ... The overwhelming majority of members and candidates for membership of the ADP Central Committee are ready to go to Iran at the party's behest, by legal means or otherwise."³

On 29th March 1979, a plenum was held in Baku by the ADP Central Committee. Some of the members discussed the possibility of the creation of an Islamic Republic in Iran and that the revolution was being led by the spiritual

¹ Ibid., 68

² Ibid., 95

³ Ibid., 84-85

leaders of Shia Islam. Several members of the ADP Central Committee wished to cooperate with the Islamists on ideological grounds. A debate on the autonomy of Iranian Azerbaijan also took place at the plenum with some adopting a radical position and arguing that the Azerbaijani should join the Kurds, Turkmens and Baloch in demanding autonomy, while others were more cautious and advised against a hasty stance on the issue.

The assembly accordingly called on all political emigrants to vote in a referendum on the establishment of an Islamic Republic. The Executive Bureau of the ADP was to decide its position on the autonomy of Iranian Azerbaijan and to take the necessary steps to repatriate the political immigrants living there.

Unfortunately, despite their support for Khomeini and the readiness of the communists to cooperate with the Islamists in order to achieve their strategic aims, most of their expectations were not to be realised.

On 31st March 1979, Heydar Aliyev received the Executive Bureau of the ADP. He realised that, because of its long period in exile, the ADP had come a long way; it now had a considerable number of qualified members and he thought that it was time for them to focus on large-scale repatriation.

He listened to the members of the Executive Bureau before delivering a speech full of valuable advice. A number of passages will be quoted here because they help to clarify the stance taken by the leader of the Azerbaijani communists on the events in Iran, as well as the question of nationality:

"The new movement in Iran has branded the Shah an enemy of the people. You declared the same thing 32 years ago and were forced to flee from persecution. You therefore have a legal right to aim for a positive outcome to the question of repatriation.

I believe that there are two ways of addressing your situation. The first is through official channels, the Iranian embassy in Moscow or the consulate in Baku, for instance ... You must send daily letters and telegrams to Khomeini, Bazargan and the newspaper and magazine editors and you must visit Iranian diplomatic representatives ... The more they distance themselves, the greater your chance of solidifying your position in Iranian Azerbaijan.

The second is less official. You must use your acquaintances and family connections to incite the Iranian public to revolution, making use of the press, radio and television. The authorities will have to succumb to the pressure of public opinion and resolve the issue.

In all likelihood, many of you will be in a position to return to your country within two or three months. There is everything to indicate that the government approves of your repatriation.

The ADP should function in Iran under its given name; this will get more people on your side, but equally do not forget that you are a constituent part of the People's Party of Iran ... *We support the existence of Iran as a single independent nation* [my emphasis] and the consolidation of the People's Party of Iran

as the sole Marxist-Leninist party, uniting the best people from Khorasan and Mazandaran, Azerbaijan and Kurdistan and all the Iranian provinces. For this reason, it is vitally important for the public to embrace an internationalist way of thinking and that activists are taught to respect the People's Party of Iran.

You will need to reinforce this tendency in the long term, earning the trust and respect of the leadership of the People's Party of Iran and strengthening the unity that exists between the Farsi and Azerbaijani peoples. Now that the activities of the Tudeh party have been practically legalised, questions of unity, cohesion and cooperation are now of profound political significance. Remember that unity is the most important condition for assured success in Iran. You have lived here under our protection and there has always been someone to resolve conflicts with the People's Party of Iran acting as an arbitrator in contentious situations. In Iran you will be on your own.

Regarding the aims of the country as a whole, the Kurds are striving for national autonomy; they are armed and are standing up to the authorities and the Turkmens. Azerbaijan is quiet for the time being. Why is this?

After the suppression of the national-democratic movement in 1946, the Shah put a lot of work into Iranian Azerbaijan, reinforcing the district with trusted and loyal agents from SAVAK [the Ministry for Security]. For this reason the people were unable to act, they were terrified, and they were never carried away by revolutionary fervour. I personally believe that the Azerbaijani people have not yet woken up and are simply biding their time.

It might be a good thing that there is, as yet, no move towards autonomy in Iranian Azerbaijan. We should bear in mind the fact that, like the Shah, Khomeini and Bazargan fear an Azerbaijani uprising. We must be careful not to frighten them, but should concentrate on solving problems closer to home.

I believe that at the current stage of the revolution, *you should not demand national autonomy, and taking up weapons is currently entirely out of the question* [my emphasis]. This would not work in your favour and would only serve to revive pro-Shah forces in Iran. Azerbaijan should develop in the context of a single Islamic republic, although it should also make its presence felt. It is vital that people are made aware of the need for mother-tongue teaching in Azerbaijan and the development of its own independent culture through the press and by working closely with the people.

The current regime will not last forever so it is necessary to play an active role in the cleansing process currently underway in Iran, to use the current weakness and indecisiveness in the country to our own advantage and always to be at the forefront of events.

"I personally consider it possible that Iran will blossom as a federal state [my emphasis]. Telagani's words to the effect that the Azerbaijani people have been deprived of their mother tongue for 2,500 years brings hope that Khomeini will respect the people's desire for national independence.

"The unification of Soviet and Iranian Azerbaijan is out of the question [my emphasis]. It is a bad idea that could prevent all our aspirations from coming to fruition. Proceed by establishing business contacts with owners of factories, plants, newspapers, and cultural and educational institutions, awaken their national pride and secure their support."

Heydar Aliyev's perceptive words to the Iranian communists were those of an experienced, shrewd and far-sighted politician. As someone who loved his people, he passionately hoped for independence for Southern Azerbaijan or at least for its cultural autonomy, and it is for this reason that he was in favour of Iran's existence as a federal nation. But, the tragic experiences of 1946, when dreams of autonomy were drowned in the blood of multitudes of patriots, informed his warning to the ADP leaders against rash moves and especially against armed conflict. At the same time, Heydar Aliyev called on the Iranian political immigrants to Azerbaijan to play an active part in the processes unfolding in their homeland and to inspire the Azerbaijani people to fight for their rights, most importantly, the right to study in their own language and to develop their own independent culture.

On 9th July 1979, Jabrayilov sent Heydar Aliyev a report on the meeting between Amrali Lakhrudi, first secretary to the ADP Central Committee, and Anushiravan Ibrahimi, secretary to the Central Committee of the People's Party of Iran, in Moscow. Judging by this document, there were already indications in Iran of "the development of a significant anti-communist campaign by reactionary sectors of the clergy and western sympathisers inside the government ... Our comrades in the Tudeh Party cannot rule out the possibility that this foreshadows the beginning of a powerful reaction against left-wing forces in the country."¹

Worse still, disagreements had developed between local members of the People's Party of Iran and the exiles who had returned to Iran.

From the historian Jamil Hasanli's account:

"Unfortunately, events in Iran did not adhere to the pattern envisaged by Moscow. Khomeini came to power like a true leader. He began by declaring that America was Iran's number one enemy. Before this, there had been an interesting turn of events and, once the Shah was certain that the United States did not intend to help him out by defending the monarchy, he made overtures to the Soviet ambassador in Tehran, offering to cut off all communication with America, remove their military bases from Iranian territory, and to get relations with the Soviet Union on the right track. At that point the revolution was no more than two months away. The Soviet ambassador travelled to Moscow to discuss the Shah's offers. Moscow turned them down and the ambassador did not

¹ GAPPOD, fund 1., inventory 89, case 212, 38

return to Tehran until the Shah had been overthrown. Andrei Gromyko, Mikhail Suslov and Boris Ponomarev held discussions with members of the Tudeh Party concerning support for Khomeini and the Islamic Revolution. As events unfolded, any idea of cooperating with Khomeini and the political position of the People's Party of Iran began to appear deluded and even absurd.

Khomeini dashed all the Kremlin's hopes. All too aware of the communist threat, he began recriminations against the Tudeh. Huge numbers of members of the People's Party of Iran made their way back to Iran only to be arrested and thrown into gaol. The Tudeh suffered huge losses during the revolution and, ultimately, all Moscow's calculations came to nothing. Not one of the leaders of the ADP went to Iran although many of them had been on the point of going."

We should note here that it was Heydar Aliyev who in effect saved members of the ADP from reprisals. Once he saw that Khomeini's regime was beginning to clamp down on communists, he summoned the leaders of the ADP and advised them to wait for less troubled times.

Heydar Aliyev was ostensibly weighed down by the thought of his involuntary guilt: by fulfilling the Kremlin's commands he had unwittingly gambled with Kianouri's life. Eskandari had turned out to be right after all, when he sensed the bloodthirstiness of the "powerless old man" and when he refused to allow unnecessary casualties. During these difficult years, Aliyev may well have drawn parallels between the current situation and the events of 1946 when Moscow had likewise failed to predict the course of events accurately and had equally cold-bloodedly given Iranian patriots up to the brutality of the Shah's regime. We cannot compare the extent of the repression in 1946 with that of 1979-1980, but both could have been avoided if the Moscow strategists had been ever so slightly more far-sighted.

It could well have been his feelings of guilt and inner revolt at the ill-considered decisions made by Moscow that spurred Heydar Aliyev on to the unprecedented action that I have described through Elchin's words in previous chapters. During talks with foreign diplomats in 1982, Aliyev openly declared that two united peoples lived in South and North Azerbaijan and that he believed that one-day justice would prevail. It was a message to the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran, who spoke out critically against Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Although the Soviet Union initially considered the Iranian Revolution anti-imperialist and nationalist, it soon became clear that it had, in fact, taken a different direction.

In fact, the slogan, "Neither East nor West", placed the United States and the Soviet Union in the same camp. At the beginning of 1982, the Soviet Union renewed its arms shipments to Iraq (which was at war with Iran at the time), but did not prevent Syria and Libya from supplying Iran with Soviet weapons. Violent reprisals against communists and their sympathisers were

unleashed in Iran. There was no unity within the government concerning relations with Moscow. Supporters of the Iranian president, Ali Khamenei, demanded an end to relations with imperialist governments and collaboration with the Soviet Union, but supporters of the chairman of the Islamic *Majlis*, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, insisted that, like the United States, the Soviet Union should be viewed as "the devil incarnate".

Once he had accepted the difficult relations with Iran, Heydar Aliyev uncharacteristically launched an attack on Azerbaijan's southern neighbour, letting it be known that the Soviet government had no qualms about "playing the Azerbaijani card". He allowed himself this outburst, since Azerbaijan was part of a powerful empire and his native land was in no way under threat from Iran. His words concerning a divided people were not an emotional outpouring, but entirely diplomatic. It was the response of the leader of Azerbaijan to just another blow to his hopes.

To say that this response was "analysed" in Iran is a major understatement. Heydar Aliyev's words were broadcast on almost all foreign radio stations and the Iranian ambassador in Moscow was summoned urgently by the government of the Islamic Republic for an explanation.

From the BBC report of 23rd November 1982:

"Heydar Aliyev has replaced Andrei Kirilenko as a member of the Politburo. The Iranian government is paying close attention to the situation in Azerbaijan and to Aliyev's words on Azerbaijan. It is voicing concern regarding his election to such a high position."

Aliyev openly admits that he supports the unification of the two Azerbaijans. At a meeting with diplomats he noted that the population of Soviet Azerbaijan is six million. Under socialism Azerbaijan is becoming a developed country, but the 10-15 million Azerbaijanis residing in Iran are living in unbearable conditions.

Heydar Aliyev told the diplomats that the two Azerbaijans should be united, noting that this was his personal opinion and that it was up to the Azerbaijani people themselves to determine the process of unification. Aliyev's opinions were passed on in detail to the Iranian government through the Iranian ambassador in Moscow."

* * *

On 24th December 1979, Soviet troops offering "international aid" entered Afghanistan. After the Western oil crisis, the Soviet Union found itself at the peak of its military power. The West had grounds to believe that the intervention in Afghanistan was the beginning of more far-reaching plans, with Afghanistan representing only a base or outpost.

By early 1980, there were 22 divisions concentrated on the Soviet-Iranian border ready for a forced march onto Iranian soil in accordance

with the 1921 military agreement. Soviet troops maintained that it was an unavoidable measure, taken in response to the plans of the American government to attack Iran. They also maintained that Jimmy Carter thought better of this idea when he received information about the concentration of Soviet troops on their border, ready to intervene in Iran.

In an interview, the former deputy chairman of the KGB, Filipp Bobkov, recollected these events and the real reason behind Soviet intervention in Afghanistan:

"We can draw all sorts of conclusions from the entry of our soldiers into Afghanistan, but discussions tend to miss one crucial point. Before Soviet troops went into Afghanistan, there was already a significant presence of U.S. Marines in the Persian Gulf. The Americans were preparing to land so as to offer assistance to the Americans held hostage at their embassy in Tehran. You recall that there was a major conflict surrounding the embassy in 1979. The United States then decided to punish the Iranians by sending troops into Tehran. This intervention was imminent and proved to be the deciding factor. If the Americans had sent troops into Iran we were obliged, by agreement, to do likewise. Can you imagine the consequences?

Intervening in Afghanistan deflected attention away from Iran and the deployment of American troops was abandoned. Our action basically prevented the Americans from entering Iran because the entire picture had changed in the Middle East. That is to say, the decision to intervene in Afghanistan was determined by the situation in Iran."

Nevertheless, things remained very tense both in the Gulf and on the Soviet-Iranian border even after Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan.

Excerpts from TASS [The Soviet News Agency] reports:

"Washington, 25th April 1980. The Carter administration has committed an act of war against the Islamic Republic of Iran. We were informed tonight at an urgent press conference held at the White House that an airborne operation was to be carried out from a secret airstrip in a remote Iranian desert in order to liberate American embassy staff, who are accused of spying on Iran.

The operation was called off, however, due to 'technical difficulties' as the report from the White House put it. Two American planes collided on the ground resulting in the loss of eight crew members and injury to a number of American soldiers. All others involved in the planned operation have been evacuated.

President J. Carter has accepted full responsibility for the operation."

"New York, 25th April. Acting on orders from the Pentagon, the Constellation Battle Group has today rounded Singapore on its way into the Indian Ocean where it will join the huge American naval fleet concentrated off the shores of Iran. Information from United Press International, who quote diplomatic sources."

"Tehran, 25th April. The united forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran have made an announcement in connection with the United States' abandoned act of war against Iran.

Part of that announcement declares that two American military aircraft with CIA agents and marines on board, bound for the American Embassy in Tehran, where they would deliver marines to rescue the hostages there, crashed into one another, burst into flames and fell to the ground near the town of Tabas, in the north eastern Iranian Province of Khorasan, while under surveillance by planes belonging to the Iranian Air Force."

"London. A large group of Labour MPs from the House of Commons today tabled a motion before parliament to the effect that: 'We are opposed to the use of force to free the hostages and against any military action that could grow into a full-blown international conflict.' Members of parliament are demanding that the English government should cease all cooperation with the United States of America with regard to the hostages unless the White House can categorically offer assurance that they will not undertake any military action against Iran."

"Ottawa, 25th April. The Canadian prime-minister, Pierre Trudeau, stated at a press conference that the use of military force against Iran by the United States was dangerous and would not lead to the resolution of the crisis there, but could result in a further escalation of the conflict."

The events unfolding in Iran had a direct effect on Azerbaijan, with the Azerbaijani leader playing an active role. Soviet troops continued to amass on their border with Iran and planes carrying important officials from the Ministry of Defence and border-security troops landed in quick succession at the air base near Gala. The deputy chief of the KGB Border Guards, Lieutenant General Revenko, analysed the situation on the ground and reported back to Moscow every five or six hours. Exercises were carried out to demonstrate the military capabilities of the troops deployed on the Iranian border.

In a conversation we had, the former head of the 4th Army political division, Aleksandr Gudkov, remembered that:

"Our primary task was to secure the Azerbaijani border during the Iranian Revolution.

Nobody was able to foresee the course of events in Iran. America might suddenly intervene or religious fanaticism flare up again amongst the Iranians. There were fears that inhabitants of the Iranian border regions could dismantle the border controls and cross into Azerbaijan. The risk of an incursion was quite high. After all, the borders with Iran are mainly populated by Azerbaijanis."

"Wasn't Heydar Aliyev also keeping abreast of events?" I enquired. "Of course," he replied. "We would report to him from time to time. He was always asking about the situation in Lankaran, Astara and Nakhchivan and would analyse all the finer details. He listened attentively to our reports, asked after the soldiers, about events on the territory adjacent to ours and whether there had been any attempts to cross the border and so on."

From the recollections of General Aleksandr Kovtunov, the former commander of the 4th Army:

"Everything came to a head in January 1979. I even received the order to make preparations for the entry of Soviet troops into Iran from Julfa in Nakhchivan. The 4th Army was stationed in Azerbaijan, in Nakhchivan and Karabakh. We had received information to the effect that the Americans might enter Iran. I informed Heydar Aliyev of the command I had received. He simply said: 'I know. Carry out your orders. Tell me when you are ready.' I did not ask him his opinion on the events as such questions were dealt with by Moscow and we were just carrying out orders. As a military man, and even more as first secretary of the Central Committee, he could not afford to waste words because the whole world would immediately pick up on them. Later we heard TASS deny the projected invasion after the Iranian government had declared that Soviet troops were preparing to invade Iran from Julfa in Nakhchivan. We were ordered to hold fire and stay where we were."

Fortunately, Leonid Brezhnev and his advisors stopped short of passing the point of no return. Who can say what might have resulted from a confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States of America, if they had both sent troops into Iran? I have no real proof, but I am pretty certain that the Kremlin was constantly in touch with Heydar Aliyev during the intensification of the situation on the southern borders.

A multitude of sources testify to the Kremlin's reliance on Heydar Aliyev's opinion regarding political issues in the Middle East. Suffice it to say that, in the 1970s, the Soviet embassy in Iran sent information and reports directly to him. These reports dealt mainly with the situation in South Azerbaijan: the violation of the Azerbaijanis' rights to education, to publish books and newspapers in the mother tongue, as well as the economic decline.

That Yuri Andropov entrusted Soviet foreign policy in the "East" to Heydar Aliyev, and how efficiently he carried out this mission will be discussed in the third book.

However, we must first explain the circumstances that led to Heydar Aliyev's appointment to such high positions and examine how, notwithstanding national traditions, he succeeded in selecting his successor to the role of first Secretary to the CPA Central Committee.

"WE NEED YOU HERE, HEYDAR!"

On 7th November 1982 General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev heroically stood at the Lenin Mausoleum and watched a military parade and a workers' presentation. He even gave a short speech at a reception in the Kremlin Palace of Congresses. His days, however, were numbered.

The final period of his life has been described in great detail in Vladimir Medvedev's book *Chelovek za Spinoy* [The man behind]. The pages describing the Kremlin leader's rapid demise make difficult reading, even more so when you consider that this man, who was not in control of his faculties, was heading one of the greatest powers on the planet almost single-handedly. Although, was it really single-handed? Evidence came to light in the 1990s showing that Brezhnev seriously thought about retiring, but the individuals closest to him had changed his mind. What a shame this is. Who knows, if Andropov had come to power several years earlier, perhaps things would have gone differently in the Soviet Union. Perhaps Heydar Aliyev would not have had to endure so many disappointments.

Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev died at about 10 a.m. on 10th November 1982, but the public was only informed of this on the following day. The funeral was arranged for 15th November. A few hours after Brezhnev's death the general secretary's assistant, Andrei Aleksandrov-Agentov, telephoned Heydar Aliyev and asked him to fly to Moscow at once.

On 12th November, an unscheduled CPSU Central Committee plenum took place, and Andropov was elected the new general secretary. He had worked for exactly 15 years – from May 1967 to May 1982 – as chairman of the USSR KGB and spent six months as the CPSU Central Committee secretary with responsibility for ideology. A wave of generally well-disposed commentary appeared in the foreign press concerning the former Lubyanka boss's election. Andropov's biographer, the historian Roy Medvedev, writes that you could read in Western newspapers and magazines that Andropov was "the 'new Kennedy'", that he was "well-versed in international affairs", that he "exuded culture" in comparison to other Kremlin leaders, that Andropov was a "secret liberal" and "speaks English well", and that he was "a pragmatist who was open to political moderation and economic reform." Even Soviet dissidents who had been exiled or had emigrated to the West had a positive reaction to the changes in the Kremlin's leadership.

There were, of course, opposing opinions. Some Western political analysts went so far as to say that there had been a secret service coup in the USSR, and that Andropov had long been gradually preparing to become general secretary.¹

The academician Georgy Arbatov, who knew Andropov well, wrote: "According to my observations and impressions, Andropov was distinguished

¹ Roy Medvedev, *Unknown Andropov*, 348-350

by his lack of a lust for power. I do not exclude the possibility that he began to think about himself as Brezhnev's successor simply because he could not see anyone else. I do not think that Andropov had even tried to prepare himself for this new political role before 1982."¹

Arbatov recalls that "Andropov was an unusual person who was interesting to work with. He did not have a formal education (he went to a technical school for river transportation), but he read and knew an awful lot and was, of course, much more erudite than many of his colleagues ... He was very talented outside of politics: he wrote excellent poetry and was very musical – he sang well, played the piano and the guitar, although we only know this from hearsay."² Georgy Shakhnazarov, one of Andropov's advisors, describes him in this way: "Two different types of person could inexplicably be found within Andropov: the Russian intellectual and the official fanatically devoted to his party duty."³ Dmitri Volkogonov gives a similar assessment in his book *Sem Vozhdey* [Seven leaders]: "You cannot deny that he was differentiated from his predecessors by the breadth of his thinking, analytical skills, personal humility and extraordinary intellect. Nevertheless, he was a security service officer to his very core."⁴

For this reason, when he became head of the enormous USSR, Yuri Andropov resolved to impose order first and foremost: to bring an end to government corruption and low levels of operational discipline, and to get to grips with the growing importance of the "shadow" economy and mafia groups. As he introduced these policies, he could not help but recall Heydar Aliyev, who was one of the first to enter an uncompromising battle with criminality and corruption back in Azerbaijan.

The CPSU Central Committee 1982 Autumn Plenum saw the general secretary announce his new policies, marking an abrupt change in Heydar Aliyev's fortunes. Later many individuals I spoke to suggested that Brezhnev had been intending to bring Heydar Aliyev into the Politburo to replace Kirilenko and make him a CPSU Central Committee secretary. Hence, in their view, Andropov was only carrying out the late general secretary's wishes, with a slight adjustment. Take the assessment of Filipp Bobkov, who is very well-placed to judge: "Andropov thought highly of Aliyev. Of course, the appointment itself could be interpreted as such, since Aliyev was elected as a Politburo member immediately after Brezhnev's death. There was probably some sort of agreement. But let's think about it logically: if Andropov did not want to do this, he could have put the issue to one side, delay, or simply not elect him at all.

¹ Arbatov, 376

² Ibid., 127

³ Shakhnazarov, 103

⁴ Volkogonov, vol. 2, 136

Firstly, Aliyev had been made a Central Committee first secretary when Andropov was a Politburo member and the KGB chairman. If Andropov was against Aliyev's candidacy, he would have found a way to make his views known to Brezhnev. He was not against it. He had always had a smooth relationship with Aliyev, and he had never had any issues with him in his capacity as chairman of the Azerbaijani KGB. Later he very much approved of what Aliyev did in Azerbaijan when he was first secretary – I know this for certain – therefore there was no issue regarding whether to bring him to Moscow or not."

Andropov's initial personnel reshuffles attest to the fact that he made a conscious choice in transferring Heydar Aliyev to Moscow. He immediately behaved like a leader, like someone who made independent decisions, and was quick to get rid of Brezhnev's numerous favourites. Roy Medvedev writes: "Immediately after Andropov became general secretary he began to reduce the enormous apparatus of personal power created over the last years of Brezhnev's life. The heavily populated 'CPSU Central Committee General Secretary's Secretariat' was abolished. It had essentially duplicated and even subordinated the staff of all other Central Committee departments. Armed with Brezhnev's name or signature, his personal secretariat turned into the most influential government institution. Its numerous advisors, aides and particularly Brezhnev's assistants frequently imposed their will on not just ministers or rank-and-file Central Committee members, but also on members of the Politburo and the Central Committee Secretariat."⁵

Another of Brezhnev's favourites was the all-powerful Nikolai Shchelokov – and what a story his dismissal is. In his memoirs Brezhnev's son-in-law, Yuri Churbanov, discusses the reasons for Andropov's aversion to the USSR's internal affairs minister:

"As soon as Leonid Ilyich had died, literally two weeks later Andropov sent Shchelokov off to 'the heavenly group', as the group of general inspectors of the Soviet Armed Forces was colloquially known. This was tantamount to being pensioned off. Shchelokov did not recover... It was not a question of personal enmity, but of fundamental differences in opinion about how the minister should behave – that was the issue between them."⁶ Andropov took into account neither how close the internal affairs minister had been to the late general secretary, nor the fact that Shchelokov had been one of the most powerful and energetic ministers in Brezhnev's team. At the same time he kept persistently urging Heydar Aliyev to transfer to Moscow because, above all else, he saw him as a kindred spirit.

It has to be said that despite all of Brezhnev's intellectual affinity and liking for Heydar Aliyev, he was nevertheless an Andropov man. They were like-minded individuals; Andropov had always been impressed by Heydar Aliyev's

⁵ Medvedev, *Unknown Andropov*, 354

⁶ Churbanov, 97

great operational discipline, personal humility, asceticism and the decisive steps he took against social issues in Azerbaijan.

Heydar Aliyev himself later said of Andropov: "I had a close, friendly relationship with Yuri Vladimirovich. This began when I was working in the Azerbaijani KGB and our friendship continued until he passed away. Every time I went to Moscow I would meet with Andropov. He would always find time for these conversations. Our meetings were practical: I would inform him about the work of the party organisation and got some good advice. More often than not we touched on issues of ideology and public morality in our conversations. He eagerly listened to what I had to say about my measures to tackle social issues and he filled me with confidence. Our propensity for denigrating former leaders has affected even Andropov. For me, however, as someone who knew him well, this hurts. Andropov was a great man; he was one of the most educated and cultured people in the Politburo – his humility and principled stance are well known. He was a confirmed internationalist, he really understood the national issues in the republics and acted to solve them."¹

As Heydar Aliyev himself admitted, Andropov's suggestion that Aliyev transfer to a job in Moscow was a complete surprise. Judging by the reminiscences of his advisers, Andropov summoned him for a meeting after he had announced the idea at a 'slimmed-down' Politburo meeting.

From a conversation with Rafael Allahverdiyev:

"On 19th November 1982 we were summoned to Moscow for the CPSU Central Committee plenum as usual. Heydar Aliyev set off for the Central Committee directly from the airport, while I went to the Azerbaijani permanent representative to examine the Politburo documents and report to him on his return. The documents were delivered. The first document on the top was Andropov's speech to the Politburo from 18th November where he announced that it was necessary to promote Heydar Aliyev to full Politburo membership and elect him a first deputy chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers at a session of the Supreme Soviet.

Heydar Aliyevich arrived roughly half an hour later. He saw that I had tears in my eyes and asked what was wrong. I replied that I had received some documents from the Politburo. He invited me into an office, looked through the documents and said: 'Now is not the time to cry, but I'll be honest, this was unexpected even for me. I went to the Central Committee, and they only told me about yesterday's meeting then. Brezhnev attempted to transfer me to Moscow twice, but I told him each time that I was needed in Azerbaijan. When I went to see Andropov, however, he had already made his decision. He said, "We need you in Moscow, Heydar."'

¹ Karaulov, 224

In thinking about this pivotal change in Heydar Aliyev's fortunes, I asked all my interviewees the same question: how did they view this change and how did Heydar Aliyev himself see it? The responses were very varied and sometimes extremely unexpected:

"We both expected and feared it, wanted and didn't want it," said Afrand Dashdamirov, the former head of the CPA Central Committee's Propaganda Department. "I personally had two viewpoints. The highest position achieved by someone from Azerbaijan in the Soviet state had been that of Nariman Narimanov, who is buried in the Kremlin Wall Necropolis, and Mir Jafar Baghirov. The latter was a very influential person in his time and was a candidate Politburo member for all three republics in the South Caucasus. Their leaders would travel to plenums in Moscow via Baku so that they could meet with Baghirov. So, we had had this period in our history, albeit a short one. But Heydar Aliyev had received the opportunity to go further than them – to represent our people at such a high level was historically important for Azerbaijan's status and for solving issues in the republic.

The second consideration was that this was a new stage in Azerbaijan's history – no matter how close he was to the republic in his new role. At that time it was difficult to predict what character this new stage would have."

Ramiz Tariverdiyev, a former assistant to Heydar Aliyev, shared his own sensational recollections with me:

"He came back after the plenum where he had been elected a member of the Politburo. He gathered his advisers and divisional heads. There were congratulations, general chit-chat and the sound of laughter. But I was in a gloomy mood, which did not escape his notice, of course. Later on that evening, when everyone had left, Arif Mustafayev and I were talking about Azerbaijan's future. Rafael came looking for me and said that Heydar Aliyevich would like to speak to me. It was late, about 11 p.m. I went into his office, he looked at me and smiled, 'Come over, take a seat.'

We then had roughly the following conversation:

'I have always criticised you,' Heydar Aliyev said, 'so in theory you should be happy to see me leaving. But when everyone else was congratulating me, you sat to one side with a glum expression. What's wrong?'

I shrugged. 'Why should I be happy?'

Heydar Aliyev raised his eyebrows. 'Well, it is the first time an Azerbaijani has been elected to this position in the USSR and you're almost in tears.'

'I'll tell you plainly, Heydar Aliyevich – I think that this is bad for Azerbaijan and it is bad for me, since, however much you might have chastised me, I have grown used to working with you. It will also be hard for you.'

'How so?' Heydar Aliyev asked with genuine puzzlement.

'Because you will never be made general secretary, and since they are not used to working in your way, you will always be seen as an outsider in Moscow.'

Heydar Aliyev paused before responding. In all likelihood, given the general atmosphere of euphoria, no one else had expressed their concerns so honestly, which touched him. That is probably why he chose to tell his assistant what he had not told anyone else.

"You are wrong, Andropov asked me to choose between three positions, two of which are completely independent."

He fell silent again, then, narrowing his smiling eyes, said that I probably wanted to know which ones.

"If you trust me," I muttered.

"How can you doubt this after so many years of working together?" Heydar Aliyev replied with a laugh. "In addition to the position of first deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers, he offered me the posts of USSR foreign affairs minister and chairman of the USSR KGB."

"And what did you say?" I replied, barely audibly.

"I said that I left the security services a long time ago and have no knowledge of diplomatic work, while government work would be just the ticket."

I have no reason to disbelieve Ramiz Tariverdiyev, and so we can make an important conclusion from what he said: at the beginning of the 1980s Heydar Aliyev could have become the head of two powerful organisations – the KGB and the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs.¹ However, he chose the most difficult and thankless option – the government. Perhaps this was because he knew this area best, but perhaps there was another reason, which he preferred not to reveal for the time being.

It is likely that the former leader of Azerbaijan did not show all of his cards to his adviser, as Andropov had brought him into government to eventually make him chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers. I will provide compelling evidence in the next book in this series that will prove Andropov's intention to promote Aliyev to the second most important position in the Soviet Union. Especially as Nikolai Tikhonov was elderly and lacking in initiative and needed to be replaced by a young and energetic head. Heydar Aliyev needed to find his feet in the position of first deputy chairman, to learn the inner workings of the Kremlin.

When I spoke with Heydar Aliyev's daughter, Sevil, I asked how his family members – particularly her and Zarifa khanim – took this change in his fortunes, transferring to Moscow and moving into a new and important position.

"Both my mother and I were pleased. Firstly because we – Ilham and I – were living and studying in Moscow at that time; Ilham was at university and I was on a graduate course at the Institute of Oriental Studies. Our

¹ Eduard Shevardnadze would subsequently become the country's chief diplomat without any experience or ability.

mother was dividing her time between the two cities. She could not leave father, but she also missed her children. Consequently she was pleased by father's new appointment. Although, of course, my mother loved Baku very much and was constantly travelling here, and my father did not want to leave Azerbaijan either. When Andropov suggested he move to Moscow, he hesitated. Father used to say that Andropov was offended, saying, 'So you don't want to come and help me?' Andropov needed trustworthy people. We were not concerned. Andropov brought him in with good intentions."

Nonetheless some of my interviewees are convinced that Aliyev was not brought to Moscow simply 'for a promotion', but that a creeping change of power was taking place in Azerbaijan. Ever since Nariman Narimanov's time Kremlin strategists had employed similar tactics. It was difficult to simply get rid of a strong leader from one of the Soviet republics, since he could take advantage of his undisputed authority back home. As a consequence it was entirely possible that they wanted to bring him to the capital and quietly 'sideline' him there. This is precisely what happened to Narimanov in the 1920s when he was transferred to Moscow and made one of the chairmen of the Central Executive Committee. He soon fell ill and died in very mysterious circumstances. Something similar happened with Heydar Aliyev, whose time in Moscow resulted in a solid stream of disappointments.

I asked the famous Russian historian Roy Medvedev whether there was any ulterior motive in Heydar Aliyev's transfer to Moscow. His reply was unambiguous:

"No, there was nothing of the sort because no one thought that strategically. During Stalin's era such long-term plans were laid: bring him to Moscow, tear him away from his roots and put my own person in his place. That might have been the case with Narimanov, but Beria, say, was brought to Moscow to govern and not simply to be taken away from his home soil. Postyshev was taken away from his 'roots', whisked away from Ukraine. He became the deputy chairman of the Council of People's Commissars and Khrushchev was 'planted' in his place. Postyshev was then sent to Kuybyshev – all these sorts of things happened."

By the 1970s under Brezhnev, however, the old men in charge had no such strategic plans. Heydar Aliyev was brought to Moscow for honest reasons, and as I continued to observe him I got the impression that Aliyev himself had been striving for Moscow anyway. He had become claustrophobic; Azerbaijan is a small republic and he felt that he was capable of bigger things. He was ambitious and wanted to get promoted. This was entirely natural for any strong leader at that time."

The famous Kazakh writer and activist, Olzhas Suleimenov, has a different view on this question.

Olzhas Suleimenov: Unfortunately, I lost contact with Heydar Aliyev when he was elected to the Politburo and transferred to Moscow. Various

different reports trickled in about how he was doing. We realised that he had been shut off from Azerbaijan, and I regret that this happened. When a tree is torn out of its native soil, it never develops luxurious foliage and never bears fruit. A tree needs rich, black earth and not sand, even if it is golden sand.

Elmira Akhundova: It was a tragic period for him.

O. S.: But then his personal tragedy developed into a national tragedy. Similar purges were taking place in other Soviet republics. It was a way of getting important leaders out of their land to weaken their positions, which then allowed the central authorities to implement their own policies.

Even before this I had known that there were various ways of getting rid of leaders. One of them was promoting them to Moscow and then quietly undermining their significance. This is probably what they intended to do with Aliyev – they couldn't remove a popular leader with a big fuss. The only way was for the local party to do this, as happened with Kunayev. Moscow could not interfere with a republic's internal affairs by this point, you see.

E. A.: You have an interesting view on this issue. At the time, we were all convinced that Heydar Aliyev had been promoted.

O. S.: I'll draw an analogy for you. In the steppe the roads go between the hills and there are no drainage ditches. If a boulder falls onto the road, then it is rolled up the nearest hill, from where it will roll away on its own. In Heydar Aliyev's case Moscow evidently behaved in this manner. The boulder was raised up onto a little hill, and then was gradually pushed down. It soon transpired that the stone was not lying on any old road; it was at a crossroads and could choose its direction, its vector of movement. That this was the case became clear from the fact that at the end of the 1980s Azerbaijan was left without a leader, without a government. It is the same as a boat missing its helmsman in a storm. The part-time sailors took the helm and sailed the boat, filled with people, to its destruction.

Another of my interviewees – a person extremely well-qualified to judge – said that Heydar Aliyev was in two minds about this twist of fate, as if he had foreseen the future troubles that would afflict both himself and his native republic.

From a conversation with former Chairman of the RSFSR Council of Ministers Vitaly Vorotnikov:

"From the point of view of the party hierarchy, this was a promotion, but at the same time, I had the impression that it was difficult for him to leave Baku. I suppose that Andropov had a certain role in this matter. Aliyev greatly respected Andropov and this was mutual. They liked each other in a personal as well as professional capacity, and I think that this relationship played an important role in Aliyev accepting the offer. Nonetheless it is impossible to say *a priori* that he was brought to Moscow

to become chairman of the government. Perhaps Aliyev would have been made other offers; perhaps he would have been transferred to the Central Committee in another capacity, as a secretary, for example. This was possible; if not general secretary, he could have become another leading figure. I do know for sure, however, that he went to Moscow without any particular delight."

The following is an extract from a conversation I had with Vladimir Medvedev, the head of Brezhnev's security, a man who is also extremely well-acquainted with this matter.

Elmira Akhundova: Was there an agreement between Aliyev and Brezhnev that Heydar Aliyev would transfer to Moscow?

Vladimir Medvedev: Yes, Brezhnev wanted him to move. There was even talk about making him Soviet Union premier. I think that Brezhnev saw Aliyev at the head of the government. I cannot prove this for certain now, but, in any case, Brezhnev saw him as a Politburo member in Moscow. Judging from Brezhnev's attitude towards Aliyev, we can surmise that, had he lived longer, he would have made Aliyev a Politburo member.

Elmira Akhundova: Why did Andropov appoint him as a first deputy to the premier? Perhaps he had an end goal in mind in this too?

V. M.: Of course. Andropov would have made Aliyev head of the government. He simply wanted Aliyev to get up to speed with affairs on an all-Union level.

We will never know what really happened. It was, as I often feel, such an enormous shame that Heydar Aliyev did not leave memoirs. Nonetheless, the waypoints of his future work were established and his horizons were delineated. A huge task awaited him in Moscow – an attempt to drag this vast country out of its economic lethargy. Before that, however, he had to choose a successor in Azerbaijan.

A DIFFICULT CHOICE

“Now,” he said, “we have to think about who will replace me in Azerbaijan.”
“I don’t see Azerbaijan without you, and nor do I see you without it,” I said.

“For the first time in the history of the CPSU Central Committee a former state leader has been asked to choose his successor,” he said, “so let’s think about it.”

Usually personnel decisions concerning high-ranking officials were made in Moscow, so this was an exception. Andropov asked Aliyev to find a successor for Baku in just one week. This was an unspoken sign of trust. During this time Heydar Aliyev was surrounded by dozens of advisors with different opinions about his possible successor. People’s thoughts on this issue were very varied.”

(From a conversation with Rafael Allahverdiyev)

The choice was a particularly difficult because in 13 years of governing Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev had formed an energetic and competent team, and each member could be entrusted with extremely important aspects of running the republic. Hasan Hasanov recalls that Heydar Aliyev gave a speech at the CPA Central Committee Bureau in which he said: “When Veli Akhundov left there was not a single person in the Bureau or the Central Committee who could take on his role. Today every member of the Central Committee Bureau is potentially capable of occupying this position.”

When he had returned to Baku and listened to the opinions of all the Bureau members, Heydar Aliyev finally settled on the candidacy of Kamran Baghirov. However, according to Ramiz Mehdiyev, Aliyev originally proposed Chairman of the Council of Ministers Hasan Seyidov to the Politburo. The overwhelming majority of his colleagues, expressed their opposition, however, a decision some later regretted.

From a story by Rafael Allahverdiyev:

“They were choosing between Seyidov, Tatliyev and Baghirov. Aliyev couldn’t split his support: he had to settle on someone. In Moscow the other nominees recommended Polad Poladzadeh, the Soviet minister for irrigation construction to him, along with other candidates, but he immediately brushed them aside, saying that he had never worked with them and had not witnessed them in action. As a result there were two candidates left: Seyidov and Baghirov. Aliyev sought advice from all members of the Bureau.

We were all for Kamran Baghirov. It then turned out that he suffered from epilepsy. Much later Aliyev said reproachfully, ‘You all supported Baghirov en masse, why did you not dissuade me then?’ Baghirov had an

assistant by the name of Sahib Guliyev, who gave Baghirov first aid when he suffered attacks, so no one knew about this serious condition. It never happened to Baghirov around other people. We all supported Baghirov because he was a mild-mannered person, while Seyidov was harsher and more demanding.

On 1st December, Kamran Baghirov flew to Moscow for an interview and was supposed to go through the confirmation process in the Politburo. Meanwhile on 3rd December the CPA Central Committee held its last plenum under Heydar Aliyev."

On the subject of Kamran Baghirov's illness: people who worked with him – Ramiz Tariverdiyev, Fuad Musayev, Sahib Guliyev – asserted that he suffered disturbances of the vestibular system, rather than epilepsy. He was sometimes struck with vertigo, especially in stressful situations. At the critical moment he would have to lie down, or else he could lose his balance and fall. One such unpleasant incident happened in Moscow, in Gorbachev's presence. Baghirov was presenting a speech at a conference and almost fainted. At that point Gorbachev irritably took issue with Aliyev, asking, "What on earth did you recommend us a sick person for?"

Although, for example, Zakir Abdullayev, a former Central Committee departmental head, attests that Kamran Baghirov really did suffer from epilepsy. "He once had a seizure in my presence," recalls Abdullayev. "Then another time I was receiving treatment in the Kremlin hospital and got talking with Malinovsky, the USSR's chief surgeon. He asked where I was from, and I replied that I was from Azerbaijan. 'Your first secretary, poor man, suffers from epilepsy,' Malinovsky replied."

Of course, it is not of any great importance which specific condition Kamran Baghirov suffered from. What is important is that the Azerbaijani leader was seriously ill. And this factor should have given Heydar Aliyev serious pause for thought. Unfortunately, his team members' insistence played a fateful role, as they unanimously advised him to choose Kamran Baghirov.

From a conversation with Zakir Abdullayev:

Elmira Akhundova: I have been told that Heydar Aliyev had three candidates to choose from for the position of first secretary: Tatliyev, Seyidov and Baghirov. He spent a long time deciding and consulted everyone. Did he ask you?

Zakir Abdullayev: We spoke once.

E. A.: Isa Mammadov maintains that Aliyev offered the position to him as well, although others dispute this.

Z. A.: Isa Mammadov's candidacy was not confirmed by Moscow. I had a close friend who worked in the CPSU Central Committee as the deputy director of a department. He told me that Isa Mammadov almost got through, but there were great objections raised in the Central Committee – that he was a relatively new person who had only recently become a Central

Committee secretary. In short, Moscow was against it. Aliyev himself decided against Seyidov and Tatliyev, and as a result he settled on Baghirov.

E. A.: Why?

Z. A.: Kamran Baghirov was very loyal to him. Heydar Aliyevich would listen carefully to his opinion when Baghirov was a Central Committee sectoral head. Baghirov could 'raise' and also solve many issues. Heydar Aliyevich had great faith in him.

E. A.: And did the fact that Seyidov was a very stern man play a role? Were people worried it would not be as comfortable working under him?

Z. A.: There was that too. But the main thing was that it had to be a person who was close and loyal to Aliyev. Heydar Aliyevich did not have that kind of trust in Seyidov or Tatliyev. He feared that they might subsequently betray him, treat his personnel in a different way. But Kamran listened to Heydar Aliyevich's opinion until the very end.

From a conversation with Fuad Musayev:

"When I went to see Kamran and told him that he was Heydar Aliyevich's chosen successor, he took it very nervously. He was frightened. And so he should have been: following on from Aliyev was such a huge responsibility. To think of shouldering such a burden!

The accusations levelled at Baghirov that he allegedly did something against Heydar Aliyev are untrue. Baghirov did not betray Aliyev. And he didn't suffer from epilepsy. I knew him from childhood; it's true that he was ill, but at the same time he was an athletic man who could play tennis on court from morning to evening. He would play every day. He was a very decent man. He just fell short in comparison to Heydar Aliyevich."

From a conversation with Ramiz Mehdiyev:

Ramiz Mehdiyev: At that time there were around a hundred people in the Central Committee. And Heydar Aliyev devoted several days to coming to understand the general opinion. He spoke with each and every member of the Central Committee, just think of that. Each one expressed a different opinion. For the main part two names were mentioned: Kamran Baghirov and Hasan Seyidov. Although other Bureau members were mentioned in back room discussions too.

When he asked me who I thought should be first secretary, I replied that the most suitable candidate would still have to be Kamran Baghirov. Later events showed that we were mistaken at this point: he was not able to govern the republic properly.

Elmira Akhundova: Why did you prefer Baghirov to the other candidates?

R. M.: First of all, he actively supported all the work that was being carried out in Azerbaijan. Secondly, unlike the other members of the

Bureau he was very open and easy to talk to. We all voted for him because he had good relationships with everybody – although we later realised that this was due to the lack of firm principles. It also turned out that much in his character was contrived, including his sincerity and openness.

From a conversation with Hasan Seyidov:

Hasan Seyidov: After the USSR Central Committee plenum, Heydar Aliyev returned to the permanent representative and started discussing the main question: who would govern Azerbaijan after him?

Elmira Akhundova: Did he say who he wanted to nominate?

H. S.: No, we didn't know his view. He asked me what I would think if he suggested my candidacy. I replied that I would not be in favour of it. I was an industrial man, I worked in the economic sphere, whereas we needed someone who could thoroughly investigate ideological and administrative issues. I was out of my depth in that area, and I said as much to Heydar Aliyevich.

I was in favour of Kamran Baghirov: he was a well educated, Russian speaker who had worked in ideology and had a good knowledge of the administrative departments well, as well as the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and so on. Therefore, when Aliyev asked me, I replied that I did not oppose Baghirov's candidacy, if, of course, he would want to work with me. I was in the Council of Ministers, while he was in the Central Committee. Kamran and I came into the Central Committee at the same time, only eight days apart. We worked together – he was in the Construction Department at that time – and our families were friendly.

E. A.: Rafael Allahverdiyev said that Heydar Aliyev asked a great deal of people about Baghirov. Do you think he had his doubts about him?

H. S.: He didn't have doubts; he was just looking for confirmation of his own opinion.

From a conversation with Rafael Allahverdiyev:

Elmira Akhundova: Is it possible that Kamran Baghirov's candidacy seemed most convenient to Aliyev because he was someone who would easy to control from Moscow?

Rafael Allahverdiyev: No, that is incorrect. When he left he gave Kamran Baghirov three parting messages. "Kamran, you can cast aside all of my relatives. If they come to you and ask for something, you do not have to grant their requests – I won't take offence. But don't forget two things: I put a great deal of effort into building a coherent and unified team. The principles of departmental or regional favouritism did not play a role in forming it. It was a team. Don't ruin it. And the second thing: there was a good reason I visited Nagorno-Karabakh twice a year. It's a powder keg; remember this and try to keep the situation in the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region in check. Consider these my parting words."

Aliyev didn't mention controlling Baghirov or dictating anything to him. Believe me, he was concerned with the fate of the republic, rather than this.

These recollections show that the process of choosing a successor was rather dramatic. It seems to me that Heydar Aliyev, who possessed a unique sense of intuition, settled on Kamran Baghirov with great reluctance, and only after all the other candidates had dropped out for objective or subjective reasons. Ultimately, as I have been able to ascertain, the balance was tipped in favour of the collective opinion, which Heydar Aliyev was used to taking into consideration. As the future showed, the final choice proved to be a misguided one. Baghirov's lack of backbone as leader played a fateful role during the start of the events in and around Nagorno-Karabakh, particularly as Heydar Aliyev had been sent into retirement by then.

IN THE FOREIGN MEDIA SPOTLIGHT

The change in Heydar Aliyev's career trajectory provoked a flurry of responses in the international media. Foreign radio transcripts and articles from leading Western newspapers housed in his personal archive comment on his election as a Politburo member, and his appointment as a first deputy chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers.

"The election of Heydar Aliyev as a Politburo member has elicited a wide response throughout the world," broadcast *Radio Svoboda* on 23rd November 1982. According to the international observers, Heydar Aliyev's rise was unexpected because his political career was mainly linked with Leonid Brezhnev.

In reporting on Aliyev's election to the Politburo, on 23rd November 1982 *BBC Radio* (in Farsi) emphasised "his commitment to the reunification of Northern and Southern Azerbaijan." The programme noted that "his political career began in the security services in 1941, and he was not one of the Russians sent to Azerbaijan by Moscow. He was a native Azerbaijani, a Muslim, and, as the facts attest, has showed great interest in the fate of Azerbaijanis in Iran.

To this day, Aliyev has never interfered in issues of external policy. It is assumed that his election to the Politburo is due to the standing he won from his fight against corruption and other social evils in Soviet society, as well as to his political flair."

The radio station speculated that Andropov was not interested in continuing the policy of concealing shortcomings. Furthermore, he was demanding greater openness. Heydar Aliyev's election was seen as an advancement of the role of the secret police and judicial authorities in solving a series of issues and carrying out the instructions of the new Soviet leadership in the fight against corruption.

Information on Aliyev's appointment as a first deputy chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers aired on *Voice of America*, in broadcasts by radio stations in Israel, Monte Carlo, Kuwait and other countries. The world's most influential Western newspapers published articles about Aliyev.

On 25th November a radio station in Kuwait suggested that Heydar Aliyev's next promotion would be to the position of chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers. And, according to reports by *Radio Svoboda* from 24th November, a correspondent for the France-Presse Agency declared that "as far back as May, it was expected that Heydar Aliyev would be appointed chairman of the USSR KGB in place of Andropov, who had transferred to work in the CPSU Central Committee. However, Fedorchuk, the head of the Ukrainian KGB, was appointed to this position."

In a broadcast by the Azerbaijani service of *Radio Svoboda* from 25th November 1982, it was remarked that the 59-year-old Aliyev had

become a deputy to the 77-year-old Soviet premier, Tikhonov. Tikhonov's other deputy, 75-year-old Arkhipov, was not a Politburo member. According to the correspondent, it was possible that Heydar Aliyev would take on Tikhonov's position the following spring, which would result in fundamental changes within the Soviet government.

The West German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine* wrote that "Andropov himself promoted [Heydar Aliyev]" to the Politburo, "which in practice represents the supreme authority in the USSR. ... It is Moscow's opinion that Aliyev brought peace and order to the Islamic republic [Azerbaijan], which shares a border with Iran; he fought a gruelling battle with corruption and occasionally passed death sentences for the crime of embezzlement in the national economy. ..."

Now that he has become a Politburo member, Aliyev has stepped over the heads of two candidates, both from the KGB: Shevardnadze, the leader of Georgia, and Rashidov, the leader of Uzbekistan. Aliyev's promotion is not just an assessment of his personal merits, but also speaks volumes about how much the Kremlin is expecting of him in the future."

On 26th November 1982 the Azerbaijani service of the *Radio Svoboda* broadcast a review of an article from the *New York Times* newspaper about Heydar Aliyev's election: "Heydar Aliyev has made great efforts to improve Azerbaijan's national economy. Foreign correspondents note his political erudition and attractive appearance, pointing out that his promotion to such a high position will raise the prestige of the Soviet Union's Muslim population, which is some 40-44 million people."

On 28th November 1982 *Voice of America* broadcast a review (in Azerbaijani) of the American press reports about the new Soviet leaders.

So, the *Christian Science Monitor* newspaper published an article about Heydar Aliyev: "According to the suppositions of Western diplomats, Aliyev's appointment shows the intent to raise the Soviet economy and instil order in it."

On 29th November 1982 BBC Radio's Persian language service broadcast a message from *Times* newspaper's Moscow correspondent containing the remark: "Aliyev's promotion to high positions came as a surprise. As a result of this, Soviet Azerbaijan has found itself at the centre of global attention."

On 30th November 1982, the Azerbaijani version of *Radio Svoboda* broadcast a review of the *Los Angeles Times* article titled "Heydar Aliyev – a Shining Star in the Kremlin Hierarchy". Notably, the article contained the following: "Aliyev currently has a secure position, and it is not out of the question that he will replace the 77-year-old Tikhonov. This means that a non-Slavic official has drawn close to such a high position for the first time since Stalin's death. Aliyev has won renown for his fight against corruption, which corresponds with Andropov's viewpoint, since the general secretary attaches

great significance to the fight against corruption and mismanagement in the country. Aliyev's election as a Politburo member will not be greeted with enthusiasm by the Soviet bureaucratic elite, which enjoyed unlimited privileges in Brezhnev's 18-year leadership [my emphasis]. ..."

Western diplomats who visited Azerbaijan several months ago formed the impression of Aliyev as an educated and cultured man who nevertheless adheres to a Marxist-Leninist worldview and its accompanying strict policy. He is competent in terms of foreign policy and is one of few Soviet party leaders that travel abroad."

The historian Roy Medvedev also wrote in an article regarding the fact that Heydar Aliyev's promotion had caused ambivalence and wariness in certain circles. It was published in *The Washington Post*, and I discovered a translation in Heydar Aliyev's personal archive.

"Heydar Aliyev's promotion has caused alarm in certain circles in Moscow and the provinces. As well as anti-Semitism, Stalin sowed anti-Islamic sentiment into the fabric of the USSR in the last 10 years of his life. All of the ethnic minorities who were displaced from the Caucasus and Lower Volga Region between 1943 and 1944 were Muslim. Stalin expressed his dislike for the Muslim peoples of the Caucasus as far back as the civil war. Under Stalin, the Politburo was almost always a third Caucasians (Ordzhonikidze, Mikoyan, Beria, Stalin himself), but there were never any representatives from Azerbaijan or Central Asia. This began to change under Khrushchev and Brezhnev, but many anti-Islamic prejudices were preserved and have even increased in the light of recent events in the Islamic world. An individual from Moscow's nationalist intelligentsia assured me that, along with Ziya Nuriyev (the deputy chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers), Heydar Aliyev would contribute to the downfall of the Russian North. Not that long ago a Russian member of the intelligentsia from the Caucasus asked me whether I was afraid of Muslims coming to power in the USSR.

I replied that I was not.

'Then how do you feel about Aliyev's promotion?'

'But Aliyev is an Azerbaijani and a communist, not a Muslim.'

'Heh, everything is different down in the Caucasus from how you think it is in Moscow. A Muslim is always a Muslim.'

We have a multiethnic country that aspires to be international, and such Russian nationalism within it is even more dangerous than all other manifestations of regional nationalism."

Unfortunately, the fears of people who had been well disposed towards the Kremlin's "new star" ultimately came true: the high-ranking party bureaucrats did everything in their power to prevent Andropov from giving Heydar Aliyev the second most important position in the USSR. Andropov was too ill to resist, and never saw his idea through to its end.

I could continue still further with quotes from the Western media. The whole period of Heydar Aliyev's work in Moscow would take place under the close scrutiny of the world media. One day, Heydar Aliyev angrily said to General Ziya Yusifzadeh, who had come to visit him in Gorki-10: "Do you think that those conversations are to my benefit? Foreign newspapers are writing about this, including the most prestigious ones – *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, the Turkish press. They're saying Aliyev is the most influential Politburo member and so on. This won't end with anything good." It was as if he'd seen into the future.

SAYING GOODBYE

Having decided on his successor, Heydar Aliyev started preparing his final speech for his last CPA Central Committee plenum as leader. He spent about a week saying his goodbyes to Azerbaijan, to the people who worked in his team and under his leadership in various periods of his life, to the regional governors, to members of the Azerbaijani intelligentsia. Many of the people I spoke with still cherished very touching recollections of these farewell meetings.

"I remember, I was sitting in Aliyev's office when the telephone started to ring," Hasan Hasanov told me. "It was Andropov; he was coordinating an issue he was intending to discuss at the Politburo. In the course of the conversation he asked, 'Why are you being held up in Baku?' Someone else might have been at a loss for what to say, but I witnessed Heydar Aliyev's assured answer: 'I've been first secretary for a full 14 years; I really must round things off and say my goodbyes to people – if only for 14 days.' In truth, this farewell bore a symbolic character; not long afterwards he returned to Azerbaijan on holiday, and then in the autumn of 1983 he came to Baku to take part in the International Conference on Oriental Carpets. He would attend all the cultural events in Moscow that were connected to Azerbaijan.

Thousands and thousands of people wanted to say goodbye to him then, but it was impossible to make this happen on a large scale. An exception was made for the intelligentsia, and groups of intellectuals would come to Heydar Aliyev's office and chat with him. We all had mixed feelings: joy for his success and anxiety for Azerbaijan's future. Later on, when Armenia's claims to Nagorno-Karabakh became more overt, we felt his absence particularly intensely."

Elchin was among a group of writers who visited the first secretary's office. He describes his feelings at that time in article "Litzom k Litsu s Istoriyey" [Face to face with history]: "A group of writers, including me, came to bid him farewell. It was only then that it became clear how difficult it was for him to part with Azerbaijan, how inextricably connected he was to the republic. Heydar Aliyev was very emotional and unable to hide it. Looking at him, I thought that the man's soul was truly an impenetrable mystery; it combined his resoluteness, toughness and even sometimes mercilessness, with this emotional turmoil, a world of feelings and openness."

For the whole latter part of November there were newspaper articles about conferring honorary titles on party functionaries, Soviet workers, and cultural and artistic figures. Examples included "Honoured Teacher", "Honoured Artist", "Honoured Cultural Worker" and so on. Hundreds of people received titles such as these at the time, and many young party functionaries also received the keys to new, well-furnished flats.

From Milli Majlis Deputy Mikhail Zabelin's recollections:

"When Heydar Aliyevich was on the cusp of leaving for Moscow, we were living in Musabeyov village in a flat dating from the Khrushchev period. There were three families living there – my wife's brother with his family, her father, and four of us just in my family. I was on the housing waiting list. Heydar Aliyevich called me in and said, 'I'm leaving, do you need anything?' I thanked him and said that I didn't need anything. In the second half of the day he called me in again and asked why I was being dishonest.

'What do you mean by that, Heydar Aliyevich?'

'Don't you need a flat?'

'Yes, Heydar Aliyevich, I do need one, but I was embarrassed to say so.' He phoned Mirzajanov, the Central Committee's administrator of affairs, there and then. And I was given a four-room apartment in a Central Committee housing block.'

Milli Majlis Deputy Hadi Rajably also recalls this:

"I'll tell you about an interesting episode connected with Heydar Aliyev's departure to work in Moscow. We were a group of 11 Central Committee advisors and inspectors living in a party school's communal residence. My family, wife and two children were living in the region. Usually, of course, Central Committee workers were taken from Baku, but Heydar Aliyev broke this tradition. He changed the whole aura of the Central Committee apparatus. So anyway, my room in the residence was a kind of headquarters, by virtue of the fact that it had a television. That evening we all gathered together in this 'headquarters' and hung out together late into the night, celebrating Heydar Aliyev's new appointment. We carried on right until dawn, delighted that our leader was leaving for Moscow to occupy such a high position. At 9 a.m. we arrived for work, all sleepy. Back then there wasn't even chewing gum to cover the smell of alcohol on your breath. Ramiz Mehdiyev was due to hold a staff meeting an hour later. We tried to sit at a bit of a distance so that he wouldn't notice how hangover we were. Then Ramiz Enverovich declared that, on leaving, Heydar Aliyevich had instructed us to be allocated flats. To this day I live in the flat allocated to me by Heydar Aliyevich."

Dozens of former party workers could tell similar stories about how their living conditions were improved in those November days or about the promotion they received.

Despite the joyous euphoria accompanying his appointment to a senior position and his election to the Politburo, Heydar Aliyev could not shake off the worry he felt for the fate of the republic. He was especially concerned by one malignant tendency in the history of Azerbaijani statehood, which had led to national tragedies on a number of occasions. More than anything else he feared that animosity and scheming would emerge in the upper reaches of power.

"As I left to work in Moscow in December 1982," Heydar Aliyev recalled much later, "I appealed to my colleagues with two warnings: firstly, endeavour to ensure that factions do not emerge in the party leadership, that no discord arises. Forces hostile to Azerbaijan will exploit this and will inflict a crippling blow on the republic. And, secondly, do not neglect the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh. Unfortunately, they did not heed my advice and, as a result, Azerbaijan has been in such a difficult position in recent years."¹

From a conversation with Ramiz Mehdiyev:

"When Heydar Aliyevich was leaving for Moscow, his parting words to us at the last Bureau were as follows: 'Of most importance is that you do not allow scheming to develop, or leading party workers to oppose each other. This must be feared and avoided more than anything else.' Unfortunately, some of our leaders did not take heed of these words – sacred words, I would say. The fact that such a sick man – in the literal sense – as Abdurrahman Vazirov came to govern Azerbaijan is largely the result of the scheming that evolved both inside and outside the Central Committee Bureau. And, unfortunately, I must say that Kamran Baghirov turned out to be someone who was not only unable to stave off this danger, but was also consumed by scheming himself to a large extent."

The final days before Heydar Aliyev's departure were especially difficult. Many people recall that he was unable to hold back tears when giving a speech at an extended Central Committee meeting. He openly said that he did not want to leave Azerbaijan, that there were so many plans and initiatives that he would have liked to have seen through to the end in the republic. "But we'll be working together all the same", he said to bolster both himself and the other attendees.

Fattah Heydarov participated in one of these farewell meetings: "He tried to say goodbye to everyone he had worked with, and not forget anyone. The meetings mostly took place on the fifth floor of the old CPA Central Committee building. He assembled there as well – the first secretaries of all the Azerbaijani regions, as well as the heads of the trade unions. To this day I still remember this meeting down to the fine details.

Heydar Aliyev gave a short speech.

"We have worked together for many years," he said. "I am very glad that all the scheduled plans and assigned tasks have been successfully resolved and implemented thanks to your help. We have done a lot for Azerbaijan: we have raised its industrial potential, given our towns and villages a new appearance, and brought about a moral regeneration in society. During this work you understood the essence of my assignments well, and actively supported my initiatives. For this I offer my gratitude to you all. I will always remember these years with great gladness."

¹ Heydar Aliyev, *Our Independence*, vol. 6, 475

Tears welled up in his eyes. We were all emotional; I even felt a lump rise in my throat. At the end he stood by the doors to shake everyone's hands as they were leaving, and say goodbye in person. I was so moved that when it was my turn to bid farewell to him, I kissed him on the cheek, stood back a step, and my eyes filled with tears. We all felt a kind of anxiety, and a sense of uncertainty. It was as if we had a premonition of what was to come and didn't want to let him go. He left Azerbaijan with a great heaviness in his heart too, as if he too foresaw what difficult trials he would have to undergo in the near future."

On 3rd December 1982, Heydar Aliyev gave a major speech at a CPA Central Committee plenum summing up his 13 years as first secretary. The speech ended very emotionally, and it was no coincidence that many attendees could be seen dabbing their eyes:

"The years following the CPA Central Committee's August 1969 Plenum were, as you no doubt remember, stressful and difficult. It was a hard but wonderful time, and the 13 years since then have seen a drastic improvement in Azerbaijan's economy, scientific development and culture, a renaissance of its authority and glory. We communists who have worked hard for the republic are rightly proud of our successes, and I am glad to have fulfilled the responsibilities of CPA Central Committee first secretary for all these glorious years. I experience a feeling of deep satisfaction knowing the part I have played in the republic's achievements. Rest assured, dear comrades, that I will not let the Communist Party of Azerbaijan down in my new position. I will work to honour and glorify it further still."

Heydar Aliyev kept his word as always. Legends abound to this day about his work in the Kremlin. The popularity of Andropov's protégé among the creative intelligentsia, media representatives, mid-level leaders and ordinary Soviet citizens grew to geometric proportions. It was said that old men in the provinces kissed his image when it appeared on their television screens and prayed that he would become general secretary.

Heydar Aliyev's five years in the Kremlin were a steep learning curve, but they also allowed him to show just some of his talent as a multi-faceted leader and demonstrate his vast knowledge and experience in numerous areas of domestic and foreign policy. He would go on to find this extremely useful in the 1990s when he became leader of an independent Azerbaijan and built a foreign policy orientated government from scratch.

¹ *Bakinskij Rabochij*, 4th December (1982)

IN A CASUAL SETTING

Natural, uncontrived modesty was a way of life for Heydar Aliyev. His asceticism has long been a matter of folklore; his children were brought up in a strict, punctilious family atmosphere. I cannot recall a single piece of gossip about Heydar Aliyev's personal life, or about those closest to him. Firstly, he and his wife were always very open to people, always mingling with the general public. Secondly, they gave no grounds at all for idle rumours. This taught society a lot about its own moral code, and was to Heydar Aliyev's credit; he never once abused his position in pursuit of personal gain.

In this chapter I would like to touch on a fairly delicate subject and show Heydar Aliyev in a casual setting: where and how he spent his free time, his favourite music, films and so on. The personal lives of such highly placed individuals are usually a closed book, but the recollections of Heydar Aliyev's nearest and dearest gave me a valuable insight. I am especially grateful to his daughter Sevil and his loyal bodyguard Aleksandr Ivanov, who gave me exclusive material.

As I have already described, Heydar Aliyev simply did not own a private villa or dacha during his time as leader. Nor did he own private apartments; he lived in a government house on Druzhby Molodezhi Street and also inherited the previous rulers' summer residence in the village of Zaghluba.

From a conversation with Aleksandr Ivanov:

Aleksandr Ivanov: Apart from Heydar Aliyevich, the second secretary, the president of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, the chairman of the Council of Ministers, and the commander of the Baku Air Defence Forces all lived at the Ganjlik government residence (we called it site 73 amongst ourselves). It contained five two-story cottages and a guesthouse for visiting ministers from the USSR. Heydar Aliyevich lived in a typical cottage with his family, and there was nothing to distinguish it from the houses of the other leaders around him.

There was also a sports hall with a swimming pool. Swimming was Heydar Aliyevich's great passion, and he took any opportunity to use the pool. He would organise his mornings like this: 40 minutes of brisk walking around the grounds, then another 40 minutes of strenuous gymnastic exercises, followed by half an hour of freestyle swimming. And he did this practically every day, so long as there was no urgent business to attend to – someone to meet, somewhere to go. There was also a sauna, but he didn't use this. Just swimming, walking and gymnastics.

Elmira Akhundova: Would he do these exercises by himself or under a doctor's supervision?

A. I.: No, his feelings towards doctors were always somewhat hostile. We employed the methodologist Zhilishchev, who had training in physical

activity, to supervise Heydar Aliyevich's activities and take his blood pressure before and after on occasion.

E. A.: Did he spend more time in Baku or Zaghluba in the 1970s?

I. A.: He only spent the summer in Zaghluba. Very occasionally, he was able to call in there on a day off during the winter, leaving the strain and stress behind. There were a number of similar cottages at Zaghluba, and a new guesthouse was later built, although Heydar Aliyevich never stayed there – neither before leaving for Moscow nor when he came for official trips as a Politburo member. A swimming pool was specially built there, which was his dream.

When I spoke to Heydar Aliyev's daughter, I asked how her father spent his free time and who he liked to socialise with away from work. "In winter we would go to Zaghluba on Sundays," Sevil told me. "And then we'd move there for the summer. Our only social circle was people in the neighbouring dachas. Plus, of course, there were our close family friends Vitaliy and Nadezhda Krasilnikov. We saw a lot of them – my mother and Nadezhda were friends, and so were her daughter Anechka and me. My mother and father loved joking and organising Sunday lunches. My mother would play the piano while father sang, and everyone had a wonderful time. In summer we would sometimes even eat on the beach."

We would also go to Yalta as a family whenever my father took a holiday. The state dachas there were lovely. We would walk along the beach after breakfast, come home and eat lunch. Father always had papers to work on and would ring Baku on the high-frequency telephone. We would watch films in the evenings. Sometimes my parents would go round to Brezhnev's dacha – my mother was friends with his wife Viktoriya Petrovna."

I spoke to former Chairman of the Azerbaijani Council of Ministers Hasan Seyidov about the lifestyle of the dacha's residents.

Hasan Seyidov: It was formerly called 'Armenikend', but often we called it Teymur Guliyev's dacha, in honour of the chairman of the Council of Ministers under Mir Jafar Baghirov. It was a large piece of land, with lots of fruit trees, and five two-storey houses were scattered across the land. One of our colleagues joked that it was like a 'cultural prison' because we'd go there after working together and see the same faces. The grounds were communal, with no dividing fences between any of the houses. We would sometimes watch films together in the guest house.

Elmira Akhundova: Did you see Heydar Aliyev's family in informal settings, perhaps for family holidays or for birthdays? What was your boss like outside of work?

H. S.: He was not fond of birthdays, and always shied away from such events.

E. A.: So when would you usually meet up?

H. S.: For public holidays: New Year's Eve, 7th November, May Day – and not always for them.

E. A.: So what would usually happen? Would you mark the occasion at somebody's home?

H. S.: We had guest rooms in the city, and also in Zaghluba. Our five families would gather in these places. Heydar Aliyevich was always cheerful and lively. You know, it was like he was a totally different person, joking and sharing stories.

E. A.: What did you talk about? Only about work or about other cultural topics?

H. S.: We spoke very little about work, because Zarifa would always interrupt us, joking, 'Enough talking about work, let's get down to business.' She was a real live wire, and very talented on the piano. Their family as a whole was very musical. Zarifa's sister headed the Dan Ulduzu ensemble. Zarifa was so joyful, and she loved to accompany Heydar Aliyevich, who enjoyed singing.

Elmira Akhundova: What was his repertoire?

H. S.: For the most part, he sang Azerbaijani songs, but he knew some Russian songs too. I remember once in the mid-1970s when Todor Zhivkov, the leader of Bulgaria, came Baku with his daughter and her husband. During the meal the whole family began to sing a Bulgarian song. Then Heydar Aliyevich proposed that we sang something too, so we sang the cGorus of "Moscow Nights". Heydar Aliyevich danced so well, too! Like a professional – he knew our national dances, the waltz, and could keep up with the quicker Western rhythms as well.

Anatoly Konstantinov, the former Commander of the Baku Air Defence Forces, also had the opportunity to share friendly meals with Heydar Aliyev. According to him, the first secretary was quite different outside of work: "He was Azerbaijan's serious leader during formal receptions – welcoming foreign delegations and making official speeches and toasts. But at informal meetings he was very relaxed, like an ordinary person. He and Zarifa would perform together; she would play the piano and sing, while he danced with all the ladies. When other leaders gave speeches, nobody could get a word in edgeways. It was different with Heydar Aliyevich. My wife and I and other guests would raise toasts and tell amusing stories.

I put it to Anatoly Konstantinov that everyone used to comment that the pair had a reverential relationship, truly excellent relationship, and that Aliyev loved and respected Zarifa greatly. "It was a close-knit family. Zarifa khanim was always the lynchpin whenever dancing lines began. She would change into national dress, stick a cigarette in her mouth, or put on a hat, acting out something funny. She was a very cheerful person, and Heydar Aliyevich always encouraged that.

Heydar Aliyev's daughter, Sevil, told me that he would often take Zarifa and the children with him when he travelled to Moscow for work.

"Mother always wanted to have us around, so we travelled everywhere as a foursome. We were with him in 1976 when he was elected as a candidate member of the Politburo. We were so happy, so proud of him!"

Professor Zahra Guliyeva, a friend of Zarifa khanim's, recalls:

"She was one of those people who could ease any situation. She could mitigate any negative energy that built up in Heydar Aliyevich, and she took this role very seriously, remembering her own father. Everybody envied her, but she had so many worries about everybody close to her – her husband, her children. ..."

When we went on official trips, she would call home right when we landed. She was very worried when Hasan Abdullayev was dismissed as president of the Academy of Sciences. She told me, 'Zara, you know, we were family friends. I called his wife to ease the situation.' She often tried to resolve everything through her gentleness and diplomacy. She loved her husband dearly and fussed over him, keeping a strict eye on his health."

Milli Majlis Deputy Mikhail Zabelin, who worked as Heydar Aliyev's assistant for a time, added that Zarifa Azizovna "was a wonderful person. I often spoke to her on the phone, maybe five or six times a day. Heydar Aliyevich would rarely call home; she would usually call him – she would ask whether he had arrived.

"Yes, he is here," would be my usual response.

"Is he alright?"

"Everything is fine."

"Don't forget to give him his medicine and carrot juice at 11 a.m."

"I won't."

At 11, he would drink a glass of carrot juice and take his medication. A little while later, she would call again: 'Don't let him have lunch at the cafeteria. I have cooked and sent him lunch. Make sure he eats it.'

Then something else would come up. She was constantly looking after him. Many husbands, especially men of his rank, might have found this irritating, but this was never the case with him. Perhaps he even found it endearing, as he loved her so much."

I asked Mikhail Zabelin how the pair's love manifested itself – in their conversation or perhaps tone of voice.

"I rarely heard them talking, but I did catch a glimpse of their relationship on one occasion. Heydar Aliyevich was in the lounge, but Zarifa was concerned that he was not answering the phone, and asked me to find him. He came into his office wiping his hands and asked, 'What is it?' I said, 'Zarifa Azizovna asked me to check on you.' He called her right away. He did not speak particularly tenderly, but his tone of voice indicated that he harboured great love and affection for this woman and was appreciative of her concern."

Zarifa was a very attentive woman overall. She would never forget any of my daughters' birthdays. She would call me to say, 'Misha, I've sent a

little dress for your little girl for her birthday. I think it's her size.' She would often call before New Year, saying 'I have sent something for all of you, and Heydar Aliyevich will give you his gifts.' We always got New Year presents from him, as well as separate gifts from Zarifa. It was terribly kind. We felt that they cared about us."

I asked Sevil about Heydar Aliyev's favourite dishes, "He did not like rich food," she said, "but he loved Nakhchivan cuisine. The woman who cooked us dinner used to cook for my mother's parents. She had known me since birth. My aunt Nina cooked very well, like my grandmother Laila – Yerevan-Nakhchivan cuisine.

But my father loved trying new dishes. In 1976, I remember we had a lovely holiday when we went together to Yugoslavia. We ate spaghetti on the beach every day. Father had an appreciation for all types of cuisine, both Eastern and European. He told my mother that he had even tried frogs. As a picky eater she was horrified; if she travelled anywhere, she only ate things she could recognise, mostly chicken. But with dad we even tried oysters."

Sometimes the Aliyev family managed to get away on holiday to Yalta, though not every summer. The top party elite would try to take their Yalta holidays when Brezhnev was there, but this was not always possible, even for Politburo members. However, the Aliyev family might go there at any time. They usually stayed in the fourth dacha in Mishor, a remote summer resort near Yalta. Brezhnev would take his holidays nearby, in the first dacha in Livadia.

"But in general, we simply thought of it as a holiday," recalls Aleksandr Ivanov with a smile. "The dacha was in the mountains, three to four minutes drive from the seashore. The sea was also fenced off, with security everywhere. Heydar Aliyevich was a wonderful swimmer. I was a young man, but I couldn't keep up with him, so I then decided to accompany him on a boat. He used to spend a very long time in the water. Swimming was his favourite pastime during holidays. He scarcely sunbathed. Instead, he would get in the car and head back to the dacha to check the numerous packages that would have arrived: updates from the Politburo, correspondence from Moscow and newspapers. After lunch, he usually worked uninterrupted. In the evenings he would sometimes watch a film. He liked the newsreels *Headlines* and *Fitil* or new Azerbaijani films. And this pretty much describes his usual holiday: an hour or two in the sea and a film. And this is in Crimea, a place full of entertainment in the summer! But he never went to concerts and other performances in Yalta."

According to Aleksandr Ivanov, Brezhnev used to arrange a get-together in Livadia once each summer: a friendly evening for all the political leaders who were holidaying in Yalta at the time. Heydar Aliyev might be invited to Brezhnev's dacha if he was receiving visitors from other socialist countries, or if there were something directly related to Azerbaijan. "I saw how happy Brezhnev was to receive Heydar Aliyevich at his dacha in Yalta," says Aleksandr Ivanov.

"Brezhnev and his wife personally welcomed us, and embraced Heydar Aliyev warmly. Everyone felt that Brezhnev was delighted to see him."

When he moved to Moscow, Heydar Aliyev tried to combine his summer holiday with a trip to Azerbaijan. He and his family would stay in Zaghluba, in dacha No. 5, where they had used to stay when he was first secretary. Even when he became a Politburo member and took on one of the highest public offices in the Soviet Union, he would not consent to staying in the guesthouse that had been built shortly before his transfer to Moscow.

Aleksandr Ivanov recounted a curious story which took place in the country residence during one of Heydar Aliyev's regular visits to Azerbaijan. "I took it upon myself to swim next to him. He swam quite far, always to the second set of shallows, because he preferred to swim in clear water. When he was far enough, he swam parallel to the shore. Unlike him, Kamran Baghirov preferred tennis courts to swimming, and he only went out on a motorboat." Baghirov once offered Heydar Aliyevich a ride on his small motorboat. They went out into the sea with Aleksandr Ivanov, who Baghirov tried to persuade to stay behind. Heydar Aliyev smiled; he knew that trying to dissuade the head of security from coming was pointless – he had his protocol!

They sailed along the coast towards the Interior Ministry's health resort. Aliyev remarked, 'Let's go to see the KGB – I haven't been there for a long time.' The weather was good and the beach was clustered with people sunbathing and swimming. Aliyev and Baghirov jumped from the boat into the water and swam to the shore. The people on the beach recognised them and a hubbub arose. Imagine the spectacle: a Politburo member and the first secretary wearing only swimming trunks! Heydar Aliyev greeted everybody, made a few jokes, and immediately saw many familiar faces. Khalilov, the resort manager, also pulled up to the shore on his black Volga. After some friendly mingling it was time to go back. They swam to the boat, but it wouldn't start, so they asked Khalilov for a lift.

"We got into the car – wet, and in swimming trunks," Aleksandr Ivanov told me with a smile. "The two of them sat in the back seats, and I sat next to the driver. The driver started signalling to the security of the first dacha, but they knew that Aliyev was with Baghirov on the beach, and didn't rush to open the gates. When the guard came out to tell us off he saw me and Heydar Aliyevich laughing on the back seat and got flustered.

The weather began to deteriorate, and we saw our drivers staring out to sea from the beach, including my deputy Viktor Nemushkov and Yuri Karnev. Then Heydar Aliyevich decided to surprise them by creeping up behind. When they turned towards us, we saw that they were looking anxious. When we asked what was wrong, they told us that Ilham had borrowed a flat-bottomed boat and headed out after us, but now the weather had turned. That was the first time I heard him swear. We were just about to send another boat out after him when we heard the chugging sound of an engine – it was Ilham on his way back."

From a conversation with Sevil Aliyeva:

Sevil Aliyeva: My father really valued honesty. He wouldn't stand the slightest lie – and he raised us the same way. I was open with both of my parents. I was closer to my mother – we were like one person. But I had a very close relationship with my father too. I could tell him about my boyfriends, friends, my studies, anything, really. He would give me advice, and we would always joke together. Jokes and humour were an essential part of our household.

Elmira Akhundova: Did you have any disagreements with your parents about your tastes in music, films, hobbies, fashion or career? Heydar Aliyevich was a very powerful man – was this apparent at home?

Sevil Aliyeva: We didn't have any arguments at all, because my mum and dad were such an wonderful couple. He told me once that if he had not met my mum, he probably would never have married. She was very gentle and diplomatic that there was never any reason for conflict. She complemented him so well and knew how to deal with his moods. And he never made groundless remarks. There were certain things that he didn't like in people, but nobody in the family had those. As children, we tried to behave so as not to put our parents out of sorts.

My parents always encouraged my hobbies. I loved to listen to Western music, and there wasn't much of it in Baku at that time, so I asked someone to bring some records from abroad. I was very fond of short skirts and platform shoes, which were fashionable then.

My father was a modern man. He respected my interests, especially as he also liked fashionable clothes. If he went away somewhere, he would bring back beautiful dresses for me and my mother. He wanted us to look good, commenting if something was off. I remember when I wore a very comfortable, but slightly old-fashioned, long skirt, my dad saw it and asked me to get rid of it.

E. A.: What did you do for Heydar Aliyevich's birthdays?

S. A.: He worked so much that he often forgot about his birthdays. When we were children, we made him cards. But we didn't have guests at his birthdays.

E. A.: Did Heydar Aliyevich have the opportunity to read anything when he was governing the republic? Who were his favourite writers? What classic and contemporary books did he like? What about films? Who was his favourite actor? I know that he was very musical and loved singing along with Zarifa khanim – what songs did he sing?

S. A.: Dad had a thorough knowledge of literature, especially classical. He told us that he had read all the classics when he was still at school. He knew foreign classics, and could quote Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. He also loved Huseyn Javid.

He loved comedy films, especially Soviet comedy. He could watch *Office Romance* (1977), *Mimino* (1978), *Carnival Night* (1956) and *Old Friend* (1969) several times over. He loved humour in general.

He enjoyed singing "Sene de qalmaz" [Don't be arrogant!], by Tofiq Guliyev, in accompaniment with my mum, who would sometimes have to quietly prompt him of the words. As for Soviet music, he loved Mark Bernes' song from *Night Patrol* (1957). I still remember him singing 'Even a bird can't live without a place to call home.' He also liked "A Million Scarlet Roses", a hit song by Alla Pugacheva. When Pugacheva visited Baku in 2001, dad asked her to sing it, and they sang it together. The song is sacred to me because my parents often danced to it. It was their favourite.

Another song, "El Bimbo", was very popular in the 1970s. I remember when we were on holiday in Yugoslavia in 1976, we often heard it there in the restaurants. He loved that song, too.

But the song that was most dear to him was one of mine, "Come Back, my Sweetheart", which I dedicated to my mother. Every time dad heard it, he cried. Even when it didn't have words yet, he associated with her and his feelings after she passed away. This song is special to me because it represents the memory of my mum and my dad.

Poems have been written and films made about the wonderful relationship between Heydar Aliyev and Zarifa khanim. Yet much remains unsaid about their relationship. How could anybody do justice to the strength of the self-sacrificing love that Heydar Aliyev's wife showed towards him? I would venture to suggest that nobody in the world (perhaps with the exception of Izzet khanim, his mother) loved him as Zarifa did. She enveloped him with her care and maternal attention, dedicated herself to him and was ready to sacrifice the most precious thing she had in the name of her love for him – her life.

Lydia Rasulova recalled one touching episode that Zarifa khanim herself told her. All the Bureau members, including the first secretary, went to The Theatre of Musical Comedy for the premiere of Rauf Hajiyev's operetta *Crossroads*. During the interval Lydia khanim talked to Zarifa Azizovna, who always accompanied her husband. She told her that she was visiting her children in Moscow, and that Semyon Tsvigun had invited her to fly on his plane for the return journey. Just after they took off, they discovered a technical problem: the chassis had not closed. They could not land until all the fuel was used up, or the aeroplane would explode on landing. At first, the crew said nothing to the passengers, but they saw that the plane was circling. Zarifa khanim said that fire engines and ambulances had driven up onto the runway. She commented that there might be an accident, but that she only had one concern: how Heydar Aliyev would take the news.

"These words struck me," Lydia Rasulova recalls. "Even in a life-threatening situation she didn't think about herself."

* * *

Children, grandchildren, feeding a large family, managing the household – daily tasks like these were Zarifa khanim's domain, and she took scrupulous care of them. Despite his high status as the first secretary, Heydar Aliyev liked going shopping to see the real state of trade in Baku, particularly in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, when there were food shortages. Heydar Aliyev would often make unplanned trips so that his subordinates would not have time to arrange an abundance of groceries in one particular store. "We would be on the way home from work," recalls Aleksandr Ivanov, "towards Genclik Metro Station. Our route went through Azneft, down along Chkalov. We would come up to Communist Street, and then he would say, 'Tolya, let's turn left here.' We would leave accompanying cars behind and head towards the fort, down Zevina Street. He would go round all the shops there. He was all by himself, picture that. Someone could have blocked our way, without giving us any chance to contact the KGB or MVD.

In shops he was interested in everything: the prices, the range available, etc. There was a posh grocery store on the corner of Lieutenant Schmidt Street. Once he went up to the counter, where there was some tasty ham from Tambov. He asked me if I had any cash. Interior Minister Jafar Veliyev said that he had some, but Heydar Aliyevich, said that he was asking me. I bought a kilo for 3 roubles 70 kopecks. Then we briefly stopped at another store, before going home. Zarifa always greeted him on his return. 'Zarifa,' Heydar Aliyevich said with a smile, 'look at the present I've bought for you!'

On another occasion, after a meeting, we were going along Stroiteley Avenue at some ungodly hour, down to Olympia. We had left work unusually late, but before we reached Olympia, he suddenly announced, 'Look, I know that place, you used to be able to get decent beer there!' We went in. The poor guy's hands were trembling so much that he spilt the beer from Heydar Aliyevich's glass. We had a drink each. When we returned to the car, he said to the driver, 'Ah, you would have really enjoyed that beer, Tolya!' He loved teasing people."

As he lived under conditions of strict protocol, Heydar Aliyev naturally wanted to break out of the groove sometimes, ruffle some feathers in a fun way, and loosen his impeccable tie – literally, on occasion.

"Once in Moscow I bought a light summer cotton suit, quite sporty, with a loose shirt", Aleksandr Ivanov told me. "We always suffered so terribly in those wool jackets and noose-like ties! When we were due on our latest trip out of the city, I decided to wear this suit. When the boss got off the train, he looked at me, but didn't say a word. Then Namiq Tagizadeh started admonishing me, saying, 'What are you doing, dressing like that?!" When we had got into the car, Heydar Aliyev asked me what the deal was with my suit. I replied that it was very comfortable and, most importantly, light. He called his tailor a short while later and ordered one just like it for himself.

His suits were mainly tailor-made for him; I don't recall him ever buying a suit off the rack in my time. He had his suits made in a specialist tailor's on Kutuzovsky Prospect in Moscow as well. The only ready-made clothing he would buy was shirts. Zarifa did not attend a single fitting; he would choose both the material and the cut for himself. The women might help with selecting ties and shoes."

Heydar Aliyev's aide Turan Huseynov also recalls this:

"In the 1970s he had all his suits made for him by a tailor. Balabey Mirzajanov, the Central Committee's administrator of affairs, once said, 'I showed Heydar Aliyev several jackets made by various tailors, and he settled on this one.' They called the tailor who made this jacket. He was a Baku Armenian, an aficionado of his profession, and his tailoring was masterful. He even ordered a special sewing machine from France because it could do a special stitch for a suit. He tailored clothes for Heydar Aliyev for many years, but then he went away somewhere, and a tailor by the name of Nazim took on this role."

Sevil Aliyeva confirms her father's love of clothes: "He wanted everything to be fitted right down to the millimetre, and so he never bought ready-made suits. Even ready-made clothes would have fitted him fine, though, as he had the perfect figure."

Sevil smiles as she recalls the modest material goods that surrounded her father. There was no place for luxury or excess; every household object had a functional value and served its owner for decades. Heydar Aliyev's one "weakness" was a well-tailored suit, with a tie to match.

"My father was very fastidious about how he looked, and everything had to be one hundred percent correct. He would pick out the fabrics himself, and we would sometimes help him in this. He loved grey and navy blue fabrics, and the various shades of these colours. He categorically wouldn't have black suits; he didn't own a single one."

It was hard to choose shirts for him because he liked one specific type. He preferred a classic style, and the collar needed to be ideally suited to a tie-knot. I once bought him shirts from an Italian company, and he really took to them. He asked me to always buy him shirts like that. He always looked fashionable and elegant.

His mother used to buy his shirts and ties for him. He generally liked bright -coloured ties, saying that they gave his face a good hue.

He was very neat and trim in everything, even in photographs from his youth. He was very poor, but he looked so elegant all the same. Everything sat well on him. He would also grow accustomed to clothes. For example, to an old worn-out sweater that had already acquired some holes. He might declare that he liked it and was comfortable in it.

He would wear a watch for decades. Even in photographs you can see the face of the watch, yellowed from age. He wore a Seiko watch for a long time, and got so used to it that he didn't want any other kind. In

general, he didn't appreciate expensive watches. Then something in his watch broke, and Beylar bought him a simple watch for about 40 dollars. When I wanted to give him a new watch as a present, he said: 'I don't need expensive watches. This one is comfortable.'

He loved beauty, but never had any aspirations to luxury or to expensive things."

Aside from his fine attire, Heydar Aliyevich was a connoisseur of quality beverages - fine wines, aged cognac and whisky. In terms of vodka he preferred to drink Zubrovka, which Brezhnev's favourite. It was specially imported from Belarus to Baku.

"In the late 1970s he acquired another favourite drink: the Azerbaijani vintage cognac Shirvan," recalls Aleksandr Ivanov. "Shirvan was his pride and joy. He even chose the shape of the bottle himself, and designed the label himself too. I remember how he tormented the late Yunis Rzayev, chairman of the State Committee for Viticulture and Wine Production, over the label."

Former Central Committee departmental head Zakir Abdullayev recalled an intriguing story about Shirvan:

"Once we were returning by train to Baku following a zonal meeting. I was travelling in the same compartment as Arif Mustafayev, the assistant for agriculture, Jafar Veliyev, the head of the Internal Affairs Ministry, and Mammad Asgarov, the agriculture minister. We knew beforehand that we would be travelling by train, so we'd brought some food with us for the journey. Everyone was exhausted after the meeting, so around half an hour after the train set off we decided what the hell, let's have a couple of vodka shots each. We'd only just downed one shot, when Heydar Aliyev's head of security, Namiq Taghizadeh, appeared and said that Heydar Aliyev was summoning us.

'What kind of good-for-nothing people are you?' he said when we went in - dressing us down in a jokey way. 'There you are hitting the bottle on the quiet, and you're not sparing a single thought for your first secretary's wellbeing. Take a seat!'

He poured us all some of his favourite cognac, Shirvan, and gave himself a measure too. There was a variety of snacks on the table. I have remembered this unusual evening with Heydar Aliyevich ever since."

For all his love for his work, which amounted to workaholism, Heydar Aliyev was also open to material pleasures; he valued friendly interaction around a table, a well-timed joke, a good story, and was an admirer of female beauty. In the final part of this trilogy I will describe the almost child-like inquisitiveness and spontaneity with which he would acquaint himself with the historical and cultural values of any country he visited, the pleasure and boldness he would exhibit when trying exotic dishes and drinks from overseas, and how he was able to move even the most elite and uptight group to laughter in bilateral talks.

In my opinion, he felt constricted by protocol and the environment of party functionaries and official bureaucracy his whole life. He felt comfortable and at ease alongside poets and writers, at a children's party, or mixing with rural village elders.

When Heydar Aliyev visited Nakhchivan for the last time in 2002, he went up into the mountains. He dropped into a teahouse – a visit that was not covered by protocol. He was served a cup of tea; he dropped a lump of sugar into it, drank up and, gazing into the distance, said thoughtfully, "The happiest day of my life." And then, evidently thinking that he would be misunderstood, added, "In Nakhchivan."

LEADER

I have attempted to reveal the most varied facets of Heydar Aliyev's character – as a leader, ideologist and politician. Of course, it is exceedingly difficult to paint a comprehensive picture of such a vibrant and unconventional individual. As Ramiz Mehdiyev correctly remarked, "It is very challenging to create a political portrait of Heydar Aliyev that can claim to be complete, if only because that would be equivalent to trying to describe an entire era."

Indeed, it is difficult to determine which characteristics ultimately define Heydar Aliyev: his intellect, broad outlook, unique capacity for work, organisational skills, astonishing far-sightedness, creativity, analytical thinking, integrity? Most likely all of these were essential qualities, and yet to unpack the puzzle that was this truly blessed individual is an almost hopeless task.

Therefore, my aim is much more modest: in this chapter I have gathered the recollections of people who knew Heydar Aliyev well. Gathered together, these accounts add a dash of colour and nuance to our view of him during the period he led Soviet Azerbaijan. And so, what impression did he leave on those around him in the 1970s?

Sabir Huseynov: "His memory was simply unique. He could mentally reconstruct any event after many years. He could list with ease the names of individuals who had been present somewhere, who said what, who replied, how, and even what gestures they made. More than that, he could call to mind what the weather was like and what time it was."

Hasan Seyidov: "Heydar Aliyevich would often quote poetry at public gatherings, reciting 99 percent of it by heart. He knew lots of poetry. In 1978, when we created a new anthem, he recited it off by heart through from start to finish."

Aleksandr Gudkov: "During festivals, Heydar Aliyev would invite the commanders of military units to lunch after the parade. I can still remember some of the wonderful toasts he gave in our honour: he remembered everyone, spoke about each individual personally and, furthermore, could find and emphasise that one quality that was truly inherent to that person. We were astonished by the depth of his assessment. He was never too critical or too flattering. It was nice when he praised you, but it also made demands of you. It was a way for him to train us: every person wanted to improve the situation in their division. Something else – he really didn't like it when someone began praising him, and didn't permit this."

Ramiz Tariverdiyev: "He might speak informally during moments of openness and confide some of his thoughts and doubts.

Incidentally, he never swore; in my presence he never once uttered a swear word. If he got angry, he might raise his voice. The most offensive thing I ever heard from him was: 'What an obstinate person you are! Look at how many people I've re-educated, but I can't do anything with you.' He would rebuke me, and I would offer my excuses. And one day I dared to say: 'Heydar Aliyevich, I am second in the world in terms of stubbornness.' He replied, 'What do you mean – second? Who's in first place?' I kept my mouth shut. Then he suddenly understood the insinuation and told me to get out – but he did so without anger.

He would listen to people. And he might agree with another person's point of view, but only if it was well substantiated and convincing. He thought very highly of professionals and always listened to their opinion. He never spoke rashly, never insisted that something had to be done just because he had said so.

We would definitely argue, for example."

Former CPSU Central Committee Secretary Aleksandra Biryukova: "I didn't feel the difference in our rank when talking to him; he didn't press his authority or position onto you.

I would sometimes come across Heydar Aliyev at receptions in Moscow; you would just shake his hand and nothing else. I have to say that he stood out among the other republic leaders for his simplicity and modesty. This also manifested itself in the fact that his speeches at the receptions were short, practical and utterly concise. He left a very good impression on everybody.

Aleksandr Nikolayevich Shelepin, who I was then working with at the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions and who knew Heydar Aliyevich well, also had a very high opinion of him. He valued Heydar Aliyev as a practical man, who was endeavouring to do a great deal for people, and as a man of extreme modesty in his personal life."

Former Chairman of the RSFSR Council of Ministers Vitaly Vorotnikov: "Firstly, he made a very good impression externally. He was composed, collected, cheerful, always immaculately dressed, and tactful in personal interactions. This evoked good will and drew people to him. On the other hand, we were new to the Central Committee and, of course, we didn't allow ourselves to loosen up much in our personal interactions. He differed in this regard too. I remember both Demirchyan and Shevardnadze, but Aliyev a somewhat different person: he knew how to hold himself in such a way so as to create an impression. And, moreover, as I later confirmed, this was his genuine way of being, his character, rather than an affectation. Heydar Aliyev's work as first secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan was, of course, evaluated positively. The republic was on the rise during his time. This has to be said straight out. He did a great deal to push Azerbaijan to new heights; time and again the general secretary would give the republic

accolades at plenums and party congresses, saying that it was striding forward and achieving successes. These words meant a lot, believe me. I was not, unfortunately, in Azerbaijan. But his work was always appraised positively; I don't remember any criticism being directed at him."

Yevgeny Primakov: "He stood out in his single-mindedness. He would quickly grasp a new idea and assimilate its essence. He was extraordinary in terms of his organisational ability – that is undoubted. He did a huge amount for Azerbaijan's development, and lived for the republic's interests. I have no doubt about this whatsoever."

Sabir Huseynov: "He didn't know the meaning of fatigue – literally. I'll tell you a story about this.

The Central Committee was preparing for a party congress, and it was all hands to the pump for the whole staff. There were a couple of days or so left before the opening ceremony. Heydar Aliyevich would sit in his office without budging, reading, probing and correcting hundreds and hundreds of pages of documents that were brought to him. He would send them back to be rewritten dozens of times, and would rebuke his aides for any inaccuracies. Not everyone could handle the frenzied pace that he expected – and also maintained himself, if not greater. I was once in Heydar Aliyev's office for him to check a stack of legal terminology I had prepared, when one of his assistants came in.

'Why are you walking like a roast chicken?' he asked, without looking up from the documents.

'I'm tired, Heydar Aliyevich.'

'Tired?! What on earth have you been doing? Unloading a truckload of cement?'

He waved the man away and continued reading. When the aide had left the room, he raised his head.

'Sabir, what is tiredness? What kind of feeling is it?'

'Perhaps it's not good,' he continued in a confidential tone, 'but I have never been able to understand it when someone says they're tired. Perhaps it's age-related? But that assistant of mine is almost 15 years younger than me.'

I shrugged. How, one might ask, do you explain such a concept as a feeling? It's difficult to imagine something like that if you haven't experienced it. Even as he got older he didn't know what fatigue was, and could speak to an audience for hours at a time without moving or changing position."

Colonel General Aleksandr Kovtunov: "I knew about him mainly from the press and reports from co-workers of his that I happened to meet. There were no contradictions or inconsistencies of any kind, just the consensus that a genuine leader had appeared in the republic. Over the first three years of service in Azerbaijan I realised that an extraordinary

man had taken power; an intelligent man of action, someone with huge strength of will, who had decided to make Azerbaijan one of the leading, most advanced republics in the wider region at least, not just the South Caucasus. Georgia was flourishing at that time; Georgians had a better standard of living than Azerbaijanis, especially the rural population. And then someone appeared who decided to turn this situation around.

I remember Heydar Aliyev with warmth, but I also remember the great amount he taught me – both in the science and study of leadership. I completed my service as commander-in-chief of troops of the Far-Eastern District, and was responsible for a huge amount of people. Interaction with Heydar Aliyev and my service in Azerbaijan gave me a lot. I knew Nazarbayev too, and leaders from other republics, but I never encountered anyone of such a calibre and with such purpose."

Academician Afrand Dashdamirov: "The first impression I had from our personal interaction was that – perhaps for the first time – there was someone in Azerbaijan who attentively heard me out and correctly understood me. I felt that I was not wasting my words, but, on the contrary, I received feedback and understanding. I greatly valued this.

Heydar Aliyev was a splendid listener: attentive, analytical and constructive with his criticism. Most importantly, he endeavoured to make sure that proposals didn't just disappear into thin air, but were practically implemented."

Hasan Seyidov: "In 1977 I fell seriously ill, and had to go to Moscow for an operation. Heydar Aliyev had phoned the hospital three times before I had returned back to the ward from intensive care. The nurses later told me about this. There was also the time when my wife fell ill. He found out either from me or from someone else; he was very attentive and would always ask what was needed, which medicines were necessary. Perhaps these are trifles, minor details to some, but, our lives are made up of these minor details, aren't they?

He tried to provide all of his staff with a flat; he immediately would offer a helping hand whenever someone's family grew in size. I was living near Narimanov Metro Station at the time, and one day he commented that I lived far away.

I'd lived there seven years while working as a Central Committee secretary. 'You should move to a flat opposite the party school,' Heydar Aliyevich said. I replied that my flat was sufficient for me.

But then when I returned after my operation in 1977, he said: 'I've picked out a flat for you in a new block. Go and take a look, and if you like it then take the keys and move in.'

This was in the building opposite the Council of Ministers. Every time I go onto the balcony and look out over the sea and the city, I always remember him.

Heydar Aliyevich once didn't give his approval to appoint someone who had survived a minor stroke as a deputy minister.

'This is manufacturing,' he said. 'We might kill him.'

Five years passed, and I put forward his candidacy again – this time to work in the Central Committee. I'd forgotten about our previous conversation, but Heydar Aliyevich suddenly commented, 'But you said he'd suffered a minor stroke.'

I froze and replied in astonishment that he remembered everything. The candidate was given approval this time, but I was struck by Heydar Aliyevich's phenomenal memory. He was very well-educated overall; he had an in-depth knowledge of Azerbaijan's history, literature and culture, and was of the highest intellectual calibre. And everyone who worked with him wanted, if only in some respect, to be like him."

Jafar Veliyev: "If anything ever happened to you, he would help without fail.

Heydar Aliyevich instituted the procedure that, since I was in the party committee and a departmental director, I should stay at work until he had left – but he would not leave earlier than 10 p.m.

One day he called at about 8 p.m., asking where I was. I replied that some bad luck had befallen me: my sister had caught a cold, but had now developed pneumonia. I had checked her into the medical treatment commission and was going to see her every evening.

'Why didn't you tell me? Drop into my office.'

I went in to see him.

'What's going on with your sister?'

'Pneumonia – and heart problems.'

He called Chazov, head of the USSR Ministry of Health's 4th Directorate and told him to send us a decent cardiologist.

Chazov's deputy, Kharlyamov, flew right out to us.

Another example: we had a ground-floor flat that was quite crowded, of course. But then it just so happened that a new block was built for the Central Committee workers next to the party school. When construction work had finished, the party and local committees gathered to distribute the flats.

At the end Heydar Aliyev asked me: 'Don't you need a flat? I know that you have three children, your wife has a doctoral degree, and you are a good worker yourself. What are you staying quiet for? Go and have a look. There's one section of flats with five rooms. Take your pick of floor.'

This was a sign of his great consideration towards me."

Svetlana Gasimova: "He was an unbelievably considerate and attentive person. He invited me in to see him out of the blue once in the 1970s, and said, 'Svetlana, I've been told that General Hazi Aslanov's wife is in

the eye hospital. Could you go and visit her, pay her some attention while she's there in hospital. Perhaps there's something she needs.' That is to say, despite how preoccupied he was with his work obligations, he had picked up on the fact that Hazi Aslanov's wife was in hospital. It's only a small example, but it speaks volumes. I would often go to visit our honoured women on his instruction, especially the elderly and lonely – people who needed issues resolving. I would resolve them on his behalf."

Zahra Guliyeva: "A group of 10 Azerbaijanis was due to go to Portugal. Nothing connected to Azerbaijan escaped his attention. I was included in this delegation as a deputy and dean. I just happened to be in Moscow at the time at a meeting of a Supreme Soviet commission. And all of a sudden I was informed that I had been removed from the delegation. This piece of news reached Baku. Just imagine it: Heydar Aliyevich sent a Central Committee employee to Moscow specifically to ascertain why a representative of Azerbaijan had been removed from the list and a Russian representative put in their place. My name was ultimately reinstated. This issue was not about me personally, but about Azerbaijan being fully represented in the delegation. After all, if Azerbaijan had included someone into the delegation, then nobody had the right to remove them from the list. What is more, he behaved diplomatically in this matter: the Russian comrade was also included."

In conclusion, I would like to add two interesting psychological portraits of Heydar Aliyev's personality. The first comes from Russian dissidents Elena Klepikova and Vladimir Solovyov; you cannot agree with them on everything, of course, but there is truth in what they say:

"In visibly demonstrating the energy output that the security services can squeeze out of their officials, the new breed of police officer, in the form of Aliyev and Shevardnadze, is distinguished by its high, almost embossed, diligence in carrying out orders, and by its organisational talent and exceptional capacity for work. And both are immeasurably ambitious, which has also increased their energetic potential – as they are more ambitious than their colleagues in Moscow. In order to be appointed to positions in Moscow, they had to present themselves in an exemplary fashion within their republic's borders, which they had to traverse in a north-westerly direction. Their native republics served them as something like a launch pad, since their ambition, as well as their way of thinking, was imperial and international, extending across the empire and beyond, not restricted by national boundaries.

But KGB General Aliyev, as opposed to the Georgian [Shevardnadze – Ed.], represented a more ideal official: a man without doubts or misfires who did not know any other dogma than the official minimum of imperial ideology. He was as effective and full of potential active energy as a drawn-back, quivering arrow, right before it tears away from the bowstring."¹

¹ Solovyov & Klepikova, 52

The other interesting portrait comes from Turan Huseynov, Heydar Aliyev's former aide. He came to write it under the following circumstances. On Heydar Aliyev's initiative the decision was taken to open a branch of Moscow's Institute for Sociological Research in Baku; Professor Ilya Zemtsov came to Baku to recruit staff for local branch, and Turan Huseynov was one of those who joined. During his time at the Centre of Sociological Research, he put together a general psychological portrait of Heydar Aliyev, which, for all the grandiloquence and ostentation of the author's style, presents something of interest for future researchers of this phenomenal individual:

"1969 and subsequent years were a tense time of colossal emotional, mental and physical efforts. During this period of feverish work conducted under the most trying of conditions, a man arose – the type of man that arises perhaps once every few centuries. He was sensitive, attentive to everything, indefatigable in his labour, with an immense, versatile and ingenious mind of inexhaustible patterns of thought and design, an iron will, a temperament as volatile and scorching as lava, a memory that indelibly records everything, an imagination that knows no bounds, and the ability to unerringly predict where force must be applied in order to achieve the best results. That man was Heydar Aliyev.

As an organiser, Aliyev 'dealt out' his best achievements under the power of inspiration; thoughts and designs were born in him in the process of work itself, in the heat of a meeting, and all of them without exception were marked with their own, new stamp. No issue ever seemed unsolvable to him, because an unflagging source of creative power beat in his heart. He possessed the great art of foresight, and was almost flawless in its application, as he not only calculated his every step and weighed up his every intention carefully, but also knew how to conduct large-scale operations, and complete them in the most intensive way, until all the resources had been expended. He never lost his composure in the face of difficulties and hardships; on the contrary, difficulties only sharpened his ingenuity. His intellect and belief in himself are so great and radiate so tangibly from him that anyone who draws close to him falls under his power, feeling somewhat despondent in the face of his greatness. Even individuals who were most biased against him found themselves powerless to shake off the sense of wonder he inspired. If greatness was measured just by intellectual power and strength of character, there would be no one equal to Heydar Aliyev in our nation's history."

This opinion dates from the 1970s. 30 years later the most renowned politicians on the planet would speak of Heydar Aliyev's uniqueness. I will reference these statements in the third part of this series, but on the whole I feel that the most appropriate way to characterise this incredible individual is Napoleon's famous saying: "Success creates great people".

to be continued ...

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INDEX

A

- Abakumov, Viktor, 91
Abashidze, Irakli, 311
Abbas, Hazrat, 105
Abbasov, Inglab, 109
Abbasov, Akim, 45
Abdelghani, Ahmed, 162–63
Abdin, Tofiq, 117
Abdullayev, Bahlul, 117
Abdullayev, Hasan, 274, 498
Abdullayev, Zakir, 235, 238, 247, 249,
261–62, 356, 383–84, 396, 482, 505
Abdulrahimov, Pasha, 119–21
Abwehr Zeppelin Academy, 87
Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan, 39,
41, 57, 95, 193–94, 208, 245, 274,
285, 445, 498
ACP Central Committee, 91
activism, 71, 132, 428, 463, 477
ADP. *See* Azerbaijan Democratic Party
ADR. *See* Azerbaijan Democratic
Republic
Aeroflot, 414
Afghanistan, 68, 356, 465–67
 Soviet intervention in, 465, 467
Africa, 161–62, 300, 443
Agadzhanyan, Slavik, 409
Agadzhanyan, Valeri, 409
Aghayeva, Sona, 61–62
agriculture, 108, 212, 360, 379, 401–2
 agricultural production, 221, 303,
332, 362–63, 379, 387, 392
 farming, 9, 22, 101, 107, 212, 230,
272, 380, 385, 388–92, 399, 403,
445
 rural areas, 212, 283, 360–61, 379,
383, 389, 395–96, 398–99, 442, 446,
448, 510
aid, international, 71, 466
Akhundov, Ruhulla, 100
Akhundov, Veli, 105, 109, 116, 149–50,
155, 166–67, 193, 195, 197–98, 203,
360, 362, 375, 380, 405
 birthday celebrations, 194

- comparison with Aliyev, 233, 236,
252
conflicts with intelligentsia, 137
opposition, 196
personal qualities, 195–97
successor, 22–23, 198–201, 203, 208,
284, 516
Akstafachai reservoir, 379
Aleksandrov-Agentov, Andrei, 471
Alikhanov, Enver, 150, 196–97, 199,
252–53, 405
Aliyev, Agil, 21, 29, 31, 32, 35, 40–43,
46–47, 51, 57, 59, 77, 79
Aliyev, Alirza, 15–17, 21–23, 29, 31, 32,
39, 41, 44, 65, 126, 137
Aliyev, Aziz, 46, 63, 70, 88, 144, 185–
86, 188, 517
Aliyev, Hasan, 39
Aliyev, Heydar
 6th Congress of Azerbaijani Writers,
287–88
 agricultural policy, 232, 236, 379–80,
383, 387–92
 and Alish Lambaranski, 257–58
 “Aliyev factor”, 438, 516
 ambition, 38
 American agents, 161
 ancestry, 15–17, 20
 anniversary celebrations in Baku, 220
 anti-corruption, 208–9, 278, 315–23,
325–27, 335, 337–39, 341–42, 395–
97, 447–48
 appearance, 8, 43, 75, 79, 179, 503–4
 appointed deputy chairman of
Azerbaijani KGB, 124
 appointment as first deputy chairman,
487–88
 appointment as First Secretary, 201
 appointment to chairman of Az
KGB, 127–28
 artistic talent, 39, 49–50, 143
 awards, 90, 393
 and Azerbaijan Democratic Party,
451–52
 and Azerbaijani language, 307–9

and Azerbaijani reunification, 118
 Azerbaijani unification, 466, 469
 Baghirov trial, 102
 beginning of biography project, 7–10
 birth, 15, 23
 border security, 151–52, 156, 175–76,
 426–28
 and Boris Kevorkov, 411
 and Brezhnev, 199, 211, 214–15,
 217–21, 343–58, 471–72, 499
 Central Committee Bureau, 253,
 260–61
 Chekist, 113, 208, 270, 315
 childhood in Nakhchivan, 29, 31–32,
 36–38, 392
 and Col Kopylov, 106
 collective farms, 326, 390–91
 communications, 245
 conflict with Iran, 469
 controversy over gift to Brezhnev,
 352
 creation of green spaces, 375–76
 dacha in Zaghulba, 46, 292, 401,
 495–97, 500
 daily routine, 233
 dealing with complaints, 181
 death of father Alirza Aliyev, 22, 77
 death of mother Izzet Aliyeva, 83
 departure for Moscow, 13–14, 318,
 478–79, 484, 491–94, 507
 destruction of Djomartly village,
 20–21
 developing infrastructure, 429–30
 early education, 40, 42–43
 early years in the Kremlin, 494–95
 economic reforms, 360, 362–65
 and Eduard Shevardnadze, 421–24
 and Elchibey, 282, 284–85, 287
 elected party leader of Azerbaijan,
 211
 elected to Politburo, 472–79, 481,
 487–90
 family, 17, 21, 348
 and Garry Kasparov, 314
 glasnost, 319–20
 and Gorbachev, 299
 graduation from Nakhchivan
 Teaching College, 53
 graduation from Soviet NSM
 College, 81

head of counterintelligence, 90,
 93–94, 96
 head of department of Nakhchivan
 People's Council, 64
 housing and reforms, 181–82, 375
 idealism, 55, 341
 importance of family, 185, 190
 industrial development, 221, 365–73,
 375
 infrastructure, 375, 387
 interview 'Let Justice Prevail,' 328–
 29, 331–33
 investigated by Moscow, 398
 investigation of futher father-in-law,
 88
 investigation of George Darko
 murder, 162
 joined security services, 64–65, 67–68
 jokes and pranks, 349
 and Kamran Baghirov, 481–85, 487,
 500–501
 and Gara Garayev, 312–13
 in Kazakhstan, 304
 Komsomol, 439
 Kremlin plots, 269
 learning Cyrillic alphabet, 43
 in Leningrad, 82
 liberalism, 134–35, 138
 lieutenant in NKVD, 65–67
 local history museums, 289
 love of nature, 37, 46
 love of reading, 46–47, 78
 and Luis Corvalan, 301, 303
 marriage to Zarifa Aliyeva, 185–89,
 497–99, 502–3
 meeting with "the Naturalist",
 159–60
 military matters, 63, 426, 431
 move to Baku, 56, 82
 and Muhammad Biriya, 295
 and Muslim Magomayev, 293
 Nakhchivan Commissariat for State
 Security, 70–73
 Nakhchivan Teachers' College, 44–45
 and Narimanov, 197
 Narimanov centenary celebrations,
 295–96
 Operation Douglas, 110–11
 opposition to Armenian separationism,
 405–9, 411–13, 415, 417–18

opposition to mass arrests, 121
 perestroika, 341
 personal fitness and health, 33, 45,
 234, 356, 495, 499
 phenomenal memory, 511
 poem *Greetings to Heydarbaba* 121
 in Politburo, 415, 487–89
 popularity, 9
 prevention of dissidents, 135, 146
 progress in higher education, 444–45,
 447
 promoted to Major General, 90,
 149–51
 promoting Azerbaijan's cultural legacy,
 289–91
 public image, 12
 Gabala radar station, 432
 and Rasul Rza, 273–75
 reburied remains of Huseyn Javid,
 288
 in Records Department, 60
 recruiting foreign students, 162
 reforms to Azerbaijani school system,
 441–44
 relationship with mother, Izzet
 Aliyeva, 32, 41, 77
 release from military service, 60
 renovation of Higher Military
 Academy, 437
 response to criticism, 10
 retired from Politburo, 419
 romance with Sona Aghayeva, 61–62
 the 'Sailov incident,' 318–19
 saving individuals from prosecution,
 74–75
 security services, 64, 70–71, 80, 88,
 115, 161
 shortages, 401–3
 son Ilham on Olympic committee,
 450
 Soviet Writers Union, 293–94
 space program, 430
 speeches, 107, 259–63, 265, 296–301,
 400, 491
 speeches and discourses, 74, 116–17,
 251, 259–63, 265, 294–301, 400,
 449, 466, 491
 story about rescue of Andropov's son,
 67–68
 study at Academy of Sciences, 57
 success, 238, 380
 Sungayit protest, 109–10
 support for Azerbaijani sporting
 progress, 449–50
 support for film 'The Interrogation,'
 279
 support for intelligentsia, 277–82,
 289, 311–12, 314, 330
 theatre, 30, 50–53
 tolerance for religion, 136–37
 tolerance of magazines, 271
 travel abroad, 112–13
 trial of Baghirov, 126
 and Tsvigun, 200
 and Tudeh (People's Party of Iran),
 451, 453–59, 461–62, 464–66
 and Veli Akhundov, 194–99, 203–4
 Victory Day, 436
 visit of President Nixon, 355
 visit to Nakhchivan, 422
 viticulture, 383–87
 willingness to listen to colleagues,
 253–55, 510
 work, discipline and efficiency, 121–
 23, 233–35, 250, 509
 and the Writers Union, 107, 277
 and Yuri Andropov, 129–30, 199–200,
 333, 474
 Aliyev, Iqra, 413, 432
 Aliyev, Ilham, 13, 450
 Aliyev, Irshad, 379
 Aliyev, Jalal, 59–60, 62, 77, 82
 Aliyev, Kamal, 182
 Aliyev, Suleyman, 16, 21, 46, 77, 82,
 287
 Aliyev, Zeynalabdin, 17, 21–22, 77
 Aliyeva, Ekaterina, 190
 Aliyeva, Izzet, 15, 22–23, 31, 41, 77–78,
 82–83, 136, 187, 502
 Aliyeva, Rafiqa, 23, 41, 82–83
 Aliyeva, Sevil, 51, 62, 189–90, 265, 348,
 476, 496–97, 499, 501, 504
 Aliyeva, Shafiq, 23, 31, 37, 41, 77,
 82–83, 515
 Aliyeva, Zarifa, 99, 102, 144, 150, 185–
 90, 263, 476, 497–99, 501–4
 Aliyev family, 15, 23, 29, 31–32, 39, 41,
 50, 77, 186, 499
 Allahverdiyev, Rafael, 242–43, 245, 318,
 474, 481, 484

allies, 70, 73, 85–86, 400, 454, 459
 All-Union Central Council, 259, 377, 479, 508
 All-Union Leninist Young Communist League, 63
 Amirov, Ali, 199, 407
 Amirov, Fikrat, 290–91, 311
 Andranik, 19, 21, 25–26
 Andropov, Yuri, 127, 129–31, 146, 149, 174, 176, 268–69, 322, 354, 469, 471–74, 476–79, 481, 487–89, 491
 anti-corruption, 218, 235, 333, 472
 comparison with Heydar Aliyev, 143
 correspondence with Pyotr Kapitsa, 146
 investigation into Vechë, 267
 and Leonid Brezhnev, 322, 324, 345, 350–51
 the 'new Kennedy,' 471
 and perestroika, 341
 role in KGB, 129, 132–33
 support for Heydar Aliyev, 130, 199–200, 322
 Angola, 161, 371
 Anninski, Lev, 281
 Anti-aircraft, 45, 151
 anti-corruption policies, 218, 321–24, 326–28
 Anti-Counterrevolution Organisation, 125
 anti-Semitism, 267, 489
 anti-Soviet sentiment, 74, 86, 100, 110, 116–17, 132–36, 139, 146, 281, 284
 Antonov, Mikhail, 369–70
 apparatus, 173–74, 215, 329, 452, 473, 517
 applause, 106, 259, 287
 Arafat, Yasser, 459
 Arch-Medved, 336–39
 Armenia, 100–101, 115, 167, 173–74, 299, 307, 372, 412
 Aliyev's views on "Armenian issue", 417–18
 Armenian Communist Party, 167–68, 410
 Armenian diaspora, 142, 166, 335
 Armenian Separatism, 258, 405, 407, 409, 411–13, 415, 417, 419, 424
 Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic, 165, 167, 170, 407
 conflict in Nakhchivan, 26
 Dashnak Party, 170, 411
 disputes and conflicts with Azerbaijan, 19–23, 25, 405–10, 412

freedom of population, 120, 126
 history, 19
 KGB, 127
 leadership, 26, 405, 410, 433
 media, 410, 412
 Nakchivan, 26–27
 nationalism, 85–86, 151, 163, 165–68, 170–71, 173, 277, 296, 303, 405–9, 416–17
 smuggling, 336–39
 trial of Abdelghani, 163
 Armistice of Mudros, 26
 Artamonov, Ivan, 267
 Arushanov, Konstantin, 173
 Asadov, Huseyn, 74
 asceticism, 315, 439, 474, 495
 ASE (Azerbaijani Soviet Encyclopedia), 273–75
 Asgarov, Mammad, 117, 505
 Astoria Hotel, 81
 Atakishiyev, Aghasalim, 96–97, 100, 126
 Atakishiyev, Rauf, 311
 Atmoda journal, 280
 Averbakh Prize, 188
 aviation, 45, 155, 347, 359, 425, 430, 435
 Aylisli, Akram, 278, 281
 Azerbaijan
 agriculture, 78–79, 326, 363, 367–68, 379–80, 383, 387–88, 392, 395–96
 and America, 87, 111
 Anniversary celebrations, 219–20, 274
 and Armenia, 19, 417–19, 421, 423
 awarded the Order of Lenin, 138
 Azerbaijani Criminal Code, 284
 Azerbaijani language, 70, 120
 Azerbaijan Supreme Court, 417–18
 Azerbaijan Supreme Soviet, 307, 405
 border regions and military activity, 123, 405, 426–27, 430–32, 468
 capital city Baku. See Baku
 Council of Ministers, 93, 166, 194, 196, 257, 496
 counterintelligence, 86, 97, 111, 117, 154, 161
 defence industry, 371–72
 during 'Krushchev thaw,' 117
 economic development, 151, 221, 231, 254, 258, 323, 359, 361–65, 367, 369, 371–73, 385–86, 401–2, 443, 494

economic recession, 379
 Elchibey, 283–85, 287
 freedom of press, 280–81
 and Georgia, 424
 Heads of National Security, 125
 history, 25, 103, 137, 166, 193, 289, 475, 511
 housing, 375
 immigration, 153
 industrial development, 155, 193–95, 202, 221, 254, 364, 366–67, 369–72
 infrastructure, 429
 intelligentsia, 39, 133–34, 139–40, 145, 277, 283, 287, 291, 294, 491
 and Iran, 70, 85, 114, 127, 153, 466, 468–69
 Iranian immigrants, 86, 454, 457, 461, 463–64
 KGB. See Azerbaijani KGB
 Komosol, 440
 leader Mir Jafar Baghirov, 92
 Manuscript Archive, 141
 Military Academy, 13, 436–37
 military facilities, 80, 88, 90
 Nakchivan. See Nakhchivan
 nationalism and independence, 194, 268, 271–72, 275, 364
 oil industry, 161, 257, 359–60, 364–65
 Order of Lenin, 221
 Radio Svoboda, 201, 487
 scientific progress, 445
 security, 74, 88, 90, 125, 127, 129, 152, 167–68, 170, 176, 488
 social problems, 392
 Southern Azerbaijan, 64, 70–72, 86, 119, 139, 165, 271, 294–95, 451, 453, 464, 487, 516
 Soviet cultural events, 298–301, 305, 311
 sporting prowess, 449–50
 state language, 307–9
 tackling corruption, 198, 208–9, 320, 325, 329, 335, 341, 397–98, 472
 transition to Latin alphabet, 43
 and Turkey, 26
 visit by Leonid Brezhnev, 220, 321–23, 343, 349, 356–58
 visit by Luis Corvalan, 303–4

visit by Vladimir Putin, 81
 visits by international leaders, 355
 viticulture, 232, 383, 385–87
 Western interest in, 86
 Writers' Union, 287
 Azerbaijan Communist Party, 93, 97, 105, 116, 193–94, 203–4, 207–9, 220, 223, 272, 317, 364
 Azerbaijan Democratic Party, 71–72, 451–55, 459, 461–62, 464–65
 Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, 69, 271, 296
 Azerbaijani culture, 103, 107, 134–35, 137, 141, 143, 147, 167, 171, 276–79, 287, 289–92, 295, 297–98, 517–18
 language, 146, 269, 273, 276–77, 309
 Azerbaijani KGB, 96–97, 102, 105–6, 109, 113, 121, 124, 126–28, 133, 135, 149, 154–56, 295, 320, 473–74
 Aliyev's role, 36, 47, 81, 89, 149–52, 157, 159
 Armenian nationalism, 167
 arrests, 93, 95
 chairman of, 66, 89, 121
 corruption, 198
 counterintelligence, 161–62
 Domestic Personnel, 173, 175, 177, 179
 Elchibey, 283–84
 increased efficiency, 122
 Kopylov, 105
 liberalism, 138, 143–44, 146
 personnel, 176, 181, 183
 SAVAK agencies, 153–54
 Semyon Tsvigun, 116, 119, 124
 unrest and dissent, 169
 Ziya Yusifzadeh, 68
 Azerbaijani Language Protection Committee, 120
 Azerbaijani Trade Union Council, 411
 Azerbaijani Writers' Union, 167, 275, 277, 281
 Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic, 63, 70, 72–73, 80, 120, 126, 165, 173, 219–21, 297, 300, 309, 379, 400, 407
 Azerbaijan State University, 138, 260, 318, 447

B

Babazadeh, Ismayil, 139
 Baghirov, Adil, 112, 114, 176, 186
 Baghirov, Kamran, 234, 395, 450, 481–85, 493, 500
 Baghirov, Khagani, 111, 151
 Baghirov, Mir Jafar, 59, 63, 70–71, 75–76, 125, 165, 173–74, 186–87, 193, 201–2, 359, 413, 481–85, 496, 500
 arrest of Beria and removal from post, 92–93
 and Aziz Aliyev, 88, 185–86
 influence, 475
 meeting with Aliyev, 71
 trial and removal from office, 96–97, 100–102, 126
 Baghramyan, Ivan, 416
 Bagramtinsk Hydrosystem, 379
 Bahlulzadeh, Sattar, 145
 Baibakov, Nikolai, 370, 381
 Bakhshiev, Agash, 249, 251, 253, 255
 Bakikhanov, Abbasgulu, 297
 Baku, 19, 38, 57, 59, 61, 72, 75–76, 78, 80, 82–83, 114, 120, 184, 186, 293
 ADP headquarters, 414, 427, 451, 461, 505
 agriculture, 397, 403
 Alish Lambaranski, 257–58
 arts and culture, 53
 Azerbaijani Communist Party plenum, 93
 Baku Air Defence, 425–26, 431, 495, 497
 Baku-Nakhchivan railway, 17
 building and infrastructure, 182, 364–65, 375
 business elite, 217
 celebrations, galas and events, 220, 237, 259, 291, 299, 412
 conflict with Armenia, 21
 cosmopolitan city, 120–21, 279, 289, 297, 299
 ecology and environment, 46, 56, 203, 220, 364–65, 376
 education, 441–42
 fashion, 79, 504
 Festival of Soviet Literature, 412
 food shortages, 108, 155, 503

Heydar Aliyev's role in, 56, 150, 190, 217
 hotels, 354–55
 housing, 450
 industry, 193, 207, 219, 360–61, 367, 369–72, 376
 international meetings, 300–301, 304–5, 475, 491
 KGB and counterintelligence, 87, 90, 111–12, 117, 119, 128, 137, 159–61, 176, 182, 200, 316
 leadership, 26, 31, 124, 226, 411, 462, 481
 military, 156, 425, 436, 438
 oil industry, 17, 21–23, 55, 120, 137, 155, 299, 359, 365
 Order of Lenin, 221
 refugees, 72, 141, 166
 smuggling, 335–36, 338
 sport, 450
 Stavka, 433
 strategic importance, 151–52, 154
 students, 139, 161–63, 188, 417–18
 terrorism, 113
 trial of Elchibey, 283–84, 289
 Victory Day celebrations, 299–300
 visit by Brezhnev, 218–19, 321, 352–53, 355–56, 421
 visit by Kianouri, 454–55
 visit by Medvedev, 220
 visit by Richard Nixon cancelled, 355
 visit by Rostropovich, 292
 visit by Todor Zhivkov, 497
 visit by Vladimir Putin, 81
 visits from Moscow, 203
 Baku Honorary Citizen, 343
 Balakishiyev, Nadir, 109
 Balayan, Zoriy, 411
 Balayev, Alirza, 139–40, 198
 Baltic States, 190, 268, 279, 431
 Bantsrev, 96, 178–79
 Baruzdin, Sergey, 311
 Battle of Sardarabad, 406
 Bazargan, 461–63
 BBC Radio, 466, 487–88
 Beylarov, Jabbar, 90, 182
 Behbudov, Rashid, 144, 290–91, 343
 Beria, Laventiy, 70, 72–73, 91–93, 100–101, 477, 489, 517
 arrest and execution, 92–94, 100–101

Berlin, 112–13, 160, 459
 Berzinsh, Uldis, 279–80
 Bevin, Ernest, 85
 Bilasuvar, 429
 Bilgah, 16, 114, 276
 Biriya, Muhammad, 295
 Birukova, Aleksandra, 373, 421
 Blatov, Anatoly, 348
 Bobkov, Filipp, 93–94, 97, 106, 109, 115, 127, 132, 138, 140, 161, 168, 170, 410, 467, 472
 Bogoslovsky, Valentin, 226
 Bolsheviks, 20, 26, 55, 69, 92, 125, 273
 Bolshoi Theatre, 290–92
 border security, 36, 59, 66, 69, 88, 151, 156, 175, 182, 418, 425–30, 468
 Brezhnev, 203, 351, 393
 agriculture, 212
 air conditioning plant, 368
 and Akhundov, 167, 194, 203
 and Aliyev's election to the Politburo, 479, 487–89
 Aliyev's support for, 211, 343, 346, 357–58
 and Andropov, 129, 132, 322, 473–74
 anti-academic, 330–31
 assistants, 348–49
 Baku Honorary Citizen, 343
 "Brezhnevism", 315
 controversy over gifts, 352–54
 cult of personality, 344–45
 death, 471–72
 economic policy, 321
 family, 347, 349–50, 352–53
 final years, 400, 406, 477
 granting independence to local party leaders, 362
 and Heydar Aliyev, 199–200, 211, 215, 217–18, 220, 329, 346–47, 349–52
 holidays in Yalta, 499–500, 505
 illness, 343, 350
 industry, 369–70
 Kosygin Reforms, 399
 leadership qualities, 128–29, 213–15, 332
 living modestly, 348
 love of jokes, 348–49, 367–68
 and Narimanov, 296

new constitution, 413
 peacefulness, 213
 Politburo rule, 215, 225, 241, 321, 332, 350–51, 473
 reasons for success, 211–12
 and relations with Iran, 458, 469
 security, 322, 347, 479
 and Semyon Tsivgun, 124
 and Solzhenitsyn, 280, 288
 speeches, 259, 266, 321, 355–57
 succession, 472–73
 and Suslov, 267
 "swing" technique, 267, 269
 tolerance for corruption, 200, 218, 322–23
 transition from Krushchev, 102
 visits to Baku, 218–21, 321, 343, 349, 355, 421
 viticulture, 383–84
 and Yuri Andropov, 128
 bribery, 75–76, 195, 198, 200, 208–9, 218, 243–44, 316–17, 320–21, 325, 327, 329, 331–33, 395, 418
 Bulgaria, 85, 178–79, 297, 497
 Bunyadov, Ziya, 20, 137–38, 277, 515
 Bunyadzadze, Dadash, 100, 197
 bureaucracy, 136, 157, 182, 259, 333, 362, 390, 506
 Burlatsky, Fyodor, 235, 345
 Byelorussian Council of Ministers, 402

C

Carter, Jimmy, 467
 Caspian Sea, 153, 193, 359, 425
 Caucasus, 15, 32, 67–68, 78, 111, 195, 299, 303, 345, 349, 354, 435, 489
 Central Asia, 63, 218, 268, 369, 431, 489
 Chakovskiy, Aleksandr, 294, 311
 Chamanzamini, Yusuf Vezir, 95, 103
 Chazov, Evgeni, 354, 511
 Cheka. See security services
 Chekist, 113, 135, 201, 204, 270, 315–16, 319
 Chernenko, 181, 200, 225, 354
 Chernyaev, Anatoly, 344
 Chilean Communist Party, 301
 Chirac, Jacques, 293

Chubanov, Yuri, 330, 347, 350, 352–53, 357, 473
 Churchill, Winston, 85
 CIA, 87–88, 468
 cinema, 138, 241, 278–79, 296, 331, 390, 410
 Cold War, 70, 72, 80, 85, 87, 131, 152, 427, 431, 516
 collective farms, 77, 80, 95, 119, 169, 227, 268, 326, 381, 385, 389–90, 392, 395, 397, 406
 collective farm bosses, 389–90, 396
 production, 399, 403
 workers, 212, 325–26, 386, 388–89
 Communist Party, 55, 63, 99, 103, 115, 121, 124, 128, 165–66, 208, 212, 219, 223, 269, 272
 communists, 106, 114, 140–41, 168, 231, 261, 269, 301, 325, 399, 456, 462, 465, 489, 494
 corruption, 129–30, 139, 195, 198, 200–201, 207–8, 278, 303–4, 315–20, 322–23, 327–28, 332–33, 341–42, 447, 487–88
 government, 472
 nepotism, 195, 200, 208, 213, 278, 329
 Corvalán, Luis, 301, 301–3, 305
 counterintelligence, 67, 72, 78, 86, 94, 97, 106, 112–13, 143, 151, 153, 161
 departments and agents, 69, 110, 156, 163
 Heydar Aliyev head of, 93–94, 103, 105, 112–13, 115, 179, 182
 CPA Central Committee, 153, 155, 166, 168, 185–86, 194, 196, 274, 276–77, 401, 403, 410, 421–22, 451–52, 493–94
 CPA Party Control Committee, 274
 CPG Central Committee, 323, 344, 423
 CPSU, 67, 120, 132, 165, 199, 274, 404, 459, 474
 Central Committee, 150, 186, 203–4, 240, 273, 275, 296, 298, 323, 332–33, 344–45, 362, 421, 451–53, 481–82
 creative intelligentsia, 107, 132–34, 138–39, 177, 259–60, 267, 270, 276, 278, 330, 412, 494

D

dachas, 281, 321, 330, 341, 346, 348–50, 354, 401, 495–96, 499–500
 Dagestan, 144, 185–86, 425
 Danielyan, Eduard, 408–9
 Daneshian, Ghulam Yahya, 451–52, 454–59
 Danton, Georges, 126
 Dardanelles, 86
 Dashdamirov, Afrand, 299, 307, 341, 475, 510
 Dashkesan, 193, 360, 412, 419
 Dashnaks, 19–21, 168–70, 411
 DDR. See Germany
 death penalty, 114, 169, 316, 418, 488
 defectors, 86, 153
 defence, 45, 63, 104, 111, 292, 347, 366, 371–72, 430–33, 468
 Demichev, Pyotr, 266
 Demirchyan, Karen, 168, 308, 410–11, 421–22, 424, 429, 434
 destalinisation, 99, 101
 détente, 103, 213
 Dikermakher, 335–36, 339
 dissidents, 131–33, 135–37, 139–41, 143, 146–47, 151, 266–67, 269–70, 278–80, 282
 Djamalova, Dilruba, 387, 392
 Doctors' Plot, 91
 Dubrovin, Nikita, 337
 Dulles, Allen, 86
 Dzerzhinsky, 92, 204
 Dzerzhinsky Club, 102, 144, 184, 196, 263, 385

E

economy, 154–55, 219, 221, 231–32, 321, 323, 325, 341, 358–59, 361, 395, 399–400, 426–27, 443, 488

Aliyev's programme for regeneration, 376
 Artists' Union, 311, 377
 cultural renaissance, 50, 290
 Crimea, 70, 166, 217, 268, 347, 400, 499
 Czechoslovakia, 131–32, 139, 177–79, 201, 297
 development, 193, 196, 212, 215, 220–21, 246–47, 360–61, 363–64, 373, 375, 379, 399–400, 403–5, 427, 429
 education, 39–41, 44, 49, 55–56, 141, 143, 282, 403, 439, 441, 443, 445, 447, 469, 472
 Efendiyev, Sultan Majid, 100
 Efendiyev, Zaur, 159, 177
 Elchibey, Abulfaz, 140, 275, 277, 282–85, 318
 arrest by KGB (as Abulfaz Aliyev), 140, 283–85
 Elchin, 50, 142, 278, 281, 288, 294–95, 314, 377, 491
 elections, 459, 487, 492
 Electrical Engineering, 368–69, 371
 embezzlement. See corruption
 Emelyanov, N.A., 88, 91, 93, 100, 187
 empire, 195, 237, 466, 512
 Enverovich, Rainiz, 492
 environmental concerns, 46, 364, 371, 375, 379
 Ernst Thälmann Club, 30
 Eskandari, Iraj, 452–57, 459, 465
 espionage, 92, 152, 156, 170, 265
 Europe, 113–14, 213, 272
 Executive Bureau, 453–57, 459, 461–62
 exile, 132, 147, 267, 280, 454, 461–62, 464

F

Fairbanks, Douglas, 30
 fascism, 64, 73, 299
 Fifth Directorate, 72
 Fikrat, Tofiq, 40, 47
 Finland, 355
 First Five-Year Plan, 219
 fishing, 37, 185, 317, 346, 427
 Five Year Plan, 359
 Fuzuli, Mohammed, 47, 106, 156, 287–88
 foreign media, 110, 201, 208, 268, 356, 471, 487–88
 foreign policy, 7, 103, 116, 163, 213, 266, 301, 469, 489, 494
 freedom, 13, 93, 119, 251, 275, 283, 287, 301, 363, 458
 frontiers, 426–27, 431
 fuel, 155, 359, 365, 388, 390

G

Gabala, 384, 425, 432
 Gabala Radar Station, 431–33
 Gadimov, Fikrat, 30, 41, 43, 77
 Gahramanov, Farrukh, 37
 Ganja, 115, 123, 230, 250, 289, 297, 304, 373, 385, 403, 416
 Garayev, Aliheydar, 100
 Garayev, Gara, 290–91, 311–13
 Gasimov, Yunis, 35, 61
 Gasimov, Inran, 281
 Gasimov, Ismayil, 60
 Gaulle's transit, 71
 Gaziyev, Hasanbey, 44, 50
 GDR. See Germany
 General Prosecutor's Office of the USSR, 99
 Geneva Convention, 73
 Georgia, 85–86, 126–27, 165, 195, 268–69, 273–74, 303, 307, 315–16, 323, 345, 386, 421, 423–24, 510
 Germany, 68, 87–88, 112, 153, 160, 178, 213, 272, 297, 430, 449, 451, 488
 East, 114, 153
 industry, 365
 Soviet prisoners of war, 73, 87
 Ghana, 161–62
 Gilels, Emil, 311
 glasnost, 319
 Gobustan magazine, 103, 117–18, 271–72, 280
 Goethe, 42
 Gogol, Nikolai, 51
 Goja, Fikrat, 278
 Gorbatchev, Mikhail, 127, 131–32, 195, 214–15, 220, 299, 341, 345, 353–54, 421, 482, 516–17
 anti-alcohol campaign, 384
 leadership, 258
 perestroika, 211, 237, 258, 348, 352
 Gorbatcheva, Raisa, 353
 government officials, 63, 88, 107, 135, 327, 329–30, 410
 GPU (State Political Directorate), 69, 125–26
 Grachev, Andrei, 276, 344
 grape production, 32, 232, 380, 383–88, 391, 395–97, 414

vineyards, 35, 38, 232, 360, 383–86, 388, 391–92
 Great Britain, 85
Great Soviet Encyclopaedia, 274–76
 Gribachev, Nikolai, 294, 311
 Grig, Antonin, 329
 Grishin, Victor, 332
 Gromyko, Andrei, 347, 350–51, 393, 465
 Gudkov, Aleksandr Stepanovich, 425
 Guinea, 161
 Guliyev, Daniil, 270–72
 Guliyev, Eldar, 138, 278
 Guliyev, Sahib, 482
 Guliyev, Rzagulu, 78, 80
 Guliyeva, Zahra, 188, 445
 Guntekin, Rashad Nuri, 46
 Gurbanov, Allahverdi, 119–21
 Gurbanov, Shikhalı, 118, 121, 137
 Gurvich, Efim, 255, 260, 389
 Guskov, Anatoly, 93, 105, 126

H

Hajibeyov, Uzeyir, 289–91
 Hajiyev, Abdul Manaf, 51
 Hajiyev, Gasim, 45, 51
 Hajiyev, Nazim, 166–67, 516
 Hajiyev, Rauf, 311, 502
 Hajiyeva, Roza, 51
 Hamit, Abdulhag, 40
 Hamzayev, Ibrahim, 49, 52
 Hamzayeva, Zaros, 43
 Hasanali, Nariman, 275
 Hasanov, Hasan, 250–51, 298, 481, 491
 Hatamzadeh, Parviz, 320
 Helsinki Treaty, 213, 267
 Hero of Socialist Labour, 275, 311, 318, 377, 392–93
 Heydarov, Firdun, 320
 Hitler, 159, 416
 housing, 181, 213, 232, 492
 flats, 123–24, 132, 290, 426, 449–50, 491–92, 511
 shortages, 375
 human rights, 101, 106
 Hungarian Revolution, 67–68, 399
 Huseyn, Mehdi, 107
 Huseyn, Seyid, 95
 Huseynov, Bahadur, 135–36, 138, 156, 167, 173, 175
 Huseynov, Hasan, 138, 142, 173, 236

Huseynov, Ilhuseyn, 142, 154, 407
 Huseynov, Mirza Davud, 100
 Huseynov, Sabir, 115, 371, 432, 435, 507, 509
 Huseynov, Turan, 196, 233, 235–36, 245, 252, 262, 504, 513
 Huseynova, Zargalam, 45, 49, 56
 Huseynzadeh, Mehdi, 96, 217, 436
 Huseynov, Isa, 296
 hydroelectric power, 414, 427

I

Ibrahimbeyov, Magsud, 270, 342
 Ibrahimbeyov, Rustam, 138, 270, 314
 Ibrahimov, Ali Ismayilovich, 249
 Ibrahimov, Ajdar, 296
 Ibrahimov, Haji, 236
 Ibrahimov, Ismayil, 161, 196, 205, 219, 227, 244
 Ibrahimov, Mirza, 103, 117, 288, 307
 Ibrahimov, Nazim, 226, 241–42, 250, 357, 392
 Ilandagh (Snake Mountain), 50
 Ilf and Petrov, 319
 immigration, 87, 454, 456, 461
 independence, Azerbaijani, 11, 100, 201, 258, 283, 364, 372, 463–64
 industrial development, 193, 212, 232, 359–61, 363–66, 373, 384, 399–400, 414, 421, 443
 construction, 365–67, 372
 decline, 400
 energy system, 70, 372, 399
 factories, 108, 219, 221, 232, 245–46, 254–55, 316, 320, 336–37, 360–61, 366–71, 373, 375–76, 384, 414
 high-tech industries, 445
 manufacturing, 151, 153, 155, 195, 232, 373
 metallurgical, 366
 oil, 365
 prevention of hazard, 371
 projects and reforms, 360, 400
 trade and export, 403
 training, 232, 444
 Inozemtsev, Nikolai, 211, 401
 Institute of Agriculture of Azerbaijan, 193
 Institute of Literature, 135
 intelligentsia, 133, 137, 143, 146, 277,

279, 287–89, 291, 293–95, 311, 313–14, 327, 330, 489, 491
 Azerbaijan, 268, 284
 Moscow, 265, 315
 Interior Ministry, 91, 93–95, 174, 201, 279, 500, 503
 Internal Affairs Department, 126, 268, 473
 international competitions, 449–50
 internationalism, 201, 269, 276–77, 474
 Iran, 13, 15, 36, 63–64, 68, 70–72, 85–88, 91, 111, 113–14, 152–53, 427, 451–59, 461–69, 487–88
 Air Force, 431, 468
 American relations, 467
 attack on Southern Azerbaijan, 71
 Iranian intelligence, 87, 153
 Iranians in Azerbaijan, 86, 114, 451, 454
 Soviet counterintelligence, 86, 113, 173
 Soviet-Iranian relations, 70, 88, 124, 427–28, 453, 457, 459, 462, 464, 466, 468
 weapons, 465
 Iranian Azerbaijan, 65, 70, 153, 380, 451, 453, 462–64
 Iranian Marxist party, 451
 Iraq, 288
 Ismayilov, Eldar, 73, 80, 88, 100, 165, 173, 359
 Ismayilov, Ibrahim, 30, 35, 37–38, 40, 45, 47, 55–56, 59, 62, 64, 73–76, 78–80, 99–102, 173–74, 186–87
 Israel, 487
 Ivanov, Aleksandr, 346, 402, 415, 495, 499–500, 503, 505
 Ivanov-Gdlyan gang, 398

J

Jabbarli, Jafar, 51, 289, 311
 Jafarov, Jafar, 137, 272–73
 Javad, Ahmad, 95
 Javanshir, Panah Ali Khan, 15–16, 19
 Javid, Huseyn, 40, 47, 95, 103, 277, 288, 501

K

Kalbajar gold mines, 417
 Kamal, Namiq, 40, 47
 KGB Academy, 81, 90, 177, 182–83, 282

INDEX

530

531

Kaptsa, Pyotr, 146
 Karaulov, Andrei, 60, 233, 251, 278–79, 320, 323, 326, 344–45, 366, 395, 414
 Karim, Novruz, 125
 Karimov, Shekir, 226, 242
 Kasparov, Garry, 311, 313–14
 Kataev, Valentin, 294
 Kazakhstan, 187, 304, 405
 Kaznacheev, Viktor, 353–54, 516
 Keldysh, Mstislav, 311
 Kengerli, Ehsan khan, 39
 Keropyan, Marie-Elizabeth, 335–36, 339
 Kevorkov, Boris, 226, 411, 449

KGB
 Aliyev's promotion, 90
 anti-corruption, 322
 anti-nationalism, 266, 410
 border security, 156
 bureaucracy, 136
 Chairman, 93, 104–5, 107, 124, 127, 129, 143, 145, 147, 160, 175, 177, 182, 198, 201
 Directorate, 85, 87, 89–90, 94, 97, 101, 104, 106, 127–28, 131–33, 135, 137–39, 141, 168, 170
 Graduate School / FSB Academy, 81
 human rights, 106
 influence in the state system, 131
 investigation into Veche, 267
 Krushchev's vision, 93–94
 'localisation,' 93
 nationalist groups, 167–69
 purges, 95, 104
 questioning of Brezhnev's daughter, 357
 security services, 64–67, 69, 80–82, 86, 88, 92–94, 96, 98, 102, 104–6, 112–14, 124–26, 142–44, 150–52, 173–78
 structure and divisions, 69
 surveillance, 132–35, 266
 tensions with creative intelligentsia, 107
 treatment of protesters, 107, 116–18, 168
 USSR, 87, 89, 127–29, 131, 138, 143, 149, 152, 154, 159, 177–78, 198, 200, 471, 476

KGB Academy, 81, 90, 177, 182–83, 282

Khalilov, Gurban, 234, 432
 Khanlarova, Zeynab, 311
 Khazri, Nabi, 270, 288
 Khomeini, 452–54, 456–59, 461–65
 Krushchev, 92–95, 99, 101–4, 107–9,
 115–16, 128, 131–33, 194, 209, 211–
 12, 215, 265–66, 344–45, 350–51,
 516–17
 thaw, 102–3, 116–17, 161, 165
 Kianouri, Noureddin, 452–59, 461, 465
 Kiev, 81, 112, 258, 444
 kill lists, 101
 Kirilenko, Andrei, 351, 466, 472
 Kirsanov, Yakov, 250, 261
 Kislovodsk, 182, 190, 354, 450
 Klepikova, Elena, 195, 267, 517
 Kochinyan, Anton, 167, 405–6
 Komsomol, 63, 75, 104, 116, 118, 120,
 139, 174–75, 285, 300, 377, 403,
 439–40, 449
 Konstantinov, Anatoly, 497
 Kopylov, Fyodor, 104–6, 126
 Korea, 371
 Kostandov, Leonid, 371
 Kosygin, Aleksei, 123, 128, 215, 323,
 350–51, 360–61, 369–70, 393, 399,
 402
 Kovtunov, Aleksandr, 246, 380, 421, 425,
 429, 469, 509
 Kozlov, 127, 236, 272
 Krasilnikov, Vitalij, 284–85, 496
 Krasin, Viktor, 267
 Kremlin, 91, 93, 193, 195, 198, 201–2,
 211, 266–67, 308–9, 349–50, 392,
 451–52, 488–89, 494, 516–18
 chronicles, 266, 344, 516
 hospital, 482
 leaders, 268, 471
 Kunayev, Dinmuhamed, 219, 346, 350,
 478
 Kurdistan, 407, 462–63
 Kuwait, 487

L

Lake Adilagha, 36, 38, 50
 Lakhridi, Amrali, 457, 464
 Lemberansky, Alish, 219, 257–58
 Leonidovna, Galina, 357
 Leonov, Leonid, 293–94

Lermontov, Mikhail, 12, 298
 Libya, 465
Literaturnaya Gazeta, 26, 118, 239, 311,
 328–29, 331
 Lukyanov, Anatoli Ivanovich, 421

M

Magomayev, Muslim, 143, 228, 289,
 291–93, 311, 517
 Mammadov, A., 89, 141
 Mammadov, Aydin, 31
 Mammadov, Dovlat, 30, 41, 45, 50
 Mammadov, Gambay, 59–60, 163, 338,
 395
 Mammadov, Isa, 75, 78–79, 190, 396,
 482
 Mammadov, Magsud, 140
 Mammadov, Mais, 73, 326, 341, 381, 385,
 390–91
 Mammadov, Muslim, 226
 Mammadov, Soltan, 318
 Mammadov, Suleyman, 74
 Mammadov, Yuri, 231, 423, 430, 449
 Mammadov, Zohrab, 169
 Mammadova, Sidiga, 385
 Mammadzadeh, Ramiz, 109, 139–41,
 175, 196, 204, 308
 Mammadzadeh, Siyavush, 304
 Mammadguluzadeh, Jalil, 40, 47, 51, 289
 Margaryan, Gurgen, 336–39
 Markov, Georgy, 294
 Maximov, Vladimir, 133
 Maximov, Yuri, 434
 Medvedev, Roy, 95, 128–29, 132, 214,
 221, 268–69, 278, 315, 320, 322,
 344, 350, 355, 471, 473
 Medvedev, Vladimir, 214–15, 220, 322,
 347–49, 352, 471, 479
 Mehdiyev, Ramiz, 8, 228, 240, 243, 289,
 296, 319, 481, 483, 492–93, 507
 Mekhmandarov, Samedbey, 69, 125
 Mikhailevski, Vladimir, 450
 Mikoyan, Anastas, 166
 military, troops, 69–71, 80, 85, 124,
 428–29, 431, 467–69, 510
 Military Councils, 63, 421–23, 425,
 428–29
 military facilities, 151, 437
 Mirzajanov, Balabey, 504

Monte Carlo, 487
 Morozkov, Vladimir, 261, 319, 372, 388,
 436
Moskva journal, 103, 267
 Mozambique, 371
 Muradaliyev, Fazil, 226
 Musabeyov, Gazarfar, 100
 Musayev, Fuad, 482–83
 Musayev, Sanan, 163
 Mushfig, Mikayil, 95, 103
 music, 143, 187, 290–92, 346, 447, 497,
 501–2, 517
 Mustafayev, Arif, 260, 475, 505
 Mustafayev, Feyruz, 249
 Mustafayev, Imam, 97, 105, 193–94, 223,
 249, 269, 307, 360, 451
 Mustafayev, Vagif, 99, 111, 185, 220

N

Najafov, Fakhraddin, 16
 Nagorno-Karabakh, 151, 165–69, 197,
 246, 258, 405, 411–16, 448, 484–85,
 491, 493, 515
 Najafov, Niyazi, 226
 Nakhchivan, 7, 15, 17, 19–22, 25–27,
 29–33, 37, 39, 46, 61–63, 166
 40th Anniversary of Republic, 149–
 50, 190
 agriculture, 32, 386, 397
 Aliyev's childhood, 31, 35, 37–38,
 41–44
 Aliyev's nostalgia for, 42, 506
 anniversary of the Republic celebrations,
 149
 arts and culture, 29–30, 50–52, 288
 Autonomous Republic, 26–27, 63,
 182, 190, 229, 412, 427–28
 border with Iran, 26, 36, 59, 63–65,
 162, 182, 412, 418, 427–28
 climate, 32
 education, 39–40, 44, 46, 51, 53, 56,
 376
 industry and infrastructure, 30, 373,
 429
 military operations, 59, 425, 431,
 436–37, 469
 Nakhchivan Khanate, 19, 25, 435
 prisoners of war, 73
 refugees, 72

scientists, 41
 security services, 70–72, 74–75, 136
 territorial disputes, 27
 Nakhchivan Revolutionary Committee, 26
 Naples, 291
 Napoleon, 342, 513
 Narimanov, Nariman, 103, 125, 194,
 197, 296, 475, 477
 Centenary Celebrations, 295
Nash Sovremennik magazine, 103, 267
 Nasimi, Imadaddin, 290–91
 Nasiminsky District, 226
 Nasirov, Mustafa, 175, 182, 425–27, 437
 nationalism, 118–20, 134, 136, 138, 141,
 167–69, 194, 200–201, 268–71, 277,
 283–84, 296–97, 301, 410–12, 451
 NATO, 86, 160
 navy, Caspian Fleet, 151
 Nazarov, Mikhail, 225, 402
 Nazarovich, Enver, 252
 Nazi Germany, 63–64, 73, 87, 95–96,
 168, 185
 Neftchi Football Club, 251, 423, 449–50
 Nenashev, 357–58
 newspapers, 136, 226, 261, 344, 348,
 364, 377, 464
 coverage of corruption, 333
 coverage of Hungary 1956, 67
 influence of foreign press, 129, 490
 New York Times, 209, 412, 488, 490
 Nikonorov, Anatoly, 267
 Nixon, Richard, 131, 355
 Niyazi, 290–91, 311
 Nizami, 43, 81, 141, 196, 273, 297–99,
 304
 NKAR (Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous
 Region), 165, 167, 170–71, 408,
 411–12, 414, 417, 448–49
 NKGB (People's Commissariat of State
 Security), 69, 71, 80, 125
 NKVD (People's Commissariat for
 Internal Affairs), 30, 57, 60, 65, 69,
 77–78, 80, 94, 96, 101, 125, 173
 North Azerbaijan, 283
 North Caucasus, 19, 218, 220, 269, 299,
 425
 Novikov, Ivan (Deputy Chairman of
 USSR Council of Ministers), 225,
 369–70
 Novikov, Vladimir, 369

Novruz bayram (Spring holiday), 37–38, 121
 Novy Mir magazine, 267
 NSM (National Security Ministry), 60, 67, 72, 81, 90–91, 94, 113, 173–74, 187
 Nuriyev, Eldar, 150

O

October Revolution, 17, 219, 272–73, 343, 393
 oil industry, production of crude oil, 376
 Operation Alagez, 87, 89
 Operation Douglas, 110–11
 Operation Duel, 87–88, 90
 Order of Lenin, 138, 149, 219, 221, 343, 377, 392–93, 411
 Osipov, Vladimir, 267

P

Pakistan, 68, 111
 Palace of Culture, 149, 376, 389
 pan-Turkism, 40, 91, 134, 271, 288
 Paris, 11, 14, 68, 289, 293, 339, 456
 Pasternak, Boris, 266, 280
 patriotism, 189, 219, 278, 392
 Pavlov, 118
 peace, 13, 62, 189, 213, 279, 291–92, 300, 313, 344, 442, 488
 Peasants' Theatre, 51
 Pedagyan, 71
 People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, 69, 125
 People's Commissariat of State Security, 64–65, 69, 73, 125
 People's Front, 318, 428
 People's Party of Iran, 451, 453–55, 457, 459, 461–65. See also Tudeh
 perestroika, 214, 341–42, 345, 386, 404
 persecution, 100, 135, 265, 275, 281, 418, 462
 Persian Gulf, 64, 71, 467
 petrochemical industry, 154, 169, 359, 364–66, 390
 Petrovna, Viktoria, 353
 physical education, 45, 423, 449–50
 Pikul, Valentin, 267
 Pishevari, Seyid Jafar, 64, 70–72, 451
 Pitovranov, Evgeny, 94

R

Radio Svoboda, 201–2, 208, 268, 363, 487–88
 Radist, 87–88

Pleshakov, Piotr, 431–32
 PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organisation), 459
 Podgorny, Nikolai, 115–16, 128, 351
 poetry, 40, 47, 103, 118, 134–36, 271, 273, 275, 279–81, 287–88, 290, 295, 297–98, 304, 506–7
 Pogosyan, Genrikh, 411
 pogroms, 21, 266
 poison pen letters, 240–41
 Poladzadeh, Polad, 481
 Politburo, 128–30, 294–95, 298, 322–23, 344–46, 350–52, 368–70, 412–13, 421–23, 433, 472–75, 479, 481–82, 487–92, 498–500
 political immigrants, 452–53, 459, 461–62, 464
 Polyanchikho, Viktor, 198
 Ponomarev, Boris, 465
 Ponomarev, Nikolai, 311, 413
 Popular Front, 290
 post-Soviet era, 290
 post-Stalin era, 174, 193, 259, 283
 Prague, 139, 177, 201
 Pravda newspaper, 85, 133, 183, 319–20, 345, 388, 393, 458
 prisoners, 68, 73, 88, 92, 95, 100, 169, 267
 productivity, 363–64
 propaganda, 86, 109, 115, 131–32, 136, 138, 168, 251, 260, 266, 271, 274, 279, 282, 284
 property, 20, 195, 325–26, 332, 338, 397
 Prosecutor's Office, 60–61, 75, 78, 95, 101, 170
 protests, 62, 70, 100, 107–10, 116, 140, 268, 308, 418–19
 publishing, 242, 273, 275, 280
 Pugachev, Yury, 236–38, 338, 397
 Pugo, Boris, 199
 purges, 64–65, 95, 99, 101, 104, 125–26, 197, 316, 478
 Pushkin, 50, 297–98
 Putin, Vladimir, 81

R

Radio Svoboda, 201–2, 208, 268, 363, 487–88
 Radist, 87–88

Rahimov, Suleyman, 277
 Rahimov, Kamran, 42, 228, 396, 429
 Rahumanov, Huseyn, 100
 Rajabli, Hadi, 387
 Rashidov, Sharaf, 350, 367, 398, 488
 Rasizadeh, Shamil, 239, 241, 243, 245, 247
 Rasulova, Lydia, 245, 253, 380, 385, 389, 443, 447, 502
 rebellion, 283, 307–8
 Red Army, 80, 125, 435
 Red Banners, 259, 293, 377, 400, 411, 425
 reforms, 91, 103, 130, 198, 209, 212, 215, 225, 228, 316, 360–61, 400, 439
 refugees, 21–22, 72, 162, 295, 451, 457
 religion, 39, 83, 136–37, 440, 452, 454, 457
 repatriation, 73, 153, 166, 170, 288, 461–62
 Re-Stalinisation, 265
 revolution, 29, 39–40, 55, 185, 212, 272, 290, 452, 454, 457, 461–65
 Romania, 70, 297
 Romanov, Grigory, 402
 Rostropovich, Mstislav, 292–93
 Rudenko, Roman, 101
 Ryazanov, Eldar, 325
 Rza, Khalil, 117, 135–36
 Rza, Rasul, 103, 117, 273–76, 288
 Rzayev, Anar, 270–71, 273, 277–78, 280–81, 314, 517
 Rzayev, Novruz, 125–26, 423, 517

S

Sabir, 46, 176, 273, 297
 Sadykhov, Chingiz, 150
 Sailov incident, 318–19
 Salahov, Tahir, 144–46, 149, 196, 199, 271, 287, 314
 Salamov, Albert, 122, 149, 176, 183–84
 Sanjabi, Karim, 453, 461
 SAVAK (Ministry for Iranian Security), 86, 114, 153, 156, 463
 Schiller, 51
 Second World War, 290, 299, 338, 359, 406, 416
 Selimzadeh, Akram, 105, 116, 119, 162–63, 177–78, 284–85, 335, 337–38, 408
 Samedoglu, Vagif, 279
 Semichastny, Vladimir, 104, 128–29, 166, 174, 236–37, 267
 Semyonov, Yulian, 143
 Serov, Ivan, 104
 Seven-Year Plan, 123
 Severnaya North State Power Plant, 360
 Seyidov, Hasan, 199, 234, 244, 254, 261, 323, 330, 341, 375, 380, 395, 401, 483–84, 507, 510
 Shafiyev, Sabir, 204
 Shaginyan, Marietta, 412
 Shakespeare, 51, 501
 Shakhab Quarter, 29
 Shakhnazarov, Georgi, 353
 Sharov, Mikhail, 311
 Shaumyan, Levon, 274
 Shchelokov, Nikolai, 279–80, 322, 330, 473
 Shcherbytsky, Vladimir, 308
 Shelepin, Aleksandr, 104–6, 128–29, 174, 267
 Shelest, Petro, 128–29, 219
 Shamakhi Region, 226, 318–19
 Shevardnadze, Eduard, 200, 269, 303, 308, 315, 323–24, 341, 344, 349, 401, 421, 423–24, 434, 488
 Sheykhzamanov, Mammadbaghir, 125
 Shirin, Eyyub, 125
 Shirvanin, Seyid Azim, 196
 Shkitov, Sasha, 408
 Sholokhov, Mikhail, 282, 291
 Shostakovich, 266
 Shushinsky, Firudin, 134
 Sidgi, Mohammad Taghi, 39
 Simonov, Konstantin, 311
 Smirnov, Lev, 372
 smuggling, 320, 335–38
 social conditions, 361
 Solovyov, Vladimir, 127, 195, 267, 269, 316, 512
 Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr, 270, 280–81, 292
 South Caucasus, 25, 63, 307–8, 369, 433, 435
 leadership, 201, 240, 315, 475
 military, 80, 156, 175, 421–23, 425, 428, 431, 433, 437

535

Southern Azerbaijan, 25, 70–71, 294, 451, 469
 Southern Strategic Direction, 432–33
 Soviet Academy of Sciences, 331
 Soviet Union, 127, 421, 434, 443
 after collapse, 13, 27
 agriculture, 79, 401–2
 Aliyev's promotion to Politburo, 475–76, 479, 488–89
 Andropov, 472–73
 anti-corruption, 209, 317, 333
 Azerbaijani agriculture, 387
 Azerbaijani goods, 373
 Azerbaijanis studying in, 443
 Azerbaijan's place in, 120, 208, 238, 283, 291, 295
 border disputes, 425, 427
 Brezhnev's leadership, 211, 213, 219–20, 225, 345
 bureaucracy, 136
 Cold War, 85–86, 431
 collapse and aftermath, 69, 133, 269, 272, 428
 conflict with Iran and Turkey, 36
 constitution, 307–8
 Dashnak agents, 170
 economic reforms, 404
 economy, 361–62, 364
 education, 40, 49
 ethnic issues, 268
 film 'The Interrogation,' 279
 food crisis, 107
 foreign espionage, 152
 foreign intelligence services, 87
 Gorbachev, 353
 housing, 375
 imports, 384
 industry, 366–67, 372
 internal trade, 381
 international students, 161–62
 and Iran, 295
 Iran, 71–72, 86, 452, 454, 457–58, 461, 464–66, 469, 471
 KGB, 67, 99, 106, 132, 198–200
 Kosygin Reforms, 360, 399
 Krushchev's trip to USA, 103–4
 leadership, 198
 literature, 103
 military and economic aid, 64
 military education, 45

Muslim population, 488
 need for change, 401
 oil, 365
 oil industry, 71, 359
 in operation in Azerbaijan, 437
 party leaders, 220
 perestroika, 341
 propaganda, 131, 146
 pseudo-academics, 331
 recognition of Aliyev's achievements, 392
 relationship with the West, 103
 relations with Iran, 63
 repatriates, 73, 153–54
 secret millionaires, 319
 security services, 65
 Solzhenitsyn, 281
 Soviet Encyclopaedia, 274–76
 Soviet Literature Festival, 297, 304
 sport, 45
 terrorism, 409
 Turkey, 87
 victories, 70
 weapons, 465
 World War II, 59, 73, 85
 sport, 45–46, 266, 423, 449–50
 Stalin, Josef, 9, 70–72, 75, 85–86
 death and successors, 91–92, 99, 237, 488
 policy in Southern Azerbaijan, 165
 Stalinist era, 88, 94, 99, 102, 185, 241, 277, 343, 350–51, 477
 Stalin Prize, 257
 Stalinism, 40, 47, 55, 92, 99–100, 102, 117, 175, 265
 State Committee for Publishing in the Soviet Union, 242–43, 357–58
 State Committee for Sport and Physical Education, 423, 450
 State University of Azerbaijan, 283, 329
 Stavka (Soviet Military General Headquarters), 432–34
 Stavropol, 220, 333, 353–54
 Stepanakert, 167–70, 226, 246, 268, 408–9, 414–15
 St. Petersburg, 81–82, 185, 219, 444.
 See also Leningrad
 Stravinsky, 271
 students, 40, 44–46, 116, 139, 318, 435, 438–39, 446–48

dissident, 139, 283–84, 307, 439
 international, 161–63
 killed in Baku, 417
 studying abroad, 153, 372, 444
 Sudaplatov, Pavel, 91–92
 Suleymanly, Bakhtiyar, 106
 Suleymanly, Mowlud, 117–18, 259, 281, 287
 Suleimenov, Olzhas, 14, 303–4, 477
 Sulkevich, Samedbek, 69
 Sultanov, Agabey, 257
 Sultanov, Hamid, 100
 Sumgait, 109–10, 116, 120, 154, 193, 290, 336, 360, 391
 Sumgait protest, 109–10, 116
 Supreme Court, 95, 174, 285
 Surkov, Aleksei, 311
 surveillance, 112, 117, 131–32, 151–52, 265–66, 347, 468
 Suslov, Mikhail, 93, 166, 200, 266–67, 291, 296, 344, 393, 406, 465
 Syria, 290, 301, 465

T

Tabriz, 71, 152–53, 461
 Taghizadeh, Namiq, 233, 252, 503, 505
 Tairov, Leonid, 388
 Tajikistan, 13, 119, 136, 373
 Talibov, Vasil, 32
 Talysh-Mughan Republic, 428
 Tariverdiyev, Ramiz, 260
 Tatiyev, 481–83
 Tbilisi, 19, 56, 112, 197, 268, 308, 323, 425, 428, 433–34
 technology, 132, 154, 156, 232, 363–64, 366, 368–69, 372, 380, 404, 445
 Tehran, 71, 85, 153, 451, 456–58, 464–65, 467–68
 terrorism, 64, 91, 113, 123, 169–70, 409–10, 424
 1973 Moscow explosions, 410
 Telman Club, 50, 52–53
 theatre, 49–53, 55, 117, 143, 257, 272, 278, 289–90, 314, 346, 414, 502
 Tikhonov, Nikolai, 225, 323, 402, 422, 429, 476, 487–88
 Tolstoy, Leo, 10, 50
 trade, 25, 94, 218, 230, 317, 381, 400, 402–4, 503

U

Ukraine, 73, 90, 92, 101, 106, 114, 119, 128, 166, 219, 268, 279, 292, 369, 371
 nationalism, 119
 Ukrainian Communist Party, 308
 Ukrainian KGB, 487
 Ulduz, magazine, 121, 278
 Ulku, Irfan, 56–57, 65, 68, 518
 Ulntsev, Robert, 284
 Ulyanovsk Civil Aviation School, 430
 Union of Soviet Writers, 291, 293–95, 297

United Kingdom, 63
 British Cabinet, 63, 468
 British Secret Service, 92
 United Nations, 268, 298, 300
 United States of America, 13, 64, 87, 107, 111, 141, 156, 276, 300, 370, 399, 457, 464–69, 487

agricultural production, 108
 aircraft and Douglas S-16, 110-11,
 467-68

American citizens of Azerbaijani
 descent, 141
 bases and agents, 86, 152, 156,
 160-61, 467
 embassies, 111, 152, 467-68
 espionage, 70, 110, 161, 170
 films and broadcasts, 30, 488
 hostages in Tehran, 468
 and the "Iron Curtain", 86
 oil industry, 154
 opposition in Southern Azerbaijan,
 86-87, 516

President Nixon's visit to Soviet
 Union, 355
 press and journalism, 141, 295, 488
 relations with Iran, 86, 452, 456,
 458, 464, 467-69

Urud, 17, 19, 23, 36, 51, 56, 422, 518
 USSR. See Soviet Union
 Ustunov, Dmitri, 215, 347, 350-51, 430,
 433-35

Uzbekistan, 136, 237, 268, 333, 341,
 347, 368, 373, 383, 387, 398, 488

V

Vahabzadeh, Bakhtiyar, 103
 Vaikhir water reservoir, 362
 Veche magazine, 267
 Veliyev, Jafar, 505, 511
 Vazirov, Heydar, 100
 Victory Day celebrations, 299-300
 Vietnam, 371
 Vishnevskaya, Galina, 292
 viticulture, 232, 303, 376, 383-86, 391,
 397, 414, 505
 Volgas, 30, 118, 326, 500

Vurghun, Samed, 289, 291, 294, 297

W

Walker, Martin, 198
 weapons, 63, 110, 116, 131, 267, 372,
 408, 437, 458, 463
 Katyusha rocket launcher, 359
 nuclear, 85
 YAK-3 fighter jet, 359
 Wehrmacht, 159-60
 White House, 467-68
 wine, 78, 232, 303, 379-81, 383-84,
 505
 Writers' Union, 59, 107, 117-18, 259,
 270, 281, 287, 294

Y

Yakir, Pyotr, 267
 Yalta, 182, 346, 496, 499
 Yerevan, 19, 21-22, 56, 166-67, 170,
 185, 337, 405-8, 410, 412, 414-15,
 422, 427, 431, 516
 Yunost magazine, 103, 267
 Yusifzadeh, Ziya, 66, 68, 88, 99, 104,
 106, 111-12, 127, 146, 176, 181,
 227, 236, 284, 489

Z

Zakharov, Oleg, 214
 Zamanov, Abhas, 117, 140-41, 284, 335,
 418
 Zangezur, 15-17, 19-23, 25-26
 Zangilan District, 19, 106, 422, 427
 Zardab Region, 262
 Zemtsov, Ilya, 68, 513
 Zenkovich, Nikolai, 143, 199, 237-38, 359
 Zeppelin Academy, 87