

# **The Contemporary History of Azerbaijan in the Interpretation of Politicians: Heydar Aliyev**

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Every event that takes place around us becomes, after a certain period of time, an object of historical inquiry. The study, analysis, and evaluation of such objects often require access to a range of classified, personal, and state-level documents. Researchers are generally able to obtain these documents only after approximately seventy years have passed since the events in question. It is assumed that within seventy years, the individuals who participated in those events will no longer be alive, which makes it possible to study them without intruding upon private lives.

Despite the fact that at least seventy years are typically required for an event to become a subject of historical research, even the most recent events are reflected in Azerbaijani history textbooks. Although both participants and observers of these events are still alive, the events are often significantly distorted. This is because such representations are intended for generations born after the events themselves. For this reason, the authorities assume that they can present contemporary political processes as a part of history in whatever manner they choose.

Slightly more than thirty years have passed since the events of 1990 to 1993. This means that a generation has emerged in Azerbaijan that did not witness these events and learns about them through the narrative provided by the authorities. However, the parents and grandparents of this generation were either observers or participants in those events. How they

remember these events depends on their memory, their analytical abilities, and their personal interests. From this perspective, it is of particular interest to examine how the politicians of that period interpreted and assessed the political processes of the early 1990s, which have not yet fully become history but have had a profound impact on the current social situation in Azerbaijan.

In Azerbaijan, the tradition of producing personal sources such as memoirs, recollections, and correspondence is not well developed. Politicians, in particular, have been largely unproductive in this regard. Of the four politicians who were represented in the Azerbaijani leadership between 1990 and 1993 (Abdurrahman Vezirov, Ayaz Mutallibov, Abulfaz Elchibey (Aliyev), and Heydar Aliyev), only one, Vezirov, has left memoirs. Although Aliyev did not write memoirs, nearly all of his speeches, interviews, and addresses have been published in book form. In these speeches, Aliyev interpreted and evaluated the political processes in which he was both a participant and an observer from his personal point of view.

This article is devoted to how Heydar Aliyev interpreted the major political transformations that took place in Azerbaijan between 1990 and 1993. It reflects how a Soviet bureaucrat who led both Soviet Azerbaijan and independent Azerbaijan perceived the struggle for power, how he defined and evaluated his own place and role within that struggle, and under what circumstances and conditions he returned to power.

### **The Years 1990–1993 Through the Eyes of Heydar Aliyev**

Heydar Aliyev was the 11th First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Soviet Azerbaijan and the third President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. He did not produce any memoirs or other personal narrative sources regarding his political career. However, a 38-volume collection titled *Our Independence Is Eternal*, consisting of his speeches, addresses, interviews, and statements, was

published by Azerbaijani State Publishing House *Azərnəşr* between 1997 and 2011. In order to reconstruct the contemporary history of Azerbaijan through Aliyev's perspective, the speeches, interviews, statements, and appeals contained in the first volume of this collection have been used.

In October 1987, Heydar Aliyev was removed, without prior warning, from his position as a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and two days later from his post as First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR. Over the following three years, he repeatedly attempted to establish contact with General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, but these efforts were unsuccessful. On 19 January 1990, Gorbachev himself called Aliyev regarding the situation in Azerbaijan. Aliyev states that he does not wish to go into the details of this conversation. It may be assumed that Gorbachev blamed him for the tensions in Azerbaijan and that the conversation ended in a harsh tone; one day later, Soviet troops were deployed to Baku.[\[1\]](#) Aliyev asserts that after his dismissal, he was not permitted to return to Azerbaijan. He does not specify exactly when he returned but notes that in May 1991, he came to Baku to attend the funeral of his elder brother, Huseyn Aliyev. At that time, he was already serving as Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Nakhchivan. Although Aliyev considered Nakhchivan his homeland, he referred to this period of his life as a "three-year period of exile."[\[2\]](#)

Official documents indicate that no prohibition was placed on Aliyev's return to Azerbaijan. However, the leadership of the republic was seriously concerned about his political ambitions. As a result, when the position of president was established at a meeting of the Supreme Soviet of the Azerbaijan SSR in May 1990, Ayaz Mutallibov, the head of the republic, succeeded in incorporating into the constitution a special clause setting the maximum age for presidential candidates at 70, thereby barring Aliyev from running for the

presidency. Aliyev had been in Azerbaijan since 1990 and, in the September elections of that year to the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Azerbaijan, he put forward his candidacy from the Nehram electoral district No. 340 in the Babek district of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and was elected as a deputy. One year later, he became Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Nakhchivan ASSR. Aliyev states that 60.000 people gathered to welcome him in Nakhchivan, chanting "A-li-yev!".[\[3\]](#) It should be noted that, according to official data, the population of the Nakhchivan ASSR at that time was approximately 294.000. If 60.000 people indeed participated in welcoming him, this would constitute 20.4 percent of the population of the autonomous republic.[\[4\]](#)

Aliyev provides extensive information in many of his speeches and interviews about the conditions in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic and his activities during the period when he served as Chairman of the Supreme Soviet there. He states that at that time the population of Nakhchivan suffered from a lack of electricity and gas, and that the situation was particularly severe during the winter. He notes that, in order to supply the population with fuel for their hearths and avoid freezing, 70 percent of Nakhchivan's forests were cut down.[\[5\]](#) According to Aliyev, this problem was artificially created by the Azerbaijani authorities, specifically the Azerbaijan Popular Front, which deliberately maintained a blockade of Nakhchivan in order to turn the population against him.[\[6\]](#) In another interview, Aliyev remarks that the Popular Front government feared him and believed that the difficult living conditions in Nakhchivan would help remove him from power.[\[7\]](#)

Aliyev states that in order to resolve these everyday problems, he mobilized his "former connections," traveling to Iran and Türkiye and securing assistance from both countries in the form of financial aid and raw materials. He emphasizes that the President of Türkiye, Suleyman Demirel, provided him with a loan of 100 million dollars, and that the President of Iran, Ali Rafsanjani, also assisted him.[\[8\]](#) Aliyev considers

two achievements to be his greatest successes during his time in power in Nakhchivan. The first was reaching an agreement with the President of Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, that Armenian forces would not attack Nakhchivan. The second was the withdrawal of Soviet border troops from the territory of Nakhchivan. Given that Nakhchivan shares a 300-kilometer border with Armenia, it would have been extremely difficult for the region to engage in military confrontation with Armenia; for this reason, the agreement was received with great relief by the local population.[\[9\]](#) Aliyev states that he personally took control of the weapons of the border troops and the motorized rifle division stationed in Nakhchivan and transferred them to the Minister of Defense of Nakhchivan.[\[10\]](#)

A number of factors contributed to Aliyev's return to political power in Azerbaijan. Among them, two played a particularly significant role: the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the intensification of political struggle among the republic's political forces against the background of this conflict. In some cases, this struggle escalated into armed confrontation. Two such confrontations, namely those between Surat Huseynov and the Popular Front government, and between Alikram Humbatov and the Popular Front, followed by Aliyev, were especially important in facilitating Aliyev's return to power and the consolidation of his authority. In his speeches, Aliyev offers extensive reflections on both conflicts.

When discussing his return to political power in Azerbaijan, Aliyev emphasizes that it occurred after repeated and insistent invitations from President Elchibey, followed by several instances in which airplanes were sent to Nakhchivan to bring him to Baku.[\[11\]](#) In this context, Aliyev also clarifies his relationship with the Popular Front. He notes that while he was in power in Nakhchivan, it was he who appointed members of the Popular Front to positions, but later they failed to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of those offices. Aliyev believed that the Popular Front never had a broad social base. The organization had emerged in 1988 in the

context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and opposed the communist regime. The inability of the Soviet state to resolve the Karabakh issue led to public dissatisfaction, and the Popular Front articulated these grievances, which is why it initially enjoyed widespread support.[\[12\]](#) Aliyev associates the decisive consolidation of public support around the Popular Front with the failed attempt by Mutallibov to return to power in May 1992. He argues that this ill-considered move provoked public discontent, leading the population to side with the Popular Front, and in the elections held in June, Elchibey was elected President of Azerbaijan.

Aliyev claims that this election was falsified and asserts that, in reality, the people did not elect Elchibey. He argues that “the Popular Front did not come to power through a normal democratic struggle as a political party.”[\[13\]](#) According to Aliyev, after coming to power, Elchibey appointed members of the Azerbaijan Popular Front to all positions while continuing to remain its leader. Aliyev states: “Abulfaz Aliyev believed that if he was the chairman of the Popular Front and had been elected president, then he could appoint members of the Popular Front to all leading positions.”[\[14\]](#) Addressing the cadre policy of the Popular Front government, Aliyev remarks: “These people, who were junior researchers and writers, did not understand what the state is. Yet they spoke loudly about freedom, liberty, and justice; and what was the result? They all turned to theft.” Aliyev further states:

*During my telephone conversations with Elchibey from Nakhchivan, as well as when I met him in February and later, already in June, during our subsequent meeting, I told him that he was making a very serious political mistake. Once he was elected president, he should have stepped down as chairman of the Popular Front, because he had been elected president not by the Popular Front but by the people of Azerbaijan. However, unfortunately, he not only gave preference to the Popular Front but relied entirely and exclusively on it.*[\[15\]](#)

Referring to their February meeting, Aliyev notes that he criticized the governing abilities of those in power: "Such a policy is doomed to failure." However, Elchibey, in his words, responded very thoughtlessly:

*'We are learning how to govern. Let the inexperienced gain experience. If they fail, we will dismiss them and appoint others in their place.'* I said: *'Where has it ever been seen that you learn governance by practicing on the people? You are conducting experiments on them.'* [\[16\]](#)

In his interviews and speeches, Aliyev also provides insight into his attitude toward Elchibey. He states that he was never in opposition to him. He met him for the first time in February 1993 and had not known him personally before that meeting. During this meeting, Aliyev claims that Elchibey did not show him sufficient attention as Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic and did not provide assistance to Nakhchivan. Moreover, he adds that the Popular Front imposed a blockade on Nakhchivan in order to undermine him, which became an important factor influencing their relationship. According to Aliyev, there was no harsh confrontation between them. [\[17\]](#)

Aliyev explains that he came to Baku at Elchibey's request because, after nearly a year in power, the Popular Front realized that the situation was deteriorating and that the public would turn against them. [\[18\]](#) The immediate cause of the crisis, however, was related to Surat Huseynov. After arriving in Baku, discussions were held regarding which position Aliyev would assume. He declined the initial offer to become Prime Minister. On 11 June 1993, after Isa Gambar resigned as Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, deputies proposed that Aliyev take this position. He stated that he first wished to meet with Huseynov before making a decision. After meeting with Huseynov, Aliyev returned to Baku and, on 15 June, accepted the position offered to him. [\[19\]](#)

Aliyev states that he first met Surat Huseynov on 13 June 1993. At that time, Huseynov had already served for a year as Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Azerbaijan and as the President's Plenipotentiary Representative. Aliyev asserts that on 4 June, armed units of the Azerbaijan Popular Front carried out a provocation against Huseynov and his military unit. Following this incident, Huseynov began demanding the resignation of Elchibey and his team. The president complied with some of these demands: the Prime Minister (Panah Huseynov), the Chairman of Parliament (Isa Gambar), the Minister of Defense (Rahim Gaziev), the Minister of Internal Affairs (Abdulla Allahverdiyev), and the Minister of National Security (Fakhreddin Tahmazov) all resigned.[\[20\]](#) Aliyev states that he spent the entire night discussing the situation with Huseynov:

*The next morning, he took me into the city. I saw the traces of the fighting, destroyed buildings, apartments burned to ashes; I saw the traces of crime... On 16 June, Surat Huseynov's troops confronted the military units of the Popular Front. Fighting took place, and there were casualties. Naturally, I could not allow fratricide. The people had already shed too much blood in those years. I reached an agreement with Surat that his troops would not enter Baku and that there would be no fighting or bloodshed in the capital.*[\[21\]](#)

Aliyev characterizes the confrontation between Huseynov and the Popular Front as a crime committed by the leaders of the Popular Front. After this meeting, Aliyev returned and, on 15 June 1993, was elected Chairman of the Supreme Soviet. He does not state that he was elected by a majority vote, instead noting that "I was elected Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan at the recommendation of many deputies of parliament, as well as of President Abulfaz Elchibey himself."[\[22\]](#) On 15 June 1993, Aliyev delivered his first speech in the National Assembly as Chairman of the Supreme Soviet; President Elchibey was also present at that session. In his speech, Aliyev spoke positively about the policies

pursued in Azerbaijan during the rule of the Popular Front, including adherence to the principles of a market economy and the existence of freedom and liberty in the republic. In general, he stated that the policies implemented over the previous year under the Popular Front government had been correct and that he himself supported them. During his address, Aliyev also gave a favorable assessment of President Elchibey's foreign policy.[\[23\]](#)

Aliyev identified three main causes of the tension in the republic: (1) the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, (2) the confrontation with Surat Huseynov, and (3) the deterioration of relations among ethnic groups, which he associated with the Popular Front's policy of Turkism. At the same time, Aliyev emphasized that his goal was not to obtain a position of power, but to stand alongside the people of Azerbaijan. He recalled that when he had spoken in the same hall in February, he had expressed the same intention, but "at that time, I was not accepted." Now, however, "Isa Gambar, Panah Huseynov, and the President of Azerbaijan, Abulfaz Elchibey, are asking me to come and assume a position here and to participate together in resolving these issues."[\[24\]](#) In his speech, Aliyev also promised that he would not seek revenge against anyone who had treated him poorly.

Two weeks after this speech, in an interview he gave to the Russian Ostankino Interstate Television Company, Aliyev expressed completely different views about the Popular Front government. He attributed Azerbaijan's difficult situation to the leadership of the Azerbaijan Popular Front and directly to Elchibey.[\[25\]](#) He accused Elchibey of alcohol abuse and of engaging in drunkenness instead of governing the republic,[\[26\]](#) and described members of the Popular Front holding high positions in the state leadership as swindlers.[\[27\]](#) In his later speeches, Aliyev openly rejected the idea of linking Azerbaijan's independence to the Popular Front or to the popular movement, stating: "This independence is a historical process; we achieved it on the basis of socio-political

developments. No one should claim that any individual, as a hero, is the commander of this independence.”[\[28\]](#)

Two weeks after assuming the position of Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, Aliyev appointed the 34-year-old Surat Huseynov as Prime Minister and explained his decision as follows:

*Surat Huseynov was the director of a large factory in Yevlakh, which means he is a production specialist. He understands the problems of the economy. I offered him the position of Prime Minister, and I am confident that we will work hand in hand. I will share all my experience with him. Of course, our main problem is to gather experienced personnel, intelligent and conscientious specialists.*[\[29\]](#)

Another conflict that facilitated Aliyev’s return to power was the confrontation between Popular Front and Alikram Humbatov. Humbatov had been the head of the Lankaran branch of the Popular Front. In 1992–1993, he established the Lankaran (Goytepe) regiment, which fought in the Nagorno-Karabakh war, and he served in its ranks as a colonel. During that period, he held the position of Deputy Minister of Defense responsible for combat training. Ethnically Talysh, Humbatov later accused the Popular Front of Turkic nationalism, left its ranks, and, following the rebellion of Surat Huseynov, declared the creation of the Talysh-Mugan Autonomous Republic in seven southern districts of Azerbaijan (Astara, Lankaran, Lerik, Yardimli, Masalli, Jalilabad, and Bilasuvar).

Aliyev initially blamed Ayaz Mutallibov and later Surat Huseynov for the emergence of tensions with Humbatov. He accused Humbatov of serving Mutallibov and claimed that his aim was to remove him from power and to fragment Azerbaijan.[\[30\]](#) In his speeches, Aliyev notes that he met with Humbatov several times and acknowledges that during these meetings Humbatov’s demands were not related to establishing the Talysh-Mugan Republic or to dividing Azerbaijan. In his

interviews, Aliyev states explicitly that Humbatov was concerned about the legitimacy of his authority. During these meetings, Humbatov argued that the National Assembly did not have the authority to elect Aliyev as Chairman of the Supreme Soviet and that a formal session of the Supreme Soviet should be convened for this purpose; he demanded that such a session be called. At the same time, Humbatov attempted to prevent the referendum planned for August 1993, which aimed to remove Elchibey from power. His third demand was the abolition of the presidential system and the transition to a parliamentary system of governance. Interpreting Humbatov's demands, Aliyev clarifies what he believed to be Humbatov's objective, stating that his aim was to convene a session of the Supreme Soviet and bring Mutallibov from Moscow to Azerbaijan to make him president.[\[31\]](#) Despite Humbatov's efforts, on 29 August 1993, a nationwide referendum titled "On Confidence in the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Abulfaz Elchibey" was held in Azerbaijan. According to claims, more than 90 percent of voters participated in the referendum, and the population expressed no confidence in Elchibey.

Aliyev states that, in order to resolve his conflict with Humbatov, he delegated full authority to Huseynov. Although Huseynov travelled to Lankaran several times, he was unable to resolve the problem. According to Aliyev, instead of settling the conflict, Huseynov supported Humbatov. Following this, on 23 August 1993, Aliyev addressed the public via television, stating that on the night of 18-19 August, Prime Minister Huseynov had held a meeting in Ganja and had invited Humbatov to attend. After this meeting, the situation in the southern region deteriorated further.[\[32\]](#) Aliyev reported that on 22 August, a confrontation had occurred in Lankaran between Humbatov and the local population, during which firearms were used against civilians.

After this incident, Aliyev dismissed the head of the Lankaran executive authority, a member of the Popular Front, Huseyngulu Mammadov, and appointed Dilruba Jamalova, who had previously

served for many years as secretary of the Lankaran Communist city party committee, in his place. In his address, Aliyev emphasized in particular that “those who maintained the ‘Lankaran factor’ openly stated that they had preserved it in order to exert pressure on Heydar Aliyev.” [\[33\]](#)

Undoubtedly, the most significant factor that enabled Aliyev’s return to power was the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In his speeches and interviews, Aliyev addresses several issues related to the transformation of the conflict into a large-scale war. First of all, he notes that both the Soviet and Azerbaijani leaderships failed to pursue appropriate policies and believes that the authorities did not take the necessary measures in a timely manner. Aliyev accuses the Popular Front government of failing to give adequate attention to the army and argues that, as a result, part of the country’s territory was occupied:

*For several years, Azerbaijan has been subjected to aggression, yet it has been unable to establish its army. Even after declaring its independence, it still could not do so. This is because they (Popular Front) did not wish to create an army. Instead, they used it for various separate purposes... Yesterday, the head of the executive authority of the Fuzuli district openly admitted in his speech that the Fuzuli district was meant to be surrendered; it was deliberately handed over by certain groups.* [\[34\]](#)

Aliyev attributed Azerbaijan’s lack of success in the war to the impact of political infighting on the military front. In his speeches, he claimed that instead of building a regular army, the Azerbaijani leadership distributed weapons and ammunition to various detachments and mafia-like groups. According to him, these groups acted arbitrarily on the front line, defending territory when they deemed it necessary and, when they did not, withdrawing from combat zones and deliberately handing over territory to Armenian forces. [\[35\]](#) Aliyev stated that “information coming from Fuzuli and

Jabrayil shows that those who sold these lands were, first and foremost, local mafia forces, as well as the heads of executive authorities in both Jabrayil and Fuzuli.”[\[36\]](#) To support his claims, Aliyev pointed to the fact that, in some occupied territories, the army had not engaged in serious fighting and that casualties were either minimal or nonexistent: “In the most recent battles, up to 20–30 people were killed... Out of a 2,000-strong brigade in Jabrayil, 1.950 abandoned their positions and crossed to the other side of the Araz River, into Iran.”[\[37\]](#)

In Aliyev’s view, evasion of military service also contributed to the occupation of territories. He repeatedly emphasized in his speeches that all citizens, all able-bodied men, should be mobilized to defend the country. He encouraged Azerbaijani servicemen serving in former Soviet republics to return home and called on Azerbaijani youth to fulfill their civic duty: “Some parents, placing personal feelings above national interests, have taken their children out of Azerbaijan or hidden them elsewhere to prevent them from joining the army.”[\[38\]](#) In one of his speeches, he even quoted Samad Vurgun (“From this day, I too am a mobilized soldier”) to call for general mobilization, stating that “it is the civic duty of everyone capable of bearing arms to defend the Motherland.”

Aliyev stressed that desertion weakened the army and frequently spoke about its widespread nature. He attributed this phenomenon to the decline of patriotism among young people and to indifference toward national values. To support this argument, he drew attention to rising crime rates among youth: “In 1992, 60 percent of those convicted of crimes were young people under the age of 30.”[\[39\]](#) After coming to power, Aliyev stated that he initially demanded the punishment of all deserters but later granted them amnesty. His speeches indicate that neither threats nor amnesties significantly reduced the level of desertion among soldiers. In one of his addresses to the nation after being elected president, he stated:

*Every deserter must be met with public condemnation in society; he must understand that if he deserts, he betrays his people, his nation, his country, and his own parents. I appeal to you, and to those deserters: they are on a very wrong path. In these difficult days for the nation, one cannot flee and hide.* [\[40\]](#)

In another speech, he added:

*I appeal to the parents and relatives of young people who evade mobilization or desert. They must understand that they also bear responsibility for the actions of their children and relatives.* [\[41\]](#)

Aliyev also noted that one of the factors weakening the army was widespread corruption. According to him,

*instead of 400–500 soldiers, there are only 15–18 in the battalions, while funds, food, and supplies are allocated for 400. Five days before salaries are distributed, commanders send 70–80 percent of the soldiers home, take their pay, and put it in their own pockets. Moreover, they even take bribes to allow them to go home.* [\[42\]](#)

In many of his speeches and interviews, Aliyev addressed the future political system of Azerbaijan. During his participation in the session of the National Assembly in June 1993, as well as in subsequent statements, he emphasized his support for democracy, human rights, and political pluralism, and stressed that there would be no return to the political regime established under the leadership of the former Communist Party. He viewed Azerbaijan's future within a presidential system of governance and opposed a parliamentary system. Aliyev explained this position as follows:

*We are not yet ready for a parliamentary form of governance. Therefore, the institution of the presidency is essential. A parliamentary system requires stable traditions, and such traditions do not emerge on their own.* [\[43\]](#)

Aliyev argued that a parliamentary system requires fully developed, legally grounded, and strong political parties, and that in the absence of such parties in Azerbaijan, a parliamentary model would be dangerous for the republic.[\[44\]](#) In this context, he also turned to historical reflection, recalling the history of the Azerbaijan Republic (1918–1920). Aliyev noted that one of the reasons for the collapse of Azerbaijani statehood in the early twentieth century was the infighting and intrigues among political parties:

*This parliamentary system did not allow the state to survive, and the struggles, conflicts, and intrigues between various groups and parties, in and of themselves, tarnished the name of that state. Why am I saying this? Because we must draw lessons from it. If we assess that period and the activity of that democratic government, and if we take pride in the fact that such a stage existed in our history, then we must also be aware of the shortcomings of those processes so that we do not repeat those mistakes again.*[\[45\]](#)

Aliyev's views on the parliamentary system allow for several general conclusions about his political line. He tends to interpret any form of political discussion and debate as intrigue and conflict, since in the Soviet environment in which he lived and matured as a politician, any opinion different from that of the leadership was treated as hostility, political intrigue, opposition to authority, or political unreliability. Because a parliamentary system does not guarantee power to any single individual, Aliyev believed it would result in chaos, as he adhered to the principle that power is strong when it is concentrated in a single hand. He also assumed that the Azerbaijani people, having been deprived of democratic traditions and principles for centuries, were not prepared to live under such a system. In his view, governance must think on behalf of the people, and when power is concentrated in one center, it can function more effectively.

Aliyev equates the effectiveness of governance with the strength and stability of the state. Effective government, in his understanding, is not grounded in fundamental freedoms or the rule of law but is associated with the functioning of the army and law enforcement institutions. In many of his speeches, he addressed the issue of power directly, openly warning the population that if a president were not elected in the republic, the situation would become even more severe and catastrophic, and most importantly, state independence could be lost. He stated:

*The people must express their opinion. Let the people say how they want to live. If they want to live worse than before, let them say so. If they truly want to escape from this difficult situation, let them say so.* [\[46\]](#)

And elsewhere: “If the people still want to live in this situation, let them express their view. Or if they want to live in another situation, let them also express their view.” He concluded by stating: “With these words, I do not intend to exert any pressure or influence on the people or on individual voters.” [\[47\]](#) At the same time, Aliyev rejected the idealization of political leaders, such as the Popular Front’s glorification of Mammad Amin Rasulzadeh, describing it as a kind of “disease.” [\[48\]](#)

His speeches provide insight into how he understood democracy and political pluralism. In Aliyev’s view, relations between government and opposition are based on two principles. The first is ideology. According to him, ideology consists of the idea of an independent state and national moral values. In 1993, Aliyev stated: “We do not have ideological diversity because both the government and the opposition support state independence.” He further argued that ideological elements rooted in national morality, culture, and religion did not distinguish the opposition from the government. [\[49\]](#)

The second principle, according to Aliyev, is position or

office. He described the struggle between government and opposition as a struggle for positions of authority: "You are in office, I am not; I will fight you in order to obtain your position."[\[50\]](#) Thus, in Aliyev's conception, ideology functions as a means of establishing a state on a given territory and maintaining control over power. For this reason, fundamental freedoms are not clearly visible in his ideological framework. His understanding of free media, one of the core principles of democracy, is also interpreted through the prism of government and opposition, and in this interpretation, the role of civil society is not clearly present, and the existence of a free press is being questioned.

*What are newspapers being published with? Not long ago, when I was working in the Supreme Soviet, it was impossible to publish the newspaper Azərbaycan; it had stopped, the state had no money. But Cumhuriyyət is published three times a week. Azadlıq is published even more regularly and better. The newspaper Müsavat is even larger than Azerbaijan. Where do they get this money? Are these funds earned through honest labor? Where does this money come from? With what resources are these newspapers being published? Is this not the money of mafia groups? Or are these newspapers being published with money inherited from their grandfathers?[\[51\]](#)*

## **Conclusion**

The Nagorno-Karabakh war that began in the late of the 20th century, and the escalating tensions among various political groups in its wake, had a profound impact on the political system of newly independent Azerbaijan. After gaining independence, Azerbaijan spent approximately one year under a democratic government, but in July 1993, following Aliyev's return to power, it effectively reverted to a system resembling the former communist regime.

Although in his speeches and interviews Aliyev presented

himself as a supporter of freedom, democracy, and liberty, he claimed that the elections in which Elchibey was declared president had been falsified. In doing so, he sought to argue that no genuine democracy had existed in Azerbaijan after the collapse of the communist system. He described Elchibey's failure to resign from the leadership of the Azerbaijan Popular Front after becoming president as political inexperience. At the same time, Aliyev himself remained the chairman of the New Azerbaijan Party until his death and appointed to key state positions members of this party, former communist bureaucrats, or their children and relatives.

During his rule, Aliyev claimed that occupied territories had been "sold" by executive officials appointed by the Popular Front. While demanding public condemnation of military deserters, he overlooked the fact that he himself had not participated in World War II, and that his son Ilham Aliyev, who was in his thirties during the Karabakh war, also did not serve in the military.

On the basis of accusations of desertion and betrayal, Aliyev soon removed all Popular Front members from power and replaced them with former party secretaries, that is, representatives of the communist bureaucracy. Describing democracy as chaos, he warned the population of national conflict, fratricide, and the loss of state independence. He sought to convince society that the only way out of this chaos was through the strengthening of his own rule. Having obtained the position of Chairman of the Supreme Soviet at Elchibey's invitation, Aliyev became president only a few months later. Aliyev's political ideology, ascent to authority, and attitude towards adversaries are articulated in his speeches and interviews, however they are depicted completely differently in historical textbooks.

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## Notes and References

[1] "I promise you nothing," interview with the Sobesednik correspondent. Heydar Aliyev. Our Independence Is Eternal, Book 1, Azernashr, 1997, p. 51.

[2] Statement at a press conference for journalists and mass media representatives at the Press Center in Istanbul, Aliyev, p. 408.

[3] "I promise you nothing," p. 52.

[4] All-Union Population Census of 1989. Distribution of the urban and rural population of the regions of the USSR republics by sex and nationality. Nakhichevan ASSR, [https://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/resp\\_nac\\_89.php?reg=70](https://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/resp_nac_89.php?reg=70).

[5] "I promise you nothing," p. 48.

[6] Interview with writer Aleksandr Prokhanov, Aliyev, p. 59.

[7] "I Am Grateful to the People," Aliyev, p. 48.

[8] Ibid.

[9] "I promise you nothing," p. 52.

[10] Final speech at the meeting with elected deputies of the people and leading officials and intellectuals from the districts of Bilasuvar, Jalilabad, Masalli, Lankaran, Astara, Yardimli, and Lerik, Aliyev, p. 79.

[11] Interview with the Interstate Television Company Ostankino, Aliyev, pp. 22–23.

[12] Ostankino, p. 26.

[13] Interview with a correspondent of Nezavisimaya Gazeta, Aliyev, p. 117.

[14] Ostankino, 26.

[15] Ibid., 27.

[16] Interview with writer Aleksandr Prokhanov, p. 59.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Conversation with writer Aleksandr Prokhanov.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ostankino, 25.

[21] Interview with writer Aleksandr Prokhanov, p. 61.

[22] Ostankino, 22.

[23] Speech at a session of the National Assembly of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Aliyev, p. 10.

[24] Ibid., 13.

[25] Ostankino, 22-31.

[26] "I Am Grateful to the People," conversation with the correspondent of Rossiyskiy former newspaper, Aliyev, p. 46.

[27] "I promise you nothing," Aliyev, p. 52.

[28] Speech at a meeting with intellectuals at the Azerbaijan Republic Academy of Sciences, Aliyev, p. 150.

[29] Conversation with writer Aleksandr Prokhanov.

[30] Opening speech at the meeting with elected deputies of the people and leading officials and intellectuals from the districts of Bilasuvar, Jalilabad, Masalli, Lankaran, Astara, Yardimli, and Lerik, Aliyev, pp. 63–75.

[31] Bilasuvar, Jalilabad, Masalli, p. 71.

[32] Address to the nation via Azerbaijani National Television, Aliyev, pp. 90–100.

[33] Azerbaijani National Television, p. 99.

[34] Speeches during meetings in frontline regions—Imishli, Fuzuli, Beylagan, Shamkir, Aghjabadi districts, and the city of Ganja, Aliyev.

[35] “The Duty of All of Us Is to Protect the Statehood and Territorial Integrity of Independent Azerbaijan,” Aliyev, pp. 101–116.

[36] Ibid., p. 111.

[37] Speeches during meetings in frontline regions—Imishli, Fuzuli, Beylagan, Shamkir, Aghjabadi districts, and the city of Ganja, Aliyev, p. 285.

[38] Speech at a meeting with representatives of youth at the Supreme Soviet of the Republic, Aliyev, p. 176.

[39] Speech at a meeting with representatives of youth at the Supreme Soviet of the Republic, Aliyev, p. 173.

[40] Speeches at a meeting with representatives of the public and at a military meeting in Beylagan district, Aliyev, p. 502.

[41] Address to the nation via national television and radio of the Republic in connection with the intensification of Armenia’s aggression against Azerbaijan, Aliyev, p. 517.

[42] Speech at a meeting with the leaders of political parties and public movements of Azerbaijan, Aliyev, p. 252.

[43] Nezavisimaya Gazeta, Aliyev, pp. 117–118.

[44] Ibid., p. 117.

[45] At the Azerbaijan Republic Academy of Sciences, Aliyev, p. 154.

[46] “The Duty of All of Us Is to Protect the Statehood and Territorial Integrity of Independent Azerbaijan,” Aliyev, pp. 114–115.

[\[47\]](#) Ibid.

[\[48\]](#) At the Azerbaijan Republic Academy of Sciences, p. 156.

[\[49\]](#) Speech at a meeting with the leaders of political parties of Azerbaijan, p. 249.

[\[50\]](#) Ibid., p. 250.

[\[51\]](#) Ibid., p. 255.