

The Modern History of Azerbaijan in the Interpretation of Politicians: Ayaz Mutallibov – Part II

written by BRI History Studies Group BAİ Tarix Araşdırmaları Qrupu

(The link to the first part of the article is at the end of this text.)

Mutallibov believes that following the events of January 1990, political power should have passed to the Azerbaijan Popular Front. Such a transition had already taken place in Armenia and Georgia. However, Moscow decided to keep the Communists in power in Azerbaijan. Mutallibov attributes this to the Popular Front's pro-Turkish position, noting that the "Turkish factor" was the primary reason for Moscow's strained attitude toward the organization. Conversely, Turkey also did not want to see Mutallibov in power—viewing him as a politician loyal to Russia—and preferred to see the Pan-Turkist Abulfaz Elchibey assume the presidency.

Although Mutallibov was considered a pro-Russian politician, he acknowledges that his relations with the Russian leadership were not good. After being elected president, he repeatedly asked the Russian leadership to invite him for an official visit to Russia but didn't receive positive response. When the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was established, a decision was made to keep its doors closed to Azerbaijan. In one interview, Mutallibov stated that he was initially opposed to the idea of joining the CIS and refused to enter the organization but later changed his mind. The reason for this decision was the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Mutallibov

understood that achieving success on the battlefield was impossible without the assistance of the Russian army. At the time, the Russian leadership was opposed to Azerbaijan joining the CIS. Mutallibov made two attempts to join the CIS. After the first attempt failed, he turned to Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk for help; Kravchuk invited him to attend the CIS summit scheduled for December 1991 in Almaty. Mutallibov claims that "there were officials in the Russian president's inner circle who had reached certain agreements with the Azerbaijani opposition, and my ability to expose these agreements became the basis for persuading the Russian president to admit Azerbaijan to the CIS."[\[i\]](#) He notes that Russian President Boris Yeltsin refused to meet with him in Moscow but did receive Abulfaz Elchibey who had come to power following a coup.

Mutallibov believes that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has its origins in political rather than socio-economic causes. He attributes the prolongation and escalation of the conflict to Moscow's pro-Armenian stance. In a speech at a party congress in 1990, Mutallibov accused Politburo member Alexander Yakovlev—considered the architect of restructuring—of supporting the Nagorno-Karabakh separatists.[\[ii\]](#)

Mutallibov repeatedly emphasized that only the central authorities could resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh problem. He explained this as follows: The republic's authorities lacked the mandate to prevent the unconstitutional actions of the autonomous region's leaders. It was necessary to arrest those violating the Soviet Constitution; however, the Constitution of the Azerbaijani SSR contained provisions governing the rights and guarantees of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast. Punishing the region's leaders required a decision by the central government. Furthermore, carrying out mass arrests of individuals participating in rallies and making unconstitutional calls within the region was not feasible based solely on a request from the prosecutor's office. Punitive measures for actions contravening the constitution

could be carried out by central law enforcement agencies upon the decision of the supreme authority. Since resolving such matters did not fall within Mutallibov's responsibility, he was unable to take decisive action. Overall, in all his public statements, Mutallibov emphasizes that he sought to conduct his political activities within the framework of the law.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict—and the Khojaly tragedy in particular—played a significant role in Mutallibov's rise to power and his subsequent ousting. He states that after assuming office, he had to contend with forces opposing him both outside and within the republic. By "outside forces," Mutallibov refers to the Armenian lobby, the leadership of Armenia, and Russia. He attributes the Armenian opposition against him to the introduction of a passport regime in Nagorno-Karabakh in April 1991. This regime entailed the expulsion of unregistered Armenians from the region. The decree authorizing this decision had been signed by Gorbachev during Vezirov's tenure but was never implemented, as the Armenian lobby in the United States had blocked it. Mutallibov says he learned of this from former US intelligence officers who were in Baku in 1991. The document they presented stated that 40 members of the U.S. Congress had appealed to President George H. W. Bush to pressure Gorbachev into halting the implementation of the decree. After Mutallibov insisted on the decree's enforcement, in April 1991, Interior Ministry troops and mobile special-purpose units (known by the Russian acronym OMON) cleared 24 villages in Nagorno-Karabakh of Armenian militants who were not residents of the region.[\[iii\]](#) These armed forces were positioned between Armenian and Azerbaijani villages, convincing the Armenian population that if they left, the Azerbaijanis would slaughter all the Armenians. Mutallibov adds that in the mountainous villages of the Shaumyan region—which had a predominantly Armenian population—heavily fortified bases belonging to Armenian armed groups were situated on the high ground, capable of repelling a professional army. Only military helicopters were able to

destroy these bases; Azerbaijan lacked this capability. Nevertheless, Azerbaijani army units destroyed these bases. A list of the weapons and ammunition seized from Shaumyan region was presented to Gorbachev on May 3, 1991

In his interviews, Mutallibov comments on the events surrounding Khojaly as follows:

On 27 February 1992, the Minister of Internal Affairs and the Chairman of the Committee for State Security came to see me and reported that a serious incident had occurred in Khojaly; however, they did not provide details because they themselves knew little about the situation. Following my resignation in March, a parliamentary commission of inquiry into the Khojaly tragedy was established. Once the commission concluded its work, a parliamentary session was held in early May, to which I was also invited. During the session, the commission's findings were read out, stating that Ayaz Mutallibov bore no personal responsibility for the tragedy. [\[iv\]](#)

Mutallibov did not consider himself guilty of the Khojaly tragedy, but he understood his responsibility as head of state.

In response to accusations of delaying the formation of a national army and attempting to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by relying on the Soviet army, Mutallibov points out that at a meeting in Minsk on 28 December 1991, on the establishment of the CIS, he demanded the allocation of the weapons and ammunition for the creation of an Azerbaijani national army. In February 1992, USSR Deputy Minister of Defense Vladimir Chernavin and Lieutenant General Boris Gromov visited Baku and carried out this allocation, and the arsenals, ammunition, and weapons in the depots were taken over by Azerbaijani military units. Mutallibov adds that by the time he left Azerbaijan, the issue of supplying the army had been resolved. [\[v\]](#) However, Mutalibov pointed out that the situation on the front line depended entirely on the Russian

army: Victory would go to whichever side Russia supported.[\[vi\]](#)

Mutallibov recalls that the situation in the republic deteriorated after he came to power. In addition to ongoing demonstrations fueled by separatism in Nagorno-Karabakh, the presence of approximately 400.000 refugees in the republic created intolerable conditions. It was impossible to provide these people with food and housing. Mutallibov remembers appealing to the Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers, Nikolai Ryzhkov, regarding this matter, but Ryzhkov replied that he could not provide any assistance due to the economic crisis. Seeking ways to resolve the economic crisis and help the vulnerable people in the republic, Mutallibov—immediately after his appointment as First Secretary, approached Mikhail Gorbachev and proposed transferring unused oil fields in the Absheron region to the republic. Mutallibov intended to utilize American and Canadian experts as well as modern technologies for this purpose. He planned to remit a portion of the revenue from the oil to be extracted to the USSR treasury as taxes, while using the remainder to meet the republic's needs. Mutallibov asserts that his proposal was accepted by Gorbachev and Ryzhkov, who stated that the matter would be resolved through the creation of a joint venture.[\[vii\]](#)

In his interviews, Mutallibov addresses the importance of the oil factor in the struggle for power in Azerbaijan. He notes that, on his initiative, the first international tender for the development of oil fields in the USSR was held. The American company Amoco won this tender.[\[viii\]](#) Mutallibov emphasizes that at the time the tender took place, the primary focus was on developing the oil fields rather than on oil transportation; in other words, the tender did not have a geopolitical dimension. However, during the tenure of Abulfaz Elchibey, the issue of transporting the extracted oil came to the fore, and the question of constructing the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline was raised, which led to heightened geopolitical tensions. Mutallibov also clarifies the data regarding

Azerbaijan's oil resources. He believed that Azerbaijan—which produced only 9 million tons of oil annually during the Soviet era—would be unable to fill the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline, designed to transport 50 million tons of oil per year. Mutallibov points out that, according to revised 1990 data, Azerbaijan's oil reserves stood at 500 million tons. "Later, the figures were inflated; people started talking about billions." Mutallibov also notes that the oil currently being extracted comes from fields that operated during the Soviet period.[\[ix\]](#) Because he believes it impossible to fill the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline without Kazakh oil, Mutallibov emphasizes that the geopolitical issue stemmed from the fact that the pipeline was intended to bypass Russia. The pipeline required Azerbaijan to be cautious because the Azerbaijani authorities were compelled to strike a balance between Moscow and Washington. Russia could exert influence over Azerbaijan. The most significant way to do so was through the Azerbaijani diaspora in Russia. The funds remitted by the diaspora to Azerbaijan significantly exceeded the country's state budget.

Mutallibov recalls that during his tenure, he paid special attention to Azerbaijani statehood, the aspirations of the Azerbaijani people, and the fate of the Azerbaijani diaspora in Russia. In autumn 1990, under his leadership, the Constitutional Act on the Sovereignty of Azerbaijan was adopted. Mutallibov emphasizes that Azerbaijan was the first republic in the USSR to adopt such a document.[\[x\]](#) He presents the adoption of this document as the result of a dialogue between the authorities and society, adding that the Nagorno-Karabakh issue played a significant role in the development of this dialogue: "Following the 1988 decision by Karabakh separatists to secede from the Azerbaijani SSR and join the Armenian SSR, dissatisfaction with the central government among the republic's population reached a high level."[\[xi\]](#)

The State Committee on the State of Emergency in the USSR's attempted coup d'état on 19–21 August necessitated critical decisions regarding the restoration of the republics'

independence. On 30 August 1991, the Declaration on the Restoration of the State Independence of Azerbaijan was adopted at an extraordinary session of the Supreme Soviet of the Azerbaijan SSR. Mutallibov notes that Russia was at the forefront of these events because they unfolded within the framework of Gorbachev's perestroika.

The Politburo discussed imposing a state of emergency in the country on several occasions, as the economic situation was crucial, shops were empty, and people struggled to buy food. A power struggle was underway in Moscow between the Union government led by Gorbachev and the Russian government led by Yeltsin. During this period, Mutallibov struggled to solve the Azerbaijani republic's economic and social problems. Mutallibov notes that he no longer believed help would come from the central authorities; consequently, in 1990, an order was placed in France for a national Azerbaijani currency. By the time the dissolution of the USSR was announced, Azerbaijan already possessed its own currency. Mutallibov emphasized that, on his orders, a Gold Currency Fund and a state treasury were established. Subsequent steps involved restoring the state symbols of the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic: the anthem, the coat of arms, and the flag.

At the same time, according to Mutallibov, he was deeply concerned about the collapse of the USSR and the severing of economic ties with the other Soviet republics. As an economist, businessman, and administrator, Mutallibov understood that declaring state independence did not automatically guarantee economic independence; therefore, state independence should not hinder economic ties among the former Soviet republics. Mutallibov realized that success was impossible without such connections. He recalls that in 1990, when he received a call from Agroprom reporting a serious problem with grain imports, he contacted Nursultan Nazarbayev (then-First Secretary of the Kazakh SSR) and asked him to fulfill his grain supply obligations. Mutallibov notes that, despite the declaration of independence, the state was not

prepared to be economically independent.

Mutallibov notes that after leaving Azerbaijan, he made no attempt to return to power and established no ties with the Azerbaijani opposition during or after the conflict in Ganja. Mutallibov maintains that, despite his name being repeatedly mentioned in proceedings involving Surat Huseynov, Alikram Gumbatov, and Rovshan Javadov, he had no involvement in those conflicts.[\[xii\]](#) Mutallibov recalls a conversation with Rovshan Javadov during his presidency, stating that Javadov—who had accused him of indecisiveness—said he would side with the stronger one (Javadov initially sided with the Popular Front of Azerbaijan before switching to Heydar Aliyev). He learned that his name was being linked to Surat Huseynov and Alikram Gumbatov from his wife, who was in Azerbaijan at the time and had access to the local press. Mutallibov viewed the association of his name with the opposition as a pretext for Heydar Aliyev to tarnish his image and arrest him on charges of attempting a coup d'état. Aliyev regarded Mutallibov as the most serious threat to his power and considered him his primary political rival.

In this context, Mutallibov clarifies his stance regarding Aliyev. During the time Aliyev was in Moscow, his relationship with Mutallibov was cordial. Whenever Mutallibov came to Moscow to present a report, he would meet with Aliyev, consult him, and seek his views. Mutallibov adds that in 1990, when Boris Pugo—Chairman of the Party Control Committee—attempted to initiate criminal proceedings against Aliyev on Mikhail Gorbachev's orders, he opposed this decision. He justified his position as follows: Shevardnadze's methods of rule were no different from Heydar Aliyev's, so why arrest the one and promote the other?[\[xiii\]](#)

After Aliyev was removed from power, Mutallibov met with him at Aliyev's Moscow apartment in late February 1990. During the meeting, Aliyev described Mutallibov as Azerbaijan's first democratically elected leader and added that there were good

people within the Azerbaijani opposition with whom one could work.[\[xiv\]](#) Subsequently, the two politicians held several telephone conversations. In these discussions, Aliyev sought Mutallibov's consent to return to Baku, secure housing there, and run for election to the Supreme Soviet. During the talks, Aliyev also confirmed his intention to be elected as a delegate to the 28th Congress of the CPSU. This suggests that Aliyev's statement—made at the Azerbaijani embassy following the events of January 1990—regarding his renunciation of his party membership card was not correct.[\[xv\]](#)

Relations soured when Aliyev attempted to return to Azerbaijan. Mutallibov initially tried to prevent Aliyev's return to Azerbaijan but failed; however, he barred him from entering Baku and forced him to go to Nakhchivan instead, believing that keeping Aliyev away from the capital was the best decision. A second obstacle to Aliyev's political comeback was the age limit established when the presidency was created in May 1990; the rule set the age range for candidates at 35 to 65, whereas Aliyev would have turned 68 during the election year.[\[xvi\]](#) A third attempt to block Aliyev's return to politics occurred in the summer of 1991. In an interview, Aliyev claimed that after the Supreme Council of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic decided not to participate in the Azerbaijani presidential election, Baku dispatched military personnel to Nakhchivan to arrest him—an action Aliyev described as an assassination attempt—but the effort to bring him to Baku failed.[\[xvii\]](#)

After Mutallibov lost power and Aliyev began negotiations with the leadership of the Azerbaijan Popular Front (APF) regarding a return to power, Mutallibov attempted to meet with Aliyev to discuss his return to Baku. However, all his efforts proved unsuccessful. Although Aliyev had initially promised to help him, he later mobilized all his opportunities to have him extradited to Baku and arrested—yet he too failed to achieve this. Russia supported Aliyev's return to power, and the fact that Russia opposed Mutallibov's extradition was perceived as

an indication that Russia might use him if the need arose. This caused serious concern for Aliyev. [\[xviii\]](#)

Conclusion

Ayaz Mutallibov views his tenure as one of the democratic phases in the modern history of Azerbaijan. For the first time in the republic, multiparty parliamentary elections were held, opposition representatives secured parliamentary seats, and a dialogue took place between the authorities and the opposition. However, Mutallibov's understanding of democracy does not extend beyond the political worldview of a Soviet bureaucrat. He considers a one-party system acceptable for state governance and believes in the effectiveness of making political decisions based on the will of the authorities rather than on free elections and public debate.

Failing to properly assess the opportunities presented by the historical circumstances, Mutallibov attempted to pursue his initiative within the political arena and the framework of Soviet law; consequently, his contemporaries viewed him as an "accidental president." Yet, Mutallibov was not the naive, inexperienced politician he was made out to be. However, the decisions he made, the elections he oversaw, and his ability to control the media proved insufficient to manage the unfolding situation. Mutallibov made decisions that yielded short-term rather than long-term gains; he lacked the capacity to fight on multiple fronts and analyze political processes on a broad scale. Mutallibov, who rightly viewed Aliyev as his most formidable rival in the struggle for power, deemed it a shrewd move to send him to Nakhchivan—where he wielded significant influence—rather than keeping him in Baku, where his influence was limited. By framing the power struggle solely around the presidency and failing to consider the potential of the parliament—owing to his own lack of democratic credentials—Mutallibov inadvertently created an opportunity for Aliyev to se

References

[i] Ibid.

[ii] XXVIII съезд Коммунистической Партии, 403.

[iii] Keçmiş prezident Ayaz Mütəllibov maraqlı detallar haqda danışır (2015). Azadlıq Radiosu. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-yGZgPtj5A>, əldə edilib 16 may 2026.

[iv] Ibid.

[v] Ayaz Mütəllibovun Xurala müsahibəsi (III hissə), 13 noyabr 2018, <https://www.xural.org/qaynar-qazanda-az%c9%99rbaycanin-ilk-prezidenti-ayaz-mut%c9%99llibov-iii-sonuncu-hiss%c9%99-onu-az%c9%99rbaycan-secib-video/>. əldə edilib 15 may 2026.

[vi] Mütəllibov, 2000, 71.

[vii] Муталлибов А. 70 мгновений 7 лет. Современник, 2000, 114.

[viii] Нет оснований для моей экстрадиции из России. Время, 20 апрель 2004, <http://www.vremya.ru/2004/68/5/96686.html>. əldə edilib 11 may 2026.

[ix] Ibid.

[x] Аяз Муталибов: «Если бы задумка ГКЧП сработала, то пошли бы процессы совершенно другие». Vesti.az, 31 avqust 2010, <https://web.archive.org/web/20100831071039/http://vesti.az/news.php?id=51610>. əldə edilib 11 may 2026.

[xi] Ibid.

[xii] Муталлибов, 2000, 43–44, 47.

[xiii] Ibid., 97.

[\[xiv\]](#) Ibid., 96-99.

[\[xv\]](#) Heydar Aliyev left the Communist Party in May 1991.

[\[xvi\]](#) Доклад председателя Президиума Верховного Совета Азербайджанской ССР Кафаровой Э. М. Бакинский Рабочий, 19 мая 1990 г., р.2.

[\[xvii\]](#) Коновалов В., Иванов-Смоленский Г. Алиев против Алиева Известия. 4 августа, 1993.

[\[xviii\]](#) Муталлибов, 2000, 123.

Part I

The Modern History of Azerbaijan in the Interpretation of Politicians: Ayaz Mutallibov – Part I